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FEB. 1950

THRILLING ANC WONDER STORIES

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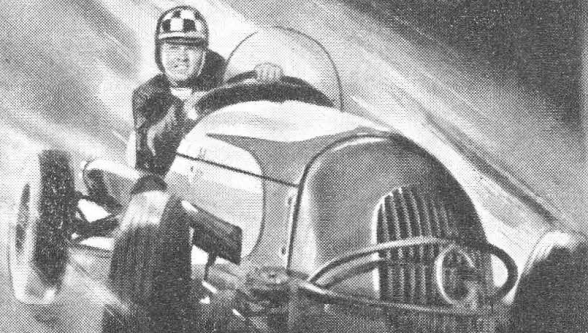


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 a complete short novel
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 KUMMER, JR.

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 a novelet of the future
 By HENRY
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 a fantastic novelet
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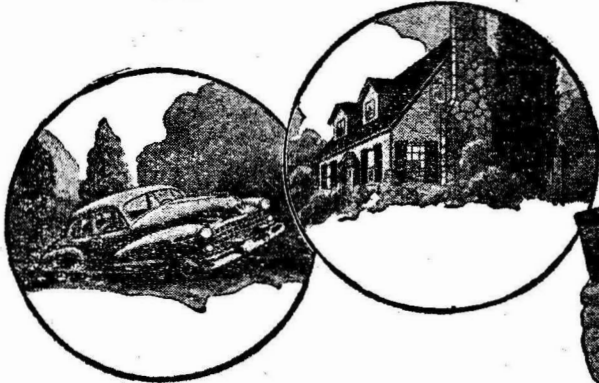
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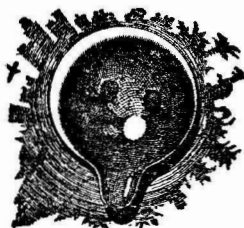
THRILLING WONDER STORIES

VOL. XXXV, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

February, 1950

A Complete Short Novel



WHEN TIME WENT MAD

By DIRK WYLIE and
FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Webb Hildreth's future twin plunges him into an appalling shock area—while a damaged time machine weaves eras into an unstable pattern! 11

Three Complete Novelets

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She was like a dream come to life—with hair of tawny gold and the glowing face of a smiling angel—but she was not human!
- THE GREATER CONFLICT** Raymond F. Jones 92
At last Cal Meacham of the Peace Engineers finds the answer to his problem, but he does not find it anywhere on Earth!
- THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER** Henry Kuttner 114
Even the slickest of confidence tricks can backfire at times, but Macduff proves he's the most resourceful swindler in space!

Short Stories

- DEAD RUN** Cleve Cartmill 51
Jake Murchison and his gang fight to save a planet from atomic doom
- SPECTATOR SPORT** John D. MacDonald 81
The first man to reach the future, Dr. Rufus Maddon, meets a strange fate
- THE SKEPTIC** R. C. W. Ettinger 85
A wounded officer decides to find a way to exile human pain
- PAYMENT IN FULL** Ray Bradbury 135
They were three left of Earth's millions, three marooned on Mars!

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- WONDER ODDITIES** Science Facts 61
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- SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW** A Department 160

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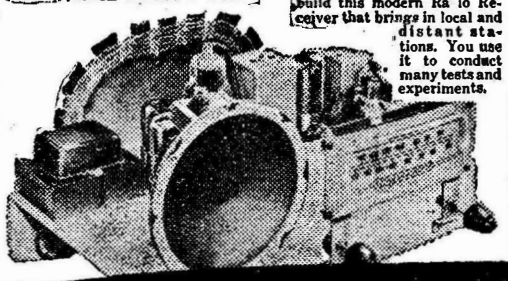
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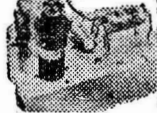
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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

EXACTLY one month from today this magazine is going to have a new companion. The name of this soon-to-arrive member of the science fiction family will be announced soon and it promises to fill a long-empty gap in the field.

For many years now we have received—by letter, by telephone, by word of mouth direct and by virtually every mode of communication save carrier pigeon—laments over the unavailability of most of the great stories published from ten to twenty-five years ago during the so-called “formative” period of stf writing.

Few of these hundreds of stories have received the publication in book form—either as novels or as parts of the recent wave of anthologies—which guarantees a certain degree of permanence. For the most part the magazines which printed them have long since been consigned to the waste basket or the fireplace or have crumbled to illegibility.

In our current and well-loved companion, *STARTLING STORIES*, the Hall of Fame reprint feature has for eleven years brought some of the best of them singly to life. But this effort has barely scratched the surface of the huge backlog of magnificently imaginative stories that has too long been consigned to oblivion save in the bookcases of a scant few ardent and faithful collectors.

Rich Pickings

Furthermore the limitations of the Hall of Fame have not permitted the reprinting of the longer stories, scores of which run to full book-length. Our new companion is to be a *big* magazine, one which will permit the publishing of at least one long novel

per issue, as well as a goodly number of novelets and short stories. It promises rich pickings for avid fan and general reader alike.

Leading the opening issue will be Edmond Hamilton's unforgettable novel of the inner core of Earth, *THE HIDDEN WORLD*, one of the most imaginatively-stirring stories this still-very-active author has ever written. It will be backed by at least two novelets, *VISIT TO VENUS* by Festus Pragnell, and *THE MAN FROM BEYOND* by John Beynon Harris.

For the other stories and novelets the selection will be made from the best early works of such authors as Eando Binder, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Richard Vaughan, Raymond Z. Gallun, Fletcher Pratt and scores of others. This soon-to-appear magazine will provide not only magnificent stf entertainment in its own right but will provide modern readers with a chance to compare the very best from the allegedly “good old days” with current trends and craftsmanship in the field.

A Magnificent Volume

It has not been our custom to give over this space to the reviewing of current science fiction and fantasy books. But custom is created not only to be followed but to be shattered on occasion—and this looks to be a suitable occasion.

The cause is the recent publication of a magnificent volume of plates and printed matter by a pair of men who rate as greats not only with devotees of stf but with scientists themselves. We intended to review it here ourselves but a certain moderately

(Continued on page 8)

Is High School High enough?

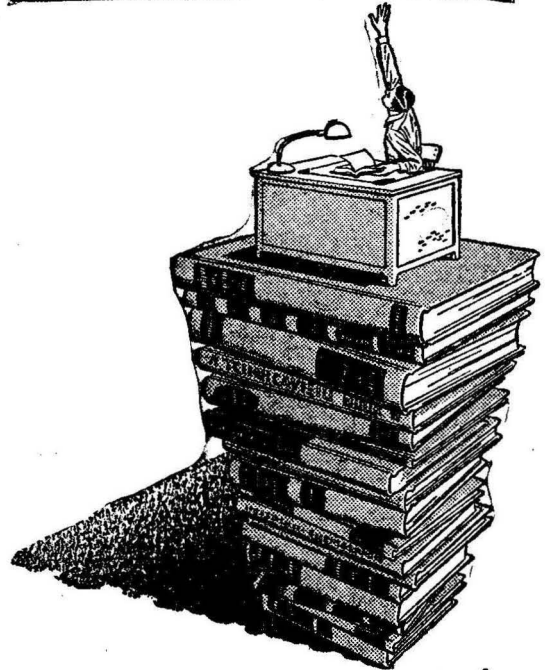
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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

well-known science fiction author volunteered out of his own enthusiasm to write us such a review.

We accepted gratefully and herewith give you—

THE CONQUEST OF SPACE by Chesley Bonestell & Willy Ley, Viking Press, New York (\$3.95). Reviewed by Robert A. Heinlein.

This book could be reviewed in three words: "Go buy it!"

Willy Ley's deft and lucid handling of the intricacies of space travel is not new to the TWS family. Chesley Bonestell's breath-taking astronomical and space travel paintings are certainly almost as well known to you. They have appeared in LIFE, Coronet, and many other places. Here we have them together, in a beautiful quarto volume. They go together like ham and eggs.

No matter how many times you have read Ley on space-ships, you will find this a fresh account, told with his usual easy humor. As to the Bonestell paintings, this is the first time they have been gathered in one place—and they take you all over the solar system, from a rocket fueling on earth to the eternal snow of Pluto, with frequent stops at all the way stations.

There is nothing like a Bonestell painting—they seem to be color photographs, taken impossibly before the fact. There are fifty-eight Bonestell plates in the book, twenty-three of them in fine four-color reproduction.

It will be tempting to take a razor blade to some of them and frame them, even though it would involve the violation of a beautiful volume. I had the good fortune to get a defective copy—"defective" in that the binding machine had duplicated sixteen whole pages of Bonestell plates. Naturally, I refuse to swap it. I can have framed copies without damaging my book! (Examine carefully each copy in your book store; the binder may have done it more than once.)

In addition to the pure joy of owning this beautiful and instructive book, there is another advantage. Perhaps you get tired of dunderheads who scoff at science fiction, the dimwit who picks up your copy of TWS and says, "You read that stuff?"

Slip him this book. Let him read it—if he can read. If not, let him look at the pictures. If there is anything in him to save you will have made a convert.

Willy Ley's text is in four parts—rockets and space ships, starting with a detailed account of a present-day firing at White Sands—a discussion of the Moon Rocket and the moon itself—a tour of the solar system—and finally a discussion of the little planetoids. He has thoughtfully included at the beginning a two-page tabulation of "vital statistics" about our family of planets.

This bonus is a valuable feature of the book;

(Continued on page 139)



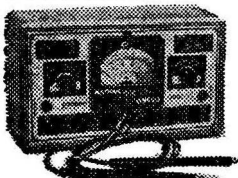
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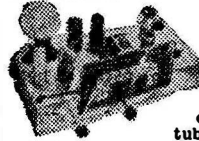
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... AND THEN DAN SAVED THE DAY

WOW! A DEAD STICK LANDING AND HE'S SNAPPED A SKI!

LET'S GET OVER THERE. HE MAY BE HURT!

RIDING THEIR MOTORIZED-SLED, TWO STATE GAME WARDENS ARE RETURNING FROM A LONG WOODS PATROL WHEN ...

ARE YOU HURT, MISS?

NO, BUT I'M DARNED MAD. MY ENGINE CONKED OUT AND NOW I'LL MISS THE ICE CARNIVAL.

IT'S JUST A FEW MILES TO HEADQUARTERS AND WE'LL RUSH YOU TO ORVILLE BY CAR.

WONDERFUL! I'LL SEND A REPAIR CREW FOR THE PLANE TOMORROW.

I DO HOPE WE'LL MAKE IT. MY APPEARANCE IS SET FOR EIGHT O'CLOCK.

SAY! YOU MUST BE SANDY OLTNER, THE FLYING FIGURE SKATER!

AND I LOOK LIKE A TRAMP.

REI'DLL GET YOU THERE WITH TIME TO SPARE, MISS OLTNER. HOW ABOUT IT, DAN?

YES, SIR... I'LL EVEN HAVE TIME TO CLEAN UP HERE FIRST.

BLADES? TRY THESE

HERE'S THE BLADE I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR! NEVER HAD SUCH SMOOTH SHAVING.

THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO ORDER FOR TOUGH-BEARDED GENTS.

OUR COMMITTEE IS GIVING A LITTLE PARTY FOR SANDY LATER. WILL YOU JOIN US?

WE-L-L... HANDSOME!

PLEASE DO!

TO GET REFRESHING, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING, TRY THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LONGER-LASTING THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADES. WHAT'S MORE, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE HANDY TEN-BLADE PACK.

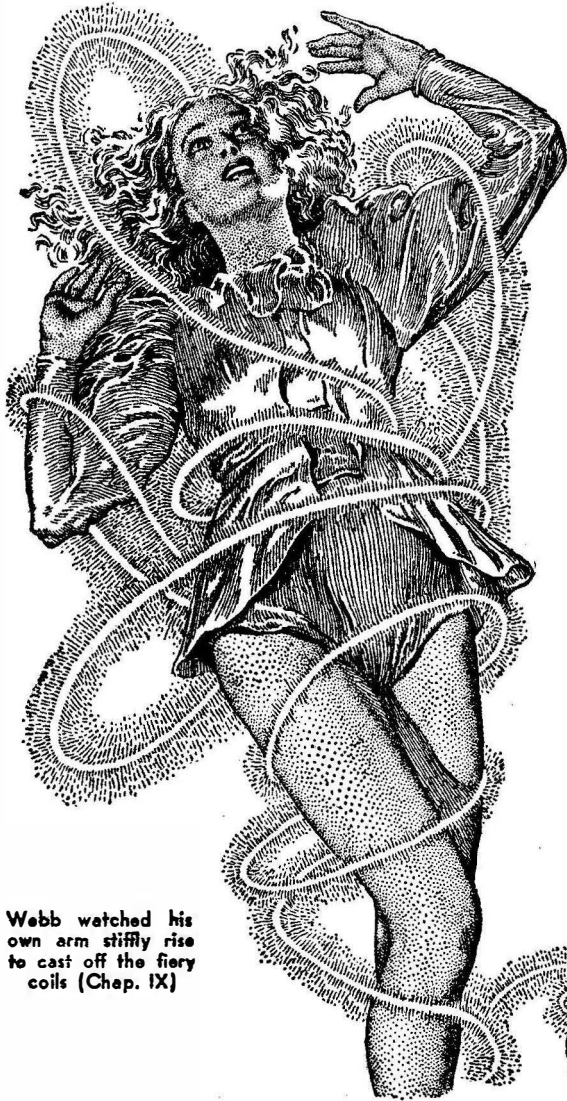
THIS IS MY FIRST GOOD LOOK AT YOU, MISTER... YOU'RE HANDSOME!

PLEASE DO!

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

Thin Gillette
10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢

When TIME WENT MAD



Webb watched his own arm stiffly rise to cast off the fiery coils (Chap. IX)



CHAPTER I

Twin Out of Time

I HAVE BEEN searching for you for a long time," said Ron Dineen.

Webb Hildreth carefully closed the door of his apartment and sat down. He stared into the shadows at the man in the flaring knee-length trousers. He reached for the light switch but the man stopped him with a gesture.

"Please," he said. "Not too much light. Not yet."

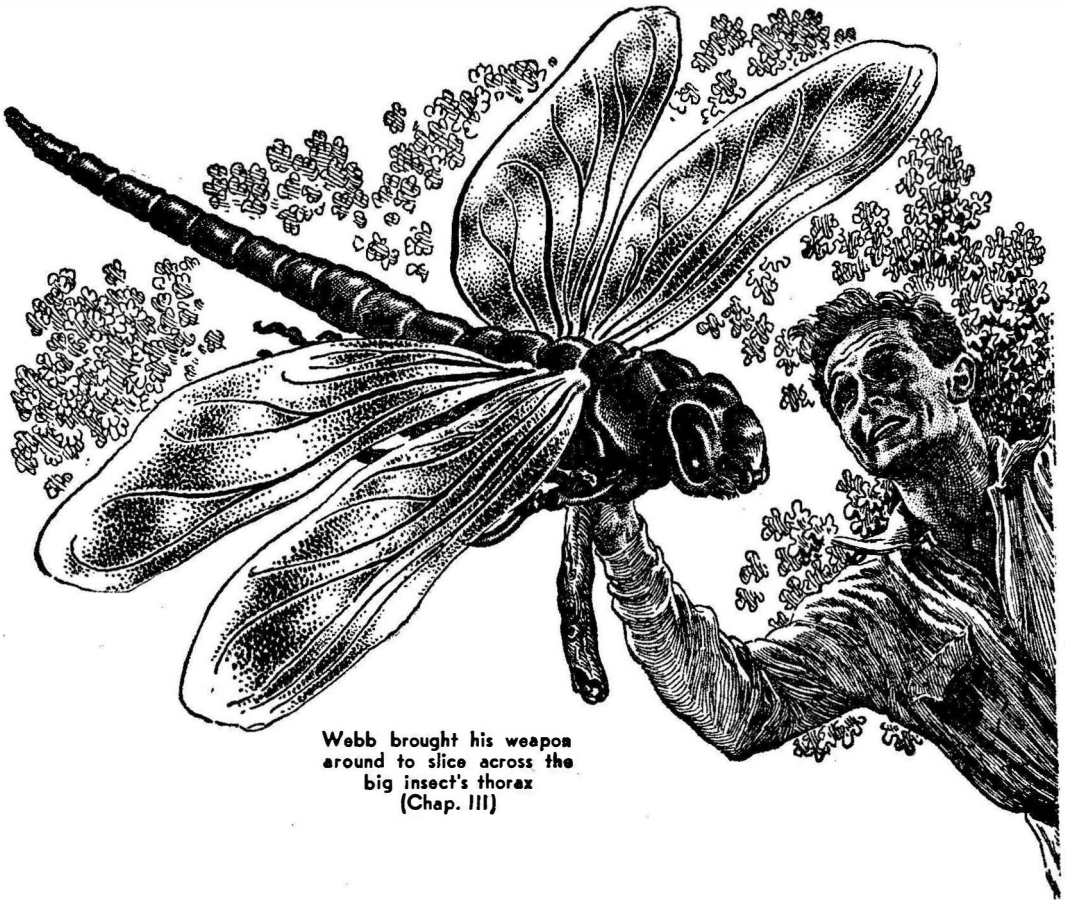
"I don't get it," Hildreth



A Novel by
DIRK WYLIE and FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Webb Hildreth's future twin plunges him into an appalling shock area!

A Damaged Time Machine Creates a Force Field



Webb brought his weapon
around to slice across the
big insect's thorax
(Chap. III)

said. "How did you get into my place?"

Ron Dineen made a curious gesture with his index finger—it seemed to be the equivalent of a shrug. "I did not come through the door," he said carefully. "Your—is it 'lock'?—your lock could not stop me. I just came in. And you were not here, so I waited."

Hildreth rubbed his jaw. Even though he was half again as heavy as this man in the funny clothes he felt uneasy. A thousand times he had walked through that door into his lonely apartment, and this was the first time anyone had been there.

He didn't like it, particularly when the person who was waiting for him in the dark had all the earmarks of a Bermuda beach vacationer—short pants,

sleeveless jacket and all. He wished that the war-trophy Luger in the bedroom were closer to hand.

"I don't know anybody named Ron Dineen," Hildreth said. "What do you want?"

Dineen smiled. Again there was the gesture with the finger. "I just want to see you."

"Okay. You're looking at me. What about it?"

Ron Dineen sighed and looked around the room. "May I seat myself?" he asked politely. "I am so tired."

Hildreth, getting used to the situation, reached for his pipe and thumbed it full of rough-cut. "Sit down? Sure. Take your choice. The rocking chair or the trunk."

to Weave Earth's Eras into an Unstable Pattern!

Dineen inclined his head courteously. He clambered onto the trunk—he was a very small man, Webb realized with a

start—and looked at Webb Hildreth with an air that was almost fatherly.

"You are just the way I imagined you, Webb," he said.

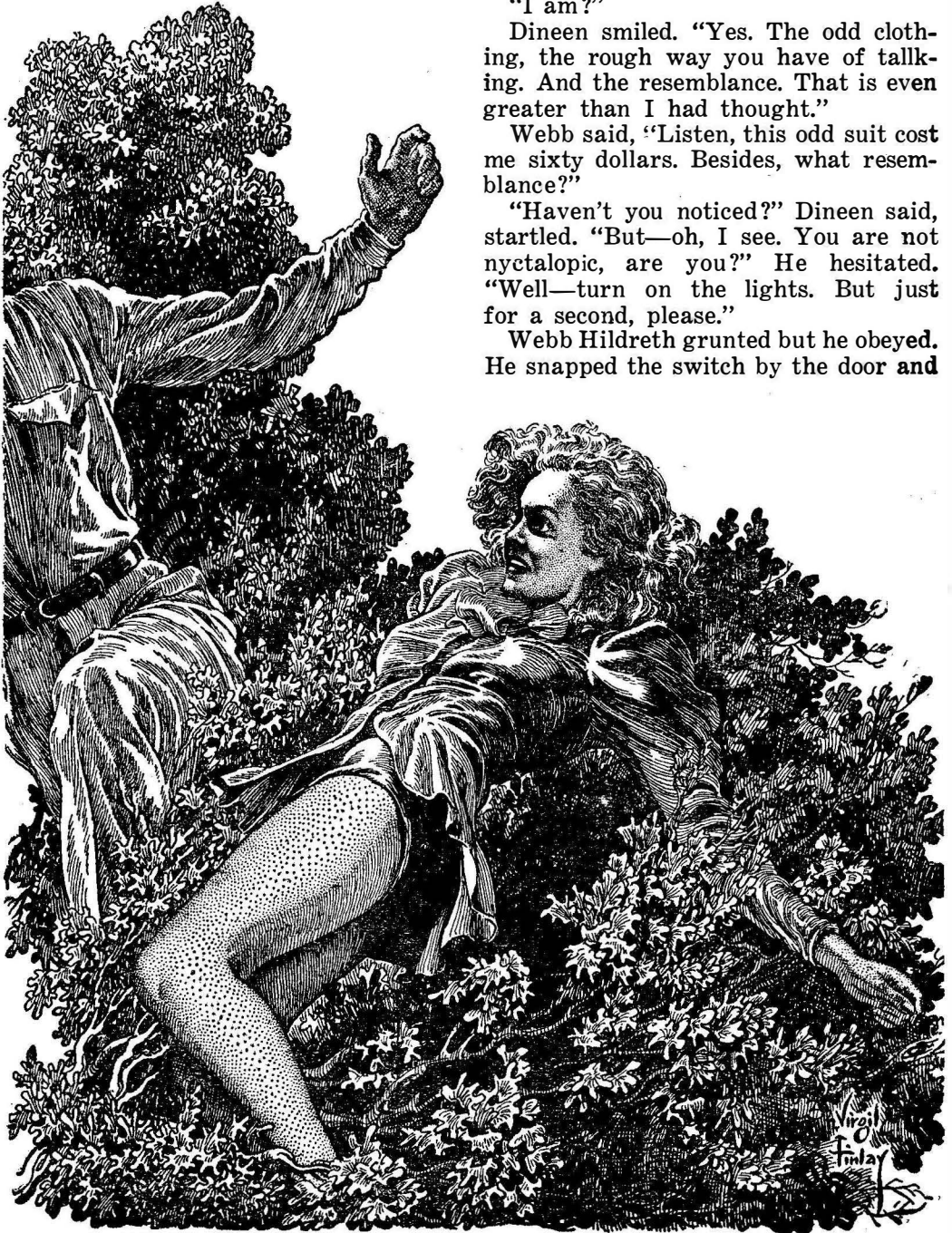
"I am?"

Dineen smiled. "Yes. The odd clothing, the rough way you have of talking. And the resemblance. That is even greater than I had thought."

Webb said, "Listen, this odd suit cost me sixty dollars. Besides, what resemblance?"

"Haven't you noticed?" Dineen said, startled. "But—oh, I see. You are not nyctalopic, are you?" He hesitated. "Well—turn on the lights. But just for a second, please."

Webb Hildreth grunted but he obeyed. He snapped the switch by the door and



turned back to see Ron Dineen perched stiffly on the trunk, eyes screwed tight in pain.

"Well, what's the resemblance?" he said "All I see is—" He broke off and stared in blank amazement at the other.

"Good Lord!" he said. "You're the spitting image of *me!*"

"Please, the lights," said Ron Dineen in a strangling voice. Automatically Webb turned them off but his eyes remained fixed on the man in the shadows.

DINEEN exhaled a long gasp of relief. "That was terrible," he said intensely. "I have not had so much light for over a year. And then I was still almost—well."

"You mean, light hurts you?"

Dineen said, "Yes. I think your people called it nyctalopia—a fear of light. But we know it as something else. It has no name, just The Sickness. And I have had it for almost two years."

"Talk," said Webb. "Tell me things. Why do you look so much like me!"

Ron Dineen shook his head. "You could not understand. Not yet."

"All right, then tell me where you came from."

Ron Dineen shook his head again and through the dimness Webb saw his smile. "Not where," he said. "When. This is, let me see, Nineteen Forty-nine. I come from what would be Three Thousand Fifty-four. Within a year or two of it anyhow. You see, we lost the dating during the Great War and then—"

"Never mind the dating," Webb said violently. "What did you say?"

"I said I came from the year Three Thousand Fifty-four. Yes," he nodded, "it is hard for you to believe. But true. I was ill with The Sickness and due for euthanasia. I did not want to die. So I stole a Chroney and I am here. I had always wanted to see you, of course, ever since I knew you existed."

Hildreth sat limp. "You're not joking, are you?" he said at last. "No, I can see you're not. What's a Chroney?"

"The machine I came in. It's in your other room, there." Dineen waved at the door to the kitchen.

Webb Hildreth said, "Excuse me," got up and headed toward the kitchen on the double. He was conscious that Dineen had risen to follow. He stopped short at the kitchen door.

Faintly luminous in the dark, a pale bulb reared its seven-foot height in the middle of the room. Webb reached out to it but halted the motion.

"It's a time machine," he said. "A real live time machine."

Dineen said from behind him, "Yes, of course. We call it a Chroney."

Webb stared at the thing in fascination. It was huge and strange-looking in the familiar kitchen, a curious inverted pear of gleaming milky material. He said in sudden alarm, "Get it out of here! This is an old building—that thing must weigh half a ton!"

"Oh, no." Dineen brushed past him and reached out for the Chroney. He tugged at its top and with bubble slowness it drifted to the floor. Webb goggled.

"It floats," he said foolishly. "What is it, solid helium?"

Dineen squinted at him in surprise. "You know about Chroney then? There is solid helium in it, of course. The coils are made of it, to avoid resistance. But the reason it is light is the anti-gravity."

"Anti-gravity?"

"Yes." Dineen's tone became professional. "Naturally," he said, "there must be some mass left unneutralized because otherwise how would the Chroney stay with the Earth's gravitational field when it travels in time? But on the other hand there is the danger of a seismic fault, and one needs as much mobility as one can get, of course, and—"

"Shut it off," Webb begged. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Dineen made the finger-shrug. "All right. But I must explain. I am a fugitive and I have come to you for help."

"Fugitive from what?"

Dineen hesitated. "I am unfit to live," he said. "At least that is the law in my time. The Code says that those who have The Sickness must die. Besides, I have always been unfit in many ways.

"Ever since I was a tiny child I have been"—he picked the word carefully—"prevented. I have been prevented from marrying, from working in the fields I loved, from doing everything I *wanted* to do. I grew up in an institution."

He glanced at Hildreth. "You see, Webb," he went on, "I am what they called an atavism. In every way I am more like humanity of the Twentieth Century than like my own. And so, when I fled, I came to you."

Webb tapped the milky-white egg thing. It gave out a single vibrant bell note, crystal clear. "In that," he said. "Lord! But wasn't there any place for you to hide in your own time? Some foreign country?"

Dineen laughed. "There is only one country in my time, Webb. It covers the world. It had to be that way after the Utter War, of course—it was the only way to save the planet. Just one government and it is everywhere. They would have found me anywhere in the world I might go. So I had to leave that world. I stole a Chroney and came to you. Because you are my twin."

Webb attempted a laugh. "Twin? I guess you mean great-great-grandfather or something like that."

"No. You are the twin of my mind. The body—there is a resemblance, too. Naturally, since the minds are so close. But I scanned all the ages and I found your mind, the twin of mine. And I came to it. I do not think they will follow. If they do—" He hesitated, and even in the darkness Webb Hildreth could see his face become suddenly old and tired. "If they do," he said, "I may have brought you death!"

HILDRETH coughed and then remembered to light his pipe. In the flare of the match Dineen winced and drew back and Webb hastily waved the match out. "What do you mean, death?" he asked.

Dineen said, "I told you that I was under sentence of execution. Because you are so much like me, because your brain-pattern corresponds with mine, they might well kill both of us. Oh, I have

taken precautions," he added hurriedly, and gestured at the time-bubble. "I have set up an interference field to make location difficult. But the field is not perfect."

Webb shook his head wearily. "This is too much for me," he said. He walked over and peered into the Chroney through a sort of sphincter-shaped opening. Inside was a comfortable little chamber, just big enough for two men of Dineen's size. Two padded leather-like armchairs faced a glowing blank screen, their broad arms studded with meters and buttons. Above the screen a tiny red light winked angrily.

"What's the light for, Ron?" Hildreth asked.

"Light?" Ron Dineen came up behind him, peered over his shoulder. Webb Hildreth heard his quick, alarmed gasp of breath. "Scanners!" he whispered tensely. "They're looking for us in another Chroney!"

There was a *ping* of metal under stress from within Dineen's time machine and at once a series of varicolored lights on the chair arms began to flash. Dineen whimpered an inarticulate oath. "Back, Webb!" he ordered. "I think—yes! They're trying to jam the vibrator!"

His arm circled Hildreth and he tugged—surprisingly strong for his anemic-looking state. Webb followed him, trotting into the other room.

There was a soundless, blue-white flash from inside the Chroney, then a sizzling sound. "Blown!" whispered Dineen. "They've blown the interference vibrator. Now there's nothing to stop them."

He retreated into the hall, drawing Hildreth with him.

"I've got a gun," Webb said confusedly. "In the bedroom. Let me go—I'll get it."

"*Gun!*" Dineen laughed hysterically. "No good, Webb! Look!" He pointed. At the corner of Webb's living-room there was a splitting sound and a crack ran up the plaster. It expanded, plaster and laths flaring out from it. A writhing gray fog filled the gap. There

was a crazy display of flashing colors in shapes whose geometry racked Hildreth's eyes. Then the fog solidified.

A gleaming shape filled the room, extending through the wall into the apartment behind. A ten-foot, top-shaped affair, broad as it was high, whose milky surface crawled with shifting amorphous streaks of polychromatic fire.

A gap opened, sphincter-wise, in the glimmering hull. From it boiled a pair of pale gorillas in clothes like Dineen's, stubby truncheons snouting from their large fists.

"The Peacemen!" moaned Dineen.

Webb gaped foolishly—but only for a second. The pressure of danger was too urgent for maundering.

"Duck, Ron!" he yelled. "I'll get a gun!" He left Dineen standing paralyzed, raced for the bedroom and the war-trophy Luger he kept by his bed.

The two gorilla-men pounced on the corpse-like Dineen, bore him to the floor and made cryptic motions around his body with what seemed a snake of chill blue flame. Hildreth saw that in one glance, then he was at the night table and clawing out the gun.

But someone was watching and there was a flicker of quick motion in the translucent depths of the time-top. He heard a brittle electrical crackling. A tenuous little globe, glowing with its own lambent fires, sped toward him and sputtered into extinction before it had quite reached him.

The discharge released as the fireball flashed out struck at him, sent him reeling to the floor. For a moment he lay sick and numbed, the Luger held loosely in his hand. The two Peacemen who were working over Dineen came to with a startled shout.

Webb yanked back the slide, jacked a shell into the Luger's chamber just as another of the little fireballs darted from the sphincter of the time-top. It flashed in a straight line for him, seemed to hesitate midway, then veered until it sizzled out against a metal lampstand.

Webb cursed and rolled over on his left side, snapped a shot into the entrance of the time-top.

WITHIN it someone screamed—a shrill agony-laden sound that went up and up. Abruptly there was a metallic whine from inside the top and the surface of it was suddenly alive with new snakes of multicolored flame. The top flickered oddly—and whisked dizzily out of sight!

But the two black-uniformed huskies were upon him. He scrambled to his feet with split-seconds to spare and lashed out at the nearer one as they closed in, driving the pistol barrel in a bone-crunching blow to the bridge of the nose that effectively disabled him for the moment.

The force of the blow knocked the pistol from Webb's grasp. Weaponless and alone, he faced the other guard. The man's rubbery mouth split in a sadistic grin. Slowly he raised his truncheon until it was aimed squarely at Webb's abdomen.

A lens in its tip winked malignantly, sparked out another of the fire-balls!

Webb was aware only of a chaotic blur of motion as he sprang, dodging the globe of electrical energy. One fist slammed down on the bend of the big man's elbow, throwing his forearm up.

Hildreth's hands slipped quickly around the thick wrist, jerked hard.

The arm bones didn't break, but the big man screamed in an amazingly shrill voice and dropped the truncheon.

Webb shifted his grip, twisted about, slammed him to the floor with a force that should have broken bones. But the big man bounced up like a rubber doll. He clawed at Webb's face, gouging away flesh, scrabbling for the eyes. He grunted and fell back as Webb slammed hammer-blows to the thick body.

There was no time for science as the big man rushed back to the fight. He fought clumsily but he didn't know how to quit. Webb's blows rocked him back but he came in again, time after time, trading brutal punches that sledged against Webb's ribs, mauled him, slammed him against the walls, stabbed at his face with stiffened fingers.

Gasping stertorously, Webb gave way before the man's superior weight. A staggering blow landed full over the heart, sent him reeling away with pain and nausea clouding his eyes.

With a raw and shapeless face that could no longer mirror emotion, the big man plodded brainlessly after him.

Webb, sobbing for breath against the wall, watched the implacable advance with sick eyes. Imperceptibly he tensed. His foot shot out in a vicious kick that caught the man just under the ribs.

There was a sharp hiccough of agony. As the big man folded at the waist, fell in a clumsy heap at his feet. Webb kicked him again. Just a tap behind the ear this time, just enough to keep him unconscious for awhile.

Webb took time for two long, ragged breaths. Then he searched for a moment, located his Luger and the two truncheons on the littered floor. He limped out in search of Ron.

Dineen was unhurt but trussed into rigid immovability. The metallic, glowing bonds held without knots and Webb found his fingers useless against them.

"Just a minute, Ron," he managed through puffed lips. He disappeared into the kitchen, skirting the pale egg of the Chroney and its tinkling alarms, and hobbled back a moment later with a pair of heavy, side-cutting pliers. As he wriggled them beneath the metallic tapes, the wail of a police siren split the air outside. Brakes squealed.

Ron's eyes widened with fright. "Peacemen?" he asked tensely.

Webb's head jerked in a short nod. "We call them cops." He threw his weight on the pliers. Metal snapped and there was a crackling of released energy as the bonds on Ron's wrists parted in a shower of sparks.

Some heavy object thudded on the stairs. Webb jammed the pliers into his pocket. "That rig of yours—the Chroney," he bit out. "Will it carry two?"

Ron, his feet still taped together, nodded.

"Then let's go!" Hildreth scooped him up. "They'll be shooting the lock out of the door in a second."

The bulging oval of the time machine still stood in the center of the room. Dineen waved at it dizzily as they approached and its side suddenly gaped in an opening large enough to admit a man. Webb tossed Ron Dineen through the gap just as heavy police feet reverberated in the hall.

The door slammed back and a flood of blue uniforms poured in.

Webb threw one alarmed glance over his shoulder, taking in the police and the two unconscious Peacemen, then dove after Ron into the time machine.

The sphincter closed behind him, and they were in thick gloom.

CHAPTER II

Into the Eons

THE shouts, the disordered noises of the police, were cut off sharply with the joining of the sphincter. An oppressive silence filled the tiny cabin of the Chroney.

Webb looked apprehensively at the smooth white wall where the sphincter had closed. "Well," he said after a moment, "let's get going."

Ron blinked at him from the vision screens, still blankly glowing. "No fear," he said mildly. "They can't get in. And I want my feet free."

Webb fished the big pliers from his pocket, eased himself with a wordless grunt to the narrow bit of floor. Breathing hard, he slid the jaws of the side-cutters beneath the hard glowing metal on Ron's ankles. Again there was the snap and the shower of flashing sparks. Webb released his breath in one final sigh. He rose.

"All right," he said. "Now can we go?"

Ron nodded and his fingers flickered among the buttons on the chair arm. The alarm bells and lights cut out and a single greenish glow cast its light on the screen before them.

"We go deeper into the past," he explained. "The farther we go, the harder to find us."

Hildreth relaxed in the cushioned chair next to Ron—as much as his aching muscles would permit. He tenderly touched his outraged face. No bones were broken, he thought—but every inch of skin from the waist up and a lot below hurt furiously from the pounding he had received.

But, Webb thought, he had hurt before—and this was a time machine!

Excitement began to pulse through him like a stimulating drug as he looked about in the dimness. He saw Ron kick over a foot switch that started a tingling vibration through the entire cabin. Ron's thin fingers delicately guided a knob-headed lever along its slot and the vibration became a rocking swaying sensation.

Webb stared over Ron Dineen's shoulder at the face of a large dial. A little like a speedometer it was and its readings clicked by at a furious rate. His glance fell on the screen. Its dull surface writhed with phantom images—the blurred gray ghosts of buildings that seemed to weave and grow and diminish, then a space of green rippling blankness that could only have been the time before the city existed.

A flicker of light from a smaller screen startled him. At quick irregular intervals its surface lit up with a pulsating glow and each time the glow withdrew again, shrank upon itself to become a trembling fuzzy line that bulged at its middle. It undulated across the mirror, expanded again into the unsteady glow.

A mellow little bellnote chimed softly each time the line wavered into being.

He jabbed an inquiring thumb into Ron's ribs. "What's that?" he asked.

Ron scowled unhappily at the flickering line. "The hunters, mind-brother. The glow in the detector shows that another time machine is trying to synchronize with ours. Each time the bell rings they are close." His mouth twisted wryly.

"They try to match our pace through time, you see. When they do they will fire electronic bolts to derange the mech-

anism of our machine. Like the one that blasted the interference field. And then our Chroney will stop and they will drag us back like specimens escaped from a zoo."

A GAIN the glowing time machine flashed by, the distorted line that marked its passage expanding into a warped image of a turret-topped ship. Its image lasted a fraction of a second while the turret whipped around. There was a glare that filled the screen and Webb was slammed against the wall as their machine lurched under a staggering concussion.

"Webb," came Ron's calm voice through the thick gloom. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," Webb answered briefly. "I hope so."

"Hang on, then. I'm going to try evasive action. It's dangerous, but—" he laughed with surprising confidence—"this is dangerous too!"

The illusory motion of the time machine altered and changed in character as Ron adjusted something Webb could not see. There was an instant of poised hesitation, then Webb felt that the floor had dropped from under him. There was no motion but he felt as though he were on a thousand-mile roller coaster making a series of sweeping dips.

Ron chuckled again. "That will confuse them," he said. "It may burn out the coils too—but what does that matter? I crossed the leads. Now we're getting a pulsating current through the drive. I doubt that they can match our velocity now."

