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Vol. 14, No. 1

CONTENTS

Summer, 1946

## An Amazing Fantastic Novel



## THE DARK WORLD

By HENRY KUTTNER

*Edward Bond enters a twin universe of black sorcery, where his evil replica, Ganelon, fights for a kingdom of slaves, infinite power, and two alluring women—Arles and Medea!.....* 9

## Short Stories

- THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES.....Edmond Hamilton 62  
*A Hall of Fame Classic reprinted by popular demand*
- PLANET OF THE BLACK DUST.....Jack Vance 70  
*The pirates held all the cards but one—a man's soul*
- THE VICIOUS CIRCLE.....Polton Cross 79  
*Dick Mills oscillates back and forth from past to future*
- EXTRA EARTH.....Ross Rocklynn 88  
*President Woodward and his cabinet wage war on six evil men*

## Special Features

- THE ETHER VIBRATES.....Announcements and Letters 6
- REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS.....Sergeant Saturn 107
- MEET THE AUTHOR.....Henry Kuttner 112

Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "The Dark World"

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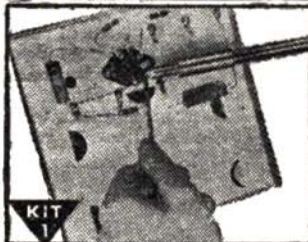
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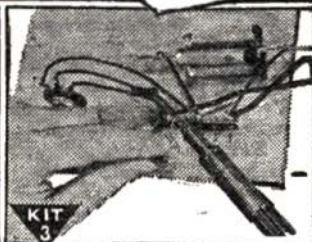
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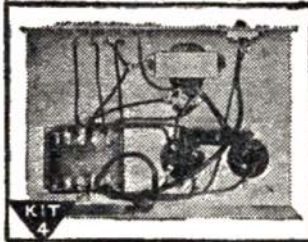
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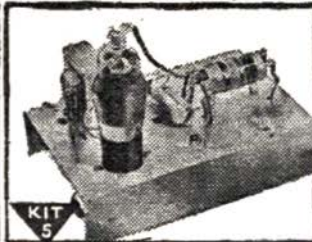
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# THE ETHER VIBRATES

**H**OLD everything, Frogeyes. Keep Wart-ears and Snaggletooth back on the other side of the ship. Yes, let the Xeno lie unopened for a few Mercurian minutes (they're a lot shorter than Earth minutes). Ye Sarge has a serious (serious? Yes, serious!) question to propound to his readers.

STF seems to be definitely on the upgrade of late, if only to judge by the staggering sacks of mail that are reaching this old space cantine over the televisor. V-weapons, the atomic bomb and radar to the moon and beyond seem definitely to have gripped the mass imagination.

Quiet, Snaggletooth! Massea do so have imagination—you merely have to dig deep with a ray-powered drill to tap it. Pardon, people, while I dip this gremlin in the port Xeno vat.

Here is what the Sarge wants to know—since STF is becoming something of a household world now that man is straying beyond the stratosphere, should the Sarge hammer the bung into the Xeno keg, drop his three Bemlins through the starboard space lock and play it straight?

Should he keep on kicking the same old Neptunian gong around, bad puns, worse poetry and all?

Or should he strain for compromise, soft-peddling Wart-ears, Snaggie and Frogeyes, sip Xeno only occasionally and break into song and ribald laughter only once or twice an issue, meanwhile dishing out more sober comment?

## Let's Have a Poll

His fate is in your hands—so let's have a reader poll on the subject.

Okay, Frogeyes, roll out the Xeno. You might as well be useful rather than sit and sulk because this old astrologer has turned the fate of you and your two fellow mobile Arcturian shock absorbers over to the fans.

Let us drink to Chad Oliver, the Crystal City (Texas) gazer.

Old Chad, familiar to recent eons of readers as the oliver-oil bearer of the Great Southwest has accomplished the hitherto impossible. He has *photographed* the Sarge. Yes, that's old Saturn towering over his slaves on the left end. The cute little fellow with



the Xeno bladder is Snaggletooth, as any fool can plainly see. Frogeyes, next to him, is less obvious, since he is squinting into the sun, but Wart-ears' nodular cranial protuberances are plainly in evidence at the right. We are all wearing space suits and ready to take off.

Thanks again, Chad, old thing, for letting the readers know what ye Sarge really looks like—especially after those slanderous drawings (alleged) that so many other iconoclasts have been shipping him. We salute you with a triple Xeno.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

**Z**EALOUS helots of the world to come can practice deep breathing against the drape shape of things to come. For that ace astrologer of the spaceways, Captain Future, with all of his followers in fine fettle, is due to show in another rocket-propelled novel when again our orbit swings near Earth.

(Continued on page 98)







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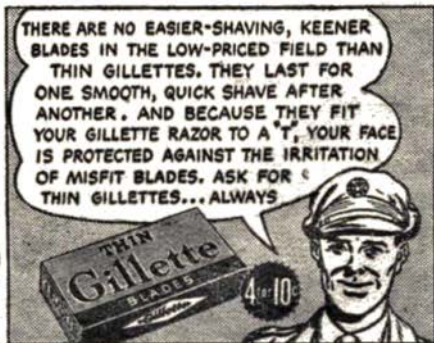
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Wolf and sowled figure hung in golden mists, watching and waiting, and the sighing murmur formed itself into words on no human tongue—but I knew them! (CHAP. II)

# THE DARK WORLD

By HENRY KUTTNER

*Edward Bond enters a twin universe of black sorcery, where his evil replica, Ganelon, fights for a kingdom of slaves, infinite power, and two alluring women—Arles and Medea!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Fire in the Night*

**T**O THE north thin smoke made a column against the darkening sky. Again I felt the unreasoning fear, the impulse toward nightmare flight that had been with

me for a long time now. I knew it was without reason. There was only smoke, rising from the swamps of the tangled Limberlost country, not fifty miles from Chicago, where man has outlawed superstition with strong bonds of steel and concrete.

I knew it was only a camper's fire, yet I *knew* it was not. Something, far back in

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my mind, knew what the smoke rose from, and who stood about the fire, peering my way through the trees.

I looked away, my glance slipping around the crowded walls—shelves bearing the random fruit of my uncle's magpie collector's instinct. Opium pipes of inlaid work and silver, golden chessmen from India, a sword. . . .

Deep memories stirred within me—deep panic. I was beneath the sword in two strides, tearing it from the wall, my fingers cramping hard around the hilt. Not fully aware of what I did, I found myself facing the window and the distant smoke again. The sword was in my fist, but feeling wrong, not reassuring, not as the sword ought to feel.

"Easy, Ed," my uncle's deep voice said behind me. "What's the matter? You look—sort of wild."

"It's the wrong sword," I heard myself saying helplessly.

Then something like a mist cleared from my brain. I blinked at him stupidly, wondering what was happening to me. My voice answered.

"It isn't the sword. It should have come from Cambodia. It should have been one of the three talismans of the Fire King and the Water King. Three very great talismans—the fruit of cut, gathered at the time of the deluge, but still fresh—the rattan with flowers that never fade, and the sword of Yan, the guarding spirit."

My uncle squinted at me through pipe-smoke. He shook his head.

"You've changed, Ed," he said in his deep, gentle voice. "You've changed a lot. I suppose because of the war—it's to be expected. And you've been sick. But you never used to be interested in things like that before. I think you spend too much time at the libraries. I'd hoped this vacation would help. The rest—"

"I don't want rest!" I said violently. "I spent a year and a half resting in Sumatra. Doing nothing but rest in that smelly little jungle village, waiting and waiting and waiting."

**I** COULD see and smell it now. I could feel again the fever that had raged so long through me as I lay in the tabooed hut.

My mind went back eighteen months to the last hour when things were normal for me. It was in the closing phases of World

War II, and I was flying over the Sumatran jungle. War, of course, is never good or normal, but until that one blinding moment in the air I had been an ordinary man, sure of myself, sure of my place in the world, with no nagging fragments of memory too elusive to catch.

Then everything blanked out, suddenly and completely. I never knew what it was. There was nothing it could have been. My only injuries came when the plane struck, and they were miraculously light. But I had been whole and unhurt when the blindness and blankness came over me.

The friendly Bataks found me as I lay in the ruined plane. They brought me through a fever and a raging illness with their strange, crude, effective ways of healing, but I sometimes thought they had done me no service when they saved me. And their witch-doctor had his doubts, too.

He knew something. He worked his curious, futile charms with knotted string and rice, sweating with effort I did not understand—then. I remembered the scarred, ugly mask looming out of the shadow, the hands moving in gestures of strange power.

"Come back, O soul, where thou art lingering in the wood, or in the hills, or by the river. See, I call thee with a *toemba bras*, with an egg of the fowl *Rajah moelija*, with the eleven healing leaves. . . ."

Yes, they were sorry for me at first, all of them. The witch-doctor was the first to sense something wrong, and the awareness spread. I could feel it spreading, as their attitude changed. They were afraid. Not of me, I thought, but of—of what?

Before the helicopter came to take me back to civilization, the witch-doctor told me a little. As much, perhaps, as he dared.

"You must hide, my son. All your life you must hide. Something is searching for you—" He used a word I did not understand. "—and it has come from the Other World, the ghostlands, to hunt you down. Remember this: all magic things must be taboo to you. And if that too fails, perhaps you may find a weapon in magic. But we cannot help you. Our powers are not strong enough for that."

He was glad to see me go. They were all glad.

And after that, unrest. For something had changed me utterly. The fever? Perhaps. At any rate, I didn't feel like the same man. There were dreams, memories—haunting urgencies as if I had somehow, somewhere





Standing before the Window, my arm swept up without volition and—as Medoa and Edeyrn stared in horror—I brought the Sword Called Liyr smashing down (CHAP. XV)

left some vital job unfinished. . . .

I found myself talking more freely to my uncle.

"It was like a curtain lifting. A curtain of gauze. I saw some things more clearly—they seemed to have a different significance. Things happen to me now that would have seemed incredible—before. Now they don't.

"I've traveled a lot, you know. It doesn't help. There's always something to remind me. An amulet in a pawnshop window, a knotted string, a cat's-eye opal and two figures. I see them in my dreams, over and over. And once—"

I stopped.

"Yes?" my uncle prompted softly.

"It was in New Orleans. I woke up one night and there was something in my room, very close to me. I had a gun—a special sort of gun—under my pillow. When I reached for it—the—call it a dog—sprang from the window. Only it wasn't shaped quite like a dog." I hesitated. "There were silver bullets in the revolver," I said.

My uncle was silent for a long moment. I knew what he was thinking.

"The other figure?" he said, finally.

"I don't know. It wears a hood. I think it's very old. And beyond these two—"

"Yes?"

"A voice. A very sweet voice, haunting. A fire. And beyond the fire, a face I have never seen clearly."

My uncle nodded. The darkness had drawn in; I could scarcely see him, and the smoke outside had lost itself against the shadow of night. But a faint glow still lingered beyond the trees. . . . Or did I only imagine that?

I nodded toward the window.

"I've seen that fire before," I told him.

"What's wrong with it? Campers make fires."

"No. It's a Need-fire."

"What the devil is that?"

"It's a ritual," I said. "Like the Midsummer fires, or the Beltane fire the Scots used to kindle. But the Need-fire is lighted only in time of calamity. It's a very old custom."

**M**Y UNCLE laid hown his pipe and leaned forward.

"What is it, Ed? Do you have any inkling at all?"

"Psychologically I suppose you could call it a persecution complex," I said slowly. "I—believe in things I never used to. I think someone is trying to find me—has found me.

And is calling. Who it is I don't know. What they want I don't know. But a little while ago I found out one more thing—this sword."

I picked the sword up from the table.

"It isn't what I want," I went on, "But sometimes, when my mind is—abstract, something from outside floats into it. Like the need for a sword. And not any sword—just one. I don't know what the sword looks like, but I'd know if I held it in my hand." I laughed a little. "And if I drew it a few inches from the sheath. I could put out that fire up there as if I'd blown on it like a candle-flame. And if I drew the sword all the way out—the world would come to an end!"

My uncle nodded. After a moment, he spoke.

"The doctors," he asked. "What do they say?"

"I know what they would say, if I told them," I said grimly. "Pure insanity. If I could be sure of that, I'd feel happier. One of the dogs was killed last night, you know."

"Of course. Old Duke. Another dog from some farm, eh?"

"Or a wolf. The same wolf that got into my room last night, and stood over me like a man, and clipped off a lock of my hair."

Something flamed up far away, beyond the window, and was gone in the dark. The Need-fire.

My uncle rose and stood looking down at me in the dimness. He laid a big hand on my shoulder.

"I think you're sick, Ed."

"You think I'm crazy. Well, I may be. But I've got a hunch I'm going to know soon, one way or the other."

I picked up the sheathed sword and laid it across my knees. We sat in silence for what seemed like a long time.

In the forest to the north, the Need-fire burned steadily. I could not see it. But its flames stirred in my blood—dangerously—darkly.

## CHAPTER II

### *Call of the Red Witch*

**I** COULD not sleep. The suffocating breathlessness of late summer lay like a woollen blanket over me. Presently I went into the big room and restlessly searched for cigarettes. My uncle's voice came through

an open doorway.

"All right, Ed?"

"Yeah. I can't sleep yet. Maybe I'll read."

I chose a book at random, sank into a relaxer chair, and switched on a lamp. It was utterly silent. I could not even hear the faint splashing of little waves on the lakeshore.

There was something I wanted—

A trained rifleman's hand, at need, will itch for the familiar feeling of smooth wood and metal. Similarly, my hand was hungry for the feel of something—neither gun nor sword, I thought. A weapon that I had used before. I could not remember what it was. Once I glanced at the poker leaning against the fireplace, and thought that was it; but the flash of recognition was gone instantly.

The book was a popular novel. I skimmed through it rapidly. The dim, faint, pulsing in my blood did not wane. It grew stronger, rising from sub-sensory levels. A distant excitement seemed to be growing deep in my mind.

Grimacing, I rose to return the book to its shelf. I stood there for a moment, my glance skimming over the titles. On impulse I drew out a volume I had not looked at for many years, the Book of Common Prayer.

It fell open in my hands. A sentence blazed out from the page.

I am become as it were a monster unto many.

I put back the book and returned to my chair. I was in no mood for reading. The lamp overhead bothered me, and I pressed the switch. Instantly moonlight flooded the room—and instantly the curious sense of expectancy was heightened, as though I had lowered a—a barrier.

The sheathed sword still lay on the window-seat. I looked past it, to the clouded sky where a golden moon shone. Faint, far away, a glimmer showed—the Need-fire, blazing in the swampy wilderness of the Limberlost.

And it called.

The golden square of window was hypnotic. I lay back in my chair, half-closing my eyes, while the sense of danger moved coldly within my brain. Sometimes before I had felt this call, summoning me. And always before I had been able to resist.

This time I wavered.

The lock of hair clipped from my head—had that given the enemy power? Superstition. My logic called it that, but a deep, inner well of conviction told me that the an-

cient hair-magic was not merely mummery. Since that time in Sumatra I had been far less skeptical. And since then I had studied.

The studies were strange enough, ranging from the principles of sympathetic magic to the wild fables of lycanthropy and demonology. Yet I was amazingly quick at learning.

It was as though I took a refresher course, to remind myself of knowledge I had once known by heart. Only one subject really troubled me, and I continually stumbled across it, by roundabout references.

And that was the Force, the entity, disguised in folk-lore under such familiar names as the Black Man, Satan, Lucifer, and such unfamiliar names as Kutchie, of the Australian Dieris, Tuña, of the Esquimaux, the African Abonsam, and the Swiss Strätteli.

I did no research on the Black Man—but I did not need to. There was a recurrent dream that I could not help identifying with the dark force that represented evil. I would be standing before a golden square of light, very much afraid, and yet straining toward some consummation that I desired. And deep down within that glowing square there would be the beginning of motion. I knew there were certain ritual gestures to be made before the ceremony could be begun, but it was difficult to break the paralysis that held me.

A square like the moon-drenched window before me—yet not the same.

For no chill essence of fear thrust itself out at me now. Rather, the low humming I heard was soothing, gentle as a woman's crooning voice.

**T**HE golden square wavered—shook—and little tendrils of crepuscular light fingered out toward me. Ever the low humming came, alluring and disarming.

Golden fingers—tentacles—they darted here and there as if puzzled. They touched lamp, table, carpet, and drew back. They—touched me.

Swiftly they leaped forward now—avid! I had time for a momentary pulse of alarm before they wrapped me in an embrace like golden sands of sleep. The humming grew louder. And I responded to it.

As the skin of the flayed satyr Marsyas thrilled at the sound of his native Phrygian melodies! I knew this music. I knew this—cbant!

Stole through the golden glow a crouching shadow—not human—with amber eyes and



a bristling mane—the shadow of a wolf.

It hesitated, glanced over its shoulder questioningly. And now another shape swam into view, cowed and gowned so that nothing of its face or body showed. But it was small—small as a child.

Wolf and cowed figure hung in the golden mists, watching and waiting. The sighing murmur altered. Formed itself into syllables and words. Words in no human tongue, but—I knew them.

"Ganelon! I call you, Ganelon! By the seal in your blood—hear me!"

Ganelon! Surely that was my name. I knew it so well.

Yet who called me thus?

"I have called you before, but the way was not open. Now the bridge is made. Come to me, Ganelon!"

A sigh.

The wolf glanced over a bristling shoulder, snarling. The cowed figure bent toward me. I sensed keen eyes searching me from the darkness of the hood, and an icy breath touched me.

"He has forgotten, Medea," said a sweet, high-pitched voice, like the tone of a child.

Again the sigh. "Has he forgotten me? Ganelon, Ganelon! Have you forgotten the arms of Medea, the lips of Medea?"

I swung, cradled in the golden mists, half asleep.

"He has forgotten," the cowed figure said.

"Then let him come to me nevertheless. Ganelon! The Need-fire burns. The gateway lies open to the Dark World. By fire and earth, air and darkness, I summon you! Ganelon!"

"He has forgotten."

"Bring him. We have the power, now."

The golden sands thickened. Flame-eyed wolf and robed shadow swam toward me. I felt myself lifted—moving forward, not of my own volition.

The window swung wide. I saw the sword, sheathed and ready. I snatched up the weapon, but I could not resist that relentless tide that carried me forward. Wolf and whispering shadow drifted with me.

"To the Fire. Bring him to the Fire."

"He has forgotten, Medea."

"To the Fire, Edeyrn. To the Fire."

Twisted tree-limbs floated past me. Far ahead I saw a flicker. It grew larger, nearer. It was the Need-fire.

Faster the tide bore me. Toward the fire itself—

*Not to Caer Llyr!*

From the depths of my mind the cryptic words spewed. Amber-eyed wolf whirled to glare at me; cowed shadow swept in closer on the golden stream. I felt a chill of deadly cold drive through the curling mists.

"Caer Llyr," the cloaked Edeyrn whispered in the child's sweet voice. "He remembers Caer Llyr—but does he remember Llyr?"

"He will remember! He has been sealed to Llyr. And, in Caer Llyr, the Place of Llyr, he will remember."

The Need-fire was a towering pillar a few yards away. I fought against the dragging tide.

I lifted my sword—threw the sheath away. I cut at the golden mists that fettered me.

Under the ancient steel the shining fog-wraiths shuddered and were torn apart—and drew back. There was a break in the humming harmony; for an instant, utter silence.

Then—

"Matholch!" the invisible whisperer cried. "Lord Matholch!"

The wolf crouched, fangs bared. I aimed a cut at its snarling mask. It avoided the blow easily and sprang.

**I**T CAUGHT the blade between its teeth and wrenched the hilt from my grip.

The golden fogs surged back, folding me in their warm embrace.

"Caer Llyr," they murmured.

The Need-fire roared up in a scarlet fountain.

"Caer Llyr!" the flames shouted.

And out of those fires rose—a woman!

Hair dark as midnight fell softly to her knees. Under level brows she flashed one glance at me, a glance that held question and a fierce determination. She was loveliness incarnate. Dark loveliness.

Lilith. Medea, witch of Colchis!

And—

"The gateway closes," the child-voice of Edeyrn said.

The wolf, still mouthing my sword, crouched uneasily. But the woman of the fire said no word.

She held out her arms to me.

The golden clouds thrust me forward, into those white arms.

Wolf and cowed shadow sprang to flank us. The humming rose to a deep-pitched roar—a thunder as of crashing worlds.

"It is difficult, difficult," Medea said. "Help

me, Edeyrn. Lord Matholch."

The fires died. Around us was not the moonlit wilderness of the Limberlost, but empty grayness, a featureless grayness that stretched to infinity. Not even stars showed against that blank.

And now there was fear in the voice of Edeyrn.

"Medea. I have not the—power. I stayed too long in the Earth-world."

"Open the gate!" Medea cried.—"Thrust it open but a little way, or we stay here between the worlds forever!"

The wolf crouched, snarling. I felt energy pouring out of his beast-body. His brain that was not the brain of a beast.

Around us the golden clouds were dissipating.

The grayness stole in.

"Ganelon," Medea said. "Ganelon! Help me!"

A door in my mind opened. A formless darkness stole in.

I felt that deadly, evil shadow creep through me, and submerge my mind under ebon waves.

"He has the power," Edeyrn murmured. "He was sealed to Llyr. Let him call on—Llyr."

"No. No. I dare not. Llyr?" But Medea's face was turned to me questioningly.

At my feet the wolf snarled and strained, as though by sheer brute strength it might wrench open a gateway between locked worlds.

Now the black sea submerged me utterly. My thought reached out and was repulsed by the dark horror of sheer infinity, stretched forth again and—

Touched—something!

Llyr . . . Llyr!

"The gateway opens," Edeyrn said.

The gray emptiness was gone. Golden clouds thinned and vanished. Around me, white pillars rose to a vault far, far above. We stood on a raised dais upon which curious designs were emblazoned.

The tide of evil which had flowed through me had vanished.

But, sick with horror and self-loathing, I dropped to my knees, one arm shielding my eyes.

I had called on—Llyr!



Arles clung to me in silence for a moment while, above her head, I looked down over the valley, knowing her dreams could never come true  
(CHAP. X)



## CHAPTER III

*Locked Worlds*

**A**CHING in every muscle, I woke and lay motionless, staring at the low ceiling. Memory flooded back. I turned my head, realizing that I lay on a soft couch padded with silks and pillows. Across the bare, simply furnished room was a recessed window, translucent, for it admitted light, but I could see only vague blurs through it.

Seated beside me, on a three-legged stool, was the dwarfed, robed figure I knew was Edeyrn.

Not even now could I see the face; the shadows within the cowl were too deep. I felt the keen glint of a watchful gaze, though, and a breath of something unfamiliar—cold and deadly. The robes were saffron, an ugly hue that held nothing of life in the harsh folds. Staring, I saw that the creature was less than four feet tall, or would have been had it stood upright.

Again I heard that sweet, childish, sexless voice.

"Will you drink, Lord Ganelon? Or eat?"

I threw back the gossamer robe covering me and sat up. I was wearing a thin tunic of silvery softness, and trunks of the same material. Edeyrn apparently had not moved, but a drapery swung apart in the wall, and a man came silently in, bearing a covered tray.

Sight of him was reassuring. He was a big man, sturdily muscled, and under a plumed Etruscan-styled helmet his face was tanned and strong. I thought so till I met his eyes. They were blue pools in which horror had drowned. An ancient fear, so familiar that it was almost submerged, lay deep in his gaze.

Silently he served me and in silence withdrew.

Edeyrn nodded toward the tray.

"Eat and drink. You will be stronger, Lord Ganelon."

There were meats and bread, of a sort, and a glass of colorless liquid that was not water, as I found on sampling it. I took a sip, set down the chalice, and scowled at Edeyrn.

"I gather that I'm not insane," I said.

"You are not. Your soul has been elsewhere—you have been in exile—but you are home again now."

"In *Caer Llyr*?" I asked, without quite knowing why.

Edeyrn shook the saffron robes.

"No. But you must remember?"

"I remember nothing. Who are you? What's happened to me?"

"You know that you are Ganelon?"

"My name's Edward Bond."

"Yet you almost remembered—at the Need-fire," Edeyrn said. "This will take time. And there is danger always. Who am I? I am Edeyrn—who serves the Coven."

"Are you—"

"A woman," she said, in that childish, sweet voice, laughing a little. "A very old woman, the oldest of the Coven now, except for one. And as for the Coven, it has shrunk from its original thirteen. There is Medea, of course, Lord Matholch—" I remembered the wolf—"Ghast Rhymi, who has more power than any of us, but is too old to use it. And you, Lord Ganelon, or Edward Bond, as you name yourself. Five of us in all now. Once there were hundreds, but even I cannot remember that time, though Ghast Rhymi can, if he would."

I put my head in my hands.

"Good heavens, I don't know! Your words mean nothing to me. I don't even know where I am!"

"Listen," she said, and I felt a soft touch on my shoulder. "You must understand this. You have lost your memories."

"That's not true."

"It is true, Lord Ganelon. Your true memories were erased, and you were given artificial ones. All you think you recall now, of your life on the Earth-world—all that is false. It did not happen. At least, not to you."

"The Earth-world? I'm not on Earth?"

"This is a different world," she said. "But it is your own world. You came from here originally. The Rebels, our enemies, exiled you and changed your memories."

"That's impossible."

"Come here," Edeyrn said, and went to the window. She touched something, and the pane grew transparent. I looked over her shrouded head at a landscape I had never seen before.

Or had I?

**U**NDER a dull, crimson sun the rolling forest below lay bathed in bloody light. I was looking down from a considerable height, and could not make out details, but it seemed to me that the trees were oddly

shaped and that they were moving. A river ran toward distant hills. A few white towers rose from the forest. That was all. Yet the scarlet, huge sun had told me enough. This was not the Earth I knew.

"Another planet?"

"More than that," she said. "Few in the Dark World know this. But I know—and there are some others who have learned, unluckily for you. There are worlds of probability, divergent in the stream of time, but identical almost, until the branches diverge too far."

"I don't understand that."

"Worlds coexistent in time and space—but separated by another dimension, the variant of probability. This is the world that might have been yours had *something* not happened, long ago. Originally the Dark World and the Earth-world were one, in space and time. Then a decision was made—a very vital decision, though I am not sure what it was. From that point the time-stream branched, and two variant worlds existed where there had been only one before.

"They were utterly identical at first, except that in one of them the key decision had not been made. The results were very different. It happened hundreds of years ago, but the two variant worlds are still close together in the time stream. Eventually they will drift farther apart, and grow less like each other. Meanwhile, they are similar, so much so that a man on the Earth-world may have his twin in the Dark World."

"His twin?"

"The man he might have been, had the key decision not been made ages ago in his world. Yes, twins, Ganelon—Edward Bond. Do you understand now?"

I returned to the couch and sat there, frowning.

"Two worlds, coexistent. I can understand that, yes. But I think you mean more—that a double for me exists somewhere."

"You were born in the Dark World. Your double, the true Edward Bond, was born on Earth. But we have enemies here, woods-runners, rebels, and they have stolen enough knowledge to bridge the gulf between time-variants. We ourselves learned the method only lately, though once it was well-known here, among the Coven.

"The rebels reached out across the gulf and sent you—sent Ganelon—into the Earth-world, so that Edward Bond could come here, among them. They—"

"But why?" I interrupted. "What reason could they have for that?"

Edeyrn turned her hooded head toward me, and I felt, not for the first time, a strange, remote chill as she fixed her unseen gaze upon my face.

"What reason?" she echoed in her sweet, cool voice. "Think, Ganelon. See if you remember."

I thought. I closed my eyes and tried to submerge my conscious mind, to let the memories of Ganelon rise up to the surface if they were there at all. I could not yet accept this preposterous thought in its entirety, but certainly it would explain a great deal if it were true. It would even explain—I realized suddenly—that strange blanking out in the plane over the Sumatra jungle, that moment from which everything had seemed so wrong.

Perhaps that was the moment when Edward Bond left Earth, and Ganelon took his place—both twins too stunned and helpless at the change to know what had happened, or to understand.

But this was impossible!

"I don't remember!" I said harshly. "It can't have happened. I know who I am! I know everything that ever happened to Edward Bond. You can't tell me that all that is only illusion. It's too clear, too real!"

"Ganelon, Ganelon," Edeyrn crooned to me, a smile in her voice. "Think of the rebel tribes. Try, Ganelon. Try to remember why they did what they did to you. The woods-runners, Ganelon—the disobedient little men in green. The hateful men who threatened us. Ganelon, surely you remember!"

It may have been a form of hypnotism. I thought of that later. But at that moment, a picture did swim into my mind. I could see the green-clad swarms moving through the woods, and the sight of them made me hot with sudden anger. For that instant I was Ganelon, and a great and powerful lord, defied by these underlings not fit to tie my shoe.

"Of course you bated them," murmured Edeyrn. She may have seen the look on my face. I felt the stiffness of an unfamiliar twist of feature as she spoke. I had straightened where I sat, and my shoulders had gone back arrogantly, my lip curling a feeling of scorn. So perhaps she did not read my mind at all. What I thought was plain in my face and bearing.

"Of course you punished them when you



could," she went on. "It was your right and duty. But they duped you, Ganelon. They were cleverer than you. They found a door that would turn on a temporal axis and thrust you into another world. On the far side of the door was Edward Bond who did not hate them. So they opened the door."

**E**DEYRN'S voice rose slightly and in it I detected a note of mockery.

"False memories, false memories, Ganelon. You put on Edward Bond's past when you put on his identity. But he came into our world as he was, free of any knowledge of Ganelon. He has given us much trouble, my friend, and much bewilderment. At first we did not guess what had gone wrong. It seemed to us that as Ganelon vanished from our Coven, a strange new Ganelon appeared among the rebels, organizing them to fight against his own people." She laughed softly. "We had to rouse Ghastr Rhymi from his sleep to aid us. But in the end, learning the method of door-opening, we came to Earth and searched for you, and found you. And brought you back. This is your world, Lord Ganelon! Will you accept it?"

I shook my head dizzily.

"It isn't real. I'm still Edward Bond."

"We can bring back your true memories. And we will. They came to the surface for a moment, I think, just now. But it will take time. Meanwhile, you are one of the Coven, and Edward Bond is back upon Earth in his old place. Remembering—" She laughed softly. "Remembering, I am sure, all he left undone here. But helpless to return, or meddle again in what does not concern him. But we have needed you, Ganelon. How badly we have needed you!"

"What can I do? I'm Edward Bond."

"Ganelon can do much—when he remembers. The Coven has fallen upon evil days. Once we were thirteen. Once there were other Covens to join us in our Sabbats. Once we ruled this whole world, under Great Llyr. But Llyr is falling asleep now. He draws farther and farther away from his worshippers. By degrees the Dark World has fallen into savagery. And, of all the Covens, only we remain, a broken circle, dwelling close to Caer Llyr where the Great One sleeps beyond his Golden Window." She fell silent for a moment.

"Sometimes I think that Llyr does not sleep at all," she said. "I think he is withdrawing, little by little, into some farther

world, losing his interest in us whom he created. But he returns!" She laughed. "Yes, he returns when the sacrifices stand before his Window. And so long as he comes back, the Coven has power to force its will upon the Dark World.

"But day by day the forest rebels grow stronger, Ganelon. With our help, you were gathering power to oppose them—when you vanished. We needed you then, and we need you more than ever now. You are one of the Coven, perhaps the greatest of us all. With Matholch you were—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "I'm still confused. Matholch? Was he the wolf I saw?"

"He was."

"You spoke of him as though he were a man."

"He is a man—at times. He is lycanthropic. A shape-changer."

"A werewolf? That's impossible. It's a myth, a bit of crazy folklore."

"What started the myth?" Edeyrn asked. "Long ago, there were many gateways opened between the Dark World and Earth. On Earth, memories of those days survive as superstitious tales. Folklore. But with roots in reality."

"It's superstition, nothing else," I said flatly. "You actually mean that werewolves, vampires and all that exist."

"Ghastr Rhymi could tell you more of this than I can. But we cannot wake him for such a matter. Perhaps I—well, listen. The body is composed of cells. These are adaptable to some extent. When they are made even more adaptable, when metabolism is accelerated sporadically, werewolves come into being."

The sweet, sexless child's voice spoke on from the shadow of the hood. I began to understand a little. On Earth, college biology had showed me instances of cells run wild—malignant tumors and the like. And there were many cases of "wolf-men," with thick hair growing like a pelt over them. If the cells could adapt themselves *quickly*, strange things might occur.

But the bones? Specialized osseous tissue, not the rigidly brittle bones of the normal man. A physiological structure that could, theoretically, so alter itself that it would be wolf instead of man, was an astounding theory!

"Part of it is illusion, of course," Edeyrn said. "Matholch is not as bestial in form as he seems. Yet he is a shape-changer, and

his form does alter."

"But how?" I asked. "How did he get this power?"

For the first time Edeyrn seemed to hesitate. "He is—a mutation. There are many mutations among us, here in the Dark World. Some are in the Coven, but others are elsewhere."

"Are you a mutation?" I asked her.

"Yes."

"A—shape-changer?"

"No," Edeyrn said, and the thin body under the robe seemed to shake a little. "No, I cannot change my shape, Lord Ganelon. You do not remember my—my powers?"

"I do not."

"Yet you may find them useful when the Rebels strike again," she said slowly. "Yes, there are mutations among us, and perhaps that is the chief reason why the probability-rift came ages ago. There are no mutants on Earth—at least not of our type. Matholch is not the only one."

"Am I a mutant?" I asked very softly.

**T**HE cowed head shook.

"No. For no mutant may be sealed to Llyr. As you have been sealed. One of the Coven must know the key to Caer Llyr."

The cold breath of fear touched me again. No, not fear. Horror, the deadly, monstrous breathlessness that always took me when the name of Llyr was mentioned.

I forced myself to say, "Who is Llyr?"

There was a long silence.

"Who speaks of Llyr?" a deep voice behind me asked. "Better not to lift that veil, Edeyrn!"

"Yet it may be necessary," Edeyrn said.

I turned, and saw, framed against the dark portiere, the rangy, whipcord figure of a

man, clad as I was in tunic and trunks. His red, pointed beard jutted; the half-snarling curve of his full lips reminded me of something. Agile grace was in every line of his wiry body.

Yellow eyes watched me with wry amusement.

"Pray it may not be necessary," the man said. "Well, Lord Ganelon? Have you forgotten me, too?"

"He has forgotten you, Matholch," Edeyrn said. "At least in this form!"

Matholch—the wolf! The shape-changer!

He grinned.

"It is Sabbath tonight," he said. "The Lord Ganelon must be prepared for it. Also, I think there will be trouble. However, that is Medea's business, and she asks if Ganelon is awake. Since he is, let us see her now."

"Will you go with Matholch?" Edeyrn asked me.

"I suppose so." I said. The red-beard grinned again.

"Ai, you have forgotten, Ganelon! In the old days you'd never have trusted me behind your back with a dagger."

"You always knew better than to strike," Edeyrn said. "If Ganelon ever called on Llyr, it would be unfortunate for you!"

"Well, I joked," Matholch said carelessly. "My enemies must be strong enough to give me a fight so I'll wait till your memory comes back, Lord Ganelon. Meanwhile the Coven has its back to the wall, and I need you as badly as you need me. Will you come?"

"Go with him," Edeyrn said. "You are in no danger—wolf's bark is worse than wolf's bite—even though this is not Caer Llyr."

I thought I sensed a hidden threat in her words. Matholch shrugged and held the curtain aside to let me pass. [Turn page]





"Few dare to threaten a shape-changer," he said over his shoulder.

"I dare," Edeyrn said, from the enigmatic shadows of her saffron cowl. And I remembered that she was a mutant too—though not a lycanthrope, like the red-bearded werewolf striding beside me along the vaulted passage.

What was—Edeyrn?

## CHAPTER IV

### *Matholch—and Medea*

**U**P TO NOW the true wonder of the situation had not really touched me yet. The anaesthesia of shock had dulled me. As a soldier—caught in the white light of a flare dropped from an overhead plane—freezes into immobility, so my mind still remained passive. Only superficial thoughts were moving there, as though, by concentration on immediate needs, I could eliminate the incredible fact that I was not on the familiar, solid ground of Earth.

But it was more than this. There was a curious, indefinable familiarity about these groined, pale-walled halls through which I strode beside Matholch, as there had been a queer familiarity about the twilight landscape stretching to forested distance beneath the window of my room.

Edeyrn—Medea—the Coven.

The names had significance, like words in a language I had once known well, but had forgotten.

The half-loping, swift walk of Matholch, the easy swing of his muscular shoulders, the snarling smile on his red-bearded lips—these were not new to me.

He watched me furtively out of his yellow eyes. Once we paused before a red-figured drapery, and Matholch, hesitating, thrust the curtain aside and gestured me forward.

I took one step—and stopped. I looked at him.

He nodded as though satisfied. Yet there was still a question in his face.

"So you remember a little, eh? Enough to know that this isn't the way to Medea. However, come along, for a moment. I want to talk to you."

As I followed him up a winding stair, I suddenly realized that he had not spoken in English. But I had understood him, as I had

understood Edeyrn and Medea.

Ganelon?

We were in a tower room, walled with transparent panes. There was a smoky, sour odor in the air, and gray tendrils coiled up from a brazier set in a tripod in the middle of the chamber. Matholch gestured me to one of the couches by the windows. He dropped carelessly beside me.

"I wonder how much you remember," he said.

I shook my head.

"Not much. Enough not to be too—trusting."

"The artificial Earth-memories are still strong, then. Ghost Rhymi said you would remember eventually, but that it would take time. The false writing on the slate of your mind will fade, and the old, true memories will come back. After a while."

Like a palimpsest, I thought—manuscript with two writings upon its parchment. But Ganelon was still a stranger; I was still Edward Bond.

"I wonder," Matholch said slowly, staring at me. "You spent much time exiled. I wonder if you have changed, basically. Always before—you hated me, Ganelon. Do you hate me now?"

"No," I said. "At least, I don't know. I think I distrust you."

"You have reason. If you remember at all. We have always been enemies, Ganelon, though bound together by the needs and laws of the Coven. I wonder if we need be enemies any longer?"

"It depends. I'm not anxious to make enemies—especially here."

Matholch's red brows drew together.

"Ai, that is not Ganelon speaking! In the old days, you cared nothing about how many enemies you made. If you have changed so much, danger to us all may result."

"My memory is gone," I said. "I don't understand much of this. It seems dream-like."

Now he sprang up and restlessly paced the room. "That's well. If you become the old Ganelon again, we'll be enemies again. That I know. But if Earth-exile has changed you—altered you—we may be friends. It would be better to be friends. Medea would not like it; I do not think Edeyrn would. As for Ghost Rhymi—" He shrugged. "Ghost Rhymi is old—old. In all the Dark World, Ganelon, you have the most power. Or can have. But it would mean going to Caer Llyr."

Matholch stooped to look into my eyes.

"In the old days, you knew what that meant. You were afraid, but you wanted the power. Once you went to Caer Llyr—to be sealed. So there is a bond between you and Llyr—not consummated yet. But it can be, if you wish it."

"What is Llyr?" I asked.

"Pray that you will not remember that," Matholch said. "When Medea talks to you—beware when she speaks of Llyr. I may be friend of yours or enemy, Ganelon, but for my own sake, for the sake of the Dark World—even for the sake of the rebels—I warn you: do not go to Caer Llyr. No matter what Medea asks. Or promises. At least be wary till you have your memories back."

"What is Llyr?" I said again.

**M**ATHOLCH swung around, his back to me. "Ghast Rhymi knows, I think. I do not. Nor do I want to. Llyr is—is evil—and is hungry, always. But what feeds his appetite is—is—" He stopped.

"You have forgotten," he went on after a while. "One thing I wonder. Have you forgotten how to summon Llyr?"

I did not answer. There was a darkness in my mind, an ebon gate against which my questioning thoughts probed vainly.

Llyr—Llyr?

Matholch cast a handful of powdery substance into the glowing brazier.

"Can you summon Llyr?" he asked again, his voice soft. "Answer, Ganelon. Can you?"

The sour smoke-stench grew stronger. The darkness in my head sprang apart, riven, as though a gateway had opened in the shadow. I—recognized that deadly perfume.

I stood up, glaring at Matholch. I took two steps, thrust out my sandaled foot, and overturned the brazier. Embers scattered on the stone floor. The red-beard turned a startled face to me.

I reached out, gripped Matholch's tunic, and shook him till his teeth rattled together. Hot fury filled me—and something more.

That Matholch should try his tricks on me!

A stranger had my tongue. I heard myself speaking.

"Save your spells for the slaves and helots," I snarled. "I tell you what I wish to tell you—no more than that! Burn your filthy herbs elsewhere, not in my presence!"

Red-bearded jaw jutted. Yellow eyes flamed. Matholch's face altered, flesh flowing like water, dimly seen in the smoke-

clouds that poured up from the scattered embers.

Yellow tusks threatened me through the gray mists.

The shape-changer made a wordless noise in his throat—the guttural sound a beast might make. Wolf-cry! A wolf mask glared into mine!

The smoke swam away. The illusion—illusion?—was gone. Matholch, his face relaxing from its snarling lines, pulled gently free from my grip.

"You—startled me, Lord Ganelon," he said smoothly. "But I think that I have had a question answered, whether or not these herbs—" He nodded toward the overturned brazier. "—had anything to do with it."

I turned toward the doorway.

"Wait," Matholch said. "I took something from you, a while ago."

I stopped.

The red-beard came toward me, holding out a weapon—a bared sword.

"I took this from you when we passed through the Need-fire," he said. "It is yours."

I accepted the blade.

Again I moved toward the curtained archway.

Behind me Matholch spoke.

"We are not enemies yet. Ganelon," he said gently. "And, if you are wise, you will not forget my warning. Do not go to Caer Llyr."

I went out. Holding the sword, I hurried down the winding stairway. My feet found their path without conscious guidance. The—intruder—in my brain was still strong. A palimpsest. And the blurred, erased writing was becoming visible, as though treated with some strong chemical.

The writing that was my lost memory.

The castle—how did I know it was a castle?—was a labyrinth. Twice I passed silent soldiers standing guard, with a familiar shadow of fear in their eyes—a shadow that, I thought, deepened as they saw me.

I went on, hurrying along a pale-amber hallway. I brushed aside a golden curtain and stepped into an oval room, dome-ceilinged, walled with pale, silken draperies. A fountain spurted, its spray cool on my cheek. Across the chamber, an archway showed the outlines of leafy branches beyond.

I went on through the arch. I stepped out into a walled garden. A garden of exotic flowers and bizarre trees.



The blooms were a riot of patternless color, like glowing jewels against the dark earth. Ruby and amethyst, crystal-clear and milky white, silver and gold and emerald, the flowers made a motionless carpet. But the trees were not motionless.

Twisted and gnarled as oaks, their black boles and branches were veiled by a luxuriant cloud of leafage, virulent green.

A stir of movement rippled through that green curtain. The trees roused to awareness.

I saw the black branches twist and writhe slowly—

**S**ATISFIED, their vigilance relaxed. They were motionless again. They—knew me.

Beyond that evil orchard the dark sky made the glowing ember of the sun more brilliant by contrast.

The trees stirred again.

Ripples of unrest shook the green. A serpentine limb, trailing a veil of leaves, lashed out—struck—whipped back into place.

Where it had been a darting shape ran forward, ducking and twisting as the guardian trees struck savagely at it.

A man, in a tight-fitting suit of earth-brown and forest-green, came running toward me, his feet trampling the jewel-flowers. His hard, reckless face was alight with excitement and a kind of triumph. He was empty-handed, but a pistol-like weapon of some sort swung at his belt.

"Edward!" he said urgently, yet keeping his voice low. "Edward Bond!"