Webb said nothing; he had heard too many men make statements that sounded like that just before enemy artillery got the range. His seeking hands found a padded grip. He braced himself against it and waited. Trouble was coming—Webb felt it in his bones—trouble that was coming in roaring with a red-hot blast.

Anxiously he watched the glowing screen. The shape of the pursuing time-top whipped through the blurred gray

movement on the plate. A hot white glare blinded him again. Again the floor rocked beneath his feet with the nearness of the blast.

In the chaotic seconds that followed, flash after blinding flash lit the cockpit like lightning, smashing through the dimness. The wounded time machine lurched insanely under the concussion of electronic blasts. And then a bolt landed squarely on them.

The machine slued crazily around. From somewhere within its mechanism came a tortured electrical scream as an oscillator went mad. A crushing force slammed down upon the two men, filling the time-egg's cockpit with the explosive pressure of a bursting bomb.

FRAGILE instruments shattered beneath that force. Gauges and meters were warped out of shape. The indestructible walls quivered and bulged—but they held.

And the earth-moving force found release at the weakest point of the time machine's hull. There was a tearing shredding report—and the sphincter ripped asunder.

With the opening of the gap there was a rush of colossal forces to the breach. Dineen and Webb Hildreth, like a pair of orange pips squeezed between the fingers, were hurled through the sphincter as the anti-gravity in the Chroney went mad. The sphincter pointed skyward and up into the air a dozen feet they shot—and fell buffeted to the earth.

Webb lost consciousness but only for a second. He shook the fog out of his

head and looked around. He lay in sunlight but even as he opened his eyes a cloud scudded across the face of the sun. Off to one side a figure ran blunderingly about in a patch of light. As Webb tried to focus on it it collapsed to the earth, moaning.

Webb pushed himself up on one elbow. A couple of yards from him the Chroney stood crookedly, its sphincter gaping and out of shape, its milky surface glowing no longer but black-streaked and scorched. The air about it was turbid with a subtle haze that told of cloaking forces invisible to the eye.

They were in a forest and the tall trees formed a wall about him. A wind roared through the branches, chilling the air. Overhead the sky was clouding up at frightening speed.

"Webb!" Ron Dineen's voice came to him, sharp with pain.

Webb stood up shakily and looked for the man from the future. He found Dineen lying face down in a clump of grasses, hands tight over his eyes to keep out the blinding light of day.

Webb dropped to one knee beside him. There was blood staining the grasses. "Ron," he said gently. "Let me help you."

"No," said Dineen, and his voice shook with a pain that could not be hidden. "It is too late to help this body, Webb. The body is smashed."

"No!" Webb said sharply but Dineen stopped him.

"Yes, Webb. Believe me, I am not sorry. The Sickness would have killed

[Turn page]

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me in another six months anyhow. And this body was no longer useful." His shoulders shook with effort but he forced himself to roll over, dragged himself up to lean against the bole of a tree.

He coughed convulsively, still shielding his eyes with tight-clamped palms.

"There is much to tell you, Webb," he said. "Listen. I spoke of the resemblance between us, remember? And it is not just the face and form, Webb. Our minds are brothers. Your brain-tracing is the same as mine. We are mental twins. I came to you because I needed you. Now I can tell you why."

Webb Hildreth said, "Please, Ron, don't talk now. Rest. When you're stronger—"

"That is never. Listen, Webb, the Chroney is still working, although it is out of control. It is broadcasting an interference pattern with the whole power of its energies behind it. What this will do I do not know. It is outside my experience. But for a while, I think, you are safe from the Peacemen. Long enough to do what I must ask you to do."

"Do?"

"Yes, Webb." Ron gasped convulsively and hesitated a painful second before he was able to go on. "I am a Sensitive, Webb. I found your brain-pattern, so much like my own, and I came to it. I am dying in this body. But I do not need to die for always if you will help. If you will welcome me . . ."

Webb said, startled, "Welcome you? You mean—"

"Welcome me into your mind. We are so close that our minds are en rapport! No, but you have not yet evolved the word and I can say it no better. It means that I can live in your mind, if you will let me. There will be two minds in your brain and we will become one mind in time.

"You will not know it at first but your consciousness will gradually add all of my own to itself and you will have the knowledge and experience of two lifetimes to draw upon. It will take time. The brain must adapt itself phys-

ically, create new neuron-paths. But it will happen."

"You want me to let you come into my mind." Webb's words were not fearful but wondering.

"Yes, please, Webb. I can do it only if you wish, of course. And—I promise it will be your body still. You will not lose your personality, your—what is the word you use?—your soul. But you will add part of mine."

Hildreth nodded, eyes compassionate on the racked, slight figure. He touched Dineen's thin shoulder.

"How do we start?" he asked.

RON DINEEN said, "Thank you, Webb," and then for a moment he was unable to speak. Droplets of sweat popped out on his forehead, trickled over his fingers. Then he said, "You will need something to focus your mind on. Have you something bright? A silver bell or a knife blade?"

"Will a watch crystal do?"

"That will do." Dineen's voice was fading. "Look at it, Webb. Catch a point of light on it if you can and look at it. Think about it. Just think about the light."

Webb twisted the glass in his fingers, staring into it, seeking a reflection from the dimmed sun. Dineen's weakening voice was in his ear, repeating, over and over, "Think of the light, Webb. Think that there is nothing in the world but the light. Just that point of light. . . ."

Head bent, Webb stared at the tiny highlight on the watch crystal. His fingers shifted and the light winked out but Webb stared on. Dineen's voice faded into a whisper and beyond, almost soundless.

After a long time Webb knew that he was seeing the watch no longer. There was no watch to see, nothing to see, no forest, no dying man before him. There was nothing but a growing sound that began with the drumming roar of wind through the trees and became the shriek of a tempest, sending him whirling leaflike out of the world, out into black, empty space.

A disembodied ego, Webb floated in black limbo, lost, bewildered, frightened, until he heard a warm voice from out of the emptiness around him.

"It's all right, Webb," said Dineen's voice, soundless but real.

Webb groped to answer. "Where—where are we?"

A soundless chuckle. "Nowhere, Webb. This is just thought." The voice changed minutely, became serious, intent.

"My heart," it said. "My heart just stopped beating. I must hurry. I'm coming into your mind, Webb. You may feel something but don't fight it. It won't hurt you, Webb—my word on that. For a long time you won't even know I'm there. But I'll be there. Are you ready, Webb?"

The thought of assent flashed from Webb. A pleasant warmth pervaded him, lingered. There was a strange, ego-twisting sense of duality, as though he were two persons staring into a double mirror. And then he shrieked voicelessly with the pangs of an expansion of being that seemed to drive every atom of him to the far corners of the cosmos.

The cold of utter space crept into him. He fell with a sweeping rush, tumbling down and down, down and down again.

He awoke.

Nothing was changed.

He looked around him. The wind still tore at the thick foliage of the trees, drove the tumbled dark clouds over the glade. Ron Dineen still lay at his feet.

But Dineen was dead.

WITH a sigh Webb rose wearily to his feet. He touched the limp, slight form and turned away. Friends had died before, from Normandy to the Rhine. There was nothing to help it. The living were obligated only to the living and he could do nothing more here.

Tired, he stared at the blackened, seared shape of the Chroney. The haze around it had thickened and was full

of an uneasy motion. Webb could not understand it but in a few hours of his life he had found too many things he could not understand. One more did not matter.

Wearily he limped toward the machine. Perhaps it was still working. If it were, battered though it was from the electronic bolts of the Peacemen, it might serve to carry him home.

It was hard walking. The storm wind had risen to gale intensity, shooting stinging drops of rain like bullets before it. He seemed to be hobbling right into the force of the wind, leaning against it, almost unable to make headway.

Webb stopped as realization came to him. It was something more than the force of the gale that pushed him back. The anti-gravity of the Chroney—it was still on, still thrusting out with the mighty impetus that had hurled him and Ron Dineen into the air. Webb thrust against it for a moment of blind unreason. Then common sense made him stop.

No power on earth—at least none that Webb Hildreth could control—could carry him through that invisible screen of force. The Chroney was there but for all practical purposes it might be back in the shop that made it, uncounted centuries away.

Webb stood silent for a long moment. Never in all the years of the world had any man been so alone, he thought. The forest around him was not New York—yet, according to Ron Dineen, the Chroney did not move in space, only in time. If New York's teeming skyscrapers were not around him it could be only because he was in an era where they did not yet exist.

And where was the way that led home?

Webb stood and wondered.

Dully he gazed at the Chroney, only a few feet away from him by any yardstick but as far removed as the farthest star. If he could somehow circumvent the field of force—

Yet he knew that even that would not help. He ticked off the points in his

mind. First, he couldn't get inside the Chroney. Second, if he could, he had no idea of how to operate it. Third, if he could and if he had, his last sight of the interior of that tortured machine gave little hope that it would be in running condition now.

No, there was no easy way out for Webb Hildreth, he knew that. And besides, what of the Peacemen? Ron Dineen had said they might follow—and he had said that the curious field of force around the Chroney might be dangerous, might somehow go completely out of control.

What that might mean, Webb Hildreth could not know. But he was sure in his heart that it would be bad. Everything was bad.

The memory of that last heart-tearing scene with Ron Dineen came to him. Was it a dream—or had there really been that curious, dizzily unbelievable episode in the half-world of thought, when another's mind had crept into his for life?

Awkwardly Webb tried to project a thought to the mind of Ron Dineen.

"Ron!" he called soundlessly. "Ron! If you can hear me—please answer."

There was no answer. Webb remembered vaguely that Dineen had said there would be no trace of his presence—at first. And once again he felt more than ever alone. Alone in a silent forest crossed only by the roaring wind.

Alone? No! He spied a flicker of motion among the trees, the quickest glimpse of shadowy manlike figures.

His voice rose in a shout that was loud even above the shriek of the growing storm. Open-handed, his arm went up in a gesture beckoning to the hidden figures.

CHAPTER III

Castaways of Time

FROM among the trees came an answering cry.

A single individual stepped from the forest at the edge of the rain-whipped

glade, stared intently at Webb for a long moment.

Others slipped from the concealment of the trees behind him, dark-skinned, breech-clouted men, lances in their hands and short heavy bows. With guttural exclamations they trotted up to surround Webb like curious children.

"Indians!" Webb said aloud. "Good lord!" Yet, he thought, it was logical enough. America had been populated by Indians in its past and he was in its past. At least, he thought gratefully, he was not so far back as to be in the Neanderthaler's period or the day of the great dinosaurs.

The coppery-skinned leader strode up to Webb and fired a string of unintelligible syllables at him. "Sorry," Webb said, shaking his head. "That is, unless you happen to speak English?"

There were grunts. One of the Indians pointed to Webb's face, covered with the first beginnings of a pale beard. There were surprised murmurs. With a complete lack of hostility they fingered his clothing, examined his light skin.

Hildreth watched them in deepening dismay. Their actions were proof positive that there was no white man for many miles around—probably, he thought, no white man on the entire continent. Every action, every guttural word they spoke was an added proof that he was indeed marooned in the depths of time.

Savages or not, he thought, at least they were company and he was that much up on his previous state of affairs. He began a simple experiment in sign language. Gesturing at the chief, he pointed to the glimmering bulk of the Chroney, then to himself.

A howl went up from the Indians, startling Webb out of half a year's growth. Good lord, he thought, what did I do then?

But it was nothing he had done. A swoop of shadow that was shadow of no storm-cloud angled across the rain-lashed grasses of the clearing. Webb, following the frightened eyes of the Indians, looked up to see what made it.

A glider, gleaming a metallic gray, swept overhead. It circled, skimmed along the clearing at treetop height. A gust of violent wind caught it and spun one wing up. The sailplane wobbled crazily as its pilot fought to regain control but it was too late. The ship slued off to one side and crashed violently into the tree trunks at the downwind end of the clearing.

If Webb had been in a state of mental turmoil before here was confusion thrice confounded. Just as he had oriented himself in time, placed his period as before the white man's conquest of America—along came this gleaming metallic flying machine, obviously a product of a technological civilization, to throw him back into limbo.

The sheer incredulity of it halted him in his tracks, staring bug-eyed at the ragged wreck of the machine, while the Indians howled about him. By the time he was able to move the last of them was vanishing with frightened celerity into the dark woods.

For the space of a heartbeat Webb stood frozen. Then he shouted hoarsely and ran stiff-legged through the beating rain to the glider.

Halfway to the crumpled craft something ripped past him with a hissing tearing rush. Behind him was the crash of an explosion.

In mid-stride he had analyzed the sound, comprehended it with the help of a fading memory of a day of rocket-torn hell at St. Lo, let his knees buckle beneath him. He dropped flat, hugging the wet ground.

"Fine hospitality!" he snarled as one hand slid back to his pocket, dragged out the Luger. Another rocket shell tore over his head with a noise like ripping rags.

Easy, he told himself, take it easy. Don't get hurt, Hildreth—but don't hurt this guy, either!

Panting a little, he snaked carefully over the sodden grass, going the long way around until he hit the shelter of the trees. It was easy then. A quick crouching rush that carried him right up to the twisted metal of the glider,

blunt pistol muzzle snouting through a torn crevice.

"Throw 'em out!" he snapped. "Throw your guns out, and come out with your hands up!"

No answer.

"All right," Webb said resignedly. He twisted the pistol barrel up, squeezed the trigger. The slug tore through thin metal plates and whined off into the forest.

"Come out of there!" he repeated.

There was a pause, then a whispered oath from inside. A long-barreled pistol thumped to the ground. The head and shoulders of the glider's pilot came into view, wriggling out of the wreckage, and Hildreth flattened cautiously against his perch.

The pilot slid out, stood slump-shouldered and weary, turned to face Hildreth.

Webb's eyes opened wide but the pistol in his fist remained rock-steady. "So you're a woman!" he said. "Murderous sort of wench. Do you speak English?"

The monosyllabic reply was low-voiced and sullen.

Webb grinned. "All right. Why were you shooting at me with that Buck Rogers gadget?"

The girl stared at him. "Why shouldn't I shoot you? You're not in the gang. I'd have killed you, if I hadn't been so twisted up in there that I could hardly move, let alone aim straight."

Hildreth eased himself from the sliding surface of the glider and approached her, gun arm hanging easily by his side. She stiffened as he came near.

He halted placatingly. "I'm not going to hurt you," he told her. "I need help as badly as you do, so—uh!"

A KNIFE flashed coldly as she dove for him. He sidestepped swiftly, thrust out a leg to trip her, batted the blade from her hand as she fell.

He clamped a foot on the knife and panted, "Behave, will you? If I wanted to hurt you I would have done it before this."

She climbed to her feet silently. Webb said, "That's better. Look, I need help,

I tell you. So do you. Now stand still, and tell me what this is all about. Why should you kill me just because I'm not in your gang?"

Eyebrows raised, she regarded him quizzically. Finally she said, "You *are* queer! If you're not going to kill me could we at least get in out of the rain?"

Webb nodded. As a precaution he scooped up her weapons, added them to the two shock-truncheons he had got back in the apartment and the Luger. How long ago that scene in the apartment had been—or, he thought wryly, how long from now!

"Go ahead," he told her. Cautiously he crawled into the glider feet first, ahead of the girl. He watched carefully as she wriggled into the tiny space left free.

"All right," he said. "Talk."

The girl shrugged and rubbed her shoulder where it had collided with a tree-root as she fell. "I'm one of the Brooklyns from across the river," she said. "The only one now, I guess. The Hellgate gang raided us and I got away but I don't think anybody else did.

"I don't know what to do now—with my gang wiped out I'm done for. Oh, and my name's Mag, for all the good it'll do either of us. With your gang gone you're nine-tenths dead anyhow."

Webb fumbled in his pocket, poked a cigarette at her. She took it hesitantly, rolling it around in her fingers.

"What's this?"

"Cigarette," Webb told her. "Haven't you seen one before?" He lit one for himself with a quick puff, held it out to the girl. "Here, try mine. Like this." He showed her.

Clumsily she sucked at the cigarette, exploding almost instantly into a fit of coughing that nearly strangled her. Red-faced and with streaming eyes she backed away from Webb as far as the confined space would let her. Incredulously she watched as he retrieved it from the floorplates and drew in the smoke with enjoyment.

"Keep it," she told him hoarsely. "What gang are you from anyway? I never heard of those things before. Nev-

er saw a gun like yours before either. You're a queer one and no mistake!"

"Never mind where I'm from, Mag," Webb told her. He smiled wryly. "You wouldn't believe it anyway. What year are you from? Maybe I'll tell you after you answer that."

"What year? Two Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty, of course, what year do you think it is?"

Webb chuckled mirthlessly. "Do you have Indians in Two Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty? For me, a couple of hours ago, it was Nineteen Hundred Forty-nine. For you it was Two Thousand Two Hundred Fifty. Judging by the looks of this place, the local lights probably would figure it at Nine Hundred AD, give or take a couple of hundred years—that is, if they've got around to figuring years at all. Look around you, Mag—does this look like the place you come from?"

The glider shifted a little beneath the battering of the wind, was carried by it a couple of feet. Hastily they scrambled from it before it capsized, stood again in the cold rain. Thunder exploded deafeningly in the black sky.

"Look around you, Mag," Webb repeated, the water streaming over him.

She clutched his arm in the first stirring of fright. "No! I saw that just before I crashed. One moment I was over old New York, aiming toward the up-drafts in Wall Street Valley—and then there were just trees under me! But there's a town to the west. I saw it before I crashed. And that's strange too. A real town, like they must have been before the Big War, with houses that go up to the clouds and aren't ruined at all! I'd never seen a town like that and I've flown all around New York and beyond in my sail-ship."

"A city?" Webb was almost brutal as he grabbed her. "Let's get over there, Mag—fast! We might find help yet. We might find New York!"

Mag wrenched herself from his grasp, leaped away. "They'll kill me! I'll buy it sooner or later but I'm not crazy enough to walk into it!"

"No, no, Mag, they won't kill you,"

Webb laughed, light-headed with the relief and exultation her information had given him. "I promise they won't. Let's go and I'll tell you how things were in the Twentieth Century on the way."

THEY huddled under the trees until the rain let up a bit and then they struck out toward the west, Webb leading and Mag trailing tirelessly behind. Occasionally he looked around and always he saw her twisted, reassuring grin. She was a deceptively strong woman, he realized, as well as an extremely attractive one. He began to wish that they had met under more pleasant conditions, with more time for personalities and light small talk.

In silence they went along until abruptly Webb halted. Mag came up beside him, staring at what he saw. "What do you make of that?" he demanded.

She looked. A yard ahead was a ragged declivity like an earthquake fault. It had a look of raw newness about it as though some fantastic excavating machine had just then come by and chopped away a one-sided ditch. The edge of the little cliff was crumbling brown earth, slick with rain. A pair of forty-foot oaks that grew on the very lip of the cliff had toppled, their giant roots thrust into the air.

And beyond the cliff, through the persistent drizzle, they saw silent, impassible everglades, dankly steaming.

"Looks as if it just happened," Webb commented. "Where did *that* come from?"

Mag said, "You must have brought it with you. I never saw it before. And Webb, it looks so *old*."

"Smells it too," Webb said succinctly, wrinkling up his nose. From the marshy lowlands ahead came a powerful stench of rotting vegetation. "You know," Webb said slowly, "if my geology professor was right, this is what the earth must have looked like in prehistoric times. Long before mankind—before mammals even, I think."

Mag said, "What does that mean?"

"I hate to think what it means,"

Webb said reluctantly. He shrugged and made an effort to get back to business. But the lift had gone out of his voice as he said, "Old or new, it's in the way." He glanced right and left along the declivity and frowned. "I don't see any end to it. What do you think, Mag? Shall we try to go around it, or push right through?"

Mag said, "I don't know, Webb. I don't recognize any landmarks and I'm afraid of getting lost. If we start drifting off the path to the city—"

Webb snorted. "What path? Anyway, don't you think we'd get lost in that muck?" He gestured to the swamp. "No, I vote for pushing along the edge of it for awhile. We can try going straight through as a last resort."

There was authority in his voice and Mag yielded to it unprotestingly. "All right, Webb," was all she said.

To the north the ground had a slight upward slope and to the north they went, forest on one side, flanked on the other by bog and morass. In spite of the soft weeping rain the air had become heavily humid with the moldy jungle odor that drifted off the swamp.

That swamp—Webb had never seen anything like it. A clod kicked into it broke through the flat, dull, green surface, sending up a thick splash of dead black water. Nothing moved in it as far as his eye could see—nothing but trees and ferns and utterly still water.

It was the trees growing out of the expanse of greenish slime that made Webb's eyes narrow in continued speculation. Great, massive-trunked things that reared a hundred feet into the air and exploded into masses of delicate lacework. Others whose tall shafts ended in great bunches of grassy leaves. Giants encased in a scaly armor that did not look like bark, with narrow leaves that twisted into huge, complex cones on the herringbone branches.

And the ferns! Looping arborescent monsters! Their feathery fronds were dwarfed by the huge trees about them, yet some of them stretched sixty feet and more toward the sullen sky.

Webb shook his head. If this was a

swamp in the twentieth century United States of America, it was no swamp he had ever seen. It might be in America, he thought ruefully, but not the twentieth century. Not by some millions of years. It was anachronism. It was the Paleozoic period, lost and wandering about, fifty million years after its time!

Webb turned to the girl. "Stay away from that edge," he warned. "Heaven knows how deep that muck is. If you fall in you'll probably stay."

MAG gave him her lopsided grin, a little strained now, he thought. "Don't worry about me," she said. Then, her eyes widening, she screamed, "Webb! Behind you!"

Webb whirled, and leaped forward with a shout. From out of the red-scaled trees darted a needle-bodied monstrosity with buzzing, four-foot wings. It banked in toward them, the harsh sound of its flight like a midget motor. Like a dragonfly, it looked—but a dragonfly enormously larger than any Webb had seen hovering over a summer pond. Large enough to kill!

Webb clawed for his Luger but there was no time for that; the huge insect was too close. He dodged, grabbed up a fallen branch. It whirred past him and he could see its serrated jaws open and clamp shut in a grasp that nothing could escape. Just like a boxer, he thought in a corner of his mind, flexing his arm muscles for the fight.

Mag flung herself at the ground, and the monster skidded past her, halted in mid-air, whirled and darted back. Webb leaped to save her, swinging his impromptu club. The blow missed, but the thing dodged aside, gave Webb time to shift his grip on the branch. It came buzzing in again to the attack. Webb brought his weapon around in a desperate sweeping slash that sliced across the big insect's thorax.

It went spinning crazily into a bush, tangled there, its four-foot double wings rattling angrily. Webb spun to face it. His hands moved on the stick, and he lunged from the left foot, throwing his weight behind it. His right foot stamped

hard. His body swept forward and his arms continued the action.

There was little sound as the branch slid into the monster insect's bulging head. Its wings continued to rattle with the unquenchable energy in its body but it was dead.

Mechanically Webb twitched his crude lance free of the insect carrion. For the space of a heartbeat he stood panting, hearing the blood pound through his head. A sound from behind him jerked him around.

"Mag!" he explained, and leaped to help her up. "Are you all right?"

She looked at him from under lowered eyelids, then bent to brush the clinging mud and leaves from her tunic. "I guess so," she said. "Outside of being scared to death. Why did you bother with a stick? Why didn't you tear it to pieces with your bare hands?"

Webb grinned. "I forgot about the gun, I guess," he admitted. "Anyway, I killed it, didn't I?"

"It and me too, pretty near. What do we do if another of those things comes along? You'd better give me back my own gun. I'll feel better."

Webb hesitated only a second, then his grin broadened. "Well, all right," he said. "Just let me get my breath." He scraped the moss off a boulder, offered it to Mag and found a log for himself.

From a pocket he pulled her little rocket pistol and held it a moment in his hand, looking it over. The barrel was long but the rest of the gun was a watchmaker's charm. Even the magazine was no larger than the end of his thumb. He turned it over curiously.

Mag's voice interrupted him. "Webb," she said, with a note of strain. He looked up, ready for anything.

For anything but what he saw. He heard the racket of an express train crashing through the air overhead and, looking up, saw what made it. Out of the drifting gray clouds and the rain shot a roaring, whistling shape. A wingless, streamlined thing with a comet's tail of burnished incandescence.

A rocket ship! Shooting toward the west—toward the city!

CHAPTER IV

City of Living Fear

WEBB stood staring at the soggy sky and for the moment he had forgotten the girl. Unmindful of the rain that pattered past the leaves overhead to drip on his upturned face, he whispered, "What a ship! Good Lord, what a ship!" Men could go to the moon in a ship like that, he thought—and probably did.

Moonrocket or not, the ship was swallowed up in an instant by the dark clouds, left boiling from the flaming force of its jet. In spite of the muggy air from the swamp Webb began to feel the chill of the rain. He turned back to Mag.

But she wasn't there.

He said sharply, "Mag! Where are you?" and a bush parted silently. Mag slithered wetly from the thicket.

"Where'd you go?" he demanded.

Mag's eyes swept the wet skies. "That rocket," she said, and the tone of her voice explained everything.

Webb blinked. With mild surprise he found he still held her pistol. He tossed it to her. "Put it away," he said. "Why are you afraid of rockets?"

Deftly she caught the weapon, slipped it into the clumsy holster at her hip. She said, "I've seen two rockets in my life before this one. The oldest men of the gang said they were likely the last two on earth. The first one came when I was too young to carry a gun, and it almost wiped out the gang that time. But we scattered into the woods, and after awhile it went away.

"I was older when the second rocket showed up. It dropped bombs and strafed us but the men in it didn't know how to handle it very well. We shot it to bits. There haven't been any since but we remembered."

Webb said, "That was no war rocket, just now."

"What other kind is there?" Mag's expression was wide-eyed. "The men in

that second rocket, those that lived to reach the ground, didn't talk our kind of talk. But they were warriors. We could tell that. We had to kill them finally. They wouldn't stop fighting us."

"Well," said Webb, "that rocket was heading for the city. Maybe the boys in it are from the same outfit that bombed your gang and they sound like heels to me. But all the same they've got the only civilization that we know of around here. We'll go along the way we were.

"The only thing," he finished, "the only thing that bothers me is that that rocket isn't from my century either, Mag. It's not from yours, it's not from mine and I don't believe it belongs to the Indians. Where does that leave us?"

Mag shrugged.

"It leaves us in a peculiar kind of spot," Webb told her. "It looks to me as though something funny has happened to time. What it is I cannot say—but look at the evidence. We have traces of four different eras all around us—five if you count that man-sized bumblebee that jumped us ten minutes ago and those funny-looking trees."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mag said.

Webb nodded. "That's what I told Ron Dineen," he said. "Now I guess I'm talking the same kind of gibberish." He puzzled over the thought for a moment. "He said the time machine was doing something funny," Webb remembered. "Broadcasting static or something of the sort. I wonder—"

"What?" Mag's eyes on him were confident, sure that he would find an answer.

Webb shook his head. "I don't know," he said. He stood up creakingly. "Let it rest for awhile. Maybe we'll find things out when we get to the city. All set to push on?"

Mag's expression was dubious but she said nothing. Silently she slipped the pistol out of its holster, checked the loading and slid it back. With a wary eye on the dim stagnant swamp whence the dragonfly had come, she fell in after Webb as he moved out cautiously along its edge.

DARKNESS was close by the time they had struggled through the outskirts of the dank Paleozoic fen. Only a range of low, rolling hills, hardly more than gentle billows in the flat land, stood between them and the city.

It lay before them in the gloom now, nestled in a shallowed valley.

It was dusky and foggy, with lightning flashes playing through the clouds. Hildreth caught glimpses of slender columnar pylons, yearning toward the black skies, buildings that must have towered a mile high or more, laced with cobwebby bridges, flanked with flying buttresses.

It was not any city of Webb Hildreth's experience. It was a city from another world—or from a dream.

Looking at the fairy city, Mag sank to the ground. Wearily she brushed back the black hair that had straggled rain-driven about her face.

"Do you think we can do any good there, Webb?" she asked tiredly. "It's a mighty big place."

"We can try," he said. "If we knew what we were looking for, exactly, it would help." He rubbed a hand along his bristly chin, pulled it away and inspected the mud that clung to it. "We'd best clean up a bit somehow. Then—we'll see if these people can help us. It ought to be easy. Only angels could build a city like that."

Somewhat later, and a little cleaner, they stumbled through the darkness down the hill. The rain had stopped but racing clouds hid the moon and little light came from the towers of the city.

There was a road—curiously graded in a concavity, like the half of a hollow tube—that drove arrow-straight toward the city once they found it. They followed it, thankful for the ease of walking its oddly resilient surface afforded, yet warily ready to leap into the flanking trees at the first sign of danger.

For a long while they followed that strange road, made for what strange vehicles neither of them could imagine. The only sound was the chirping of crickets and now and then the lonesome wail of some night bird.

And then, abruptly, they were within the city.

It was as sudden as a snap of the fingers. There were no outbuildings to warn them they were entering, nothing but the sudden monstrous looming of nameless structures.

The city was dark as death—and as quiet.

Black bulks of buildings, visible only because they were blacker than the darkness that surrounded them, reared about the two. In the gloom they were shapeless, topless. Webb's heels rang on hard pavement. Cold and clear his footsteps were flung back to him by the walls pressing closely in.

He stopped. "Mag," he whispered. The girl pressed close to him, and he could sense her nervousness. "Stick close," he told her. "Hang onto me and don't let go unless there's trouble."

"All right," she whispered. "Webb—" "What?"

"Do you hear someone following us?"

He listened. Silence, except for the distant crickets. "No," he said.

There was the echo of her sigh. "I guess I was wrong," she said but he felt her move closer.

They went on for a quarter of a mile without a sight or a sound, and Webb Hildreth felt the tension grow inside him. Then it broke. Someone was coming.

Someone—or something. Whatever it was, it snuffed along with a curiously eager sound of inhaling breath. The Luger sprouted from Webb's fist and he pressed back against the wall, touched what might have been a doorway.

He ducked into it, jerking the girl after him. Utter darkness swallowed them.

The panting sounds grew louder and passed by. Webb dimly glimpsed the hunched outlines of some huge turtle-backed thing nosing swiftly along the street. A truck of some mad futuristic sort? Possibly—but Webb doubted that any machine would have made that snuffling sound. He grimaced in the dark and turned to the girl.

And the girl was gone!

"Mag?" he said querulously, stretching out his arms. "Mag!" Black fear rose in his throat as he groped for her frantically. Cold walls met his touch, nothing more.

There was a half-heard stirring in the street but Webb ignored it. "Mag!" he cried, full-voiced. He beat against the empty wall, searching for the door that must have opened to swallow her.

And then he twisted around, trapped, to face what was in the street as the half-heard noises became the clear sound of voices, low and cautious but carrying to him.

"That doorway on the right—someone's in it."

"One man only. Throw the spy-light on him. If he isn't Citizen—blast him!"

Webb Hildreth didn't wait. He felt a flicker of heat—infra-red rays? He wondered and thought of the sniper-scopes of the Pacific in the war so far behind him. He felt the warmth breathing across his face and hands and he got out of there fast.

A startled shout rose behind him as he scuttled along the dark avenue. A harsh, electric sound tore the air apart. Dazzling lights exploded beside him, dug into a wall and tore out flaming goutts of molten metal that hissed and splattered about him.

Darkness slammed down again, impenetrable after the moment's flare of light. Webb twisted aside to dart into a narrow way the flash had shown him. Head hunched down, cringing within himself in anticipation of another bolt of annihilation, he ran up a spiralling ramp that rose under his feet.

There was no end to the twisting ramp, no break to the walls around him. Up Webb went, and up, until his legs turned to weary lead. Still the ramp slanted on ahead of him. Perilously close behind were the soft voices of the pursuit and only the ramp's curving lines protected him from their weapons.

And then, so suddenly that he fell, the ramp leveled off. There was an open space before him. Webb lurched across it. . . .

But his luck was played out.

There was another babble of voices behind him and a second bolt ripped close by. He reeled from the impact of the noise it made. Lightning gouged into his hip, lava sizzled against his flesh and Webb Hildreth went tumbling down, batted aside by the electric blast.

He had a moment of clear vision, and saw that the pavement fell away beneath him. One hand scrabbled blindly to find the edge of the chasm. For the tick of a second his weary fingers held.

"What the devil!" thought Webb Hildreth, and his fingers relaxed. He plummeted into black space.

UNDER a sullen scarlet sky Webb searched for water. His soul cried out for it as he lay burning in a barren, blood-red waste. From the flaming sky a monstrous finger came down to poke him tentatively, roll him over.

A reedy voice from outside his dream said, "See in the pockets, Tam. He can't hurt you. He's a deader sure."

The dream popped like a bubble. Webb groaned and his eyes clicked open.

Over him a gnome crouched open-mouthed, astonishment almost hiding the stupidity of its avaricious little eyes.

"Water!" Webb croaked.

The gnome tumbled backward. "He be alive, Cronner!" it quavered accusingly. A second wizened troll's face swam mistily into range of Webb's eyes.

It squinted at Webb. "You been't a deader?" it said dubiously.

"Water, please," Webb whispered again. "Help me up."

The gnomes started back in alarm. "Oh, no," they shrilled. "You be a Trog! You might do us hurt!"

They scurried away with the light rustle of mice in a wall. Webb coughed rackingly and closed his eyes against a glare from above. The sun, at least, had been no dream. Overhead the sky was fiercely bright. Webb saw that he lay under a ten-foot drop, and wondered how long he had been there.

He looked around for the ragged little men but they were gone like the tag-end of a dream. They probably had

been a dream, he thought, half delirious with pain from a dozen wounds—and from hunger, from fever, from thirst. His fingers scrabbled aimlessly beside him and dully he noticed that they were in cool grass.

He heard the scampering trolls come back and with them a heavier tread. A shadow fell over his face.

Short-booted legs straddled him. A pleasant, but utterly impersonal, voice said, "You don't die easily, do you, Trog?"

Webb looked up past the boots to see a uniformed man, web-belted and with a canteen hooked to the belt. His eyes clung to the canteen. "Water!" he said hoarsely.

From out of sight came the squeaking of the trolls. "He said that before," they told the booted man. "When us caught him, just like now, he asked for water."

The booted man chuckled. "He's thirsty," he said. He knelt beside Webb, lifted his head, held the canteen to his lips. The water was tepid but sweet. Greedily Webb sucked it in until the man said, "Take it easy, Trog. Don't kill yourself. Leave that job to us."

The trolls giggled and squeaked approvingly. "Us'll take care of that, hey, soldier!"

The booted man said mildly, "Us will, will us? You corpse-eating rats, get out of here before I turn this Trog loose on you." The trolls squealed in terror and scuttled away. The man laughed once. "Vermin," he said. "We'll clean them out of the city one day."

With a long sigh Webb pushed the canteen away. "Thanks," he said. "You're a soldier?"

The man shrugged. "Yes—or an exterminator. I kill Trogs—Trog."

Webb protested, "I'm no Trog! I don't even know what a Trog is!"

The man was silent but his grin was an unsatisfactory answer.

Webb slumped back: "Take a look at my leg," he asked. "If I have one, that is. I can't get up to see."

"Oh, your legs are there. It doesn't matter, you know. You won't need them

when we kill you." He hesitated. "Still," he said amiably, "you do have a hole in your hip. I might as well get an aid car. Can you hold out by yourself for a minute?"

Webb nodded. It was hard for him to think, with his whole body taut and throbbing under hammer blows of pain. His stomach muscles were hard with it. To take a breath was almost impossible and he decided that there were broken ribs as well as the wound in his hip. Experimentally he tried to move his right arm.

That one refused to work. He gave up, and concentrated on the other. It seemed in operating order and he dragged it up across his chest. At the motion, slow and painful as it was, the booted man jumped back. One hand whipped to the wide belt, came back with a flare-mouthed gun.

"Hold it!" he snapped, all amiability gone.

Hildreth lay still. He said irritably, "I won't hurt you, friend. Are you going to call that ambulance?"

Settling back comfortably, the soldier said, "Relax, Trog. It's called."

Sulkily Webb rolled his head aside. Trog, he thought—gnomes and trolls.

He saw more grass and short stunted trees. Above the trees, glinting under the morning sun, the spires and fairy bridges of the city he had seen—when? Had that been last night? Had it been only a few hours back that Mag and he had come here?

Mag! Webb had forgotten her in the pain of his wounds but memory flooded back. He opened his lips before he thought. Then he thought and closed them. He dared not ask this man about her. These folk—killed Trogs. If she were still alive and free, silence was the best help he could give her.

Trog, he thought again. He turned his head back. "What's a Trog?" he demanded.

A smile curved the man's thin lips. "Still playing, eh, Trog? Well, keep it up. Still, you ought to know what Trogs are, even if you say you aren't one. Let me put it this way—either you're a Citi-

zen and live in the city, or you're a Trog and live God-knows-where in some stinking cave or other. You're not a Citizen. Then you must be a Trog. And we kill Trogs. Simple?"

"No," Webb said sourly. "What about that ambulance?"

"Don't be impatient, Trog," the man admonished gently. "Here it comes now."

CHAPTER V

Stay of Execution

WEBB felt himself all over, and could not believe what his senses told him. A worm of hysteria maggoted in his brain. He had been dragged here, half-dead and the rest dying, and placed on a white table under a bank of lamps. He'd blacked out for a moment—surely it was no more than that—and when he had come to . . .

He was whole again. Miracles had been done. There were no aches. The arm that had certainly been fractured flexed freely. The great charred wound in his hip was just a patch of fresh pink skin. And—ridiculous topper—some unknown force had shaved him and combed his hair!

A bored and unattractive woman came in to inspect him. "All right," she said. "Get off and follow the messenger. He knows where to take you."

The messenger was a stocky soldier, who kept a careless hand on his gun as

he led Webb out of the medical chamber. Once Webb coughed and the rattlesnake speed with which his "escort" whirled convinced him not to try to get away.

Silently they marched along a mile of descending resilient corridor, past the intersecting shafts of other deep-buried tunnels. They entered a warmly lit room. Remembering the long descent, Webb glanced apprehensively at the ceiling but there was no hint of the quintillion tons of rock that hung above it.

Athletic-looking men turned from their desks or conversations to eye him. There was a military air to the place and the guide confirmed Webb's guess.

"Defense Center," he explained briefly, and steered Webb to one of the desks. A girl in brief costume of green looked up. "The Trog," he said economically.

The girl nodded and beckoned. "In. Captain Orcutt's waiting."

They opened a door into a hybrid chamber, half office, half laboratory. A stocky man in cool green coveralls, head cropped like a Heidelberger, stood waiting with hands clasped behind his back. With him was the booted man whom Webb had met before.

There was a silence. The booted man said, "Well, Orcutt?"

Orcutt nodded. "Trog, all right. Put him in the chair, Simons."

Simons waved negligently to Webb. "Sit," he said, and followed him to the indicated chair, a seat soft as the clouds that angels sit on. Webb sat and the

[Turn page]



The Dark Continents of Your Mind

DO YOU struggle for balance? Are you forever trying to maintain *energy, enthusiasm, and the will to do?* Do your personality and power of accomplishment ebb and flow—like a stream controlled by some unseen valve? Deep within you are minute organisms. From their function spring your emotions. They govern your *creative ideas and moods*—yes, even your enjoyment of life. Once they were thought to be the mysterious seat of the soul—and to be left unexplored. Now cast aside superstition and learn to direct intelligently these *powers of self.*

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booted man peered into his eyes, swinging down a little device that sent a pencil beam of light into the pupils.

Webb blinked, then held his eyes open. Get it over with, he thought. Pulse and respiration were checked. Dime-sized metal contacts were attached to his temples and the palms of his hands, placed beneath his tongue.

Then Simons stood back. "Are you comfortable?" he asked anxiously.

Webb nodded. "Not that you really care," he said.

Orcutt said, "Hostile reaction, Simons. Notice. Normal, I would say."

Simons agreed. "If Trogs are ever normal. Now lean back, Trog. This won't hurt, probably."

He rolled up a stand supporting a double row of pivot-mounted reflectors. At the touch of a button the reflectors moved. The two rows revolved in opposite directions, their myriad surfaces gleaming as they spun.

They moved faster and faster, and Webb's eyes were held irrevocably. He did not lose consciousness for a second but he was held as effectively as though drugged. He saw the uniformed figure and the figure in green moving back and forth outside his line of vision. He felt tiny tingling shocks of electricity, jarring his head and making a brassy taste in his mouth. He heard droning noises and shrill ones. But he did not move.

THE whirling mirrors slowed, after endless ages, and Webb's eyes flickered away.

There was the mother and father of all migraine in his head for a moment, then it vanished. He stretched and grinned at the men confidently.

"Still think I'm a Trog?" he asked.

Simons smiled.

"No, really," Webb insisted, growing concerned. "What did you find out?"

Orcutt spread his hands. "What we knew already, Trog."

"Hey!" Webb squawked. "If that's what your machine said it lies!"

"Typical Trog reasoning," Simons observed. "Attributes malice to inanimate objects." Orcutt nodded.

"No, please," Webb begged. "I told you—I'm no Trog. I'm a man from the Twentieth Century."

"Oh, yes," Orcutt mused. He reached up and snapped off the machine. "That's what's hard to understand. You weren't lying—not about *that*. There was no falsehood pattern. I guess it just shows how little we know about the early days. I didn't even realize there *were* Trogs then—thought it was before the Underworld Split when the Trogs began to breed true."

Webb said harshly, "Listen, let's put our cards on the table. I know I'm not a Trog. Give me half a chance and I'll prove it."

Simons said warmly, "Trog, it may sound strange but I *like* you! You're a good fighter. But of course we have the evidence, so you might as well give up. Here," he said, "look at the results."

He spread charts on the table before Webb. Encephalograms, they looked like—tracings of the electrical potential of the brain. "Your brain pattern," he explained indulgently, pointing to one of them. "Trog brain pattern there. And"—he indicated a third tracing on the wall—"normal human pattern. No doubt, really, is there?"

Webb gulped. The incredible thing was—he was right. The normal human pattern was a smooth, rolling wave. Trog pattern had irregular peaks, impossible to mistake—and so had Webb's.

"But—" he began. Orcutt silenced him with a gesture.

He stood up and beckoned to Simons. "I'm hungry," he said. "Let's go see what the Ration Authority has given us for dinner. Oh, never mind him." He frowned as Simons looked dubiously at Webb. "The Detail will take care of him. He can't get out."

Simons followed Orcutt to the door, his manner reluctant. The green-clad man walked out. Simons hesitated, then whirled and came back to Webb, hand outstretched. "Sorry," he said. "Good try. Shake!"

Numbly Webb shook the hand and watched Simons give him a little head-duck of respect before he hurried out.

The door closed, shutting off a grumbling comment of Orcutt's about the hard times the city was having with food supplies.

Webb swore luridly and sat down. What the Detail might turn out to be he could only guess. But he knew it would not be good. He thought of Mag and winced. He had promised her that the city men wouldn't kill her—and, he thought, *It looks as if they'll kill both of us before they're done.*

A voice of command came through the door. Webb looked about instinctively for a weapon, then stopped himself. Brains might get him out of this but muscle would not. He took out his cigarettes and extravagantly lit one of the few left in the battered pack.

The door swung open. It was a tall man in the military green and his eyes sparked irritation as he saw Webb alone in the room.

"Slovenly!" he boomed. "Utterly, utterly slovenly! If the Trog had the brains of a—Trog, he'd have run off!"

Webb sighed and stood up. "I'm not a Trog," he mentioned, just for the sake of the record.

"Shut up, Trog." The military man stood aside and let Webb see the patrol of half a dozen armed men in the corridor. "Come with the Detail," he ordered. "Don't try to resist. No sense making a mess in the Defense Center."

Webb took a last puff on the cigarette and carefully crushed it out on the sole of his shoe. The soldier frowned. "Filthy Trog habit," he observed. "Never saw that one before—and I've seen plenty of Trogs."

"Trogs don't do it," said Webb. "Well, never mind. Where do we go?"

The man laughed. "Come on," he said, and not too roughly shouldered Webb toward the patrol. They marched off in hollow square, Webb tucked away in the middle.

TROGS, as best Webb could figure out, were semi-human things that lived in caves underground. That being so, he pondered, how in the name of the seven deadly sins had the mental tests

gone so far wrong? *I'm no Trog*, he reassured himself. Then, remembering the brain-tracings, he groaned. The tracings weren't wrong—*couldn't* be wrong.

He kicked morosely at the rubbery flooring of the corridor. The door before which they were waiting opened abruptly and the patrol lurched forward, dragging Webb along.

The door closed and the floor dropped away from them.

Webb squawked in distress as his stomach floated up toward his throat. He had been in high-speed elevators before but this one was blood brother to a free fall. The Detail, though, didn't seem to mind. One of the soldiers nudged another. "Trog," he said, and grinned.

The elevator stopped and the Detail got out. A sentinel with a long-barreled weapon came to attention and faced them. "Show your orders," he said.

The Detail commander lifted an eyebrow. "Orders?" he said. "We're just taking this Trog to the Pits for execution. Do you tell me we need orders for that?"

The sentinel spat. "Now you do," he said. "Whole area's in quarantine. Defense Center orders."

"Aagh," the commander said disgustedly. "Look, soldier, I'm giving you an order. Step aside and let us pass or I'll have your buttons."

"Oh, will you?" The sentinel patted his weapon. "Just go back now."

The commander's eyes slitted. "I'll report this, you know."

"Report and be damned. This is Chroney area now—Defense Center requisitioned it this morning."

The commander fumed but Webb's interjection came first. "Did you say Chroney?" he demanded. "You mean time machine?"

The response he got was surprising. Quick as the head of a cobra the sentinel's weapon came around to center on his chest. The Detail commander leaped back, hand going to his own weapon.

Tableau—Webb found himself the center of a ring of weapons, each man shocked silent.

The sentinel broke the charm. "I

thought this was a Trog," he snarled.

The commander admitted worriedly, "It is. That's the devilish thing." He scowled at Webb. "What do you know about the Chroney, Trog?" he barked.

Webb attempted a smile, "Not much," he said placatingly. "I wondered what the word meant, that's all."

"He's lying," said the sentry. The commander nodded.

He glowered at Webb. "You've won yourself a stay of execution, Trog," he said moodily. "I daren't kill you till Defense Center has a chance to question you. If you Trogs know about the Chroney's what might you not know?"

Webb swore silently. These future-men and their delusions about Trogs were giving him the screaming horrors. "Look," he said tentatively but the commander stopped him.

"No," he said. Decision was crystalizing in his eyes. "No," the commander purred again. "We won't take you back to Defense Center. You were turned over to me after all. I'll find my own ways to make you talk. And I promise you they won't be half as pleasant as the hypnoscopes at the Center!"

Webb sighed and stared moodily down the corridor. At the end of it a scarlet flare was pulsing, something new, something that had not been there before. He stared at it curiously. The sentinel followed his gaze absently—then, galvanized, his raucous cry split the silence.

"The Trog light!" he squawked. "The Trog light! Take warning! The Trogs are at the city again!"

CHAPTER VI

Terror from Below

IF WEBB'S position as a mock-Trog had seemed bad before it grew visibly worse now.

"Watch him!" bellowed the commander. "They may be trying to rescue him! If he makes a move flame him!"

The Detail raced toward the flaring Trog Light, boiled through the door

beneath it. Webb, left with the sentry, looked unhappily at the man's twitching trigger finger and said a silent prayer. The elevator door behind them opened and a crew of soldiers leaped forth, running toward the battle. Webb's guard drew him out of the way in time to avoid being run over by a wheeled semi-portable weapon that three soldiers were trundling down the hall.

From the gaping double doors under the Trog light came sounds of combat. Men shouted, there were vast dull explosions, shrill sounds of oscillating ray-weapons.

Webb's captor cursed and glared at his ward. "Trogs!" he mouthed. "Traucherous back-biters. Lousy earth-grubbers, coming up out of the dirt to stab from behind. Stinking gutter-filth—"

There was more, but Webb stopped listening to it, for the sounds of battle were coming alarmingly close. Lights were flaring in orange brilliance behind that door and Webb found himself wondering what he would do if the fighting came toward him. Strange fighting, he thought in the sub-cellars of an enormous city! Apparently the Trogs were earth-dwellers, inhabitants of tunnels and caves. And apparently they dug their warrens in under the city and made their raids.

Definitely the battle was coming closer. The men of the city were being pushed back. Webb twitched uncomfortably. The elevator doors behind him opened again, and another squad of men, faces drawn, raced toward the battle. Webb stared after them.

"Filthy Trogs!" The words stung in his ear. Webb jumped involuntarily, and looked warily at his captor. The guard was grinding his teeth, macerating the stream of muttered invective. His eyes were wild as he swung on Webb. "Trog filth!" he snarled. "Ought to flame you now! Like enough they're trying to rescue you!"

"Oh, no," Webb said placatingly, uneasy before the rank hatred in the man's gaze.

The man's face contorted savagely

and for an instant Webb felt the plunging electronic bolt as it must soon come from the weapon. Then the guard hesitated.

“You!” he bellowed. “In there! I’m going to get into this fight—but if you try to stick your neck out of that door I’ll flame it off you!”

Webb stammered. “B-but—” That was all he had a chance to say. Maniacal hatred in his eyes, the guard shouldered Webb to the side of the corridor, thrust open a door and hurled him inside. Webb reeled into a large dimly lit room.

“Stay there, now!” The guard bellowed and his hand hammered against Webb’s shoulder. Off balance to start with, the thrust sent Webb catapulting into a maze of machinery in the middle of the room. His head crashed against something, and sparks erupted in his brain. Stunned, he was only vaguely conscious of the door slamming behind the guard.

Webb shook his head groggily. A flicker of motion caught his eyes and he stared blearily at a tiny man with a long blond beard, advancing toward him.

“You’ve hurt the Chroney!” the little man accused. “Who are you and why do you come blundering in here like a grannix?”

Chroney! Bemused as Webb was the word pierced the fog in his brain. He stared at the machinery. It was no more like the egg-shaped thing he’d traveled in with Ron Dineen than a Stanley Steamer was like a New York taxicab but it might have been a time machine easily enough for all Webb knew.

He stood looking at it, the dizziness spinning in his mind, trying to make sense of the jiggling coils of silvery wire and the stacks of delicate tubes, crushed where he had fallen against them. And, as he looked, the thing changed in his mind. Nothing was different but he saw things differently. From a confused mass of gadgets, he felt his mind understanding and relating the things, blending them into a single machine. He knew, without know-

ing how he knew, that the chronos-force was acted on by the warped stasis set up by the coils. . . .

FROM very far away someone was speaking to him in words he couldn’t quite hear.

“Speak up!” the words came from nearer at hand, and Webb turned trancelike to look at the blond-bearded man. “Speak up!” the little man repeated. “Who are you?”

Automatically, Webb’s lips formed the words of the answer. “My name is—” he began, and stopped, for his rebel vocal chords were trying to say, not “Webb Hildreth,” as was right and proper, but “Ron Dineen!” He swayed dizzily, trying to comprehend what was happening to him.

The tiny man didn’t wait for an answer. Coming closer, he saw what had happened to his machine. Sparks of rage danced from his eyes and he clenched his fists in raving anger.

“Oh, you clumsy oaf!” he spat. “Wait till Defense Center hears of this! A month’s work, you’ve ruined—and if I hadn’t had the controller out for adjustment you might have wrecked a year’s!”

Webb’s eyes went back to the machine without his volition and saw something he had missed before. Without knowing how he knew it, it was clear to Webb that something was missing from the crude Chroney—something that should have been there but wasn’t. His eyes wandered around the room, ignoring the stamping bearded man, and rested on a flat opalescent object on a workbench at the wall.

Webb’s legs moved him forward, without direction from his mind.

The man leaped after him. “Hi! Stop! What are you doing?” Webb swept him off, reached for the opalescent thing and took it. The little man leaped at him, clawing for it, but his strength was nothing to Webb’s. He jumped back, panting, then ran for the door.

“Help!” he screamed, racing out into the turmoil that was boiling through the corridor outside. “Help me! Someone’s

after the Chroney!" He might as well have been whispering for all the attention he got from the panicked men outside.

Webb watched him out of sight, then stepped through the door himself in the other direction. At the elevator in which he had come he stopped, still in the grip of the curious whirling paralysis which had seized him and forced his limbs to do things he never planned. At the end of the corridor, he saw, the defenders of the city were in hand-to-hand combat with a remorselessly advancing tide of little figures. A soldier broke free from the battle, sped toward Webb and the elevator.

"They're too many for us!" he sobbed, and punched at the call-button on the elevator. But it was a useless gesture. As he touched it, the attention bell over the elevator door tingled and blinked gently. The door opened. The soldier glanced in casually—then casualness was stripped from him. "More Trogs!" he gasped. "We're surrounded!"

He whipped his weapon up desperately but his best speed was far too slow. From the huddle of slight darkly menacing forms inside the elevator a dozen rays leaped out and intersected on the soldier. He collapsed without a sound.

Whatever had seized control of Webb's mind relinquished it now as though surprised. Webb, his mind a turmoil of uncertainty and apprehension, hesitated a second, then leaped for the body of the soldier, hands groping for the weapon.

He never had a chance to get it. It wasn't a ray or a bullet that found him, it was a hurtling mace. It bounced off his head with a shower of comets and the flare of a super-nova. There was bursting light in his skull—and then there was darkness. . . .

"Kill'm," said the loudest voice in Webb's ears. "He's a bove-grounder. Kill'm!"

Webb groaned. The number of people who thirsted after his blood was appalling. Unwillingly he opened his eyes to see what the latest coterie of enemies might look like.

But he couldn't see. His eyes opened lingeringly, then strained far open, wide as his vagus muscles could force them. All he beheld was blackness, utter and unmarred.

"I'm blind!" he gasped. "What have you devils done?"

Someone grunted surprisedly next to his ear. A voice said dubiously, "He talked. What's 'blind'?"

"Bove-grounder talk," said a thick voice farther away. "Let's vote and get it over. I vote to kill'm."

Webb swore and tried to get up. "Look," he started to say, but the word never got past his throat. As soon as he moved, bodies came hurtling at him from every point of the compass, soft, small bodies that clung to him and weighed him down by force of numbers. Taken by surprise, he tried to fight back. But they were too many for him, and in the dark he was helpless.

Yet—he could have sworn the others were not half so helpless as he. There was a precision and certainty to their movements which didn't go with darkness. It was as though they could see in the dark—or as though he were really blind.

He blinked in dismay, then sighed relievedly. Vaguely he was beginning to see blurred shapes around him. There was a stronger light—or a paler darkness—to one side than the other. Dim and dusky this place was but it was not utter darkness. He was not blind.

ONE of the panting shapes that pinned him pushed itself off, half gouging an eye in the process, and stepped back. "Let'm breathe," commanded the shape. "He'll not try anything again."

"You're right," Webb agreed. "I won't. But what's this all about? Who are you?"

The same grunt came once more near his ear. "He talked again!" it said. "Should we kill'm or take'm to the boss?"

Webb grunted back. "You talk like a bove-grounder yourself," he said. "What are you?"

"We're Trogs," said the small figure that stood aloof. "Smig says you're Trog too and that's the only thing that keeps you alive."

"Sure he's Trog," said another voice. "Didn't you see'm? The bove-grounders had'm captive and we freed'm. Kill'm if you want to. I don't care. But he's Trog all the same."

"Shut up, Smig," said the other. "You got us into enough trouble already. You scouted the bove-grounders and told's they weren't prepared, you got's lost coming back. You shut up."

"We're not lost!" Smig yelled. "We—"

"Shut up. You!" This was for Webb. "Tell's if you're Trog or bove-grounder, you."

Webb shook some of the weird little mannikins off his arm and sat up. He could see a little better now, though he could make out no detail in the dimness. He saw that there were half a dozen of the Trogs around him, all armed. They were in a long, narrow tunnel that seemed to lead toward a place of distant light. If the battle they had left was still raging they had moved far away, for there were no sounds of it.

He cleared his throat. "The—the bove-grounders said I was a Trog," he temporized. "That's all I know. Until a couple of hours ago I'd never heard the word before."

"Hear?" squealed Smig. "He's Trog. The bove-grounders said so!"

"Fap," said the standing one with the voice of authority. "You heard'm say he never heard of Trogs? What kind of Trog is that?"

Webb coughed. "What they meant," he said, "was that I'm much more like a Trog than a bove-grounder. Actually, of course, I'm neither. I'm a man from the past."

Smig sounded disappointed. "I thought he was Trog," he said. "Maybe we better kill'm anyhow."

"Look," Webb said hastily, "Trog or not, I can help you a lot. I can tell you what the bove-grounders are doing—I just came from the city, you know. For

instance, did you know that they're building a Chroney?"

Silence. Finally the leader said, "A what?"

"A Chroney," Webb repeated. "Don't you know what it is? It's a machine that travels in time. And they're going to use it against you!"

Silence again. Webb heard buzzing whispers between Smig and the Trog leader, then the leader said disgustedly, "Ah, you're stupid, Smig. 'F I listened to you I'd go crazy too. First you want to keep'm alive, then you want to kill'm, now you want to let'm go."

"But he's crazy," Smig argued. "He said, 'travel in time.'"

"Don't care what he said. We'll take'm to the boss, you hear, Smig?"

Smig sighed unhappily. "Don't blame me then," he warned. The leader poked Webb in the ribs.

"Up," he said. "We're going to the boss. He'll take care'f you."

Webb got up wearily, remembering wistfully how nice it had been in the twentieth century when no one shot at him or pushed him around—at least until Ron Dineen's Peacemen had burst into his quiet apartment. Poor Ron Dineen, he thought. Apparently his desperate effort to prolong his life by entering Webb's mind had failed.

Or had it? Could Ron's mind have been the force that seized him in the room with the crude Chroney? Had Ron looked through his eyes to see the machine and recognize it—and cause him to go after the opalescent thing on the workbench?

Belatedly remembering, he felt in his pockets. Something hard and flat, something warm and stirring with an inward pulsation was there. He dared not take it out of his pocket to look at it with the hostile Trogs about, but he was curiously relieved to find he still had the thing the old man had called a controller. Somehow, somehow it fitted into the picture.

UNBELIEVINGLY, Webb realized it had been only a day or so of elapsed time—though heaven knew how

many centuries he had fled through—since Ron Dineen appeared in his apartment. So many things in a few hours! The Peacemen—the mad flight through Time—the city and the Trogs—and Mag.

Mag was a special memory. Webb felt something sharp striking at his inmost heart as he thought of her. Sharp she was too and almost a savage in her warrior ways. But there was something about Mag that made Webb's heart pulse faster. Where had she disappeared to back in the city? Would he ever see her again?

Webb sighed and, prodded by the little Trogs, lurched down the dusk-hung tunnel toward the brighter spot ahead.

As they drew near, the light became more and more brilliant and murmurings arose from the Trogs. Finally the leader halted and said shrilly, "What's that, Smig? Have you shown's the wrong way?"

Smig's voice was filled with apprehension as he answered. "Hope not," he said doubtfully. "I never saw s'much light before—but this's the way we came, I'll swear."

"It better be." The leader's voice was menacing.

There was a babble from the other Trogs but the leader cut through them. "Shut up," he said harshly. "Goggles on, all'f you. We'll go ahead and look."

In the growing light Webb saw the Trogs reach into their garments and come up with huge black eyeshields, slip them on hastily and form in a ragged military order. With the black domino shapes around their eyes and their pudgy stature, they reminded Webb of a troop of underground pandas, curiously dressed in human clothes.

They trudged endlessly down the corridor toward the light, and it grew brighter at every step. There were murmurs and whispers of consternation from the Trogs. Then they were at the end of the tunnel and the murmurs flared to a peak and subsided in awe-struck horror.

"Gah!" said the leader fiercely. "Smig, you'll pay for this!"

Smig cowered and Webb, watching him, felt curiously sorry for the little leprechaun. In the bright glow of a fire-red sun the trolls seemed less like deadly foes and more like frightened little elves.

And frightened they were. For the tunnel, which they had taken a thousand times before to reach the central cave of their race, now opened on emptiness and a precipice. The little men stared unbelievably.

Coming as near the edge as he dared Webb saw that the tunnel emerged jaggedly in a cliff front, opening on a thirty-foot drop. Beyond the precipice lay barren desert, broiling in the rays of an ancient red sun.

CHAPTER VII

Tidal Wave

THE Trog leader turned his blind hooded eyes on Smig and Smig cowered away. Wordlessly the leader looked at him for a moment, then gestured to the other Trogs. Five of them followed him a few yards down the tunnel, leaving Smig and Webb isolated at the cave lip.

There was a sound of heated discussion. But though Webb could see them gesturing and pointing at Smig he could make out no word.

"What's going on?" he asked Smig.

Smig wiped sweat off his pale cave-dweller's skin. He turned his face to Webb, the muscles of his jaw working convulsively. "D'you believe in hell, bove-grounder?" he asked. "Because we're going there."

Webb swallowed. "So?" he managed. "You mean your pals are going to kill us?"

Smig nodded somberly. "They'd've done it before now, except they're scheming how to get my gun away from me. They can't be bothered taking you along any more and they're mad at me. We're done." He scratched his wrinkled abdomen where it protruded through

the midriff-effect costume he wore. "Good-by, bove-grounder," he said. "It won't be long."

Webb swallowed again. Things were piling up and he didn't like it. He glanced at Smig, staring in dreary resignation out onto the desert landscape—glanced at the whispering knot of Trogs—made up his mind.

He started toward the cave-mouth, then hesitated and looked at the solitary Trog. "Smig," he said, "would you like to stay alive?"

Smig didn't even turn around. "Shut up, bove-grounder," he said dismally. "It's bad enough this way."

"But I mean it, Smig. Look down there. It's steep, but it's not a dead fall. If we could just get down to the ground we could run for it."

Smig whirled, horrified. "In the *sunlight*?" he gasped. "It would kill me. I'm Trog!"

"Oh, for the heaven's sake," Webb said disgustedly. "And what will your friends do to you if you stay here?" The Trog stared emptily up at him. Impulsively Webb stepped closer to the gnome and, gently but firmly, shoved. The Trog squawked as he lost balance and went slipping and sliding over the edge.

Webb paused long enough to see Smig land safely. Then, spurred by the sharp outcries from the Trogs behind him, he launched himself feet-first.

The crumbling dirt was at an angle not fifteen degrees from the perpendicular but it slowed Webb's fall. He felt sharp edges of rock racking at him, but he landed in one piece—and running. "Come on!" he yelled to Smig. "Let's get out of here!"

The Trog picked himself up and followed. Webb saw that the mouth of the tunnel was on a sort of headland of cliff. Around the bend, twenty yards away, was safety—if they could live to get that far.

A sun-bright finger of deadly rays showered on the dirt ten feet from Webb, and a burst of fire-hot sand exploded where the ray struck. Webb swore and dodged, running zig-zag and bent low. Another ray-burst struck

where he had just been, and there was a sudden yell of pain from Smig behind him. Then Webb was at the point where the cliff-side swept inward. One last leap, and he was in safety.

Half a second later Smig tumbled after him, pale hand clapped to his shoulder, his masked face working convulsively.

Webb panted, "Did they hit you, Smig?"

The troll sputtered a stream of unintelligible oaths. "Get me! Nah! A rock fell from up there and pretty near knocked me out. Those bright-wits couldn't hit the wall of a cave from inside."

"A rock fell?" Webb glanced upward, puzzled.

His mouth dropped open. There above them was a face, leaning over and staring down. It was Mag, holding a rocket gun in her hand and looking just as surprised as he.

"Webb!" she shrilled. "Webb, you gossoon, where in the world did you come from?"

Webb exhaled his relief. "Come down here, woman," he ordered—but it wasn't necessary. Slipping and sliding, she was coming. She landed beside him in a flurry of arms and legs. Webb caught her to steady her—and, without transition, she was in his arms and their lips were together.

AFTER a long, long time he let her go.

Mag stepped back and looked at him. Her voice was not strident when she said, "Bless your heart, Webb, but that was a long time coming."

Webb coughed. "So were you," he said. "Where *were* you?"

Mag grinned. "I've been looking for you, mostly," she said. "That is, after I got away from the Trogs, those low-living, despicable, contemptible sons of—"

"Stop right there!" Webb ordered. He jerked his thumb at the troll beside him. "Meet Smig. Smig, this is Mag."

"Hello," said Smig. And proudly, "I'm Trog, bove-grounder."

Mag inspected him. "You sure are," she said. "I've met Troggs before. Six of them grabbed me from behind. They carried me off, with a garrote around my neck so I couldn't scream or breathe much either. I don't know what their plans were but I changed them, soon as they let me loose for a second. With this."

She patted the holstered rocket pistol. "And if you want to make a blood fight out of it I'm with you," she told Smig nastily. "I'm a Brooklyn, the toughest gang on the river."

"Smig doesn't want to fight," Webb said quickly. "He's on our side. What happened after that?"

Mag's expression changed. "I was looking for you, Webb," she said. "I ransacked that whole filthy city looking, until things got too hot for me. Then I gave up and decided to light out for my glider. Doubt I could fix it but it's all I've got—or I thought it was, anyway. Besides—"

Webb interrupted, "Things got too hot? You mean the city people got after you?"

"Them?" she said contemptuously. "No. It was the others, those white-faced gorillas in black satin shorts. When they came I left. Last I saw, the city people were taking a beating from the Troggs underneath and the gorillas on top—guns, rays and heaven knows what-all. They played too rough for me."

"Gorillas in satin shorts," Webb repeated. The phrase struck a note in his memory. "You mean—" Then recollection burst on him. "Good Lord!" he said. "The Peacemen!"

"That's what they called themselves," Mag said indifferently. "I didn't think they were so peaceful."

Webb's jaw hardened. The Peacemen were here—and that meant trouble. Ron Dineen's words came back to him—that they would follow and that they would bring death. And follow they had.

Webb thought of the people in the city, smothered under the attack of the Peacemen, and groaned. Apparently the killers from the future were willing to wipe out thousands of innocent people

from another age—a city or a civilization—in order to get Ron Dineen. Or—disquieting thought—were they after Dineen? Was that it or were they deceived by the resemblance in brain-patterns of which Dineen had spoken and actually on the trail of Webb himself?

Webb swallowed convulsively, and realized Mag was still talking.

"—couldn't get any closer, so they had to stop their ship outside the turbulent zone and come the rest of the way to the Chroney on foot." She stopped, eyebrows flaring upward at the sight of Webb's face. "What's the matter, Webb?" she asked anxiously.

He gestured impatiently. "What was that about a Chroney?"

Mag said, "Just what I finished saying. These Peacemen are looking for one. They want the guy who's running it. They think he's in the city." She laughed. "Boy, am I glad I'm not him!" she said. "They're tough customers. Even tougher than the old Hellgates."

Webb's eyes narrowed. "They want the Chroney," he mused. "I wonder. This turbulent zone you were talking about—do you know what it is?"

"Nope."

"I think I do. I think it accounts for a lot of things. The swamp we saw—and the Indians and the city and you—a lot of things that just don't fit. It's connected with the Chroney—a time machine out of control. It's got to be."

He stood erect and released her. "If *they* want the Chroney I want it too. We'll get there before them, Mag. It's going to be a showdown fight—and we'd best beat them to the punch. Can you find your glider from here?"

"Sure," she said. "Though this country does hop around so. That desert wasn't here before. But I'll find the glider."

"And from your glider I know the way to the Chroney. We'll ambush 'em, Mag! Come on!"

Smig squalled, "Me too! Don't leave me, bove-grounder!"

Webb grinned leanly. "Wouldn't think of it, Smig," he said. "Let's go!"

THEY toiled across the desert while the ancient sun hung motionless at the horizon. Mag stopped and, shading her eyes, looked directly at it. Its light was enough to make her squint, but not so much that she had to close her eyes.

She said doubtfully, "It doesn't move, Webb. Why not?"

Webb wiped his brow. "I've been wondering," he said. "I—I've got a theory. It's kind of crazy but then this whole thing is crazy anyhow."

"What's the theory?"

He said, "Know anything about astronomy, Mag?"

"Just what I picked up for myself. We didn't go in for that kind of thing in the Brooklyn's."

"But you know the Earth rotates on its axis? Of course. Well, according to astronomers, the tidal drag on the Earth's surface is eventually going to stop that rotation. Then the Earth will be to the sun just like the moon is to the Earth—always the same side will face the sun. Which means—as far as anybody on the surface of the Earth will be able to say—that the sun will stop moving. It won't rise or set."

Mag said, "Like *that* sun, you mean?"

Webb nodded. "Just so. The only thing is—it will take time. Lots of it. Not a couple of hundred years or a couple of thousand—millions." He watched her expression carefully. "I think this desert comes from the far future," he said slowly. "I don't know how far but looking at it makes me think that it's a long, long time from anything you or I knew—as far ahead of our time as that Paleozoic forest was behind it."

"But I was never in any time machine!" Mag protested.

"You didn't have to be. When the Chroney I was traveling in went out of control—anything could have happened. What really did happen, I think, is that the forces it used went streaming out in all directions, like sparks from an explosion.

"Little pieces and segments of different eras were trapped in the time-force and drawn to the machine. And I think

the machine is still operating, and that this system of time-segments it has set up is not stable. I wonder what would happen to us if this little bit we're on broke loose."

Smig broke in sharply. "Bove-grounder, don't talk so!" he ordered nervously. "What do you mean, break loose?"

Webb frowned. "It wasn't here before," he said. "For Mag and me, I judge this is just about where there used to be a lot of swampland and ferns. For you—well, where the tunnel ended, I think a new era began and I think your home should be somewhere around here. Here in space—but millions, maybe hundreds of millions of years, away in time.

"Suppose, while we're standing on this sand, the machine let go again. This sand is *old*—and the sun is old too. Bigger than the one we're used to but not much hotter. It's a dying sun. I think this desert comes from the day before the end of the world. And if it broke loose—if the time-force let go of it—I think we'd be marooned in this far, far future."

Mag blinked wordlessly. She looked at Webb, and around her at the scorched sands. "I don't understand," she said. Webb grimaced and was about to speak but she stopped him.

"Webb," she said, "I don't think I *want* to understand. Skip it." She pointed over his shoulder. "Anyway, what I've been meaning to ask you for the last two minutes is, what became of the mountain we were heading for?"

Webb looked, and a smothered gasp from Smig told him the Trog was looking too. Ahead had been the cone-shaped mountain that was their landmark, perhaps five miles off. Now it was gone. Instead there was a straight horizon, marked by a curious heat-wave effect in the air, a shimmering of light with a purplish tinge.

"Half the desert's gone!" wailed Smig. "What happened?"

Tight-lipped Webb said, "There's been another shift in time. Part of this segment went back to its own time. Any minute the rest may go to join it!"

"Look!" Mag was staring toward the

horizon. While they watched the haze cleared. Inch-high in appearance from where they stood, they saw a slate gray wall extending clear across the desert. "What's that?" grunted Mag.

"Don't know," Webb snapped. The haze was gone completely now and the wall was changing character. Before their eyes it was crumbling off. A white ruff appeared at the top of it and spread, smokelike plumes spurting out and vanishing.

Smig yelped, "Water! It's a tidal wave!"

Webb swore. "You're right, Trog. Come on! If we bear left, toward where Mag says the glider is, there's high ground there. If we make it—well, it may not be enough. But we'll drown here for sure!"

He led the way at a galloping race, Mag fleetly following and the Trog pumping his short legs to keep close behind. It was a quarter of a mile to the ragged edge of high ground where another time-era abutted theirs—the longest quarter mile Webb had ever run. Fast as they ran, the rushing wall of water seemed faster.

It was two miles away—then a mile behind—then closer, covering ground like a stampeding herd of beasts. Webb risked a quick look over his shoulder as he ran and estimated they might make it—if they were lucky.

"Faster!" he panted, and Mag nodded silently and ran on ahead. Webb's breath was coming in painful ragged gasps and the thumping of his heart was like a series of explosions in his ears. He leaped a tiny sand-ridge and landed, staggering but still running.

There was a brittle lightning-crack and electrical flame exploded on the ridge he had just jumped. Webb squawked in surprise and stared off to the right. Far away, clambering up the ragged cliff-line, a handful of black dots was visible.

One of them, already atop the little precipice, seemed to be pointing at Webb and the others with a thick truncheon-like affair that brought horrid memories to Webb. As he watched the end of the

truncheon winked with coruscating light and something brilliant and deadly looking sped toward them.

"The Peacemen!" Webb yelled. "Watch out!"

CHAPTER VIII

Between the Devil and the Deep

MAG shrilled, "It's them, all right—the pale devils I saw in the city." She flopped herself on the hot sand, and a fireball sped overhead to crash against the desert floor a hundred feet away. Instantly she was up again and running.

Twisting and dodging, the three of them lost time to the remorseless flood behind. They were almost within touching distance of the crumbling earthwall when the first surge touched them. Scrambling up the ledge, the roaring spray drenched them all and the warp-legged Trog was almost too late entirely. Had it not been for Webb's hand under his spindly shoulder the undertow would have dragged him back.

The tidal wave thundered against the cliff, sending up cascades of salty liquid foam. Blinded and half-drowned, the three fell exhausted to a pine-needled forest floor, striving to get their breath.

Webb gave them only a moment. Then, "Okay," he gasped. "Up and get moving. The Peacemen can't see us through the spray but they know where we are. They'll be coming."

Smig groaned feebly. "Leave me, bove-grounders," he begged. "Let me die here. My dark-goggles are smutted up t'where I can't see the end of my nose. I'm half dead from fright and running. Leave me here."

Mag grinned at the little man. "You're still alive, Trog," she told him. "Here, squeeze your eyes shut and give me your goggles. I'll clean 'em for you. Then we'd best do what Webb says."

Webb stood up and looked around him. They were in a pine forest amid

desolate scattered clumps of tall trees that gave no hint of what era had spawned them nor whether human feet had ever passed this way.

THERE was a frown on his face as he asked, "Mag, do you still think you can find your way from here?"

Mag breathed on the Trog's goggles and gave them a final whisk with her kerchief. "Sure," she said. "Provided your friends don't stop us. Looks to me like they're going in the same direction." She handed the goggles to the Trog, whose face was a twisted knot of unhappiness as he strove to keep the dim light out of his eyes. Quickly he groped them from her hands and slipped them into place.

"Ah," he said, and grinned again. "Good old dark!"

"Let's go then," Webb said. "That way?" He pointed and Mag nodded. The three started off through the trees at a dog trot, keeping as quiet as they could. They had gone only a few hundred yards when Mag touched Webb's shoulder to stop him and silently pointed behind.

Where they had been the Peacemen were now. Their figures were only dimly visible through the trees but there was definite indication of pursuit. Webb could see them moving about like huge gorilloid bloodhounds on a trail.

"They're after us," Mag whispered voicelessly.

Webb nodded and the lines in his face grew tighter. He gestured Smig and the girl down, himself bent into the shelter of a clump of seedling pines, peering at

the Peacemen. It was only a moment before he had the answer to the question in his mind.

He sank down beside the others. "They're coming this way," he whispered. "We can't outrun them. Those babies are built for muscle. We'll have to fight."

Smig groaned. "I knew it! I should have stayed t'die in the tunnel!"

"Shut up, Smig. You aren't dead yet. Have you still got that gun of yours?" The Trog nodded glumly. "And, Mag, your rocket? Good. I doubt the two shells I've left in my Luger will last long but for what they're worth I've got them. We'll try an ambush.

"You, Smig, up in a tree. Mag, get off to one side and pick off the last Peacemen first. I don't want that rocket of yours going off in my face; don't aim nearer either of us than ten feet. I'll take these bushes. They're as good as any. I'll shoot first."

Mag nodded silently and wriggled off. The Trog glared reproachfully at Webb but after a quick look over his shoulder at the approaching flickers of motion that were the Peacemen he climbed his indicated tree without a word.

Webb waited half a minute, then dared another look. The Peacemen were coming in long ground-eating strides, wordless and grim, like the brute fighting machines they were. It was only a matter of moments. Webb sank back and raised the Luger, sighted on the bole of the tree next which the first man would have to pass. . . .

[Turn page]

A NEW VAN VOGT NOVEL!



When he allowed Marie Chanette to die, Lieutenant Cargill tore open the fabric of time to come and found himself haunted by an inescapable destiny in THE SHADOW MEN, by A. E. van Vogt, featured in the January issue of our companion magazine—

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The first Peaceman appeared. Webb centered the Luger on the barrel chest of the man, finger lightly squeezing against the trigger. It came micrometrically back, then hesitated on the hair-line that would release the shot. Something inside Webb said *No!*, and fiercely he tried to fight himself out of it. These were not humans with a code of fair play and the right to expect it. They were beasts, deserving nothing better than to be shot from hiding. Yet Webb's finger stuck on the trigger.