I knew him. Or I knew him for what he was. I had seen dodging, furtive, green-clad figures like his before, and an anger already familiar surged over me at the very sight of him.

Enemy, upstart! One of the many who had dared work their magic upon the great Lord Ganelon.

I felt the heat of rage suffuse my face, and the blood rang in my ears with this unfamiliar, yet well-known fury. My body stiffened in the posture of Ganelon—shoulders back, lip curled, chin high. I heard myself curse the fellow in a voice that was choked and a language I scarcely remembered. And I saw him draw back, disbelief vivid upon his face. His hand dropped to his belt.

"Ganelon?" he faltered, his eyes narrow as they searched mine. "Edward, are you with us or are you Ganelon again?"

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## CHAPTER V

### *Scarlet Witch*

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**G**RIPPED in my right hand I still held the sword. I cut at him savagely by way of answer. He sprang back, glanced once over his shoulder, and drew his weapon. I followed his glance and saw another green figure dodging forward among the trees. It was smaller and slenderer—a girl, in a tunic the color of earth and forest. Her black hair swung upon her shoulders. She was tugging at her belt as she ran, and the face she turned to me was ugly with hate, her teeth showing in a snarl.

The man before me was saying something. "Edward, listen to me!" he was crying. "Even if you're Ganelon, you remember Edward Bond! He was with us—he believed in us. Give us a hearing before it's too late! Arles could convince you, Edward! Come to Arles. Even if you're Ganelon, let me take you to Arles!"

"It's no use, Ertu." the voice of the girl cried thinly. She was struggling with the last of the trees, whose flexible bough-tips still clutched to stop her. Neither of them tried now to keep their voices down. They were shouting, and I knew they must rouse the guards at any moment, and I wanted to kill them both myself before anyone came to forestall me by accident. I was hungry and thirsty for the blood of these enemies, and in that moment the name of Edward Bond was not even a memory.

"Kill him, Ertu!" cried the girl. "Kill him, or stand out of the way! I know Ganelon!"

I looked at her and took a fresh grip on my sword. Yes, she spoke the truth. She knew Ganelon. And Ganelon knew her, and remembered dimly that she had reason for her hate. I had seen that face before, contorted with fury and despair. I could not recall when or where or why, but she looked familiar.

The man Ertu drew his weapon reluctantly. To him I was still at least the image of a friend. I laughed exultantly and swung at him again with the sword, hearing it hiss viciously through the air. This time I drew blood. He stepped back again, lifting his weapon so that I looked down its black barrel.

"Don't make me do it," he said between his

teeth. "This will pass. You have been Edward Bond—you will be again. Don't make me kill you, Ganelon!"

I lifted the sword, seeing him only dimly through a ruddy haze of anger. There was a great exultation in me. I could already see the fountain of blood that would leap from his severed arteries when my blade completed its swing.

I braced my body for that great full-armed blow!

And the sword came alive in my hand. It leaped and shuddered against my fist.

Impossibly—in a way I cannot describe—that blow reversed itself. All the energy I was braced to expend upon my enemy recoiled up the sword, up my arm, crashed against my own body. A violent explosion of pain and shock sent the garden reeling. The earth struck hard against my knees.

Mist cleared from my eyes. I was still Ganelon, but a Ganelon dizzy from something more powerful than a blow.

I was kneeling on the grass, braced with one hand, shaking the throbbing fingers of my sword-hand and staring at the sword that lay a dozen feet away, still faintly glowing.

It was Matholch's doing—I knew that! I should have remembered how little I could trust that shifting, unstable wolfing. I had laid hands upon him in his tower-room—I should have known he would have his revenge for that. Even Edward Bond—soft fool that he was—would have been wise enough not to accept a gift from the shape-changer.

There was no time now for anger at Matholch, though. I was looking up into Ertu's eyes, and into the muzzle of his weapon, and a look of decision grew slowly in his face as he scanned mine.

"Ganelon!" he said, almost whispering. "Warlock!"

He tilted the weapon down at me, his finger moving on the trigger.

"Wait, Ertu!" cried a thin voice behind him. "Wait—let me!"

I looked up, still dazed. It had all happened so quickly that the girl was still struggling in the edge of the trees, though she cleared them as I looked and lifted her own weapon. Behind it her face was white and blazing with relentless hate. "Let me!" she cried again. "He owes me this!"

I was helpless. I knew that even at this distance she would not miss. I saw the glare

of fury in her eyes and I saw the muzzle waver a little as her hand shook with rage, but I knew she would not miss me. I thought of a great many things in that instant—confused memories of Ganelon's and of Edward Bond's surged together through my mind.

Then a great hissing like a wind swept up among the trees behind the girl. They all swayed toward her more swiftly than trees have any right to move, stooping and straining and hissing with a dreadful vicious avidity. Ertu shouted something inarticulate. But I think the girl was too angry to hear or see.

She never knew what happened. She could only have felt the great bone-cracking sweep of the nearest branch, reaching out for her from the leaning tree. She fired as the blow struck her, and a white-hot bolt ploughed up the turf at my knee. I could smell the charring grass.

**T**HE girl screamed thinly once as the avid boughs writhed together over her. The limbs threshed about her in a furious welter, and I heard one clear and distinct snap—a sound I had heard before, I knew, in this garden. The human spine is no more than a twig in the grip of those mighty boughs.

Ertu was stunned for one brief instant. Then he whirled to me, and this time I knew his finger would not hesitate on the trigger.

But time had run out for the two woods-people. He was not fully turned when there came a laugh, cool and amused, from behind me. I saw loathing and hatred flash across Ertu's bronzed face, and the weapon whirled away from me and pointed toward someone at my back. But before he could press the trigger something like an arrow of white light sprang over my shoulder and struck him above the heart.

He dropped instantly, his mouth frozen in a snarling square, his eyes staring.

I turned, getting slowly to my feet. Medea stood there smiling, very slim and lovely in a close-fitting scarlet gown. In her hand was a small black rod, still raised. Her purple eyes met mine.

"Ganelon," she murmured in an infinitely caressing voice. "Ganelon." And still holding my gaze with hers, she clapped her hands softly.

Silent, swift-moving guardsmen came and lifted the motionless body of Ertu. They carried him away. The trees stirred, whisped—and fell silent.



"You have remembered," Medea said. "Ganelon is ours again. Do you remember me—Lord Ganelon?"

Medea, witch of Colchis! Black and white and crimson, she stood there smiling at me, her strange loveliness stirring old, forgotten memories in my blood. No man who had known Medea could ever forget her wholly. Not till time ended.

But wait! There was something more about Medea that I must remember. Something that made even Ganelon a little doubtful, a little cautious. Ganelon? Was I Ganelon again? I had been wholly my old self when the woodspeople stood before me, but now I was uncertain.

The memories ebbed. While the lovely witch stood smiling at me, not guessing, all that had made me so briefly Ganelon dropped from my mind and body like a discarded cloak. Edward Bond stood there in my clothing, staring about the clearing and remembering with dismay and sick revulsion what had just been happening here.

For a moment I turned away to hide from Medea what my face must betray if she saw it. I felt dizzy with more than memory. The knowledge that two identities shared my body was a thought even more disturbing than the memory of what I had just done in the grip of Ganelon's strong, evil will.

This was Ganelon's body. There could be no doubt of it now. Somewhere on Earth Edward Bond was back in his old place, but the patterns of his memory still overlaid my mind, so that he and I shared a common soul, and there was no Ganelon except briefly, in snatches, as the memories that were rightfully mine—mine?—returned to crowd out Edward Bond.

I hated Ganelon. I rejected all he thought and was. My false memories, the heritage from Edward Bond, were stronger in me than Ganelon. I was Edward Bond—now!

Medea's caressing voice broke in upon my conflict, echoing her question.

"Do you remember me, Lord Ganelon?"

I turned to her, feeling the bewilderment on my own face, so that my very thoughts were blurred.

"My name is Bond," I told her stubbornly. She sighed.

"You will come back," she said. "It will take time, but Ganelon will return to us. As you see familiar things again, the life of the Dark World, the life of the Coven, the doors of your mind will open once more. You will

remember a little more tonight, I think, at the Sabbath." Her red smile was suddenly almost frightening.

"Not since I went into the Earth-world has a Sabbath been held, and it is long past time," she went on. "For in Caer Llyr there is one who stirs and grows hungry for his sacrifice."

She looked at me piercingly, the purple eyes narrowing.

"Do you remember Caer Llyr, Ganelon?"

The old sickness and horror came over me as she repeated that cryptic name.

Llyr—Llyr! Darkness, and something stirring beyond a golden window. Something too alien to touch the soil that human feet touched, something that should never share the same life humans lived. Touching that soil, sharing that life, it defiled them so that they were no longer fit for humans to share. And yet, despite my revulsion, Llyr was terribly intimate, too!

I knew, I remembered—

"I remember nothing," I told her shortly. For in that particular moment, caution was born in me. I could not trust anyone, not even myself. Least of all Ganelon—myself. I *did* remember, but I must not let them know. Until I was clearer as to what they wanted, what they threatened, I must keep this one secret which was all the weapon I had.

**L**LYR! The thought of him—of it—crystallized that decision in my mind. For somewhere in the murk of Ganelon's past there was a frightening link with Llyr. I knew they were trying to push me into that abyss of oneness with Llyr, and I sensed that even Ganelon feared that. I must pretend to be more ignorant than I really was until the thing grew clearer in my memory.

I shook my head again. "I remember nothing."

"Not even Medea?" she whispered, and swayed toward me. There was sorcery about her. My arms received that red and white softness as if they were Ganelon's arms, not mine. But it was Edward Bond's lips which responded to the fierce pressure of her lips.

Not even Medea?

Edward Bond or Ganelon, what was it to me then? The moment was enough.

But the touch of the red witch wrought a change in Edward Bond. It brought a sense of strangeness, of utter strangeness, to him—to me. I held her lovely, yielding body in my

arms, but something alien and unknown stooped and hovered above me as we touched. I surmised that she was holding herself in check—restraining a—a demon that possessed her—a demon that fought to free itself.

"Ganelon!"

Trembling, she pressed her palms against my chest and thrust free. Tiny droplets stood on her pale forehead.

"Enough!" she whispered. "You know!"

"What, Medea?"

And now stark horror stood in those purple eyes.

"You have forgotten!" she said. "You have forgotten me, forgotten who I am, *what I am!*"

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Ride to Caer Sécaire*

LATER, in the apartments that had been Ganelon's, I waited for the hour of Sabbat. And as I waited, I paced the floor restlessly. Ganelon's feet, pacing Ganelon's floor, but the man who walked here was Edward Bond. Amazing, I thought, how the false memory-patterns of another person, impressed upon Ganelon's clean-sponged brain, had changed him from himself to—me.

I wondered if I would ever be sure again which personality was myself. I hated and distrusted Ganelon, now. But I knew how easily the old self slipped back, in which I would despise Edward Bond.

And yet, to save myself, I must call back Ganelon's memories. I must know more than those around me guessed I knew, or I thought Ganelon and Bond together might be lost. Medea would tell me nothing. Edeyrn would tell me nothing. Matholch might tell me much, but he would be lying.

I scarcely dared go with them to this Sabbat, which I thought would be the Sabbat of Llyr, because of that strange and terrible link between Llyr and myself. There would be sacrifices.

How could I be sure I, myself, was not destined for the altar before that—that golden window?

Then, for a brief but timeless moment Ganelon came back, remembering fragmentary things that flitted through my mind too swiftly to take shape. I caught only terror—

terror and revulsion and a hideous, hopeless longing. . . .

Dared I attend the Sabbat?

But I dared not fail to attend, for if I refused I must admit I knew more about what threatened Ganelon than Edward Bond should know. And my only frail weapon against them now was what little I recalled that was secret from them. I must go. Even if the altar waited me, I must go.

There were the woodspeople. They were outlaws, hunted through the forests by Coven soldiers. Capture meant enslavement—I remembered the look of still horror in the eyes of those living dead men who were Medea's servants. As Edward Bond, I pitied them, wondered if I could do anything to save them from the Coven. The real Edward Bond had been living among them for a year and a half, organizing resistance, fighting the Coven. On Earth, I knew, he must be raging helplessly now, haunted by the knowledge of work unfinished and friends abandoned to the mercies of dark magic.

Perhaps I should seek the woodspeople out. Among them, at least, I would be safe while my memories returned. But when they returned—why, then Ganelon would rage, running amuck among them, mad with his own fury and arrogance. Dared I subject the woodspeople to the danger that would be the Lord Ganelon when Ganelon's memories came back? Dared I subject myself to their vengeance, for they would be many against one?

I could not go and I could not stay. There was safety nowhere for the Edward Bond who might become Ganelon at any moment. There was danger everywhere. From the rebel woodspeople, from every member of this Coven.

It might come through the wild and mocking Matholch.

Or through Edeyrn, who had watched me unseen with her chilling gaze in the shadows of her cowl.

Through Ghast Rhymi, whoever he was. Through Arles, or through the red witch!

Yes, most of all, I thought, through Medea—Medea, whom I loved!

At dusk, two maidens—helot-servants—came, bringing food and a change of garments. I ate hurriedly, dressed in the plain, fine-textured tunic and shorts, and drew about me the royal blue cloak they had carried. A mask of golden cloth I dangled undecidedly, until one of the maidens spoke:

"We are to guide you when you are ready, Lord," she reminded me.

"I'm ready now," I said, and followed the pair.

A pale, concealed lighting system of some sort made the hallways bright. I was taken to Medea's apartment, with its singing fountain under the high dome. The red witch was there breathtakingly lovely in a clinging robe of pure white. Above the robe her naked shoulders gleamed smoothly. She wore a scarlet cloak. I wore a blue one.

The helots slipped away. Medea smiled at me, but I noticed a wire-taut tenseness about her, betrayingly visible at the corners of her lips and in her eyes. A pulse of expectation seemed to beat out from her.

"Are you ready, Ganelon?"

"I don't know," I said. "It depends, I suppose. Don't forget that my memory's gone."

"It may return tonight, some of it anyway," she said. "But you will take no part in the ritual, at least until after the sacrifice. It will be better if you merely watch. Since you do not remember the rites, you'd best leave those to the rest of the Coven."

"Matholch?"

"And Edeyrn," Medea said. "Ghost Rhymi will not come. He never leaves this castle, nor will he unless the need is very great. He is old, too old."

**I** FROWNED at the red witch. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Caer Sécaire. I told you there has been no sacrifice since I went to Earth-world to search for you. It is past time."

"What am I supposed to do?"

She put out a slender hand and touched mine.

"Nothing, till the moment comes. You will know then. But meantime you must watch—no more than that. Put on your mask now."

She slipped on a *small* black mask that left the lower half of her face visible.

I donned the golden mask. I followed Medea to a curtained archway, and through it.

We were in a courtyard. Two horses stood waiting, held by grooms. Medea mounted one and I the other.

Overhead the sky had darkened. A huge door lifted in the wall. Beyond, a roadway stretched toward the distant forest.

The somber, angry disc of the red sun, swollen and burning with a dull fire, touched

the crest of the mountain barrier.

Swiftly it sank. Darkness came across the sky with a swooping rush. A million points of white light became visible. In the faint starshine Medea's face was ghost-pale.

Through the near-darkness her eyes glowed.

Faintly, and from far away, I heard a thin, trumpeting call. It was repeated.

Then silence—and a whispering that rose to a rhythmic thudding of shod hoofs.

Past us moved a figure, a helot guardsman, unmasked, unspeaking, his gaze turned to the waiting gateway.

Then another—and another. Until three score of soldiers had gone past, and after them nearly three score of maidens—the slave-girls.

On a light, swift-looking roan stallion Matholch came by, stealing a glance at me from his yellow eyes. A cloak of forest green swirled from his shoulders.

Behind him, the tiny form of Edeyrn, on a pony suited to her smallness. She was still cowed, her face hidden, but she now wore a cloak of purest yellow.

Medea nodded at me. We touched our heels to the horses' flanks and took our places in the column. Behind us other figures rode, but I could not see them clearly. It was too dark.

Through the gateway in the wall we went, still in silence save for the clopping of hoofs. We rode across the plain. The edges of the forest reached out toward us and swallowed us.

I glanced behind. An enormous bulk against the sky showed the castle I had left.

We rode under heavy, drooping branches. These were not the black trees of Medea's garden, but they were not normal either. I could not tell why an indefinable sense of strangeness reached out at me from the dim shadows above and around us.

After a long time the ground dipped at our feet, and we saw below us the road's end. The moon had risen belatedly. By its yellow glare there materialized from the deep valley below us a sort of tower, a dark, windowless structure almost Gothic in plan, as though it had thrust itself from the black earth, from the dark grove of ancient and alien trees.

Caer Sécaire!

I had been here before. Ganelon of the Dark World knew this spot well. But I did not know it; I sensed only that unpleasant familiarity, the *déjà vu* phenomenon, known



to all psychologists, coupled with a curious depersonalization, as though my own body, my mind, my very soul, felt altered and strange.

Caer Sécaire. Sécaire? Somewhere, in my studies, I had encountered that name. An ancient rite, in—*in* Gascony, that was it!

The Mass of Saint Sécaire!

And the man for whom that Black Mass is said—dies. That, too, I remembered. Was the Mass to be said for Ganelon tonight?

This was not the Place of Llyr. Somehow I knew that. Caer Llyr was elsewhere and otherwise, not a temple, not a place visited by worshippers. But here in Caer Sécaire, as in other temples throughout the Dark Land, Llyr might be summoned to his feasting, and, summoned, would come.

Would Ganelon be his feast tonight? I clenched the reins with nervous hands. There was some tension in the air that I could not quite understand. Medea was calm beside me. Edeyrn was always calm. Matholch, I could swear, had nothing to take the place of nerves. Yet in the night there was tension, as if it breathed upon us from the dark trees along the roadside.

Before us, in a silent, submissive flock, the soldiers and the slave-girls went. Some of the soldiers were armed. They seemed to be herding the rest, their movements mechanical, as if whatever had once made them free-willed humans was now asleep. I knew without being told the purpose for which those men and maidens were being driven toward Caer Sécaire. But not even these voiceless mindless victims were tense. They went blindly to their doom. No, the tension came from the dark around us.

Someone, something, waiting in the night!

## CHAPTER VII

### *Men of the Forest*

FROM out of the dark woods, suddenly, startlingly, a trumpet-note rang upon the air. In the same instant there was a wild crashing in the underbrush, an outburst of shouts and cries, and the night was laced by the thin lightnings of unfamiliar gunfire. The road was suddenly thronging with green-clad figures who swarmed about the column of slaves' heads, grappling with the guards, closing in between us and the mindless vic-

tims at our forefront.

My horse reared wildly. I fought him hard, forcing him down again, while stirrings of the old red rage I had felt before mounted in my brain. Ganelon, at sight of the forest people, struggled to take control. Him too I fought. Even in my surprise and bewilderment, I saw in this interruption the possibility of succor: I cracked my rearing horse between the ears with clubbed rein-loops and struggled to keep my balance.

Beside me Medea had risen in her stirrups and was sending bolt after arrowy bolt into the green melee ahead of us, the dark rod that was her weapon leaping in her hand with every shot. Edeyrn had drawn aside, taking no part in the fight. Her small cowed figure sat crouching in the saddle, but her very stillness was alarming. I had the feeling she could end the combat in a moment if she chose.

As for Matholch, his saddle was empty. His horse was already crashing away through the woods, and Matholch had hurled himself headlong into the fight, snarling joyously. The sound sent cold shudders down my spine. I could see that his green cloak covered a shape that was not wholly manlike, and the green people veered away from him as he plunged through their throngs toward the head of the column.

The woodsfolk were trying a desperate rescue. I realized that immediately. I saw too that they dared not attack the Covenant itself. All their efforts were aimed at overpowering the robotlike guards so that the equally robotlike victims might be saved from Llyr. And I could see that they were failing.

For the victims were too apathetic to scatter. All will had long ago been drained away from them. They obeyed orders—that was all. And the forest people were leaderless. In a moment or two I realized that, and knew why. It was my fault. Edward Bond may have planned this daring raid, but through my doing, he was not here to guide them. And already the abortive fight was nearly over.

Medea's flying fiery arrows struck down man after man. The mindless guards fired stolidly into the swarms that surged about them, and Matholch's deep-throated, exultant, snarling yells as he fought his way toward his soldiers were more potent than weapons. The raiders shrank back from the sound as they did not shrink from gunfire. In a moment, I knew, Matholch would reach his men,

and organized resistance would break the back of this unguided mutiny.

For an instant my own mind was a fierce battle-ground. Ganelon struggled to take control, and Edward Bond resisted him savagely.

As Ganelon I knew my place was beside the wolfing; every instinct urged me forward to his side. But Edward Bond knew better. Edward Bond too knew where his rightful place should be.

I shoved up my golden mask so that my face was visible. I drove my heels into my horse's sides and urged him headlong down the road behind Matholch. The sheer weight of the horse gave me an advantage Matholch, afoot, did not have. The sound of drumming hoofs and the lunging shoulders of my mount opened a way for me. I rose in the stirrups and shouted with Ganelon's deep, carrying roar:

"Bond! Bond! Edward Bond!"

The rebels heard me. For an instant the battle around the column wavered as every green-clad man paused to look back. Then they saw their lost leader, and a great echoing hail swept their ranks.

"Bond! Edward Bond!"

The forest rang with it, and there was new courage in the sound. Matholch's wild snarl of rage was drowned in the roar of the forest men as they surged forward again to the attack.

Out of Ganelon's memories I knew what I must do. The foresters were dragging down guard after guard, careless of the gunfire that mowed their disordered ranks. But only I could save the prisoners. Only Ganelon's voice could pierce the daze that held them.

I kicked my frantic horse forward, knocking guards left and right, and gained the head of the column.

"In the forest!" I shouted. "Waken and run! Run hard!"

There was an instant forward surge as the slaves, still tranced in their dreadful dream, but obedient to the voice of a Coven member, lurched through the thin rank of their guard. The whole shape of the struggle changed as the core of it streamed irresistibly forward across the road and into the darkness of the woods.

The green-clad attackers fell back to let the slaves through. It was a strange, voiceless flight they made. Not even the guards shouted, though they fired and fired again upon the retreating column, their faces as

blank as if they slept without dreams.

My flesh crawled as I watched that sight—the men and women fleeing for their lives, the armed soldiers shooting them down, and the faces of them all utterly without expression. Voiceless they ran and voiceless they died when the gun-bolts found them.

I wrenched my horse around and kicked him in the wake of the fleeing column. My golden mask slipped sidewise and I tore it off, waving to the scattering foresters, the moonlight catching brightly on its gold.

"Save yourselves!" I shouted, "Scatter and follow me!"

Behind me I heard Matholch's deep snarl, very near. I glanced over one shoulder as my horse plunged across the road. The shape-changer's tall figure faced me across the heads of several of his soldiers. His face was a wolf-like snarling mask, and as I looked he lifted a dark rod like the one Medea had been using. I saw the arrow of white fire leap from it, and ducked in the saddle.

The movement saved me. I felt a strong tug at my shoulders where the blue cape swirled out, and heard the tear of fabric as the bolt ripped through it and plunged hissing into the dark beyond. My horse lunged on into the woods.

Then the trees were rustling all about me, and my bewildered horse stumbled and tossed up his head, whinnying in terror. Beside me in the dark a soft voice spoke softly.

"This way," it said, and a hand seized the bridle.

I let the woodsmen lead me into the darkness.

It was just dawn when our weary column came at last to the end of the journey, to the valley between cliffs where the woodsmen had established their stronghold. All of us were tired, though the blank-faced slaves we had rescued trudged on in an irregular column behind me, unaware that their feet were torn and their bodies drooping with exhaustion.

The forest men slipped through the trees around us, alert for followers. We had no wounded with us. The bolts the Coven shot never wounded. Whoever was struck fell dead in his tracks.

In the pale dawn I would not have known the valley before me for the headquarters of a populous clan. It looked quite empty except for scattered boulders, mossy slopes,

and a small stream that trickled down the middle, pink in the light of sunrise.

ONE of the men took my horse then, and we went on foot up the valley, the robot slaves crowding behind. We seemed to be advancing up an empty valley. But when we had gone half its length, suddenly the woodsman at my right laid his hand upon my arm, and we paused, the rabble behind us jostling together without a murmur. Around me the woodsmen laughed softly. I looked up.

She stood high upon a boulder that overhung the stream. She was dressed like a man in a tunic of soft, velvety green, cross-belted with a weapon swinging at each hip, but her hair was a fabulous mantle streaming down over her shoulders and hanging almost to her knees in a cascade of pale gold that rippled like water. A crown of pale gold leaves the color of the hair held it away from her face, and under the shining chaplet she looked down and smiled at us. Especially she smiled at me—at Edward Bond.

And her face was very lovely. It had the strength and innocence and calm serenity of a saint's face, but there was warmth and humor in the red lips. Her eyes were the same color as her tunic, deep green, a color I had never seen before in my own world.

"Welcome back, Edward Bond," she said in a clear, sweet gently hushed voice, as if she had spoken softly for so many years that even now she did not dare speak aloud.

She jumped down from the boulder, very lightly, moving with the sureness of a wild creature that had lived all its lifetime in the woods, as indeed I suppose she had. Her hair floated about her as lightly as a web, settling only slowly about her shoulders as she came forward, so that she seemed to walk in a halo of her own pale gold.

I remembered what the woodsman Ertu had said to me in Medea's garden before her arrow struck him down.

"Arles could convince you, Edward! Even if you're Ganelon, let me take you to Arles!"

I stood before Arles now. Of that I was sure. And if I had needed any conviction before that the woodsmen's cause was mine, this haloed girl would have convinced me with her first words. But as for Ganelon—

How could I know what Ganelon would do?

That question was answered for me. Be-

fore my lips could frame words, before I could plan my next reaction, Arles came toward me, utterly without pretense or consciousness of the watching eyes. She put her hands on my shoulders and kissed me on the mouth.

And that was not like Medea's kiss—no! Arles' lips were cool and sweet, not warm with the dangerous, alluring honey-musk of the red witch. That intoxication of strange passion I remembered when I had held Medea in my arms did not sweep me now. There was a— a purity about Arles, an honesty that made me suddenly, horribly homesick for Earth.

She drew back. Her moss-green eyes met mine with quiet understanding. She seemed to be waiting.

"Arles," I said, after a moment.

And that seemed to satisfy her. The vague question that had begun to show on her face was gone.

"I wondered," she said. "They didn't hurt you, Edward?"

Instinctively I knew what I had to say.

"No. We hadn't reached Caer Sécaire. If the woodsmen hadn't attacked—well, there'd have been a sacrifice."

Arles reached out and lifted a corner of my torn cloak, her slim fingers light on the silken fabric.

"The blue robe," she said. "Yes, that is the color the sacrifice wears. The gods cast their dice on our side tonight, Edward. Now as for this foul thing, we must get rid of it."

Her green eyes blazed. She ripped the cloak from me, tore it across and dropped it to the ground.

"You will not go hunting again alone," she added. "I told you it was dangerous. But you laughed at me. I'll wager you didn't laugh when the Coven slaves caught you! Or was that the way of it?"

I nodded. A slow, deep fury was rising within me. So blue was the color of sacrifice, was it? My fears hadn't been groundless. At Caer Sécaire I would have been the offering, going blindly to my doom. Matholch had known, of course. Trust his wolf-mind to appreciate the joke. Edeyrn, thinking her cool, inhuman thoughts in the shadow of her hood, she had known too. And Medea?

Medea!

She had dared betray me! Me, Ganelon! The Opener of the Gate, the Chosen of Llyr, the great Lord Ganelon! They dared! Black thunder roared through my brain.



I thought: By Llyr, but they'll suffer for this! They'll crawl to my feet like dogs. Begging my mercy!

Rage had opened the floodgates, and Edward Bond was no more than a set of thin memories that slipped from me as the blue cloak had slipped from my shoulders—the blue cloak of the chosen sacrifice, on the shoulders of the Lord Ganelon!

**I** BLINKED blindly around the green-clad circle. How had I come here? How dared these woodsrunners stand in defiance before me? Blood roared in my ears and the woodland swam around me. When it steadied I would draw my weapon and reap these upstarts as a mower reaps his wheat.

But wait!

First, the Coven, my sworn comrades, had betrayed me. Why, *why?* They had been glad enough to see me when they brought me back from the other world, the alien land of Earth. The woodsmen I could slay whenever I wished it—the other problem came first. And Ganelon was a wise man. I might need these woods-people to help me in my vengeance. Afterward—ah, afterward!

I strove hard with memory. What could have happened to turn the Coven against me? I could have sworn this had not been Medea's original intention—she had welcomed me back too sincerely for that. Matholch could have influenced her, but again, why, why? Or perhaps it was Edeyrn, or the Old One himself, Ghast Rhymi. In any case, by the Golden Window that opens on the Abyss, they'd learn their error!

"Edward!" a woman's voice, sweet and frightened, came to me as if from a great distance. I fought my way up through a whirlpool of fury and hatred. I saw a pale face haloed in floating hair, the green eyes troubled. I remembered.

Beside Arles stood a stranger, a man whose cold gray eyes upon mine provided the shock I needed to bring me back to sanity. He looked at me as if he knew me—knew Ganelon. I had never seen the man before.

He was short and sturdy, young-looking in spite of the gray flecks in his close-cropped beard. His face was tanned so deeply it had almost the color of the brown earth. In his close-fitting green suit he was the perfect personification of a woodrunner, a glider through the forest, unseen and dangerous. Watching the powerful flex of his muscles when he moved, I knew he would be a bad

antagonist. And there was deep antagonism in the way he looked at me.

A white, jagged scar had knotted his right cheek, quirking up his thin mouth so that he wore a perpetual crooked, sardonic half-grin. There was no laughter in those gelid gray eyes, though.

And I saw that the circle of woodsmen had drawn back, ringing us, watching.

The bearded man put out his arm and swept Arles behind him. Unarmed, he stepped forward, toward me.

"No, Lorryn," Arles cried. "Don't hurt him."

Lorryn thrust his face into mine.

"Ganelon!" he said.

And at the name a whisper of fear, of hatred, murmured around the circle of woodfolk. I saw furtive movements, hands slipping quietly toward the hilts of weapons. I saw Arles' face change.

The old-time cunning of Ganelon came to my aid.

"No," I said, rubbing my forehead. "I'm Bond, all right. It was that drug the Coven gave me. It's still working."

"What drug?"

"I don't know," I told Lorryn. "It was in Medea's wine that I drank. And the long journey tonight has tired me."

I took a few unsteady paces aside and leaned against the boulder, shaking my head as though to clear it. But my ears were alert. The low murmur of suspicion was dying.

Cool fingers touched mine.

"Oh, my dear," Arles said, and whirled on Lorryn. "Do you think I don't know Edward Bond from Ganelon? Lorryn, you're a fool!"

"If the two weren't identical, we'd never have switched them in the first place," Lorryn said roughly. "Be sure, Arles. Very sure!"

Now the whispering grew again. "Better to be sure," the woodsmen murmured. "No risks, Arles! If this is Ganelon, he must die."

The doubt came back into Arles' green eyes. She thrust my hands away and stared at me. And the doubt did not fade.

I gave her glance for glance.

"Well, Arles?" I said.

Her lips quivered.

"It can't be. I know, but Lorryn is right. You know that; we can take no risks. To have the devil Ganelon back, after all that's happened, would be disastrous."

Devil, I thought. The devil Ganelon. Ganelon had hated the woodfolk, yes. But

now he had another, greater hatred. In his hour of weakness, the Coven had betrayed him. The woodsfolk could wait. Vengeance could not. It would be the devil Ganelon who would bring Caer Sécaire and the Castle crashing down about the ears of the Coven! Which would mean playing a careful game!

"Yes, Lorryn is right," I said. "You've no way of knowing I'm not Ganelon. Perhaps you know it, Arles—" I smiled at her "—but there must be no chances taken. Let Lorryn test me."

"Well?" Lorryn said, looking at Arles. Doubtfully she glanced from me to the bearded man.

"I—very well, I suppose."

Lorryn barked laughter.

"My tests might fail. But there is one who can see the truth. Freydis."

"Let Freydis test me," I said quickly, and was rewarded by seeing Lorryn hesitate.

"Very well," he said at last. "If I'm wrong, I'll apologize now. But if I'm right, I'll kill you, or try to. There's only one other life I'd enjoy taking the more, and the shape-changer isn't in my reach—yet."

**A** GAIN Lorryn touched his scarred cheek. At the thought of Lord Matholch, warmth came into his gray eyes; a distant ember burned for an instant there. I had seen hatred before. But not often had I seen such hatred as Lorryn held for—the wolfing?

Well, let him kill Matholch, if he could! There was another, softer throat in which I wanted to sink my fingers. Nor could all her magic protect the red witch when Ganelon came back to Caer Sécaire, and broke the Coven like rotten twigs in his hands!

Again the black rage thundered up like a deluging tide. That fury had wiped out Edward Bond—but it had not wiped out Ganelon's cunning.

"As you like, Lorryn," I said quietly. "Let's go to Freydis now."

He nodded shortly. Lorryn on one side of me, Arles, puzzled and troubled, on the other, we moved up the valley, surrounded by the woodsfolk. The dazed slaves surged ahead.

The canyon walls closed in. A cave-mouth showed in the granite ahead.

We drew up in a rough semi-circle facing that cavern. Silence fell, broken by the whispering of leaves in the wind. The red

sun was rising over the mountain wall.

Out of the darkness came a voice, deep, resonant, powerful.

"I am awake," it said. "What is your need?"

"Mother Freydis, we have helots captured from the Coven," Arles said quickly. "The sleep is on them."

"Send them in to me."

Lorryn gave Arles an angry look. He pushed forward.

"Mother Freydis!" he called.

"I hear."

"We need your sight. This man, Edward Bond—I think he is Ganelon, come back from the Earth-world where you sent him."

There was a long pause.

"Send him into me," the deep voice finally said. "But first the helots."

At a signal from Lorryn the woodsfolk began herding the slaves toward the cave-mouth. They made no resistance. Empty-eyed, they trooped toward that cryptic darkness and, one by one, vanished.

Lorryn looked at me and jerked his head toward the cavern. I smiled.

"When I come out, we shall be friends again as before." I said.

His eyes did not soften.

"Freydis must decide that."

I turned to Arles.

"Freydis shall decide," I said. "But there is nothing to fear, Arles. Remember that. I am not Ganelon."

She watched me, afraid, unsure, as I stepped back a pace or two.

The silent throng of woodsfolk stared, waiting warily. They had their weapons ready. I laughed softly and turned.

I walked toward the cave-mouth.

The blackness swallowed me.

## CHAPTER VIII

*Freydis*

**S**TRANGE to relate, I felt sure of myself as I walked up the sloping ramp in the darkness. Ahead of me, around a bend, I could see the glimmer of firelight, and I smiled. It had been difficult to speak with these upstart woodrunners as if they were my equals, as if I were still Edward Bond. It would be difficult to talk to their witch-

woman as if she had as much knowledge as a Lord of the Coven. Some she must have, or she could never have managed the transfer which had sent me into the Earth-world and brought out Edward Bond. But I thought I could deceive her or anyone these rebels had to offer me.

The small cave at the turn of the corridor was empty except for Freydis. Her back was to me. She crouched on her knees before a small fire that burned, apparently without fuel, in a dish of crystal. She wore a white robe, and her white hair lay in two heavy braids along her back. I stopped, trying to feel like Edward Bond again, to determine what he would have said in this moment. Then Freydis turned and rose.

She rose tremendously. Few in the Dark World can look me in the eye, but Freydis' clear blue gaze was level with my own. Her great shoulders and great, smooth arms were as powerful as a man's, and if age was upon her, it did not show in her easy motions or in the timeless face she turned to me. Only in the eyes was knowledge mirrored, and I knew as I met them that she was old indeed.

"Good morning, Ganelon," she said in her deep, serene voice.

I gaped. She knew me as surely as if she read my mind. Yet I was sure, or nearly sure, that no one in the Dark World could do that. For a moment I almost stammered. Then pride came to my rescue.

"Good day, old woman," I said. "I come to offer you a chance for your life, if you obey me. We have a score to settle, you and I."

She smiled.

"Sit down, Covenanter," she said. "The last time we matched strength, you traded worlds. Would you like to visit Earth again, Lord Ganelon?"

It was my turn to laugh.

"You could not. And if you could, you wouldn't, after you hear me."

Her blue eyes searched mine.

"You want something desperately," she said in a slow voice. "Your very presence here, offering me terms, proves that. I never thought to see the Lord Ganelon face to face unless he was in chains or in a berserker battle-mood. Your need of me, Lord Ganelon, serves as chains for you now. You are fettered by your need, and helpless."

She turned back to the fire and sat down with graceful smoothness, her huge body under perfect control. Across the flame in its

crystal bowl she faced me.

"Sit down, Ganelon," she said again, "and we will bargain, you and I. One thing first—do not waste my time with lies. I shall know if you tell the truth, Covenanter. Remember it."

I shrugged.

"Why should I bother with lies for such as you?" I said. "I have nothing to hide from you. The more of truth you know, the stronger you'll see my case is. First, though—those slaves who came in before me?"

She nodded toward the back of the cave.

"I sent them into the inner mountain. They sleep. You know the heavy sleep that comes upon those loosed from the Spell, Lord Ganelon."

I sat down, shaking my head.

"No—no, that I can not quite remember. I—you asked for the truth, old woman. Listen to it, then. I am Ganelon. but the false memories of Edward Bond still blur my mind. As Edward Bond I came here—but Arles told me one thing that brought Ganelon back. She told me that the Coven, in my hour of weakness, had dressed me in the blue cloak of the sacrifice and I was riding for Caer Sécaire when the woodsmen attacked us. Must I tell you now what my first wish in life is, witch-woman?"

"Revenge on the Coven." She said it hollowly, her eyes burning into mine through the fire. "This is the truth you speak, Covenanter. You want my help in getting your vengeance. What can you offer the wood-folk in return, save fire and sword? Why should we trust you, Ganelon?"

Her ageless eyes burned into mine.

"Because of what you want. My desire is vengeance. Yours is—what?"

"The end of Llyr—the ruin of the Coven!" Her voice was resonant and her whole ageless face lighted as she spoke.

"So. I too desire the ruin of the Coven and the end—the end of Llyr." My tongue stumbled a little when I said that. I was not sure why. True, I had been sealed to Llyr in a great and terrible ceremony once—I could recall that much. But Llyr and I were not one. We might have been, had events run differently. I shuddered now at the thought of it.

Yes, it was Llyr's end I desired now—must desire, if I hoped to live.

Freydis looked at me keenly. She nodded.

"Yes—perhaps you do. Perhaps you do. What do you want of us then, Ganelon?"



**I** SPOKE hastily:

"I want you to swear to your people that I am Edward Bond. No--wait! I can do more for them now than Edward Bond could do. Give thanks that I am Ganelon again, old woman! For only he can help you. Listen to me. Your foresters could not kill me. I know that. Ganelon is deathless, except on Llyr's altar. But they could fetter me and keep me prisoner here until you could work your spells again and bring Edward Bond back. And that would be foolish for your sake and for mine.

"Edward Bond has done all he knows for you. Now it's Ganelon's turn. Who else could tell you how Llyr is vulnerable, or where Matholch keeps his secret weapons, or how one can vanquish Edeyrn? These things I know--or I once knew. You must help me win my memories back, Freydis. After that--" I grinned fiercely.

She nodded. Then she sat quiet for awhile.

"What do you want me to do, then, Ganelon?" she asked, at last.

"Tell me first about the bridging of the worlds," I said eagerly. "How did you change Edward Bond and me?"

Freydis smiled grimly.

"Not so fast, Covenantanter!" she answered. "I have my secrets too! I will answer only a part of that question. We wrought the change, as you must guess, simply to rid ourselves of you. You must remember how fiercely you were pressing us in your raids for slaves, in your hatred of our freedom. We are a proud people, Ganelon, and we would not be oppressed forever. But we knew there was no death for you except in a way we could not use.

"I knew of the twin world of Earth. I searched, and found Edward Bond. And after much striving, much effort, I wrought a certain transition that put you in the other world, with the memories of Edward Bond blotting out your own.

"We were rid of you. True, we had Edward Bond with us, and we did not trust him either. He was too like you. But him we could kill if we must. We did not. He is a strong man, Covenantanter. We came to trust him and rely upon him. He brought us new ideas of warfare. He was a good leader. It was he who planned the attack upon the next Coven sacrifice--"

"An attack that failed," I said. "Or would have failed, had I not swung my weight into the balance. Edward Bond had Earth-knowl-

edge, yes. But his weapons and defenses could only have breached the outer walls of the Coven. You know there are powers, seldom used, but powers that do not fail!"

"I know," she said. "Yes, I know, Ganelon. Yet we had to try, at least. And the Coven had been weakened by losing you. Without you, none of the others would have dared call on Llyr, except perhaps Ghastr Rhymi." She stared deeply into the fire. "I know you, Ganelon. I know the pride that burns in your soul. And I know, too, that vengeance, now, would be very dear to your heart. Yet you were sealed to Llyr, once, and you have been Covenantanter since your birth. How do I know you can be trusted?"

I did not answer that. And, after a moment, Freydis turned toward the smoke-blackened wall. She twitched aside a curtain I had not seen. There, in an alcove, was a Symbol, a very ancient Sign, older than civilization, older than human speech.

Yes, Freydis would be one of the few who knew what that Symbol meant. As I knew.

"Now will you swear that you speak with a straight tongue?" she said.

I moved my hand in the ritual gesture that bound me irrevocably. This was an oath I could not break without being damned and doubly damned, in this world and the next. But I had no hesitation. I spoke truth!

"I will destroy the Coven!" I said.

"And Llyr?"

"I will bring an end to Llyr!"

But sweat stood out on my forehead as I said that. It was not easy.

Freydis twitched the curtain back into place. She seemed satisfied.

"I have less doubt now," she said. "Well, Ganelon, the Norms weave strange threads together to make warp and woof of destiny. Yet there is a pattern, though sometimes we cannot see it. I did not ask you to swear fealty to the forest-folk."

"I realize that."

"You would not have sworn it," she said. "Nor is it necessary. After the Coven is broken, after an end is made to Llyr, I can guard the people of the woods against even you, Ganelon. And we may meet in battle then. But until then we are allies. I will name you—Edward Bond."

"I'll need more than that," I told her. "If the masquerade is to pass unchallenged."

"No one will doubt my word," Freydis said. Firelight flickered on her great frame, her smooth, ageless face.

"I cannot fight the Coven till I get back my memories. The memories of Ganelon. All of them."

**S**HE shook her head. "Well," she said slowly, "I cannot do too much on that score. Something, yes. But writing on the mind is touchy work, and memories, once erased, are not easily brought back. You still have Edward Bond's memories?"

I nodded.

"But my own, no. They're fragmentary. I know, for example, that I was sealed to Llyr, but the details I don't remember."

"It would be as well, perhaps, to let that memory stay lost," Freydis said somberly. "But you are right. A dulled tool is no use. So listen."

Rock-still, boulder-huge, she stood across the fire from me. Her voice deepened.

"I sent you into the Earth-World. I brought your double, Edward Bond, here. He helped us, and—Arles loved him, after a while. Even Lorryn, who does not trust many, grew to trust Edward Bond."

"Who is Lorryn?"

"One of us now. Not always. Years ago he had his cottage in the forest; he hunted, and few were as cunning as Lorryn in the chase. His wife was very young. Well, she died. Lorryn came back to his cottage one night and found death there, and blood, and a wolf that snarled at him from a bloody muzzle. He fought the wolf; he did not kill it. You saw Lorryn's cheek. His whole body is like that, scarred and wealed from wolf-fangs."