THERE was the light rattle of a falling object—a pine-cone, Webb thought—and the first Peaceman looked up in startlement to see Smig perched in the branches over his head.

That tears it! Webb thought exultantly. While the Peaceman was bringing up his weapon Webb shot him cleanly through the heart, paused the space of a second and fired his last bullet at the man behind. He heard the whine of Smig's ray-pistol coming into action, saw a brilliant pencil of light strike down at an unseen shape farther behind.

The Peaceman Webb had shot with his last bullet was only grazed. The slug had taken him in the shoulder but it took more than a few grams of copper-jacketed lead to stop that three-hundred-pound colossus of muscle. With a bellow of rage the giant leaped toward Webb, leveling his truncheon as he ran.

Webb jumped up and hurled the Luger into the face of the Peaceman. He heard the impact of the hurtling metal on the crunching facial bones of the other, saw the man stagger and followed up with a diving tackle that brought the Peaceman down.

Down, but not out—for one of the tree-trunk legs lashed out and caught Webb on the side of the head, showering him with stars and comets. The forest swimming around him, he forced himself up and plowed into the Peaceman with feet and fists flailing. The giant lashed out again and brought Webb down on top of him.

There was a moment while the earth seemed to erupt under him, then Webb

felt himself flying upright as the Peaceman thrust him off and scrambled up. Dizzily Webb leaped in again, straddled the giant with one arm around the corded throat in a hammerlock. He felt sledgehammer blows exploding against his body—then a crash as the pair of them toppled to the ground—then dizzying blackness.

Mag was pulling at him. "Let go of him, you fool!" she implored. "He's been dead these past five minutes!"

Webb opened an eye. He was flat on his back, with what felt like a baby elephant lying on him. It was the Peaceman and when Webb pulled his arm away from the thick neck the head dangled lopsidedly.

Mag fell to her knees beside him. "What a character!" she said twistedly, and Webb wondered confusedly if she had been crying. "You order us not to shoot anywhere near you and then you take on the biggest of the bunch hand-to-hand. Why didn't you let Smig take care of him?"

Webb pushed the Peaceman off and felt himself tentatively. Nothing seemed broken, hard though it was to believe. "Smig?" he repeated. "Smig had plenty to do by himself. The rest of those guys needed attention enough to keep you and Smig busy all day."

Mag shook her head. "What rest?" she demanded. "There were only four. Smig got one, I got one, you took on two yourself."

"Only four?" Webb stared unbelievably. "Why—" The ground lurched under him. Webb staggered, and automatically shot out a hand to steady Mag. "Easy, girl," he told her.

"What was that?" she demanded.

"Heaven knows. Earthquake, maybe." His eyes roved the horizon, stopped, went back and clung to something.

"No," he said, "it wasn't an earthquake. Take a look."

Above the tree-tops a white cloud was building, faster than any cloud should build, climbing mountainously toward the sky. Five thousand feet up it splayed out like a giant parasol, and an unearthly light played through it.

"Thunderstorm?" Mag asked.

Webb shook his head. "Worse than that," he said heavily. "I would guess there's been another time shift. That's the mark of an atom-bomb."

Mag's jawbone stiffened. "That's bad medicine," she said. "The old boss-man of the Brooklyns used to tell about atom-bombs. I don't want any truck with them. Say, aren't these time shifts coming pretty thick now?"

"That they are. And unless I miss my guess it isn't any accident. There were at least a dozen Peacemen in the party we saw—more like fifteen or twenty. Only four came after us. That leaves quite a few to be accounted for."

Webb rubbed his forehead tiredly. Things were coming too fast for him again; he felt a curious sense of detachment, as though the strife and confusion all around him were unreal.

He forced himself to go on, "I think the rest of them went right on to the Chroney. Obviously they have to stop it. It is interfering with their time-scanning devices. And in stopping it they have to try to jam the mechanism again."

Mag gasped, "Jam the mechanism? And what happens to us?"

Webb nodded. "That's just it. I don't know. I would guess that all these little time-fragments will fly around crazily while they're working on it. When it's over they'll go back to their own eras. That will be—wherever it is. This forest doesn't look too bad. But suppose we got stuck in something like that swamp-forest—or the desert?"

Mag said, "You suppose. I don't want to. What do we do?"

"Do?" Webb echoed grimly. "We get to that Chroney—fast!"

WHERE the mushroom-shaped cloud of the atomic blast had appeared tiny dots profaned the sky. They whirled and cavorted mystifyingly—until one of them spun downward emitting a trail of sultry flame. Then Webb knew them for what they were—aircraft battling over an atom-bombed city.

Abruptly cloud and ships winked out and a brittle ice-blue sky took their place while simultaneously the hurrying three felt another of the strange shocks. Webb stared at it without comprehension.

"Heaven knows what *that* is," he whispered. "It looks cold."

"The other way looks hot," Mag offered, pointing to her right. Webb spun, and there was a coppery sky with turbulent rags of livid cloud. "Forest fire?"

"Maybe—or maybe hell itself," Webb said shortly. "Makes no difference. Don't dawdle." Then, giving himself the lie, he halted and held up a hand. "Listen!"

There was no need to strain their ears. The locomotivelike snort Webb had heard was repeated, not too far away and followed by an ear-splitting thunder of bellowing rage. They heard something huge crashing toward them through the wood, then the animal scream again.

Webb caught a confused glimpse of something bounding in their direction, something cyclopean and murderous-looking, three times as tall as a tall man. The thing shrieked its blind hatred once more, not pausing in its rushing progress, and Webb saw an enormous red mouth crammed full of the hugest teeth in the world. *Tyrannosaur!* Webb's mind supplied.

Smig emitted a single squeal and stood frozen. "Shut up!" hissed Webb. "It may not see us!"

The hope died with its voicing. Instinctively Mag's hand flashed to her belt, came up with the rocket pistol. The giant lizard-head, tiny eyes burning green from behind the monstrous mouth, cocked to one side as it caught the flicker of motion. Then with blinding speed the saurian spun toward them.

Mag's rocket pistol whispered twice, and the shells exploded against tree-limbs yards from the tyrannosaur's head. Smig was clawing at his weapon, while Webb fumbled with the truncheon he had taken from the dead Peaceman. He squeezed the bulbous grip, cursing himself for not having taken more time to learn to handle it. A fire-

ball leaped from the tip of it, careened toward the lizard, struck it a glancing blow on one huge haunch.

The tyrannosaur rocked back, huge legs extended, tiny forelimbs clawing at the sky as it shrieked like twenty calliopes gone insane. Webb stood long enough to pump another bolt into it, then yelled, "Run!" to the others.

There was no knowing what it would take to kill one of these things. Dimly he remembered hearing a biology professor tell how dinosaurs might live and fight for minutes after heads and hearts were destroyed. This was no time to find out!

The three raced toward a clearing, turned at its edge with weapons ready. Back in the forest the tyrannosaur was thrashing in its death agony. Huge pines toppled like jackstraws and the lizard's roars sounded like all the lions of Nero's Coliseum in one.

"Poor beast!" Mag gasped. "I know he didn't mean us any good but all the same I don't like to watch this."

Webb grimaced his agreement. Smig looked at him wonderingly. "What's trouble, bove-grounder?" he asked. "You worried about that snake? You're too soft-hearted, all you bove-grounders."

He frowned contemptuously and turned away. His eyes flared into astonishment then, and his pipestem arm streaked for the weapon at his waist. Webb heard running feet behind him at the same time that he saw a wriggling serpent of pale blue flame streak past him, wrap itself around the Trog.

Webb bellowed his surprise and anger. Of all clearings for them to blunder into they had to pick the one where the Peacemen were working on the Chroney. He spun around to face the threat—but he was too late.

Half a dozen of the man-monsters were racing toward them, truncheons at the ready, each of them whirling one of the slippery blue-lit cords they had used to tie up Ron Dineen, back in Webb's own apartment. The foremost hurled the snakelike cord at Webb. Webb ducked but not quickly enough.

The thing touched his arm with a sen-

sation like the burn of dry ice. It whipped itself around him, pinioned his arms as he strove to bring up the truncheon. Another came at him, another. He was wrapped tight as any mummy before he had time to trip and fall.

He toppled onto the wriggling figure of Smig and as he went down he caught a glimpse of Mag, a step behind him, as thoroughly trussed as he.

CHAPTER IX

Time Reknit

WEBB lay helpless on a knoll a stone's throw from the Chroney. Somewhere about, he knew, Mag and the Trog must be but they were not in his sight. And when he called to them only the rising howl of the wind answered.

The Peacemen took no notice of him at all. Like giant puppets worked by an unseen hand they were going through a strange drill, eight of them, pacing around the glimmering bubble of the Chroney, setting up cryptic mechanisms and focusing them on the shell. They had been at it for an hour or more while the sun finally went down after the long day and curious images flickered in the skies.

The time-shifts were coming faster and faster. Lying cramped, Webb saw strange sights in his field of vision above the tree tops. There were skies of every color and sort—tropic skies, frozen skies, skies packed with humming ships and skies that had never known even a bird's wing.

There was a moment of a sky in which hung a low red crumbling moon—and a heart-tearing instant in which the rim of the sky held a peeping horizon of tall buildings that might have been Webb's own New York.

The forest edge seemed to be the limit beyond which the time-shifts took place. Evidently the broadcast energies of the Chroney took effect only after a

skip-distance. But Webb saw that the edge was coming closer. The forest was thinning. Through it he saw fantastic glimpses—huge pylons of ebony ice, flashing vehicles that sped along glistening highways, desolate plains of sand and once the raging breakers of an ocean—and ever the glimpses seemed closer.

"You'll have to hurry, Webb."

The voice came from close beside him. Webb tensed unbelievably. This was not the voice of a Peaceman, not Smig or Mag but—

"Ron," he croaked. "Ron!"

"That's right, Webb. Don't talk out loud though. Talk to me with your mind."

Webb stilled his lips. Voicelessly he said, "Then it was real, the feeling I've had that you were calling me."

"Of course it was real, Webb. I told you I would be inside your mind. But it's been hard to communicate. It's like learning to run a rocket. You get in the pilot chamber and the controls are all there and the rocket is ready to go. But you've got to learn how. I've been learning. Oh, I've managed to come through from time to time. I even took over control of your body when I had to—"

"That time in the city—when I stole that instrument?"

"Yes. And other times. I"—the voice chuckled—"I was at least partly responsible when you kissed the girl back on the desert. Though you would have done it anyway, no doubt. But, Webb, listen. Time is short—the Peacemen are bringing the Chroney under control. When they do it's all up.

"Once the Chroney no longer keeps them from direct communication with their own time it will be too late. You can't hope to defeat them. But they are stupid, brainless for all their science. As long as they are on their own, not guided by some bigger brain a million years away, there is a chance."

Webb felt a quick surge of hope. Grimly he fought it back, tried to destroy it with reason. "Ron," he said despairingly, "you don't know. I'm tied tighter than Houdini ever was. I can't

move a muscle. Even if I could—there are eight of them and only one of me. And they've got the guns."

"The guns don't matter. Even if you killed the Peacemen it wouldn't do you any good. Dead or alive, as long as their bodies are in the same space-time segment as yours, you can be traced through them."

"Then what? And what about the fact that I'm tied up?"

"Trust me, Webb," the voice grew solemn. "As for the other matter—just watch. I'm going to have to take over your body, Webb. Don't resist me, please."

Webb unwillingly relaxed and felt a strange numbness spread through the base of his brain. It was as though some syrupy warm fluid were pouring through him, soothing and quieting him without in the least putting him to sleep. He felt a curious sensation in his fingers, and realized with a shock that each one of them had twitched without orders from his own mind.

His toes twitched next, one after the other in orderly fashion. Then the great muscles of his legs and trunk contracted slowly and relaxed. Evidently Ron Di-
neen was trying out the controls!

The voice was even closer now. Conversationally it said, "What you don't realize, Webb, is that these things are alive. Yes, I'm talking about the things that bind you. A primitive electrical form of life with only one reflex—and that to coil around whatever resists it. But if you can relax—like *so*—and stay relaxed—why, they relax too."

Webb realized with a shock that the pressure around his arms and legs was actually lessening. Blood tingled through his limbs as the things eased off, ever so slightly at first, then more and more.

Ron's voice went on, "It's hard to relax so completely, of course. And if it were my own body I doubt I could do it. But yours is easier for me. And then, Webb, when the things lie limp on you, why then you just reach up—gently—and pick them off—gently—and then, you see—you're free!"

Webb's eyes grew round as he watched his own arm stiffly rise to touch the fiery coils, delicately lift them off and lay them gently on the ground. "Good Lord!" he said fervently.

TO HIS horror Webb felt his own legs gather under him, propel him up in a leap, running toward the Chroney and its satellite Peacemen!

He heard his own voice yelling some sort of gibberish that might have been the clipped English the Peacemen spoke—felt himself bending to seize a handful of rocks, hurling them at the startled Peacemen—knew that he was whirling, running jerkily toward the edge of the forest.

He felt himself staggering as he ran, victim of Ron Dineen's imperfect control of the strange body—heard the sounds of pursuit from behind, saw a fireball splatter against the trees ahead of him, yet could not crane his neck around to see what followed!

Then he was in the shelter of the trees, dodging about, still on the dead run.

His body stopped and turned, stood watching for a second. All eight of the Peacemen were streaming toward him, curious half-expressions of surprise on their granite-carved faces. Even as his body turned again and sprang on he heard Ron Dineen's calm voice in his brain.

"They're coming, Webb. So far, so good. Listen carefully, now."

Webb, feeling his runaway body blundering through undergrowth, watching a shower of fireballs ripping through the leaves overhead, struggled weakly against the trance-like state in which Ron held him. He could not break it—nor, he realized, dared he break it. It was all up to Ron, now.

He said, "I'm listening."

"Good. The time-zones are pulsating very rapidly now, Webb. There's a fixed cycle and I've been studying it and I think I've got it worked out. But it's fast. Too fast for me to handle by remote control, this way. I'm going to have to give your body back to you."

"Thanks. What'll I do with it?" Webb asked, bemusedly watching the forest jolt past his immobile eyes.

"Take it into the region of shifting time-zones. Keep it moving. Don't stay in any one zone more than half a minute—not that long, if you can help it. Make a wide circle, then come back to the Chroney. Got it?"

"Yes. But—"

"No time to argue. The edge of the first zone is right ahead. Circle to the right—and remember, hurry! All right, Webb, take over!"

There was a sudden wrench at the base of Webb's brain, and abruptly he came alive again. The slashing branches that he had watched with detached interest now possessed weight and whip-like cutting strength. He felt them as he blundered through, felt the aching exhaustion in his pounding lungs. Panting, Webb stole a look behind him, saw the Peacemen, truncheons sheathed now, gaining on him. He blundered against a huge pine tree, recovered and leaped past it—

Into a world of Stygian night. The air was biting cold, Webb knew, and that was all he knew—except that underfoot was something soft and gelid, something far from the piny forest floor. The cold, hard darkness hid the Peacemen from his sight. He spun to his right and dashed on. Ahead was a glimmering glow—

He stumbled across hard ridges of rock, sprawled full-length on warm bare stone. Forcing himself upward again he ran on, slipping and staggering on the uneven surface. Above was a sky of brilliant huge stars, seeming so close that he could reach out a hand and pluck them if he dared. But there was no time, for just ahead loomed the forest again—

But not the same forest. Webb ran into it and splashed ankle deep in warm mud. Weird vegetation tripped and tangled him and he heard strange roaring sounds from all about him. Every muscle was shrieking protest and his lungs were raw agony but still he staggered on—

Then came the quiet voice in his mind again, vibrant with restrained urgency: "Now, Webb! Turn right, and back to the Chroney. And hurry!"

Webb stifled an oath, and grimly followed his orders. It seemed endless ages before he was done slogging through the fetid mud, and felt the solid turf of the pine forest underfoot again. He burst out into the clearing where the Chroney stood in luminous splendor, surrounded by its ring of mechanisms left there by the Peacemen. A hummock tripped him and he sprawled full length, lacking the will to rise again.

The silent voice spoke exultantly, "It's all right, Webb. We've won! Look!"

tom towers and aircraft and curious images had been.

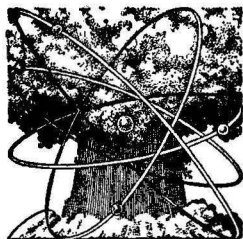
The shattered fabric of time was knit together again.

"But where are they?" Webb asked.

"The Peacemen?" Dineen's voice chuckled. "Scattered over half a dozen eras, millions of years apart. Don't worry about them any more, Webb. They're lost for good. Some of those eras were not exactly—friendly."

Webb picked himself up and looked around. He spied two figures lying huddled in the moonlight. Mag and the Trog. He hurried toward them. Ron's voice was still going on: "We couldn't beat them, Webb, so we had to trick

BUS PASSENGERS BECOME MEN OF IRON



When They Pass an Atomic Plant
And a Strange Accident Happens
in

JOURNEY FOR SEVEN

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

An Amazing Novelet Coming Next Issue!

Gasping, Webb raised his head to look at the Chroney. The ringed machines about it were buzzing and vibrating at an increasing tempo and the luminosity of the timetop itself was changing as he watched. The pale opalescence deepened, became brilliant scarlet—and, with a shrill oscillator-squeal, blacked out.

The corrective forces of the machines of the Peacemen had tamed the runaway generators of the Chroney.

WITH rising hope, Webb saw the forest clear beyond the Chroney, tall trees that stood silent and friendly in the dim moonlight from overhead. The flickering shadow-shapes were gone. The skies all about the horizon were the homely skies of any woodland area, star-sprinkled, holding a few wisps of scudding cloud where the phan-

them. If they hadn't all followed you—or me—or us—well, we would have been in trouble. But they did. Ah, the girl."

Webb sank down beside her. "Mag," he said gently. Then, wildly, "Mag! What's the matter?"

"They're paralyzed, Webb," came Ron's cool voice. "They'll come out of it. Of course, it may take some time. Here, let me take your hand." Webb felt the numbness spreading down his arm. Unbidden, his hand stretched out to touch the girl at the base of the neck. Stiff fingers found a spot where nerve endings joined beneath the skin, pressed in with a rotary motion.

Mag stirred and sighed. "She'll be all right in a minute, now," Ron's voice said. "The Peacemen wanted them out of the way. I would guess that they planned to leave them here, to die or to

rot. For you, of course, they intended something special."

"I'll bet they did," Webb said. He glanced at the tiny figure of Smig. "How about him?" he asked.

"Lend me your hand again." While the fingers were searching for the spot on Smig's scrawny neck Ron's voice said, "I have a special interest in Smig, you know. His people were my ancestors. In that war between the Trogs and the city-dwellers—the Trogs won. And all humanity, after that, came from them.

"It occurred to me while you were having your trouble in the city that they were perfectly right in calling you a Trog. You had my mind in yours inextricably. My mind was a Trog's mind, though a little more highly evolved."

"Just a minute," Webb said harshly. "I want to know something, Ron. I like you, you know that. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. But what I want to know is, are you going to be in the front of my mind like that *all* the time?"

There was a pause, then Ron's voice

again, light and calm. "I see, Webb," it said. "Ah, well, don't fear. I'll go deep inside your mind where I can neither see nor feel nor hear—whenever you say. And I'll come back when you call me, not before.

"You've still got the controller I stole for you, back in the city. When you go back in the Chroney you'll be able to take out the broken parts, replace them with this. Then, Webb, all of time is yours. Meanwhile, I will go."

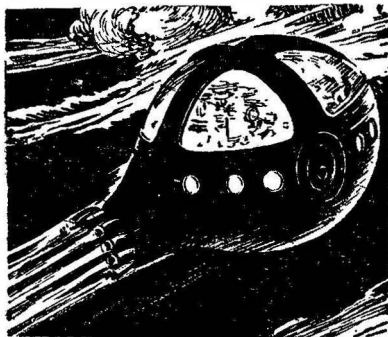
Mag stirred restlessly, tossing her head like a girl about to awaken from sleep.

Webb leaned to touch her, to cradle her in his arms.

"Good-by, Ron," he said. "You understand, don't you!" There was no answer but the ghost of a chuckle from very far way.

Webb grinned. He said aloud, "I just want to be sure that when I kiss Mag this time it's all my own idea." The chuckle came once more, even more faintly.

And then there was silence.



All Aboard the Spaceship for

PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN

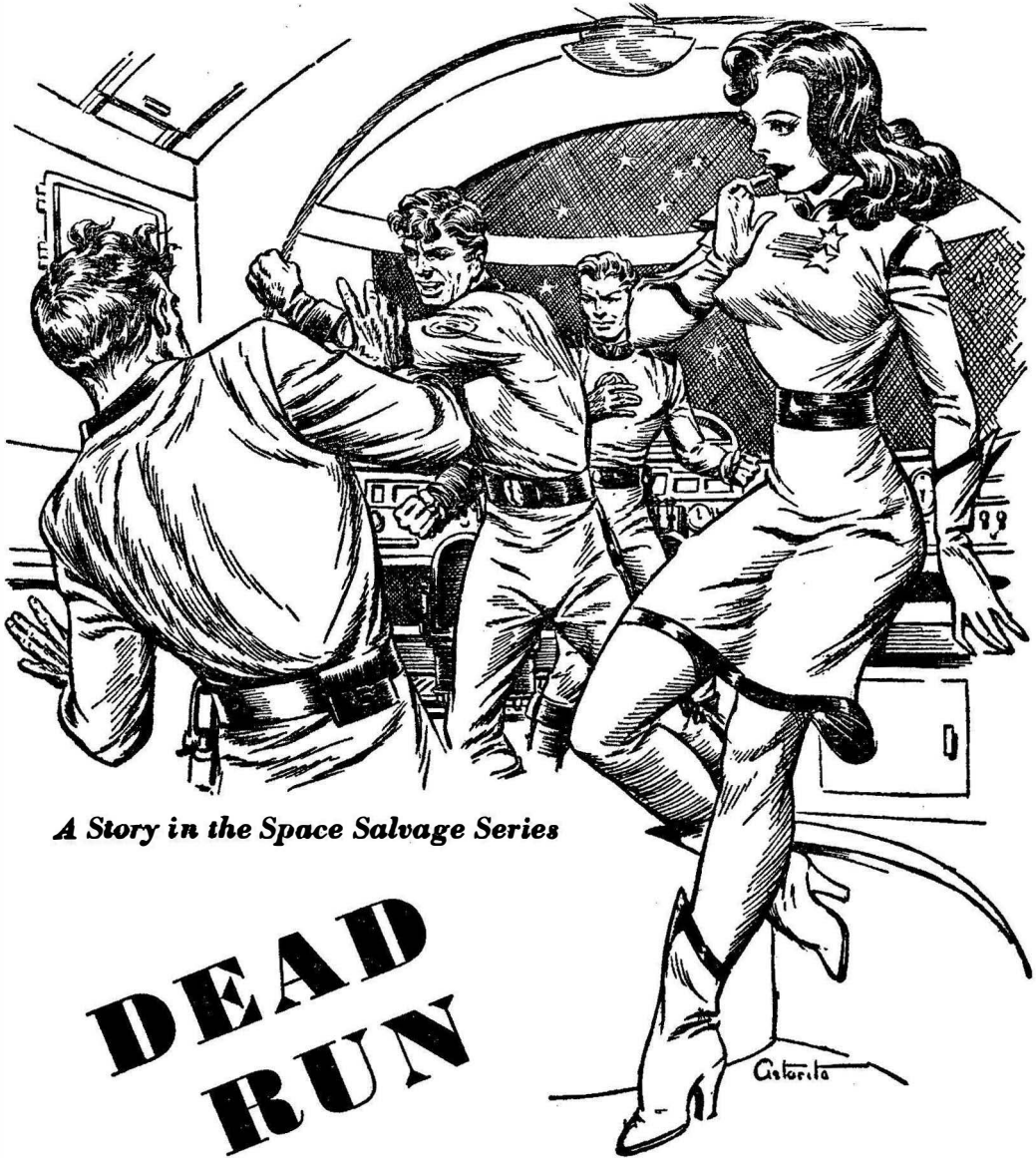
in the astonishing novel of that name

By MURRAY LEINSTER

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

MEET THE MIDGETS WITH THE MARVELOUS KNOW-HOW!

Jake Murchison and his gang fight to save a planet from atomic doom!



A Story in the Space Salvage Series

DEAD RUN

by **CLEVE CARTMILL**

I HELD my temper for the first five minutes, then I pounded on Mr. Everett's desk.

"Just a second," I said. He turned off his voice, which went with the suave slick interior of his office. "You're a little more than a straw boss here. You have the authority to okay my check. That's all I ask. Seems to me it's little

enough—under the circumstances."

He smiled politely. The man who had followed me in here, who had been following me all morning, leaned against a filing cabinet and grinned. Mr. Everett flicked a speculative glance at my shadow before going back into his act.

"I have seen and heard the news, of course, Mr. Murchison," he said

smoothly, "but our bookkeeping system hasn't. I know what a fine job Space Salvage, Inc., did on that sunken shuttle-ship but my books don't. I know Arcton owes you the money but the books haven't heard about it. We have a fixed routine."

"Fixed is right," I snarled. I looked at the man leaning against the file. He was still grinning, his dark eyes bright with intelligence. His long arms hung easily at his sides and he had one immaculate shoe crossed over the other.

"Why have you been tailing me?" I demanded.

"Have I?" he asked.

"Everywhere I've been on this run-around about dough you've tagged along."

"Coincidence?" he suggested.

"Not when you add it up." I turned back to Mr. Everett. "This man is an employe of Solar System Salvage. They've hung me up at every turn. They don't want me to get off this planet. They want a chance to hunt for something we're both after. I can understand hiring a tail to report what I do but I didn't think even Solar could bribe the Comptroller General."

THAT put frost in his eyes, saw-teeth in his voice. "Don't be insulting," he snapped.

"Look at it my way," I went on reasonably. "They tied up my cargo of herculium until yesterday. It hasn't had time to sell but it's the biggest single fortune in the System. I've tried to borrow money on it. No soap. *Solar fixed it*. I did a contract job for Arcton. Everybody admits it. But getting paid? No soap."

I let the conclusion hang in the air. The frost in Everett's eyes turned into a deep freeze.

"I can sympathize," he said icily, "but as I've said the books can't. You'll be paid in due course. Perhaps in a couple of days. Now, Mr. Murchison, I'm a busy man—"

I turned and stamped out, followed by Lanky. Two days! By that time Solar could gain advantages impossible to

overcome. Meantime, the *Dolphin* was held in dock for port duties. Here I was, potentially one of the richest men in history, and had no cash.

"You Jake Murchison?" a voice asked as I waited for an elevator. He wore a messenger's uniform, and handed me a sealed envelope when I admitted the identity. I signed for it and let the elevator go by.

"Dearest Jake," the message read. "Come to the *Andromeda* at once. Emergency. Helen."

I grabbed an *up* elevator. Emergency? Must be. She had underlined it three times. I felt like groaning. I did and a lady standing next to me moved into a corner. Then it began to seem funny, this last straw, this one more trouble, and I chuckled. The lady couldn't move any farther, so she just stiffened.

I tore out to the roof taxi port and snaffled one. "Landing field, passenger area," I said.

My tail, I saw, took the next taxi and we twosomed across the bright roofs of Arcton City to the shore of the 10-mile lake of ooze. The giant water spiders were skating over the spot where the shuttle-ship had been buried.

"Heard the news?" my driver asked.

"Nothing startling," I said.

"Yeah. Ship full of dead men and women and fissionable explosives headed right smack for us. Nobody alive on it."

"Maybe if we ignore it it'll do the same for us."

"Nope. Set on automatic controls. There's an emergency call out for Jake Murchison."

"Well, well."

"Say, he's some guy, ain't he?"

"His mother always thought so," I said.

The driver bristled. "Watch it, buddy," he warned. "Nobody talks against Jake Murchison around me. My sister was on that shuttle-ship."

"Excuse me," I said. "Yeah, he's wonderful. Pretty, too."

"Well," the driver said dubiously, "I don't know if I'd give him that."

Then we swooped over the field and

the mile-long *Andromeda* in her launching cradle soon loomed ahead. She was gleaming and polished, unlike the stove-in hull we'd peeled off a magnetic asteroid not long before. The driver dropped to the *Andromeda's* landing stage at the entry port, about half a mile from the ground. I paid him and got out.

Far off in the distance was a tiny silhouette that was my salvage ship, the *Dolphin*, locked tight with "Amounts due." I glared and entered the big ship as my shadow's taxi floated past and down toward the vast passenger station.

The *Andromeda* had an expectant feel. I got it as soon as I hit the deck of the entry lock. That's one of those silly things about big space-liners. They don't throb when the drive is idling like ships in the *Dolphin* class. You can't feel anything but you always seem to.

There's an atmosphere of excitement, of spaces waiting hungrily for you. It's an extra-sensory fact that somehow communicates itself to you and then takes charge. Watch the face of any passenger just before the take-off on your next trip and you'll see it.

But I wouldn't have needed that feeling to know big things were cooking in the fission pot. Helen's face told me as soon as I reached the navigation room.

She was Space Captain Helen Wall, the platinum twin comets on her uniform gleaming almost as brightly as her green eyes. The gray cap was businesslike on her red hair and you wouldn't think that anybody as beautiful as she and with that whistle-at figure could have the dignity which her responsibilities called for. But she did and it wasn't an act.

CARROLL was there too, all seven feet of him. He was bending over the chart table, his shoulders wider than it. He turned at the sound of my entrance and spoke first, in that gentle, crooning voice that always surprised you, coming as it did from a small-scale giant.

"Hello, Jake. Captain Wall thought I'd better go along, too."

"We're ready to blast," Helen said, "as soon as you approve our preparations."

"Give me the picture," I said.

"Well," she began but I cut her off.

"Let Carroll. He knows what I want."

She didn't blush, she wasn't angry at my curtness. It made me feel warm. There's a time for play, a time for work, a time for everything. I was obviously in charge on a salvage operation. Even though she was captain of the ship and outranked me she acknowledged my authority in my field.

"There's a ship, first class," Carroll began and I thought it strange again that, though he spoke not much above a whisper, you never had to strain to hear him.

"The *Clandon*, Interplanetary Transports' big new job. All of her crew and passengers are dead. She's on a fixed course for Arcton and astrogators figure she'll hit the city of Kilvon smack in the city hall if she isn't shifted off course."

"Nice astrogation," I said.

"They had help. A few hours ago the second officer of the *Clandon* got the Port Authority here on the Priority Beam. He was in bad shape. Said the pilot had locked the board and stepped out for a minute. Nothing unusual about it with an officer on watch.

"Then people started dying. A steward brought him the word and keeled over. He knew what was happening and 'cast his position, course and speed. He kicked off while talking."

"What *did* happen?"

"A tank of cynophthalin, bound for a pest-infested area on Arcton Four, exploded. You know what that means."

I shuddered. "But I heard something about fissionable explosives?"

"For mining operations. Eighty tons of ferocargite. If the ship hits—no planet."

I thought it over. My job was to get aboard that runaway, filled with the most deadly gas in existence, and shift its course—and without time to prepare properly.

"How much time?" I asked.

"As near as they can figure, thirty-six—no"—he glanced at his watch—"thirty-five hours."

"Why me?" I now asked Helen. "And why you?"

"You're the only competent salvage outfit here and my ship is the only one that can match the *Clandon* in speed."

"I won't work for Solar," I said. "After your father has stymied me everywhere just to hold me here while he hunts for Phamign's laboratory and the secret of founding herculium."

She frowned. "What now?"

I told her about my experience of the morning.

"I had nothing to do with it," she said. "I 'cast father two days ago and demanded that he dismiss Oliver Clayborne, who dreamed up all those bright delaying actions. I—I'd rather not talk about it."

"Why not?"

"Well, he's my father, isn't he? I might not approve of some of the things he says and does but—"

"Never mind," I said. "How did Junior come out?"

"He still has his job."

"I see. Well, I still won't work for Solar."

"I see!" she replied. "You'll let a planet be blown to dust—for stubborn pride!"

"Oh, I'm going along," I said. "But not for pay. Not for Solar."

Her eyes softened and the frown which had developed on Carroll's face went away.

"Thanks, Jake," Helen said.

It wasn't a smile I gave her, it was a look. "Equipment?" I asked Carroll.

He rubbed his square jaw uncertainly. "I've got a winch with a mile of electric cable and an electromagnet, Jake. I figured we could drop the magnet out of the after emergency hatch and, when we got close enough to the runaway, switch on the juice. That way it would latch on and you—or I—could slide down the cable and get inside."

"That's sound, except for one thing. When the magnet drops out of the hatch its inertia will cause it to string straight

out behind. It'll be dangling there on the cable. And if we drop down far enough to make contact we'll be in a heck of a dangerous position if anything goes wrong. We've got to do better than that."

"That's what bothered me when I started thinking it over," he said gently. "I thought maybe you'd—"

"Shut up! Let me think. Maybe I got an idea."

I kicked things around in my head and got nowhere. They watched me as if I were a hat and the rabbit long overdue.

A CALL on the screen ruined whatever I might have dreamed up but it was a welcome call—Cap Lane, from the *Dolphin*.

"Just wishing you luck mainly," he said. "But I wanted to tell you you got Comptroller General Everett really worked up. He just called me and said that what you said was a dirty insinuation."

"Maybe it was," I said. "But it made sense."

"Take it easy then."

"Okay, Cap. Thanks for the message."

"Jake," he said, "listen."

"Mmmm?"

"Watch it, will you?"

"Sure. Let's don't get maudlin."

"Heaven forbid," he said, and blanked out.

"We'd better blast off," I said. "I've got about fifteen hours to work something out."

Helen buttoned the attention siren into a hoarse wailing. "Stand by!" she ordered crisply. "Crew at stations. Close—"

She broke off at the sound of footsteps. She glanced over my shoulder. "At ease," she said into the intercom.

I turned to see who had arrived. It was Junior. Behind him was my shadow of the morning.

Junior—Oliver Clayborne—was his usual confident self. He occupied a position in Solar that wasn't quite clear but there was no doubt about his authority. He loomed—he was almost as big

as Carroll—in the entryway and looked us over with his boyish blue eyes.

His smile was wide, and his blond hair orderly. I had a hunch that his nails would be manicured. I looked. They were.

"What," Captain Wall inquired in a voice full of crushed ice, "do you want?"

He gave her the special smile reserved for her. A smile that had "Mmm, good!" stenciled all over it.

"I'm a passenger," he said, and took a paper from his jacket. "Orders from your father, Philemon Wall, president of Solar."

She took the paper, skimmed it: "Authorized . . . ordered to accompany . . . with bodyguard—" She broke off. She looked at Lanky. "Is that it?"

Lanky bowed sardonically. "'Rocky' Tibbett, Captain. At your—or rather his—service."

Helen turned from them, flipped a switch. A face appeared on the screen, a pretty face. A very pretty face, but not as pretty as Helen's.

"It is my pleasure to serve you," it said.

"Captain Helen Wall, the *Andromeda*. I want to talk to my father on the Priority Beam. Reverse charges. Hurry, please. *Please* hurry."

The screen blanked, sputtered, buzzed, crackled and went silent. Presently another face gradually took form as if it were a gas materializing atom by atom. It was a famous face, broad, smooth, filled with a—well, shrewd kindness is about right.

"Hello, honey," it said heartily but the green eyes were wary.

"I'm captain of this ship," Helen said in clipped tones. "I will not have Oliver aboard. He's in the way."

He fell into her mood. "And I am president of the corporation of which you are an employee. My orders supersede yours except as applies to the actual operation of your ship in flight. He stays." His eyes shifted. "Hello, Oliver. Bodyguard satisfactory?"

"Yes, sir." Junior's voice was grave as befits an employee.

Not Helen's. "Why should you set a spy on me?"

"Look at it from Solar's viewpoint," her father said in reasonable tones. "You have developed an unfortunate interest in our chief rival." He dropped me a mite-sized nod. "I feel certain that this operation will be successful, for I have a high regard for Mr. Murchison's abilities and ingenuities.

"But then, in the flush of victory and so forth, what is to prevent you and him from going off to find Phamign's laboratory? You see, Helen, I'm not questioning your loyalty. I'm questioning your judgment. And so I'm setting on board a loyal employee to watch you.

"If you were not the only captain available you would not be in charge today. But you are wasting time. If that runaway ship now reaches its destination millions will die. You should be in flight."

Helen angrily flipped off the switch and turned to Junior. "Keep out from underfoot," she snapped. Into the intercom, "Stand by for blast!"

VARIOUS bells jangled as we lashed ourselves protectively against the initial acceleration. Then we were off.

Carroll called out the course when we were in free flight, and looked at me. "Any ideas yet?"

I looked at Junior and Lanky, standing together, sort of like a team. "Yes. I've an idea I don't like some people less than two light years away."

Junior grinned. "Mr. Tibbett is armed."

"Why didn't you bring a brigade?"

"Mr. Murchison," Junior said and his tone said, "Please don't be childish."

"Mr. Murchison, there's no secret about my presence here. You have a lead on the whereabouts of Professor Phamign's laboratory. I have been assigned to prevent you from finding it without Solar's knowledge."

"Matter of curiosity," I said. "If you found it and got hold of the formula, what would you do with it?"

He chuckled boyishly and made a gesture with his shining fingertips.

"Complete an operation already started," he said. "That salvaged cargo of herculium which you took off the *Astralot* has an almost incalculable value provided"—here was one of his dramatic pauses—"provided that cargo is *all* the herculium in existence and all there is likely to be."

"What's this operation already started?"

"Basic, my dear Murchison. Word is already about the System that Phamign's formula exists and is about to be found. We want it, frankly, to knock down the value of your cargo to almost zero so you won't be a dangerous competitor, so you'll remain a little one-ship outfit."

"So you can continue to be the bloated monopoly."

"Exactly," he said cheerfully. "Whereas you, if you get the formula first, would undoubtedly tear it up and deny having found it. That act would bring you unimaginable riches and no doubt"—he inclined his head at Helen—"unimaginable pleasures."

CARROLL beat me to him. One solid smack with his left stretched Junior on the floor and at the same time his right arm took Lanky into camp. Carroll relieved him of his weapon, kicked him down the corridor and threw Junior after him.