"A wolf?" I said. "Not—"

"A wolfing," Freydis said. "Lycanthrope, shape-changer. Matholch. Some day Lorryn will kill Matholch. He lives only for that."

"Let him have the red dog," I said contemptuously. "If he likes, I'll give him Matholch flayed!"

"Arles and Lorryn and Edward Bond have planned their campaign," Freydis said. "They swore that the last Sabbat had been celebrated in the Dark World. Edward Bond showed them new weapons he remembered from Earth. Such weapons have been built and are in the arsenal, ready. No Sabbats have been held since Medea and her followers went searching to Earth; the wood-folk held their hands. There was nothing to strike at except old Ghast Rhymi. Now Medea and the rest of the Coven are back,

they're ready. If you lead against them, Ganelon, the Coven can be smashed, I think."

"The Coven has its own weapons," I muttered. "My memory fails—but I think Edeyrn has a power that—that—" I shook my head. "No, it's gone."

"How can Llyr be destroyed?" Freydis asked.

"I—I may have known once. Not now."

"Look at me," she said. And leaned forward, so that it seemed as though her ageless face was bathed in the fires.

Through the flames her gaze caught mine. Some ancient power kindled her clear blue eyes. Like pools of cool water under a bright sky—pools deep and unstirring, where one could sink into an azure silence forever and ever. . . .

As I looked the blue waters clouded, grew dark. I saw a great black dome against a black sky. I saw the thing that dwells deepest and most strongly in the mind of Ganelon—Caer Llyr!

The dome swam closer. It loomed above me. Its walls parted like dark water, and I moved in memory down the great smooth, shining corridor that leads to Llyr Himself.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Realm of the Superconscious*

**B**YWARD I moved. Faces flickered before me—Matholch's fierce grin, Edeyrn's cowed head with its glance that chilled, Medea's savage beauty that no man could ever forget, even in his hatred. They looked at me, mistrustfully. Their lips moved in soundless question. Curiously, I knew these were real faces I saw.

In the magic of Freydis' spell I was drifting through some dimensionless place where only the mind ventures, and I was meeting here the thoughts of the questing Coven, meeting the eyes of their minds. They knew me. They asked me fiercely a question I could not hear.

Death was in the face Matholch's mind turned to mine. All his hatred of me boiled furiously in his yellow wolf-eyes. His lips moved—almost I could hear him. Medea's features swam up before me, blotting out the shape-changer. Her red mouth framed a question—over and over.

"Ganelon, where are you? Ganelon, my

lover, where are you? You must come back to us. Ganelon!"

Edeyrn's faceless head moved between Medea and me, and very distantly I heard her cool, small voice echoing the same thought,

"You must return to us, Ganelon. Return to us and die!"

Anger drew a red curtain between those faces and myself.

Traitors, betrayers, false to the Coven oath! How dared they threaten Ganelon, the strongest of them all? How dared they—and why?

Why?

My brain reeled with the query. And then I realized there was one face missing from the Coven. These three had been searching the thought-planes for me, but what of Ghost Rhymi?

Deliberately I groped for the contact of his mind.

I could not touch him. But I remembered. I remembered Ghost Rhymi, whose face Edward Bond had never seen. Old, old, old, beyond good and evil, beyond fear and hatred, this was Ghost Rhymi, the wisest of the Coven. If he willed, he would answer my groping thought. If he willed not, nothing could force him. Nothing could harm the Eldest, for he lived on only by force of his own will.

He could end himself instantly, by the power of a thought. And he is like a candle flame, flickering away as one grasps at him. Life holds nothing more for him. He does not cling to it. If I had tried to seize him he could slip like fire or water from my grasp. He would as soon be dead as alive. But unless he must, he would not break his deep calm to think the thought that would change him into clay.

His mind and the image of his face remained hidden from my quest. He would not answer. The rest of the Coven still kept calling to me with a strange desperation in their minds—return and die, Lord Ganelon! But Ghost Rhymi did not care.

So I knew that it was at his command the death-sentence had been passed. And I knew I must seek him out and somehow force an answer from him—from Ghost Rhymi, upon whom all force was strengthless. Yet force him I must!

All this while my mind had been drifting effortlessly down the great hallway of Caer Llyr, borne upon that tide that flows deepest

in the mind of Ganelon, the Chosen of Llyr—Ganelon, who must one day return to Him Who Waits. . . . As I was returning now.

A golden window glowed before me. I knew it for the window through which great Llyr looks out upon his world, the window through which he reaches for his sacrifices. And Llyr was hungry. I felt his hunger. Llyr was roaming the thought-planes too, and in the moment that I realized again where my mind was drifting, I felt suddenly the stir of a great reaching, a tentacular groping through the golden window.

Llyr had sensed my presence in the planes of his mind. He knew his Chosen. He stretched out his godlike grasp, to fold me into that embrace from which there is no returning.

I heard the soundless cry of Medea, vanishing like a puff of smoke out of the thought-plane as she blanked her mind defensively from the terror. I heard Matholch's voiceless howl of pure fear as he closed his own mind. There was no sound from Edeyrn, but she was gone as utterly as if she had never thought a thought. I knew the three of them sat somewhere in their castle, eyes and minds closed tightly, willing themselves to blankness as Llyr roamed the thought-planes seeking the food he had been denied so long.

A part of me shared the terror of the Coven. But a part of me remembered Llyr. For an instant, almost I recaptured the dark ecstasy of that moment when Llyr and I were one, and the memory of horror and of dreadful joy came back, the memory of a power transcending all earthly things.

This was mine for the taking, if I opened my mind to Llyr. Only one man in a generation is sealed to Llyr, sharing in his godhead, exulting with him in the ecstasy of human sacrifice—and I was that one man if I chose to complete the ceremony that would make me Llyr's. If I chose, if I dared—ah!

The memory of anger came back. I must not release myself into that promised joy. I had sworn to put an end to Llyr. I had sworn by the Sign to finish the Coven and Llyr. Slowly, reluctantly, my mind pulled itself back from the fringing contact of those tentacles.

**T**HE moment that tentative contact was broken, a full tide of horror washed over me. Almost I had touched—*him*. Almost I had let myself be defiled beyond all human understanding by the terrible touch of—of—



There is no word in any language for the thing that was Llyr. But I understood what had been in my mind as Edward Bond when I realized that to dwell on the same soil as Llyr, share the same life, was a defilement that made earth and life too terrible to endure—if one knew Llyr.

I must put an end to him. In that moment, I knew I must stand up and face the being we knew as Llyr and fight him to his end. No human creature had ever fully faced him—not even his sacrifices, not even his Chosen. But his slayer would have to face him, and I had sworn to be his slayer.

Shuddering, I drew back from the black depths of Caer Llyr, struggled to the surface of that still blue pool of thought which had been Freydis' eyes. The darkness ebbed around me and by degrees the walls of the cave came back, the fuelless flame, the great smooth-limbed sorceress who held my mind in the motionless deeps of her spell.

As I returned to awareness, slowly, slowly, knowledge darted through my mind in lightning-flashes, too swiftly to shape into words.

I knew, I remembered.

Ganelon's life came back in pictures that went vividly by and were printed forever on my brain. I knew his powers; I knew his secret strengths, his hidden weaknesses. I knew his sins. I exulted in his power and pride. I returned to my own identity and was fully Ganelon again. Or almost fully.

But there were still hidden things. Too much had been erased from my memory to come back in one full tide. There were gaps, and important gaps, in what I could recall.

The blue darkness cleared. I looked into Freydis' clear gaze across the fire. I smiled, feeling a cold and arrogant confidence welling up in me.

"You have done well, witch-woman," I told her.

"You remember?"

"Enough. Yes, enough." I laughed. "There are two trials before me, and the first is the easier of the two, and it is impossible. But I shall accomplish it."

"Ghast Rhyimi?" she asked in a quiet voice.

"How do you know that?"

"I know the Coven. And I think, but I am not sure, that in Ghast Rhyimi's hands lie the secrets of the Coven and of Llyr. But no man can force Ghast Rhyimi to do his bidding."

"I'll find the way. Yes, I will even tell you what my next task is. You shall have the

truth as I just learned it, witch. Do you know of the Mask and the Wand?"

Her eyes on mine, she shook her head. "Tell me. Perhaps I can help."

I laughed again. It was so fantastically implausible that she and I should stand here, sworn enemies of enemy clans, planning a single purpose together! Yet there was only a little I hid from her that day, and I think not very much that Freydis hid from me.

"In the palace of Medea, is a crystal mask and the silver Wand of Power," I told her. "What that Wand is I do not quite remember—yet. But when I find it, my hands will know. And with it I can overcome Medea and Matholch and all their powers. As for Edeyrn—well, this much I know. The Mask will save me from her."

I hesitated.

Medea I knew now. I knew the strange hungers and the stranger thirsts that drove the beautiful red and white witch to her trystings. I knew now, and shuddered a little to think of it, why she took her captives with those arrows of fire that did not kill at all, but only stunned them.

In the Dark World, my world, mutation has played strange changes upon flesh that began as human. Medea was one of the strangest of all. There is no word in Earth-tongues for it, because no creature such as Medea ever walked Earth. But there is an approximation. In reality perhaps, and certainly in legend, beings a little like her have been known on Earth. The name they give them is Vampire.

But Edeyrn, no. I could not remember. It may be that not even Ganelon had ever known. I only knew that in time of need, Edeyrn would uncover her face.

"Freydis," I said, and hesitated again. "What is Edeyrn?"

She shook her massive head, the white braids stirring on her shoulders.

"I have never known. I have only probed at her mind now and then, when we met as you met her today, on the thought-lanes. I have much power, Ganelon, but I have always drawn back from the chill I sensed beneath Edeyrn's hood. No, I cannot tell you what she is."

I laughed again. Recklessness was upon me now.

"Forget Edeyrn," I said. "When I have forced Ghast Rhyimi to my bidding, and faced Llyr with the weapon that will end him, what shall I fear of Edeyrn? The Crystal Mask is

a talisman against her. That much I know. Let her be whatever monstrous thing she wills—Ganelon has no fear of her.”

“There is a weapon, then, against Llyr too?”

“There is a sword,” I said. “A sword that is—is not quite a sword as we think of weapons. My mind is cloudy there still. But I know that Ghost Rhymi can tell me where it is. A weapon, yet not a weapon. The Sword Called Llyr.”

**F**OR an instant, as I spoke that name, it seemed to me that the fire between us flickered as if a shadow had passed across its brightness. I should not have called the name aloud. An echo of it had gone ringing across the realms of thought, and in Caer Llyr perhaps Llyr Himself had stirred behind the golden window—stirred, and looked out.

Even here, I felt a faint flicker of hunger from that far-away domed place. And suddenly, I knew what I had done. *Llyr was awake!*

I stared at Freydis with widened eyes, meeting her blue gaze that was widening too. She must have felt the stir as it ran formlessly all through the Dark World. In the Castle of the Coven I knew they had felt it too, perhaps that they looked at one another with the same instant dread which flashed between Freydis and me here.

*Llyr was awake!*

And I had wakened him. I had gone drifting in thought down that shining corridor and stood in thought before the very window itself, Llyr's Chosen, facing Llyr's living window. No wonder he had stirred at last to full awakening.

Exultation bubbled up in my mind.

“Now they must move!” I told Freydis joyfully. “You wrought better than you knew when you set my mind free to rove its old track. Llyr wakens and is hungrier than the Coven ever dared let him grow before. For overlong there has been no Sabbat, and Llyr ravens for his sacrifice. Have you spies watching the Castle now, witch-woman?”

She nodded.

“Good. Then we will know when the slaves are gathered again for a Sabbat meeting. It will be soon. It must be soon! And Edward Bond will lead an assault upon the Castle while the Coven are at Sabbat in Caer Sécaire. There will be the Mask and the Wand, old woman!” My voice deepened to a

chant of triumph. “The Mask and the Wand for Ganelon, and Ghost Rhymi alone in the Castle to answer me if he can! The Norns fight on our side, Freydis!”

She looked at me long and without speaking.

Then a grim smile broke across her face and stooping, she spread her bare hand, palm down, upon the fuelless flame. I saw the fire lick up around her fingers. Deliberately she crushed it out beneath her hand, not flinching at all.

The fire flared and died away. The crystal dish stood empty upon its pedestal, and dimness closed around us. In that twilight the woman was a great figure of marble, towering beside me.

I heard her deep voice.

“The Norns are with us, Ganelon,” she echoed. “See that you fight upon our side too, as far as your oath will take you. Or you must answer to the gods and to me. And by the gods—” she laughed harshly, “—by the gods, if you betray me, I swear I'll smash you with no other power than this!”

In the dimness I saw her lift her great arms. We looked one another in the eye, this mighty sorceress and I, and I was not sure but that she could overcome me in single combat if the need arose. By magic and by sheer muscle, I recognized an equal. I bent my head.

“So be it, Sorceress,” I said, and we clasped hands there in the darkness. And almost I hoped I need not have to betray her.

Side by side, we went down the corridor to the cave mouth.

The half-circle of foresters still awaited us. Arles and the scarred Lorryn stood a little forward, lifting their heads eagerly as we emerged. I paused, catching the quiver of motion as calloused hands slipped stealthily toward hilt and bowstring. Panic, subdued and breathless, swept around the arc of woodsfolk.

I stood there savoring the moment of terror among them, knowing myself Ganelon and the nemesis that would bring harsh justice upon them all, in my own time. In my own good time.

But first I needed their help.

At my shoulder the deep voice of Freydis boomed through the glade.

“I have looked upon this man,” she said. “I name him—Edward Bond.”

Distrust of me fell away from them; Freydis' words reassured them.

## CHAPTER X

*Swords for the Coven*

**N**OW the sap that runs through Ygdra-sill-root stirred from its wintry sluggishness, and the inhuman guardians of the fate-tree roused to serve me. The three Norns—the Destiny-weavers—I prayed to them!

Urduur who rules the past!

She whispered of the Covenanters, and their powers and their weaknesses; of Matholch, the wolfling, whose berserk rages were his great flaw, the gap in his armor through which I could strike, when fury had drowned his wary cunning; of the red witch and of Edeyrn—and of old Ghost Rhymi. My enemies. Enemies whom I could destroy, with the aid of certain talismans that I had remembered now. Whom I would destroy!

Verdandi who rules the present!

Edward Bond had done his best. In the caves the rebels had showed me were weapons, crude rifles and grenades, gas-bombs and even a few makeshift flame-throwers. They would be useful against the Coven's slaves. How useless they would be against the Covenanters I alone knew. Though Freydis may have known too.

Yet Arles and Lorryn and their reckless followers were ready to use those Earth-weapons, very strange to them, in a desperate attack on the Castle. And I would give them that chance, as soon as our spies brought word of Sabbat-preparations. It would be soon. It would have to be soon. For Llyr was awake now—hungry, thirsting—beyond the Golden Window that is his door into the worlds of mankind.

Skuld who rules the future!

To Skuld I prayed most of all. I thought that the Coven would ride again to Caer Sécaire before another dawn came. By then I wanted the rebels ready.

Edward Bond had trained them well. There was military discipline, after a fashion. Each man knew his equipment thoroughly, and all were expert woodsmen. We laid our plans, Arles and Lorryn and I—though I did not tell them everything I intended—and group by group, the rebels slipped away into the forest, bound for the Castle.

They would not attack. They would not reveal themselves until the signal was given. Meantime, they would wait, concealed in the

gulleys and scrub-woods around the Castle. But they would be ready. When the time came, they would ride down to the great gates. Their grenades would be helpful there.

Nor did it seem fantastic that we should battle magic with grenades and rifle. For I was beginning to realize more and more, as my lost memory slowly returned, that the Dark World was not ruled by laws of pure sorcery. To an Earth-mind such creatures as Matholch and Medea would have seemed supernatural, but I had a double mind, for as Ganelon I could use the memories of Edward Bond as a workman uses tools.

I had forgotten nothing I had ever known about Earth. And by applying logic to the Dark World, I understood things I had always before taken for granted.

The mutations gave the key. There are depths in the human mind forever unplumbed, potentialities for power as there are lost, atrophied senses—the ancient third eye that is the pineal gland. And the human organism is the most specialized thing of flesh that exists.

Any beast of prey is better armed with fang and claw. Man has only his brain. But as carnivores grew longer, more deadly talons, so man's mind developed correspondingly. Even in Earth-world there are mediums, mind-readers, psychomantic experts, ESP specialists. In the Dark World the mutations had run wild, producing cosmic abortions for which there might be no real need for another million years.

And such minds, with their new powers, would develop tools for those powers. The wands. Though no technician, I could understand their principle. Science tends toward simpler mechanisms; the klystron and the magnetron are little more than metal bars. Yet, under the right conditions, given energy and direction, they are powerful machines.

Well, the wands tapped the tremendous electromagnetic energy of the planet, which is, after all, simply a gargantuan magnet. As for the directive impulse, trained minds could easily supply that.

Whether or not Matholch actually changed to wolf-form I did not know, though I did not think he did. Hypnosis was part of the answer. An angry cat will fluff out its fur and seem double its size. A cobra will, in effect, hypnotize its prey. Why? In order to break down the enemy's defences, to disarm him, to weaken the single-purposiveness that is so vital in combat. No, perhaps Mat-

holch did not turn into a wolf, but those under the spell of his hypnosis thought he did, which came to the same thing in the end.

Medea? There was a parallel. There are diseases in which blood transfusions are periodically necessary. Not that Medea drank blood; she had other thirsts. But vital nervous energy is as real a thing as a leucocyte, and, witch though she was, she did not need magic to serve her needs.

**I**F EDEYRN I was not so sure. Some stray remembrances hung like mists in my mind. Once I had known what she was, what chilling power lay hidden in the darkness of her cowl. And that was not magic either. The Crystal Mask would protect me against Edeyrn, but I knew no more than that.

Even Llyr—even Llyr! He was no god. That I knew well. Yet what he might be was something I could not even guess at as yet. Eventually I meant to find out, and the Sword Called Llyr, which was not a true sword, would aid me then.

Meanwhile, I had my part to play. Even with Freydis as my sponsor, I could not afford to rouse suspicion among the rebels. I had explained that Medea's drug had left me weak and shaken. That helped to explain any minor lapses I might make. Curiously, Lorryn seemed to have accepted me fully at Freydis' word, while in Arles' behavior I detected a faint, almost imperceptible reserve. I do not think that she suspected the truth. Or, if she did, she was trying not to admit it, even in her own mind.

And I could not afford to let that suspicion grow.

The valley was very active now.

Much had happened since I came there in the dawn. I had been through enough exertion both physical and emotional to last an ordinary man for a week, but Ganelon had only begun his battle. It was thanks to Edward Bond that our plans for attack could be formulated so readily, and in a way I was glad I had been too busy for anything but the most impersonal planning with Arles and Lorryn.

It helped to cover the great gaps of my ignorance about things Edward Bond should know. Many times I angled craftily for information, many times I had to call upon the excuse of the mythical drug and upon the exhaustion of my ordeal at the Castle. But by the time our plans were laid, it seemed

to me that even Arles' suspicions were partly lulled.

I knew I must lull them utterly.

We rose from the great map-table in the council-cavern. All of us were tired. I met Lorryn's scar-twisted grin, warmth in it now as he smiled at the man he thought his sworn friend, and I made Edward Bond's face smile back at him.

"We'll do it this time," I told him confidently. "This time we'll win!"

His smile twisted suddenly into a grimace, and the light like embers glowed in his deep eyes.

"Remember," he growled. "Matholch—for me!"

I looked down at the relief-map of the table, very skillfully made under Edward Bond's directions.

The dark green hills rolling with their strange forests of semi-animate trees, every brook traced in white plaster, every roadway marked. I laid my hand on the little mound of towers that was a miniature Castle of the Coven. From it stretched the highway I had ridden last night, beside Medea, in my blue sacrificial robe. There was the valley and the windowless tower of Caer Sécaire which had been our destination.

For a moment I rode that highway again, in the darkness and the starshine, seeing Medea beside me in her scarlet cloak, her face a pale oval in the dusk, her mouth black-red, her eyes shining at me. I remembered the feel of that fiercely yielding body in my arms as I had held her last night, as I had held her so many times before. In my mind whirled a question.

Medea, Medea, red witch of Colchis, why did you betray me?

I ground my palm down on the tiny plaster towers of the Castle, feeling them powder away beneath my hand. I grinned fiercely at the ruin I had made of Edward Bond's model.

"We'll have no need for this again!" I said through my teeth.

Lorryn laughed.

"No need to repair it. Tomorrow the Coven Castle will be wreckage too."

I dusted the powdered plaster from my hand and looked across the table at the silent Arles. She looked at me gravely, waiting. I smiled.

"We haven't had a moment alone together," I said, making my voice tender. "I'll need sleep before I leave tonight, but there's time



for a walk, if you'll come with me."

The grave green gaze dwelt upon mine. Then she nodded, without smiling, and came around the table, stretching out her hand to me. I took it and we went down the steps to the cave-mouth and out into the glen, neither of us speaking. I let her lead the way, and we walked in silence toward the upper end of the valley, the little stream tinkling away beside us.

Arles walked very lightly, her gossamer hair floating behind her in a pale misty veil. I wondered if it was by intent that she kept her free hand resting upon the holstered weapon at her side.

**I**T WAS hard for me to keep my mind upon her, or to care whether or not she knew me for myself. Medea's face in all its beauty and its evil floated before me up the glen, a face no man who looked upon it could ever forget. For a moment I was angry at the recollection that Edward Bond, in my flesh, had taken last night the kisses she meant for Ganelon.

Well, I would see her again tonight, before she died by my hand!

In my mind I saw the tiny roadway of the map-table, winding down from Coven Castle to the sacrificial temple. Along the real road, sometime in the night to come, I knew the cavalcade would ride again as it had ridden with me last night. And again there would be forest men hiding along the road, and again I would lead them against the Coven. But this time the outcome would be very different from anything either the rebels or the Coven could expect.

What a strange web the Norns had woven! Last night as Edward Bond, tonight as Ganelon, I would lead the same men in the same combat against the same foe, but with a purpose as different as night from day.

The two of us, deadly enemies though we shared the same body in a strange, inverted way--enemies though we had never met and never could meet, for all our common flesh. It was an enigma too curious to unravel.

"Edward," a voice said at my shoulder. I looked down. Arles was facing me with the same enigmatic gaze I had met so often today. "Edward, is she very beautiful?"

I stared at her.

"Who?"

"The witch. The Coven witch. Medea."

I almost laughed aloud. Was this the answer to all her aloofness of the day? Did

she think my own withdrawal, all the changes she sensed in me, were due to the charms of a rival beauty? Well, I must set her mind at rest about that, at any rate. I called upon Llyr to forgive me the lie, and I took her shoulders in my hands and said:

"There is no woman on this world or on Earth half so beautiful as you, my darling."

Still she looked up at me gravely.

"When you mean that, Edward, I'll be glad," she said. "You don't mean it now. I can tell. No." She put her fingers across my mouth as I began to protest. "Let's not talk about her now. She's a sorceress. She has powers neither of us can fight. It isn't your fault or mine that she's too beautiful to forget all in a moment. Never mind now. Look! Do you remember this place?"

She twisted deftly from my grasp and swept out a hand toward the panorama spread below us. We stood in a grove of tall, quivering trees high on the crest of the low mountain. The leaves and branches made a bower around us with their showers of shaking tendrils, but through an opening here and there we could see the rolling country far below us, glowing in the light of the red westering sun.

"This will be ours some day," said Arles softly. "After the Coven is gone, after Llyr has vanished. We'll be free to live above ground, clear the forests, build our cities--live like men again. Think of it, Edward! A whole world freed from savagery. And all because there were a few of us at the start who did not fear the Coven, and who found you. If we win the fight, Edward, it will be because of you and Freydis. We would all have been lost without you."

She turned suddenly, her pale gold hair flying out around her face like a halo of floating gauze, and she smiled at me with a sudden, bewitching charm I had never seen upon her face before.

Until now she had always turned a grave reserve to my advances. Now suddenly I saw her as Edward Bond had, and it came to me in a flash of surprise that Bond was a very fortunate man, after all. Medea's sultry scarlet beauty would never wholly vanish from my mind, I knew, but this Arles had her own delicate and delightful charm.

She was very near me, her lips parted as she smiled up into my face. For an instant I envied Edward Bond. Then I remembered. I was Edward Bond! But it was Ganelon who stooped suddenly and seized the forest

girl in a fiercely ardent embrace that amazed her, for I felt her gasp of surprise against my breast and her stir of protest in the moment before my lips touched hers.

Then she protested no longer.

She was a strange, wild, shy little creature, very pleasant in my arms, very sweet to kiss. I knew by the way she responded to me that Edward Bond had never held her like this. But then Edward Bond was a weakling and a fool. And before the kiss had ended I knew where I would turn first for solace when Medea had paid for her treachery with her life. I would not forget Medea, but I would not soon forget this kiss of Arles', either.

She clung to me in silence for a moment, her gossamer hair floating like thistledown about us both, and above her head I looked out over the valley which she had seen in her mind's eyes peopled with free forest folk, dotted with their cities. I knew that dream would never come true.

But I had a dream of my own!

**I** SAW the forest people toiling to raise my mighty castle here perhaps on this very mountaintop, a castle to dominate the whole countryside and the lands beyond it. I saw them laboring under my overseers to conquer still further lands. I saw my armies marching, my slaves in my fields and mines, my navies on the dark oceans of a world that might well be mine.

Arles should share it with me—for awhile. For a little while.

"I will always love you!" I said at her ear in the voice of Edward Bond. But it was Ganelon's lips that found her lips in the one last ardent kiss I had time for then.

Curiously, it seemed to me, that it took Ganelon's kisses at last to convince her I was

Edward Bond. . . .

After that, for a few hours I slept, snug in Edward Bond's cavern room's, in his comfortable bed, his guards watching beside the door. I slept with the memory of his sweet forest girl in my arms, and the prospect of his kingdom and his bride before me when I woke. I think in the Earth-world, Edward Bond must have dreamed jealous dreams.

But my own dreams were bad. Llyr in his castle was awake and hungry, and the great, cold, writhing tendrils of his hunger coiled lazily through my mind as I slept. I knew they stirred through every mind in the Dark World that had senses to perceive them. I knew I must wake soon, or never. But first I must sleep and grow strong for the night's ordeal. Resolutely I shut Llyr from my thoughts, resolutely I shut away Arles.

It was Medea's red smile and sidelong sultry glance that went down with me into the caverns of slumber.

## CHAPTER XI

### *In Ghast Rhymi's Tower*

**Q**UIETLY Lorryn and I crouched among the trees and looked out at the Castle of the Coven, aglitter with lights against the starry sky. This was the night! We both knew it, and we were both tense and sweating with a nervous exultation that made this waiting hard indeed.

All around us in the woods, unseen, we heard the tiny sounds that meant an army of forest people waited our signal. And this time they were here in force. I caught a glint of

[Turn page]

# Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep. When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills, (Advt.)

starlight now and then on rifle-barrels, and I knew that the rebels were armed to put up a good fight against the soldiers of the Coven.

Not, perhaps, too good a fight.

I did not care. They thought they were going to storm the Castle and the Coven by sheer force of arms. I knew their only purpose was to divert attention while I made my way into the Castle and found the secret weapons that would give me power over the Covenanters. While they were striking, I would make my way to Ghastr Rhymi and learn what was essential for me to learn.

After that, I did not care. Many foresters would die. Let them. There would still be slaves aplenty for me when my hour came. And nothing could stop me now. The Norns fought with me; I could not fail. . . .

There was much activity within the Castle. Voices floated out to us in the still night air. Figures moved to and fro against the lights. Then great gates were flung open upon a burst of golden radiance and the outlines of many riders crowded against it. A procession was coming out.

I heard chains clash musically, and I understood. This time the sacrifices rode chained to their mounts, so that no siren voices from the wood could lure them away. I shrugged. Let them go to their death, then. Llyr must be fed while he lasted. Better these than Ganelon, offered at the Golden Window. We saw them go off down the dark road, their chains ringing.

That was Matholch—there on the tall horse. I knew his vulpine outlines, the lift of the cloak upon his shoulders. And I would have known him too because of the great start, quickly checked, that Lorryn made beside me. I heard the breath whistle through his nostrils, and his voice grated in my ear.

"Remember! That is mine!"

Edeyrn went by, tiny on her small mount, and a breath of chill seemed to me to sweep the darkness as she passed.

Medea came!

When I could no longer make out her outlines in the distance, when her white robe was no more than a shimmer and her scarlet cloak had melted into the dark, I turned to Lorryn, my mind spinning, my plans already chaotic with change. For a new compulsion had come upon me, and I was not even trying to resist it.

I had not seen a sacrifice in Caer Sécaire. This was one of the blank places in my mem-

ory, and a dangerous blank. Until Ganelon remembered the Sabbath, until he watched Llyr accept the offerings through the Golden Window, he could not wholly trust himself to fight the Coven and Llyr. This was a gap that must be filled. And curiosity was suddenly very strong upon me. Curiosity—and could it be—the pull of Llyr?

"Lorryn, wait for me here," I whispered in the darkness. "We've got to make sure they enter Caer Sécaire, start the Sabbath. I don't want to attack until I'm sure. Wait for me."

He stirred protestingly, but I was away before he could speak. I was out upon the road and running softly and silently after that processional winding toward the valley and the Mass of St. Sécaire, which is the Black Mass. It seemed to me as I ran that the fragrance of Medea's perfume hung upon the air I breathed, and my throat choked with the passion of my hatred for her, and of my love.

"She shall be the first to die," I promised myself in the dark. . . .

I watched the great iron doors of Caer Sécaire swing shut upon the last of the procession. The Caer was dark inside. They went quietly in, one by one, and vanished into the deeper night within. The doors clanged resonantly after them.

Some memory of Ganelon's, buried beneath the surface of conscious thought, urged me to the left, around the curve of the great wall. I followed the impulse obediently, moving almost like a sleep-walker toward a goal I did not know. Memory took me close under the looming rampart, made me lay my hands on its surface. There were heavy scrollings of pattern there, writhing like tendrils over the dark walls. My remembering fingers traced the curves, though my mind still wondered.

**T**HEN the wall moved beneath my hands. The scroll-work had been a key of sorts, and a door sank open in the blackness before me. I went confidently forward, out of black night, through a black door into deeper blackness within. But my feet knew the way.

A stairway rose beneath me in the dark. My feet had expected it and I did not stumble. It was very curious to move so blindly through this strange and dangerous place, not knowing where or why I moved, yet trusting my body to find the way. The stairs wound up and up.

Llyr was here. I could feel his hungry presence like a pressure on the mind, but

many times intensified because of the narrow spaces within these walls, as if he were a sound of thunder reverberating again and again from the enclosed spaces of the Caer. Something within me reverberated soundlessly in answer, a roar of exultation that I suppressed in quick revolt.

Llyr and I were no longer linked by that ceremony of long ago. I repudiated it. I was not Llyr's Chosen now. But within me a sense I could not control quivered with ecstasy at the thought of those sacrifices who had filed blindly through the great doors of Caer Sécaire. And I wondered if the Coven—if Medea—thought of me now, who had so nearly stood with the sacrifices last night.

My feet paused upon the stairs. I could see nothing, but I knew that before me was a wall carved with scroll-patterns. My hands found it, traced the raised designs. A section of darkness slid sidewise and I was leaning upon a wide ledge, looking down, very far down.

Caer Sécaire was like a mighty grove of columns whose capitals soared up and up into infinite darkness. Somewhere above, too high for me to see its source, a light was beginning to glow. My heart paused when I saw it, for I knew that light—that golden radiance from a Golden Window.

Memory came fitfully back to me. The Window of Llyr. The Window of the Sacrifice. I could not see it, but my mind's eye remembered its glow. In Caer Llyr that Window's substance shone eternally, and Llyr Himself lolled behind it—far behind it—forever. But in Caer Sécaire and in the other temples of sacrifice that had once dotted the Dark World, there were replicas of the Window which glowed only when Llyr came bodilessly through the dark to take his due.

Above us, hovering and hungry, Llyr was dawning now in that golden radiance, like a sun in the night time of the temple. Where the Window of Sécaire was located, how it was shaped, I still could not remember. But something in me knew that golden light and shivered in response as I watched its brilliance strengthen through the columns of the temple.

Far below me I saw the Coven standing, tiny figures foreshortened to wedges of colored cloak—green-robed Matholch, yellow-robed Edeyrn, red Medea. Behind them stood a circle of guardsmen. Before them, as I watched, the last of the chosen slaves moved blindly away among the columns. I could

not see where they were going, but in essence I knew. The Window was yawning for its sacrifices, and somehow they must make their way to it.

As the light broadened, I saw that before the Coven stood a great cup-shaped altar, black on a black dais. Above it a lipped spout hung. My eyes traced the course of the trough which ended in the spout, and I saw now that there was a winding, descending curve, dark against that growing light, which came down in a great sweep from the mysterious heights overhead, stretching from—the Window?—to the cupped altar. A stir deep within me told me what that trough was for. I leaned upon the sill, shaking with an anticipation that was half for myself and half for Him who hovered above us in the sun-like dawning of golden light.

Thinly from below me rose a chant. I knew Medea's voice, clear and silver, a thread of sound in the dimness and the silence. It rose like incense, quivering among the mighty, topless columns of Sécaire.

A tenseness of waiting grew and grew in the dim air of the temple. The figures below me stood motionless, heads lifted, watching the dawning light. Medea's voice chanted on and on.

Time paused there in the columned grove of Sécaire, while Llyr hovered above us waiting for his prey.

Then a thin and terrible cry rang out from the heights overhead. One scream. The light shot out blindingly in a great burst of exultation, like a voiceless answering cry from Llyr Himself. Medea's chant rose to a piercing climax and paused.

There was a stir among the columns; something moved along that curve of trough. My eyes sought the altar and the lipped spout above it.

The Coven was rigid, a cluster of frozen figures, waiting.

Blood began to drip from the spout.

I do not know how long I hung there on the ledge, my eyes riveted to the altar. I do not know how many times I heard a cry ring out from above, how many times Medea's chant rose to a hungry climax as the light burst forth in a glory overhead and blood gushed into the great cup of the altar. I was deaf and blind to everything but this. I was half with Llyr at his Golden Window, shaken with ecstasy as he took his sacrifices. and half with the Coven below, glorying in their share of the ceremony of the Sabbat.



**B**UT I know I waited too long. What saved me I do not know now. Some voice of the ego crying unheard in my mind that this was time dangerously spent, that I must be elsewhere before the Sabbat ended, that Lorryn and his men waited endlessly while I hung here battering like a glut-ton upon Llyr's feast.

Reluctantly awareness returned to my mind. With an infinite effort I pulled myself back from the brink of that Golden Window and stood reeling in the darkness, but in my own body again, not hovering mindlessly with Llyr in the heights above. The Coven was still tense below me, gripped in the ecstasy of the sacrifice. But for how long I could not be sure. Perhaps for the rest of the night; perhaps for only an hour. I must hurry, if hurrying were not already futile. There was no way to know.

So I went back in the darkness, down the unseen stairs, and out of the dark, unseen door, and back along the road to Coven Castle, my mind still reeling with remembered ecstasy, the glow of the Window still before my dazzled eyes, and the scarlet runnel above the altar, and the thin, sweet chanting of Medea louder in my ears than the sound of my own feet upon the road. . . .

The red moon was far down the sky when I came back to Lorryn, still crouching beside the castle wall and half mad with impatience. There was an eager stir among the unseen soldiers as I came running down the road, a forward surge as if they had waited to the very limit of endurance and would attack now whether I gave the word or no.

I waved to Lorryn while I was still twenty feet away. I was careless now of the Castle guardsmen. Let them see me. Let them hear.

"Give the signal!" I shouted to Lorryn. "Attack!"

I saw him start up beside the road, and the moonlight glinted upon the silver horn he lifted to his lips. Its blare of signal notes ripped the night to tatters. It ripped away the last of my lethargy too.

I heard the long yell that swept the forest as the woodsmen surged forward to the attack, and my own voice roared unbidden in reply, an ecstasy of battle-hunger that matched the ecstasy I had just shared with Llyr.

The rattle of rifle-fire drowned out our voices. The first explosions of grenades shook the Castle, outlining the outer walls in livid detail. There were shouts from within, wild

trumpetings of signal horns, the cries of confused guardsmen, leaderless and afraid. But I knew they would rally. They had been trained well enough by Matholch and by myself. And they had weapons that could give the woodsmen a stiff fight.

When they recovered from this panic there would be much blood spilled around the outer walls.

I did not wait to see it. The first explosions had breached the barriers close beside me, and I scrambled recklessly through the gap, careless of the rifle fire that spattered against the stones. The Norns were with me tonight. I bore a charmed life, and I knew I could not fail.

Somewhere above me in the besieged towers Ghost Rhymi sat wrapped in his chill indifference, aloof as a god above the struggle around Coven Castle. I had a rendezvous with Ghost Rhymi, though he did not know it yet.

I plunged into the gateway of the Castle, heedless of the milling guards. They did not know me in the darkness and the confusion, but they knew by my tunic I was not a forester, and they let me shoulder them aside.

Three steps at a time, I ran up the great stairway.

## CHAPT R XII

### *Harp of Satan*

**C**ASTLE of the Coven! How strange it looked to me as I went striding through its halls. Familiar, yet curiously unknown, as though I saw it through the veil of Edward Bond's transplanted memories.

So long as I went rapidly, I seemed to know the way. But if I hesitated, my conscious mind took over control, and that mind was still clouded with artificial memories, so that I became confused in the halls and corridors which were familiar to me when I did not think directly of them.

It was as if whatever I focused on sharply receded into unfamiliarity while everything else remained clear, until I thought of it.

I strode down hallways arched overhead and paved underfoot in bright, intricate mosaics that told legendary tales half-familiar to me. I walked upon centaurs and satyrs whose very faces were well known to the Gaelon half of my mind, while the Ed-

ward Bond half wondered in vain whether such people had really lived in this distorted world of mutations.

This double mind at times was a source of strength to me, and at others a source of devouring weakness. Just now I hoped fervently that I might meet no delays, for once I lost this rushing thread of memory which was leading me toward Ghost Rhymi, I might never find it again. Any interruption might be fatal to my plans.

Ghost Rhymi, my memories told me, would be somewhere in the highest tower of the castle. There too would be the treasure-room where the Mask and the Wand lay hidden, and hidden deeper in the serene, untouchable thoughts of Ghost Rhymi, lay the secret of Llyr's vulnerability.

These three things I must have, and the getting would not be easy. For I knew—without clearly remembering how or by what—that the treasure-room was guarded by Ghost Rhymi. The Coven would not have left open, to all comers that secret place where the things that could end them lay hidden.

Even I, even Ganelon, had a secret thing locked in that treasury. For no Covenanter, no warlock, no sorceress can deal in the dark powers without creating, himself, the one instrument that can destroy him. That is the Law.

There are secrets behind it which I may not speak of, but the common one is clear. All Earth's folklore is rife with the same legend. Powerful men and women must focus their power in an object detached from themselves.

The myth of the external soul is common to all Earth races, but the reason for it lies deep in the lore of the Dark World. This much I can say—that there must be a balance in all things. For every negative, a positive. We of the Coven could not build up our power without creating a corresponding weakness somewhere, somehow, and we must hide that weakness so cunningly that no enemy could find it.

Not even the Coven knew wherein my own secret lay. I knew Medea's, and I knew Edeyrn's only partially, and as for Matholch—well, against him I needed only my own Covenanter strength. Ghost Rhymi did not matter. He would not bother to fight.

But Llyr? Ah!

Somewhere the Sword lay hidden, and he who could find it and use it in that unknown

way for which it was fashioned, he held the existence of Llyr in his own hand. But there was danger. For as Llyr's power in the Dark World was beyond imagination, so too must be that balancing power hidden in the Sword. Even to go near it might be fatally dangerous. To hold it in the hand—well, hold it I must, and there was no profit in thinking about danger.

I went up and up, on and on.

I could not hear the sounds of battle. But I knew that at the gate the Coven guards and slaves were fighting and falling, as Lorryn's men, too, were falling. I had warned Lorryn that none must break through his lines to warn those at Caer Sécaire. I knew that he would follow that order, despite his anxiety to come to grips with Matholch. For the rest, there was one in the Castle who could, without stirring, send a message to Medea. One person!

He had not sent that message. I knew that as I thrust through the white curtain and came out into the tower room. The little chamber was semicircular, walls, floor and ceiling were ivory pale. The casement windows were shut, but Ghost Rhymi had never needed sight to send out his vision.

He sat there, an old, old man, relaxed amid the cushions of his seat, snowy hair and beard falling in curled ringlets that blended with his white, plain robe. His hands lay upon the chair-arms, pale as wax, so transparent that I could almost trace the course of the thinned blood that stirred so feebly in those old veins.

Wick and wax had burned down. The flame of life flickered softly, and a wind might send that flame into eternal darkness. So sat the Ancient of Days, his blind blue gaze not seeing me, but turned upon inward things.

**G**ANELON'S memories flooded back. Ganelon had learned much from Ghost Rhymi. Even then, the Covenanter had been old. Now the tides of time had worn him, as the tides of the sea wear a stone till nothing is left but a thin shell, translucent as clouded glass.

Within Ghost Rhymi I could see the life-fires dwindling, sunk to embers, almost ash.

He did not see me. Not easily can Ghost Rhymi be drawn back from the deeps where his thoughts move.

I spoke to him, but he did not answer.

I went past him then, warily, toward the wall that divided the tower-top into two

halves. There was no sign of a door, but I knew the combination. I moved my palms in an intricate pattern on the cool surface, and a gap widened before me.

I crossed the threshold.

Here were kept the holy things of the Coven.

I looked upon that treasure-vault with new eyes, clearer because of Edward Bond's memories. That lens, burning with dull amber lights there in its hollowed place in the wall—I had never wondered much about it before. It killed. But memories of Earth-science told me why. It was not magic, but an instantaneous drainage of the electrical energy of the brain. And that conical black device—that killed, too. It could shake a man to pieces, by shutting his life-force back and forth so rapidly between artificial cathode and anode that living flesh could not stand the strain. Alternating current, with variations!

But these weapons did not interest me now. I sought other loot. There was no death-traps to beware of, for none but the Coven knew the way to enter this treasure-room, or its location, or even that it existed, save in legends. And no slave or guard would have dared to enter Ghost Rhymi's tower.

My gaze passed over a sword, but not the one I needed; a burnished shield; a harp, set with an intricate array of manual controls. I knew that harp. Earth has legends of it—the harp of Orpheus, that could bring back the dead from Hades. Human hands could not play it. But I was not quite ready for the harp. yet.

What I wanted lay on a shelf, sealed in its cylindrical case. I broke open the seals and took out the thin black rod with its hand-grip.

The Wand of Power. The Wand that could tap the electro-magnetic force of a planet. So could other wands of this type—but this was the only one without the safety-device that limited its power. It was dangerous to use.

In another case I found the Crystal Mask—a curved, transparent plate that shielded my eyes like a domino mask of glass. This mask would shield one from Edeytn.

I searched further. But of the Sword of Llyr I could find no trace.

Time did not lag. I heard nothing of the noise of battle, but I knew that the battle went on, and I knew, too, that sooner or later the Coven would return to the Castle.

Well, I could fight the Coven now, but I could not fight Llyr. I dared not risk the issue till I had made sure.

In the door of the vault I stood, staring at Ghost Rhymi's silvery head. Whatever guardian thought he kept here, knew I had a right to the treasure room. He made no motion. His thoughts moved far out in unimaginable abysses, nor could they be easily drawn back. And it was impossible to put pressure on Ghost Rhymi. He had the perfect answer. He could die.

Well, I too had an answer!

I went back into the vault and lifted the harp. I carried it out and set it down before the old man. No life showed in his blue stare.