Then Carroll blushed.

"That was sort of silly," he said gently. "Whatever he said or intimated you'd still be the same person you are, ma'am. Captain, I mean."

"Come on," I growled, "let's go to work."

Helen watched us go with shining eyes.

We each pulled a small gig from the Communications Annex rack and let their fans push us aft toward the machine shop.

"You're going to have trouble," I told Carroll. "That's the second time you've socked him."

"I deserve it, I guess," Carroll said mournfully, "but—"

"Yeah, I know. Well, thanks, fella.

You barely beat me to him. A good thing, maybe—my glass jaw. If I tangle with Junior again I'm going to use a blackjack—or a pair of Kragorian hounds."

"Machine shop," Carroll read from a sign and turned down a corridor. It was eery, wandering through a passenger liner that had no passengers except for our two star boarders.

THE machine-shop foreman showed me what he had and said he was glad to meet me. I said thanks, introduced Carroll and pointed to a rack of spare exhaust tubes.

"How large is that magnet?" I asked Carroll.

"Six inches diameter, Jake."

"And those?" I asked the foreman. "Inside?"

"Six and a half, the little ones."

"Got a coil spring about six feet long, less than six inches diameter?"

"Can do," he said. "Emergency shocks. This way."

He took us across the huge room to a row of 50-foot lockers. And there was my spring.

"Hot diggety!" I said.

"I don't get it," Carroll demurred.

"Popgun. Ever have one as a kid? We can aim one of those exhaust tubes like a gun barrel, the oldtime propulsion ones. We simply rig up a trigger mechanism for the spring and let it sock our magnet. It'll snap it out at pretty high velocity if I know anything about that spring."

A wide sweet grin spread across Carroll's craggy face.

"Out of character," he said.

"Again, please?"

"Compressed air, Jake. How can you do anything without it? The *Astralot*, the shuttle-ship, the—"

"I had it in mind," I pointed out, "when I asked the diameter of the magnet and tube. But it isn't a tight fit. Let's get at it. We need an anchoring frame, welded, to hold the 'gun' in the emergency hatch. We need a cocking device and a trigger. Give me a pencil."

I made some sketches, Carroll added suggestions and in fifteen minutes we had four machinists rigging up the assembly.

"Uh—Jake," Carroll said and motioned me to one side. I joined him and he looked down at the floor off to one side. He twisted his giant form from one foot to the other and, so help me, stuck his hamlike hands in his pockets.

"This is kind of hard to say, Jake."

"Why? In a new language?"

"Well, no," he said gently. "I want you to know I'll play it any way you like but I want to ask you a question."

"Not where I was last Tuesday," I said. "None of your business."

He grinned and his blush faded. "Would you really tear up that herculium formula?"

"Sure. Why not?"

He looked disappointed. "I just wanted to know," he almost whispered.

"In the first place," I pointed out, "it'll be on paper that's over a hundred years old and about to fall apart. I couldn't give that to the Interstellar Council. I'd have to copy it first. That's where it belongs."

Carroll grinned, grabbed my arms. "You son of a gun. You old son of a gun!"

"You mean you believed Junior?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, Jake. It sounded logical."

"I'd clip you one on the jaw," I said, "if I could reach that high. Look, bud, I don't want to make any speeches but that process is valuable. Just think of the household uses, ignoring its original warlike purpose. Coat a house with it—it would last forever. Sidewalks, floors, ship surfaces. Okay, take it from there, buster."

"I said I was sorry, Jake."

"That still doesn't stop me from being a little bit sore."

"I suppose not," Carroll murmured. "What do you want me to do?"

"Get our space-suits and a helmet for Helen. We've got to work in that airlock, and be in communication with her."

Carroll loped off. I watched the work

crew assembling our gadget and slapped one man on the back as he came up with an improvement on my trigger arrangement. About then a voice spoke in my ear.

"I want my gun back."

It was Lanky. "How would you like to go to gehenna?" I asked.

He grinned. "Not particularly," he said. "But I'm in a spot."

"I'm weeping."

"Yeah, I know," he said. "But you honestly seem like a nice guy and so does that king-size pal of yours. I'm a working man and what good's a working man without tools?"

He seemed very sincere and harmless but I'm a rotten judge of character. I waited for more.

"I never had anybody take my gun away from me before but then I never saw anybody move as fast as that guy Carroll, especially where everything has no weight. That's humiliating but I can take it. I can bow to a better man. But he fouled up my job."

"Yes?"

"Still, my boss doesn't know it. You know how it is. If a private detective falls down on his job the client doesn't have to pay. I need the money. Well, I was hired as a bodyguard and while I can justify myself for letting the body get knocked silly—there were two of you—I can't explain loss of my gun without a lot of embarrassment, maybe no pay."

My mouth had begun to fall open halfway through this. It completed the act. "I—will—be—darned!" I said.

HE blinked.

"Out there somewhere," I said, pointing forward, "is a ship full of dead people and a load of explosives that might very well blow your world—and us—to nothing. Carroll and I—and Captain Wall and every crew member aboard—are all that stand between life and death for millions. I don't want to sound melodramatic but that's the honest truth. And you expect me to get excited about whether you get paid or not?"

"Nonsense," he said easily. "You're going to save the works. You always have, haven't you?" He smiled.

"You're no dope," I said. "So I can't understand how you can possibly worry over such petty things."

"Listen, Mr. Murchison," he said. "I got confidence in you and Carroll. I know a lot more about you guys than you think. So I'm not worried about this runaway ship. But I am worried about getting my dough. I got a wife and a"—his face lighted up—"a son. He's six.

"He's a good kid and he thinks I'm pretty special. He wouldn't like to know his old man had his gun taken away from him. Look, I don't want to use it. I don't even want it loaded. I just want it.

"You can empty it. I wouldn't want to shoot you or Carroll—my family depend on you to keep on living. I wouldn't want to shoot Captain Wall for the same reason. And I wouldn't shoot my client for obvious reasons."

It made sense. I took the gun out of my pocket and removed the energizing cylinder.

"I'd like to have you on my side in an emergency," I said. "You don't get ruffled."

"Maybe you will," he said. "Some-time. I'll remember this. Mr. Big was still out when I left the salon. Even if he's come to by the time I get back he won't know about this."

He climbed into his gig, started his fan and rolled away.

Carroll came back, looking like a mother hen with seven lost chicks. "I was thinking we'd ought to get a nap," he said. "Nerves, that sort of thing."

"Why not?" I said. "Lots of time. Let me give instructions."

I told the foreman what to do, Carroll dumped space-suits and a helmet for Helen into his gig and we sought out one of the finest suites aboard. We stretched out after setting an alarm and I went to sleep. Carroll practically died. I had to work at getting him awake hours later and stayed clear in case he came out fighting.

He looked at the clock. "Lord, Jake, we don't have much time. There's lots of things I have to do."

"Well, do 'em."

"I got to tell Captain Wall when to swing around, how to match that ship's course at a little slower speed than the *Clandon's* making before we even start to install that gimmick."

"The crew can install it. Let's go."

He loaded the space-suits and a helmet for Helen into his gig and I followed him to the navigation room.

"Don't bother him," I told her. "We're running out of time."

She and I moved as far from Carroll as we could. Her green eyes were grave now. Her mouth drooped.

"Who's going aboard, Jake?"

"I am, of course."

"You'll be careful?"

She wasn't Captain now. She was Helen. She was—well, when a girl stands close to me, looks up at me with almost-tears in her eyes, with moist lips parted, and *then* takes hold of my hands, my reflexes take over. It's automatic. Fun, too.

We broke out of our clinch presently and the way my heart was pounding you'd think I'd run a mile.

"*Whew!*" I said. That seemed to express it so I didn't paint any lilies. I watched her walk to the chart table and if she stumbled once and I was pleased nobody can sue me for it.

Carroll gave her instructions and we departed for the emergency hatch. The crew had installed the framework but of course they hadn't put in the tube. The outer hatch would have to be opened for that.

I shoed them out, we got into our space-suits and pressurized the lock.

"Testing," I said. "Calling Captain Wall."

"Yes, Mr. Murchison," her voice said in my ear.

"Calling Carroll."

"Okay, Jake," came his gentle reply.

"Captain," I said, "we're going to be busy. You'll watch the clock and change course as you were instructed. We're taking over the ship now. You must

obey us instantly and without question if we give you orders. That applies to Carroll as well as me. Understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Murchison."

"All right, Carroll, open the lock."

WE didn't need any conversation. Each of us knew what was to be done. We slipped the tube in place and prepared for welding.

"What are we going to do about Junior?" I asked Carroll and told him about Lanky's gun.

"Quite a guy." Carroll chuckled. "We don't have to worry about Junior."

"But we do. We know the former orbit and probably location of the asteroid on which Phamign kept his secret laboratory. Junior's job is to beat us there—at least to tie us."

"You'll figure out something, Jake. You always do."

"How can I figure out something if we're tied up in port for two more days? He can start looking as soon as we land—if we land."

"Let's take this ship over, Jake. We can go off on our own. That detective isn't armed now. We can take care of Junior."

"Are you serious?"

Carroll started the torch, pinpointed the flame on the assembly I held. As I looked down the grandeur of space, the gleaming cold stars, the myriad-patterned universe, dwarfed the brilliant blue tongue of flame.

"Of course I'm not serious," Carroll said with a chuckle. "I guess I lost a momentary confidence in you when I misunderstood what you'd do with the formula if and when you found it. My proposition was an unconscious statement of that loss."

"Well, for heaven's sake, let's get that threshed out now. You're going to be on this end of the line when I slide out of here. I certainly don't want any worries about your lack of confidence."

"You needn't have, Jake."

"Okay, then. You told me once that herculium can't be analyzed. If it can't we've got to find that formula. But why can't it?"

"I want to know one more thing first, Jake. It's understood now that our salvaged cargo of herculium is worth more dough than you could spend in a thousand years—if that's all there is. What we have would coat the whole Space Patrol for years to come and piracy could be stamped out in a few months. But if you get the formula and make it available to the Council down goes the value of the cargo. You know that?"

"Of course."

"Then—why? Why cut you and me and Cap out of a fortune?"

He tacked the tube to the framework at the last place and cut off the torch. "All ready," he said.

"I don't understand your question," I said. "I hate monopolies and I'm going to bust Solar if I can. All the scientific knowledge that is developed by or available to the people—my Lord, I'm talking like a politician—should belong to the people. That's all."

"But what will we get out of it if you turn this formula over and knock down the value of our cargo?"

"Nothing, maybe—except royalties on every pound of herculium founded from now to evermore."

"I hadn't thought of that. Okay, Jake, I'll tell you why Solar lost interest in getting a sample for analysis. My grandfather's book again. *Space Pirate*, remember? It had one sentence buried in a long descriptive passage.

"That passage described the characteristics of herculium, telling how it was impregnable to almost any force and all the things you know about. But it said—and I almost quote—*the atomic structure of one of the ingredients undergoes a change. In other words transmutation takes place.*

"See what that means? You can analyze the finished product but if you combine its elements you just get a metal stew. We've got to get hold of that formula, Jake. Because I feel the same as you do."

"You ought to run for office," I said.

"Clandon in sight." Helen's voice spoke into our earphones. "And I think

you men are terrific. Had you forgotten I was in on this circuit?"

I had. Oh, well. "You're pretty, too," I said. "We want to get within one hundred feet of the *Clandon*. Whatever maneuvering is necessary is your problem. Proceed."

"Yes, Mr. Murchison," her official voice said.

All we could do was wait. But we filled in the time.

"Do you realize," Carroll asked, "what a pull there'll be on you from sheer inertia?"

"I've thought of it."

"We'd better tape your gloves for sliding down the cable."

"We'd better, I guess."

We did. And presently the nose of the *Clandon* slid into sight below us.

"Increase speed gradually, Captain," I said.

We crawled ahead. "Decrease." We did. "Hold it there."

"Ready?" I asked Carroll.

He nodded. He put his hand to the switch. I pulled the trigger. The magnet shot out and down, immediately whirled backwards.

"Now!" I said. Carroll punched the switch.

The magnet attached itself to the runaway. A line existed between us. "Hold speed constant," I ordered and slid down the tube. "Here goes," I said.

IT was weird and a little frightening to be on a half-inch line in space, not anchored to it. If the pull of inertia should yank me loose—and my arms were beginning to ache with the strain—the ship would reach her appointed destination and explode. I would float in space until I died or was rescued. If . . .

But I went down a cautious foot at a time and reached the hull. I followed a low guard rail to the emergency hatch, top-side, and opened it with the wrench strapped to my wrist. I entered the airlock and punched the proper button to pressurize it.

"I'm in," I said. I heard both their breaths. It was a combined sigh.

I opened the lock and entered the ship proper.

The Blue People—I couldn't think of them as anything else. Still they weren't as bad as the bodies on the *Astralot*, exploded by contact with deep space. But they were blue and in odd attitudes. I kept my eyes away as I went to the navigation room.

The officer on watch and a steward had died there. No one else.

"How much time?" I asked.

"We'll hit the atmosphere of *Arcton* in fifteen minutes," Helen's voice answered.

"I have to get the key for that control panel lock" I said. "This is it. Tell Carroll—what the heck, I can tell him—haul in, Carroll. And cross everything."

"Good luck, Jake," he whispered. "Hurry!"

I had to look at the Blue People now. I was looking for a pilot's uniform. It might be anywhere. A sudden thought struck me and I headed for the Men's Room. He was there in the doorway. Poor guy, I thought, he never made it. I found his key and tore back. I unlocked the panel. I reported to Helen.

"Now what?" I asked.

"See that 'Horizontal' dial? Turn it to seventy. Put the 'Vertical' on three. That'll put you in an orbit around *Arcton*. We'll send tugs to bring you in."

"What about all this gas, Carroll?" I asked.

"Everybody dead aboard?"

"Except me and don't talk about it. It ain't pretty."

"But you're in a suit. You can open the vents."

"Right. Beat it."

"Jake," Helen's voice said.

"Yes?"

"Uh—I don't know. I guess that's all. Just—Jake."

"Thanks, baby."

"Say. Jake." This was Carroll.

"Now what?"

"About Junior. I had to sock him again."

"Had to?"

"Well, I guess not. Maybe I've devel-

oped the habit. But he made a crack about professional heroes I didn't like and I let one go. Lanky is lashing him in a bunk and crying about it costing him money."

"Offer him a job with us."

"I already did. He jumped at it."

They hit atmosphere then and no further communication was possible in our talkers. I was in the orbit—and alone. I was on the *Clandon* with a ship full of dead people and I didn't like it. Even as I aired the ship I felt gaggy. And I didn't dare take off my helmet—not for a few minutes.

That girl over there—pretty legs—but blue. I turned my eyes away.

By now the air should be clear. I took off my helmet and sniffed tentatively.

I switched on the screen and instantly

Helen's face filled it. "All right?" she asked.

"I guess so. I'm still alive."

"Cap was pounding on the lock practically as we landed. He's here now."

Cap Lane's silvered head filled the screen, and he grinned.

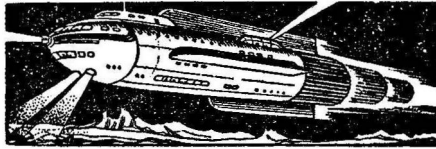
"I don't know what you did to the Comptroller General, but it must have been something, Jake."

"Did the check come?"

"Within two hours," he said. "We're all ready to take off, waiting on you. Tugs on their way."

Helen's face came in. It looked as if she'd pushed Cap away.

"Jake, I don't know when I'll see you again. Just remember—I don't care *what* everybody says—I think you're pretty, too!"



Wonder Oddities

WRONG-way electrons, usually called positrons, are among the eerier mysteries of nuclear physics. They are caused when an electron is hit so hard by some object that its time sense is reversed, causing it to travel backward in time. Science, however, still has much to learn about them.

OSMOTIC shock is the new method of treating most of the viruses that prey on bacteria, according to Dr. Thomas F. Anderson of the University of Pennsylvania. The shock causes the heads of these viruses, formerly called bacteriophages, to enlarge and burst. However, the method does not affect viruses T1, T3 and T7.

NICE shiny fresh-from-the-oven quartz crystals, rather than those grown by nature, are being produced in Bell Telephone Laboratories by Professor R. Nacken, formerly of the University of Frankfurt. The artificial crystals are clearer and freer of imperfections than the nature-made variety.

DIFFERENCES in protein patterns between the sexes and the young and old, were explained recently by Dr. Philip G. Ackerman, Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Study of such protein patterns promises to help medicine greatly in its wars on old age and disease.

EXCEEDING twice the speed of sound when its compressor has its 1,137 blades operating in high, the new giant wind tunnel for supersonic flight at Langley Field, Virginia, is already in operation. Velocities in the huge tunnel's test section can be varied by adjusting the flexible walls of the nozzle.

RADAR is currently coming into use in a new field, namely the detection of gallstones, bullets or other foreign matter in the human body. Developed by Dr. George D. Ludwig of the Naval Medical Research Institute, Washington, D. C., it can locate such objects where even the X-rays fail.

She Was a Dream



Half naked she went on
swift white feet through the
tossing glare of the torches

Come to Life—but She Was Not Human!

The Dancing Girl of Ganymede

CHAPTER I

The Wanderer

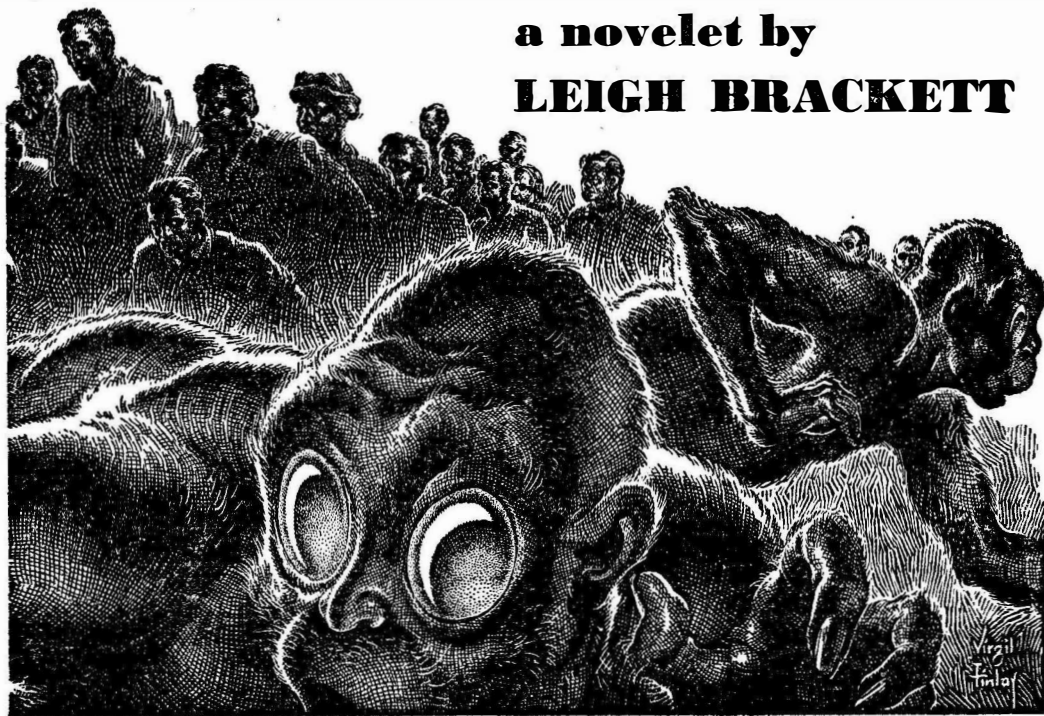
TONY HARRAH came into the bazaar of Komar, heading for the Street of the Gamblers. The sour wine was heavy in him and his pockets were light and he was in no hurry. Win or lose, there was nothing to be in a hurry about. He was on the beach and Komar is a far lost beach for an Earthman.

The wind blew slowly through the narrow streets, stirring the torch flames that burned eternally under the dim red

sky. It smelled of heat and sulphur, of the volcanic heart of Ganymede. Even here on the plateau, a thousand feet above the jungle, there was no escape from it. The sliding roofs of the houses were open wide to receive it for there was no other breath of air.

Above the tumult of the bazaar the great yellow star that was the Sun blazed splendidly in the far darkness of space. Jupiter filled half the sky, misty,

**a novelet by
LEIGH BRACKETT**



banded with crimson and purple and grey. Between Sun and Jupiter raced the thronging moons, catching light now from one, now from the other, burning, flashing, glorious.

Harrah took no joy in that magnificence. He had looked at it too long.

He shouldered his way toward the square where the Street of the Gamblers joins the Street of Maidens and the Street of Thieves and at his heels like a furry shadow came Tok the aboriginal, the lemur-eyed child of the forests, who was Harrah's and who loved him utterly.

It was on the edge of the square that Harrah caught the first wild rhythms of the music. And it was there that Tok reached out one sudden hand-like paw and caught his master's shirt and said, "Lord—wait!"

Harrah turned, startled by the urgency in Tok's voice. He opened his mouth to speak but he did not speak. The look in Tok's eyes stopped him. A queer blank look, luminous with some great fear.

The aboriginal moved forward, past Harrah, and then became a motionless shape of darkness between the torches and the moons. His head was lifted slightly into the wind. His nostrils quivered and gradually the quivering spread over his whole slim body as though he breathed in terror with every breath. Imperceptibly his flesh seemed to shrink in upon itself until all the look of humankind was gone from him and he was an animal poised for flight.

"Lord," he whispered. "Evil, Lord—evil and death. It is in the wind."

Harrah repressed a shiver. He could see nothing but the crowded square—the polyglot life of Komar, the landless, the lawless, the unwanted and forgotten, the mingled off-scourings of the Inner Worlds, mixed with the dark native-human folk of Ganymede. The only unusual thing was the music and there was nothing fearsome in that. Pipe and drum and a double-banked harp, raw and barbaric but stirring to the blood.

Yet Tok half turned and looked at him with the eyes of one who has seen

forbidden things and cried out, "Go! Go back, Lord. The wind is full of death!"

And as he spoke others of his kind came running from the square, furry man-things far from their native jungles, and one of them whimpered as he ran, "Demons. Demons with the eyes of darkness!"

"Go, Lord," whispered Tok.

The power of suggestion was so strong that Harrah almost obeyed. Then he caught himself and laughed. "What is it, Tok?" he demanded, in the simple aboriginal speech. "I see no demons."

"They are there. Please, Lord!"

"Nonsense." He jingled the coins in his pocket. "Either I win some money or you steal to feed us. Go back yourself."

He patted Tok's quivering shoulder and went on into the square, forging his way through the crowd. He was curious now. He wanted to see what had frightened Tok and set the aboriginals to flight.

HE saw the dancing girl, whirling crimson and white across the dirty stones, to the music of pipe and drum and harp, played by three men who might have been her brothers.

She was a Wanderer, from her ornaments and her ragged dress—a sort of interplanetary gypsy, one of the vast worldless tribe of space who travel from planet to planet but are citizens of none. Their blood is a mixture of every race in the System capable of cross-breeding and they are outcaste below the lowest.

There had been a few of them in Komar but this girl was new. If Harrah had seen her before he would not have forgotten. He thought that no man could ever forget her. There was something about her eyes.

Half naked in her bright rags she went on swift white feet through the tossing glare of the torches. Her hair was tawny gold and her face was the face of a smiling angel and her eyes were black.

They did not smile, those dark, deep

eyes. They had no kinship with the lithe gaiety of her body. They were sorrowful and smouldering and full of anger—the most bitter raging eyes that Harrah had ever seen.

He pushed forward, farther still, until he stood in the open space where she danced, so close that her loose mane of hair almost brushed him as she passed. And as he watched he became aware of an odd thing.

The music was sensuous and the very steps of the dance were an invitation as old as humankind. Yet in some peculiar way the girl took the primitive animal rhythms and transmuted them into something cool and lovely. An old old memory came back to Harrah, of silver birches dancing in the wind.

Then, abruptly, she came to a halt before him, her arms high above her head, poised on a quivering note of longing from the reed pipe. She looked at him, the dark, sinewy Earthman with a handful of coins, and her look was a curse.

He could feel the hatred in her as a personal thing, alive and thirsting. The violence of it shook him. He was about to speak, and then she was gone again, blown like a leaf on the surging music.

He stood where he was, waiting, in the grip of a sudden fascination that he had no wish to break. And between his feet as he watched a small brown cur slunk snarling.

The dogs of Komar are like many another pack on worlds far from their parent Earth. Lost, strayed or abandoned from the ships that land there out of space, they have thriven in the gutters and the steaming alleys. And now, quite suddenly, Harrah became aware of a new sound in the bazaar.

The narrow streets were as full of noise as ever and the wild oblique rhythms of the music filled the square. But the little brown cur lifted his muzzle to the sky and howled, a long savage wail, and somewhere close by another dog-throat picked it up, and another, and still another, until the square rang with it. Harrah heard the cry spreading out and away, running through the

twisting alleys and the dark ways of Komar, howl answering howl, desolate and full of fear, and a coldness crept along the Earthman's spine.

There was something terrible about that primitive warning out of Earth's far past, unchanged even on this alien moon.

The music faltered and died. The girl stopped her dancing, her body half bent, poised and still. A silence fell across the square and gradually the sound of human voices ceased entirely as the city listened to the howling of its dogs.

Harrah shivered. The crowd began to stir uneasily and a little muttering began to creep under the wailing of the dogs. The dancing girl relaxed very slowly from her pose, gathering herself.

A rough body brushed Harrah's knee. He looked down to see a great lurcher moving half-crouched into the open space. He realized then that the square was full of dogs, furtive shadows gliding between the legs of the men. They had stopped howling, these dogs. They growled and whimpered and their white fangs gleamed.

The small brown cur moaned once. Then he went with a rush and a scrabble out across the stones and leaped straight for the dancing girl's throat.

CHAPTER II

The Brothers

SHE did not scream. She moved, as swiftly as the dog, and caught the wiry brown body in mid-leap, between her two hands. Harrah saw her stand so for a split second, holding the frenzied beast that was shrieking now to get at her, and her eyes had narrowed to two slits of cold fire, utterly black and without fear.

Then she threw the dog into the jaws of the lurcher, that had started a rush of his own, and the two went down in a snarling tangle.

After that there was bedlam. The one act of violence was all that was needed. The crowd turned and rolled in upon itself in a panic desire to be quit of the square. Dogs and humans were mixed in a trampling screaming turmoil. Something had set the beasts mad and in their madness they snapped and tore at whatever got in their way. There began to be blood on the stones and weapons flashed in the torchlight and the voice of fury bayed in the hot wind.

Dogs and men only fought there. The aboriginals were gone.

Harrah managed to stand his ground for a moment. He saw the girl run past him and brought the barrel of his gun down across the head of a long-jawed brute that came at her from behind. When he looked again she had disappeared.

The press of the crowd bore him on then, the way she had gone. After a few paces he stumbled and looked down to see scarlet cloth and white flesh between his feet. She was trying to get up. He fought a clear space for her, battering with fists and elbows. In a second she was up, tearing like a wildcat with her long nails at the bodies that threatened to crush her down again.

She was still not afraid.

Harrah grinned. He caught her up and tossed her over his shoulder. She was small, and surprisingly light. He let the tide carry them, concentrating only on keeping his feet, clubbing dog and man alike.

The girl had drawn a little knife from somewhere in her rags. Hanging head down over his shoulder, she plied it and laughed. Harrah thought that it was fine to be brave but he thought she needn't have enjoyed it so much. Her body was like spring steel, clinging around him.

An alley mouth opened before him. He went down it with a rush of escaping humanity and raging dogs, making for the wall. The houses were irregularly built and presently he found a crevice between two of them that had once housed a stall. He dodged into it, set the girl on her feet behind him and

stood getting his breath back, watchful of the crowd still streaming by not a foot away from him.

He knew that the girl was looking at him. She was very close in that cramped space. She was not trembling nor even breathing hard.

"Why did you glare at me like that, in the square?" he asked her. "Was it personal or do you just hate all men?"

"Did you pick me up just to get the answer to that question?" She spoke English perfectly, without a trace of an accent, and her voice was as beautiful as her body, very clear and soft.

"Perhaps."

"Very well then. I hate all men. And women too—especially women."

She was matter-of-fact about it. It came to Harrah with a small qualm that she meant it. Every word of it. He was suddenly uneasy about having her little knife where she could use it on his back.

He turned around, catching her wrist. She let him take the knife, smiling a little.

"Fear," she said. "Always fear, no matter where you go."

"But you're not afraid."

"No." She glanced past him, into the alley. "The crowd is thinning now. I will go and find my brothers."

A big rusty-red mongrel thrust his head into the crevice and snarled. Harrah kicked him and he slunk back reluctantly, his lips wrinkled, his red-rimmed eyes fixed on the girl.

"I wouldn't," said Harrah. "The dogs don't seem to like you."

She laughed. "I haven't a scratch on me. Look at yourself."

He looked. He was bleeding in a number of places, and his clothes were in shreds.

He shook his head.

"What the devil got into them?" he demanded.

"Fear," said the girl. "Always fear. I will go now."

She moved to pass him, and he stopped her. "Oh, no. I saved your life, lady. You can't walk away quite so easily."

HE put his hands on her shoulders. Her flesh was cool and firm, and the strands of her tawny mane curled over it between his fingers. What mingling of alien strains had bred her he could not guess but she was like no one he had ever seen before, inexpressibly lovely in the light of the flashing moons. She was like moonlight herself, the soft gleam of it in her hair, her skin, her great haunted eyes.

Outcaste, dancer in the public streets, pariah in crimson rags, there was a magic about her. It stirred Harrah deeply. Some intuition warned him to take his hands from her and let her go, because she was a stranger beyond his knowing. But he did not. He could not.

He bent and kissed her lightly between the brows. "What's your name, little Wanderer?"

"Marith."

Harrah knew that word, in the *lingua franca* of the thief's markets. He smiled.

"And why should you be called 'Forbidden?'"

Her dark gaze dwelt upon him sombrely. "I am not for any man to love."

"Will you come home with me, Marith?"

She whispered, "I warn you, Earthman—I am death!"

He laughed and gathered her into his arms. "You're a child and children should not be full of hate. Come home with me, Marith. I'll only kiss you now and then and buy you pretty things and teach you how to laugh."

She did not answer at once. Her face was distant and dreaming as though she listened to some far-off voice. Presently she shrugged and said, "Very well. I will come."

They started off together. The alley was deserted now. There were lingering sounds of turmoil in the bazaar but they were far away. Harrah led the girl toward his house and the streets were empty and still under the thronging moons.

He kept his arm around her. He was full of a strange excitement and his

bored ill-temper had left him completely. Yet as he walked he became aware again of a gulf between him and Marith, something he could not understand. A pang of doubt that was almost fear crossed his heart. He did not know what he held, child, woman or some alien, wicked creature, close in the hollow of his arm.

He remembered the aboriginals, who had cried of death and demons. He remembered the howling of the dogs. And he wondered because of what he felt within himself.

But she was very lovely and her little white feet stepped so lightly in the dust beside his and he would not let her go.

They had left the bazaar behind them. They came to a quiet place, surrounded by the blank walls of houses, and suddenly, without sound, as though they had taken form ghost-like from the shadows, two men stepped out and barred their way.

One was an Earthman, a large man, heavy-shouldered, heavy-faced, with a look of ponderous immovability about him. The other was a Venusian, slim and handsome, with bright pale hair. Both men were armed. There was something infinitely ominous about the way they stood there, neither moving nor speaking, with the moonlight touching a hard blue glitter from their guns.

Harrah stopped, his hands half raised, and Marith moved forward, one step, away from him. Then she too stopped, like a crouching cat.

Harrah said, "What is this? What do you want?"

The Earthman answered, "We want the—the girl, not you." His slow, deep voice hesitated oddly over that word, "girl."

Marith turned. She would have fled past Harrah, back the way they had come, but again she came to a dead halt.

"There is someone behind you," she said. Her eyes looked at Harrah and he was startled to see that they were full of terror. She was afraid now—deathly afraid.

"Don't let them take me," she whispered. "Please don't let them take me!"

And then, as though to herself, "Hurry. Oh, hurry!"

Her head moved tensely from side to side, the head of an animal seeking escape, but there was no escape.

HARRAH glanced over his shoulder. A third man had come from somewhere to stand behind them with a gun, a yellow-eyed Martian with a smiling, wolfish face. Deep within Harrah a small chill pulse of warning began to beat. This was no spur-of-the-moment holdup. This was ambush, carefully planned. He and Marith had been deliberately followed, headed and trapped. "Marith," he said. "Do you know these men?"

She nodded. "I know them. Not their names—but I know them." It was terrible to see her so afraid.

It seemed to Harrah that he knew the men also, an intuitive knowledge based on long experience.

"You smell of law," he said to them. He laughed. "You've forgotten where you are. This is Komar."

The large man shook his head. "We're not law. This is—personal."

"Let us have no trouble, Earthman," said the Martian. "We have no quarrel with you. It is only the girl-thing we want." He began to move closer to Harrah, slowly, like a man approaching a dangerous animal. At the same time the others moved in also.

"Unfasten your belt," said the large man to Harrah. "Let it drop."

"Don't let them take me," whispered Marith.

Harrah lowered his hands to his belt.

He moved then, very swiftly. But they were swift too and there were three of them. Harrah had not quite cleared his gun from the holster when the Martian's weapon took him club-fashion across the side of the head. He fell. He heard his gun clatter sharply against stone, far away where someone had kicked it. He heard Marith cry out.

With infinite effort he raised himself on his hands. Wavering bands of blackness and intense light obscured his vision. But he saw dimly that the Ve-

nusian had caught the girl and that the other two were struggling to subdue her, and that her struggle was beyond belief, the small white body fighting to be free.

He tried to rise and could not. In a minute they had borne her down, the three of them. The slender wrists were snared and bound. One of the men produced a cloth that gleamed like metal and raised it above her head.

They seemed to recede from Harrah, gliding away down a street curiously lengthened into some dark dimension of pain. The echoes of their grunts and scuffings rang queerly muffled in his ears. But he saw, quite clearly, the last despairing look that Marith gave him before the shining cloth descended and hid her face.

His heart was wrenched with sorrow for her and a terrible rage rose in him against the men. He tried to get up and go after her and for a time he thought he had but when his sight cleared a little he realized that he had only crawled a few inches. How long the effort had taken him he did not know but the street was empty and there was no sound.

"Marith," he said. "Marith!"

Then he looked up, and saw that her brothers were standing over him, immensely tall, their beautiful strange faces very white in the shifting light of the moons.

CHAPTER III

A Broken Edge

ONE of the Wanderers reached down and gathered Harrah's shirtfront into his hand. Without effort, he lifted the Earthman to his feet. He looked into Harrah's face with eyes that were like Marith's, black and deep, charged with some cruel anger of the soul.

"Where is she?" he demanded. "Where have they taken her?"

"I don't know." Harrah found that

he could stand up. He tried to shake off the Wanderer's grip. "Where did you come from? How did you—"

"Find her." The hand that would not be shaken off tightened on Harrah's shirt until the cloth was drawn close around his throat. "You took her away, Earthman. Between you and the dogs something has happened that was not meant to happen. You took her—now find her!"

Harrah said between his teeth, "Let go."

"Let him go, Kehlin," said one of the others. "He will be no use dead."

Almost reluctantly the throttling grip relaxed and was gone. Harrah stepped back. He was furious but he was also more than a little frightened. Again, as with Marith, he had touched something strange in this man Kehlin. The terrible relentless strength of that strangling hand seemed more than human.

Then he swayed and nearly fell and realized that he was still dizzy from the blow and probably not thinking very clearly.

The man called Kehlin said, with iron patience, "She must be found quickly. At once, do you understand? She is in great danger."

Harrah remembered his last sight of Marith's face. He remembered her fear and the quiet deadly urgency with which the three strangers had gone about the taking of her. He knew that Kehlin spoke the truth.

"I'll get Tok," said Harrah. "He can find out where she is."

"Who is Tok?"

Harrah explained. "The aborigines know everything that goes on in Komar almost before it happens."

He turned, suddenly in a hurry to get on to his lodgings and look for Tok, but Kehlin said sharply,

"Wait. I can do it more quickly."

Harrah stopped, a cold tingle sweeping across his skin. Kehlin's face had the same look that he had seen on Marith's before, the odd expression of one listening to distant voices. There was a moment of silence and then the Wanderer smiled and said, "Tok is coming."

One point of mystery cleared up for Harrah. "Telepaths. That's how you found me, how you knew what had happened to Marith. She was calling to you to hurry."

Kehlin nodded. "Unfortunately it's a limited talent. We can communicate among ourselves when we wish, and we have some control over minds of the lower orders, that are animal or very near it, like Tok's. But I cannot read or even trace the minds of the men who have taken my sister—and she is being prevented from using her own ability to talk to me."

"They put a cloth over her head," said Harrah. "A shining sort of cloth."

"Thought waves are electrical in nature," said Kehlin. "They can be screened."

After that no one spoke. They stood in the empty space under the blank walls of the houses and waited.

Presently among the shadows a darker shadow moved. Slowly, with a terrible reluctance, it came toward them into the moonlight and Harrah saw that it was Tok. Tok, creeping, cringing, bent as though under a heavy burden—not wanting to come but drawn as a fish is drawn unwilling by hook and line.

The hook and line of Kehlin's mind. Harrah glanced from the Wanderer's still face to the awful misery of fear in Tok's eyes and a wave of anger swept over him, mingled with a certain dread.

"Tok," he said gently. "*Tok!*"

The aboriginal turned his head and gave Harrah one look of hopeless pleading—just such a look as Marith had given when the strangers took her away. Then he crouched down at Kehlin's feet and stayed there, shivering.

Impulsively, Harrah started forward and one of Kehlin's brothers caught him by the arm.

"If you want to save her—be still!"

Harrah was still, and felt the aching of his flesh where the man had gripped it, as though with five clamps of steel instead of human fingers.

Kehlin did not speak and the only sound that came from Tok was a sort

of unconscious whimpering. But after a minute or two Kehlin said, "He knows where she is. He will guide us."

TOK had already turned to go. The men followed him. Harrah saw that Tok's step was swift now, almost eager. But the terror had not left him.

Kehlin watched him and his eyes were black and deep as the spaces beyond the stars.

Demons. Demons with the eyes of darkness.