I went to the windows and flung them open. Then I returned, dropping to the cushions beside the harp, and lightly touched its intricate controls.

That harp had been in the Earth-world, or others like it. Legends know its singing strings, as legends tell of mystic swords. There was the lyre of Orpheus, strong with power, that Jupiter placed amid the stars. There was the harp of Gwydion of Britain, that charmed the souls of men. And the harp of Alfred, that helped to crush Daneland. There was David's harp that he played before Saul.

Power rests in music. No man today can say what sound broke the walls of Jericho, but once men knew.

Here in the Dark World this harp had its legends among the common folk. Men said that a demon played it, that the airy fingers of elemental spirits plucked at its strings. Well, in a way they were right.

**F**OR an incredible perfection of science had created this harp. It was a machine. Sonic, sub-sonic, and pure vibration to match the thought-waves emitted by the brain blended into a whole that was part hypnosis and part electric magnetism. The brain is a colloid, a machine, and any machine can be controlled.

And the harp of power could find the key to a mind, and lay bonds upon that mind.

Through the open windows, faintly from below, I heard the clash of swords and the dim shouts of fighting men. But these sounds did not touch Ghost Rhymi. He was lost on the plane of pure abstraction, thinking his ancient, deep thoughts.

My fingers touched the controls of the harp, awkwardly at first, then with more

ease as manual dexterity came back with memory.

The sigh of a plucked string whispered through the white room. The murmuring of minor notes, in a low, dreamily distant key. And as the machine found the pattern of Ghast Rhymi's mind, under my hands the harp quickened into breathing life.

The soul of Ghast Rhymi—translated into terms of pure music!

Shrill and ear-piercing a single note sang. Higher and higher it mounted, fading into inaudibility. Deep down a roaring, windy noise began, rising and swelling into the demon-haunted shout of a gale. Rivers of air poured their music into the threnody.

High—high—cold and pure and white as the snowy summit of a great mountain, that single thin note sang and sang again.

Louder grew the great winds. Rippling arpeggios raced through the rising torrent of the sorcerous music.

Thunder of riven rocks—shrill screaming of earthquake-shaken lands—yelling of a deluge that poured down upon tossing forests.

A heavy humming note, hollow and unearthly, and I saw the gulfs between the worlds where the empty night of space makes a trackless desert.

And suddenly, incongruously, a gay lilt—ing tune, with an infectious rocking rhythm, that brought to my mind bright colors and sunlit streams and fields.

Ghast Rhymi stirred.

For an instant awareness came back into his blue eyes. He saw me.

And I saw the life-fires sink within that frail, ancient body.

I knew that he was dying—that I had troubled his long peace—that he had relinquished his casual hold upon life.

I drew the harp toward me. I touched the controls.

Ghast Rhymi sat before me, dead, the faintest possible spark fading within that old brain.

I sent the sorcerous spell of the harp blowing like a mighty wind upon the dying embers of Ghast Rhymi's life.

As Orpheus drew back the dead Eurydice from Pluto's realm, so I cast my net of music, snared the soul of Ghast Rhymi, drew him back from death!

He struggled at first. I felt his mind turn and writhe, trying to escape, but the harp had already found the key to his mind, and it

would not let him go. Inexorably it drew him.

The ember flickered—faded—brightened again.

Louder sang the strings. Deeper roared the tumult of shaking waters,

Higher the white, shrill note, pure as a star's icy light, leaped and ever rose.

Roaring, racing, sweet with honey-musk, perfumed with flower-scent and ambergris, blazing with color, opal and blood-ruby and amethyst-blue. That mighty tapestry of color rippled and shook like a visible web of magic through the room.

The web reached out.

Swept around Ghast Rhymi like a fowler's snare!

Back in those faded blue eyes the light of awareness grew. He had stopped struggling. He had given up the fight. It was easier to come back to life—to let me question him—than to battle the singing strings that could cage a man's very soul.

Under the white beard the old man's lips moved.

"Ganelon," he said. "I knew—when the harp sang—who played it. Well, ask your questions. And then let me die. I would not live in the days that are coming now. But you will live, Ganelon—and yet you will die too. That much I have read in the future."

The hoary head bent slowly. For an instant Ghast Rhymi listened—and I listened too.

The last, achingly sweet notes of the harp died upon the trembling air.

Through the open windows came the muted clash of sword and the wordless shriek of a dying man.

## CHAPTER XIII

### War—Red War!

**P**ITY flooded me. The shadow of greatness that had cloaked Ghast Rhymi was gone. He sat there, a shrunken, fragile old man, and I felt a momentary unreasoning impulse to turn on my heel and leave him to drift hack into his peaceful abyss of thought. Once, I remembered, Ghast Rhymi had seemed a tall, huge figure—though he had never been that in my lifetime. But in my childhood I had sat at the feet of this Covenanter and looked up with awe at that majestic, bearded face with reverence.

Perhaps there had been more life in that



face then, more warmth and humanity. It was remote now. It was like the face of a god, or of one who had looked upon too many gods.

My tongue stumbled.

"Master," I said. "I am sorry!"

No light came into the distant blue gaze, yet I sensed a stirring.

"You name me master?" he said. "You—Ganelon? It has been a long time since you humbled yourself to anyone."

The taste of my triumph was ashes. I bowed my head. Yes, I had conquered Ghast Rhymi, and I did not like the savor of that conquest.

"In the end the circle completes itself," the old man said quietly. "We are more kin than the others. Both you and I are human, Ganelon, not mutants. Because I am Leader of the Coven I let Medea and the others use my wisdom. But—but—" He hesitated.

"For two decades my mind has dwelt in shadow," he went on. "Beyond good and evil, beyond life and the figures that move like puppets on the stream of life. When I was awakened, I would give the answers I knew. It did not matter. I had thought that I had lost all touch with reality. And that if death swept over every man and woman in the Dark World, it would not matter."

I could not speak. I knew that I had done Ghast Rhymi a very great wrong in wakening him from his deep peace.

The blue stare dwelt on me.

"And I find that it does matter, after all. No blood of mine runs in your veins, Ganelon. Yet we are kin. I taught you, as I would have taught my own son. I trained you for your task—to rule the Coven in my place. And now, I think I regret many things. Most of all the answer I gave the Covenanters after Medea brought you back from Earth-world."

"You told them to kill me," I said.

He nodded.

"Matholch was afraid. Edeyrn sided with him. They made Medea agree. Matholch said, 'Ganelon is changed. There is danger. Let the old man read the future and see what it holds.' So they came to me, and I let my mind ride the winds of time and see what lay ahead."

"And that was—?"

"The end of the Coven," Ghast Rhymi said. "If you lived. I foresaw the arms of Llyr reaching into the Dark World, and Matholch lying dead in a shadowed place, and doom

upon Edeyrn and Medea. For time is fluid, Ganelon. It changes as men change. The probabilities alter. When you went into Earth-world, you were Ganelon. But you came back with a double mind. You have the memories of Edward Bond, which you can use as tools. Medea should have left you in Earth-world. But she loved you."

"Yet she agreed to let them kill me," I said.

"Do you know what was in her thoughts?" Ghast Rhymi asked. "In Caer Sécaire, at the time of sacrifice, Llyr would come. And you have been sealed to Llyr. Did Medea think you could be killed, then?"

A doubt grew within me. But Medea had led me, like a sheep to slaughter, in the procession to the Caer. If she could justify herself, let her. I knew that Edeyrn and Matholch could not.

"I may let Medea live, then," I said. "But not the wolfing. I have already promised his life. And as for Edeyrn, she must perish."

I showed Ghast Rhymi the Crystal Mask. He nodded.

"But Llyr?"

"I was sealed to Him as Ganelon," I said. "Now you say I have two minds. Or, at least, an extra set of memories, even though they are artificial. I am not willing to be liege to Llyr! I learned many things in the Earth-world. *Llyr is no god!*"

The ancient head bent. A transparent hand rose and touched the ringlets of the beard. Then Ghast Rhymi looked at me, and he smiled.

"So you know that, do you?" he asked. "I will tell you something, Ganelon, that no one else has guessed. You are not the first to come from Earth-world to the Dark World. I was the first."

**I** STARED at him with unconcealed amazement.

"And you were born in the Dark World; I was not," he said. "My flesh sprang from the dust of Earth. It has been very long since I crossed, and I can never return now, for my span is long outlived. Only here can I keep the life-spark burning within me, though I do not much care about that either. Yet I am Earth-born, and I knew Vortigern and the kings of Wales. I had my own holdings at Caer-Merdin, and a different sun from this red ember in the Dark World's sky shone upon Caer-Merdin! Blue sky, blue sea of Britain, the gray stones of the Druid altars

under the oak forests. That is my home, Ganelon. Was my home. Until my science, that men in those days called magic, brought me here, with a woman's aid. A Dark-World woman named Viviane."

"You are Earth-born?" I said.

"Once—yes. As I grew older here, very, very old, I regretted my exile. I had acquired enough of wisdom. I would have changed it all for one breath of the cool, sweet air that blew in from the Irish Sea when I was a boy. But never could I return. My body would fall to dust in the Earth-world. So I lost myself in dreams—dreams of Earth, Ganelon."

His blue eyes brightened with memories.

His voice deepened.

"In my dreams I brought back the old days. I stood again on the crags of Wales, watching the salmon leaping in the waters of gray Usk. I saw Artorius again, and his father Uther, and I smelled the old smells of Britain in her youth. But they were dreams!

"And dreams are not enough. For the sake of the love I bore the dust from which I sprang, for the sake of a wind that blew from ancient Ireland, I will help you now, Ganelon. I had never thought that life would matter to me any more. But that these abominations should lead a man of Earth to slaughter—no! And man of Earth you are now, though born on this world of sorcery!"

He leaned forward, compelling me with his gaze.

"You are right. Llyr is no god. He is—a monster. No more than that. And he can be slain."

"With the Sword Called Llyr?"

"Listen. Put these legends out of your mind. That is Llyr's power, and the power of the Dark World. All is veiled in mystic symbols of terror. But behind the veil lies simple truth. Vampire, werewolf, upas-tree—they all are biological freaks, mutations run wild! And the first mutation was Llyr. His birth split the one time-world into two, each spinning along its line of probability. He was a key factor in the temporal pattern of entropy.

"Listen again. At birth, Llyr was human. But his mind was not as the minds of others. He had certain natural powers, latent powers, which ordinarily would not have developed in the race for a million years. Because they did develop in him too soon, they were warped and distorted, and put to evil ends. In the future world of logic and science, his mental powers would have fitted. In the dark

times of superstition, they did not fit too well. So he developed, with the science at his command and the mental strength he had, into a monster.

"Human once. Less human as he grew older and wiser in his alien knowledge. In Caer Llyr are machines which send out certain radiations necessary to the existence of Llyr. Those radiations permeate the Dark World. They have caused other mutations, such as Matholch and Edeyrn and Medea.

"Kill Llyr, and his machines will stop. The curse of abnormal mutations will be lifted. The shadow over this planet will be gone."

"How may I kill Him?" I asked.

"With the Sword Called Llyr. His life is bound up with that Sword, as a machine is dependent on its parts. I am not certain of the reason for this, Ganelon, but Llyr is not human—now. He is part machine and part pure energy and part something unimaginable. But he was born of flesh, and he must maintain his contact with the Dark World, or die. The Sword is his contact."

"Where is the Sword?"

"At Caer Llyr," Ghost Rhymi said. "Go there. By the altar, there is a crystal pane. Don't you remember?"

"I remember."

"Break that pane. Then you will find the Sword Called Llyr."

He sank back. His eyes closed, then opened again.

**I** KNELT before him and he made the Ancient Sign above me.

"Strange," he murmured, half to himself.

"Strange that I should send a man to battle again, as I sent so many, long ago."

The white head bent forward. Snowy beard lay upon the snowy robe.

"For the sake of a wind that blew from Ireland," the old man whispered.

Through the open windows a breath of air drifted, gently ruffling the white ringlets of hair and beard. . . .

The winds of the Dark World stirred in the silent room, paused—and were gone!

Now, indeed, I stood alone. . . .

From Ghost Rhymi's chamber I went down the tower steps and into the courtyard.

The battle was nearly over. Scarcely a score of the Castle's defenders were still on their feet. Around them Lorryn's pack ravened and yelled. Back to back, grimly silent, the dead-eyed guardsmen wove their blades

in a steel mesh that momentarily held at bay their attackers.

There was no time to be wasted here. I caught sight of Lorryn's scarred face and made for him. He showed me his teeth in a triumphant grin.

"We have them, Bond."

"It took you long enough," I said. "These dogs must be slain quickly!" I caught a sword from a nearby woodsman.

Power flowed up the blade and into the hilt—into me.

I plunged into the thick of the battle. The foresters made way for me. Beside me Lorryn laughed quietly.

Then I came face to face with a guardsman. His blade swung up in thrust and parry, and I twisted aside, so that his steel sang harmlessly through the air. My sword-point leaped like a striking snake for his throat. The shock of metal grating on bone jarred my wrist.

I tore the weapon free and glimpsed Lorryn, still grinning, engaging another of the guardsmen.

"Kill them!" I shouted. "Kill them!"

I did not wait for response. I went forward against the blind-eyed soldiers of Medea, slashing, striking, thrusting, as though these men were the Coven, my enemies! I hated each blankly staring face. Red tides of rage began to surge up, narrowing my vision and clouding my mind with hot mists.

For a few moments I was drunk with the lust for killing.

Lorryn's hands gripped my shoulders. His voice came.

"Bond! Bond!"

The fogs were swept away. I stared around. Not one of the guardsmen was left alive. Bloody, hacked corpses lay sprawled on the gray flagstones of the courtyard. The woodsmen, panting hard, were wiping their blades clean.

"Did any escape to carry warning to Caer Sécaille?" I asked.

Despite his perpetual scarred grin, Lorryn looked troubled.

"I'm not sure. I don't think so, but the place is a rabbit-warren."

"The harm's done, then," I said. "We hadn't enough men to throw a cordon around the Castle."

He grimaced. "Warned or not, what's the odds? We can slay the Covenanters as we killed their guards."

"We ride to Caer Llyr," I said, watching him.

I saw the shadow of fear in the cold gray eyes. Lorryn rubbed his grizzled beard and scowled.

"I don't understand. Why?"

"To kill Llyr."

Amazement battled with ancient superstitious terror in his face. His gaze searched mine and apparently read the answer he wanted.

"To kill—that?"

I nodded. "I've seen Ghost Rhymi. He told me the way."

The men around us were watching and listening. Lorryn hesitated.

"We didn't bargain for this," he said. "Yet by the gods! To kill Llyr!"

Suddenly he sprang into action, shouting orders. Swords were sheathed. Men ran to untether the mounts. Within minutes we were in our saddles, riding out from the courtyard, the shadow of the Castle falling heavily upon us till the moon lifted above the tallest tower.

I rose in my stirrups and looked back. Up there, dead, sat Ghost Rhymi, first of the Coven to die by my hand. I had killed him as surely as if I had plunged steel into his heart.

I dropped back into the saddle, pressing heels into my horse's flanks. He bolted forward. Lorryn urged his steed level with me. Behind us the woodsmen strung out in a long, uneven line as we galloped across the low hills toward the distant mountains. It would be dawn before we could reach Caer Llyr. And there was no time to waste.

**M**EDEA and Edeyrn and Matholch! The names of the three beat like muffled drums in my brain. Traitors to me, Medea no less than the others, for had she not bent before the wills of Edeyrn and Matholch, had she not been willing to sacrifice me? Death I would give Edeyrn and the wolfing. Medea I might let live, but only as my slave, nothing more.

With Ghost Rhymi dead, I was leader of the Coven! In the old man's tower, sentimental weakness had nearly betrayed me. The weakness of Edward Bond, I thought. His memories had watered my will and diluted my power.

Now I no longer needed his memories. At my side swung the Crystal Mask and the Wand of Power. I knew how to get the Sword Called Llyr. It was Ganelon and not the weakling Edward Bond, who would make himself master of the Dark World.

Briefly I wondered where Bond was now. When Medea had brought me through the Need-fire to the Dark World, Edward Bond, at that same moment, must have returned to Earth. I smiled ironically, imagining the surprise that must have been his. Perhaps he had tried, and was still trying, to get back to the Dark World. But without Freydis to aid him, his attempts would be useless. Freydis was helping me now, not Bond.

And Bond would stay on Earth! The substitution would not occur again if I could help it. And I could help it. Strong Freydis might be, but could she stand against the man who had killed Llyr? I did not think so.

I sent a sly sidewise glance at Lorryn. Fool! Arles too was another of the same breed. Only Freydis had sense enough not to trust me.

The strongest of my enemies must die first—Llyr. Then the Coven. After that, the woodsmen would taste my power. They would learn that I was Ganelon, not the Earth weakling, Edward Bond!

I thrust the memories of Bond out of my mind. I drove them away. I banished them utterly.

As Ganelon I would battle Llyr.

And as Ganelon I would rule the Dark World!

Rule—with iron and fire!

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Fire of Life*

**H**OURS before we came to Caer Llyr we saw it, at first a blacker blackness against the night sky, and slowly, gradually, deepening into an ebon mountain as the rose-gray dawn spread behind us.

Our cantering shadows fell before us, to be trodden under the horses' hoofs. Cool, fresh winds whispered—whispered of the sacrifice at Caer Sécaire, of the seeking minds of the Coven that spied across the land.

But Caer Llyr loomed on the edge of darkness ahead—guarding the night!

Huge the Caer was, and alien. It seemed shapeless, a Titan mound of jumbled black rock thrown almost casually together. Yet I knew that there was design in its strange geometry.

Two jet pillars, each fifty feet tall, stood like the legs of a colossus, and between them was an unguarded portal. Only there was there any touch of color about the Caer.

A veil of flickering rainbows played lam-bently, like a veil, across that threshold. Opalescent and faintly glowing, the shadow-curtain swung and quivered as though gentle winds drifted through gossamer folds of silk.

Fifty feet high was that curtain and twenty feet broad. Straddling it the ebon pillars rose. And above and beyond, towering breathtakingly to the dawn-clouded sky, squatted the Caer, a mountain-like structure that had never been built by man.

From Caer Llyr a breath of fear came cold-ly, scattering the woodsmen like leaves before a gale. They broke ranks, deployed out and drew together again as I raised my hand and Lorryn called a command.

I stared around at the low hills surrounding us.

"Never in my memory or my father's memory have men come this close to Caer Llyr," Lorryn said. "Except for Covenanters, of course. Nor would the foresters follow me now, Bond. They follow you."

How far would they follow? My wondering thought was cut off as a woodsman shouted warning. He rose in his stirrups and pointed south.

Over the hills, riding like demons in a dusty cloud, came horsemen, their armor glittering in the red sunlight!

"So someone did escape from the Castle," I said between my teeth. "And the Coven have been warned, after all!"

Lorryn grinned and shrugged. "Not many." "Enough to delay us." I frowned, trying to make the best plan. "Lorryn, stop them. If the Coven ride with their guards, kill them too. But hold them back from the Caer until—"

"Until?"

"I don't know. I'll need time. How much time I can't say. Battling and conquering Llyr won't be the work of a moment."

"Nor is it the work of one man," Lorryn said doubtfully. "With us to aid you, victory will fly at your elbow."

"I know the weapon against Llyr," I said. "One man can wield it. But keep the guardsmen back, and the Covenanters too. Give me time!"

"There will be no difficulty about that," Lorryn said, a flash of excitement lighting



his eyes. "For look!"

Angling across the hills, riding one by one into view, hotly pursuing the armored rout, came green-clad figures, spurring their horses forward.

Those figures were woodsmen's women whom we had left behind in the valley. They were armed now, for I saw the glitter of swords. Nor were swords their only weapons. A spiteful crack echoed, a puff of smoke arose, and one of the guardsmen flung up his hands and toppled from his mount.

Edward Bond had known how to make rifles! And the woodfolk had learned how to use them!

At the head of the woodswomen I noted two lithe forms, one a slim, supple girl whose ashy-blond hair streamed behind her like a banner. Arles.

And at her side, on a great white steed, rode one whose giant form I could not mistake even from this distance. Freydis spurred forward like a Valkyrie galloping into battle.

Freydis and Arles, and the women of the forest!

Lorryn's laugh held exultation.

"We have them, Bond!" he cried, his fist tightening on the rein. "Our women at their heels, and we to strike from the flank—we'll catch and crush them between hammer and anvil. Gods grant the shape-changer rides there!"

"Then ride," I snapped. "No more talk! Ride and crush them. Hold them back from the Caer!"

With that I raced my steed forward, lying low on the horse's mane, driving like a thunderbolt toward the black mountain ahead. Did Lorryn know how suicidal might be the mission on which I had sent him? Matholch he might slay, and even Medea. But if Edeyrn rode with the Coven guards, if ever she dropped the hood from her face, neither sword nor bullet could save the woodsmen!

**S**TILL they would give me time. And if the woodsmen's ranks were thinned, so much the better for me later. I would deal with Edeyrn in my own way when the time came.

Ahead the black columns stood. Behind me a shouting rose, and a crackle of rifle-fire. I looked back, but a fold of the hills hid the combat from my eyes.

I sprang from the horse's back and stood before the pillars—between them. The coruscating veil sparkled and ran like milky water

before me. Above, towering monstrously, stood the Caer, the focus of the evil that had spread across the Dark World.

And in it reposed Llyr, my enemy!

I still had the sword I had taken from one of the woodsmen, but I doubted if ordinary steel would be much good within the Caer. Nevertheless I made sure the weapon was at my side as I walked forward.

I stepped through the veil.

For twenty paces I moved forward in utter darkness. Then light came.

But it was the light that beats upon a snow plain, so bright, so glittering, that it blinds. I stood motionless, waiting. Presently the dazzle resolved itself into flickering atoms of brightness, weaving and darting in arabesque patterns. Not cold, no!

Tropical warmth beat upon me.

The shining atoms drove at me. They tingled upon my face and hands. They sank like intangible things through my garments and were absorbed by my skin. They did not lull me. Instead, my body greedily drank that weird snowstorm of—energy?—and was in turn energized by it.

Time of life sang ever stronger in my veins.

I saw three gray shadows against the white. Two tall and one slight and small as a child's shadow.

I knew them. I knew who cast them.

I heard Matholch's voice.

"Kill him. Kill him now."

And Medea's answer.

"No. He need not die. He must not."

"But he must!" Matholch snarled, and Edeyrn's sexless, thin voice echoed his.

"He is dangerous, Medea. He must die, and only on Llyr's altar can he be slain. For he is the Sealed of Llyr."

"He need not die," Medea said stubbornly. "If he is made harmless—weaponless—he may live."

"How?" Edeyrn asked, and for answer the red witch stepped forward out of the dazzling white shimmer.

No longer a shadow. No longer a two-dimensional grayness. She stood before me—Medea, witch of Colchis.

Her dark hair fell to her knees. Her dark gaze slanted at me. Evil she was, and alluring as Lilith.

I dropped my hand to sword-hilt.

I did not. I could not move. Faster swirled the darting bright atoms, whirling about me, sinking into my body to betray me.

I could not move.

Beyond Medea the twin shadows bent forward.

"The power of Llyr holds him," Edeyrn whispered. "But Ganelon is strong, Medea. If he breaks his fetters, we are lost."

"By then he will have no weapons," Medea said, and smiled at me.

Now indeed I knew my danger. Very easily my steel could have bitten through Medea's soft throat, and heartily I wished it had done so long ago. For I remembered Medea's power. The mutation that set her apart from others. That which had caused her to be named—vampire.

I remembered victims of hers that I had seen. The dead-eyed guardsmen, the Castle slaves, hollow shells of men, the walking dead, all soul drained from them, and most of their life-force as well.

Her arms stole around my neck. Her mouth lifted to mine.

In one hand she held her black wand. It touched my head, and a gentle shock, not unpleasant, crawled along my scalp. The—the conductor, I knew, and a gust of insane laughter shook me at the incongruity of the weapon.

[Turn page]

## WHEN THE MOON VANISHES!

CAPTAIN FUTURE and his companions were sojourning on Asteroid No. 697—one of the countless worlds explored by the Futuremen—and they'd left Grag, the metal man, on the Moon.

Suddenly Joan Randall sounded a warning. "Captain Future," she said, "you're wanted badly at headquarters. Ezra Gurney has ordered—"

"He's only a marshal," said Curt Newton, otherwise known as Captain Future. "Perhaps I can ignore his orders!"

"But—we can't find Grag!"

"Nonsense!" scoffed Curt. "He wouldn't stray from the Moon."

"That's just it," said Joan. "We can't find the Moon either!"



*Join Curt Newton and the Futuremen as they find themselves on Dimension X—battling their old foe, Ul Quorn—in*

## THE SOLAR INVASION

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**



**A COMPLETE CAPTAIN FUTURE NOVEL—NEXT ISSUE!**

But there was no magic here. There was science, of a high order, a science made possible only for those who were trained to it, or for those who were mutants. Medea drank energy, but not through sorcery. I had seen that wand used too often to believe that.

The wand opened the closed circuit of the mind and its energies. It tapped the brain, as a copper wire can tap a generated current.

Diverting the life-force to Medea!

**T**HE shining mist-motes swirled faster. They closed in around us, bathing us in a swirling cloak. The gray shadowiness fell away from Edeyrn and Matholch. Dun-cloaked, cowed dwarf and lean, grinning wolfling stood there, watching.

Edeyrn's face I could not see, though the deadly cold crept from beneath the cowl like an icy wind. Matholch's tongue crept out and circled his lips. His eyes were bright with triumph and excitement.

A numbing, lethargic languor was stealing over me. Against my mouth Medea's lips grew hotter, more ardent, as my own lips chilled. Desperately I tried to move, to grasp my sword-hilt.

I could not.

Now the bright veil thinned again. Beyond Matholch and Edeyrn I could see a vast space, so enormous that my gaze failed to pierce its violet depths. A stairway led up to infinite heights.

A golden glow burned high above.

But behind Matholch and Edeyrn, a little to one side, stood a curiously-carved pedestal whose front was a single pane of transparent glass. It shone steadily with a cool blue light. What lay within I did not know, but I recognized that crystal pane.

Ghast Rhymi had spoken of it. Behind it must lie the Sword Called Llyr.

Faintly now—faintly—I heard Matholch's satisfied chuckle.

"Ganelon, my love, do not struggle against me," Medea whispered. "Only I can save you. When your madness passes, we will return to the Castle."

Yes, for I would be no menace then. Matholch would not bother to harm me. As a mindless, soulless thing I would return to the Castle of the Coven as Medea's slave.

I, Ganelon, hereditary Lord of the Coven and the Sealed of Llyr!

The golden glow high above brightened. Crooked lightnings rushed out from it and were lost in the violet dimness.

My eyes found that golden light that was the Window of Llyr.

My mind reached out toward it.

My soul strained to it!

Witch and vampire-mutation Medea might be—or sorceress—but she had never been sealed to Llyr. No dark power beat latently in her blood as it beat in mine. Well I knew now that, no matter how I might renounce my allegiance to Llyr, there yet had been a bond. Llyr had power over me, but I could draw upon his power as well!

I drew on that power now!

The golden window brightened. Again forked lightnings ran out from it and were gone. A muffled, heavy drum-beat muttered from somewhere, like the pulse of Llyr.

Like the heart of Llyr, stirring from sleep to waking.

Through me power rushed, quickening my flesh from its lethargy. I drew on Llyr's power without measuring the cost. I saw fear flash across Matholch's face, and Edeyrn made a quick gesture.

"Medea," she said.

But Medea had already sensed that quickening. I felt her body quiver convulsively against mine. Avidly she pressed against me, faster and faster she drank the energy that made me alive.

But the energy of Llyr poured into me! Hollow thunders roared in the vast spaces above. The golden window blazed with dazzling brightness. And around us now the sparkling motes of light paled, shrank, and were gone.

"Kill him!" Matholch howled. "He holds Llyr!"

He sprang forward.

From somewhere a bloody figure in dented armor stumbled. I saw Lorryn's scarred face twisted in amazement as he blinked at the tableau. His sword, red to the hilt, was bare in his hand.

He saw me with Medea's arms about my neck.

He saw Edeyrn.

And he saw Matholch!

A wordless, inarticulate sound ripped from Lorryn's throat. He lifted high the sword.

As I tore myself free from Medea's grip, as I sent her reeling away, I saw Matholch's wand come up. I reached for my own wand, but there was no need.

Lorryn's blade sang. Matholch's hand, still gripping the wand, was severed at the wrist. Blood spouted from cut arteries.

Howling, the shape-changer dropped forward. The lycanthropic change came upon him. Hypnotism, mutation, dark sorcery—I could not tell. But the thing that sprang at Lorryn's throat was not human.

Lorryn laughed. He sent his sword spinning away.

He met the wolfing's charge, bracing himself strongly and caught the thing by throat and leg. Fanged jaws snapped viciously at him.

Lorryn heaved the monster above his head. His joints cracked with the inhuman strain. One instant Lorryn stood there, holding his enemy high, while the wolf-jaws snarled and strove to rend him.

He dashed the wolf down upon the stones!

I heard bones snap like rotten twigs. I heard a scream of dying, terrible agony from a gaping muzzle from which blood poured.

Then Matholch, in his own shape, broken, dying, lay writhing at our feet!

## CHAPTER XV

### *Lair of Power*

**M**IRACULOUSLY the weakness that had chained me was gone. Llyr's strength poured through me. I unshathed my sword and ran past Matholch's body, ignoring Lorryn who stood motionless, staring down. I ran to the pedestal with its blue-litten pane.

I gripped the sword's blade and sent the heavy hilt crashing against the glass.

There was a tinkling of pizzicato notes, a singing of thin goblin laughter. The shards fell clashing at my feet.

At my feet also dropped a sword. A sword of crystal, nearly five feet long—pommel and guard and blade all of clearest glass.

It had been part of the window. For within the hollow pedestal was nothing at all. The sword had been part of the pane, so that my breaking the crystal had released the weapon from its camouflaged hiding-place.

Along the sleek blade blue light ran. Within the crystal blue fires burned wanly. I bent and picked up the sword. The hilt was warm and alive.

The Sword Called Llyr in my left hand, the sword with blade of steel in my right, I stood upright.

Paralyzing cold breathed past me.

I knew that cold.

So I did not turn. I swung the steel sword under my arm, snatched the Crystal Mask from my belt, and donned it. I drew the Wand of Power.

Only then did I turn.

Through the Mask queer glimmers and shiftings ran, distorting what I saw. The properties of light were oddly altered by the Mask. But it had its purpose. It was a filter.

Matholch lay motionless now. Beyond his body Medea was rising to her feet, her dark hair disordered. Facing me stood Lorryn, a stone man, only his eyes alive in his set, white face.

He was staring at Edeyrn, whose sleek dark head I saw. Her back was toward me. The cowl had been flung back upon her shoulders.

Lorryn sagged down, the life going out of him. Bonelessly as water he collapsed.

He lay dead.

Then, slowly, slowly, Edeyrn turned.

She was tiny as a child, and her face was like a child's too, in its immature roundness. But I did not see her face, for even through the Crystal Mask burned the Gorgon's glare.

The blood stilled within me. A slow tide of ice crept with iron lethargy into my brain and cold weariness engulfed me.

Only in the eyes of the Gorgon fire burned.

Deadly radiations were there, what Earth-scientists call ectogenetic rays, but limited till now to the plant-world. Only the mad mutation that had created Edeyrn could have brought from hell such a nightmare trick of biology.

But I did not fall. I did not die. The radiations were filtered, made harmless, by the vibration-warping properties of the Mask I wore.

I lifted the Wand of Power.

Red fires blasted from it. Scarlet, licking tongues seared out toward Edeyrn.

Lashes of flame tore at her, like crimson whips that burned and left bloody weals on that calm child-face.

She drew back, the lance of her stare driving at me.

With her, step by step, retreated Medea. Toward the foot of the great stairway that led to Llyr's Window.

The whips of fire seared across her eyes.

She turned and, stumbling, began to run up the stairway. Medea paused, her arms lifted in an uncompleted gesture. But in my face she read no softening.

She, too, turned, and followed Edeyrn.

I dropped the useless sword of steel. Wand in left hand, the Sword Called Llyr in my right, I followed them.

As my foot touched the first step, a trembling vibration shook the violet air about me. Now almost I regretted having called upon Llyr to break Medea's spell. For Llyr was awake, watching, and warned.

The pulse of Llyr muttered through the huge Caer. The golden lightnings flamed from the Window high above.

Briefly two black, small silhouettes showed against that amber glow. They were Edeyrn and Medea, climbing.

After them I went. And at each step the way grew harder. I seemed to walk through a thickening, invisible torrent that was like a wind or a wave flowing down from that shining window, striving to tear me from my foothold, to rip the crystal sword from my grip.

**U**P AND up I went. Now the Window was a glaring blaze of yellow fires. The lightnings crackled out incessantly, while rocking crashes of thunder reverberated along the vaulted abysses of the Caer. I leaned forward as though against a gale. Doggedly I fought my way up the stair.

There was someone behind me.

I did not turn. I dared not, for fear the torrent would sweep me from my place. I crawled up the last few steps, and came out on a level platform of stone, a disc-shaped dais, on which stood a ten-foot cube. Three of its sides were of black rock. The side that faced me was a glaring blaze of amber brilliance.

Far below, dizzily far, was the floor of the Caer. Behind me the stairway ran down to those incredible depths, and the tremendous wind still blew upon me, pouring out from the Window, seeking to whirl me to my death.

To the Window's left stood Edeyrn, to its right, Medea. And in the Window—

The blazing golden clouds whirled, thickened, tossed like storm-mists, while still the blinding flashes spurted from them. The thunder never ceased now. But it pulsed. It rose and fell in steady cadence, in unison with the heart-beat of Llyr.

Monster or mutation—human once, or half-human—Llyr had grown in power since then. Ghast Rhymi had warned me.

Part machine and part pure energy and

part something unthinkable, the power of Llyr blasted through the golden clouds upon me!

The Wand of Power dropped from my hand. I lifted the crystal sword and managed one forward step. Then the hell-tide caught me, and I could advance no further. I could only fight, with every bit of my strength, against the avalanche that strove to thrust me toward the edge of the hanging platform.

Louder grew the thunders. Brighter the lightnings flamed.

The cold stare of Edeyrn chilled me. Medea's face was inhuman now. Yellow clouds boiled out from the Window and caught Edeyrn and Medea in their embrace.

Then they rolled toward me and overwhelmed me.

Dimly I could see the brighter glow that marked Llyr's Window. And two vague silhouettes, Edeyrn and Medea.

I strove to step forward. Instead I was borne back toward the edge—back and back.

Great arms caught me about the waist. A braid of white hair tossed by my eyes. The giant strength of Freydis stood like a wall of iron between me and the abyss.

From the corner of my eye I saw that she had wound a scrap torn from her white robe about her head, shielding her from the Gorgon's stare. Blindly, guided by some strange instinct, the Valkyrie thrust me forward.

Against us the golden clouds rolled, sentient, palpable, veined with white lightnings and shaking with deep thunders.

Freydis strove silently. I bent forward like a bow, battering against the torrent.

Step by step I won forward, Freydis to aid me. Ever she stood as a bulwark against my back. I could hear her panting breath, great gasps that ripped from her throat as she linked her strength with mine.

My chest felt as though a white-hot core of iron was driven through it. Yet I went on. Nothing existed now but that golden brightening amid the clouds, clouds of creation, sentient with the shaking tumult of breaking universes, worlds beyond worlds crashing into ruin under the power of Llyr...

I stood before the Window.

Without volition my arm swept up. I brought the Sword Called Llyr smashing down upon Llyr's Window.

In my hand the sword broke.

It fell to tinkling fragments at my feet.



The veined blue glimmers writhed and coiled about the broken blade.

Were sucked into the Window.

Back rushed the cloud-masses. A tremendous, nearly unbearable vibration ripped through the Caer, shaking it like a sapling. The golden clouds were drawn through the Window.

With them went Edeyrn and Medea!

One glimpse I had of them, the brand of my fire like a red mask across Edeyrn's eyes, Medea's face despairing and filled with a horror beyond life, her gaze fixed on me with an imploring plea that was infinitely terrible. Then they vanished!

For one instant I saw through the Window. I saw something beyond space and time and dimension, a writhing, ravening chaos that bore down upon Medea and Edeyrn and a golden core of light that I knew for Llyr.

Once almost human, Llyr, at the end, bore no relation to anything remotely human.

The grinding millstones of Chaos crushed the three!

The thunder died.

Before me stood the altar of Llyr. But it held no Window now. All four sides were of black, dead stone!

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Self Against Self*

**B**LACKNESS and black stones were the last things I saw, before dark oblivion closed down over me like folding wings. It was as if Llyr's terrible resistance was all that had held me upright in the last fierce stages of our struggle. As he fell, so fell Ganelon at the foot of the Windowless altar.

How long I lay there I do not know. But slowly, slowly Caer Llyr came back around me, and I knew I was lying prostrate upon the altar. I sat up painfully, the dregs of exhaustion still stiffening my body, though I knew I must have slept, for that exhaustion was no longer the overwhelming tide that had flooded me as I fell.

Beyond me, at the head of the great steep of stairs, Freydis lay, half stretched upon the steps as if she had striven to return to her people in the moment before collapsing. Her eyes were still bound, and her mighty arms lay flung out upon the platform, all strength drained from them by the fierceness

of our battle. Strangely, as she lay there, she brought back to my double-minded memories the thought of a figure from Earth—another mighty woman in white robes, with bandaged eyes and upraised arms, blind Justice holding her eternal scales. Faintly I smiled at the thought. In the Dark World—my world, now—Justice was Ganelon, and not blind.

Freydis stirred. One hand lifted uncertainly to the cloth across her eyes. I let her waken. Presently we must struggle again together, Justice and I. But I did not doubt who would prevail.

I rose to my knees, and heard a silvery tinkling as something slid in fragments from my shoulder. The Mask, broken when I fell. Its crystal shards lay among those other shards which had blasted Llyr from the Dark World when the Sword broke. I thought of the strange blue lightnings which had wrought at last what no other thing in the Dark World could accomplish—Llyr's destruction. And I thought I understood.

He had passed too far beyond this world ever to touch it except in the ceremonies of the Golden Window. Man, demon, god, mutation into namelessness—whatever he had been, he had kept but one link with the Dark World which spawned him. A link enshrined in the Sword Called Llyr. By that talisman he could return for the sacrifices which fed him, return for the great ceremonies of the Sealing that had made me half his own. But only by that talisman.

So it must be safely hidden to be his bridge for the returning. And safely hidden it was. Without Ghost Rhymi's knowledge, who could have found it? Without the strength of the great Lord Ganelon—well, yes, and the strength of Freydis too—who could have won close enough to the window to shatter the Sword upon the only thing in the Dark World that could break it? Yes, Llyr had guarded his talisman as strongly as any guard could be. But vulnerable he was, to the one man who could wield that Sword.

So the Sword broke, and the bridge between worlds broke, and Llyr was gone into a chaos from which there could never be a returning.

Medea, too—red witch of Colchis, lost love, drinker of life, gone beyond recalling. . . .

For a moment I closed my eyes.

"Well, Ganelon?"

I looked up. Freydis was smiling grimly at me from beneath the uplifted blindfold. I

rose to my feet and watched in silence while she got to hers. Triumph flooded through me in great waves of intoxicating warmth. The world I had just awakened to was wholly mine now, and not this woman nor any other human should balk me of my destiny. Had I not vanquished Llyr and slain the last of the Coven? And was I not stronger in magic than any man or woman now who walked the Dark World? I laughed, the deep sound echoing from the high vaults about us and rolling back in reverberant exultation until that which had been *Caer Llyr* was alive with the noise of my mirth. But *Llyr* was here no longer.

"Let this be *Caer Ganelon!*" I said, hearing the echo of my own name come rolling back as if the castle itself replied.

"*Ganelon!*" I shouted. "*Caer Ganelon!*" I laughed to hear the whole vast hollow repeating my name. While the echoes still rolled I spoke to *Freydis*.

"You have a new master now, you forest people! Because you helped me you shall be rewarded, old woman, but I am master of the Dark World—I, *Ganelon!*" And the walls roared back to me, "*Ganelon—Ganelon!*"

*Freydis* smiled.

"Not so fast, *Covenanter,*" she said calmly. "Did you think I trusted you?"

I gave her a scornful smile. "What can you do to me now? Only one thing could slay me before today—*Llyr* Himself. Now *Llyr* is gone, and *Ganelon* is immortal! You have no power to touch me, sorceress!"

She straightened on the step, her ageless face a little below mine. There was a sureness in her eyes that sent the first twinge of uneasiness into my mind. Yet what I had said was true for no one in the Dark World could harm me, now. Yet *Freydis'* smile did not waver.

"Once I sent you through limbo into the *Earth World,*" she said. "Could you stop me if I sent you there again?"

**R**ELIEF quieted my tremor of unease. "Tomorrow or the next day—yes, I could stop you. Today, no. But I am *Ganelon* now, and I know the way back. I am *Ganelon*, and forewarned, and I think you could not so easily send me *Earthward* again, naked of memories and clothed in another man's past. I remember and I could return. You would waste your time and mine, *Freydis*. Yet try it, if you will, and I warn you,

I should be back again before your spell was finished."

Her quiet smile did not falter. She folded her arms, hiding her hands in the flowing sleeves. She was very sure of herself.

"You think you are a godling, *Ganelon,*" she said. "You think no mortal power can touch you now. You have forgotten one thing. As *Llyr* had his weakness, as *Edeyrn* did, and *Medea* and *Matholch* so have you, *Covenanter*. In this world there is no man to match you. But in the *Earth World* there is, *Lord Ganelon!* In that world your equal lives, and I mean to call him out to fight one last battle for the freedom of the Dark World. *Edward Bond* could slay you, *Ganelon!*"

I felt the blood leave my face, a little wind of chill like *Edeyrn's* glance breathed over me. I had forgotten. Even *Llyr*, by his own unimaginable hand, could have died. And I could die by my own hand too, or by the hand of that other self who was *Edward Bond*.

"Fool!" I said. "*Dotard!* Have you forgotten that *Bond* and I can never stand in the same world? When I came, he vanished out of this land, just as I must vanish if you bring him here. How can a man and his reflection ever come hand to hand? How could he touch me, old woman?"

"Easily," she smiled. "Very easily. He cannot fight you here, nor in the *Earth World*. That is true. But *limbo, Ganelon?* Have you forgotten *limbo?*"

Her hands came out of her sleeves. There was a rod of blinding silver in each. Before I could stir she had brought the rods together, crossing them before her smiling face. At the intersection forces of tremendous power blazed into an instant's being, forces that streamed from the poles of the world and could touch only for the beat of a second if that world were not to be shaken into fragments. I felt the building reel below me.

I felt the gateway open. . . .

Here was grayness, nothing but oblivion made visible all around me. I staggered with the suddenness of it, the shock, and the terrible tide of anger that came surging up through my whole body at the knowledge of *Freydis'* trickery. It was not to be endured, this magicking of the *Dark World's* lord! I would fight my way back, and the vengeance I would wreak upon *Freydis* would be a lesson to all.

Out of the greyness a mirror loomed before me. A mirror? I saw my own face, be-

wildered, uncomprehending, staring back into my eyes. But I was not wearing the ragged blue garments of sacrifice which I had donned so many aeons ago in the Castle of the Coven. I seemed to wear Earth garments, and I seemed not quite myself, not quite Ganelon. I seemed—

"Edward Bond!" said the voice of Freydis behind me.

The reflection of myself glanced across my shoulder, and a look of recognition and unutterable relief came over it.

"Freydis!" he cried, in my own voice. "Freydis, thank God! I've tried so hard—"

"Wait," Freydis stopped him. "Listen. There is one last trial before you. This man is Ganelon. He has undone all your work among the forest people. He has slain Llyr and the Coven. There is none in the Dark World to stay his hand if he wins his way back to it. Only you can stop him, Edward Bond. Only you."

I did not wait for her to say anything more. I knew what must be done. I lunged forward before he could speak or stir, and drove a heavy blow into the face that might have been my own. It was a strange thing to do. It was a hard thing. At the last moment my muscles almost refused me, for it was as if I struck myself.

I saw him reel back, and my own head reeled in imagination, so that the first blow rocked us both.

He caught himself a dozen feet away and stood for a moment, unsteady on his feet, looking at me with a confusion that might have been the mirror of my own face, for I knew there was confusion there too.

Then anger flushed those bewildering, familiar features, and I saw blood break from the corner of his mouth and trickle across

his chin. I laughed savagely. That blood, somehow, made him my enemy. I had seen the blood of enemies, springing out in the wake of my blows, too often to mistake him now for anything but what he was. Myself—and my deadliest foe.

He dropped into a half-crouch and came for me, stooping to protect his body from my fists. I wished fervently for a sword or a gun. I have never cared for an equal fight, as Ganelon does not fight for sport, but to win. But this fight must be terribly, unbelievably equal.

**I** E DODGED beneath my blow, and I felt the rocking jar of what seemed to be my own fist jolting against my cheekbone. He danced back, light-footed, out of range.

Rage came snarling up in my throat. I wanted nothing of this boxing, this game fought by rules. Ganelon fought to win! I roared at him from the full depth of my lungs and hurled myself forward in a crushing embrace that carried us both heavily to the grey sponginess that was limbo's floor. My fingers sank delightfully in his throat. I groped savagely for his eyes. He grunted with effort and I felt his fist thud into my ribs, and felt the sharp white pain of breaking bone.

So wholly was he myself, and I he, that for an instant I was not sure whose rib had snapped beneath whose blow. Then I drew a deep breath and sobbed it out again half finished as pain like bright light flashed through my body, and I knew it was my own rib.

The knowledge maddened me. Careless of pain or caution, I drove my fists savagely into

[Turn page]

## What Would Happen if Civilization Were to Collapse?

**M**EN have always wondered what would happen to the survivors were our present civilization destroyed—and humanity thrown back upon the none-too-gentle arms of Nature. Who would then be the leaders in the race? How would the survivors meet the onslaughts of the elements and of wild beasts?

This fascinating and adventurous topic is dealt with by Francis Flagg in AFTER ARMAGEDDON—next issue's Hall of Fame Classic. It's a distinguished science fiction masterpiece!



him at blind random, feeling exultantly the crackle of bone beneath my knuckles, the spurt of blood over my hard-clenched hands. We strove together in a terrible locked embrace, there upon the floor of limbo, in a nightmare that had no real being, except for the pain shooting through me after each breath.

But in a moment or two, I knew somehow, very surely, that I was his master. And this is how I knew. He rolled half over to jab a hard blow into my face, and before the blow began, I had blocked it. I had *known*. He squirmed from beneath me and braced himself to strike me again in the ribs, and before he could strike, I had twisted sidewise away. Again I had *known*.

For I had been Edward Bond once, in every way that matters. I had lived in his memory and his world. And I knew Edward Bond as I knew myself. Instinct seemed to tell me what he would do next. He could not out-think me, and so he could not hope to out-fight me, to whom his every thought was revealed in the moment before he could act upon it.

Even in the pain of my broken rib, I laughed then. Freydis had overreached herself at last! In smothering Ganelon under Edward Bond's memories in the Earth World, she had given me the means to vanquish him now! He was mine, to finish when I chose, and the Dark World was mine, and Edward Bond' kingdom of free people was mine too, and Edward Bond's lovely pale-haired bride, and everything that might have been his own.

I laughed exultantly, and twisted in three perfectly timed motions that blocked and overbalanced the man who was myself. Three motions only—and then I had him across my knee, taut-stretched, his spine pressing hard against my thigh.

I grinned down at him. My blood dripped into his face. I saw it strike there, and I met his eyes, and then strangely, for one flashing instant, I knew a fierce yearning for defeat. In that instant, I prayed voicelessly to a nameless god that Edward Bond might yet save himself, and Ganelon might die. . . .

I called forth all the strength that was in me, and limbo swam redly before my eyes and the pain of my broken rib was a lance of white light as I drew the deep breath that was Edward Bond's last.

I broke his back across my knee.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### *Freedom at Last!*

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**H**URRIEDLY two cold, smooth hands pressed hard upon my forehead. I looked up. They slid lower, covering my eyes. And weakness was like a blanket over me. I knelt there, unresisting, feeling the body of the man who had been myself slide limply from my knee.

Freydis pressed me down. We lay side by side, the living and the dead.

The silver rods of the sorceress touched my head, and made a bridge between Edward Bond and Ganelon. I remembered Medea's wand that could draw the life-force from the mind. A dull, numbing paralysis had me. Little tingling shocks rippled through my nerves, and I could not move.

Sudden agonizing pain shot through me. My back! I tried to scream with the white fury of that wrenching agony, but my throat was frozen. I felt Edward Bond's wounds!

In that nightmare moment, while my brain spun down the limitless corridors of a science beyond that of mankind, I knew what Freydis had done—what she was doing.

I felt the mind of Edward Bond come back from the gulfs. Side by side we lay in flesh, and side by side in spirit as well.

There was blackness, and two flames, burning with a cold, clear fire. . . .

One was the mind—the life—of Edward Bond. One was my life!

The flames bent toward each other!

They mingled and were one!

Life and soul and mind of Edward Bond merged with life of Ganelon!

Where two flames had burned, there was one now. One only.

And the identity of Ganelon ebbed, sank . . . faded into a graying shadow as the fires of Edward Bond's life leaped ever higher!

We were one. We were—

Edward Bond! No longer Ganelon! No longer Lord of the Dark World, Master of the Caers!

Magic of Freydis drowned the soul of Ganelon and gave his body to the life of Edward Bond!

I saw Ganelon—*die!* . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

When I opened my eyes again, I knelt upon the altar that had been Llyr's. The empty

vaults towered hollowly above us. Limbo was gone. The body across my knee was gone. Freydis smiled down at me with her ageless, timeless smile.

"Welcome back to the Dark World, Edward Bond."

Yes, it was true. I knew that. I knew my own identity, housed though it was in another man's body. Dizzily I blinked, shook my head, and rose slowly. Pain struck savagely at my side, and I gasped and let Freydis spring forward to support me on one great white arm, while the hollow building reeled about me. But Ganelon was gone. He had vanished with limbo, vanished like a scatter of smoke, vanished as if the prayer he breathed in his extremity had been answered by the nameless god he prayed to.

I was Edward Bond again.

"Do you know why Ganelon could break you, Edward Bond?" Freydis said softly. "Do you know why you could not vanquish him? It was not what he thought. I know he believed he read your mind because he had dwelt there, but that was not the reason. When a man fights himself, my son, the same man does not fight to win. Only the suicide hates himself. Deep within Ganelon lay the knowledge of his own evil, and the hatred of it. So he could strike his own image and exult in the blow, because he hated himself in the depths of his own mind.

"But you had earned your own respect. You could not strike as hard as he because you are not evil. And Ganelon won—and lost. In the end, he did not fight me. He had

slain himself, and the man who does that has no combat left in him."

Her voice sank to a murmur. Then she laughed.

"Go out now, Edward Bond. There is much to be done in the Dark World!"

So, leaning upon her arm, I went down the long steps that Ganelon had climbed. I saw the green glimmer of the day outside, the shimmer of leaves, the motion of waiting people. I remembered all that Ganelon had remembered, but upon the mind of Ganelon the mind of Edward Bond was forever superimposed, and I knew that only thus could the Dark World be ruled.

The two together, twinned forever in one body, and the control forever mine—Edward Bond's.

We came out under the emptied arch of the opening, and daylight was blinding for a moment after that haunted darkness. Then I saw the foresters anxiously clustering in their battered ranks around the Caer, and I saw a pale girl in green, haloed by her floating hair, turn a face of incredulous radiance to mine.

I forgot the pain in my side.

Arles' hair swam like mist about us both as my arms closed around her. The roar of exultation that went up from the forest people swept the clearing and made the great Caer behind us echo through all its hollow vaults.

The Dark World was free, and ours.

But, Medea, Medea, red witch of Colchis, how we might have reigned together!



NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

## THE SOLAR INVASION

Featuring Curt Newton and the Futuremen

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN



# The Man With X-Ray Eyes

By EDMOND HAMILTON

*Endowed with super-vision, reporter David Winn learns the awesome and terrifying secret of seeing too much!*



**D**R. JACKSON HOMER, tall and thin and gray, listened in half-fascinated doubt to his caller's rush of words. They swept on, quick, eager, convincing. He was young, this dark-haired, vivid-faced fellow who had given his name as David Winn. His arguments rang with the confidence of youth as yet unacquainted with defeat.

Winn gesticulated, motioned colorfully to drive home his arguments. His clear voice echoed from the walls of Dr. Homer's long laboratory, set delicate brass and nickel instruments on the shelves and vessels of shimmering glass on the tables to quivering, drifted out of the open window to be lost in the morning confusion of a sunny crosstown street of New York.

"You can't refuse!" Winn asserted. "It means a human being to test your process on, and you admit that you want to try it on a human."

"I would like to very much, yes," Dr. Homer sighed. "It would complete my investigation. But I had not thought of being able to do so until you volunteered—the risks—"

"What risks?" challenged young David Winn. "You've done the thing to a dozen animals from dog to monkey, haven't you, without changing anything in them except their eyesight?"

"The eyesight alteration is change enough," Dr. Homer said. "You say that you are a newspaper reporter and not a scientist. Do you realize exactly what my process involves?"

"Of course I do," David Winn answered. "I read the newspaper accounts of it thoroughly, from the first mention of your work that appeared three months ago.

"That first article said that you, Dr. Homer, the eminent biologist of Manhattan Founda-

tion, believed that you could change the eyes of animals so that they could see through stone and metal and such substances as easily as through glass.

"You proposed to do this by making the retinas of those animals' eyes sensitive to certain ultra-violet vibrations instead of light-vibrations. They would see by these ultra-violet radiations instead of by light, and since all inorganic matter is transparent to these particular vibrations, so would it be transparent to their eyes."

Dr. Homer nodded.

"Yes, that was a fairly correct statement of my purpose in undertaking this series of experiments. I was sure I could make animal eyes capable of seeing through solid matter."

Winn leaned forward.

"Then, two weeks ago, the papers said that you had succeeded. You had so changed the sensitivity of the eyes of several animals that they saw by the ultra-violet waves and could look straight through stone or metal or any inorganic substance. They could not see through living things or matter derived from living things, as these particular vibrations would not penetrate organic matter.

## EDITOR'S NOTE



**S**OME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Man With X-Ray Eyes," by Edmond Hamilton, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFCTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

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Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!



David's face turned white as he heard Marta's words

"That article added that you were of the opinion that you could change human eyes in just the same way by altering the retina's sensitivity, and that a man whose eyes were so treated could see through stone and brick walls, through metal of any kind, in fact, could see through almost everything except living beings and such part of their clothing and possessions as were of organic matter."

David Winn's face lit.

"That's why I came here to volunteer as a test-subject for your process! I want you to change my eyes so that I too will be able to look through solid matter as though it didn't exist!"

"But why?" Dr. Homer asked him keenly.

"Just why do you want this power of looking through doors and walls at will?"

"Not for criminal purposes, if that is what you are thinking of," Winn told him.

"Yes, that is what was in my mind," Dr. Homer admitted. "I can take no chance of turning loose on this city a criminal who is able to see through its walls as though they were glass."

"I can satisfy you that I've no criminal ideas," David Winn assured him. "I told you I was a newspaper reporter. I'm a young one, an inexperienced one. But once I had this power, I would be the greatest reporter who ever lived!"

"Do you see what I mean? If I can look

through walls and see what people are doing behind closed doors, I can get stories no other reporter can get. I can even see what people are saying behind closed doors—I've practiced lip-reading during the last few weeks in anticipation."

**T**HE young man's face gleamed, enthusiasm in his eyes as he bent forward. Dr. Homer considered him.

"So that is it—you want my process to make you the reporter who sees everything?"

"That's what I want, to see everything!" Winn declared. "Why, within weeks this power of mine would bring me a better job and a bigger salary than any other reporter in the country!"

"You wish me to change your eyesight because it will bring you a larger salary?" the scientist asked. "You must want that increased salary very badly."

David Winn smiled.

"I do, and the reason is the usual one—a girl. Marta Ray and I are very much in love with each other, but a cub's salary wouldn't be much when we're married. But on the salary I'll make when I start seeing through doors and walls—"

"And you're willing to undergo this change of eyesight to get that," Dr. Homer commented. "You understand, once your eyes were changed in this way the process could not be undone?"

"Why should anyone want it undone?" Winn countered. "If I can just get that power, I'll be satisfied to keep it and to use it."

Dr. Homer thought in silence for a time. His brows knit. He looked out through the window at the noisy morning traffic in the street below. From the window, his gaze went to a long white table over whose end was suspended an upright mechanism of brass and steel and quartz.

The scientist walked over to the instrument, fingered its connections. David Winn watched him intently. Dr. Homer suddenly turned.

"I am going to use the process on your eyes, Winn," he said. "But there are conditions."

He raised a rigid finger.

"First, if the process does succeed with your eyes, you are to tell absolutely no one of your power."

"I agree to that," Winn said quickly and decisively.

"Second, you will promise never to use

that power for criminal or vindictive purposes."

"I do promise," David Winn told him. "And now? You'll do the thing at once?"

"I might as well," said the scientist. He seemed torn by doubts. "I don't know—I may be doing wrong in this, but I've got to see if the human retina reacts like the others.

"Yes, I'll do it at once," he went on. "The process will take less than two hours—of course you'll have to be anaesthetized during it."

Under his direction, David Winn removed coat and vest and climbed up onto the white table and stretched out.

Dr. Homer swung the suspended instrument over him, carefully adjusted its tubes until twin quartz lenses were directly over the eyes of the prostrate young man. He then placed ready on a smaller table, glass containers of pink and green solutions, instruments, and droppers.

He swung the tube of an anaesthetic-gas apparatus toward Winn's face, then held its rubber nose-piece in his hand.

"All ready?" he said.

"All ready," David Winn smiled. "If all goes well I'll be seeing you—and much else—in two hours."

Dr. Homer nodded.

"If all goes well," he repeated. "Here goes."

The gas-apparatus hissed. . . .

David Winn opened his eyes and looked up from the table on which he lay. He saw the anxious face of Dr. Homer bending over him. There seemed a faint violet tinge in the light, but David Winn could see no other change. Had the process failed?

Then as he looked up past Dr. Homer's face, he gasped. He was looking up through the ceiling of the laboratory as though no ceiling was there! He was looking up at the bottom of a table, several chairs, and two white-coated scientists busy with flames and tubes, all seemingly suspended miraculously in the air a dozen feet above him.

And above these, in turn, David Winn could see other objects and other men suspended in the same way. Level above level he could see as clearly as though the ceilings and floors dividing them did not exist, far up through the great building's many levels to the open air.

Then the explanation came in full force to David Winn's half-dazed mind. He struggled up to a sitting position.

"You did it, then!" he exclaimed. "The

process succeeded!"

"Did it?" Dr. Homer asked him keenly. "Has your vision changed any?"

"Changed?" Winn drew a long breath. "I'll say that it's changed. Why, I can see through the ceilings above and the walls and even this table I'm sitting on, as though they didn't exist!"

IT was true. To David Winn's eyes, the walls, floors and ceilings of the building had vanished. He could see up through level above level into the open air. In each level he saw only the human beings, their clothing, wooden doors and tables; only organic matter.

He could look down through similar levels to the surface of the ground below. It occurred to him that he saw the ground only because it was so intermixed with organic matter in its upper layer.

Dr. Homer helped him to clamber down from the metal table. Winn seemed to himself to be standing on empty space, the tile floor invisible to his sight. It was an eerie sensation.

He took a few steps tentatively across the room and blundered into something invisible that upset with a crash.

Winn made a wry face.

"I'll have to look out for metal furniture, won't I? But it's wonderful—wonderful—"

Dr. Homer's face held excitement.

"You can see only organic matter, then, the same as my animal subjects?"

"Just the same," said David Winn. Elation was beginning to replace his bewilderment. "Think of it, I'm looking straight through the walls! The reporter who can see through walls!"

"You've no regrets, then, that you underwent the process?" the scientist asked, and Winn laughed.

"Regrets? I wish that I'd been born this way. I'm going to see the world as it really is from now on, and not just the walls behind which it hides!"

He put on his hat and maneuvered to the door, Dr. Homer helping him. He grasped the invisible door-knob.

"I'll be back tomorrow to make whatever scientific tests you want, doctor. Just now I'm eager to make use of my power."

"Be careful," Dr. Homer warned. "Take it easy until you learn how to navigate."

David Winn closed the door, walked down a hall and invisible stairs carefully, and

emerged into the street.

Crowded New York was an astounding spectacle to his eyes now that he saw only the living and organic matter in it.

The great buildings of stone and steel had largely vanished to his sight, and he now saw only the level above level of working people and miscellaneous organic objects they contained.

He could see none of the automobiles and buses thronging the street before him. His eyes beheld only groups of people in sitting posture rushing to and fro suspended in the air.

He set off for his newspaper-office. It was but two blocks away, but before he reached it, David Winn had almost been run down at intersections by two taxicabs invisible to his eyes; had been roundly cursed by a man pushing a metal hand-truck along the sidewalk which he had run into; and had tripped twice over objects he could not see.

When he got into the city-room of his paper, it presented as weird an appearance as the street. Men sat at desks invisible to his eyes, using invisible telephones and typewriters. Winn threaded cautiously through them to the city editor's desk.

The editor, Ray Lanham, looked up as he approached and tossed a scrap of paper toward him.

"Where have you been all morning, Winn?" he asked. "Here's a list of some of the most prominent men in the city. I want you to get as many of them as you can to state their opinion on the latest disclosures of civic graft."

"This assignment ought to be easy enough for you," Lanham added. "Phone in what you get in time for the rewrite."

David Winn smiled as he pocketed the slip of paper.

"Don't hunt easy assignments for me, for from now on I'm the best reporter you've got," he said. "In one week all the newspapers in this town will be begging me to work for them. . . ."

Grinning to himself at the editor's dumb-faced face, he walked out of the office and reached the street.

When he saw a taxi-driver sailing along amid the weird throng of rushing figures in the street, David Winn hailed him and entered the cab he could not see. He sped downtown in eerie progress.

The first name on his list was that of Roscoe Saulton, candidate for governor. Winn left

the cab at the Saulton Campaign Headquarters, and found his way up through the invisible walls and stairs and floors to the suite of offices he wished to reach.

He found two other newspapermen waiting to see Roscoe Saulton on the same matter, and Winn was just appearing from the inner offices. His big, good-humored face was wreathed in a welcoming smile.

His face sobered as David Winn put his question. It became almost stern.

"I have only the strongest condemnation for all forms of civic graft," he declared. "This rottenness that has been uncovered in our body politic must be destroyed!"

"Can we quote you as saying that if elected you will do all in your power to cleanse municipal politics?" one of the reporters asked.

Saulton nodded vigorously.

"You may, and I hope that you make it emphatic. I am seeking the office of governor only that I may serve the people, and I know no better way to serve them than to smash this political ring of chicanery and fraud that has long disgraced this city."

He shook hands heartily with them.

"Good day, gentlemen—and remember that I am always glad to see you."

AS Roscoe Saulton returned to the inner offices and the other two newspapermen went out, David Winn lingered.

He could look through the walls into the inner office to which Saulton had gone, and could see Saulton and the half-dozen other cigar-smoking men in that office as clearly as though the intervening walls did not exist.

Winn could see the movement of their lips and read from it what they were saying. Saulton had sunk into a chair and was speaking to one of the others.

"More damn reporters to get my opinion on graft," he was saying. "They've kept me busy damning the organization up and down all morning."

The other men grinned.

"Don't damn it too hard when you're relying on it to put you into office next month, Saulton," one of them said.

Another contradicted.

"Go as far as you like with your denunciations," he advised the candidate. "It doesn't hurt the organization a bit and it will get you votes."

"Well, once I'm in the governor's chair, I'll give short shrift to these pussyfooting reformers," Roscoe Saulton growled, "but right

now I've got to coddle them along, worse luck."

David Winn's absorbed watch was interrupted by a secretary who came up to him in the outer office.

"Is anything the matter?" the man asked. "You've been staring at the wall for minutes."

Winn turned. "Oh, just a little absent-minded, I guess. Good day."

Winn walked out of the building to the street. He felt disgusted to the core of his being.

So this was Roscoe Saulton, the gubernatorial candidate whose integrity was unquestioned! A pseudo-reformer who denounced political graft even while he used it to reach office.

Others, everyone, might be taken in, but the truth could not be hidden from the eyes of David Winn. He had looked through the walls behind which Saulton thought himself secure, had seen the real Roscoe Saulton.

He looked at the next name on his list. It was that of James Willingdon, financier and mining-magnate and philanthropist whose eminence was known over the whole nation. Winn got another cab to take him to Willingdon and Company's Wall Street offices.

He was passed through a half-dozen secretaries and underlings until he at last reached the office of James Willingdon's personal secretary and explained his errand. The secretary was beautifully courteous.

"Mr. Willingdon is engaged in an important business conference, but I will see whether he can see you for a moment. Will you please wait here?"

David Winn looked after the secretary as he went through an invisible wall into the next office. There were a dozen men in that room, gathered round a long table. Winn saw them as clearly as though there were no wall separating them.

He saw James Willingdon himself at the head of the table, a man of fifty with a gray face, steely gray eyes, and a straight erect figure. Willingdon was speaking to the others at the table.

Winn could read the movement of his lips as clearly as though he were hearing the words issuing from them.

"I tell you, it's the best proposition any of us have ever had," James Willingdon was saying. "We announce United Mines, and with our names and the publicity we'll give it, the public will fall over itself to buy the



stock. When it's gone high enough we'll unload without warning."

"What if the public learns what has happened afterward?" a tall, anxious-looking man queried. "We wouldn't be very popular, I can assure you."

"There's no chance they'll even suspect. We'll simply assert that bear raiders broke the stock's value and that we lost more than anyone else!" James Willingdon answered. "They'll never question it any more than they ever have before."

"Very well, we're with you, Willingdon," another said. "But remember, no double-crossing—we sell at the same time."

The personal secretary who had been hovering close by came quickly forward and spoke to the financier.

David Winn saw Willingdon excuse himself to the others and come into the room where he waited.

James Willingdon's face wore a smile of perfect-seeming sincerity as he shook Winn's hand.

"I can spare you only a moment, Mr. Winn," he said, "for some of my associates and I are busy planning a project that will mean great things for this country—yes, great things.

"But my secretary said that you wanted my opinion of the recent graft-disclosures, and my duty as a citizen comes before all else. As a citizen of this municipality, I want to put on record my utter detestation of all such wrong-doing as has just been disclosed."

David Winn went out of the place with a bitter smile. So James Willingdon, great financier and revered philanthropist, was—just a crook. Just another like Roscoe Saul-ton.

IT came to Winn as he emerged into the street that his new eyesight gave him more than the power to look through walls—it gave with it the power to look through the falsities of ordinary existence into the true hearts of men.

Ten minutes later, David Winn was putting his question to the third man on his list, one of the overlords of the clothing industry.

The clothing-magnate spoke eloquently against civic corruption. He dwelt on the horror of defrauding poor as well as rich. He mentioned Lincoln and Washington. But David Winn was not listening.

The offices of this man were on the ground floor of the great block of buildings that

housed his shops. Winn looked through the offices' walls as though they did not exist, was staring into those far-stretching factory-divisions.

He saw the long rows of pinched-looking, pale-faced girls and women bent over machines, working like so many automatons without looking up. He saw panting youths struggling with hand-trucks of clothing and fabrics and furs through ill-lit, ill-ventilated corridors and rooms.

Winn avoided shaking hands with the denouncer of graft and escaped into the street. He felt a revulsion.

He walked along the street, forgetting his further names for the time, and found himself passing a curious structure.

Its walls were transparent to his eyes like those of all the other buildings in sight, of course. But its interior seemed divided into a great number of very small rooms.

There were men crowded in nearly all the rooms, as far back into the structure as he saw. Some of the men lay in stupefied sleep. Others gazed longingly into the streets.

It was a prison. Winn saw the guards in the corridors between the cells, the debased character of many of the occupants, the unconquerable dirtiness, as clearly as though there were no walls and bars between.

He had many times passed the stately gray stone building before, but never until now had he seen through the stone front to the foulness and misery within. He passed hurriedly on.

But the next building was worse. It was a large hospital. He had passed this, too, many times in the past, and had admired the neatness of the big brick building with its gleaming sun-rooms and other rooms showing their expanse of shining glass window.

But now David Winn's eyes saw nothing of the neat brick walls, the glistening glass. He looked through brick and plaster and metal to the building's interior. He saw long rows of mattresses, resting on beds he could not see; hundreds of them.

Men and women were stretched upon them, and children too. Some were tossing feverishly in the grip of dread diseases. Others shrieked in the agony of pain. He could see men whose limbs were but bandaged stumps, could see children lying supine in casts.

He gazed up through the level on level of rows of beds and sufferers to the operating-rooms, glimpsed the flash of steel instruments suddenly reddened. He saw the sheet being

drawn over the faces of suddenly quiet figures, beheld new sufferers being brought hastily in from the ambulances at the rear. Sick and shaken, David Winn stumbled on.

He passed quickly the adjoining insanity-hospital, turning his head away from the building through whose transparent walls he could see men and women tearing at the bars of their cells and at themselves, or sitting and staring droolingly into nothingness. He kept his eyes averted until he had turned the corner.

The grotesque spectacle of the city hummed and swarmed in the warm afternoon sunlight as he went down this street. He hardly knew now where he was going, hardly was aware of the weirdness of the spectacle that the street presented to his eyes. In his soul, a horror was expanding that he could not conquer.

Now it was a section of the slum-district through which he was passing. But he did not see it as it appeared to the eyes of others in the street, a narrow thoroughfare lined with dingy brick-fronted tenements and noisy with children playing on the worn cobbles. He was seeing what lay behind the dingy building-fronts.

David Winn's eyes beheld an unimagined dirtiness and squalor through the walls that were transparent to them. He saw large families crowded into a single room, with shabby mattresses piled in a corner showing on what they slept at night. He saw scavenging children returning triumphantly home with revolting food.

In those rabbit-warrens of filth and darkness, his super-penetrating vision descried every species of crime, breeding and taking place. Men and women sodden with poisonous liquor, he saw, and others pale and flaccid from the drugs they took as he watched. Children were deftly instructed in crime in places whose walls could not bar the gaze of David Winn.

Winn tried to tell himself that all this had always been, that it was only because he now saw it all that he was so shaken with horror, but it was unavailing. Wherever his steps took him, wherever his eyes turned, he looked through walls into some new nest of pain or foulness or crime hidden from the light of day.

He was sick, sick unto his soul. Why, he cried to himself, had he ever been so mad as to let his eyes be changed? Why had he not realized what it would mean? All the wretch-

edness and wrong-doing and horror of life that was hidden from other men by walls would always be staring him in the face. He would see them always with eyes that penetrated all concealment.

If his eyes could be changed back to their former state, if the process could be undone—but no, it could never be undone. Dr. Homer had warned of that. He would always be like this, always desecrating through any concealment the horror hidden from all others.

**B**UT if he could get away, with Marta! David Winn's heart leapt to catch at the sudden gleam of hope. In the country there would be fewer walls, less hidden things. They could be married and go there to live, just he and Marta together, Marta loved him and would understand—

He would go to her, explain to her. Feverishly, David Winn walked northward until he came to the apartment-building he sought. He raced up the invisible stairs and along the hall. His hand was raised to knock on Marta Ray's door, but he paused as he looked through the transparent wall and saw Marta and her mother.

They were talking, and their faces were turned half toward him. David Winn read their lips as clearly as though he heard their speech.

"He said that if his plans worked out we could be married quite soon," Marta was saying.

The mother sniffed.

"Why you have anything to do with him, I don't know. David Winn has nothing and never will have anything."

"Oh, don't start that again, Mother," Marta Ray said wearily. "I know David doesn't amount to much."

"Then why are you going to marry him?" her mother demanded.

"Because David is the best I can get. I have to marry someone, don't I?" said the girl discontentedly.

David Winn stood quite motionless outside the door for some moments. Then he turned, and with his face white and strange, went softly down the stairs. . . .

The police sergeant that night was explaining to Dr. Homer as he led him back along a corridor to the morgue-room.

"We found your name and address in his pocket when we fished his body out of the river, and thought maybe you could identify him," he was saying.

Dr. Homer stepped into the morgue-room, and as the sheet was thrown back he looked steadily at the drowned man.

He lay with body tensed, and with one hand flung palm-outward against his face, across his eyes.

"Funny thing about that arm," the sergeant remarked. "When we found him, his hand was up in front of his eyes like that and we couldn't move it away."

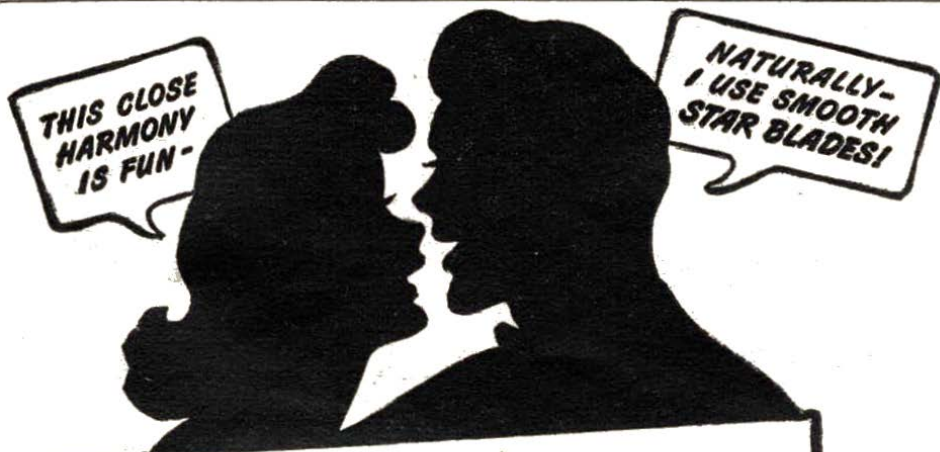
"Looks just like he was trying to keep from seeing something, doesn't it?"

Dr. Homer nodded sadly as he looked at David Winn.

"He was trying to keep from seeing everything. For he saw everything just as he wanted to, and it was too much for him."

"God keep us blind in this world! Prevent us from the horror of doing what he did, of seeing too well."

Next Issue's Hall of Fame Story: AFTER ARMAGEDDON, by Francis Flagg



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The tall black body crumbled as the needle-beam spoke

## PLANET OF THE BLACK DUST

By JACK VANCE

*The pirates held all the cards but one—the soul of a man who was determined not to let them win!*

**A**BOUT the middle of the dog watch Captain Creed came up on the bridge of the space-freighter *Perseus*. He walked to the forward port and stood gazing at the blood-red star which lay ahead and slightly to the left.

It was a nameless little sun in the tail of the Serpens group, isolated from the usual space routes. The Earth-Rasalague route ran far to one side, the Delta Aquila ran far to the other and the Delta Aquila-Sabik inter-sector service was yet a half light-year further out.

Captain Creed stood watching the small red star, deep in thought—a large man, with a paunch, a bland white face, a careful coal-black beard. His heavy black eyes, underhung with dark circles, were without expression or life. He wore a neat black suit, his boots shone with a high polish, his hands were white and immaculately kept.

Captain Creed was more than mere master of the *Perseus*. In partnership with his brother he owned the European-Arcturus Line—a syndicate impressive to the ear.

The home office, however, was one dingy

room in the old Co-Martian Tower in Tran, and the firm's sole assets consisted, first, of the *Perseus* itself, and second, of the profit anticipated from a cargo of aromatic oils which Captain Creed had taken on consignment from McVann's Star in Ophiuchus.

The *Perseus* could not be considered the more valuable of the two items. It was an old ship, slow, pitted by meteorites, of little more than 600 tons capacity.

The cargo was another matter—flask upon flask of rare aromatics, essence of syrang blooms, oil of star-poppies, attar of green orchids, musk of crushed mian flies, distillation of McVann's blue bush—exotic liquids brought in by the bulb-men of McVann's Star a half ounce at a time. And Captain Creed was highly annoyed when the insurance evaluator permitted but an eighty-million-dollar policy and had argued vehemently to have the figure moved closer to the cargo's true value.

Now, as he stood on the bridge smoking his igar, he was joined by the first mate, Blaine, who was tall and thin and, except for a scrub of black hair, egg-bald. Blaine had a long knife-nose, a mouth twisted to a perpetual snarl. He had a quick reckless way of talking that sometimes disconcerted careful Captain Creed.

"They're all fixed," he announced. "They'll go in about ten minutes—" Captain Creed quelled him with a frown and a quick motion of the head, and Blaine saw that they were not alone. Holderlin, second mate and quartermaster, a young man of hard face and cruel blue eyes, stood forward at the helm.

He wore only loose tattered trousers, and the scarlet glare from the star ahead gave a devilish red glow to his body, put a lurid cast on his face. Like two hawks they watched him, and his expression did not entirely reassure them. After a moment Captain Creed spoke smoothly.

"I doubt if you are right, Mr. Blaine. The period of that type of variable star is slower and more even, as I think you'll find if you check your observations."

Blaine shot another quick look at Holderlin, then, mumbling indistinguishably, left for the engine room.

Creed presently stepped across the bridge. "Take her five degrees closer to the star, Mr. Holderlin. We're somewhat offcourse, and the gravity will swing us back around."

Holderlin gave him one look of surprise, then silently obeyed. What nonsense was this? Already the ship was gripped hard by gravity. Did they still hope to beguile him with such slim pretexts? If so they must think him stupid indeed.

Even a child would by now have been warned by the happenings aboard the

*Perseus*. First at Porphyry, the space-port on McVann's Star, Captain Creed had discharged the radioman and the two ship's mechanics for reasons unexplained.

Not an unusual circumstance, but Captain Creed had neglected to hire replacements. Thus, the only other man aboard beside Captain Creed, Blaine and Holderlin, was Farjoram, the half-mad Callistonian cook.

ON SEVERAL occasions, after Porphyry had been cleared, Holderlin had surprised Blaine and Creed intent at the radio. Later, when he inspected the automatic frequency record, he found no trace of calls.

And four or five days ago, while on watch below and supposedly asleep, he had noticed while leaving his tiny compartment that the entrance port to the starboard life-boat was ajar. He had said nothing, but later, when Blaine and Captain Creed were both asleep, had inspected the life-boats, port and starboard, to find that the fuel in the starboard life-boat had been drained except for the slightest trickle and that the radio transmitter had been tampered with.

The port boat was well fueled and provisioned. So Holderlin quietly refueled the starboard boat and thoughtfully stowed away spare fuel.

Now came Blaine's unwary statement to Captain Creed, and Creed's peculiar orders to steer toward the star. Holderlin's tough brown face was unexpressive as he watched Creed's great bulk by the port, blotting out the sun ahead.

But his brain searched through all angles of the situation. For fourteen years of his thirty-three he had roved space and of necessity had learned how to care for Robert Holderlin.

A slight shock shook the hull. Captain Creed turned his head negligently, then once again looked out on space. Holderlin said nothing, but his eyes were very alert.

A few minutes passed, and Blaine came back to the bridge. Holderlin sensed, but did not see the look which passed between Creed and the gaunt mate.

"Ah," said Captain Creed. "We seem to be close enough. Starboard ten degrees and set her on the gyroscope."

Holderlin turned the wheel. He could feel the surge of power into the jets, but the ship did not respond.

"She doesn't answer, sir," he said. "What's this!" cried Captain Creed. "Mr. Blaine! Check the steering jets! The ship does not answer the wheel!"

Creed must dislike too blunt action, thought Holderlin, to insist on such elaborate circumstances—or perhaps they suspected the gun in his pocket. Blaine ran off, and returned in a very short time, a wolfish grin



lifting his already contorted lip.

"Steering jets fused, Captain. That cheap lining they put in at Aureolis has given out."

Captain Creed looked from the furious little sun ahead to Blaine and Holderlin. With his entire fortune at stake, he seemed strangely unperturbed by the prospect of disaster. But then Captain Creed's white face was always controlled. He gave the order that Holderlin had been expecting.

"Abandon ship!" he said. "Mr. Blaine, despatch the distress signal! Mr. Holderlin, find Farjoram and stand by the starboard life-boat!"

Holderlin left to find the cook. But he noted as he passed that Blaine, at the transmitter, had not yet flipped down the big red "Emergency" relay.

Presently Captain Creed and Blaine joined Holderlin and the cook on the boat walk.

"Shall I accompany your boat, Captain, or Mr. Blaine's?" asked Holderlin, as if he had not understood Captain Creed's previous order, or was challenging it. Blaine looked in sudden alarm at the captain.

"You will take charge of the starboard boat, Mr. Holderlin," replied the Captain silkily. "I wish Mr. Blaine to accompany me." He turned to enter the port boat. But Holderlin stepped forward and produced a sheet of paper he had been carrying for several days.

"A moment, if you please, sir. If I am to be in charge of the boat, for the protection of myself and the cook—in the event your boat is lost—will you sign this certification of shipwreck?"

"Neither boat will be lost, Mr. Holderlin," replied Captain Creed, smoothing his black beard. "Mr. Blaine contacted a patrol cruiser only a hundred million miles away."

"Nevertheless, sir, I believe the Astronautic Code requires such a document."

Blaine nudged the captain slyly.

"Well certainly, Mr. Holderlin, we must observe the law," said Captain Creed, and so signed the certification. Without more ado, he and Blaine entered their lifeboat.

"Take off, Mr. Holderlin!" Captain Creed ordered through the port. "We will wait till you clear."

**H**OLDERLIN turned. The cook had disappeared.

"Farjoram!" he cried. *Farjoram!*"

Holderlin ran to find him and at last discovered the fuzzy-skinned little Callistonian huddled in his cabin, red eyes bulging in great terror. There was foam at his mouth.

"Come," said Holderlin gruffly.

The Callistonian babbled in frenzy.

"No, no—I not go in life-boat. Get away, you go! I stay!"

Then Holderlin remembered a tale which had gone the rounds of how this Farjoram and eight others had drifted in a life-boat for four months through the Phenesian Blackness. When at last they had been picked up, there was only Farjoram among the picked bones of his fellows. So now even Holderlin shuddered.

"Hurry!" came Captain Creed's call. "We are almost into the sun!"

"Come!" said Holderlin roughly. "They'll kill you if you don't."

For answer the Callistonian whipped out a long knife and spasmodically stabbed himself in the throat. He fell at Holderlin's feet. Holderlin returned alone.

"Where's Farjoram?" queried Creed sharply.

"He killed himself, sir. With a knife."

"Humph," murmured Creed. "Well, take off alone then. The rendezvous is at a hundred million miles on the line between this star and Delta Aquila.

"Right, sir," said Holderlin. Without further words, he sealed himself in the boat and took off.

The sun was close, but not too close. It would have pulled an unfueled life-boat to doom, but it was not so near as to prevent another ship from approaching the *Perseus*, shackling into the fore and aft chocks and towing it off to safety.

Holderlin used his blasts for a few seconds, then cut them as if his fuel were exhausted. Presently as he drifted away from the *Perseus*, apparently helpless in the red star's gravity, he saw the port boat break clear and speed, not out toward Delta Aquila, but back along the blast-track.

Holderlin drifted quietly a few minutes, in the event that Captain Creed or Blaine were watching him through glasses. But there was little time to waste. The ship lying astern would presently draw alongside and, after transferring the precious cargo, would let the *Perseus* hurtle into the scarlet sun.

Holderlin had different plans. He assured himself that the certificate signed by Captain Creed was safe—then, judging the interval to be adequate, started his blasts and whisked himself back to the *Perseus*.

He brought the bow of the lifeboat against the *Perseus*' forward tow ring, then slipped into his air-suit, clambered out into space and shackled the two together. Then, back in the life-boat, he eased open the throttle and nudged the bow of the *Perseus* to a safe position of space.

He pushed himself across the emptiness, this time to the *Perseus*' entrance port and, shedding his space-suit, ran up to the bridge. He sent out a detector wave, and the almost instant contact bell told him the other ship stood close—too close for flight to the only

refuge he could think of—the lone planet of the red star.

He picked up this ship in the televue. It was a long black vessel with high-straked bow, great thick-ribbed tubes and a bridge built smooth into the hull. Holderlin instantly recognized the type—a class of fast heavily-armed ships designed for the Scorpio Sagittarius frontier run, built by the Belisarius Corporation of Earth.

Two years before he had shipped aboard one of the same class, and he recollected an incident of the voyage. Out past Fomalhaut, they were engaged in a running battle with a war-sphere of the Clantlalan system, and there had been a lucky shot into the main generator which had put them out of action.

Only the arrival of three Earth cruisers had staved off capture and slavery. Holderlin recollected the exact details of that lucky shot. The bolt had struck amidships, just forward of the lower drive-jet. It had broken into the hull through a small drain, the Achilles' heel of the heavy armor.

So Holderlin watched and waited as the sleek black vessel cruised close. The lifeboat dangling against the *Perseus'* bow was turned partly away in the shadow, and was, he hoped, not too conspicuous.

But the ship came easing up with an insolent leisure, and there seemed to be no suspicions aboard. Holderlin's hard face creased in a grin as he sighted along the *Perseus'* ancient needle-beam.

**T**HE encounter was of dream-like simplicity. Like a tremendous black shark, the ship drifted over him, her little black drain drawing the sights of his needle-beam like aagnet.

He pulled the trigger and laughed aloud as a great hole opened where the drain had once been. As before, the lights died, the driving beams cut off, all evidence of life vanished, and the black ship rolled sluggishly in recoil from the blast, a great helpless hulk.

Holderlin ran to the bank of jet controls. He could consider himself safe now, for at least a few hours, when, with luck, he would be so well concealed that the black ship could seek in vain. And if those aboard were not able to rig up an auxiliary generator quickly, they themselves might be forced to take to their life-boats—for the red star glowed close ahead.

He threw on acceleration and, with the lifeboat dragging crazily from the bow, blasted away toward the lone planet of the scarlet sun.

An hour later the planet loomed large, and he entered the green-tinted atmosphere. In order to escape the televue plates of the raider, he circled to the far side, nudging the *Perseus'* bow around with the lifeboat.

Through his own televue, the planet showed as a world of about half Earth's size, scarred with gorges and precipitous crags, interspersed with plains. These plains brimmed with a black froth, which the televue presently revealed to be thick, fronded, vegetation.

The atmosphere, of a marked green tint, supported great fleecy clouds, glowing in the lurid sunlight in all shades of orange, gold, red and yellow.

Holderlin let the *Perseus* fall toward the base of a great black peak where dense forests indicated good concealment. Single-handed he landed the ship with its steering jets fused, an epic in itself.

For two tense hours he crouched in the lifeboat, jockeying the nose of the *Perseus* back and forth as it settled on its landing blasts through the green murk past the hot-colored clouds.

He had led two cords into the lifeboat with him—one made fast to the throttle that he might blast the ship to safety if the terrain were too soft or too rough, the other to kill the tubes when the ship finally settled solidly.

The *Perseus* teetered low through the green air and crashed down through the black forests onto solid soil. Holderlin yanked his cut-off cord, and the roaring blasts died. He fell limply back in his bucket seat.