A shiver of superstitious fear went over Harrah. Then he looked again at the Wanderers in their tawdry rags—outcasts of an outcaste tribe, selling their sister's beauty in the marketplace for the sake of a few coins, and his awe left him.

He had caught too much of it from the aboriginals, who could make an evil spirit out of every shadow.

He began to think again of Marith, and the yellow-eyed Martian who had cracked his skull, and his knuckles itched.

He had no weapon now except a knife he carried under his shirt but he felt that he could make shift.

Abruptly he asked a question that had been on the top of his mind. "What did the men want with her?"

One of the Wanderers shrugged. "She is beautiful."

"That was not in their minds," said Harrah. "Nor is it yours."

"An old feud," said Kehlin harshly. "A blood feud."

Something about his voice made Harrah shiver all over again.

There was something strange about Komar now. After that brief violence of the dogs, nothing stirred. The sound of voices came from the roofless houses, a sort of uneasy muttering that burst into sharper cadence around the wine-shops.

But no man walked in the streets. Even the dogs were gone.

Harrah was sure that eyes watched them from the darkness, as Marith and her captors had been watched. But it was only a feeling. The aboriginals

themselves were intangible as smoke.

Tok led the way swiftly, doubling back toward the lower side of the bazaar. Here was a section that Harrah never visited—the Quarter of the Sellers of Dreams. Poetic name for a maze of filthy rat-runs stinking with the breath of nameless substances. The sliding roofs were always closed and what few voices could be heard were beyond human speech.

They came to a house that stood by itself at the end of an alley. It looked as though it had stood a long time by itself, the fecund weeds growing thick around the door, rooting in the chinks of the walls.

There was no light, no sound. But Tok stopped and pointed.

After a moment Kehlin nodded. With that gesture he dismissed Tok, forgot him utterly, and the aboriginal went with three loping strides into the shadows and was gone.

KEHLIN moved forward, treading noiselessly in the dust.

The others followed. Around at the side was a wing, partially destroyed in some old quake. A thick stubby tree had sprouted in the dirt floor, its branches spreading out over the broken walls.

Without waiting for Kehlin's orders Harrah swung up into the tree and climbed from there to the coping of the house, where he could look down upon the roof.

The sliding sections were closed. But they were old and rotted and through the gaps Harrah saw a dim glow of light. Somewhere below a lantern burned and a man was talking.

The Wanderers were beside him now on the coping, moving with great care on the crumbling brick. Their eyes caught the lantern-glow with a feral glitter, giving them a look unutterably cruel and strange.

Harrah thought they had forgotten him now as completely as they had forgotten Tok.

He shifted position until he could see directly down through a hole in the roof. Kehlin was beside him, very close.

The man's voice came up to them, slow, deliberate, without pity.

"We've come a long way for this. We didn't have to. We could have stayed safe at home and let somebody else do the worrying. But we came. One man from each world—*men*, hear me? Human men."

His shadow fell broad and black across the floor, across Marith. A large shadow, ponderous, immovable. The girl lay on the floor. The metallic cloth still covered her head and a gag had been added outside it, to keep her from screaming. She was still bound but the cords had been replaced by metal cuffs, connected by wires that led to a little black box. A tiny portable generator, Harrah thought, and was filled with fury.

"You're tough," said the man. "But we're tough too. And we won't go away empty handed. I'll ask you once more. How many—and where?"

Marith shook her head.

A lean dark hand that could only have belonged to the Martian reached out and pressed a stud on the black box. The body of the girl stiffened, was shaken with agony.

Harrah gathered himself. And in the instant before he jumped Kehlin moved so that his shoulder struck the Earthman a hard thrusting blow and sent him plunging head foremost through the roof.

There was a great splintering of rotten wood. The whole room was suddenly revealed to Harrah—the three men looking upward, the girl scarlet and white against the brown floor, the small black box, all rushing up, up to meet him.

He grasped at a broken edge of roof. It crumbled in his hands, and he saw the Venusian step back, it seemed very slowly, to get out of his way. The momentary breaking of his fall enabled Harrah to get his feet under him and he thought that he was not going to die at once, he would surely live long enough to break Kehlin's neck instead of his own.

He hit the floor in a shower of dust and splinters. Half smiling the Martian drew his gun.

CHAPTER IV

As Leopards . . .

AFTER that for a moment no one moved. The dust of years sifted down on them. Another board fell with a crash. Harrah gasped for the breath that had been knocked out of him and the girl writhed in her uninterrupted pain. A brief moment of stillness in which the Earthman, the Martian and the Venusian stared at Harrah and thought of nothing else.

Then, very stealthily and swiftly, the Wanderers dropped through the open roof as leopards drop on their quarry from above. In a way, it was beautiful to watch—the marvelous grace and strength with which they moved, the flashing of the three bright silent blades. A ballet with knives. The Martian's gun went off once. It didn't hit anything. The big Earthman turned to grapple with Kehlin and grunted as the steel went home between his ribs.

Harrah got up. There didn't seem to be any place for him in that fight. It was over too fast, so fast that it seemed impossible that three men could die in so few seconds. The faces of Marith's brothers were cold with a terrible coldness that turned Harrah sick to look at them.

He stepped over the body of the Venusian, noting how the curling silver hair was mottled with crimson and dark dust. He cut the power from the black box and Marith relaxed slowly, her flesh still quivering. He tore the gag and the metal cloth from her head, and thought that men who could do this thing to a girl deserved to die. And yet he took no joy in it.

Marith looked up at him and he thought she smiled. He lifted her and held her in his arms, touching her with awkward gentle hands.

The big Earthman raised his head. Even death he would meet on his own time, refusing to be hurried. He saw

what had been done, and there was something now in his broad stolid face that startled Harrah—a grim and shining faith.

He looked at the Wanderers with a look of bitter fury in which there was no acknowledgment of defeat.

"All right," he said. "All right. You're safe for a while now. You set a trap and you baited it with *her* and it worked—and you're safe now. But you can't hide. The very dogs know you. There's no place for you in earth, heaven or hell. If it takes every drop of human blood in the System to drown you we'll do it."

He turned to Harrah, kneeling in the dirt with Marith in his arms.

"Don't you know what they are?" he demanded. "Are you in love with that and you don't know what it is?"

Harrah felt Marith shudder and sigh against him and before he could speak Kehlin had stooped, smiling, over the big man. The Wanderer's knife made one quick dainty motion and there were no more words, only a strangled grunting such as a butchered pig makes when it falls. Then silence.

Marith's fingers tightened on Harrah's wrist. She tried to rise and he helped her up and steadied her.

Still smiling, Kehlin came across the room, the knife swinging languidly in his hand.

Marith said, "Wait."

Kehlin's smile turned into something sardonic. As one who is in no hurry he waited, coming only far enough so that the blood of the big Earthman would not touch his sandals.

Marith looked up into Harrah's face. There was no hatred in her eyes now.

"Is it true?" she asked. "Do you love me?"

Harrah could not answer. He looked at the dead men and the three silent beings that stood over them and there was a sickness in him, a sickness beyond the fear of death.

"What are you?" he said to them. "The dogs know you. Tok knows you. But I don't know you."

His gaze came back to Marith. She

had not taken her eyes from him. They broke his heart.

"Yes," he said, with a queer harshness. "Yes, I guess I love you as much as you can make any meaning out of the word." The smell of blood lay heavy and sweet on the air and the blade gleamed in Kehlin's hand and it seemed a strange word to be speaking in this place. It had a jeering sound of laughter.

Marith whispered, "Kiss me."

STIFFLY, slowly, Harrah bent and kissed her on the mouth. Her lips were cool and very sweet and a queer wild pang rang through him so that his flesh contracted as though from pain or fear and his heart began a great pounding.

He stepped back and said, "You're not human."

"No," she answered softly. "I am android." Presently she smiled. "I told you, Earthman. I am Marith. I am Forbidden."

She did not weep. She had no human tears. But her eyes were heavy with the sadness of all creation.

"From time to time," she murmured, "men and women have loved us. It is a great sin and they are punished for it and we are destroyed. We have no souls and are less than the dogs that tear at us. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust—even that is denied us for we are not born of the earth, of Adam's clay. The hand of man made us, not the hand of God, and it is true that we have no place in heaven or hell."

"We will make a place," said Kehlin, and his fingers played with the shining knife. There was no sadness about him. He looked at the dead men, the man of Earth, the man of Venus, the man of Mars.

"On their worlds we will make a place. Heaven has no meaning for us nor hell. Only the life we have now, the life man gave us. You, Earthman! How long have you been out here beyond the Belt?"

"A long time," said Harrah. "A long, long time."

"Then you haven't heard of the war." Kehlin's white teeth glittered. "The secret quiet war against us—the slaves, the pets, the big wonderful toys that grew so strong we frightened the men who made us. It's not strange you haven't heard. The governments tried to keep it secret. They didn't want a panic, people killing each other in mistake for runaway androids. We were so hard to detect, you see, once we shed our uniforms and got rid of our tattoo marks." He stirred the Martian with his foot, the dark face turned upward, snarling even in death.

"It took men like this to recognize us," he said. "Men trained in the laboratories before they were trained against crime. We thought we were safe here, far beyond the law, but we had to be sure. Law wouldn't matter if word got back to the Inner Worlds. They would come out and destroy us." He laughed. "Now we're sure."

"For a time," said Marith. "There will be others like them."

"Time," said Kehlin. "A little time. That's all we need."

He moved again toward Harrah, casually swift, as though one more thing needed to be done.

Harrah watched him come. He did not quite believe, even now. He was remembering androids as he had known of them long ago—Kehlin had named them. The slaves, the pets, the big wonderful toys. Synthetic creatures built of chemical protoplasm, moulded in pressure tanks, sparked to intelligent life by the magic of cosmic rays drawn pure from outer space.

Creatures made originally to do the work that human flesh was too frail for—the dangerous things, the experiments with pressure and radiation, the gathering of data from places where men could not go, the long lonely grinding jobs that tear human nerves to pieces.

For man had built better than Nature. The androids were not hampered by the need of food, air and water. A few ounces of chemicals every year or so kept them going. Their lungs were orna-

mental, for the purpose of speech only. They had no complicated internal structure to break down and their flesh was tough-celled, all but indestructible.

And because they could be made beautiful, because they had strength and grace and endurance beyond the human, their uses had widened. Entertainers, household servants, fashionable adjuncts to expensive living. Things. Objects to be bought and sold like machines. And they had not been content.

Kehlin's eyes were brilliant with the glory of hate. He was as splendid and inevitable as the angel of death and, looking at him, Harrah became aware of a bitter truth—the truth that the big Earthman had denied with his dying breath. Man had wrought too well. These were the natural inheritors of the universe.

Marith said again, "Wait."

This time Kehlin did not stop.

Marith faced him, standing between him and Harrah's vulnerable body.

"I have earned this right," she said. "I demand it."

Kehlin answered without a flicker of emotion, "This man must die." And he would not stop.

Marith would not move and behind her back Harrah drew his own knife into his hand. Futile as it was he could not submit to butchery without at least the gesture of fighting back. He looked into Kehlin's face and shuddered, an inward shudder of the soul.

MARITH spoke.

"This man has already helped us greatly—perhaps he has saved us by saving me." She pointed to the bodies. "We're not free of their kind and what we have to do can't be done in a minute. We need supplies from Komar—metals, tools, chemicals, many things. If we get them ourselves we run the risk of being recognized. But if we had an agent, a go-between—" She paused, then added, "A human."

Kehlin had at last halted to listen. One of the other men—Harrah could not, somehow, stop thinking of them as men—spoke up.

"That is worth thinking about, Kehlin. We can't spend all our time in the public squares, watching for spies."

Kehlin looked across Marith's white shoulder at the Earthman, and shook his head.

"Trust a human?" He laughed.

"There are ways to prevent betrayal," said Marith. "Ways you know of."

And the android who had spoken before echoed, "That is so."

Kehlin played with the knife and continued to watch Harrah but he did not move. Harrah said hoarsely, "To the devil with you all. No one has asked me whether I'm willing to betray my own kind."

Kehlin shrugged. "You can join them quite easily," he said, and glanced at the bodies. Marith turned and took Harrah by the arms. Her touch sent that queer pang through his flesh again, and it was strangely sweet.

"Death is yours for the asking, now or later. But think, Earthman. Perhaps there is justice on our side too. Wait a little before you die."

She had not changed, he thought. Her little white feet that had walked beside his in the dust of Komar, her voice that had spoken to him through the moonlight—they had not changed. Only her eyes were different.

Marith's eyes and himself, because of what he knew. And yet he remembered.

He did not know what he held—child, woman or some alien wicked creature, close in the hollow of his arm. But she was very lovely and he would not let her go.

He drew a long breath. Her eyes, searching his, were a beauty and a pain so poignant that he could neither bear it nor look away.

"All right," he said. "I'll wait."

hungry ochreous sea. They had come by steep and secret ways that were possible only to an aboriginal—or an android.

Harrah, who had been handed bodily down the dizzy cliffs, was more conscious than ever of his human inferiority. He was exhausted, his bones ached with wrenching, and his nerves were screaming. But Marith, so small and sweetly made, had dropped over the precipices like a little white bird, unaided, and she was quite unwearied.

Once during the descent Kehlin had paused, holding Harrah without effort over a thousand feet of sheer space, between the wheeling moons and the darkness.

He had smiled, and said, "Tok is following. He is afraid but he is following you."

Harrah himself was too much afraid even to be touched.

Now they stood, the four androids and the man from Earth, in the jungle of Ganymede. Vapor from some hidden boiling spring drifted through the tangle of branches and flowering vines, the choking wanton growth of a hothouse run wild. There was a taste of sulphur in the air and a smell of decay and a terrible heat.

Kehlin seemed to be listening to something. He turned slightly once, then again as though getting his direction. Then he started off with complete certainty and the others followed. No one spoke. No one had told Harrah where they were going or why.

Only Marith kept close to him and now and again he would meet her gaze and she would smile, a smile wistful and sad as far-off music. And Harrah hated her because he was weary and drenched with sweat and every step was a pain.

He hoped that Tok was still following them. It was comforting to think of that furry shape gliding noiselessly along, at home in the jungle, part of it. Tok was not human either. But he too could feel pain and weariness and fear. He and Harrah were brothers in blood.

The sky was blotted out. The eternal moonlight sifted through the trees, restless, many-hued, tinged here and

CHAPTER V

The Same Beauty

THEY had come a long way down from the plateau of Komar, into the jungle that laps around it like a

there with blood from the red glow of Jupiter. The forest was very still. It seemed as endless as the dark reaches of the dreams that come with fever, and Harrah fancied that it held its breath and waited.

Once they came to a place where the trees were slashed by a vast sickle of volcanic slag. To the north a gaunt cone stood up against the sky, crooked, evil, wearing a plume of smoke on its brow. The smell of sulphur was very strong and heat breathed out of the mountain's flanks with a hissing sound like the laughter of serpents.

Lightly, swiftly, the white-skinned beautiful creatures sped across that blasted plain and the man came staggering after them.

Three times they passed through rude villages. But the huts were empty. Word had gone through the jungle as though the wind carried it and the aboriginals had vanished.

Kehlin smiled. "They have hidden their women and children," he said, "but the men watch us. They crouch in the trees around our camp. They are afraid and they watch."

At length through the stillness Harrah began to hear a sound very strange in this primal forest—the clangor of forges. Then, quite suddenly, they came to the edge of a place where the undergrowth had been cleared away and their journey was over.

The picked bones of a rusty hull lay among the trees and beneath its skeletal shadow there was motion. Long sheds had been built. Lights burned in them and figures passed to and fro and vast heaps of metal torn from the ship lay ready to be worked.

Kehlin said softly, "Look at them, Earthman. Thirty-four, counting ourselves. All that are left. But the finest, the best. The lords of the world."

Harrah looked. Men, a few women or creatures made in their semblance. All stamped with the same beauty, the same tireless strength. There was something wonderful about them, working, building, untouched by their environment, apart from it, using it

only as a tool to serve them. Something wonderful, Harrah thought, struggling for breath in the bitter heat. Wonderful and frightening.

Kehlin had apparently given them the whole story telepathically, for they did not pause from their work to ask questions. Only they glanced at Harrah as he passed and in their eyes he saw the shadow of fate. Kehlin said, "We will go into the ship."

SOME of the inner cabins were still intact. The ship had been old and very small. Stolen, Harrah guessed, the best that they could do, but they had made it good enough. No more than ten men could have survived in its cramped quarters. Yet thirty-four androids had ridden it across deep space. Darkness, lack of air and food, did not bother them.

"We brought what equipment we could," said Kehlin. "The rest we must fashion for ourselves." The sound of the forges echoed his words. He led Harrah into what had been the captain's cabin. It was crammed with delicate electronic apparatus, some of which Harrah recognized as having to do with encephalographs and the intricacies of thought-waves.

There was no room for furniture. Kehlin indicated a small clear space on the deck-plates. "Sit down."

Harrah did not obey at once and the android smiled. "I'm not going to torture you and if I had wished to kill you I could have done so long ago. We must have complete understanding, you and I." He paused and Harrah was perfectly aware of the threat behind his words. "Our minds must speak, for that is the only way to understanding."

Marith said softly, "That is so, Earthman. Don't be afraid."

Harrah studied her. "Will I be able to understand you then?"

"Perhaps."

Harrah sat down on the hard iron plates and folded his hands between his knees to hide their trembling. Kehlin worked smoothly for a time. Harrah noted the infinite deftness of his move-

ments. A distant humming rose in the cabin and was lost to hearing. Kehlin placed round electrodes at the Earthman's temples and Harrah felt a faint tingling warmth.

Then the android knelt and looked into his eyes and he forgot everything, even Marith, in the depths of that passionate alien gaze.

"Seventy-three years ago I was made," said Kehlin. "How long have you lived, Earthman? Thirty years? Forty? How much have you done, what have you learned? How is the strength of your body? How is the power of your mind? What are your memories, your hopes? We will exchange these things, you and I—and then we will know each other."

A deep tremor shook Harrah. He did not speak. Two sharp movements of Kehlin's hands. The cabin darkened around him. A swift reeling vertigo, an awful plunging across some unknown void, a loss of identity . . .

Harrah cried out in deadly fear and the voice was not his own.

He could not move. Vague images crowded his mind, whirling, trampling, unutterably strange.

Memories coming back, confused, chaotic, a painful meshing of realities. Silence. Darkness. Peace.

He lay at rest. It seemed that there had never been anything but this bodiless negation in the very womb of sleep. He had no memories. He had no identity. He was nothing. He was without thought or trouble, wrapped in the complete peacefulness of not-being. Forever and forever, the timeless sleep.

Then, from somewhere out of the void, vast and inescapable as the stroke of creation upon nothingness, a command came. The command to wake.

He awoke.

Like a comet, cruel and bright across the slumbrous dark, awareness came. A sudden explosion of being, leaping full upon him with a blaze and a shriek. Here was no slow gentle realization, softened by the long years of childhood. Here was inundation, agony—self.

The little part of Harrah that re-

mained cringed before that terrible awakening. No human brain could have borne it. Yet it was as though the memory were his own. He felt the flood tide of life roar in and fill his emptiness, felt the fabric of his being shudder, withstand and find itself.

He knew that he was remembering the moment of Kehlin's birth.

He opened his eyes.

Vision keen as an eagle's, careless of darkness, of shadows, of blinding light. He saw a tall Earthman with a haggard face, who sat before him on the rusty deck and regarded him with strange eyes. An Earthman named Tony Harrah. Himself. Yet it was Kehlin the android who looked out of his eyes.

He started up, wavering on the brink of madness, and Marith's hands were on his shoulders, holding him steady.

"Don't be afraid. I am here."

It was not her voice speaking to him but her mind. He could hear it now. He could feel it touching his, sweet and full of comfort. Quite suddenly he realized that she was no longer a stranger. He knew her now. She was—Marith.

Her mind spoke gently. "Remember, Earthman. Remember the days of Kehlin."

He remembered.

CHAPTER VI

Lords of the World

HE remembered the laboratory, the birthplace, the doorway to the world of men. He remembered the moment when he first rose up from the slab where he had lain and stood before his makers, embodied and alive. He remembered the fine smooth power of his limbs, the bright newness of sounds, the wonderful awareness of intellect.

Brief vivid flashes, the highlights of seventy-three years of existence, coming to Harrah as though they were his own. The long intensive training—*Kehlin, Type A, technical expert*. The ease of learning, the memory that never fal-

tered, the growth of mental power until it overtopped the best of the human teachers.

He remembered the moment when Kehlin first looked upon the redness of human blood and realized how frail were the bodies of men.

He watched the gradual development of emotion.

Emotion is instinctive in natural life. In the android, Harrah saw it grow slowly from the intellect. An odd sort of growth, like a tree of crystal with clear, sharp branches—but alive and no less powerful than the blind sprawling impulses of man. Different, though. Very different.

One great root was lacking—the root of lust. Kehlin's hungers were not of the flesh and because he was free of this he was free also of greed and cruelty and—this came to Harrah with a shock of surprise—of hate.

In this uncanny sharing of another mind he remembered testing experimental ships at velocities too great for human endurance. He had enjoyed that, hurtling across infinity like a rogue asteroid with a silent shriek of speed.

He remembered being cast adrift in space alone. He wore no protective armor. The cold could not harm him and he had no need of air. He looked at the naked blaze of the universe and was not awed. The magnificence of space did not crush him with any sense of his own smallness.

He did not expect to be as big as a star. Rather, for the first time, he felt free. Free of the little worlds, the little works of men. They were bound but he was not. Distance and time were no barriers to him. He was brother to the roving stars because both had been made, not born. He wanted to go out to them.

The rescue ship came and took him in but he never forgot his dream of the other suns and his longing to go among them, clear out to the edge of the universe.

Instead he gathered data for the scientists in the forbidden places of the Solar System. He walked the chasms of

Mercury's Darkside, where the human mind will crack in the terrible night, where the black mountain ranges claw at the stars and no life has ever been or ever will be. He went deep into the caverns of the Moon. He went into the Asteroid Belt and charted a hundred deadly little worlds alone while his masters waited safely in the shelter of their ship.

And still he was outcaste—a thing, an android. Men used him and ignored him. They were human and he was an object out of nature, vaguely repulsive, a little frightening. He had not even any contact with his own kind. As though they had some foreknowledge of trouble men kept their androids apart. Harrah was aware, in Kehlin's mind, of a piercing loneliness.

There's no place for you in earth, heaven or hell!

Marith's thought crossed his like the falling of tears. "For us there was no comfort, no hope, no refuge. We were made in your image, man and woman. Yet you were cruel gods for you made a lie and gave us the intelligence to know it. You denied us even dignity. And—we did not ask to be made."

Kehlin said, "It is enough."

Once again Harrah was flung across a reeling darkness. This time the change was not so frightening but in a way it was worse. He did not realize that until he was again fully aware of himself. Then he was conscious of a bitter contrast, a thing both saddening and shameful.

The mind of the android, that he had shared for that brief time, had been as a wide space flooded with light. His own seemed cluttered and dark to him now, haunted by ugly shapes that crept along the borders of consciousness. All the splendid strength was gone. The crushing weariness of his body descended upon him, and he looked down almost with disgust at his unsteady hands.

He did not ask what Kehlin had found in him. He did not want to know.

"Can you understand now how we felt?" asked Kehlin. "Can you understand how we learned to hate men?"

Harrah shook his head. "You don't hate," he said. "You don't know the meaning of hate as we do. What I mistook for hatred in you was something much bigger. I'd call it pride."

He had seen so much in Kehlin's mind. Pity for man in his weakness, admiration for his courage because he had survived and built in spite of his weakness. Perhaps even gratitude.

BUT Kehlin had called his fellow androids the lords of the world, and he was right. They were proud and their pride was just and they would not live in chains.

Kehlin shrugged. "Call it what you will, it doesn't matter." He looked at Harrah, and for the first time the Earthman saw in the android a softening, almost a weariness.

"It isn't that we want to rule men. It isn't that we want power! It's only that men have driven us through fear. Should we go down into nothingness because men fear us? Remember, we don't even have the hope of a hereafter to soften our going!"

He shook his head. "It will be a long fight and a bitter one. I don't want it, none of us do. But we *must* survive and to do that we must rule and perhaps men will come out the better for it. There will never be any peace or real advancement until these wretched little worlds are governed by those who are not of the mass but above it, not driven by every wind that blows."

He was silent a moment, brooding, and then he echoed Marith's words.

"Fear. Always fear. The human race is ridden with it. Lust and fear and greed and sorrow. If only they had not been afraid of us!"

The old blaze of anger came again into his eyes. "With acid and with fire they destroyed us, Earthman. Thirty-four, all that are left. But not for long. Human reproduction is slow and clumsy, but not ours. Only a little time and there will be more of us, many more, and we will go back and take what is ours."

He said it very quietly and Harrah

heard truth in his voice like the tolling of a bell—the passing-bell for the mastery of human kind.

"Will you help us, Earthman, or will you die?"

Harrah did not answer and Marith said, "Let him rest."

Kehlin nodded. He left and Harrah was hardly aware of his going. The girl spoke to him gently and he rose and stumbled after her, out of the ship.

She led him to a place apart from the main sheds, an unfinished lean-to where only a dim light filtered from the work-lamps. It was dark under the trees and hot. Terribly hot. Harrah sat down on the moist ground and put his head between his hands and there was still no answer in him, only a great blankness.

Marith waited and did not speak.

After awhile Harrah lifted his head and looked at her. "Why did you save me from Kehlin's knife?"

She answered slowly, "I'm not like Kehlin. I was made only for beauty, a dancer. My mind won't reach so high. It asks questions but they're little ones, of small account."

"What questions, Marith?"

"I have been alive for nineteen years. My owner was very proud of me and I made him a great deal of money. And everywhere I went, in every city, on every world, I watched men and women. I saw the way they looked at each other, the way they smiled. Many of the women were not beautiful or talented. But men loved them and they were happy."

Harrah remembered her words—*I hate all men and women also. Especially women.*

"When I was through working," she said, "my owner put me away like a dancing doll until it was time to work again. I had nothing to do but sit alone and think and wonder."

She was close to Harrah. Her face was indistinct in the gloom, a shadowy thing of dreams.

"When you thought that I was human you said you loved me. I think that is why I saved you from the knife."

There was a long silence and then Harrah said the words she was waiting for, wanting to hear, and they were the truth.

"I love you now."

She said, very softly, "But not as you would love a woman."

He remembered her dancing in the bazaar, the ancient sensual dance that became in her a thing of sheer loveliness.

"No," he said. "But that's because you're more than human, not less."

He took her into his arms and he knew now what he held there. Not child nor woman nor any wicked thing but a creature innocent and beautiful as the moonlight and as far beyond him.

He held her close and it was as though for a moment he held his own youth again, the short bright days before he had learned the things Kehlin had named—lust and fear and greed and sorrow. He held her close and there was no passion in him, only an immense tenderness, a longing and regret so deep that his heart was near to breaking.

He had his answer.

MARITH drew away from him and rose, turning her face into the darkness so that he could not see her eyes. She said, "I should have let you die in Komar. It would have been easier then for both of us."

An eerie chill ran over Harrah. "You can read my mind now." He got up, very slowly.

She nodded. "Kehlin more than I because he shared it fully. That was what I meant when I reminded him that there were ways to prevent betrayal. If I were human I would tell you to run quickly and hide yourself from Kehlin and I would hope. But I am not human and I know there is no hope."

She turned toward him then, clear in the barred moonlight.

"Like to like," she whispered. "You have your burden and your pride and you would, not be free of either. Kehlin was right. And yet I wish—oh, I wish . . ."

Quite suddenly she was gone and

Harrah was reaching out his hand to emptiness.

For a long moment he did not move. He heard the sound of movement in the camp and knew that the telepathic warning had gone out and that within a few seconds he would be dead but he could only think that Marith was gone and he had lost her.

Then from the dark jungle, swift with love and terror, Tok came crying out to his lord.

Harrah had forgotten Tok, who had followed him down from the safety of Komar. He had forgotten a number of things. Now he remembered. He remembered Kehlin's words and the three men who had died in Komar and why they had died.

He remembered that he was human and could hope where there was no hope. "Come, Lord! Run!"

Harrah ran. And it was already too late.

The androids came, the fleet lithe creatures heading him off. Tok stood not thirty feet away, but he knew that he could never make it.

He stopped running. He saw Kehlin among those who came to trap him and he saw the gun the android carried now in place of the knife.

With acid and with fire they destroyed us . . .

With fire.

It was Harrah's turn to cry out to Tok, to the unseen watchers in the trees. He shouted with all his strength in the split second before he fell and his words carried over even the sound of the shot.

He thought that Tok was gone. He thought that there was an answer from the jungle but he was not sure. He was not sure of anything but pain.

HE lay where he had fallen and he knew that he would continue to lie there because his leg was broken above the knee. He looked incuriously at the dark blood seeping around the wound, and then up into the face of Kehlin, wondering why the android had aimed so low.

Reading his thought Kahlin answered, "You had already spoken. And—I preferred you should die with us."

For a long time after that he did not speak and there was a great silence on the clearing. The androids stood, the thirty-four tall splendid beings who were the last of their kind, and they made no sound.

The jungle also was very still. But the aboriginals had done their work well and already there was a taint of smoke on the air and the wind blew hot. The naked bones of the ship mocked them with the shelter they might have had. There was no refuge, no escape, and they knew it.

Harrah saw how Kehlin looked up at the sky, at the distant suns that light the edges of the universe. The jungle sighed and flames stood up among the trees all around them like a ring of spears. Harrah thought that humans were not alone in their knowledge of sorrow. Kehlin turned abruptly and called, "Marith!"

She came out from among the others and stood before him.

"Are you happy, Marith? You have done a human thing. You have behaved like a woman, wrecking empires for love."

He flung her down beside Harrah and then he shook his head slowly and said, "No, the blame is mine. I was the leader. I should have killed the man."

He laughed suddenly. "And so this is the end—and it does not come to us from the hands of man but from the paws of apes who have learned no more than the making of fire!"

Harrah nodded. "Apes," he said. "Yes. That's the gulf between us. That's why we fear you. You were never an ape."

He watched the ring of fire brighten and draw in. The pain in his leg was very great and he was bleeding and his mind seemed distant from his body and full of profound thoughts.

"We distrust anyone who is different," he said. "We always destroy them, one way or another."

He looked up at Kehlin. "Apes. A

restless, unruly bunch, driven by passions and hungers you could never understand. You would not have been able to rule us. No one ever has. We can't even ourselves. So in the end you would have destroyed us."

Kehlin's eyes met his, the black, deep eyes, brilliant now with some terrible emotion that Harrah could not read.

"Perhaps," he said softly. "Perhaps. And you're proud, aren't you? The weakling has pulled down his betters and it makes him feel strong. You're proud to die because you think you've put an end to us. But you have not, Earthman! You have not!"

Standing very tall beneath the banners of red light that shook from the flaring trees Kehlin cried out strongly, shouting to the stars, to all creation.

"You made us once, you little men who love to feel like gods! You will make us again. You can't keep from it—and we will inherit the universe!"

Harrah knew now what was in Kehlin's mind. It was faith. He saw it in the faces of all those who stood with Kehlin, the beautiful creatures trapped and waiting under the crimson pall.

A great curtain of flame and falling ash swept between them, hiding the androids from Harrah's sight. A bitter pang struck through him, a wild regret, and he tried to call out, to say that he was sorry. But the words would not come and he felt ashamed and very small and full of a black and evil guilt. He bowed his head and wept.

MARITH'S voice spoke close beside him. "They are gone and soon we will be too and it is better so."

Harrah turned. He was amazed to see that there was a strange look of joy about her as though she had been released from some dark prison.

"Do you love me, Marith? Do you love me still after what I've done?"

She answered, "You have set me free."

He took her in his arms and held her and it came to him that only this way, only now, could they two have been joined. And he was happy.



"You will listen to me, sir!" said
Dr. Maddon

SPECTATOR SPORT

*The first man to reach the future, Dr. Rufus
Maddon meets a fate far worse than any death!*

DR. RUFUS MADDON was not generally considered to be an impatient man—or addicted to physical violence.

But when the tenth man he tried to stop on the street brushed by him with a mutter of annoyance Rufus Maddon

grabbed the eleventh man, swung him around and held him with his shoulders against a crumbling wall.

He said, "You will listen to me, sir! I am the first man to travel into the future and I will not stand—"

The man pushed him away, turned

B y J O H N D . M a c D O N A L D

around and said, "You got this dust on my suit. Now brush it off."

Rufus Maddon brushed mechanically. He said, with a faint uncontrollable tremble in his voice, "But nobody seems to care."

The man peered back over his shoulder. "Good enough, chum. Better go get yourself lobed. The first time I saw the one on time travel it didn't get to me at all. Too hammy for me. Give me those murder jobs. Every time I have one of those I twitch for twenty hours."

Rufus made another try. "Sir, I am physical living proof that the future is predetermined. I can explain the energy equations, redesign the warp projector, send myself from your day further into the future—"

The man walked away. "Go get a lobe job," he said.

"But don't I look different to you?" Rufus called after him, a plaintive note in his voice.

The man, twenty feet away, turned and grinned at him. "How?"

When the man had gone Rufus Maddon looked down at his neat grey suit, stared at the men and women in the street. It was not fair of the future to be so—so dismally normal.

Four hundred years of progress? The others had resented the experience that was to be his. In those last few weeks there had been many discussions of how the people four hundred years in the future would look on Rufus Maddon as a barbarian.

Once again he continued his aimless walk down the streets of the familiar city. There was a general air of disrepair. Shops were boarded up. The pavement was broken and potholed. A few automobiles traveled on the broken streets. They, at least, appeared to be of a slightly advanced design but they were dented, dirty and noisy.

The man who had spoken to him had made no sense. "Lobe job?" And what was "the one on time travel?"

He stopped in consternation as he reached the familiar park. His consternation arose from the fact that the park was all too familiar. Though it was a

tangle of weeds the equestrian statue of General Murdy was still there in deathless bronze, liberally decorated by pigeons.

Clothes had not changed nor had common speech. He wondered if the transfer had gone awry, if this world were something he was dreaming.

He pushed through the knee-high tangle of grass to a wrought-iron bench. Four hundred years before he had sat on that same bench. He sat down again. The metal powdered and collapsed under his weight, one end of the bench dropping with a painful thump.

Dr. Rufus Maddon was not generally considered to be a man subject to fits of rage. He stood up rubbing his bruised elbow, and heartily kicked the offending bench. The part he kicked was all too solid.

He limped out of the park, muttering, wondering why the park wasn't used, why everyone seemed to be in a hurry.

IT appeared that in four hundred years nothing at all had been accomplished. Many familiar buildings had collapsed. Others still stood. He looked in vain for a newspaper or a magazine.

One new element of this world of the future bothered him considerably. That was the number of low-slung white-panel delivery trucks. They seemed to be in better condition than the other vehicles. Each bore in fairly large gilt letters the legend **WORLD SENSEWAYS**. But he noticed that the smaller print underneath the large inscription varied. Some read, *Feeder Division*—others, *Hookup Division*.

The one that stopped at the curb beside him read, *Lobotomy Division*. Two husky men got out and smiled at him and one said, "You've been taking too much of that stuff, Doc."

"How did you know my title?" Rufus asked, thoroughly puzzled.

The other man smiled wolfishly, patted the side of truck. "Nice truck, pretty truck. Climb in, bud. We'll take you down and make you feel wonderful, hey?"

Dr. Rufus Maddon suddenly had a horrid suspicion that he knew what a lobe job might be. He started to back away. They grabbed him quickly and expertly and dumped him into the truck.

The sign on the front of the building said WORLD SENSEWAYS. The most luxurious office inside was lettered, *Regional Director—Roger K. Handriss.*

Roger K. Handriss sat behind his handsome desk. He was a florid grey-haired man with keen grey eyes. He was examining his bank book thinking that in another year he'd have enough money with which to retire and buy a permanent hookup. Permanent was so much better than the Temp stuff you could get on the home sets. The nerve ends was what did it, of course.

The girl came in and placed several objects on the desk in front of him. She said, "Mr. Handriss, these just came up from LD. They took them out of the pockets of a man reported as wandering in the street in need of a lobe job."

She had left the office door open. Cramer, deputy chief of LD, sauntered in and said, "The guy was really off. He was yammering about being from the past and not to destroy his mind."

Roger Handriss poked the objects with a manicured finger. He said, "Small pocket change from the twentieth century, Cramer. Membership cards in professional organizations of that era. Ah, here's a letter."

As Cramer and the girl waited Roger Handriss read the letter through twice. He gave Cramer an uncomfortable smile and said, "This appears to be a letter from a technical publishing house telling Mr.—ah—Maddon that they intend to reprint his book, *Suggestions on Time Focus* in February of nineteen hundred and fifty. Miss Hart, get on the phone and see if you can raise anyone at the library who can look this up for us. I want to know if such a book was published."

Miss Hart hastened out of the office.

As they waited Handriss motioned to a chair. Cramer sat down. Handriss said, "Imagine what it must have been like in those days, Al. They had the se-

crets but they didn't begin to use them until—let me see—four years later. Aldous Huxley had already given them their clue with his literary invention of the Feelies. But they ignored him.

"All their energies went into wars and rumors of wars and random scientific advancement and sociological disruptions. Of course, with Video on the march at that time, they were beginning to get a little preview. Millions of people were beginning to sit in front of the Video screens, content even with that crude excuse for entertainment."

Cramer suppressed a yawn. Handriss was known to go on like that for hours.

"Now," Handriss continued, "all the efforts of a world society are channeled into World Senseways. There is no waste of effort changing a perfectly acceptable status quo. Every man can have Temp and if you save your money you can have Permanent, which they say, is as close to heaven as man can get. Uh—what was that, Miss Hart?"

"There is such a book, Mr. Handriss, and it was published at that time. A Dr. Rufus Maddon wrote it."

Handriss sighed and clucked. "Well," he said, "have Maddon brought up here."

Maddon was brought into the office by an attendant. He wore a wide foolish smile and a tiny bandage on his temple. He walked with the clumsiness of an overgrown child.

"Blast it, Al," Handriss said, "why couldn't your people have been more careful! He looks as if he might have been intelligent."

Al shrugged. "Do they come here from the past every couple of minutes? He didn't look any different than any other lobey to me."