He stirred himself. The green of the atmosphere hinted unhealthiness—and once more climbing into his air-suit he returned to the *Perseus*.

He twisted the dial at the radio. There was only silence. Through the skyport, he saw that the soft black fronds had closed over the ship. The *Perseus* was well concealed. Holderlin slept.

When he awoke all was as before, the radio still silent. He tested the atmosphere with the Bramley Airoyler, and as he suspected the dials showed poison. But apparently there were no tissue-irritant gasses, and there was a sufficiency of oxygen.

So he charged a respirator with appropriate filters and jumped out on the planet to inspect the steering jets. He sank to his ankles in an impalpable black dust like soot, which every passing puff of air blew into whirls of black smoke.

As he walked, he stirred up clouds of this dust, which settled in his clothes and into his boots. Holderlin cursed. He could see that a grimy period lay before him. He plodded around to the steering jets.

They were both better and worse than he had expected. The linings were split and broken, and fragments had wedged across the throat of the tube. The electron filaments were destroyed, but the backplates of telex

crystal were still whole.

The tubes themselves were sound, neither belled, warped nor cracked, and apparently the field coils were not burnt out. Holderlin surmised that a small charge of vanzitrol had been exploded in each.

He could not recall seeing any spare linings aboard, but to make sure he ransacked the ship—to no avail. However, the Naval Regulation Lining Oven and a supply of flux was in its place as provided by Article 80 of the Astronautic Code, a law from the early days of space-flight, when durable linings were unknown.

Then every ship carried dozens of spares—yet often as not these would burn out or split in the heat and pressure, and the ship would be forced to land on a convenient planet and mold another supply. Now Holderlin's concern was to find a bed of clean clay.

The ground at his feet was covered by the black dust. Perhaps, if he dug, he might find clay.

As he stood by the jets, Holderlin heard a heavy shuffling tread through the forest. He ran back to the entrance port, knowing that on strange planets prudence and agility are better safeguards than a needle-beam and steel armor.

The creature of the footsteps passed close beside the ship, a thin shambling being fifteen feet high, vaguely manlike, with a spider's gaunt construction. The arms and legs were skin and bone, the skin was greenish-black, the face peculiarly long and vacant.

It had a fierce shock of reddish hair at the back of its head, the eyes were bulging milky orbs, the ears were wide and extended. It passed the *Perseus* with hardly a glance and showed neither awe nor interest.

"Hey!" cried Holderlin, jumping to the ground. "Come here!"

The thing paused a moment to regard him dully through the red light, then slowly shambling off in its original direction, stirring up black clouds of dust. It disappeared through the feathery black jungle.

Holderlin returned to the problem of repairing the tubes. He must find clay enough to mold four new linings—three or four hundred pounds. He brought a spade from the ship and dug into the surface.

He worked half an hour and turned up nothing but hot black humus. And the deeper he dug, the thicker and tougher grew the roots of the fungus trees. He gave up in disgust.

AS HE climbed, sweating and dusty, from his hole, a little breeze raced along the top of the jungle stirring the fronds, and in the black fog which floated down, Holderlin

discovered the origin of the black powder at his feet—spawn.

He must find clay, clean yellow clay, the nearer the better. He did not fancy carrying this clay on his shoulder any great distance. He looked to where the lifeboat dangled by its nose from the bow of the *Perseus*.

He saw that the shackle, with the entire weight of the lifeboat hanging on it, was locked. Holderlin scratched his head. He would have to balance the boat on the gravity units, releasing the shackle from all strain, to remove it.

But when he finally poised the boat in mid-air and climbed out on the nose, he discovered that his shift of position had weighted the bow and that if he unscrewed the shackle, the boat very likely would nose down and throw him to the ground.

Cursing both shackle and lifeboat, Holderlin let the boat hang against the hull as before and made his way to the ground. He entered the ship and outfitted himself with a sack, a light spade, a canteen of water and spare charges for his respirator.

"Aboard the *Perseus*! Aboard the *Perseus*! Respond, *Perseus*!"

Holderlin chuckled grimly and sat down beside the speaker.

"Aboard the *Perseus*!" came the call again. "This is Captain Creed speaking. If you are alive and listening, respond immediately. You have bested us fair and square, and we hold no grudge. But no matter how you reached this planet you cannot go farther.

"A detector screen surrounds you, and we will heterodyne any distress call you broadcast."

Evidently Captain Creed had not yet surmised who had run off with his ship, or how it had been accomplished. Another voice broke in, harder and sharper.

"Respond immediately," said the new voice, "giving your position, and you will receive a share in the venture. If you do not, we shall know how to act when we find you, and we will find you if it means searching the planet foot by foot!"

All during this pronouncement, the strength of the radio carrier wave had increased rapidly, and now Holderlin heard a low mutter, rapidly waxing to a roar. Running to the port, he spied the black pirate ship sweeping toward him across the green sky, just under the canopy of many-colored clouds.

Almost overhead the brake-blasts spewed forward, and the ship slowed in its majestic course. Trapped—thought Holderlin. With racing pulse he leapt for the lifeboat. The shackle he'd blast away with his needle-beam!

But the black ship passed across the mountain, where it slowly sank from sight.

sunlight glinting from its sides. Holderlin breathed easily again. This world was small, and the mountain made a prominent landmark. Probably the same reasons that had brought him here to hide, led them here to seek him.

At least he knew where his enemies were stationed, a matter of some advantage. How to escape them, he as yet had no notion. They seemed invulnerable with a fast well-armed ship against his wrecked hulk, and certainly no less than thirty or forty in the crew.

Holderlin shrugged. First he must repair the tubes. Then he would try his luck at winning clear. And if he could bring that scented cargo only as far as Laroknik on Gavnad, the sixth of Delta Aquila, the universe lay open to him.

He'd buy a space-yacht, a villa on Fan, the Pleasure Planet. He'd buy an asteroid and create a world to his whim, as did the Empire's millionaires.

Holderlin put aside his dreaming. He took his sack and plodded off through the black dust in the direction of the mountain, seeking clay. A half mile from the ship, the feathery black canopy overhead thinned, and he entered a clearing.

Within this clearing moved a score of the tall manlike creatures. But their hair was not reddish like that of the creature that had passed him in the wood. It was greenish black. They stood busy with an enormous beast, evidently domesticated.

This had a great round body, as big as a house, supported on a circle of wide arching legs. With two long tentacles it stuffed the black tree-branches into a maw on top of its hulk. Below hung a number of teats at which the black things worked, squirting a thin green liquid into pots.

**H**OLDERLIN passed through the clearing, full in the red sunglow, but beyond a few dull glances, they took no heed of him. Continuing a mile or so, he came to the edge of the forest and the steep rises of the mountains.

Almost at his feet he found what he sought. In the diminished gravity he loaded into his sack a great deal more than he might have carried on Earth—perhaps a half of his needs—and set out in return.

But as he waded through the black dust the sack grew heavy, and by the time he reached the clearing where the natives tended their beast, his arms and his back ached.

He stood resting, watching the placid natives at their work. It occurred that possibly one of them might be induced to serve him.

"Hey—you!" he called to the nearest, as best he could through the respirator. "Come here!"

This one looked at Holderlin without interest.

"Come here!" he called again, although plainly the creature could not understand him. "I need some help. I'll give you—" he fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a small signal mirror—"this."

He displayed it, and presently the native shambled across the glade to him. It stooped to take the mirror, and a hint of interest came over the long doleful face.

"Now take this," said Holderlin, giving over the sack of clay, "and follow me."

At last the creature understood what was required of him, and with no show of either zeal or reluctance, took the bag in its rickety arms and shuffled along behind Holderlin to the ship. When they arrived, Holderlin went within and brought out a length of shiny chain, and showed it to his helper.

"One more trip, understand? One more trip. Let's go." The creature obediently followed him.

Holderlin dug the clay, loaded the bag into the native's arms.

Above them came the sound of voices, footsteps, scuffling and grating on the rock. Holderlin crept for cover. The native stood stupidly, holding the sack of clay.

Three figures came into sight, two of them, panting through respirators—Blaine and a tall man whose pointed ears and high-arched eyebrows proclaimed Trankli blood. The third was a native with a red mop of hair.

"What's this?" cried the Trankli half-breed, spying Holderlin's helper. "That sack is—"

They were the last words he spoke. A needle-beam chattered and cut him down. Blaine whirled about, grabbing for his own weapon. A voice brought him up short.

"Drop it, Blaine! You're as good as dead!"

Blaine slowly dropped his hands to his sides, glaring madly in the direction of the voice, his malformed lip twitching. Holderlin stepped from the shadow into the scarlet sunlight, and his face was as ruthless as death itself.

"Looking for me?"

He walked over and took Blaine's needle-beam. He noted the native's reddish mop of hair. This was the one that had passed him in the woods, was evidently in league with his enemies.

The needle-beam spoke once more, and the tall black body crumpled like broken jackstraws. Holderlin's worker watched impassively.

"Can't have any tale-bearers," said Holderlin, turning his ice-blue eyes on Blaine.

"Why don't you give up, Holderlin?" snarled Blaine. "You can't get away alive."

"Do you think you'll outlive me?" mocked Holderlin. "What's that you've got? A ra-

dio, hey? I'll take that." He did so. "The native was taking you to the *Perseus*, and you were going to flash back the position. Right?"

"That's right," admitted Blaine sourly, wondering at what moment he was to be killed.

Holderlin mused.

"What ship are you in?"

"The *Maetho*—Killer Donahue's. You can't get away, Holderlin. Not with Donahue after you."

"We'll see," said Holderlin shortly.

So it was Killer Donahue's *Maetho*! Holderlin had heard tales of Donahue—a slight man of perhaps forty years, with dark hair and a pair of black eyes which saw around corners and into men's minds. He had a droll clown's face, but past deeds of blood and loot did not echo the humor of his countenance.

Holderlin thought a moment, staring at the flaccid Blaine. The native stood uninterestedly holding the clay.

"Well, you wanted to see the *Perseus*," Holden said at last. "Start moving." He gestured with the needle-beam.

Blaine went slowly, sullenly.

"Do you want to die now," inquired Holderlin, "or are you going to do as I say?"

"You got the gun," growled Blaine. "I got no say at all."

"Good," said Holderlin. "Then move faster. And tonight we'll cook linings for the steering jets." He motioned to the waiting native. With Blaine ahead, they plodded off toward the ship.

"What's over the mountain? Donahue's hideout?" Holderlin asked.

**B**LAINE nodded dourly, then decided he had nothing to lose by truckling to Holderlin.

"He gets thame—dust here, sells it on Fan."

Thame was an aphrodisiac powder.

"The natives collect it, bring it in little pots. He gives them salt for it. They love salt."

Holderlin was silent, saving his energy for plowing the black dust.

"Suppose you did get away," Blaine presently put forward. "you never could sell those oils anywhere. One whiff of sorang and you'd have the Tellurian Corps of Investigation on your neck."

"I'm not selling them," said Holderlin. "Think I'm a fool? What do you think I got that certification of shipwreck for? I'm going to claim salvage. That's ninety per cent of the value of ship and cargo, by law."

Blaine was silent.

When at last they arrived, weary and begrimed with black dust, the native dropped the sack and held out a gangling arm.

"*Фауор, фауор*," it said.

Holderlin looked at him in puzzlement.

"It wants salt," said Blaine, still intent on ingratiating Holderlin. "They do anything for salt."

"Is that so?" said Holderlin. "Well, we'll go in the galley and find some salt."

So Holderlin gave the native the bit of chain and a handful of salt and dismissed it. He turned back to Blaine and gave him the radio.

"Call up Creed or Donahue and tell them that the native says you won't reach the ship till tomorrow night—it's that far off."

Blaine hesitated only an instant, long enough for Holderlin to lay a significant hand on his needle-beam. He did as was told. He called Creed, and Creed seemed satisfied with the information.

"Tell him you won't call again till tomorrow night," said Holderlin. "Say that's because Holderlin might catch an echo of the beam from the mountain."

Blaine did so.

"Good," said Holderlin. "Blaine, we're going to get along very well. Maybe I won't even kill you when I'm done with you."

Blaine swallowed nervously. He disliked this kind of talk. Holderlin stretched his arms.

"Now we'll make make tube linings. And because you ruined the last set, you'll do most of the work."

All night they baked linings in the atomic furnaces, Blaine, as Holderlin had promised, working the hardest. His bald head glistened in the glow from the furnace.

As soon as the linings were finished—no longer clay, but heavy metallic tubes—Holderlin clamped them in place. And when the angry little sun came over the horizon, the *Perseus* was once more in condition to navigate.

With Blaine's help, Holderlin unshackled the lifeboat from the hull and brought it to the ground beside the *Perseus*. Then Holderlin locked Blaine in a storage locker.

"You're lucky," he observed. "You can sleep. I have to work." Holderlin had seen a ten-pound can of vanzitrol in the *Perseus* armory—a compound stable chemically, but uncertain atomically. Holderlin ladled about a pound into a paper sack, enough to blast the *Perseus* clear through the planet.

He found a detonator and, entering the lifeboat, took off. Feeling safe from observation after Blaine's information, he skimmed low over the black jungle until, about thirty miles from the *Perseus*, he found a clearing which suited him, not too large, not too small.

He landed and buried the vanzitrol and the detonator in the center. Then he returned to the *Perseus* and slept for four or five hours.

When he awoke, he aroused Blaine. They got in the lifeboat, flew to the mined clearing. Holderlin set the lifeboat down two

hundred yards out in the jungle.

"Now Blaine," he said, "you're to call Creed and tell him you've found the *Perseus*. Tell him to take a bearing on the radio beam and come at once. Tell him there's a clearing handy for him to land in."

"Then what?" asked Blaine doubtfully.

"Then you'll wait in the clearing until the *Maetho* is about to land. After that I'll give you a choice. If you want to return aboard the *Maetho*, you can stay where you are. If you want to stay with me, you'll run like mad for the lifeboat. Suit yourself."

Blaine did not answer, but a suspicious look crept into his eyes, and his lips curled craftily.

"Send the message," said Holderlin.

Blaine did so, and Holderlin was satisfied. They had cornered Holderlin in the *Perseus*, said Blaine, and Mordang, the Trankli half-breed, was holding him while Blaine radioed.

"Very good, Blaine!" came back Creed's voice. Then Donahue asked a few sharp questions. Had the *Perseus* crashed? No, replied Blaine, she was sound. Could the *Perseus* bring her needle-beam to bear on the clearing? No, the clearing was quite safe, a half mile astern of the *Perseus*. Donahue ordered Blaine to wait in the clearing for the ship.

Twenty minutes later Holderlin, hidden in the jungle, and Blaine standing nervously in the clearing, saw the hulk of the *Maetho* come drifting overhead.

**I**T HOVERED about five hundred yards above. Blaine, nakedly caught in the red sunlight, waved an arm to the ship at Holderlin's brittle command.

There was a pause. The cautious Donahue apparently was inspecting the situation.

Presently Holderlin, waiting tensely at the edge of the forest, saw a small scout boat leave the *Maetho*, drift down toward the clearing. His mouth tightened. He cursed once, bitterly.

This meant either Creed or Donahue had smelled a rat. His plan could not succeed—he'd have to move fast to escape with his skin! Blaine also knew the jig was up, was uncertain which way to jump.

He decided that under the circumstances Holderlin offered the least immediate danger, and casually began to leave the clearing. At once Donahue's voice crackled from a loud speaker.

"Blaine! Stay where you are!"

Blaine broke into a frightened run, but the black dust hampered him. From the *Maetho* a needle-beam spoke, and amid a great puff of black dust, Blaine exploded to his component atoms.

Holderlin was already to the lifeboat. A slim chance remained that the lifeboat on

landing would miss the mine, and the *Maetho* would land and be blown to scrap. But this he doubted, as the detonator was sensitive, the clearing small.

An air-rending blast as he entered his boat assured him he was right. The ground swayed like jelly, and a hail of earth, rocks, bits of trees spattered far over the jungle. The *Maetho* was tossed upward like a toy balloon. A tremendous choking pall of black dust thickened the sky.

Holderlin jerked his lifeboat into the air and dashed away, low to the ground, through the trees. He drove for his life, threading the trees as best he might, crashing through those he could not dodge.

Nor was he too early, for all the *Maetho's* armament had opened a savage fire on the jungle, blasting at each square yard. Twice million-watt bolts missed him by feet.

After rocking minutes he gained clear of the area, and slowing his mad flight, wove a more careful course through the trees.

When the *Maetho* was finally finished, the jungle lay torn into great craters and tangled rubbish for miles around. Holderlin, gingerly raising the boat so he could peer through the tree tops, saw the great sullen shape of the war-ship winging back across the mountain to its base. Over the clearing towered a black sky-filling cloud.

He returned to the *Perseus*, and sat brooding in his quarters. His bolt seemed to be shot, and it would only be a matter of hours before Creed and Donahue found another native to guide them to his ship.

He sprawled on his bunk, hands behind his head. A nucleus of information Blaine had given him suddenly blossomed to a plan of action. He got up, spooned some more van-zitrol from the can, gathered up a few sacks of salt from the galley, took off in the lifeboat.

Three or four hours later, with night fast falling across the black forest he returned, and there was a spring in his walk, a triumphant set to his jaw.

Holderlin went to the teleview and boldly sent forth a call.

"Aboard the *Maetho*! Creed or Donahue, come in! *Maetho*, come in!" The screen flickered to life at once. There was Donahue, and behind him the black bearded face of Captain Creed.

"Well," said Donahue crisply. "What do you want?"

Holderlin grinned. "Nothing. In about two minutes I'm blasting your ship to bits. If you enjoy life, you'll get clear."

"What's this?" Donahue's voice snapped like breaking wood. "Are you trying to bluff me?"

"You'll know in two minutes," responded Holderlin. "Three of the pots of thame-dust



you took aboard today are loaded with van-  
zitol. I've got a gamma-ray detonator you  
can't jam. Now! You've two minutes to get  
clear."

Donahue whirled, cut in the ship's loud  
speaker.

"Abandon ship! All hands!" he shouted.  
"Get clear!"

Then like a cathe whirled about. Holder-  
lin watched in interest. Captain Creed was  
striding for the door. He met Donahue's eyes,  
and saw murder. He stopped in his tracks  
and slowly turned to face Donahue.

Donahue began talking, and Holderlin saw  
he was not sane. Obscenities poured from his  
lips.

"You white-faced dog, you've ruined me!"  
screamed Donahue in a high-pitched crazy  
voice, and his thin body was as tense as an  
epileptic's.

"Let's leave the ship and argue later,"  
Creed suggested coolly.

"You'll stay here, you fat filth!" cried  
Donahue, and whipped out his needle-beam.

Creed fired his sleeve gun, and Donahue fell  
to the ground, screaming, his shoulder  
mangled.

He picked up the needle-beam with his  
left hand and began throwing wild shots at  
Creed. Creed crouched behind the radio  
locker, unable to gain the door. A bolt  
smashed the television feeder lines. The  
screen went dark.

Holderlin sat looking at his watch. He held  
one hand poised over a little black key.

Twenty seconds, ten seconds, eight seconds,  
seven, six, five, four, three, two—"I'll give  
them five seconds more," he told himself.  
One—two—three—four—five! He snapped  
closed the key, and sat like a statue, waiting  
for the shock from across the mountain.

Whoom!

Holderlin stood up, a grin on his face. He  
sealed all the ports and sat himself at the  
controls. A ead of him lay a busy week,  
wherein he must do the work of four men.  
He cracked back the throttle, and took off for  
Laroknik on Gavnad.

## "It's the Cage I Made for My Trained Gorilla—and I've Been Trapped in it for Three Weeks!"



**M**ARK HAVERFORD, the mysterious scientist, spoke out of the  
depths of great despair. And Jeff and Laura Pembroke, honey-  
mooing in West Africa, shuddered at the implication of his words.

"Yes, it's the cage I made for him," said Haverford. "See for your-  
self! Was going to experiment on him. The laugh's on me, I guess.  
It's he t at did the experimenting! It's unbearable—"

"But now it will be all right," promised Laura, tears streaming down  
her cheeks. "Now we'll get you out. We must."

"Maybe you think so. You don't know this cage. Had it made  
double strong, idiot t at I was! Special fool-proof lock, too. Even a  
professional safe-cracker couldn't pick it. And if t ose bars—well, if a  
gorilla couldn't smash them—you'd both better watch out. When he comes back—"

Man against monster! Primeval forces in control! That's the dread state of affairs in  
**TITAN OF THE JUNGLE**, by Stanton A. Coblentz, a complete novel of startling adventure  
in a world gone topsy-turvy. It's a novel that will hold you enthralled—and provide  
plenty of food for thought, too. It's featured in t e Summer issue of our companion  
magazine—

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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"I'm just wondering where I am," I said to the stranger. "This is New York — isn't it?"

# THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

By **POLTON CROSS**

*Back and forth from past to future, like a human pendulum, oscillates Dick Mills—while others watch in sheer horror!*

**T**HIS IS the story of a man accursed, of one human being in multi-millions who did not get a fair chance. In a word, I am a sort of scapegoat of Nature. I resent it—bitterly, but there is absolutely nothing I can do about it.

My name is **Richard Mills**. I am dark, five

foot eight, and my age is—well, that's part of the story. But for the sake of convenience let's say that I was thirty-two when the horror started.

It's odd, you know, how you don't always appreciate the onset of something enormously significant. I should have guessed that

there was something wrong when, from the age of fifteen I often found myself mysteriously a few hours ahead of the right time without knowing how I had done it. I should also have attached suspicion to repeating actions I had done before. But then all of us have felt that we have done such-and-such a thing before and so, like you, I didn't think any more about it.

Until the impossible happened!

I had just left the office at 6:15 p.m. I was then clerk to a big firm of lawyers. In the usual way I took the elevator to the street level and went outside. The October evening was darkening to twilight and the lights of New York were on either side of me as usual, climbing into drear muggy sky.

I remember singing to myself as I swung along. Another day over, Betty to meet, and a cheery evening ahead of both of us. . . . But I did not keep that appointment. Because, you see, I walked into something which was at once beyond all sane imagining.

One moment I was streaking for the 'bus stop—then the next I was in the midst of a completely formless gray abyss. It had neither up nor down, light nor dark, form nor outline. I was running on something solid and yet I couldn't see it, and it was just when I was trying to imagine the reason for this sudden fog that I found myself still running down a broad highway I had never in my life seen before!

I slowed to a standstill and cuffed my hat up on my forehead as I looked about me. The street had altered inexplicably. It was not gray and dirty but highly glazed, as though the road surface were made of polished black glass. The traffic too was strangely designed and almost silent. There were no gasoline fumes—I noticed this particularly. In general the buildings were much the same, only shiny on the facades and somewhat taller.

And the lighting! It was still night but instead of the usual street illumination there were great elliptical globes swinging in mid-air somehow and casting a brilliance below that had no shadows. Everything had the pallid brightness of diffused daylight.

"Anything the matter?" a pleasant voice asked me.

**I** TURNED sharply as a passer-by paused. Until now I hadn't noticed that the men and women passing up and down the sidewalk were rather odd in their attire—the

women in particular. The absurd hats, the queer translucent look of their clothes, the multicolored paints to enhance their features. Still women—eternally feminine—but different. And now this stranger. He was tall and young with pleasant eyes and the most amazingly designed soft hat.

"I noticed you hesitating," he explained, passing a curious but well-mannered eye over my attire. "Can I help you?"

It surprised me to find anybody so courteous.

"I'm just wondering—where I am," I replied haltingly. "This is New York, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Wall Street?"

His look of surprise deepened. "Why, no," he said. "You're on Twenty-Seven Street. Don't you remember that all street names were abolished ten years ago to avoid duplication?"

I could only gaze at him fixedly, and he gave a slight smile.

"Look here, you're mixed up somewhere," he said, taking my arm. "It's a part of the city's 'Lend a Hand' policy for us to help each other, so I'm going to make you my special charge. Incidentally, the 'Lend a Hand' policy is a good idea, don't you think?" he asked, forcing me to stroll along with him. "It's done away with a lot of the old backbiting."

"Oh, surely," I agreed, weakly. "But look here—er—what sort of cars are those? They're very quiet."

"You mean the atom-cars? Say, where have you lived? And if you'll forgive me, that's an awfully old-fashioned coat you've got on. I know it's a breach of courtesy but I'm curious."

I dragged to a stop and faced him directly. "You won't credit this," I said. "But only what seems about ten minutes ago I was running down Wall Street for an ordinary gasoline-driven 'bus. Then I ran into a fog, or something and—suddenly I was here!"

"It would be ill-mannered for me to disbelieve," he said slowly, regarding me. "Yet I am puzzled. It may help you if I explain that you are in New York City which was resurfaced with plastic in Nineteen Fifty-Eight. The present date is October the twelfth, Nineteen Seventy-One."

1971! Twenty-five years! Great Goeffrey!

Somehow I had slipped a quarter of a century ahead of my own time of 1946. You can think of such things but you dare not believe them. Yet hang it, it had happened!

I had no opportunity to ask my genial friend anything more for he was blending into the returning gray mist, and I was back again in that blank world where nothing is, or ever was, that world which is outside time, space, and understanding. I stood wondering and fearful, waiting.

This time I sensed that the interval was longer, but when the mist evaporated it revealed that I was back again in familiar Wall Street, only I had moved some two hundred yards from the bus stop—or, in other words—the precise distance I had walked with the stranger!

I blinked, mopped my perspiring face, then glanced up at a nearby clock. It was 6:20, the exact time as when I had started to run for the bus. I had left the office at 6:15—five minutes to get down the street. . .

Had my other adventure taken up no time whatever?

By an effort I pulled myself together when I saw one or two passers-by looking at me curiously. I had to think this one out—maybe talk it over with Betty Hargreaves since apparently I still had time to meet her.

But she never arrived to keep the appointment. Finally I rang up her apartment. It was only after the storm with her had subsided that I realized I had arrived back in the same place on the following evening—twenty-four hours later!

I smoothed things over with her as best I could, said I had been sent out of town on urgent business, and we promised to meet at the same time and place the following evening. I didn't add, "I hope," even if I felt like it.

Troubled, I began a contemplative wandering through the city, heading in the general direction of my rooming house.

I never reached it. To my alarm I once more found myself sailing into grayness, and there was nothing I could do to avoid it. My last vision was of a distant lighted clock point to 11:15. Then it was gone, and I was helpless, baffled, frightened.

**A**MID this gray enigma all sense of direction, time, and space vanish. I found it safest to stand still and wait until it cleared. It did so eventually and I discovered I was lying in bed in a quiet little room with a gray oblong of window revealing the night sky.

Puzzled, I stirred restlessly and reached out a hand for the bedside lamp. When I scrambled out of bed and looked down at my-

self I got an even bigger shock.

I had the figure of a boy of seven years! I was just as I had looked at seven!

With a kind of automatic instinct I went to the dressing table and stared at myself in the mirror. There was no doubt about it—I was a child once more, in my own little bedroom at home in Washington. My parents must be asleep in the next room, but somehow I didn't dare go and look. Yet I had the memory of everything I had done up to the age of thirty-two!

Impossible! Idiotic! I had grown backwards!

Returning to the bed I threw myself upon it and struggled to sort the puzzle out. But gradually that impalpable mist came creeping back and I left the world of my childhood, wandered for a while in blank unknown, and then emerged into the street from which I had disappeared. . .

The first thing I saw was that lighted clock ahead. It was still at 11:15. Presumably I had once again been absent exactly twenty-four hours—and I had traveled twenty-five years backwards, even as on the other occasion I had traveled twenty-five years forwards.

Can you wonder that I was sick at heart, perplexed? It appeared then that my intervals in "normal" time lasted about five hours—or to be exact 4 hours 55 minutes. Queer how I cold-bloodedly weighed this up. I felt like a visitor who has only five hours to stay in a town before going on his way.

When I encountered a police officer presently I asked him what day it was, and his rather suspicious answer confirmed my theory of a twenty-four hour absence. I got away from him before he ran me in and went straight to Betty Hargreaves' apartment. Fortunately she had not yet gone to bed, and she eyed me with chilly disfavor when we were in the lounge.

"I suppose I cooled my heels because you had urgent business again?" she asked, going over to the sideboard and mixing me a drink. "I've got a telephone, you know. You could have told me!"

"I'm sorry about that appointment, Bet. I just couldn't keep it. I—er—" I hesitated over the right phrasing—"I sort of keep coming and going."

"You're telling me?"

She handed me my drink and raised a finely lined eyebrow. Betty is a pretty girl, a slim blond with eyes which are really blue and hair which is really golden. But when she

looks annoyed—whew!

"I never heard of a financier's chief clerk coming and going as much as you do," she commented presently, sitting down on the divan beside me. "What's happening, Dick? Is there a merger on, or what?"

"No. It's—er—" I put the drink down and caught at her arm. "Bet, I need help! I'm in one gosh-awful spot."

"Money, or a girl?" she questioned drily. "If it's money, I can help you out. Dad didn't exactly leave me penniless. If it's a girl, then let's say good night and thanks for the memory."

"No, it's neither," I said. "It's so hard to explain. You see, I—I keep seeing the future and the past!"

Be it said to her everlasting credit that she did not even blink. She just gazed, as one might at a lunatic, a baby, or a dipsomaniac. And while she gazed I talked, the words tumbling over themselves. I told her everything and when I had finished I expected her to laugh in my face. Only she didn't. Instead she was thoughtful.

"It's mighty odd," she said seriously. "And because I know you haven't a scrap of imagination and are too gosh-darned honest to lie for no reason, I believe you. But it's creepy!" She hugged herself momentarily. "And what are we going to do about it?"

"We!" Bless the girl! She was on my side.

"I dunno," I muttered. "So far as I can estimate I am allowed five hours to live like an ordinary man, then off I go! I don't know if a doctor could explain it, or maybe a psychiatrist."

"Hardly a doctor, Dick." She shook her fair head musingly. "It isn't as though you've got a pain. It's more like an illusion. You might do worse than see Dr. Pembroke. He's a psychiatrist in the Hammersley Trust Building. I know because a cousin of mine went to him for treatment."

I made up my mind. "I'll see him at the first opportunity. It won't be in the morning because I expect I'll be veered off again at about four-fifteen in the small hours. When I can catch up on normal working hours I'll see what he can do for me."

**F**OR ridiculous conversation this probably hit an all time high, yet so sure was I of the things which had happened to me and so staunch was Betty's loyalty, we might have been talking of the next gridiron match. Anyway she was a great comfort to me and, when

I left her around 12:30, it was with the resolve to master my trouble when it came upon me again.

I went home to my rooms, learned from a note under the door that my firm had telephoned to inquire what had happened to me, and then I went to bed! Funny, but I wasn't tired in spite of everything, and I must have gone to sleep quite normally.

But when I awoke again I was not in my bedroom, though I was in pajamas.

It took me several minutes to get the hang of an entirely new situation. I was lying on my back on closely cropped and very green grass. The air was chilly but not unpleasantly so. The sky overhead was misty blue with the sun just rising. I judged it was still October, but extremely mild.

As I stood up I got a shock. A small group of men and women—attired so identically it was only by their figures I could tell any difference in sex—was watching me. Embarrassed, I stared back at them across a few yards of soft grass. Then I was astonished to behold the foremost man and woman suddenly float over to me with arms outstretched on either side. They settled beside me. They had silver-colored wings folded flat on their backs.

"I know," I sighed, as they appraised me. "I've no right to be here and I'm in the future. All right, lock me up. It won't make any difference."

The man and woman exchanged glances and I had the time to notice that they were both remarkable specimens—tall, strong, athletic-looking, with queer motors strapped to their waist belts from which wires led to the wings on their backs.

After a good deal of crosstalk I found out that they belonged to the local police force, made up of an equal number of men and women, and that I was of course both a trespasser and an amazing specimen to boot. This time, it appeared, I had slipped ahead not twenty five years but two hundred!

Were I a literary man, I suppose I could fill a book with the marvels I discovered, but here it is wisest policy to sketch in the principal advancements. I learned that their amazing system of individual flight had led to the abolition of ordinary aircraft; that they had conquered space, mastered telepathy, overcome the vagaries of the climate, and completely outlawed war. Yes, it was a fair and prosperous land I saw in 2146.

In the end they locked me up for examina-

tion by their scientists, but of course it did them no good for as time passed I faded away from the prison cell and was back again in New York, still in my pajamas, in the middle of a street, and—I soon discovered—at 4:15 in the morning! Once again, twenty-four hours had elapsed since presumably I had vanished while asleep at 4:15, twenty-four hours before.

To be thus thinly clad on an October early morning is no picnic. I took the only sensible course and presented myself at a police station, told the sergeant in charge that I had been sleep-walking and had just awakened. I was believed and I got shelter. After borrowing a suit of clothes I crept home to my rooms in the early dawn hours.

Now I really was getting frightened! If this were to go on—good heavens! I did some computing and figured that I had until about 9:15 in the morning before I'd take another trip, so before that time I must see Dr. Pembroke. It was unlikely that he would be at his office so early, unless the urgency of the reason were stressed.

I rang up Betty, told her what had occurred, and asked her advice. She suggested that I tell Pembroke over the 'phone at his home what had happened, and try to get him to be at his office before nine. She promised to be there, also.

Dr. Pembroke did not sound at all enthusiastic at first, but he warmed up a trifle when I went into explicit details. Finally he seemed interested enough to agree to be at his consulting rooms by 8:45. So it was arranged.

Promptly at quarter to nine I was there with Betty, very serious and determined, beside me.

Grant Pembroke was at his office promptly on time. He was a tall, eagle-nosed man with very sharp gray eyes and a tautly professional manner. He ushered us both into his consulting room which was equipped with rather overpowering looking apparatus, and then switched on softly shaded lights and motioned me to be seated in their immediate focus. Betty sat in the margin of the shadows.

"So, Mr. Mills, you keep imagining you float away into the future and the past at regular intervals, eh?" he asked slowly, settling down and fixing me with those piercing eyes.

**H**IS scepticism caused me to grow even more earnest.

"I don't imagine it, Doc—it actually happens," I told him. "And in about fifteen minutes it should happen again, then you'll see for yourself."

"Mmm." He made a brief examination of me as though he were a medical man, then sat back in his chair again and put his fingertips together. "And while you are away, twenty-four elapse here?" He asked the question thoughtfully.

"That's correct, yes."

"Do twenty-four hours elapse in the place you—er—visit?"

"No. It varies a lot. The only definite timing I've noticed is that on the last occasion I leaped two hundred years ahead instead of the former twenty-five."

"Just so, just so. A most interesting side-light on Time."

"I don't want to be an interesting side-light!" I protested fiercely. "I want to live like any other man, marry the girl I love, and keep my job. As things are I am in danger of losing them all. This sort of thing is unthinkable!"

"Mmm, just so," he agreed. "But there is the other side, you know. We are dealing with a paradox of Time that has so far only been a theory and never proved. You may have the good fortune to be that living proof."

I could only assume that he had queer ideas on what constitutes good fortune, and so I kept quiet. For another long minute he studied me, then turning to his desk he began to scribble something down on a scratch pad. He also made calculations and a drawing that looked like a plus sign with a circle running through it. I was just about to ask him the purpose of this doodling when things happened—once again.

Even as I felt myself drifting into gray mist I noticed the electric clock stood at exactly 9:15; that Betty and Pembroke had jumped to their feet in stunned amazement.

Then off I went. And this movement was backwards in Time, not forward. . . .

When the mists cleared, I was seated on a wagon, driving a horse in a leisurely manner along a winding country road. I saw I was wearing rough breeches and a flannel shirt, while a hot sun was blazing down on my battered straw hat. A yokel? A farmer? A pioneer? I had never been any of these things so far as I could remember—yet here it was!

Glancing inside the wagon I saw a woman and a boy and girl asleep, and far behind my



wagon were many more of similar design kicking up a haze of dust across the desert.

I had to work discreetly to find out what was going on, and very astonished I was to discover that my name was Joseph Kendal, and that the three in the wagon were my wife and two children. We were heading for Georgia, which had settled by General Oglethorpe a few years previously. In other words the General had fixed Georgia as he wanted it in 1732, and this—according to my wife—was 1746. We were changing our domicile, every one of us. But all that this signified to me was that I had dropped back two hundred years even as before I had gone ahead for a similar period.

I scarcely remember what happened while I was there. It seemed to be one endless trip across the desert with all the old pioneering flavor about it. I fitted into it without any effort. Everything I did seemed reasonable and natural. Secretly I was rather sorry when it all had to come to an end just after sunset and I was in the gray mists of Between, Beyond, or whatever it is. . . .

I returned to normality seated in that same chair in Dr. Pembroke's consulting room. He was opposite me, looking very weary and untidy. Betty, who had apparently been half asleep in the chair on the rim of the shadows, jerked into life as I sat gazing at her. I glanced round and noticed two white-coated nurses and two men who looked like scientists.

My eyes moved to the clock. It registered 9:15 and, judging from the window, it was daylight.

"Twenty-four hours to the minute!" Pembroke ejaculated, getting up and coming over to me. "Upon my soul, young man, you didn't exaggerate. We've been waiting, and waiting, ever since you disappeared from view. I summoned the nurses in case of need, and these two gentlemen here are scientists with whom I've been discussing your problem."

"The point is: have you got the answer?" I asked irritably.

"Yes, yes, indeed," Pembroke assented, and the two scientists nodded their heads in grave confirmation. "But," he added, "it is rather a grim answer."

"I don't mind that," I said. "Can I be cured?"

**T**HEY were silent. I set my jaw and glanced helplessly at Betty. She could

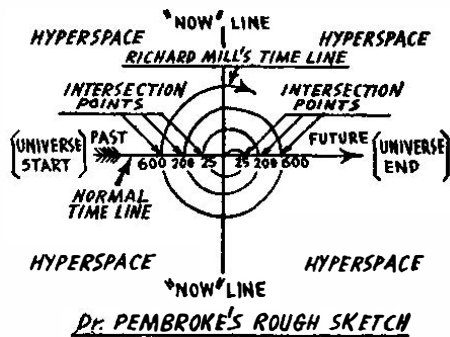
only stare back at me, tired from the long vigil, and I thought I saw tears in her eyes as though she were trying to control an inner grief. At last I looked back at Pembroke.

"Tell me what you have done and where you have been," he instructed.

I did so. "Well, let's have it!" I finished bitterly. "What is wrong with me?"

He hesitated. Then going over to his desk he handed me a sheet of paper on which was a curious looking drawing, the finished effort which I had seen him commence just before I had evaporated. The drawing looked like a plus sign.

The horizontal line was marked "Past" at the left hand end, and "Future" at the right



hand end. Where the vertical line intercepted it in the center was the word "Now." This same "Now" was also inscribed at top and bottom of the vertical line. So far, so good. Now came the odd bit.

Starting from the exact center of the plus sign was an ever widening curve, just like the jam line inside a Swiss roll. You know how that line circles out wider and wider? Well, that is what it looked like, and of course it inevitably crossed the right hand section of the horizontal line marked "Future," and the left hand line marked "Past."

So I sat staring at this drawing which looked as though it had come out of "Alice in Wonderland" as Pembroke started speaking.

"Young man, I don't want to be blunt, but I have to," he said. "You are a freak of nature! Every human being, every animal, every thing, is following a Time Line through space, and that line is straight. You may recall Sir James Jeans' observations on this in his 'Mysterious Universe?'"

I shook my head. "I never read Jeans."

"Mmm, too bad. Then let me quote the

relevant statement on page one forty-two from the Penguin Edition." Pembroke picked up the blue covered book. "He says—'Your body moves along the Time Line like a bicycle wheel, and because of this your consciousness touches the world only at one place at one time, just as only part of the cycle wheel touches the road at one time. It may be that Time is spread out in a straight line, but we only contact one instant of it as we progress from past to future. . . . In fact, as Weyl has said—'Events do not happen: we merely come across them.' ' End quote."

"And what has this to do with me?" I demanded.

"Just this." Pembroke returned the book to his desk. "Your Time Line is not *straight*. It operates in a circle, like that circular design you see there. You told me that, in earlier life, you noticed you were unaccountably late sometimes and unusually early at others?"

"Ye-es," I agreed, thinking. "That's right enough."

"That," Pembroke mused, "can be taken as evidence of the first aberrations in the Time Line you were following. Now it has taken its first real curve. Instead of progressing normally in a straight line you are carried into hyperspace—that gray mist you have mentioned—which is non-dimensional, non-solid, non-etheric. In a word, it's plain vacuum—"

"But I lived and breathed!" I interrupted him.

"Are you sure?" he asked quietly.

I hesitated. Now that I came to think back, I wasn't!

"You can no more be sure you lived and breathed than you can be sure of what you do under anaesthetic," he said. "But you were still heading along a Time Line—not of your own volition, mind you—but inevitably, because Time sweeps us along with it. And so, when the curve struck the normal straight Time Line leading from past to future—the *World Line*, that is, which Earth herself is following—you became a part of it again, but you were twenty-five years ahead of the present."

I nodded slowly. So far he made sense.

"You stayed there for a period of which you are uncertain, chiefly because your sense of Time had become catastrophically upset. And then, still impelled along this circular Time Line, you came back through hyperspace and once more intersected the normal

Now Line exactly twenty-four hours afterwards. Events then proceeded normally for a while until—*still* following the circle—you passed through hyperspace to a past event. Then, hyperspace intervened once more, and so you came back to Now."

"Then as the circles grow larger from the center the gaps will become correspondingly greater?" I questioned, and my voice sounded as though it did not belong to me.

**D**R. PEMBROKE gave me a sympathetic glance and nodded.

"Just so; and the mathematical accuracy of first, twenty-five and then, two hundred years—forward and backward—shows that the problem is not a disorder but a mathematical fluke quite beyond human power to alter. You move in a circle, Mr. Mills, not a straight line, and unless at some point the circle turns back on itself—an unlikely possibility since the Universe is a perfect cyclic scheme—I can foresee nothing else but . . . endless circular traveling, gradually taking in vast segments of Time until . . ."

PEMBROKE stopped and the room seemed deathly quiet. For some reason though, I was calm now the thing was explained.

"Can you account for my not feeling tired?" I asked presently.

"Certainly. You somewhat resemble a battery. You use up energy in a forward movement into Time because you are, in essence, moving into the unexplored—but in the backward movement the energy replaces itself because you are merely returning to a state already lived. You cannot grow old, or tired, or suffer from catabolism in the ordinary way because you represent a perfect balance between catabolism and anabolism, the exact amount of each being equal because each journey is the same amount of Time—namely, first twenty-five, then two hundred. And next—well, who knows?"

"Look here," I said slowly. "This last time I went back two hundred years, as I told you, but I was somebody else—a pioneer or something of two centuries ago. I was never that!"

"In a past life you must have been," he answered calmly. "Otherwise you could not have taken over that identity."

"Then when I was that person why didn't I know what lay in the future?"

"Perhaps you did. Can you be sure that you didn't?"

This was becoming involved all right but,

after all, I wasn't sure. No, darn it, I couldn't answer it. Maybe I had known!

"And when I was a boy of seven?" I asked. "I presume I became a boy again because I was just at that age?"

"Just so. Time-instants are indestructible. You are bound to become at a certain instant what you are at that instant. Otherwise Time itself would become a misnomer. You will ask why—at seven years of age—you did not know what you would do at thirty-two? Again I say, are you sure you didn't?"

"I—I don't know. I don't think so—unless it was buried in my subconscious or something."

"It must have been. It was there, that knowledge, but maybe you considered it as just a dream fancy and thought no more about it, just as we speculate on how we may look in, say, ten years time and then dismiss it as pure imagination. But with you such an imagining would be fact. And incidentally, as for your carrying a memory of these present experiences about with you, remember that your physical self is all that is affected by Time. Mind and memory cannot alter."