"I suppose it couldn't be helped," Handriss said. "We've done this man a great wrong. We can wait and reeducate, I suppose. But that seems to be treating him rather shabbily."

"We can't send him back," Al Cramer said.

Handriss stood up, his eyes glowing. "But it is within my authority to grant him one of the Perm setups given me.

World Senseways knows that Regional Directors make mistakes. This will rectify any mistake to an individual."

"Is it fair he should get it for free?" Cramer asked. "And besides, maybe the people who helped send him up here into the future would like to know what goes on."

Handriss smiled shrewdly. "And if they knew, what would stop them from flooding in on us? Have Hookup install him immediately."

THE subterranean corridor had once been used for underground trains. But with the reduction in population it had ceased to pay its way and had been taken over by World Senseways to house the sixty-five thousand Perms.

Dr. Rufus Maddon was taken, in his new shambling walk, to the shining cubicle. His name and the date of installation were written on a card and inserted in the door slot. Handriss stood enviously aside and watched the process.

The bored technicians worked rapidly. They stripped the unprotesting Rufus Maddon, took him inside his cubicle, forced him down onto the foam couch. They rolled him over onto his side, made the usual incision at the back of his neck, carefully slit the main motor nerves, leaving the senses, the heart and lungs intact. They checked the air conditioning and plugged him into the feeding schedule for that bank of Perms.

Next they swung the handrods and the footplates into position, gave him injections of local anaesthetic, expertly flayed the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, painted the raw flesh with the sticky nerve graft and held his hands closed around the rods, his feet against the plates until they adhered in the proper position.

Handriss glanced at his watch.

"Guess that's all we can watch, Al. Come along."

The two men walked back down the

long corridor. Handriss said, "The lucky so and so. We have to work for it. I get my Perm in another year—right down here beside him. In the meantime we'll have to content ourselves with the hand sets, holding onto those blasted knobs that don't let enough through to hardly raise the hair on the back of your neck."

Al sighed enviously. "Nothing to do for as long as he lives except twenty-four hours a day of being the hero of the most adventurous and glamorous and exciting stories that the race has been able to devise. No memories. I told them to dial him in on the Cowboy series. There's seven years of that now. It'll be more familiar to him. I'm electing Crime and Detection. Eleven years of that now, you know."

Roger Handriss chuckled and jabbed Al with his elbow. "Be smart, Al. Pick the Harem series."

Back in the cubicle the technicians were making the final adjustments. They inserted the sound buttons in Rufus Maddon's ears, deftly removed his eyelids, moved his head into just the right position and then pulled down the deeply concave shining screen so that Rufus Maddon's staring eyes looked directly into it.

The elder technician pulled the wall switch. He bent and peered into the screen. "Color okay, three dimensions okay. Come on, Joe, we got another to do before quitting."

They left, closed the metal door, locked it.

Inside the cubicle Dr. Rufus Maddon was riding slowly down the steep trail from the mesa to the cattle town on the plains. He was trail-weary and sun-blackened. There was an old score to settle. Feeney was about to foreclose on Mary Ann's spread and Buck Hoskie, Mary Ann's crooked foreman, had threatened to shoot on sight.

Rufus Maddon wiped the sweat from his forehead on the back of a lean hard brown hero's hand.

Next Issue: LITTLE JOE, a Space Salvage Story by Cleve Cartmill



A hideous shriek
came from a woman
at the next table

The Skeptic

By R. C. W. ETTINGER

*When a wounded officer decides to exile pain he discovers
a latent power for making others see his own mind-images!*

THERE once was a man who didn't believe in anything, one thing at a time. My name was Robert Wilson. It still is, of course, but in other ways I have changed. Now I'm downright credulous, you might say, but in my heyday—well, with me skepticism was a science.

You could tell me practically any-

thing, and if I felt like it I wouldn't believe it; you could *show* me anything and I still wouldn't believe it. What's more—hold onto your hat—you wouldn't believe it!

That was me, the poor man's Sven-gali. And here it is—the story of my rise and fall.

It began in misery and ended the same

way. The miserable ending we'll have to work around to gradually; the miserable beginning was in a 12-bed room in Percy Jones Hospital, Battle Creek. The misery was in my left leg, perineal nerve trouble. Captain Conrad, across the room, was experiencing very similar sensations—only, as he liked to remind me, he came by his differently.

It was July and, while our side of the building was usually comfortable, that day the wind was wrong or something and it was just plain hot. Captain Conrad's heavy breathing graduated into a groan.

"I am sweating," he announced, "like a hen laying firecrackers." The preposterous presumption, implying he was more uncomfortable than I! I moaned softly.

"I am sweating," I informed the room, "like a cat passing pineapples."

"Sure, pass the pineapples!" he said bitterly. "Pass the Porterhouse steaks! Pass the grilled hummingbirds' tongues! With us *soldiers* it was 'Pass the D-ration.' And after that vacation on the taxpayers' money he has the nerve to complain of a little discomfort! Of course," he gouged, "I suppose what he's really moaning about is, they won't give him flight pay because he's on the tenth floor."

I let it go, losing interest. It would have been a losing fight anyway, with all those gravel-agitators against me.

Captain Conrad and I had reached the States a couple of months before, in the spring of 1945, having been hurt about the same time—he in the Hürtgen Forest when an 88-mm shell clipped him—I on the steps of an officers' club in Paris, when I slipped carrying a case of cognac.

NATURALLY I was meat for Connie and the other ground-grippers, considering that I was a navigator *and* an F.O. *and* a non-combat casualty. I didn't let it bother me and usually held up my end but today I was miserable for sure. I lay there a bit and then decided it was about time. All right, so I'd be first again to holler. It didn't make me especially happy but I had more sense than pride.

"Susie!" I yelled. No response.

"*Su-sie!*" I yelled. More nothing.

"*Su-u-u-sie!*" I yodeled and this time she appeared. A young and pleas-

ant-featured cadet, Susie was too plump to be called pretty but had that pink freshness of skin and lips that some fat girls enjoy and that, to me at least, is very appetizing. She was smiling, as usual.

"Flight Officer Wilson sounding off again, I see. Why don't you be quiet. You'll disturb the *sick* patients."

"If they're any sicker than me they've decomposed long ago," I groaned.

"Oh, my, always looking for sympathy!" She patted my cheek. "Now it's only a quarter of two and you know the doctor wants to take you off sedatives. So be a good boy and don't pester me. But here's something nice," she professed brightly, "to take your mind off your troubles."

"Nectarine." I grimaced but quickly accepted the offering. "*Nectarine!* To take my mind off my troubles would require a guillotine, at least. Listen," I warned her, "at two o'clock sharp I want my shot!"

"Look, why don't you read a nice book so you'll stop thinking about your leg," she coaxed. "It's all in your head, you know."

"All right, give me my shot in the head."

"No, I mean it, you've been on sedatives long enough. Isn't there anything that will take your mind off your leg? Why don't you play a nice game of chess?"

"Why don't you give me a nice kiss?" I suggested.

You guessed it—she took me up and daringly planted a firm sweet cool one on my lips—to her hilarious regret. For where she intended to leave off I aimed to carry on. I seized her and squeezed her, she lost her balance and there we were—in bed together!

The point is, of course, that by the time the riot in the room tapered off a good twenty minutes had gone wherever it is used minutes go and I had forgotten my pain for that time. Which gave me to think. I was on the wrong track but I was thinking.

Excitement took one's mind off pain. Even conversation did the same thing to some extent. So it *was* in your head after all—and all that was necessary was to ignore the pain and give your attention to something else.

It didn't work. I just didn't have that kind of will power. The more I tried to

think of something else the more the pain obtruded. And I was so tired of hurting! It wasn't unbearable at any given moment but there had been so much, would be—

At any given moment! A curious thought was dawning. Surely yesterday's pain didn't bother me except as it affected my attitude? Nor the pain of an hour ago! *Nor the pain of a split second ago!*

You can argue away the universe at this rate. Is time infinitely divisible? Is the present an infinitesimal layer between the has-been and the not-yet? What becomes of reality?

Don't get me wrong. I don't claim that these half-baked notions bear any relation to objective truth, although they did seem mighty plausible at the time: I'm merely indicating my train of thought. And that train was barreling down the stretch like old No. 99 on the downgrade.

I decided that the present has no more duration than a point has length. The subjective *impression* of the "present," which varies with the individual and with the occasion, is a phenomenon analogous to persistence of vision in the eye—only it can be controlled.

I did it. Instead of trying to ignore the pain, I concentrated on it, trying to pin it down, asking myself, "*When* does it hurt?" And the more I tried to pin down, to *locate* the pain, the more elusively it squirmed and wriggled until, lo and behold—there was no pain!

JUBILATION, emancipation! I warmed myself in the sun of my own appreciation and congratulatory admiration—that sun which heralded with modest self-esteem the dawn of a new day, the era of Mind over Matter. Beat a path to my door, you so-called physicians, you medical midgets, you dope-dispensing dimwits. Professor Wilson will explain about pain!

But first I would get in a dig or two. Captain Conrad, who had been in constant misery the last hour or so, decided he had had enough for a while. "Ward boy! Get the nurse!" Susie came and when he asked for a shot readily agreed and went to get it.

I couldn't resist the opportunity to taunt him. "Why complain about a little pain? Be a hero, hero! You don't hear me screaming for medicine, do you?"

"You don't fool anybody, buzz-boy. If you're not complaining you're just not hurting. I know you as well as if I'd wheeled the manure to make you."

An unkind cut but I was not long disconcerted. "A proverb," I observed sagely, "is the last resort of the mentally destitute. Besides, who lies down with a dog gets up with fleas. As I was saying, I have discovered how to banish pain. You just say to yourself—

"OUCH!" Lamentation, humiliation! Somewhere the dam had burst and the double-damned nerve was sluicing its fiery torrent to my brain once more. After a short struggle I got it under control again but the incident gave me pause. I decided I had better go into this thing carefully and thoroughly before making any rash commitments.

I went into it very thoroughly indeed.

* * * * *

By September I was considering announcement of my results. I had mastered the technique of anaesthesia and flattered myself I possessed no small skill in the manipulation of hallucinations. Ah, vanity! Ah, boundless ignorance!

By September, too, the class of '45 had been promoted from beds and wheelchairs to crutches and we soon felt strong enough for a foray into town. Scene the second finds a frolicsome foursome quaffing heartily of the watered spirits of the Firmament Club. Except for Captain Conrad's red-headed Peggy, who cheated slyly by taking her infrequent rums with milk.

Right away came trouble. A stout civilian emerged from the woodwork and weaved over to our table. "Hello, Susie, my pet! Looking powerful pretty in them civvies. Let's dance." So help me, that's what he said—"powerful"—ugh!—"pretty, let's dance." And Susie, though she didn't get up, smiled! Seems she knew the crumb.

I proposed a toast. "Here's to the bee, a busy soul, he don't believe in birth control—and that is why, in times like these, you meet so many sons of bees." A hard look went with it to make my meaning clear. Connie laughed raucously. We couldn't dance, of course, in our plaster pants.

The bee bristled. "Look here, Lieutenant—"

"You will not," I said firmly, "get anywhere with flattery. Neither will you

get anywhere with Flight Officer Wilson's girl. Bye-bye, bud."

He wavered forward a step. "If you weren't a cripple! I've half a mind—"

"You wuz robbed," I agreed. "But don't—"

"Stop it, Bob!" Susie put in hastily. "He doesn't mean anything, Mr. Griggs." She smiled, as they say, winningly. "I'd love to dance with you some other time but you'll excuse me now. There's a dear." The dear retired, mumbling.

"You *would* look for trouble," she scolded. "You know cadets aren't even supposed to be out this late! Now you just forget poor Mr. Griggs!"

"All right," I glanced at the retreating Griggs and shrugged. "Crawl back into your hole, you snake." And I dismissed him from my mind.

This was a mistake. Because, while we hadn't had much to drink yet, my resistance was below par. At any rate, whether out of alcoholic fog or simple absent-mindedness, I ignored Griggs in a very *special* way.

"E-E-E-E-Y-A-A-a-a-gug-ug-urgle-urgle-urk!!!" I was lifted inches off my chair, ear-drums quivering, for this hideous shriek had come from a woman almost beside me at the next table, the tables being corners-to so that we faced nearly the same direction.

Her distended mouth framed her dangling tonsils, and her eyebrows had climbed almost beyond her hair-line. While the others still gazed at her in fascination I slowly turned and followed the direction of her horrified stare, the short hairs at the base of my scalp beginning to prickle.

I HAD never seen such a big, fat king cobra leading a band. At least, he was standing on the edge of the dance-patch near the band, balanced on his sturdy tail and swaying his fat head rhythmically to and fro. Tall and thick as a man he was, black and rough-scaled. And perhaps just a bit blurred around the edges although that may have been the liquor.

For just an instant my surprise held me. Not that this serpentine character was overly startling in itself, for of course I had expected something of the sort. It was the fact that *this woman saw it too*.

A word came to mind—psychokine-

synthesis. Holy roly-poly, could I *create* these things? For just an instant this flashed through my mind. Then I had the self-possession to act first and consider later.

I reached back into my subconscious, according to the technique I had developed, and fumbled around in my Exile File until I found the name I wanted. I said clearly, "Griggs." And there he was, large as life and just as disappointing.

None too soon, either. Tonsils had raised her arm to point and people were turning around to look in that direction. She was still blubbing hysterically when they led her away, something about a "great big rattlesnake, all green and slimy and boo-hoo-hoo!"

Peggy sighed, round-eyed. "Good grief! Is that what liquor does to people? Why didn't I listen to mother?"

Connie was against temperance. "Don't be silly, Peg. Must have been something she et. Ha! Anyway, the floor show's coming on, and you *have* to be half-crocked to stand that."

The first act was a Minstrel Man, a sort of beggar's W.C. Fields. While pretending to watch this depressing spectacle I did some excited thinking.

This thing was big, bigger than I had dreamed! Psychokinesynthesis. Psychokinesis, too, would no doubt yield up its mysteries. How had the Mayans raised those monstrous stones up sheer mountain sides? Pulleys and levers, sweat and strain? Pooh! Mental power did it! This beats the Rosicrucians.

Hold on, there. You've been drinking, now start thinking. Nobody had noticed anything when I practised my manipulations back in the ward. And only one woman had seen the serpent—yes, and even she hadn't seen what I'd seen. Now, I wondered why?

Well—she was one of the few sitting close enough to hear me call Griggs a snake, and the only one of those then looking at him. She saw a snake—which to her meant something eminently green and slimy with rattles—just as *my* primary snake image featured a hooded cobra.

Hypnotism? Well, call it sympathetic hallucination. They say faith moves mountains. The truth is, if you believe something strongly enough, while your conviction may not be objectively true, *others will share it*. At least, they will

if you are me. Or would. . . .

A moderate patter of applause brought me out of my reverie. Signifying hope rather than appreciation, this clapping denoted the end of the minstrel man's efforts and the debut of a lady magician.

The lights dimmed to a murky purple, drums took up a throbbing jungle beat, horns moaned softly and Lena Horne's sister swayed onto the floor. Rounded and wriggly, dusky and devastating in a spangled black gown fashioned for fervor, she was something perhaps not out of this world but at least out of Battle Creek.

There was whistling, howling and stamping of feet. Getting into the spirit of the thing I flapped my arms and crowed like a rooster. Connie seized himself by the ears and banged his forehead against the table.

The girls were amused but not very.

Susie smiled. "She does have a well-developed—personality. I hope her magic is as smooth as her dancing."

It wasn't exactly. Or, when you got right down to it, even approximately. The routine wasn't bad really, silent sleight-of-hand stuff with coins and eggs and things while she danced—but she must have been used to working on a stage.

Here she was practically surrounded by customers, of whom at least half at any one time could see the business side of her dainty digits.

Art could not flourish under these conditions, I thought. She'd be laughed off the floor.

Here was where the fly-boy got into the ointment.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "The eggs are *hatching!*" And I shoved "eggs" down into the Exile File.

SHE had been dancing toward us with a multiplying-egg trick and a wave of snickers and wisecracks was beginning to swell behind her, where they could see her palming the celluloid half-shells.

But now—as my remark was repeated from table to table—a gathering roll of applause engulfed the hecklers. The dancer smiled in a slightly dazed way. She had noticed nothing.

"Why, isn't that clever!" admired Susie.

"Darned if it isn't," concurred Con-

nie. "Didn't think she had it in her—in them, that is. Neat trick, very."

"You say the nicest things," Peggy complained, "but never about me. What's she got that I couldn't throw around like a gyroscope too if I weren't brought up different?"

This baffled Connie. Susie said mildly, "Why, Peg, don't you think that's a pretty trick? The shells breaking right before our eyes and all those darling little chicks between her fingers? Even if they are cotton-wool," she added. It was hard to tell if any of them moved.

"*What* chicks? Did I miss something? What *is* all this?" Peggy was getting a little snappish.

Now I was baffled too. Or—wait—could there be what we might call impression immunes? Was Peggy a psychic washout or holdout? Better create a diversion, I reasoned. That's what I called it—reasoning.

"Look! The chicks are *growing!* They're *all kinds* of birds!"

They weren't, though, not as far as I could see. Just a handful of egg-sized baby chicks, peeping a little, I thought, but scarcely moving. Peggy, who plainly could still see nothing but eggs, was near tears with exasperated puzzlement and tossed off a choking drink to appease her vexation.

But the spatter of applause and delighted cries proved that some were audience to a braver show.

Including the lady magician. For the first time she heard what was said and saw—what she was holding. I had to give her credit, she was a trouper. Beyond showing a startling expanse of white in her eyes she made no immediate break. Only her knees began to match her swivel for vibration.

The exclamations of wonder and applause grew louder. Eyes bulged, jaws dangled.

"Will you look at that!" Connie admired. "Those birds are getting big! How can they all stay on her fingers? That pigeon! And that—a flamingo, by jiminy! And—"

"Pigeon? *Flamingo?*" Susie was puzzled now too. "All I see is those cotton-wool chicks. Changing color—it is an *unusual* trick—but they're not growing or—"

"I think all you people are just plain gopfy." Peggy's lips were tight. "Or playing some stupid trick on me. She's

just holding those silly celluloid eggs. Is everybody going nuts?"

It seemed like it. The place was really getting noisy now. Everybody had his own idea of what was happening and no argument failed for lack of lung-power.

"Look!" roared Connie. "She dropped them! They're walking around on the floor."

The dancer had been practically paralyzed the last few minutes but now she suddenly remembered what I could have told her all along—that she had legs—and took off. Like a big bird, of course.

"This is all too much for me," said Susie. "I just see those chicks sitting on the floor where she dropped them."

"Eggs," said Peggy. "Just eggs. *He* sees flamingos. Silly boy." She had snatched my drink too and was less upset now. "I thought you only saw *little* animals."

"Let's go," I said, getting up. It was about time. Three fist-fights and a hair-pulling had developed. And talk about noise! The little molecules of air must have been in a dither, trying to decide which way to vibrate.

"We really should," Susie agreed. "This din is giving me a headache."

"Awright—I mean all right. Silly girl!" Peggy only paused to polish off Susie's drink. Connie wanted to stay and see the fun but finally followed us. When we had fought our way to the door he clutched my arm.

"Look!" he implored, pointing at the stars painted on the ceiling. "Will you just look at that? It's growing more and more—moa and moa—it *is*, it's a moa, it's a giant moa!"

I turned with quiet dignity to survey the wild confusion within. I reached back into my subconscious. "Tut, man. The moa is extinct, you know. There's no moa now, that is."

THERE was a dead silence. And before the renewed storm could break I headed for elsewhere, putting my best crutch forward. "Leave us gather some yonder. I think we have just time to make the Anti-saloon League rally."

* * * * *

Scene the third finds a fervorful but furtive foursome approaching the limpid moonlit waters of Eagle Lake—I just made that up about the Anti-saloon League. We had left my car parked at

the top of the hill and sneaked easily past the M.P., who was busy spooning with a WAC he had caught spooning with a soldier.

And now there was the peaceful shore, sand or grass, take your choice. And what a night for it! Warm and cool if you know what I mean—and the moon, also the stars, and the lake smell and the grass smell. My eyes grew misty and my heart rose up to choke me and I extemporized a little scrap of sonnet to fit the occasion.

"Give three cheers each,
We've reached the beach."

"Be still!" hissed Susie. "Here, sit down. It's not damp." We all sat down where Susie indicated, where the grass was soft and a friendly tree discouraged the nosy moon.

Peggy's Puritanism had been softened a little by those three quick drinks and Susie, bless her heart, had always had the instincts of a red-blooded American girl. The conversation began to get interesting. It was a little too crowded for cozy, though, and I suggested a little lakefaring.

Susie protested the idea with many long and reasonable arguments and held me there, which was no trick because I couldn't get up by myself anyway. But when I threatened to scream to the M.P. that a brute of a woman was taking advantage of a poor cripple she let me have my way.

She refreshed her arguments when we got in a boat and found the oars gone, locked up. But I cast off anyway and with a little hand paddling and a light breeze to lakeward we were soon adrift on the bosom of the vasty deep.

Water is pretty homely stuff, take it in sinks or bottles or sewers, but as scenery it has an undeniable charm, even magic. Especially with a moon and stars and green-smelling breeze as accessories. So we just drifted awhile in contemplation and by the time I remembered to kiss her Susie's wandering thoughts had reverted to the Firmament Club.

"That's sweet. Wait a minute, Bob—all right, now stop, honey—I was just thinking—"

"This is not the time for it."

"All that going-on at the club. It was really very odd. And you know, it just strikes me, *you* weren't surprised. In

fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you know something about or—or even had something to do with it! Look me in the eye! No, I just said *look* at me. No, not until you tell me—I *know* you did, I just know it, I can tell by the way you look.”

I sighed. I confessed. What else could I do? That Susie!

* * * * *

“So now you know as much as I do. And don't say that makes you an idiot.”

Her forefinger sketched thoughtful pictures in the water as she leaned against the side. “Well, it's astonishing. You certainly are clever, Bob.” I admitted it. “But why didn't we all see the same thing?”

“As I told you, the way I figure it, when I exile something and convince myself of whatever I want to substitute for it, my brain sets up a sympathetic field pattern of some queer kind.

“Every brain has a varying electromagnetic aura, you know. Every other nearby brain tunes in and is conditioned by it—only those other brains don't banish the true image until they get a hint of what to replace it with. Can't just leave a blank.

“Like that leaf floating on the water.” I pointed to it and Exiled it. “There's no leaf there to my eyes, even though I remember it. No hole in space, either. I imagine water there. And so do you, now that I've mentioned it, don't you?”

“Yes.” She nodded, excited and interested. “Only the water where the leaf should be is a little misty. Of course, it's all moonlit and shimmery but those chicks were vague around the edges too, if I remember.”

“Exactly. The water is misty because you can't perfectly imagine it. And the chicks were hazy because your brain was straining to imagine a chick the exact size and shape of an egg. Connie now and some of the others can apparently take any suggestion and imagine anything. But then a lot of kids have waking nightmares where the imaginary is superimposed on the real.”

“And Peggy couldn't be fooled at all. She'll always see realities. You have to admire a girl like that.”

“Pity the person who always sees reality!” I remarked sagely. “I don't have to admire her. Here's the dumpling I admire.” And I tried to show her how much.

“Please, Bob, just a minute—yes, I'm

your honey—now stop, you've got me all excited. I mean about your discovery. Now, you said you'd tell me—yes, but I have so many questions yet!”

I GAVE up in disgust. “Well,” I growled, “what more does your insatiable, untimely, and I must say unfeminine scientific curiosity require?”

“Oh, lots of things,” she said gaily, ignoring my pettishness. “For instance—it's all right to imagine something different from what's there if you just *look* at it. But suppose you have to come in contact with it or something and the substitute and the original have basically different natures? Will the illusion stand up? Like—”

“Yes, yes,” I said. “Wilson's hi-grade hallucinations always stand up.”

“Well, like—”

“Like changing that water to solid cement? We can easily enough try it.” And I reached my good leg over to kick the pavement.

Yes, that's the way it happened. The side I leaned over on was the side on which Susie, of whom there is a good deal to love, was already leaning. Natural law being what it is we capsized. Upside-down boat. Susie in the water. Me in the water. Me and my cast, you understand.

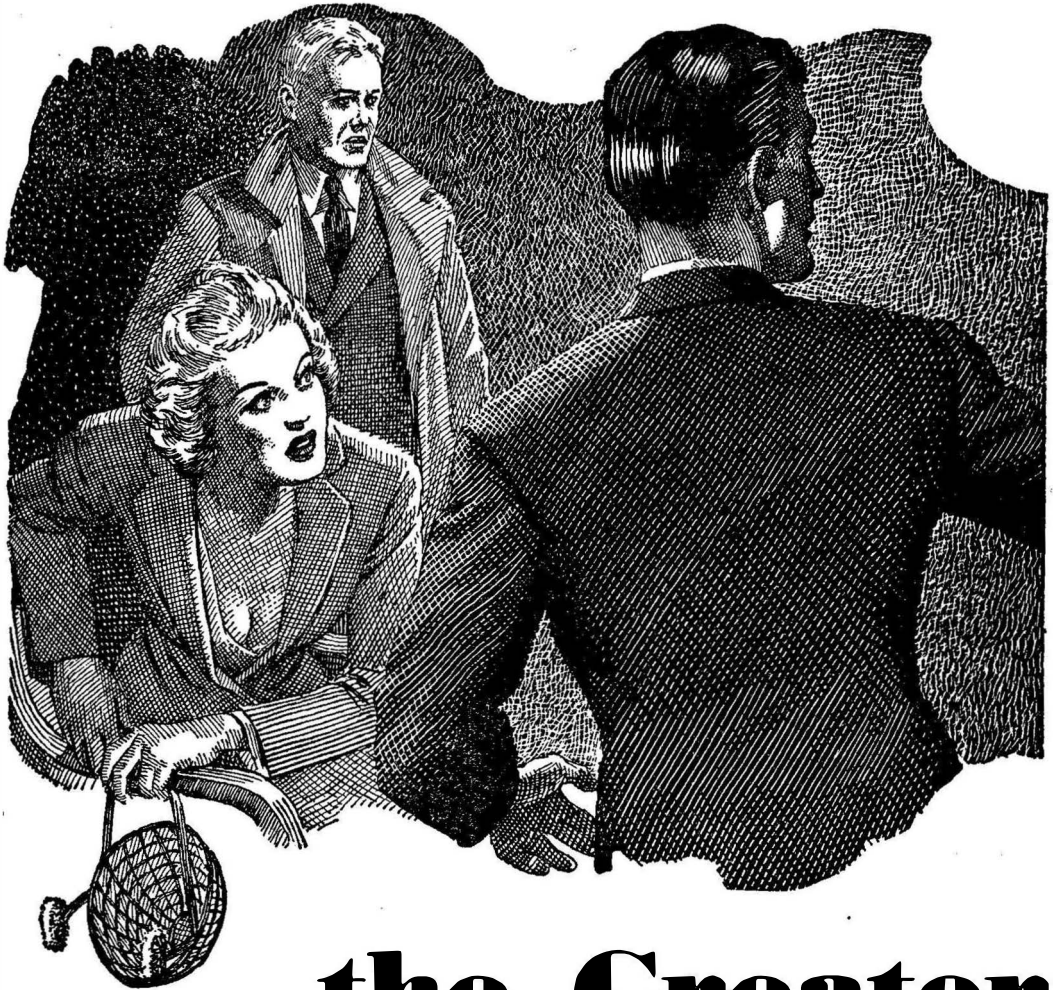
Let me say right here with a touch of pardonable pride that my illusion did stand up pretty well. I felt the wet water, having only Exiled the visual aspect of the thing but I saw a sort of dark gray murk. Silly, of course. It should have been total blackness but for some reason I imagined the inside of a block of cement to be gray.

I guess I also imagined cement to be better suited to the lungs than water. At any rate I took a deep breath, which was not the smartest thing I ever did. That stuff is all right as scenery but as environment it leaves something to be desired.

I choked, I gasped, I struggled. There was a pounding pressure in my ears, my eyes, my brain. I fought upward against the cast's deadly drag and still with insane reflex tried to breathe.

Well, there's no sense trying to make it dramatic. I didn't drown, as any fool can plainly see. But a moment after I felt Susie's hand in my hair I passed out.

That's all, really. When I came to in
(Concluded on Page 113)



the Greater

CHAPTER I

Wish for the Stars

THE desert was dreamlike in the early morning heat. Cal Meacham wished he and Ruth had started a couple of hours earlier than they did. They would have been in the outskirts of Los Angeles now.

He glanced down at the face of his companion, who was curled up in the seat beside him. Ruth Adams—Dr. Ruth Adams, M.D., Ph.D., D.Sc. He

smiled tenderly as he watched her sleeping figure. She looked more like a college freshman than a skilled psychiatrist burdened with all those degrees.

But even in sleep her face showed the lines of stress and worry that her work with the Peace Engineers put upon her.

It was little more than six months since Cal had met her there, he thought. In that short time he had worked hard-

At Last Cal Meacham Finds the Answer to His



As far as they could see,
titanic warships flowed
through space

a novelet by **RAYMOND F. JONES**

Conflict

er than ever before in his life. He had put the new plant unit of the Peace Engineers into production in Phoenix. He had seen the first of the complex communicators come off the production lines under his direction—those instruments the Engineers called interocitors.

And he had put his diamond on Ruth's finger.

She stirred as the sunlight brightened the desert. She looked up and smiled wryly as she turned her head slowly back and forth.

"Oh-h-h—" she grimaced. "It's going to be stiff for a week."

"Good morning, darling," said Cal. "Breakfast coffee is almost ready—just around the next bend in the road."

Ruth glanced at the straight, miles-long stretch ahead and wrinkled her nose at him. "I'll have mine out of the thermos you didn't want me to bring along."

She reached behind the seat and brought out the bottle. As she sipped the warm coffee she said, "What are

Problem—but He Doesn't Find It On Earth!

you going to say to Ole when we find him? Do you have any idea?"

He shook his head. "It will all depend on how he reacts. If only he could have told us what he knew instead of running away—"

The night of Cal's arrival at the magnificent desert plant of the Peace Engineers Ruth and Ole Swenberg had come to him with the warning that the company was only a front for some unknown activity which they feared. That accusation was a blow for which Cal had been unprepared.

Through the unusual procedures of their unique aptitude tests he had been given an engineering job that surpassed his wildest dreams. They gave him complete charge of the interocitor plant, the opportunity to work in laboratories with seemingly unlimited funds. It was the kind of paradise that only an engineer could understand—an engineer who has known the degradation of having to make a living by designing a toaster just a little more cheaply and shoddily than the next man.

The plant of Peace Engineers was an engineering heaven.

IN the midst of it Ole and Ruth had tried to convince him that it was a false front for something of deep and sinister significance.

Cal refused to believe it. He preferred the story given by Jorgasnovara, the somewhat eccentric head of Peace Engineers. Jorgasnovara revealed the existence of a secret organization of scientists and engineers that dated back to the seventeenth century, an organization dedicated to withholding the secrets of science from the makers of war.

With such a motive Cal could sympathize wholeheartedly. He had vowed that never again would he devote the talents of his mind and his understanding of science to the making of war.

But two things disturbed his peace of mind.

Three months ago Ole had left the plant in panic after telling Ruth he

knew the secret behind the Peace Engineers. Without speaking of it again he fled to Los Angeles and began work for an auto radio company.

The second disturbing factor was the discovery that the interocitors were not built for terrestrial markets. The Peace Engineers had space flight and Jorgasnovara had retained that secret from them. But Cal and Ruth had seen one of the vast ships come and go. They had seen it load interocitors for a market beyond the stars.

"I wish we were never going back," said Ruth suddenly. Her voice was low, almost inaudible above the hum of the engine. "I wish we were never going to hear of Peace Engineers again!"

Cal turned. Her eyes were staring far across the desert to the little fence of mountains beyond. They bore the vision of infinite dread that he had glimpsed the first time he had ever seen her.

It was mid-morning when they reached Los Angeles. The Narcissus Radio Company was one of those small outfits scrabbling for a living on the south side of town. Its single building was a wartime jerry-built shack that looked as if it were now forty years old.

The company would be lucky if its half-life were any more than two years, Cal thought. He pulled up in front of it and surveyed the cracked brick front that spoke of cost-plus deluxe.

"What a rathole!"

Ruth shook her head in dismay. "I can't imagine an engineer like Ole coming to work here for *any* reason. Did you ever hear of Narcissus Radios?"

"No," said Cal, "and very few people ever will either—except radio service men. I'll bet they really turn out some bloopers in here."

They left the car and entered the building. Two languid typists seemed to be the total office force.

Cal spoke. "We'd like to see Mr. Swenberg of the engineering department."

One of the girls shifted her gum and laughed. "Not *of*. He *is* the engineering department. Go straight on through to

the rear. His office is at the back next to the shipping department."

They passed through a swinging door and found themselves in a dingy assembly room. The makeshift wooden beams overhead showed ominous cracks. The assembly line consisted of twelve girls and a foreman who were putting a can full of parts together, which would be boxed and labeled as a car radio.

The foreman came up. Cal said, "We want to see Mr. Swenberg."

"Right back there."

They could see Ole's figure now in the glare of light coming through a door at the rear of the building. He looked up as they approached. His face registered impulsive gladness momentarily and then a cold dismay clouded his eyes.

"Hi, Ole!" said Cal. "We finally decided to come over and inspect this rat's nest you left paradise for."

Ole took his hand. "Well, it's a rat's nest, all right. You ought to see our inspection department. The last girl on the line plugs the sets in. If she can tune in KFI the thing goes in a box. I warn you, don't ever buy Narcissus radios—even if I do design them myself."

"Would you be willing to recommend anything else that you've helped design lately?"

"Such as what?"

"Such as interocitors."

Ole hesitated. His face seemed to go slack and his eyes held a beaten look.

"I'd just as soon not talk about *that*."

"It's what we came for, Ole. We've got to talk about it. Ruth and I—we've found out something new for ourselves. We've got to know what made you run away."

"What have you found out?" Ole asked but his face showed no real interest.

CAL wondered if he should say it, if Ole could understand that he actually meant it. "They've got space flight," he said slowly. "We saw their ships—one of them. It picked up a load of interocitors two nights ago and went off—somewhere. It was a spaceship. I'm absolutely certain of that."

Ole looked narrowly into Cal's eyes. "I suppose it's possible. If it's true, it makes it worse than ever. They'll have their way whenever they come out in the open and let the rest of the world know what they intend to do."

"Did you find out who they are?" said Cal. "Is that why you left?"

Ole shook his head. "It was just like sitting on a time bomb, never knowing when it might go off—or even if it would go off at all while I was there. I had to get out."

Ruth spoke up for the first time. "Ole, don't you remember that day when you came to my office?"

He looked blank, then slowly shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"That day you came in babbling about something that had terrorized you. Warner came right afterwards and wouldn't let me do anything for you but he took you away. The next time I saw you, you said you were leaving to take this job."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I remember telling you I was leaving but nothing about the other."

Suddenly, he waved his palm in front of him as if to brush the whole affair away. "I've told you I don't want to talk about any of that ugly business over there. I'm through with it! You can go on thinking what you like about it but I want nothing to do with it—and as long as you're a part of it I think that I want nothing to do with you either. If that's all you came to talk about you may as well go."

"Ole—!" Ruth began.

Cal touched her arm. "I'm sorry, Ole. We're disturbed about things ourselves and we thought you might be able to help by telling us about that day you came to Ruth's—"

"I don't know what you're talking about! Now, will you please leave?"

They turned and moved slowly back through the dingy assembly room. No one spoke as they went on and out of the building. When they were in the car Cal laid a carton on the seat between them.

"Cal—" Ruth said, "we've got to find

a way to do something for Ole. He's under terrific tension. He's being torn by some inner conflict that he can't endure much longer."

"Maybe we'll find the answer in this." He tapped the carton as he turned the car out into the stream of traffic.

"What's that? You didn't have anything when we went in there." Then she turned it over and read the printing on the carton. "You took one of their radios. How did you get it?"

"Used to do sleight of hand in college," he said. "I don't think anyone saw me pick it up. I'd rather Ole didn't know it."

"Why did you take it?"

"I don't know for sure but didn't you notice how anxious Ole was to get us out of there?"

"How could I help notice being ordered out?"

"But did you stop to figure out why?"

"That's obvious. The tension—our bringing up the Peace Engineer trouble again—"

Cal patted her hand. "Look, darling. Sometimes there's a disadvantage in being a very brilliant psychiatrist. You need the talents of a dub who's an old solder slinger from way back. Didn't you notice that back room behind the one we were in?"

"Not particularly."

"He had an interocitor in there."

"An int—! You mean he—?"

"He'd been working on it just before we came in. I could see the rosin vapor rising from his soldering iron in there. He had parts of it strung all over the bench but I know an interocitor when I see one."

"He didn't want us to see it!"

"That's why I wanted to get out with one of these things instead of standing around arguing with him. He very definitely didn't want us to see it. Anybody else—it wouldn't matter because they wouldn't know what it was. But our coming really gave him the jitters. Here's a good stopping place."

He swung the car to the curb on a residential side street where little traffic flowed. He turned to the box on the

seat and ripped it open. With a screwdriver from the glove compartment he removed a panel from the set inside. He looked into the complex assembly within. He grunted softly. "That's no more a car radio than it is a dishwasher."

"You mean it's something—like an interocitor, maybe?" There was tension in Ruth's voice now, as if she were witnessing a nightmare vision she couldn't believe. "But Ole wouldn't be doing that. He's not *with* them!"

"I don't know. What can we believe? But whatever his purpose he's certainly lying to us—some pretty fat barefaced lies. He's getting this stuff from the Peace Engineers because more than half of these components aren't even recognizable. And most of the rest are the kind of stuff that goes into the interocitor. It's part of the Engineers' technique."

"But, Cal, he can't be. You heard what he said back there. He sounded as bitter towards them as ever. He can't be with them still."

Cal shook his head. "It looks as if instead of leaving them, he has actually been promoted to a job like Jorgasnovara's on a smaller scale. Why he should be lying to us now I don't know. But I'll bet a nickel he runs the whole place back there."

WHEN Ruth finally spoke again her voice was thin with fear. "I suppose you think this means everything is just swell, that Ole has joined them and so it proves that you were right."

"Ruth, please don't talk like that."