"And—what happens now?" I simply dragged the words out.

"For your sake, young man, I hope things will straighten out for you. But if they don't I have a proposition. Tell me, have you any relatives?"

"None living, no. I was intending to marry Miss Hargreaves here very soon."

"Mmmmm, just so. Well, the Institute of Science is prepared to subsidize a trust by which anybody you may name can benefit. In return we ask that in your swing back to the Now Line you will give us every detail of what has been happening to you during your absences."

I shook my head bewilderedly. "I'll—I'll do it willingly, but I don't want the money. And Bet—Miss Hargreaves—has plenty of money anyway. Doc, isn't there some way to remedy all this?" I asked desperately. "I can tell from your making this proposition that you consider it serious."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mills. I really am. But no human agency can come to grips with your problem."

I was silent through a long interval, Betty seated now at my side. I looked at her hopelessly.

"Bet, sweetheart, what do you say? Do you know anybody who needs money in trust?"

"No," she answered bitterly. "Money is

the cheapest, most earthy compensation science can offer you for a ruined life. I don't want any part of it. Oh, Dick! There must be some way out of this!"

I shook my head. There wasn't. I knew it now. . . Finally I told Pembroke that the money had better be handed over to scientific research, and on my all too infrequent returns to Now I would tell everything I knew.

"We could marry," I whispered to Betty. "Only it wouldn't be fair to you. A day might come when I'd never return."

**P**EMBROKE confirmed this quietly. "It will," he said. "When your circular line takes so wide an orbit that it passes beyond the ends of the Now Line into hyperspace, you'll vanish forever."

Then I was doomed indeed! All I could hope for was an occasional glimpse of Betty. As for the rest, I didn't know. . .

My five-hour stay was taken up in signing legal documents. Then once more I was swept inevitably into hyperspace. So I went through the gray enigma which baffles description and this time I was six hundred years ahead of the Now Line. There was still progress, the building of superb cities, the conquest of other worlds, a sense of greater equality and comradeship between both sexes. . .

So back to Now for a brief spell with a tearful Betty, a long description of my experiences to the scientists, a banquet in my honor at the Science Institute—then outwards and backwards into the past, for a gap of another six hundred years.

Back and forth as the circle widened. . .

I have tried to keep out of this narrative the inner horror I experienced at it all—the dull, dead futility of being flung by nameless force into an ever widening gulf. Each time, of course, as the circle widened I went further afield.

Hundreds of years, thousands of years, from one end of the pendulum's swing to the other—backwards into scores of lives which had long since been effaced from memory; forwards into a wonder world of ever increasing splendor. . .

Then, in the tens of thousands of years ahead, I saw Man was pretty close to leaving his material form altogether and becoming purely mental. So much so that, on my visit after this one, Earth was empty and turning one face to the sun. Age, old and remorseless, was crawling over a once busy planet.

At the opposite end of the scale life was swinging down into the Neanderthal man stage, and then further back still to where Man was not even present.

But there were amoeba, the first forms of life, and I fancy that I must have been one of these!

Backwards—forwards—with the visions of Now mere shadows in a universe which was to me insane. Nothing made sense any more. I was losing touch with every well remembered thing, with the dear girl who always awaited my comings and goings—growing older, but always loyal. And around her the cold, impersonal scientists logging down information that could chart the course of civilizations for ages to come. No wonder I had seen progress ahead! My own guidance had prevented any mistakes and in those distant visions I had seen the fruit of my own advice! Incredible—yet true.

Gradually I realized that my Time Circle was now becoming so huge that it was involving a stupendous orbit which did not include Earth but the Universe as a whole, proving how independent of normal Time Lines had my vicious circle become.

In my swing I saw the birth of the Earth and the gradual slowing down of the Uni-

verse. This, I think, is destined to be my last return to the Now Line, for the next curve will be so enormous that—well, I do not think I shall be able to make contact with the Now Line at all. The scientists have charted it all out for me.

The curve will take me to the period of the initial explosion which created the expanding universe out of—what? That will be in the past. And my futureward movement will carry me to that state of sublime peace where all the possible interchanges of energy have been made, where there exists thermodynamical equilibrium and the death of all that is. At either end of the curve Time is *non-existent!* This is where I may at last find rest.

As I think on these things, writing these last words in the world of Now, I cannot help but marvel at what I have done. . . . But I hate it! I hate it with all my human soul! Opposite to me in this bright room Betty is seated, silent, dry-eyed, faithful to the last. Science is still represented in the quiet men in the chairs by the far wall, all of them busy writing and checking notes.

Never was so strange a sentence passed on a human being!

The grayness is coming! I have no time to write any more. . . .



A NEW SPECIES OF GENIUS PRESENTS A DIFFICULT PROBLEM  
TO A FATHER OF THE FUTURE

in

# ABSALOM

An Astonishing Fantastic Story

By HENRY KUTTNER

COMING NEXT ISSUE!



Denton One waited until the woman was looking away, then laid a heavy hand on Denton Two's shoulder

# EXTRA EARTH

By **ROSS ROCKLYNNE**

*President Woodward and his cabinet wage a unique war on the six evil men who have made a duplicate of the world!*

**A**RTHUR WOODWARD, youngest Protectorate President ever to hold office in the World Government, had a dream that night. In the dream, he was yanked out of bed and before him stood six of the ugliest, most repulsive old men he had ever seen.

"Arthur Woodward," one of the old men snapped. "Be informed that we are not pleased with you and yours!"

Arthur Woodward carefully sat on the edge of his bed, grinning. What a dream! But he would hear the dream out, even take part in it—and be properly amused.

"Tell me more," he begged.

They told him, snarling the words. It appeared that they were living entities who had come out of interstellar space. They had merely taken the appearance of old men for their purposes—their purpose being to

judge the peoples of Earth. Were Earth people kind? Were they humble? Were they decent to their fellow man? To discover the answers to these questions the six old men, who in their natural habitat were but electronic swirls which could move through space with the speed of light, had stationed themselves on various busy street corners throughout the Earth. They had danced on their old legs, they had sung in their cracked voices, and they held out their hats to passersby, begging for alms. But people had merely looked at them amusedly and gone on.

"A curse be on you selfish Earthlings!" raved one old man.

"Your conceit is overbearing!" said a second.

Oh, it was a strange dream all around!

Arthur Woodward laughed.

"Old men, you're a bunch of bored, mischievous rascals!" he said sternly. "After years of wandering through space, you want some excitement. So you picked out the one way of judging Earth that won't work. Why? Well, because we don't have poverty. We don't have beggars. To the people who refused to give you alms, you were eccentrics, having fun, and that you were seriously asking for money never entered their heads."

They ringed him in a spitting, angry circle. One shook his hand over his head.

"This is our curse," said he, ignoring Woodward's accusation. "You love yourselves too much. Therefore, you and yours shall be doubled, that you may enjoy yourselves twice as much!"

Then the six old men turned into their normal electronic vapors, and went wisping out the window.

And Arthur Woodward yawned. What a dream. He went back to bed. He slept. . . .

**E**N ROUTE from Mars to Earth, the giant space-liner *Winko*, carrying a full cargo of Martian foodstuffs, throbbed and trembled down its length as it slipped through the deeps of space.

In the chart room was an insane confusion.

"Earth is off our port bow, sir!"

"Impossible," snapped Captain Anders, bursting into the room, annoyed with an incredible example of incompetence. He strode to the televis plate. He took one look at the azure, sun-lit planet and grabbed convulsively at the edge of the instrument board.

He turned rigidly to his first mate.

"When were we supposed to dock at Earth?"

"At twenty-one o'clock, sir. In fourteen hours."

There was silence. The voice of insanity whispered lightly to each officer in the room. Anders closed his eyes, trying to think. With an effort, he opened them, drew himself erect.

"Men, one of two remarkable things has happened," he said slowly. "Either the planet Earth has jumped clear across space to a new point in its orbit, or we of this ship have been under an anesthetic for the last fourteen hours. We will, however, cease all speculation, and prepare for the landing."

An hour later, Anders came down the gangplank in his trim white uniform. He looked around on the space-field. The depot and various administration buildings loomed to the left, the wooded forest to the right, and on the horizon could be seen the glow of the distant city. This was the field, this was the planet. And coming toward him was the space-field supervisor.

The man stopped within a few feet of Anders, his face unnaturally tense.

"Is it—is it really you, Captain Anders?" he faltered.

"Who else?" Anders was irritated. "What's going on? Apparently, I'm fourteen hours off schedule."

"Off schedule?" the other repeated, shaking violently. "Captain Anders, you haven't even left the planet! You're back before you started!" He moaned. "Please come with me, Captain Anders."

The supervisor took Anders to the space-field personnels' restaurant. Here a crew was gathered at a large table, enjoying the customary take-off meal.

It was Captain Anders' crew.

And at the head of the table sat Captain Anders.

The Captain Anders of the table and the Captain Anders who had just entered the restaurant saw each other at the same time. There was a raw, seething silence. As one man, the crew came to their feet, staring.

Anders One walked toward Anders Two. He knew he was looking at himself. He didn't know why. But he did know this, shockingly. He hated that other "him" as he had never hated anything in his life. Yet he kept his emotions and his voice under a supreme control.

"We don't know what has happened," he



remarked. "What ever it is, this I know—you and I must be friends." He paused. What he had said sounded like nonsense—that he should insist on friendship with—himself.

"Do you agree?" he asked.

At that moment, the annunciator on the wall crackled:

"All space services will stand by for a special announcement."

"This is Arthur Woodward, Protectorate President of Earth," a deep, resonant voice spoke a moment later. "I make the following declaration without explanation: Just a few moments ago, Martian officials gave us startling, verified information. The planet Earth has fallen behind two hundred thirty-six million miles in its orbit. Further, at the point in space which our Earth should occupy, there is another planet of identical size, and with an identical satellite.

"All space-flights are hereby canceled until further notice."

The annunciator was silent. Captain Anders II rose from his place at the table and advanced halfway to meet Captain Anders I.

"I agree," he said quietly.

He stuck out his hand toward that of Anders I.

Neither of the duplicates was prepared for what happened. But to one of them it didn't matter. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

On the planet Mars shortly after this, Dar Tal, Marto-Tellurian Trade Relations Mediator, which important office gave him virtual control of the planet, kept that tremendous calm for which he and his race were noted. He listened to the pronouncement of his chief astronomer and languidly fondled the hem of his gold robe.

"I foresee trouble," said Dar Tal. "We have two planet Earths, swimming along in their orbits at different points. Why this is so, we shall not conjecture at the present moment. It is sufficient that your telescopic observations have proved that each of these planets duplicates the other in every respect—diameter, gravity, population, cities, machines—everything a duplicate in every minor detail.

"The problem is, What shall be our attitude toward these planets? What will be their attitude toward each other? A grave, even a serious problem. Quagga, that planet which is at its correct place in its orbit shall hereafter be referred to as Earth One, the other Earth Two."

QUAGGA nodded. "They shall so be entered in our catalogue," he said, and left Dar Tal's presence.

Dar Tal was wearing a thoughtful, calculating half-smile on his red, scaled face a half hour later when his subordinates—a half dozen Trade Masters—asssembled in session *extraordinaire*.

"You have heard the news?" Dar Tal asked.

"We have heard it, sir. It has spread to every corner of Mars."

Dar Tal looked at each Martian compellingly.

"You realize, of course, that a grave problem is on our hands. We have certain trade contracts with a planet known as Earth. Earth is dependent on us for food, as we are—or were?—dependent on her for the artifacts of civilization. Now it is fairly obvious to you that we cannot supply both Earth One and Earth Two with the same tremendous volume of exported foods that we formerly supplied only one planet.

"Nor, I believe, will it be to our best interests to split our food exports between two planets, for then—" Dar Tal smiled slyly "—we will make two enemies where we need only make one. Do you follow me, gentlemen?"

"Such a policy will mean that one of the Earths will eventually starve," one Trade Master said dubiously.

A flash of hatred crossed Dar Tal's face. Then it passed.

"And why not?" he said smoothly. "Earthlings have always felt themselves superior to us. At times they have treated us like scum. Were it not that we needed each other in order to survive, there might have been open war. As it is, both planets need us, but we need only one."

"But on what basis shall we decide which planet shall receive our favor?"

Dar Tal sneered.

"Where are your wits this fine morning? Which planet, Earth One or Earth Two, is nearer Mars?" . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a knocking on Arthur Woodward's door that morning. He opened it sleepily, snugging a robe tight around his lean waist.

"Well, Bob." Woodward recognized one of his firmest friends, Bob Denton, Secretary of Interplanetary Affairs. He said with sudden sharpness, when Denton stood on the thresh-

hold shivering with a strange dread, "What's wrong? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"Have you heard?" Denton said hoarsely.

"About what?"

"About Earth Two! Gosh, Arthur, it's on everybody's lips. Amateur astronomers, then professionals, must have got hold of it first. Then the rumor spread. A couple of newspapers have it now. I thought it was poppycock, until I received the interplanetary call from Captain Anders of the trade ship *Winko*."

Woodward was at sea. Slowly, explicitly, Denton explained, his voice cold with controlled emotional shock. In the last hour he had received countless frantic queries from amateur and professional astronomers alike. Then from newspaper editors; and finally from Anders.

"Anders was calling from the other Earth," said Denton, lowering himself shakily to a seat. "He was telling me his story—how he met his duplicate, met himself. And here's what's strange about the call, Arthur. Suddenly the connection was broken. I heard a cry, the sounds of a fight. The line was dead. What do you imagine happened to Anders?"

Woodward stood quite still until Denton had finished, then he moved over to a polished plastic table, picked up a cigarette case, selected one and lighted it. He inhaled, his eyes narrowed against the smoke. In him, a storm had broken loose, and memories of a dream—what he had thought was a dream—blew like a nauseous wind through his mind. Six old men. Six malicious entities, bored with themselves on their long pointless fight through spacial emptiness.

He turned to Denton and told Denton his dream.

"Arthur, you really think that is the reason for what has happened?" Denton began incredulously.

Woodward laughed mirthlessly.

"I'm sure of it. What else? How else can we explain this confounded duplication of worlds? Would our science be able to perform such a feat? But six electronic entities, beings whose bodies are pure force, who can control and mold energy the way we pour steel, and probably with less trouble—they could make such a world.

"You shall be doubled that you may enjoy yourselves twice as much," he said softly. "Six blundering, meddlesome, malignant, evil old men!" Angrily he crushed his cigarette. "Well, Denton, we have to act and we

have to act fast. What will be the political implications of these dual worlds? What will be our new relations with Mars?

"First of all—and these are orders—all space-flight will cease. Interplanetary radio communication will shut down. The newspapers will be ordered to make no mention of the event until a suitable time. The audio-visual networks will refrain from discussing the subject."

"But why?" Denton asked. "Why all these precautions?"

WOODWARD snorted. "How do we know Earth Two will be friendly?"

Denton was pale.

"But they're us, Arthur. They're you and me and everybody else. You can't hate yourself—" He stopped, faltering.

Woodward smiled ironically. "Or can you?"

On that note, Denton left, and in the time left before the blanket restrictions were put through, Woodward tuned in his televis set, and listened to broadcasts originating from all over Earth. In that way, he secured a picture of a stunned humanity. And in the mind of each human being was one paralyzing thought: What is the other me like? How will he affect me?

From one such broadcast, Woodward learned bitterly that already at least one big newspaper editor had put through a call to his double on Earth Two. Woodward broke all laws in having the man brought before him.

The editor was pale, harrassed. But his voice was savage as he answered Woodward's questions.

"Sure, the political implications are going to be fierce. But do you realize the really big issue? My newspaper carries advertisements paid for by various Martian food-selling and manufacturing concerns. Which newspaper, his or mine, both being identical, will continue to receive those advertising contracts?"

"Perhaps the Martians will give contracts to both your newspapers," suggested Woodward.

"Yeah? Listen here. Woodward, you're president, you should know the answers. Marto-Tellurian relations are symbiotic. We depend on them entirely for food, and they depend on us entirely for machinery and all the mechanical doodads and artifacts that keep a civilization going. But now there are

two Earths, and the Martians need only one. Why, we couldn't grow enough food on Earth to feed a million people a year. So what's going to happen if Mars sends all her food exports to the other Earth?"

Woodward had not been unaware of the problem. On the contrary it was sharp in his consciousness. He was merely trying to capture the quality of peoples' feeling toward Earth II before he acted. A ruler needs to know the instinct of a people in order best to serve them. His gray, sharp eyes bored into those of the editor.

"You've seen your double, talked with him," Woodward said. "What's your feeling toward him?"

The editor flinched. Then a dogged expression came to his craggy face.

"I'll tell you the truth, Woodward. I hate his innards!"

"But he's you."

"Is he? He's got my newspaper, he's got my wife and my kids. He's got my body. What's he going to do with them?"

"You've got your own newspaper, wife, kids and body," Woodward reminded the editor humorlessly.

The editor was baffled.

"I don't know why I hate him," he growled. "It's psychological, I'd say. But I do know this. Earth Two is where Earth One was two weeks ago. And the people are the people of two weeks ago. That means that my double is going to be influenced by different events that I've been influenced by in the last two weeks. And if Mars sends Earth Two all her food, then the events on Earth Two are going to be so different that the people of Earth Two will be different from us. Environment affects character."

The editor left, leaving Woodward with the paramount question on his hands: What would be Mars' attitude? Only one direct way to get the answer. He made a long-distance interplanetary call to Dar Tal.

Soon the Martian's studiously polite red face appeared on the televis screen.

"We've been waiting to hear from you, Dar Tal," Woodward said civilly.

"I am sorry, Mr. Woodward," Dar Tal said smoothly. "But the press of business—our new policy which has been forced on us—has prevented communication."

"What new policy?"

Dar Tal explained at great length, making numerous pleas for understanding.

"Thus, Mr. Woodward, we have been

forced to choose between two planets," he finished. "We have chosen Earth Two, obviously. Earth Two is many millions of miles nearer Mars, which means less time in transportation, not to speak of lowered shipping costs. However, do not be too alarmed. Whenever Earth One comes closer to Mars than Earth Two, then we shall do business solely with your planet."

Woodward's anger spilled over. His voice was the voice of thunder.

"Do you realize you are condemning a planet to death? We have imported food-stuffs from your planet as we needed them. We have no vast granaries stocked with food. Before a month is up my people will be on the road to starvation. And it will be more than a year before Earth One finds itself nearer to Mars than Earth Two. Do you realize that your action may plunge us into war?"

**D**AR TAL'S secondary eyelids now opened. "In that case, Mr. Woodward, you will find Mars able and ready to protect herself!" he said contemptuously.

It was Dar Tal who closed the connection.

For long moments after this graphic realization of catastrophe had been laid before him, Woodward stood stiffly. Then he called the Earth Exchange Service.

"This is Arthur Woodward," he told the operator, "You will lift the ban on interplanetary communication only to the extent of making a connection with Arthur Woodward, of Earth Two. . . ."

He had been bulwarking himself against this ordeal all day. He had been trying to convince himself that, standing face to face with a man identical in every way, they would share the same views, the same thoughts. But now, as Arthur Woodward Two's image appeared, he knew it was not so, for Woodward One was the underdog.

Instantly they hated each other. It was not a clear, reasoning hatred. It came from the emotions, which knows no reason. It rose out of a resentment of the ego which must feel its own supreme individuality. The ego knew fury because it faced another ego which presumed to be its exact equal, to share a brain and a body that rightfully belonged to one of those egos.

There was the clash of egos, the irresistible force meeting the immovable object. Had one of the egos been superior, the other would have bowed before it. As it was, they

collided, and the friction-heat of the collision was hatred.

"Arthur, we wish to avoid war," Woodward One said faintly.

"Do we?" the other Arthur said coldly.

Desperation twisted Woodward One's face.

"We must! Mars has already befriended you, deserted us. But you, by agreeing to trade with us, to allow us half the food-stuffs that come from Mars, can save people who are no less yours than if they lived on Earth Two."

"What will you give us in exchange for food?" Woodward Two said calmly.

Woodward One stared. "Machines," he faltered. "The products of machines. Books. Kitchen ut—"

He stopped.

And the other Woodward laughed with cruel pity.

"Arthur, has fear of the future clouded from your mind the one clear truth in all this grisly mess? Listen."

He uttered each word incisively, gray eyes intense.

"Arthur, friendly relations between Earth One and Earth Two are forever impossible. What does Earth One have that Earth Two doesn't have already? Why should you supply us with machines we already have in duplicate? Why supply us with books, when we have the authors of those books, and the books themselves? What ideas, what new thoughts, what cultural advantage will one planet ever have over the other?"

"What is there to trade, tangible or intangible? Why should we be friendly? We have nothing to gain, and never will have."

"But—but you will be in precisely our position when Mars comes nearer Earth One!"

"If famine and its consequent diseases have not already killed everybody of Earth One—which it will," said Woodward Two softly.

And now Woodward Two's eyes darkened.

"Arthur, the peoples of our planets hate each other. I hate you—you hate me! Don't deny it. It's infernally intolerable for me to remember that an exact equal of me exists. So this I know: there will be everlasting feud unless you and yours die. And, believe me, we want you to die. You are excess humanity, without the right to exist."

Woodward One paled with fury.

"You dare to say that! You, the shadow world, the unreal world, the copy of our world, as Martian astronomers can prove?"

Woodward Two shrugged, faint mocking lines around his lips.

"But who shall say which is the more real—the copy or the original? Really, Arthur!"

Woodward One could endure no more. He closed the connection, sank trembling to a seat, covering his haggard face with his hands.

There would be war. For Woodward Two had spoken truth, and, irony of ironies, he had spoken as Woodward One would have spoken under the same conditions. The peoples of both Earths could not continue to exist. It would be the people of Earth I who would lose this war, for food is the greatest weapon. . . .

Military law ruled Earth I. Her economy was in the rigid hands of the state. And though starvation was setting in, her factories roared at top speed, converting peacetime vessels into warcraft. Earth I was isolated from the sources of life, and gearing itself for certain death.

Five weeks after the ultimatum from Woodward Two, a small, battered lifeship entered Earth's atmosphere. The last thousand feet the torn hulk of metal went out of control and a figure parachuted from the airlock, landing hip-deep in the yellow muck of the Amazon delta.

**A** WEEK later, a uniformed officer asked admittance to Woodward One's presence.

"The military police in a little Brazilian village recently sent me a man they rescued from the jungle," he said earnestly. "This man claimed he was from Earth Two but belonged to Earth One. After he was patched up, he said it was urgent that he see you. So I have him here now."

"Who is he?"

"A Captain Anders, of the trade ship *Winko*."

Woodward One shook Anders' hand a few moments later, noting the wan, pinched look of a man who has suffered greatly.

"I remember your name," Woodward One said slowly. "You spoke to the Secretary of Interplanetary Affairs from Earth Two—then you were suddenly cut off."

"I was cut off because that was the moment Woodward Two ordered my arrest," Anders said bluntly. "He had me thrown into jail, as well as my crew. But one member of my crew had the good sense to fade out of the picture. Later on, he was able to ar-

range may escape in a middle-size pleasure cruiser. Woodward Two's police pursued me and burned the ship out of the sky. I have no doubt they were sure they killed me. But I escaped in a bunged up lifeboat and got to Earth."

Woodward One felt an electrifying excitement.

"And why did Woodward Two arrest you?"

"Because I shook hands with my duplicate and my duplicate vanished as if he had never been. Woodward Two didn't want that news carried to Earth One. Don't you see, sir? We'll never beat Earth Two in war. We need another way, and I think I've found it."

"How?"

Anders' eyes held a fierce delight. "Mr. Woodward, there's a card game called 'Old Maid' in which duplicates cancel out duplicates. But before the cards are dealt, one card is withdrawn from the deck, leaving a card which has no duplicate—the Old Maid. The loser holds the Old Maid at the end of the game.

"I propose, sir, that we consider the populations of Earth One and Earth Two as the cards in the deck. And I propose that we change the rules of the game somewhat so that I, the Old Maid, whose duplicate has been withdrawn from the deck, be on the winning, not the losing side—You understand, sir?"

Woodward understood. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

The spaceship from Earth I entered the atmosphere of Earth II. It dropped straight down toward the untraveled Pacific Ocean. It was night. There were gunners on the flanks of the spaceship, watchful for signs of enemy craft. The spaceship glided close to the dark swells, heading shoreward. It landed on an uninhabited section of the Oregon coast, and disgorged twelve men from the airlock. The spaceship left, choosing the same inobtrusive route back to interplanetary space.

The twelve men left behind silently shook hands, and, each with his small leather grip, set out in different directions through the forest. Each was on his own.

Robert Denton, Secretary of Interplanetary Affairs, walked endlessly. He was one of the dozen men. The others were men equally high in public office on Earth I. Denton was on his way to Philadelphia.

It took him a week. He found a road, and then a city. He used good Earth I money to

buy a seat on an Earth II stratoliner. His only disguise was his blank, open expression. He was apparently an ordinary citizen of Earth II.

Once in Philadelphia II, he headed for the park near the depot.

Denton I always took a walk with his wife in the park at 6:30. So did Denton II. Denton I bid to one side of a shadowy path and waited.

Denton II came soon enough, walking slowly with his wife. And as Denton II passed him, Denton I stepped behind him, waited until the woman was looking away, then laid a heavy hand on Denton II's shoulder.

"Darling, the park is so restful at this hour," Anabel II mused, turning her pretty head. Then her breath caught. "Why, Bob! You're so dressed up. Weren't you wearing a sport outfit?"

"Was I?" Denton laughed fondly until his heart stopped racing. He patted her hand. You must be getting absent-minded, dear. Truth is, I'm not a quick-change artist."

So it was over all of Earth that day. Duplicates, creeping up behind duplicates.

And in days to come, more ships, and more, made the trip from Earth I, smuggling high-ranking passengers.

The hand had been dealt, the game was being played. . . .

**D**ENTON One had a visitor at his home a few weeks later—a man wrapped in a heavy scarf and wearing thick dark glasses. Denton took the man to his room—and Arthur Woodward One ripped off his disguise. They shook hands warmly, but there was a haunting despair on Denton's thin face.

"Arthur, until yesterday morning, I thought everything was going fine," he said, shivering. "We've smuggled in most of the members of the Cabinet, and half of the Province Governors, from Earth One. All have successfully canceled out their duplicates, the way we planned. Now it remains only for you to complete the link, to cancel out Woodward Two! Then we can act. But now I'm afraid."

Denton's fear caught at Woodward's heart.

"What do you mean?"

"Woodward Two called me into conference yesterday. Ostensibly, it was official business regarding some shipping of machinery to Mars. But he was really sounding me out. Luckily, I had crammed on Denton Two's

notes and so I could answer most of the prying questions he asked me. But I'm convinced I might have tripped up a few times. If I did, then Woodward Two is aware that there's been a slow infiltration of high officials from Earth One. How he began to suspect, I don't know, unless various members of his Cabinet slipped up, acted in ways which did not jibe with the actions of their duplicates whom they canceled out.

"It wouldn't have taken much, for I'm certain Woodward Two lives in deadly fear that somehow Earth I will discover a secret he must have taken pains to keep to himself, that people of Earth One can cancel out their duplicates of Earth Two. But if he is suspicious, what will we do?"

Woodward One sat down, throwing his head back against the chair, closing his eyes wearily. A long hard trip, first from Earth One, then across the continent, afraid to draw a deep breath or act naturally for fear someone would recognize him. And had he made that trip, had he, indeed, seen the completion of all those other plans, only to realize finally that Woodward Two was in a position that would enable him to turn off the fire under the boiling pot?

"Bob, what plans have you made for me to exchange places with Woodward?" he said heavily.

"A house party here, tomorrow night. Woodward will come. Also a half hundred other people, many of them who belong to Earth One."

"Go ahead with those plans, then. We can't back out. If we fail we fail, Bob. But we mustn't fail. And we won't."

In his room the next night, Woodward could hear from below the sounds of gaiety—music, the clink of glasses, the laughter of men and women. He was dressed for the occasion, in tails and white tie. He stood with hands straight at his sides, the fingers moving nervously. Denton had told him, an hour ago, that Woodward Two had arrived. Woodward One had paced his room, filling with a destroying fear. This was fantasy, beyond imagination. That he should think of his alter-ego as a man to be feared, hated—to be destroyed. Yet he must act.

He had moved two steps toward the door when it slowly opened.

Woodward froze. A beefy man stood on the threshold. His eyes widened incredulously on Woodward One. For the space of a dozen heartbeats the two men stared. Then a half-

scream came from the man's throat.

"Woodward One!"

His hand darted to his lips. The hand held a whistle. The terrible implication of that whistle flooded over Woodward. There were plainclothes men in the house, looking for Woodward One, and acting under Woodward Two's orders. If the whistle blew, it meant the end.

He acted with a desperate speed that would never be possible to him again. He leaped at the man, grabbed his hand, then dealt him such a savagely violent blow along the side of the jaw that he fell to his knees and crumpled over onto his back. He closed the door, struck the man again, brutally. He worked fast. A towel for a gag, strips of sheeting for bonds. Then he shoved the unconscious man under the bed.

Tensely he stood at the door, the thrum of blood in his temples drowning out whatever sounds might be in the hall. But he took a chance, left the room and crept silently along, close to the wall. By a back stairs route he reached the floor below. Here, through portieres, he could see the swirl of gaiety. He also saw his alter-ego Woodward Two. Again came the blind, raw hate, the urge to destroy, even as that Woodward had wanted to destroy him and his kind.

But Woodward Two was at the center of a laughing, drinking crowd, a crowd which was doubtless his consciously planned bulwark.

Suddenly, he heard a whispering footstep from the top of the stairs. A cold shudder of fear shook him. He got hold himself, knowing what he would have to do—and he would have to use all the brassy nerve he could summon to the job. He swiftly climbed the stairs.

Halfway up, he stopped.

"Come here, you bungling fool!" he snarled. "You're making enough noise to wake the dead."

**A** BLUFF. But his only hope of success lay in bluffing.

There was a silence. Then a figure came to the stairs, looking down at him. The man came down the stairs sidewise, cautiously, and when he saw Woodward, he whipped a gun from his pocket and trained it on him.

"You're under arrest!" he snapped.

Woodward went straight up the stairs, deliberately grabbed the gun and shoved it aside.



"You fool!" he stormed. "Who do you think I am?"

The man still held the gun. He brought it around swiftly.

"You might be Woodward One, sir," he said, but uncertainty was there.

Woodward cursed explosively.

"You see? You see? Already you're falling for his trick. Come with me, you idiot."

He led the man to the floor below, pointing through the portieres.

"There's Woodward One!"

"But—but it's impossible, sir!" the man said. "He wouldn't walk right out there into the middle of the crowd."

"Wouldn't he?" Woodward laughed harshly. "Why not? I left the room for a few moments and he simply entered and took my place. Now if I go out and claim him to be an impostor, he'd have me arrested. I wouldn't stand a chance. So the only way we can work it is to create some confusion. Get your men together—move! And here's what I want you to do."

Woodward talked so rapidly, the man hardly had a chance to question the proceedings. He was convinced at the moment, however. Whether he would remain convinced was a question.

But Woodward had his answer to those doubts not five minutes later when the confusion he wanted came. There were six doorways to the ballroom besides the exit door into the night outside. Suddenly, almost at the same second, flames and smoke shot from them, and a swift crackling overrode the sounds of merrymaking.

The music stopped, there was a clattering of glasses, the stoppage of voices, and people stood rooted, staring at sheets of flame. Then there were screams and pandemonium.

"Fire!"

The cry was taken up by half a dozen throats. Denton and one or two others tried to bring order out of the retreat, but it was a stampede. Frightened people ran for the single exit that was not ablaze.

Woodward One chose that moment to run onto the ballroom. He ran straight for Woodward Two, who was one of the people trying to organize the others into a single file so they could leave through the door in the quickest possible time. He was shouting angrily. Woodward One was almost on him when Woodward Two saw him coming.

An animalistic scream burst from his corded throat. He could have been no more

terrified if a demon were after him. For Woodward One was his demon, his personal nemesis. He knew he could not count for help on the crazed people around him. His hand darted into an inner pocket, came out with a vibro-gun. It loosed a flame that was like a thin string stretched from the bore of the gun to Woodward One's shoulder.

Woodward smelled his own clothing and flesh burning, but he felt no pain beyond a sickening numbness through his right side.

Then somebody blundered past Woodward Two, knocked the vibro-gun from his hand. And Woodward One scooped it up, and lunged toward his duplicate again.

Woodward Two's face was twisted with shock. He turned, ran. He plunged straight for the broad, winding staircase that led to the upper part of the house. Woodward One went after him, panting. His duplicate was a man crazed with fear, and Woodward One knew, coldly, that if he had been in the same position, his emotions would have been the same.

In the upper part of the house, Woodward Two ran into a trap. He should have turned a ramp to the right and made it to the roof and possible escape. Instead, he blundered past into a dead-end hallway.

Woodward One stopped a few feet from where his duplicate was plastered against the wall. His shoulder was hurting abominably. There were the warning signs of dizziness and shock. He disregarded them. He looked on Woodward Two, and he almost felt pity at the high shine of fear in his duplicate's eyes.

Woodward Two spoke, his voice horrible with hate and fear.

"So this is it?" he said. "And I suppose, according to all the laws of logic, that I should submit. For though my body disappears, I will continue to live in you." He was panting. "But it's not the same thing, you hear me? My ego is mine. It fights for life! Arthur—go now. Take yourself back to Earth Two and this I promise you: Earth I will receive food!"

**W**OODWARD ONE moved forward another slow step. "Arthur, it's too late," he said tightly. "You've already pronounced your own sentence. You wanted us to die of famine. As it happens, you of Earth Two will die, but much more mercifully. You see, Arthur, once there were six old men. . . ."

And he told Woodward Two about his "dream." It was a memory the two Woodwards did not share, of course, because the Earth that had been duplicated was an Earth of two weeks ago. And while Woodward One talked, filmy curtains were rushing across his vision, his eyes were winking in the tic that precedes fainting. He was telling Woodward all this—why? Because, he thought, in contempt for his own weakness, he was trying to grasp from somewhere the courage that would allow him to destroy—himself.

"You, Arthur, will return to the hyper-space you came from," he went on haltingly. "For as nearly as we can figure, Earth Two was formed of matter and energy drawn from hyper-space, a space lying next to ours, separated by one dimension. We know that this must be so, because the only source of material to build Earth Two was the asteroids. But the asteroids remain. Therefore the entities must have had the power to draw untapped reserves of energy from hyper-space.

"Earth II belongs to hyper-space. It is composed of atoms formed of negastrons and positrons. Negative matter. Contra-terrene matter, which until now has been only hypothetical. And that contra-terrene matter requires only the correct pattern of energy to throw it off balance, to tumble it off into the space it came from. Duplicate objects of normal matter can thus cancel out their twins. And I, Arthur, contain in my body, the exact matrix of force necessary."

He had talked too much. He had waited too long. For the black cloud came over his mind—and through that cloud he saw a streaking figure. Woodward Two. He was a blurred shadow. Woodward Two was plunging under Woodward One's clumsily outstretched arms.

Woodward Two turned stupidly, holding the vibro-gun pointed at the fleeing figure. He was thinking, calmly. He was clearly conscious of the sucking pain sweeping through one side of his body. He was more conscious of what Woodward Two's escape

meant. Woodward One, would, of course, die. And Woodward Two would grill various members of his cabinet, and eventually discover which of them came from Earth One. He would discover the details of the plot. And that would be the end of it.

Woodward One fired.

He knew he had missed, of course. He couldn't help but miss, when his eyes were playing havoc with his muscles and nerves. Yet Woodward Two stumbled.

Incredulous, Woodward One staggered toward him. It was true. Woodward Two was on his knees. He collided with Woodward Two. His legs buckled and he fell over the wounded man. And in the moment before blackness came, he felt the solidity of Woodward Two vanish, in his place an empty rack of clothing which for a moment maintained its form. Then the clothing fell in a heap, and Woodward One fell across it. And before he lost consciousness, he felt a supreme moment of gladness. . . .

He awoke, looking into Denton's anxious face. Denton gripped his hand fiercely.

"We've won, Arthur," he whispered. "Those fake fires—I realized what was taking place. I came up the stairs just as you fell. But you'll be all right." Strong emotion surged through his voice. "We've got control of the government, Arthur. Mass smuggling will be possible, with the people of Earth Two none the wiser as to what is going on. Somehow we'll smuggle enough food back to Earth One, to hold off starvation until everybody is brought from Earth One and cancels out his duplicate on Earth Two."

Woodward returned the pressure warmly. He relaxed, sighing.

"And we'll never depend on Mars again, Bob. We'll have an extra Earth, a planet suitable for agriculture. That's where our food will come from." His voice turned grim with satisfaction, and his glance went upward, as if seeking out the red planet.

"Then we'll see how they like getting along without us," he said.

The locale of next issue's Captain Future novel will be described in THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW, a fascinating illustrated special feature which takes you to Sinon, the invader world, the Earth's satellite Luna, and—the mysterious Dimension X!

# THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

Manly Wade Wellman is at the controls this time out and his narrative tells of THE SOLAR INVASION, another epic tale of space conspiracy in which Curt Newton tangles with an old foe, Ul Quorn, who supposedly was driven into the sun out of control many months ago.

But Ul Quorn escaped, thanks to a combination of ingenuity and luck and, after an appropriate period, spent nursing his wounds and rebuilding his pirate crew, is back in full operation. The first warning Terreans have of his return is when the moon vanishes—and apparently Curt Newton and the Futuremen with it.

By this time it is almost too late—or would be if Captain Future had not managed to evade destruction by a fluke. After this terrestrial Pearl Harbor, it is warfare to the death, with the very existence of the entire Solar System at stake.

This Captain Future novel has all the elements that go to make up a great science fiction story!

With it is running a distinguished Hall of Fame Classic—a story which, written almost a decade and a half before the atomic bomb, foretold such an instrument of wholesale destruction.

It is AFTER ARMAGEDDON, a truly brilliant novelet by Francis Flagg, one of the ablest scientists who ever lived and—alas—died too soon.

There will be short stories to match these two major achievements as well as the usual departments. Among them, of course, will be that lurking place of the old Space Dog since time immemorial, THE ETHER VIBRATES.

Our next issue should be one to remember happily long after it is read!

## ETHERGRAMS

ALL right, Snaggie old tooth. Drag the Xeno and the mail ticker inside the lead screens. We don't want any of the atomic chain fissions our readers may have initiated to vaporize the entire ship. And before the Sarge runs for cover, thanks, readers, for getting in so many letters so promptly. It constituted the biggest and best showing ever. Which should end the amenities for this issue, if not for all time. The Sarge is in battle dress, so bring 'em on, Froggie, bring 'em on!

The first letter is the explosive (or is it?) result of an innocent little query ye Sarge voiced in the Fall, 1945, issue. All he

asked what "What is Pascagoula?" and, well, see for yourselves, pee-lots and astrogratrixes.

## WHAT PASCAGOULA IS

by Ray Corley

Dear Sarge: I've back again. Yep, it's me—the sot from the Deep South.

Saw my letter in the latest issue. Foamed at the mouth and sat down to work on this missive. Let us start.

Quote: "WHAT IS PASCAGOULA?" Unquote. Answer: Pascagoula is a small shipbuilding town about 42 miles from Mobile, Ala. WHAT! Where is Mobile? 'Sno use. No one can teach you anything about our good Ol' Mother Earth. You're too busy guzzling Xeno.

VALLEY OF THE FLAME—An excellent story which demands a sequel. Pies (By Donnel?) were above par for her, but still fall far below the standard set by Orban, and even Marcioni.

TWELVE HOURS TO LIVE—No good! The writing was excellent, the style was the same—everything was alright except the last few paragraphs. But they stank, and ruined the rest of the story. Not that the writing was bad, but it was where he ended the story. I will wonder to he end of my days whether David Grant got out of the fix be and his wife were in.

SHADOW OVER VENUS—Oh, I guess it was alright, but I hate to admit that one of Long's stories is good.

THE DARK ANGEL has been reread so many times that it failed to be interesting.

THE ETHER VIBRATES—I repeat, WHERE IN THE H... IS JOE KENNEDY? It has been three issues which do not seem the same without him. Oh well, I must be brave.

A terrible mistake has been made. And when I say terrible I mean it. A year-odd letter which I wrote about IRON MEN and didn't have the nerve to mail, has been mailed. Fray God, I hope you don't print it. In fact I plead with you. Don't print it!

Now for a story by me. Wait, Sarge, don't drown yourself in he Xeno. This will not be too bad (You hope).

Ye Sarge spot a mo' thful of powerful acid (Xeno) out the spaceship door. It fell Earthward, burning the air as it went. There was a terrific explosion which made the atom bomb sound like a cap pistol. The Xeno had struck the earth. The explosion wrecked the world, killing all the people except one—me.

I climbed into my space rocket and sped skyward. I was out for vengeance. Not because my poor old pop was blown up—no! It was because my only copy of THE ETHERNAL NOW was destroyed. GRRRRR!

An outbreak of sounds came from your ship. Ye Sarge was imbibing the forbidden juice of the Xeno-burg plant. A bullet sped from my atomic pistol. It blew ye Sarge to fine particles which would never write foul poetry about me. My revenge was complete.

There, Sarge. How'd you like that. Wha? He's fainted.—46 E. 24th St., Bayonne, N. J.

Upon recov'ring from our swoon  
And feeling not a bit the worse  
We undertake Corley's undoin'  
By seeking our revenge in verse.

The pics for Valley of the Flame  
Were not by sister Donnel done  
Rather, to your eternal shame,  
Our Wilbur Thomas was the one.

So now we'll don our festive rayon  
And dance ourselves a red-hot hula  
All the while that we are Bayonne  
To good old, tasty Pascagoula.

Oh, ye Sarge's achng little grass shack!  
Roll out the Xeno, Wart-ears. Here is the  
answer to Corley's other question.

## THIS—THIS—IS WHAT'S HAP- PENED TO JOE KENNEDY!

by Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: The icy blasts whirled across the frozen plains of Pluto. Numb with cold, my feeble senses reeling, I lashed harder at the scampering team of moon pups. They howled in agony as the stinging point of the whip ripped across their scaled backs.

The purple snow was blinding now. I staggered and the sled swerved sharply, overturning in a mountainous heap of snowflakes. I choked, gasped for breath. The moon pups, freed from the reins, were dashing away. Their barking faded in the distance, and they were swallowed into the storm.

I was alone . . . alone in the frozen wasteland of Pluto, without food or shelter, alone in the fiercest blizzard ever known in the history of the barren ninth planet. Death stared me in the face. Death to the right of me, death to the left of me. Death up, down, across, sideways. Never more to see the green fields, the spawning cities of Mother Earth. 'Twas most unnering.

In ten minutes I was frozen stiff.  
The body was never found, either.

Being a modest chap by nature, I won't request that a national holiday be declared to celebrate my return to the columns of dear old *Startling*. A simple Zui will suffice.

I bet this is the only letter you receive that doesn't mention the fact that, the cover to the contrary, Clark Ashton Smith didn't write "Twelve Hours to Live". The announcement that CAS will appear in next issue's Hall of Fame was welcome news, tho. I always read the HoF first and enjoyed the Williamson story tremendously. Shades of Frank Stockton, and are there any ladies or tigers in the audience?

The return of *Startling* and TWS to bi-monthly schedule was another pleasant surprise. Three months between each iss e was far too long to wait. Every other month is more like it.

Leave us reader on to the *Ether Vibrates*. Lieut. Williamson, D. Charles, Millard Grimes, Harold Cheney, Liz Carter, and a few other people wrote some very readable letters. Mrs. Patsy Martin's letter was just one o' them that things that pop up every now and then. The Sarge's answer was a minor masterpiece of diplomacy.

Ah, people continue to squander rehms and rehms of paper caricaturing the Old Space Dog. Mason was responsible for that—uh—thing on page 5. he's in no position to criticize *Startling's* art. Tsk!

The great American pastime seems to be ferreting out scientific flaws in the stories. Irwin Friedman has started something. I quote: "How could a blow on her helmet knock Joan unconscious unless it went through the helmet? I think they would make them stronger than that . . ." End of quotation.

Well, frankly, our own skepticism is aroused. In the interests of science, Irv, would you consent to a little experiment? Come around sometime in a flimsy space helmet, of the type supposedly worn by women of the future. Then let me take a crack at you with a heavy baseball bat. If I fail to knock you unconscious, I'll at least guarantee to give you a bit of a jar.

But Friedman has discovered my secret. Yes, believe it or not, meek, bespectacled Josephus Q. Kennedy, by day reporter for the *Daily Vampire*, is transformed by night into that dynamic man of mystery—the Blue Bem.

I'll let you birds into my confidence. Y'see, I was born on the planet Krypton, several million miles distant. When my parents found that the planet was doomed to be destroyed, they stuck me inside of an oversized B liek, and shot the infant Kennedy to Earth, just as the stinky little planet blew up.

By the time the projectile arrived, my body was fully developed. I immediately assumed the identity of Kennedy, the mild reporter and stantazy fan. But by night I don my snazzy costume with the orange stripes and purple spots, and become that dynamic man of mystery—the Blue Bem.

The Blue Bem wears his orange and purple suit under Kennedy's regular street clothes, ready to

change at a moment's notice. Machine-guns, battering rams, atomic bombs, bean shooters—all are powerless before the devastating might of the Bem.

The Bem can grind up steel bolts with one crunch of his mighty molars. He can travel faster than the speed of light (I never do this any more, tho, since I discovered that when I travel that fast, my body turns into static electricity. I got some nasty shocks for awhile before I figured this out.)

As the Blue Bem, I am more powerful than speeding locomotives, and can toss ten-ton weights around like soap bubbles. I have devoted my life to the destruction of war, crime, riots, prejudice, vice, hatred, evil, injustice, inhumanity, bestiality and exc e gastric acidity.

Hated and feared by the minions of the underworld the Blue Bem keeps his true identity a secret by donning an innocent exterior and writing letters to *Startling Stories* every couple years. For a nominal sum, the Bem will be glad to endorse shaving cream, cigarettes, toothpaste, underwear, or what have you. Kiddies under ten desiring my autograph be a re to enclose one dollar in three-cent stamps, plus fifty cents cash, to cover wear and tear on the fountain pen.

Of course, I know I can trust you chaps to keep this a secret. It is told to you in the strictest confidence.

Ah, it might as well be spring. Everywhere, amidst the snowdrifts, posies are budding, robins are chirping, little rabbits are rushing around making more little rabbits. And *The Ether Vibrates* reflects these trends, and is overflowing with poetry. Hrrmpf—I, too, have written a verse or two:

What fortunate creatures, the grulzaks,  
They're never bothered with income taxes;  
Each Martian gal has a lovely figure,  
And *Startling's* now 16 pages bigure.

The truth (give heed—this is no lie)  
Is that the area of a circ e is equal to the  
radius squared times pi,  
Apple, pumpkin, lemon merangue, and cince—  
*Startling* costs but fifteen cince.

Metinks this should hold you for the time being.  
Will be seeing you on the next trip around the  
System.—84 Baker Avenue, Dover, New Jersey.

Egad! Snaggie old tooth, more poetry!  
Drag out the thesaurus, drag out the rhym-  
ing dictionary, drag out the Xeno, drag out  
ye Sarge! Odzooks! !!

Alackaday, here goes the terror of the  
spaceways, humming a pla ntive little dirge  
as he tears the hair from his deltoid cover-  
ings. It goes, "Why d dn't Kennedy stay in  
retirement, why didn't Kennedy stay in re-  
tirement" . . . and so on. It can be sung  
to the tune of "John Brown had a little en-  
gine" if anyone cares to use it in his bubble-  
bath. No, Frogeyes, you don't pour a bub-  
blebath with the gum of the same name.  
That's sticky! In fact, it sticks in spades.  
But, once again, here goes. . .

In speaking of those "spawning" cit es  
Which Kennedy makes sound so fecund  
Whoever thought he'd steal, my pretties  
From Oscar Hammerstein the Second?

It may be spring for Kennedy  
But o'er the world icicles bloom  
For when he s ngs a threnody  
Cold dirges sound their ompah-boom!

Blue Bem a-flash ng through the skies  
Or grulzak grazing in sweet clover  
When Kennedy doth poetize  
Ye Sarge might just as well roll over.

With which our sonnet nears its appointed conclusion

And this old Space Dog is stepping out for a quick transfusion.

## COLUMBUS DISCOVERS BERGEY

by Jacqueline Grenier

Dear Sarge: You may be rather startled by this letter, though I suppose you very rarely are in said state. I'm afraid that I'll have to write in English as I am unfamiliar with the language of the planets. Though I am a student of the Chinese language, it doesn't seem to be of any help in understanding the letters you r satellites (Huh? What are they? SS) write you.

Now, as to my motives—I have two, neither adverse, one a defense and one a compliment. The defense is for your artists. Please, people, don't look at the illustrations in that tone of voice. Pity the poor artist—doesn't anyone ever do anything good about him? Your people don't know what lucky chaps they are, at least you haven't come up with an abstraction or a painting by Salvador Dali. Praise Allah!

As to the other motive—I think the science-fiction writers have remarkable foresight. I'm sure that sometime in the future your stories will be classified as history instead of fiction. However, your readers live in the future. They are not only citizens of the world, but citizens of the universe. When the time comes for science-fiction to drop the fiction, the fans, under their guiding genius, SATURN, will lead the Earth.

Though I am but an irregular reader of STF, your magazine does seem to be one of the best. That's all—except that I like your covers, monsters and all. So there!—Columbus, Ohio.

So now the Sarge is going to rule the Earth—someday. Brush up my swallowtail trousers, Froggie, and shake out the Jovian mothballs. They're powerful little lepidoptera repellents. We'll have to put up more of a front. Wart-ears, get busy rigging some tri-dimensional placards announcing the great event. No, Snaggletooth, stand by for Xenos.

And as for you, Jacqueline, thanks, thanks a lot.

## ANOTHER COLUMBIAN

by Millard Grimes

Dear Sarge: Congratulations.

- (1) For going bi monthly
- (2) For publishing some good ehorls for a change
- (3) For having such good covers lately
- (4) For going back to having 114 pages and therefore a longer letter section

Enuff of that. As you probably gather I liked the March ish of SS pretty well. Ether Vibrates was very good. Why don't you give prizes for the best letters. Free issues of SS or TWS or something like that.

Usually your ehorls (including the Hall of Fame) are pretty bad. This issue was an exception. Long's tale was best of the ehorls, the others following in their order of the contents page. All were good. Novel was only passable. Inside pics are improving. Marchioni is still bad though. Hope Stevens is good as you say.

S.O.S! I'm in great need of some old copies of Cap Future, Startling, Thrilling Wonder, or any other of mags. If any fans can help me please do so. By the way, Sarge when is Cap Future coming back out? Please let it.

Warning: Am fixing to put out a fanzine. Fans, prepare. Sarge also prepare. I'll send the first copy winging your way.

And everybody remember I want old z mags. When I say old I mean before 1942.—2307 Fifth Street, Columbus, Georgia.

Thanks again. Is this epidemic of Sargeophilia confined only to the varibus Colum-buses in the land? According to recent newsavisions ye Sarge has received, the drivers of all the other buses are on strike. Well, perhaps it will spread. It had better. This looks like a lulu coming up. Even the visatape is smoking.

## THAT STORM LAKE SIMOON

IS BACK

by David Olson

My dear Mr.—uh!—I mean Sergeant Saturn: Perhaps you remember me, but just in case your irremissible guzzling of that inconceivably potent elixer, Xeno, has at last obscured that honey cell, I shall refresh your memory. I wrote you a nice kind letter a few issues back (a real masterpiece by sumph!) in whi h I very tactfully pointed out the remarkable resemblance between a certain fellow on the fall issue's cover and a famous gentleman named Colonna. No doubt now that I have refreshed your memory you remember me. No doubt. But even if you don't it really doesn't make any difference.

When I wrote that letter I wrote it with the hope it might carry through a few purposes I had in mind. I wrote it sarcastically because I felt the cover to which I referred rated nothing but sarcasm; I wrote it in a rather adolescent and silly vein because I wanted to see it in print; and I wrote it to STARTLING because I believed STARTLING, of all the sf magazines I could think of off hand, needed and deserved cover improvement the most. I still think that.

I am, as you may have guessed, on a crusade for better science fiction covers. There are quite a few fans, I think, who would like better covers—in fact, I think every reader would appreciate improvement. It is not Sarge's painting ability, but his art that he seems to be able to present his subjects with almost photographic detail—if it is his utterly axiomatic choice of subjects.

Not only do they seem to lack any connection, or valid connection, with the story, but they are also very laughable in overall effect. I can't conceive how anyone could dream up those concoctions. Take the cover on the March issue for instance.

The first thing that meets the eye, naturally, is Alton Fay's tall, hunched, grotesque, to a bad degree, gremlin who seems quite shocked at the hole thing. I can tell he is shocked by the way his mid-section has elongated. Gremlins always do that when they are shocked. In the lower left hand corner we have another gremlin, the father no doubt, who seems irked at being left out of the joke.

I can tell he is irked by the way his eyes are bulging and his teeth are straining toward the horizontal. Gremlins always do that when they are irked. Directly above the papa gremlin we have Uncle Gus who has just tasted something extremely bad. I can tell he has tasted something bad by the way his mouth has naturally assumed the gargling position. Gremlins always do that when they taste something extremely bad.

Then, through a process of elimination, we come to serious-minded Meat-face who thinks jokes are very undignified, and to show his indignation has torn his cute blue shirt and assumed the stance of the immortal Casey at the throttle. It no doubt fills his ample heart with happiness to pretend he is on the train. And then, after looking at this happy little scene we finally come to the word STARTLING blazoned in flaming letters across our view. And we must admit, wearily, that it certainly is.

But, as he feller said, enough is too much, so I shall continue on. Doing so, I come to "Valley of the Flame" by Keith Hammond. This is good. This undoubtedly is the best thing I have ever read in STARTLING. Partly of it was as good as something by Merrit, partly of Raff's first meeting with the mad king, and his experiences in the Garden of Kharn. Immediately after the finding of Craddock, however, the thing degenerates in power.

There are many errors in logic, such as Raff's fall-



ure to use the amulet to speed up his metabolism and thus get him to the flame ahead of Parror after they had discovered how to control the amulet, which lessened the worth of the finishing chapters. The description of his fight with Parror, though, almost made up for it. If there had been no errors, I would rate the story as a classic.

I will not comment on the "Shadow Over Venus" because I did not read it. Marchioni's illustration soured me on it. By the way, why do you give that boy a pen or brush or something to work with? He doesn't seem to be able to turn out very good work with his finger.

As for the Hall of Fame Story, "Twelve Hours to Live", where did you find it? Not only is the writing stiff, the characterization lousy, the conversation unreal, but the plot or theme is not even original. I am sure you yourself must remember a story you read away back in the grades, called "The Lady or the Tiger" or something? Tell me if you think the main idea is along the same line. And to think that this is the work of the man who wrote "The Legion of Space" "The Legion of Lime", etc. Where did you find it—in some other magazine's ash can?

Though "Twelve Hours to Live" left a bad taste in my mouth, "The Dark Angel" by Henry Kuttner, sort of relieved it. Kuttner, as usual, is good. This story and the excellent lead novel make this issue of STARBILING worth remembering. Let's hope you can do as well in the future.

This letter would not be complete if I did not remark on THE ETHER VIBRATES. My comments shall be addressed to one particular—D. Charles. Oh him I say, "Poopy" and "Spfrssk!"

In ending this, dear Sarge, I would like to say what if the March issue would have had a good cover, it would have been the best stg mag out! Smile, Sarge, you're being complimented.—459 College Avenue, Storm Lake, Iowa.

With the back of the Olson hand, no doubt. Oh, well. What the Sarge would like to know is the connection, if any, between David Olson and D. Charles. Umbilical, perhaps—since they both write from the same address.

As for the selection of cover topics, neither ye Sarge nor Bergey is guilty. Let it remain a mystery to the fans. They seem to get most of the fun out of it, so why spoil a good thing? No comment on the rest of your beefs, David. What is there to say? Besides, well, here is another opinion.

## THE OTHER SIDE

by Mrs. A. Schmidt

Dear Sarge: About a year ago I picked up a fantastic magazine and enjoyed it so much I haven't been able to pass up a magazine stand since without stopping to see what I could find.

I've been very much amused with the gripes (they are mostly that) in The Ether Vibrates, except for one thing—and now I'm going to tell you about it. There seems to be an age-old gripe about the underdressed heroine, and it's getting under my skin. Can't you tell them that fundamentally this is what attracts the reader to the magazine? Or is that one of your professional secrets?

True, there are a few individuals who would rather look at a robot than a pretty girl. But thank goodness they are rare. It would be a pretty dull world.

As for the stories, I enjoy them all or I wouldn't read the magazine. The illustrations are well drawn, but your artists should get together with the authors. Sometimes they don't correspond. Please give us more of Hamilton and Kuttner. They're strictly my favorites.—935 South Downey Road, Los Angeles 23, California.

Bless you, my dear. Why should the Sarge tell them when you've done it for him so  
[Turn page]

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nically? It would be a dull world without the pretty ones. As for our authors' and illustrators' correspondence, we do not tamper with the United States mails.

## ALAS, POOR BERGEY!

by Rick Sneary

Dear Sarge: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! At last Bergey has gone to far, ever far, me. The utter sickening horror of it all is enough to make a fan gag. The March cover will go down with me as the worst cover I have ever had the misfortune to gaze upon. Just look at the wonderful summer cover, or even the winter one. That was passable, but this th g, oooge! Look at her eyes.

This is the first BEH (Bug-eyed-heroin) I have seen. (And I pray to Foo the last!) And look at that mouth! What is she going to do, bite her way out? And the darkly-shaded cheeks just aren't natural. Why I'd rather go out with that Cary Grant type hero than that horrid looking heroine. And what is more she isn't at all like Hammond described Janissa. (Chapter 4, page 27.) Why didn't you let Bergey read this instead of the last part of the story????

Valley of the Flame was very good, but not outstanding. I think it was better than the Cap. Future tale tho. Not quite as many mistakes. By the way, looking back over my files. I see you haven't had a time-travel novel for quite a while. How about looking for one. How about a chase thru time. You know the kind.

Hero trails villain back through time. Every time he gets near the villain goes back to another time. Hero is caught by villain's friends, but is helped escape by strange heroine, later falls madly in love with her. How about Kuttner, he could do a swell job, and the plot isn't worn to thin.

Speaking of Kuttner, his *The Dark Angel* was the best of the shorts. Tho it really didn't belong in a sf mag I enjoyed it very much. Get anything this fellow does, under any of his numerous names.

As always, I didn't like the Hall of Fame story. For one thing, I hate stories that leave me wondering what happened. And another thing, the answer is so simple. All he would have to have done is to pull one of the chests off about an eighth of a mile. Then torn his clothes into strips and made them into a rope. Tied the end around the top of one of the chests and walked to the end of the rope, pulled it and opened the chest at a safe distance. If the fungus was in it he could have beaten it before it reached him. Some heroes aren't so smart.

Lionel Inman's letter almost rated a story heading. It was a very witty bit of wonder g. Nice. First time I have heard of Oscar. Lion is pretty smart, found an error that I missed. I'd tell you what they were, but that's old stuff.

Well I guess that is all this trip. It sure is swell news that SS and TWS are going bi-monthly again. You'll keep me busy writing you—2802 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California.

Rick, old pee-let, correcting your spelling is a job that will tip ye Sarge over the brink of the screaming meemies. Do you type with mittens on all year round or only during the winter months? Well, we can dream, can't we, Wart-ears?

## NOW BERGEY'S A BIRD!

by Travis Willis

El Sarge: Altho' I've been reading *Startling* for four years, this is the first letter I've pounded out so be kinda lenient, willya? I like ma other SFfans, am partially human if not completely so. Ah, me!

And now to the mag itself. Cover: Anybody know where I can find an artist? Honest, Sarge, why don'tcha toss the bird Bergey out o the BEMS. An artist, my kingdom for an artist! Stories:

VALLEY OF THE FLAME: a good idea, not very well carried out. I always like a time-warp tale, but this one turned sour.

SHADOW OVER VENUS: this theme has been used before, but, even tho I shouldn't have I liked it. The girl is an animal after my own heart.

TWELVE HOURS TO LIVE: I love these abrupt, surprise endings. They always leave one speculating as to the fate of the hero and heroine. Hummm! Wonder how Dave Grant got out of that o g?

THE DARK ANGEL: hooray! Bravo! Excellent! Mutants attract me for some strange reason. Who knows, there may be one eeking over you shoulder as you read this.

As to the inside illo's, I've got no comment. They were all average.

THE THREE VIRRATES: Where does this guy Mason get off, passing cracks like that. It's Ve Sarge's feeble attempts to be coherent while under the influence of Xeno th t attracts attention to the Readers section, thereby binging i more letters.

I won't rate the letters this ish. There was nothing particularly interesting—that is, not in my opinion.

If there are any fans in Orange or Volusia Counties, Florida, contact me at the following address—517 Balfour Road, Daytona Beach, Florida.

Thanks, Travis. Is Bergey taking it this time! Hope you get fanned plenty in that Florida heat.

Oh my Uranian artichokes, Snaggie old tooth! It must be spring. Here comes another ipeacatic dose of poetry.

## THESE SCANTIES DON'T SCAN

by Harold Maxwell

Dear Sarge:

Pay no heed to the clacking mongkeez Who sneer at the BEMS on your kivers. A pent on the breed, they're a pack of wrong gees. With Xeno-hypertrophied livers. Pay no heed to those haggling twitters Who tear poor old Bergey apart. A plague on all of the snaggle-toothed critters Who just can't appreciate ART. Who are these warms who vilify clever Guys who draw gals in their scanties? I'll fix those cricks, yes I will, if I ever Discover what bomb sank Atlantis. Or let me discover a m-n-e-tin fungus, Or a ray that distintegrates livers, And then, Sarge, we'll fix those wart-eared punkers Who've the nerve to blast S.S. kivers.

It should be obvious even to nit, and doubly so to a nit-wit, that the cover of *Startling* Stories must be STARTLING. And what can startle people in these days of Atomic Bombs and radar communication with the moon? Obviously, only a good old-fashioned BEM.

I have a suggestion, however. Why not leave the cover just plain blank? That would startle pipples, plenty. You could title it "Life In The Void", or "The Fourth Dimension" or "Time Marches Backwards, or "Bergey Couldn't Make It." Or "Close-up of Art-Critics Brain" or "Sorry, It Went Down the Drain" or "Come Back Next Month." I mean, possibilities are practically endless. With another shot of Xeno I could go on for hours.

Speaking of Xeno. A barrel of same to Henry Kuttner for the surprise ending to "The Dark Angel", in your March issue. O. Henry must be turning over in his grave, just itching with jealousy. It was a swell yarn, best in a good issue.—2564 Tutors St., Flint 4, Michigan.

He who has reached the age of indiscretion And looks at pictured scanties sans a quiver Has learned no matter how high man's profession

That life in chief depends upon the liver.

How'er Childe Harold Maxwell's jeremiad In hot defense of Bergey's luscious torsos Is liverish as if with onions frad Inspiring "oh, my words!" or even "more-soe."

What matter if he has a deep psychosis?  
 What matter if his cerebrum be muscular?  
 He never will be burdened with cirrhosis  
 As long as through his veins flows blood  
 corpuscular.

We'll raise our banner 'gainst those with  
 allergy  
 Toward that great trio, Babe and BEM and  
 Bergey!

Shades of Petrarch, Frogeyes, that one  
 finished ye Sarge—or will if you don't tap  
 another barrel. And if the readers object to  
 this old Space Dog's doggerel, let them  
 cease writing him verse (it takes poetic li-  
 cence to call it poetry). Like a spavined  
 and swaybacked old fire horse, the Sarge  
 cannot resist responding. In fact, he is virtu-  
 ally the only fire horse in all the universe  
 who ever answered an alarm on spondaic  
 feet

## A TOOT FROM GABRIEL

by Howard Gabriel

Dear Sarge: Keith Hammond has the strangest style  
 of writing I have yet come across. It has a sort of  
 liquid quality in it. It's too bad though, that he used  
 a mediocre plot. Also it was too descriptive to hold  
 my interest all the way through. The story how-  
 ever was fairly good; mainly because of the manner  
 in which it was written.

All is forgiven though, Sarge. The illustrations for  
 the novel were very good. The first time in a long

[Turn page]

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time. Especially the one on page 19. I'm glad to hear that S.S. is going bi-monthly. Any chance of some more novels like the ones from '39-'42 years. Is T.W.S. also going bi-monthly too? The latest ish. of T.W.S. was the best in a year or two.

It has to come, I guess. The cover, Flashy colors, nicely drawn figures. (Specially the girl's.) But her face, man! Suffering Saturnian Cave bears! From the expression on her face you'd think she had just seen Marchioni's illustration for: SHADOW OVER VENUS, the poorest story in the ish. It wasn't too bad though.

Kuttner, I adore you! Wotta story. It was the best in the ish. by far.

Williamson, I hate you. After reading the story with bated breath, you leave the ending up to us! If you have Marchioni illustrate your next story, as you've ever read "The Lady and the Tiger", you will find that they are amazingly alike. And since "The Lady and the Tiger" was written before Williamson's little yarn—wonder who copied the other?

Polton Cross is one of my favorite short story writers. I hope his novel is no good.

Liz Carter's little poem was very amusing. D. Charles had a good letter, also. Watsamata? Name of the "big show" writing in lately.—1450 East 19th Street, Brooklyn 30, New York.

Thanks for the fixed salad, Howard, old pee-lot. So you think Williamson was merely copying the late Frank R. Stockton! Think again—and you may change your mind. Yes, kiwi, TWS is also bi-monthly now. And ye Sarge resents that crack about the alleged "big shots." Look back a couple of years, and you'll find a totally different crop of letter backs from those now operating. Letter hacks come and go, but ye Sarge goes on forever! Long may he rave!

## SHE HANGS IN THE AIR. . .

by Patricia J. Bowling

Dear Sarge: I have just finished reading "Twelve Hours to Live!" by Jack Williamson in the March issue of STARTLING STORIES. I may be just dumb, but the story is left hanging in mid-air. What happened when Captain David Grant opened the silver chest? Is it his wife or the red fungus? I certainly couldn't tell from the story.

I will appreciate greatly your giving me the ending or at least explaining it. I'll have no peace of mind until I know.—137 Eads Avenue, San Antonio 4, Texas.

Farewell peace of mind, Mrs. Bowling. Who knows? In fact, that was the whole idea of the story—and not bad for an occasional change from the usual neatly packaged yarn. Perhaps there was a cold in the chest. Quick. Frogeyes, the Xenos. Ye Sarge is slinking fast.

## SAUTED SLIGHTLY

by Michael Cook

Dear Sarge: Here goes for my first effort in writing. Concerning the March issue of S.S.—now let us get down to Sirius business (Joke?).

Ye Gods of Mars, can that be the cover of S.S.? It is, but oh, Bergey, please keep to the standard of the winter issue cover. IT WAS GOOD.

According to your method, the stories rate: VALLEY OF THE FLAME—7 jugs. Good but a little fantastic.

SHADOW OVER VENUS—2 jugs. Arrgh!

TWELVE HOURS TO LIVE—8 jugs. Swell. More of the same.

THE DARK ANGEL—6 jugs. Readable but far fetched.

THE ETHER VIBRATES—as good as usual. Well Ed Kenoswigger that's all for now. Be seeing you in the next ish.—37 Jameson Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

For that Sirius crack, Kiwi Cook, you rate one gallon of Xenos vinegar, famed for its corrosive effect on battleship steel, diamonds and the lining of the human stomach. Prepare to pour, Snaggletooth, the moment we nab him.

## ALL THIS AND ELSNER TOO?

by Henry Elsner

Dear Sarge: I know this is a little late for the next ETHER VIBRATES, but I'm writing not to see my name in print, but to give you and Hank Kuttner (Hammond) my sincerest congratulations for VALLEY OF THE FLAME. I don't think I'm using extravagant language when I say that this story was comparable to A. Merritt at his best.

It was certainly one of STARTLING'S few classic tales, and will get my vote for one of the best stories of '46, regardless of the stories you or other magazines print in the forthcoming months. I thought SWORD OF TOMORROW was excellent, but VALLEY OF THE FLAME was many times better. Not often can a scientific story come so close to true literary beauty.

Although the plot and action of the story were very well planned and carried out, it was most certainly this superb writing which made it so enjoyable. The utterly alien atmosphere weird but somehow strangely beautiful, together with such vivid descriptive passages are surpassed, as I said before, only by some of Merritt's masterpiece s.

Thanks again for bringing us such a story; I only hope all of your readers enjoyed it as thoroughly as I did.—13618 Cedar Grove, Detroit 5, Michigan.

Thanks, Henry, we thought so too. Ye Sarge would hate to hear you when you have a gripe on—with that vocabulary. Zounds!

## AND ON THE OTHER HAND

by Robert Davidson

Dear Sarge: Well STARTLING STORIES can't be good all the time. "Valley of The Flame" goes into my lowest category along with "The Kid From Mars" and "Wings of Icarus". Boy was this story lousey!

Hone I, Sarge, after reading that junk I thought I had just come out of a two-hour botany class with a very boring professor. Right now I think I know more about the Amazon country than the natives. I'll never eat another green vegetable.

The pics for the novel were good, especially the full peger. Marchioni loused up the rest of the illustrations as usual, but as I said S.S. can't be good all the time.

On the other hand, Kuttner's little masterpiece, "The Dark Angel", rings the bell this ish. I recommend it for the Hall of Fame to be reprinted around 1856. The current H. of F. short was good. I'll take a guess that he opened the one with his wife in it. The only reason for saying this is that most STF stories end up with the hero paddling 1,000 miles to shore, of course encountering assorted monsters en route.

F. B. Long's short was just average filler. Turning to the cover (and I'd rather not) we find an advertisement for the Fo He Bergere amidst some purple stuff resembling school teachers.

How about printing some more cave man stories and time travel stories, getting Pete Marx and Hollywood On The Moon back in I.W.S. and getting back to normal size—1470 East 19th Street, Brooklyn 30, New York.

It's free country, Bobby, old Betelgeusean. But why not write us again—say, after you graduate? Okay?



# THE PENDULUM VIBRATES

by Leo Alexander

Dear Sgt. Saturn: I have before me the remnants of the Mar. S.S. (remnants because my sister has just finished reading it). The cover was good until I read the story. Page 27, chapter 4, third paragraph. "Her garments, blue and gold—" is Bergey color-blind? It also says: "At her waist was a wide belt." Please, don't let him draw a thin shoulder strap!

"Valley of the Flame"—SUPERB! (and that's a big word.) For an antiquarian he has some pretty modern ideas. More of Hammond. LOTS MORE.

"Shadow Over Venus"—nuts! Junk it.

"Twelve Hours to Live"—at fir t I was a little mad, but as I sat there with the saliva dripping from my jaws, I realized I was a bit hasty. I'm still trying to conceive the subsequent events of either selection (Boy, I wonder where I learned that!)

"The Dark Angel"—I knew it ll along. Terrible.

"The Ether Vibrates"—I think Mr. Friedman has something. About putting the back cover on the front, I mean. Did you notice the beautiful coloring, the excitement, the ability of man to control the forces of nature in the fire scene on the back cover? Wonderful.

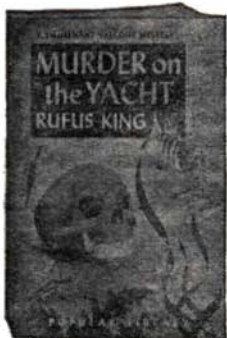
By the way, this is the first time I've written to you—736 Bloomfield St., Hoboken, N. J.

Well, keep them coming, Pee-lot Alexander. Your opinions, bizarre though they may be are all yours (praise Allah!) and ye Sarge has no intention of using coercion. No, you may take the pincers out of the heater, Wart-ears, he gets a reprieve for liking the Hammond *opus supremus*.

Well, that winds up the Sarge and his merry little gremlins for another Xenathon. Remember, kids, give us a line on how you'd like this job done in the future. This is a time of tremendous changes, and even ye Sarge is not exempt. So let us know, will you?

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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# BOOK REVIEW

URANIUM AND ATOMIC POWER, Jack De Ment and H. C. Dake, Chemical Publishing Company, Inc., Brooklyn, New York, 343 pp. \$4.00.

THE authors of this book on perhaps the most spectacular subject in science today, have done a workmanlike job that is not too involved for the layman, and at the same time delves deeply enough into the subject to interest scientific students and research workers.

This book was originally prepared in 1939, according to the foreword, and the authors and publishers through eight appendices and a rather complete bibliography have brought their subject matter up to date, climaxing their work with an appendix on the atomic bomb.

Naturally a good many of the details connected with the bomb were shrouded in secrecy during the three years in which science, industry, labor and the military forces were creating it. However De Ment and Dake have succeeded in lifting aside enough of the curtain to show us not only the potential military power, but also the extensive field in prospect for industrial development.

Your reviewer found particularly interesting the complete and informative chapter on the occurrence of uranium minerals in various parts of the world. The average man on the street, or sitting back in a comfortable armchair, is of the opinion that the incidence of these minerals is rather limited. It is therefore extremely surprising to learn that it takes eleven pages of the book to list the various varieties of uranium-bearing minerals, and their locations in parts of the world as widely separated as Llano County, Texas; Madagascar, Belgian Congo, Annerod, Norway; Spruce Pine, North Carolina; Minas Gerais, Brazil; Fergana, Russian Turkestan, and a score of other places.

Other fields that are explored carefully, and which establish a strong, effective groundwork for the researcher in this particular science include "The Physics of Uranium," "Chemistry of Uranium," "Specific Methods in Uranometry," and "Special Methods in Uranometry" such as the fluorescent indicators.

Students are going to be looking for authentic and far-reaching material in this field, and they may well add this book to their libraries as an important contribution to their reference files.

—C. S. S.



# REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By  
SERGEANT SATURN

**Y**E SARGE has received a lengthy and rather flossily prepared screed from the famed ex-fellow-Sarge Forrest J. Ackerman of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society announcing the "atombombastic" detonation of the Fourth World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles come July fourth.

This is a four-day blow-out complete with



Kuttner and costume ball. Pacificon chairman is Walter J. Daugherty, and membership in this all-out gala (we hope) may be purchased by forwarding one dollar (\$1.00) to him at 1305 West Ingraham, Los Angeles 15. You who can attend, do so with ye Sarge's benison.

For the rest, the fanzine list this month is a trifle topheavy with sundry special jobs, all of which rate attention and praise.

Joe Grulzak Kennedy has climbed into the front rank of amateur publishers with a finely conceived and executed FANTASY REVIEW. This 50-page pantagruel of a booklet contains a chronological report on the year 1945 in stff, thoughtful studies of books, re-print books and professional magazines for the same period and a very complete fan poll on just about everything to do with your (and our) favorite subject. Ye Sarge is despatching Joe a hogshhead of Xintage Xen0.

Tom Hadley drops us a line complete with RHODE ISLAND ON LOVECRAFT, a collection of personalia about the late great you-know-who nicely arranged by Hadley and Donald M. Grant, illustrated by Betty Wells Halladay and printed by Will Sykora. A nice item for those who worship at the Lovecraft shrine.

Third on the special-events roster is AFTER TEN YEARS, a tribute to the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, who died in 1935. Even though it is a year late, this is an interesting and tastefully handled job, thanks to its com-

[Turn page]

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plers and publishers, Sam Moskowitz and Gerry de la Ree of 9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey.

Fourth on the list is THE FANEWS PHOTO ALBUM, put out by Walt Dunkelberger, the Fargo blimp, which contains, as might be expected, candid shots of some thirty-six fans, a couple of amusing compositographs of a "trip to the moon" by Bob Tucker and the reproduction (ahem!) of the cover of one of our competitors. A very pleasant Christmas greeting.

Perhaps as a result of this rather frenetic special activity, the number of A-list fanzines has fallen to seven this trip, with only PHOENIX and SUNSPOTS among them at all familiar. Where, fellows, are AFFOLYTE, CHANTICLEER, SHANGRI L'ACCAIRES and VOM? This is the most miserable showing yet. Is the Sarge too fearlessly honest in his crits to risk sending them to him or what? He doesn't intend to change, come what may!

JUPITER, (you forgot to give the address, bub!). Editor, Ron Maddox. 3c per issue. Published quarterly.

This new job could stand typographical improvement. Editor Maddox has assembled a fairly notable group of contributors, including Boh Tucker, Joe Kennedy, Ken Krueger and Jack Speer, but none of their stuff is outstanding and the only real item of interest is an S. F. Quiz that kicked ye Sarge for a goal.

PHOENIX, 5201 Enright Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. A Paragon Publication. Published bi-monthly. 5c per copy, six copies 25c.

A four-page item with cover featuring an open letter in support of the Grant-Hadley team by Jay Chidsey and an amusing article by Van Splawn about the difficulties of present-day stf-seekers on the radio. Quality, not quantity he e.

SPECULATIONS, 480 Orchard Street, Rahway, New Jersey. Editor, George R. Fox. Published quarterly, 10c per copy, six copies 50c.

A new arrival in the New Jersey renaissance, containing a morbid radio script in which everybody dies, an amusing piece by Gene Hunter on overseas fans and some chuckles by Sam Moskowitz who reprints a collection of postcards he has received in his faning years along with other items. On the whole, a very promising new entry.

THE STAR ROVER, 5201 Enright Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Editors, Van Splawn and Fritz Hoffman. Published irregularly, 5c per copy.

While we were scratching our head over this one, a bit of dandruff drifted to a spot on the title page which informed us that this is the successor to PHOENIX, reviewed above. Do tell! Anyway, it looks pretty good to us with Ron Lane's review of Aldous Huxley's "True Must Have a Stop" in top place. Jay Chidsey has entered a poem about a space battle that seems to stem directly from some sub-species of Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verse" while a female who calls herself Alicia has one about a winged horse with stardust in its eyes. It occurred to us that a handkerchief could have been put to use to relieve its suffering.

SUNSPOTS, 9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey. Editor, Gerry de la Ree. Published irregularly. Free to contributors.

Sixth Anniversary Issue and a good, if small one. A reprint of a Weinbaum short story and the complete Borgulff Poll results for 1945 are high spots. Doris



Currier contributes a poem supposedly for purposes of horror which backs up James D. Breckenridge's articular plaint about the rareness of true horror in fiction and painting. On the whole, a swell job.

**THE SCIENTIFICTIONIST**, 13618 Cedar Grove, Detroit 5, Michigan. Editor, Henry Elmer Jr. Published irregularly. 10c per copy. Three for 25c.

A heavyweight. Among other ponderous features Walter Colet lists just about every soul-body transfer ever printed save for Thorne-Smith's "Turnabout" and Jerry Shelton's "Devils from Darkona" and E. Merrill Root would revive to bureaucracy, no less. Ervin Evans winds it all up with what is listed on the jacket as a "humor short," but it fails to lift the soufflé as a whole.

Finally, just as we were closing up the A-list, in came **THE ACOLYTE** in a rotary wrapper that had the Sarge spinning through space like a nauseated meteor before he finally got it unwound. A couple of hunks of the 'zine were torn off in the unbinding process, but here is what on what was left....

**THE ACOLYTE**, 1005 West 35th Place, Los Angeles 7, California. Co-editors, F. T. Laney & S. D. Russell. Published quarterly. 15c per copy.

The healthiest symptom displayed in this, the best of all fazines, is a worried plaint by F. Towser Laney lest his mimschild be slipping (it isn't). He also lets loose with a couple of loud screeches against the \$100 offering price for Lovcraft's "The Outsider" by Kiwis Unger and Sykora. The rate pans out at about one-cent of a cent per adjective. Verbs, as in all Lovcraft's works, come higher. Two decimal codes for classifying stf by Pee-lots Speer and Russell take up the bulk of the issue and had the Sarge reeling—not on Xeno, either, for once. New [Turn page]

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feature was a review of six movies by Ackerman, whose puns aren't quite bad enough to tickle ye Sarge's funnybone. But THE ACOLYTE is still on top.

The B-list packs plenty of quantity this time, but quality, save as always for Dunk and his FANFANS, is wretchedly low. Illegibility is suffering from some uncharted heptographic inflation. Don't ask us why. So...

ASSORTED MUSTINGS, 84 Baker Avenue, Dover, New Jersey. Editors, Kennedy & Fox. No charge. This one-shot has no purpose save to plug the recent Newarkcon on its cover and contains random fan jottings within. A Jo-Jo-the-Dog-faced-boy item.

FANFANS, 1443 Fourth Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota. Editor, Walter Dunkelberger. Published irregularly. 2c per copy, 55 copies. \$1.00. Still far and away the best of all the newspapers for fandom.

FANT-STORY SHEET, P. O. Box. No. 135, South Mills, North Carolina. Editor, Ross Burgess. Published irregularly. No fee. First issue of what is fondly believed to be humorous stuff on a one-pager. Hope editor Burgess can get a bit groovier.

FANTASCIENCE FAN, 5201 Enright Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Editor, Van Splawn. Published weekly. Free to contributors. Roll on, Van Splawn, roll on—holy cow, how do you do it? Ye Sarge will be writing "5201 Enright Avenue" in his sleep. This is another one page newsmag, concerned chiefly with radar to the moon. Next job.

FORLO KON, published by Private Kenneth H. Bonnell, ASN 39760427, Co. C, 5th Trng Bn, ASFPC, Fort Lewis, Washington and printed at 823 University Way, Seattle. First and second issues of this modest little pamphlet contain very short items action fiction, or culled from books, newspapers and radios. Keep going, Kiwi Kenneth.

MERCURY, 548 North Delrose, Wichita 6, Kansas. Editor, Telis Streiff. Published bi-weekly. 2c per copy, 3 for 5c, 6 for 10c. Not a very good cardzine after the memorable efforts of Dunkelberger & Krueger.

PST'S NEWS, 3507 North Suddenham Street, Philadelphia 40, Pennsylvania. Editor, Oswald Train. Published monthly. 10c per copy, 6 copies 50c, 12 copies \$1.00. Fully documented doings of the bouncing young Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, which would rate the A-list if it held a little material of more general interest.

SLANTASY, Dorothy, New Jersey. Editor, Algis Budrys. Published weekly. 3c per copy. Subscription rate 2c per copy. Budrys is apparently still in that

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

## THE SOLAR INVASION

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larval stage when he considers kaillation with k to be konvulgently komic. He'll learn. He is also (spropes of Phil Wylie's "Blunder") amazed at stf in the sickle. Evidently he doesn't read them. Shader of Sam Small!

**THE MARTIAN NEWS-LETTER**, 548 North Deirose, Wichita 6, Kansas. Editor. Tells Streiff. Published????? 2c per copy. Sloppily hecktoed but rather brashly amusing phoney fanewsheet. (Editorial note—Streiff, tell Christensen that Ye Sarge does not sit in a swivel chair. Otherwise perfectly accurately—S. S.)

**WITHOUT GLEE**, 2837 San Jose, Alameda, California. Editor, Roger Helm. Published irregularly. 5c per copy, 3 copies 10c. Zany stuff by one of ye Sarge's egular tormentors. Jack Crocroft has even hecktoed him on the cover, complete with Xeno jug and three colors. What next?

With the idea of giving credit where credit is due, ye Sarge is herewith creating a special honor roll which will be known as the Z-list henceforth. We feel certain that the bulk of stf devotees will support our signal new award as applied on this page.

**MAXIN** 98, 1345 North Hayworth Avenue, Hollywood 46, California. Editor, David D. Dagmar. Published bi-monthly. 25c per copy, 4 copies \$1.00. With the not-so-tact support of one of our competitors (he contributes an editorial) this magazine preys on the credulity of the unbalanced and illiterate by supporting all the old phonolas from those who claim they know what happened to Atlantis to visitations from the after life in dreams. Piously, we cross ourselves.

Well, that's it, Kiwis. Unusually good in some respects, unusually poor in too many others. But at least none of you slaneditors have been flirting with the deadly mediocre. For which Zoroaster be praised. Keep the Sarge fed on fanzines, pee-lots. Next to Xeno, he loves them best. Which is why he rips them to pieces with such loving care. So long!

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IT IS our very definite impression that, since he was honorably discharged from the Army early last year, Henry Kuttner has been forging ahead by leaps and bounds—and he already had most of the rest of the stf field lapped a couple of times.

In **THE DARK WORLD**, he steps right up into the spot left vacant by the death of the revered A. Merritt. Surely no one else has shown so masterful a grip on this particular sort of high imaginative fantasy. It seems to us that he has at all times a clarity which was occasionally lacking in Merritt's somewhat surrealistic prose poems.

Furthermore, so ingenious is Kuttner that he is always able at least to suggest some convincing causation for even the most fantastic of his themes and gadgets. In this respect, he is almost certainly unmatched.

But those of you who have already read **THE DARK WORLD** in this issue need no editorial puffs as to its virtues. And those who haven't will learn for themselves in short order that here is a great fantastic novel. Meanwhile, the author, in jesting spirit, takes time out to explain a little about himself. He is usually clearer when explaining some unearthly happening on a distant planet, but it should give you some idea.

Says the author of **THE DARK WORLD**:

This is no time to ask me for my biography. The papers say we've just hit radar with the Moon—or something like that, anyhow—and I've decided to live on a California mountain-top, where I can reach up with a long-handled spoon and dig off valuable mineral deposits from our satellite. I never knew it was so close.

I've decided against having a swimming-pool, though, because I don't want all the water sucked up out of it by the Moon's gravitational attraction, and I've almost decided against having an

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atmosphere, for the same reason. I don't know why people do those things to me.

All I ask is to be left alone to write science-fiction when I get ideas that intrigue me. How can I write with the Moon shooting radar at me and I don't know what-all else happening around Orion? I never look up any more.

Well, I was born, grew a while, and here I am.

That looks unsatisfactory, even to me. A biography ought to have more details in it, but the trouble is, I don't know what details. Things that interest me don't always interest other people. I am five feet something—I'm not sure exactly—weigh 135, slender as a reed, and am deeply attached to a small dark moustache named Quentlin. Went to school. Worked abjectly at various things. Wrote. Had army service. Since then, my ambition is to be as phenomenally lazy as possible.

Part of the year I live on—or, rather, over-looking—the Hudson River, far enough away from New York to be in the country. As this is written, though, it's winter, so I'm in California, catching up with my sleep and staying warm at the same time.

eels and soft-shell crabs—not to wear around. What else? I hate shoes and neckties. I like my neck, of course, but to eat. C. L. Moore is my favorite author. And I think that's all—except for the date of my demise, which I don't know yet. But you can't have everything, can you?

—Henry Kuttner

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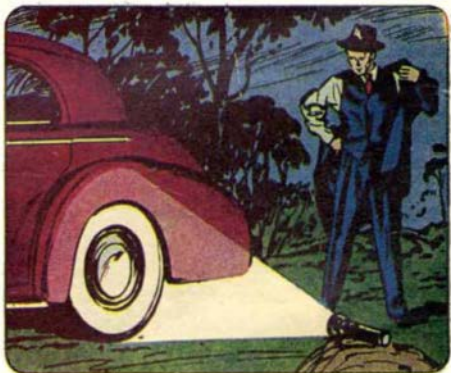
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