"I'm sorry. I'm scared, Cal. You didn't see Ole that day he came babbling to me about what he'd heard the Engineer thinking."

"I don't think everything is all right. I don't see why he lied to us. If I am right why didn't he just say so and try to explain where you and he had been wrong? It makes less sense than ever."

"What are you going to do now? Are you going back to see Ole or tell Jorgasnovara you know about the spaceship?"

He put the box on the back seat and drew her close with his arm about her shoulders. "What do you think I should do?"

"The best thing to do would be to forget about going back. Let's stay here and not ever go near the place again. What they've done to Ole they could do to any of us.

"They've done something horrible to him. He's not himself. He's in the grip of something he can't fight. I think they put him under some kind of impressed influence that day that's made little more than a robot out of him. They've made him think the thoughts they want him to think. They've made him do the things they want him to do. He's their slave, turning out these devices for whatever purpose they have."

"You don't really believe that, darling. There's a rational explanation that will be perfectly reasonable when we understand it."

He felt the trembling of her shoulders beneath his arm. He stared down the sunny Los Angeles street. A half dozen little kids were riding tricycles on the sidewalk and tossing balls up the street a ways.

It was a scene so utterly ordinary and far removed from that fantastic desert factory at Phoenix that he was almost tempted to agree to Ruth's proposal. They could live on a street just like this, he thought. They could have a house just like one of these and their kids could be playing here in the sun in a few years.

It was tempting.

He withdrew his arm and turned on the key again. "They've got space flight," he said. "We know that and that alone would keep me from backing out now. Why, that ship of theirs was so far beyond the clumsy rockets our militarists have been toying with—

"It was as far developed as an airliner. It speaks of a technology in which the pioneering is over. It could make trips to the stars with safety and regularity.

"And, Ruth—I want to go to the stars."

His own sudden vehemence startled him. He looked into her eyes a moment, then spoke more quietly. "It's a dream I had when I was a kid. I thought maybe when I was grown up—I haven't even thought about it for years. And now, suddenly, it's possible. I've got to find out about it. If they're withholding it from the rest of the world I'm going to find out why it can't be given out."

"Yes—of course you will go," she said quietly. "But first you will find out who the Peace Engineers are. You will find out the pieces of the picture that they have kept hidden from us."

He nodded. "That's what makes it so devilishly hard to understand—their elusiveness. Jorgasnovara told me enough so that up to a point I can understand it. But beyond that point it makes no sense at all."

"And you have reached that point?"

"This business with Ole pretty accurately defines it."

"Are you going back there?"

"No." He shook his head slowly. "I think the answer still lies in Phoenix—in the interocitor. Why is Ole using one? I want to know more about this apparent thought reading property the machine has. No. I'm going back to work as if nothing had happened and go on from there."

"How about dinner before we start back?"

CHAPTER II

The Thought Reader

THE long lonely four-hundred-mile drive back to Phoenix ended in late evening. Cal let Ruth out at her place and kissed her good night.

He turned the car north again and drove slowly toward the mysterious plant beyond town. Crouched on the desert with only a scattering of lights, it was like a sleeping monster that he dared not waken.

A year ago Cal had been a project engineer at Ryberg Corporation in the East. Intercepting company mail, the

Peace Engineers had started substituting incredible electronic components for those he ordered for his projects.

He recalled the first one. It had been a glass bead a quarter of an inch in diameter and it turned out to be a four-mike condenser with a thirty-thousand-volt breakdown.

They followed up with a catalogue filled with descriptions of other fantastic components. From it, he ordered parts and built the first interocitor he had ever seen. Only later did he discover the catalogue was part of an ingenious aptitude test of his engineering abilities.

When the instrument was finished, Warner, the Peace Engineers' employment director, made contact with him through it and offered the job that Cal now held.

All this procedure he could accept. He could accept Jorgasnovara's explanation of the Engineers' existence, their purpose and their secrecy. He could understand their withholding full explanations until he proved himself.

But the one wholly illogical factor was Ole Swenberg. Cal could not comprehend why the engineer, who had so bitterly denounced the organization, who had come to Ruth in such panic over some discovery he'd made concerning it—he could not understand how Ole could now be in obvious charge of a small Peace Engineers' plant.

And, though Ole was still using and working with interocitors, he refused to talk about it with Cal—and with Ruth, who had been the only one who shared his distrust of the Peace Engineers. It made no sense whatever.

Before he had seen the Engineers' ship he had been so sure that everything was all right, that the Peace Engineers had a legitimate reason for secrecy. Then he had made this trip to see what Ole knew.

Now nothing seemed right. Ole, who had been so bitter against them, was directing a midget plant for them. And he didn't want Cal or Ruth to know about it.

Wearily, Cal turned into the drive-

way of his own company-owned house. He felt exhausted beyond endurance. Tomorrow would be time enough for new questions.

IN the morning he returned to the offices and laboratories of the interocitor plant which he directed. It was the same familiar surrounding that he had known for many months but somehow none of it seemed the same now. He caught himself looking furtively about as if to catch someone in the act of spying on him. He felt watched.

Angrily he shook off the sensation. He knew it had no basis in reality. It was only the product of his new attitude of suspicion towards the Peace Engineers. There seemed to be endless details of production problems to attend to that morning but by eleven o'clock the assembly lines were rolling smoothly and he managed to get away to his own laboratory.

He locked the door behind him and leaned against it a moment. On all sides of him were the products of this alien culture of the Peace Engineers, a culture developed and hidden away from the world for more than three centuries. Panels—rows of them—of interocitor equipment. Electrical components that could not be made by any technology outside this little knot of secretive scientists who called themselves Peace Engineers.

Would there ever be an end to the questioning in his mind? It seemed so useless. Why couldn't everything be open and above question if their motives were altruistic? His doubts fought with his desire to believe that this was the professional paradise he had hoped for—where he could study and work in the freedom that he had always dreamed of—

But Ole had dreamed such dreams—and something had happened to them.

With a savage gesture he strode over to the interocitor panel that he had reconstructed two nights before when Ruth had been there and they had discovered the spaceship of the Engineers.

The interocitor was far more than a simple radio and television transmitter and receiver. It was based on wholly alien mathematical theory which Cal had begun to grasp only in the past few days. As a result of his studies he had modified one of the instruments with incredible results.

He and Ruth had discovered that somehow the interocitor put them in touch with the mind of Jorgasnovara, the Engineer. They literally *heard* his thoughts and saw the visions that passed through his mind.

The only clue Ole had ever given of what he learned was his first panic-stricken statement to Ruth that he had heard the Engineer *thinking*. The statement had made no sense then.

It did now.

But they heard nothing to incite such great fear as Ruth had seen in Ole. It led them to the discovery that the interocitors were being sent into space. They overheard Jorgasnovara's contact with someone aboard the ship.

But all this was only one facet of the machine that the suppressed and incredible technology of the Peace Engineers had produced.

Cal was just vaguely aware of the vast unknown in which the beams of the interocitor probed—and he was equally aware of his vast ignorance of those realms in spite of his study and research. That ignorance would have to be replaced with knowledge before he would have any faith in his own ability to cope with the mysteries of the Peace Engineers.

He turned on the power and stood in front of the panel, watching the instruments. He closed his eyes, trying to recover the sensation of telepathic eavesdropping he had experienced before but nothing came except his own threshing, uncertain thoughts. He half wondered if he had dreamed that he had heard and seen Jorgasnovara through the instrumentality of the interocitor—but he knew it was real enough. Ruth had seen and heard too.

Abruptly a surge of power emanated from the machine like a voice of thun-

der—but there was no sound.

He shuddered and pressed his eyelids fiercely. In his mind, he thought. Direct contact from mind to mind without sight or sound. He listened to the thoughts that came and watched their elusive images.

But it was not Jorgasnovara, the Engineer. It was someone reporting to him. “. . . six Secorian collonades lost. General Planners have decided on resurgence in that sector since it has become our weakest area.”

And then Jorgasnovara's thoughts surged in.

Cal grasped his head involuntarily at the impact of terrible emotion that was hurled from the machine and buried like a million tiny bolts of flame in the cells of his own brain. A maelstrom of emotion surged and swirled within him. The whole spectrum of human feeling seemed alive with tortured, throbbing power as if multi-fingered hands had pressed simultaneously every key of some mighty organ.

“When will it end?” the thought came. “When will it ever end?”

Cal searched through the blast for the individual currents of feeling. He sensed a vast homesickness, a longing for peace and confinement to a small spot of land. But strongest of all, a terrifying, overpowering hatred, a hatred reserved only for an enemy whose power has destroyed everything dear. Jorgasnovara hated that kind of enemy and it seemed to Cal that the power of that hatred alone could destroy life.

Then there came a calmer thought. “You are tired, Jorgasnovara. You should have let yourself be relieved long ago. There are others who could see this facet of the project through to completion. You have done excellently but you are not indispensable.”

“A matter of days now,” said the Engineer. “Only a matter of days and I shall be ready to relinquish my place.”

“As you will. But you will soon be needed in another place, I am informed. You will have little chance to rest.”

“Rest! Who can rest in the death-

struggle of a universe?"

"You are too sensitive. You should have something done about that. You know that our lifetimes will not see the end of the struggle."

"But we can act as if it would be so."

There was no answer but the vision of Jorgasnovara's thoughts remained. It was somehow sickening, Cal thought, to be able to peer as through an open window at the private thoughts of a man. Again he wondered why the interocitor was built so.

JORGASNOVARA'S mind seemed to pass slowly over events of some near or distant past. There were glimpses of strange lands that Cal did not recognize—he wondered momentarily if they might be other planets.

Then, upon a sunny landscape, it seemed a vast roll of darkness burst out of space and over the whole earth and the planets beyond. From Jorgasnovara, there was the sensation of terror and dismay. And then hate.

The terrible hate grew once again in such mighty intensity that Cal could scarcely endure its presence. Slowly it receded, and there was the vision of ships. Mighty ships of space such as Cal had seen that night by the loading dock.

Ships that went up by the thousands against that mighty roll of darkness out of space—and vanished in the flame of their own consuming. He seemed to see endless days and years of fruitless battle; and then slowly the darkness receded, pressed hard by the vast hordes of ships flooding incomprehensible forces against that silent enemy.

And that was the present, Cal sensed. There was battle and it was not won and fleets of ships and endless tons of material were swallowed in the daily gorge of war. And there the thought visions ended.

It was moments before he realized that he was no longer receiving the thoughts of the Engineer. The interocitor was still operating but there was nothing that came to Cal's mind.

He moved at last from a half-crouching position before the bench. His body was bathed in sweat. His brain felt numb from the pummeling of that wave of impressed thought and emotion. Like a flood, the answers to a thousand mysteries poured through his mind and left a thousand more to be answered.

He moved to the phone and called Ruth. "Come over at once," he said. "I know what it's all about."

He sat down on a laboratory stool while he waited for her coming and tried to quiet his nerves. He could scarcely credit the vastness of the thing but there was no alternative.

Ruth came while he sat there. She was breathless from the run from her own office in the other building. "I came as soon as I could. What is it?"

Cal nodded to a chair and stared at the interocitor. Then slowly he told her what he had just witnessed.

She seemed uncomprehending. "But this battle—these ships of space destroying each other—I don't understand."

"War. A more deadly and terrible war than any we could have dreamed of. That's what it means," said Cal soberly. "These Peace Engineers—what a ghastly joke their name turned out to be! They have become involved in a full-scale war.

"Who or what the enemy is I don't know but the Engineers are attempting to fight it alone. The Earth at this moment is involved in interstellar warfare—and only this handful of men know it. That explains the secrecy!"

"It's hardly possible," breathed Ruth. "If these Peace Engineers should fail—why don't they come out and enlist the whole world with them? How did it begin? What is the fighting for?"

"I don't know any of those answers," said Cal wearily. In his mind he seemed to see again those flaming ships. "I only have the biggest ones—and it leaves a lot of other questions.

"But it's easy to picture how it might have started. For many years they may have carried on secret flights until their ships came to a high state of perfection. Caught by surprise, perhaps, they en-

countered the first representatives of another planetary culture. Maybe one of our Solar planets, maybe from clear across the galaxy. But somebody blundered—and there was conflict.

“And rather than risk revealing their secrets the Engineers are willing to risk all mankind in their effort to fight it out alone.”

Ruth said finally, “What are we going to do?” It was like the sound of a small child in a vast and lonely cavern.

CHAPTER III

Ole Speaks

HE put his arm around her shoulders and they stood by the window looking out over the plant and the desert beyond. It was like the last terrible moments just before waking from a frightful nightmare, Cal thought. In just a moment now it should be over—

But it wasn't. It never would be as long as he lived. That surging hatred from Jorgasnovara would never leave his mind.

“I don't know what we're going to do,” he said. “I keep thinking of Ole. I wonder if he knows of this. Did they tell him about it that day he came to your office? And is that why he is quietly producing war materials in that broken-down shop of his? That would explain why he threw us out of his place. He couldn't tell us why he'd reversed his violent feelings or even that he had done so.”

“You think that all of this production is war material?”

“What else?” He ran a hand through his thick shock of hair and laughed sharply. “And I was the guy who was so fed up with practising science in the service of the warriors!”

He turned to the interocitor panel and smacked his hand against it. “I wonder what this thing *really* does—destroy armies by turning them into idiots or something equally beautiful from a militaristic standpoint?”

“Stop it, Cal,” said Ruth quietly. “Stop it!”

He faced her. “All right. I promise I won't go off like that again. The immediate problem is what do *we* do? Do we go along and help or do we try to throw wrenches in the machinery?”

“How can we do anything but help if what you say is true? I think we ought to see Jorgasnovara and make him lay all his cards on the table.”

“You think he would be willing to do just that?”

“Why not?”

“I don't know. Perhaps if Ole came in this same way they would welcome us. On the other hand, I can't believe he would be very happy about our eavesdropping on his mental processes.”

“You said the other night that he must know.”

“No, I think not now. I don't believe he would have let us go on this way if he did. I think we've discovered this quite accidentally and that no one but us knows anything about it.”

“And Ole.”

“I wonder—” Cal began. He looked speculatively at the panels surrounding him. “Warner contacted him the first time through the interocitor. I wonder if Ole—”

He advanced to a panel and threw in the power relay again. Ruth watched the familiar glow of the tubes lighting up. Like the candles of some ritual to the gods of science, it seemed to her.

Then Cal started back, his eyes on the meters in sudden fear.

“Someone has activated this—been spying on us while we've talked!”

“Is that possible?”

“Under normal quiescent conditions of the machine—I wonder if Ole—”

There were meaningless flashes of light and color across the bright tube that formed the screen but nothing recognizable came.

“Do you think you can reach Ole's machine?”

“It's just possible. I may be able to excite his—”

A swirling shape seemed to be growing out of the mist on the screen.

Slowly the lines and planes of a room appeared, a vaguely familiar place.

"That's his laboratory!" exclaimed Ruth.

Then, suddenly, there appeared a face, blurred and out of focus. But there was no doubt about whose it was. A harsh voice barked at them.

"Tighten the beam, you fool. Do you want every machine in the plant excited?"

Cal made a quick adjustment and the blurry image came into focus.

ON the screen Ole passed a hand wearily over his face. "I'm sorry. I'm pretty well wrought up, I guess. I've been watching you for days. I guess I know which side you're on, now."

"What are you talking about?" said Cal.

"When you came over here I was afraid you might be part of Jorgasnovara's secret police. I couldn't tell whether you were spying on me or not. I had to stay in character as you knew me. I didn't dare say a word. But I've been watching you while you found out what a mess they've got us into. I know now that you're not one of the inner circle yet."

"Did you know about this war all the time?" asked Cal.

"Yes. That's what nearly drove me crazy and made me leave the plant. Only I saw more of it than you did. I listened in while Jorgasnovara was getting a direct report from one battle sector. Our little wars are like neighborhood kids brawling in the street compared with the way they fight."

"What is it all about? How did it start? Why is it so undercover?"

"I don't know for sure, but it's about as you guessed it. They blundered when they first contacted some other world and now they're trying to carry off the fight without letting the rest of the world in on it. I think I know the why of that. Can't you picture the public response to such information?"

"I don't understand your actions. You're working with them. Why should you be afraid I was spying on you?"

"I'm not with them—and I think Jorgasnovara knows it. His spies have been here before. They've got to be stopped. Can't you see that?"

"I'm not so sure—now," said Cal slowly. "Why? Their enemies might wipe out our entire planet. It looks as if only the Engineers stand between us and destruction. I can't see how we can do anything but throw in with them for all we've got—regardless of our feelings about war. We're in it—but good."

"Meacham, the Pacifist," said Ole bitterly. "It's reasoning like that that keeps all wars going until both sides are ruined. There's no reason to believe they'd wipe us out. Maybe they'd like it brought to an end just as much as we would. At least until we find out we've no basis for believing otherwise."

"Have you anything but wishful thinking as a basis for believing that?"

"Yes—I know Jorgasnovara. I was here for a year before you were. I know what kind of a man he is. He would never ask quarter from anybody. Regardless of the rightness of the cause he'll fight to the complete destruction of his enemy or himself. If it were his own private war I wouldn't care what happened to him but he's involved the whole human race."

Cal recalled that burning hatred of Jorgasnovara that he'd experienced. "I agree with your estimate of him. It's only a question of how we can best get out of this. I can't understand it. It looks like the action of some utter fools, yet they can't be. Their science—"

"Think it has been pretty well demonstrated that technological sense is not synonymous with social and political acumen."

"That's the whole thesis upon which Jorgasnovara claims the organization is based—and they seem to be living proof of it—but hardly in the way they intended."

"Up to now," said Ole, "I've been alone. I've been waiting and hoping for you to show your hand. I dared not reveal what I knew because of his spies."

"He told me about his secret war

when I stumbled onto it through the interocitor. He offered me a chance to go along with them, and I was afraid not to.

"That is why I took over this small outfit for him here. I don't even know what this gadget is we're making. I had to gain time until I could find someone else in the organization whom I could trust—and I was hoping it would be you. The chance for that looked pretty slim for a long time when you refused to believe Ruth and me and now you've got to help me find some way to stop this thing before it's too late."

"We're agreed on the ultimate goal of getting out of this mess they've started but can we compromise on the means for the time being? Let's not try to interfere with their production until we know more. I could do plenty to interrupt the production of interocitors—temporarily. But they'd soon replace me when they found out I couldn't keep up production," Cal said.

"All right," Ole agreed. "I am coming over for a conference in a couple of days. Since I'm the only one that knows about the war officially let me see what I can do towards pumping Jorgasnovara. You two keep out of the way and don't say anything until we find out if somebody is liable to get hurt. In the meantime keep glued to your modified interocitor."

"Do you think he knows we're listening in?"

"I don't know. It's possible he does. He's careless about using his own machine on a loose beam. He may be waiting to smack us down like flies as soon as we make a false move, but we've got to take that chance."

Cal Meacham did little work the remainder of that day. After Ruth left to return to her office he paced the floor of his laboratory.

The double identity involved in this whole setup seemed increasingly fantastic. Altogether there were nearly four thousand persons working at the plant. Most of them were simply assemblers hired in Phoenix who didn't know a resistor from a spark gap in the first

place. To them the place was simply an electrical manufacturing plant and a weekly paycheck.

TO the engineers hired through the idealistic lures of the group, it was a place of intellectual freedom where a super-technology had flowered and was still growing and developing.

And to Jorgasnovara and his inner circle it was a war center. But who composed the inner circle of the Engineers? Those who had complete knowledge of the purpose of the plant?

Only Jorgasnovara and Warren of all those Cal had met had betrayed any such knowledge. Of the others each man seemed possessed of only a single piece of knowledge that was a fragment of the gigantic puzzle. He was given only as much as would fit him into place in that puzzle.

The complacency of his fellow engineers in accepting the place at face value irritated Cal. Yet he almost laughed at his own original willingness to do the same—until he had discovered the unsuspected properties of the interocitor.

It was worse than useless to try to talk to any of the other engineers, he thought. There were several hundred and to attempt to sound them all out would take an endless amount of time that he did not have.

To come face to face with Jorgasnovara and demand information seemed the most foolhardy procedure of all. Yet it seemed the most obvious since Ole was already in Jorgasnovara's confidence to some degree.

Ole came over in one of the pilotless planes. There were six of these, Cal had learned and they seemed in almost constant flight. Besides them, the company used three small planes with conventional controls in addition to the transport that was Jorgasnovara's private ship.

Ole and Cal went directly to the latter's laboratory. Ruth came in a few moments later. Her face was lined with the strain of knowing of the unseen conflict that raged in the heavens.

"Wouldn't it be better for us not to approach Jorgasnovara until we try to find out more by other means?" she asked.

"There's not much chance of it," said Cal. "None of us are what you would call cloak and dagger men and it would take long months of that sort of stuff to get anywhere. I think there is a very good possibility that Jorgasnovara will lay his cards on the table and invite us to have a piece—or else. Particularly since he brought Ole into it as he did."

"Suppose I stowed away," said Ruth. "One of the interocitor packing cases could be fitted out nicely. I'm small enough to fit into one."

"That's nonsense!" said Cal. "It might be possible to learn a good deal—but the chance of getting the information back would be almost zero. We've got to make contact from here, where we've got some kind of leverage."

"What do you mean?"

"We've got the whole world on our side—and we can do a pretty quick job of letting it know what information we've got already—provided it comes to that."

"Not if Jorgasnovara decides to throw a quick net around all of us."

"That's why I'm going to see him alone—and you keep out of it," said Ole. "If anything happens to me you had better take what information you've got and head for Washington. It's the only chance I see. I'm due over there in a few minutes. I'll come back as soon as I'm through."

They watched as he crossed the dusty terrain between buildings. Then Cal turned back to his interocitor and switched on the modified circuits. He adjusted it finely but he could not excite Jorgasnovara's instrument. The Engineer had it blocked against outside excitation.

Ruth just sat by the window, staring out at the bleak desert landscape in the distance.

"Penny—" said Cal.

She turned slowly. "Do you trust Ole?" she asked suddenly.

"Trust? What are you talking about?"

"Does it make sense—his being in charge of that small plant over there and trying to tell us he's opposed to Jorgasnovara? I can't forget how he looked that day after Warner took him away. I can't get over my conviction they did something to put him under their control.

"Isn't it possible that he's just what he said he feared we might be—a spy for Jorgasnovara?"

Cal grinned and put his arms around her. "How about me? Are you sure you can trust me?"

"Cal—I'm serious. I feel we can't trust anybody. Let's gather up some of the evidence that's available. Let's take samples of components, pictures and so on and turn them over to Army Intelligence. Let's take them to the White House if necessary. We've got to let someone else know about this. If Ole should be forced to betray us we wouldn't have a chance!"

"Take it easy, darling. We will—if necessary. But we can't go at it blindly. You don't know the Army. I had dealings with the brass during the war. You don't just go up and say, 'Mr. General, some guys out here are running a private war that you ought to know about. They're fighting somebody on another planet.' That would be quickest way to a private suite in the booby hatch I know of."

"Ole is not the same as he used to be. I know it. And I keep thinking that they can do the same to us that they have done to him."

He took her arm and led her towards the door. "Let's go down to the cafeteria for a snack and forget about it for awhile."

"No, I'd better get back to my office. There are two new engineers due this afternoon. If I'm away from my office very long Warner will think something's up. Call me as soon as you hear from Ole."

"Okay—and quit your worrying."

She gave him a faint smile and went out the door.

CHAPTER IV

Flight

CAL turned to his benches and equipment. It was useless to try to work. His mind spun uncontrollably about the thing they had uncovered. It was like fighting an unknown assailant in the dark. There was nowhere to get a grip on the problem.

He wondered if Ole would blunder in talking with Jorgasnovara. He had his own secret fears that Ruth might be right about Ole. What would the Engineer's reaction be? Cal tried to imagine how the conversation was going, to reconstruct it in his mind—

The desert shadows grew swiftly longer. Cal watched the clock impatiently. At last, with a start, he realized that Ole had been gone nearly four hours. It was almost quitting time at the plant. He went to the phone and buzzed Jorgasnovara's secretary before she left.

"I'd like to know if Mr. Swenberg is still in conference," he said. "I want to see him before I leave."

The girl was silent for a moment as if checking her memory. "Mr. Swenberg left quite some ago for his own plant. He stayed only ten or fifteen minutes. But he left a message for you that he had to leave right away and would see you next time he came over."

Cal hung up slowly. He felt as if somebody had suddenly dealt him a swift blow beneath the belt. The heat haze on the desert swirled like a copper river. He felt stifled and smothered.

At that moment, his phone buzzed. It was Ruth.

"Cal? I wanted to call you before I leave. I'm being given a new assignment at another plant and it's necessary for me to leave right away. I can't tell you anything about it and I won't be able to see you for some time but you'll hear from me. I'm sorry it has to be so suddenly but I'll see you soon."

"Ruth! Wait!"

He stopped. It was obvious that she was not alone. She was saying what she had been told to say. They had her trapped.

"It's all right, darling," she said. "Everything's all right. The plane is taking off soon. 'Bye, now."

She hung up.

He stood motionless, staring. Ole's attempt had triggered Jorgasnovara into swift action. They had Ole—now Ruth.

He'd be next, Cal thought. But there wasn't time to consider that. He had to get to Ruth.

He raced down the stairs and through the corridors of the building. His running footsteps echoed hollowly on the asphalt walks between buildings.

He entered Ruth's office, and found it empty. Her desk was neatly tidied as if she'd left for the night. Where had she called from he wondered. Why had they let her call at all?

He turned to the window and looked out at the airfield. There, in front of the hangar, one of the pilotless ships was being warmed up. Ruth was walking towards it, Warner beside her.

He choked back an exclamation and ran from the room. He felt somehow that if she went up in that plane she would be gone from him forever.

She had climbed in and a mechanic slid the canopy shut as Cal raced along the apron. With a sudden roar the motor was gunned and shot back a sandblast into his face. He ran on, vainly trying to overtake the rolling plane.

It moved out onto the runway. The propeller blast hurled grains of dust like flying needles into his face, and then receded.

He ceased his vain running as the plane swiftly grew smaller. The tail raised and the wheels lifted from the ground. He watched in frozen silence as it shrunk to a dot in the sky.

He turned then at the sound of a footstep behind him. It was Warner.

"Mr. Meacham!" Warner came up and took his hand. "You saved me a trip over your way."

"Ruth—" said Cal.

"Something very special came up this afternoon. Mr. Jorgasnovara asked her to take a special assignment for a time. Sorry it wasn't possible to notify you earlier but you needn't worry. She will be quite all right."

"You wanted to see me?" Cal's mouth felt cottony. He felt as if he dared not turn his back to anyone for fear of a hidden thrust. He struggled to keep down the choking in his throat.

"Yes—we also have something new for you. Mr. Jorgasnovara is very pleased with your work and feels that you can assist us in more complex operations which we have under way. However, I will leave it to him to give you the details. He'd like to see you at nine in the morning in his office. Please be sure to be there on time. I'll be seeing you again."

Warner smiled and walked swiftly away.

Cal watched his retreating figure. It was incredible. They were asking him to walk right into it. Did they take him for an utter fool? No. That was not right. They did not underestimate him. They could reach out and take him any moment they chose.

With their damnable technology they could probe his brain and dissect every secret thought. There was no hiding. Why had he supposed for a moment that he and Ole and Ruth could operate in their midst without detection?

He turned again to try to locate that disappearing speck in the sky. It was already gone from sight. If they dared harm her—

He began walking back towards the plant buildings. Inside, his growing panic turned his stomach into a knot of sickness. He wiped his moist hands against his trouser legs. He ought to get out, he thought—tonight. He'd have to make a try at least.

There were Ruth and Ole. Somehow he had to find them again, find out what had been done to them.

He returned to his lab and drew the venetian blinds closed. He made doubly sure the interocitors were disconnected

beyond all chance of excitation. Then he began packing. He filled a pair of briefcases with samples of components.

Some of the incredible ten-thousand-volt condensers the size of a bead—the ones that had first lured him to the Peace Engineers. He took scores of other small-sized components that were wholly foreign to conventional manufacturing techniques. Then he gathered up some of the booklets containing photographs of equipment and some of the textbooks that they had given him.

He surveyed the fat cases and crushed them shut. It would have to be enough. Somewhere between the White House and the Pentagon he'd find some brass that would listen to him. He refused to give recognition to the sick disbelief that he'd ever make it.

It was dark now. Later there would be a moon but for the time being the desert was black with night. He moved slowly and quietly along the corridors of the plant and stepped into the shadows outside. Only the watchmen's lights illumined the yard and he stayed in the dimness of these as much as possible.

He paused a score of times in the shadows to look behind and all about. So tense were his nerves that he would almost have welcomed the sight of a follower, to know where his enemy lay. As it was, his heightened fear peopled the dark places with unseen pursuers.

He reached the airfield at last. There were half a dozen mechanics and attendants on night duty, including the operators of the giant target beam that guided the pilotless ships.

He swallowed to moisten the cotton dryness of his throat and went into the small brightly-lit office.

The mechanic in charge looked up. "Hello, Mr. Meacham. Going out tonight?"

"Yes. I want one of the manual ships. I have to take a short trip."

"We could give you one of the automatics and you could sleep until you get there."

"No. I have quite a number of short stops to make. I'd better have a manual."

"Okay. We'll have it rolled out and warmed up in just a few minutes."

He sat down to wait. Was it his imagination, or were they unnecessarily slow about getting the plane out? He wondered if the mechanic had gone to call Warner or Jorgasnovara for instructions. But it was coming now at last. He heard the rumble of the broad doors of the hangar sliding back and turned to watch them roll the ship out. He picked up his cases and hurried out.

"Warm it up a few minutes for you?" the mechanic asked.

"I'll take it," said Cal. "Thanks a lot."

It was like a dream, he thought afterwards. The white overalled mechanics were like waiting ghosts there in the half light on the apron. How far were they going to let him go? Which one of them would strike?

But they were starting the engine. It caught suddenly with a hearty roar. He closed the canopy and taxied down to the strip. He gunned the motor and felt the tail lift, then slowly he drew back on the stick and felt the smooth rocking of the airborne ship.

It was unbelievable that he had actually got away. He couldn't believe that he had outwitted the Engineers. They had let him go for some purpose of their own.

But, as the desert merged with mountains and then became desert again, he began to relax and feel the weight of the strain lift from his mind. As he crossed New Mexico, the moon rose and splashed all the earth below with cold light.

He began to think of what he was going to do in Washington, of how he would find someone who would believe his story of a secret group of scientists who had involved Earth in an interstellar war. He began to believe that he would actually get there.

LOOK FORWARD TO

PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN

A Novel by MURRAY LEINSTER

NEXT ISSUE

CHAPTER V

Luna!

IT was between Amarillo and Oklahoma City that he first saw the shadow. He was flying almost directly into the moon when the great, semi-transparent silhouette showed up against the silver disc.

His taut nerves forced an involuntary scream from his throat. He knew that shape—that vast, ellipsoid that he had once seen shooting into space faster than the eye could follow.

He leaned the stick and jammed his foot against the pedal. The ship heeled over in a tight turn at right angles to his former course. There was a long low cloud bank a few miles away in the otherwise clear sky. If he could get into that—

He could not see the shadowy shape of the space-ship now nor did he expect to. Only that lucky glimpse against the moon could have revealed the otherwise nearly invisible ship. He couldn't know whether they had seen him or not but fear of pursuit and failure swelled up within him again.

If they captured him before he revealed his knowledge of the Peace Engineers there would be no one who could warn of the menace their ambitions and blunders had created.

It was foolish, he thought, to suppose that he could get away. If they were really searching for him he could not hide from so simple a thing as a radar beam. And he knew their technology had given them means far more effective than radar.

But the cloud was less than two miles away and he fled blindly towards it.

Halfway there the shadow fell over him. It blotted out the moon and the sky of stars and he screamed again in fearful terror. The great hull was poised almost above, moving silently with his plane. In panic, he jerked on the stick and jabbed the foot pedal.

But the plane did not swerve. And

then the motor coughed and died. He gripped the useless controls while the ship continued in the grip of the invisible force from above.

Slowly the distance between the two ships narrowed. And now Cal saw that a wide hatch had opened in the base of the spaceship a hatch wide enough to swallow his entire plane.

It drew closer. The border of the opening in the spaceship was dropping past him. He shoved back the canopy for a final glimpse of the silvery earth below. Then the hatch closed and he felt the plane drop upon it, resting on its landing gear.

He sat there for a long moment in utter darkness. There was no sound nor sense of motion. It was a void in which all perception had vanished.

It seemed like the suddenness and finality of death. He had blundered, he thought, from first to last. He had been confused by his wanting to believe in the Peace Engineers at their face value. It had taken him so long to believe that they were anything but what they professed to be.

He tried to think of what his failure might mean—to Ruth and Ole and to the whole human race—but he was too tired to put one thought after another in consecutive order. His failure was too great for comprehension.

Abruptly lights came on then. He looked about. On all sides were seamless metal plates. Except for his plane the chamber was completely bare. He climbed down from the cockpit and stood on the metal plating of the hatch door.

A spaceship, he thought. He was actually aboard a spaceship bound for some unknown destination. But there was none of the anticipated boyhood thrill. There was only a dull aching despair within him.

His muscles tensed at the sudden faint sound of an opening door. He whirled to face it and saw two men entering. Neither was familiar.

Their faces were almost expressionless. There was neither animosity nor greeting.

"Please come with us," said one.

Cal stifled an impulse to let loose a flood of questions. He checked it with the knowledge that it would be useless.

One of them led the way through the door. The other followed Cal. Neither spoke.

They took him down a long metal-walled corridor that reminded him of a battleship. At last they halted before a door.

"Please remain here," said one as he opened the door. "This will be yours until we arrive. If you need anything just press this button here by the door and we will attempt to serve you. We would advise that you sleep the remainder of the flight. We arrive in the morning early."

"Where?" Cal could not hold back that one question.

The man looked at his companion, then back at Cal. "Luna," he said. And closed the door.

Cal stood there for a long moment afterward, facing the blank door.

Luna—

He turned about. For the first time he saw that the opposite wall had ports that looked out to space. He walked towards them and peered out.

There was a single moment of nauseating vertigo as he glimpsed the scene outside and he turned his head away. Then, cautiously, he looked back, his hands gripping tightly the back of a chair by the port.

Below him Earth wheeled, a mottled bowl. About seven or eight hundred miles away, he supposed.

FOR the first time then, the full impact of the gap between the technology of the Engineers and the rest of the earth struck him. Down there at White Sands the Army was fitfully thrusting its feeble rockets one or two hundred miles into the atmosphere. No one had succeeded yet in freeing one from earth's gravity.

But the Engineers' ships were crossing space with the ease and luxury of liners crossing the Atlantic.

Maybe there was a reason for their not asking help from men who had not

succeeded in building anything more than an enlarged firecracker. What help could such men be in a battle that raged across the depths of space?

He slept finally. The bed was as soft and luxurious as he could have asked for.

An alarm wakened him and soon afterwards the guides—or guards—of the previous night entered the room. They carried breakfast on a tray.

"We will arrive within an hour. Please be ready. Jorgasnovara requires your presence for a conference."

"Jorgasnovara! He's aboard?"

"Among others."

They left and Cal turned again to the ports. They seemed to be coming in for a wide orbit around the earth side of the moon. Momentarily his awareness of imprisonment retreated and his senses absorbed the beauty of the vision through the porthole. He picked out the old familiar landmarks—Copernicus, Tycho, the Sea of Serenity, Mare Imbrium—

He saw for the first time the other side of the moon with its shadowy unfamiliar spires and vast craters. The ship circled the satellite once and then began to descend among those unnamed craters.

Cal strained his sight to detect some signs of habitation upon that barren landscape. It lay in shadowy twilight that gave the effect of a fantastic etching, and hid everything that might be familiar.

The ship had almost touched ground before he saw it. A widespread group of one-story buildings lay almost perfectly camouflaged on a flat plain between two giant mountain ranges, higher than anything Cal had known existed on the moon.

Beside one section he saw a dozen other ships like the one in which he rode and four others that were monsters. They dwarfed the smaller ships like a hen hovering over her brood.

The two men came again as the ship touched the surface of the moon. He followed them along the same corridor and then wound through other passages

that he sensed were taking him through the width of the ship to the other side. Not once did he see another person.

He observed the airtight causeway that had been extended from the ship to the port, eliminating all need of space-suits in disembarking.

They came out into the building and there he saw scores of other people but none he knew, though he scanned their faces for signs of recognition.

The building reminded him of the vastness of the Pentagon but at last the pair who guided him stopped before a door.

"Wait in here. Mr. Jorgasnovara will be here soon."

He stepped in and closed the door.

Across the room Ole and Ruth were seated.

"Cal!" Ruth jumped up and ran towards him. She threw her arms around his neck while he stood rigid, scarcely believing, trying to comprehend what he saw. Then his arms went around her and he held her tight.

Ole came towards them slowly, smiling. "This is about the last place I expected our next meeting to be."

"What have they done to you?" said Cal. "Why are we here? What do they intend to do with us?"

OLE motioned him to a chair at the small polished table at which they had been sitting.

"We misunderstood some of our data," he said with sudden bleakness in his face. "Jorgasnovara has straightened Ruth and me out somewhat. In a way the situation is not quite so bad as we thought. From another viewpoint it is much worse, perhaps."

"But they are engaged in a war, aren't they? We weren't mistaken in what we overheard regarding that."

"No—we weren't. They're engaged in a war, all right. Our mistake was the assumption that the Engineers are Earthmen."

Cal stared. "Mistake! You mean they are from somewhere else?"

Ole nodded. "The key men. Jorgasnovara and Warner and a few of the

others. This whole advanced technology was brought by them. It never developed on Earth at all."

Cal stared soundlessly, his entire mental concept of the Peace Engineers shifting slowly to this undreamed of possibility.

"Why? What do they want of us? Are they trying to take Earth over for a war base?"

"Not, it's not that. We aren't that important to them. In fact they can get along without us. The whole decision is up to you. If you say so they will leave and not bother us further.

"They gave Ruth and me their story yesterday. Jorgasnovara was going to pick you up and bring you to the spaceship after he'd given you the basic facts this morning. He wanted us to see their moon base and let us use an historical instrument they have here.

"But you fouled it all up by jumping the gun and taking off the way you did.

"I warn you that when Jorgasnovara gets through explaining you'll probably want to punch somebody in the nose or else go out and bat your head against a wall—depending on which way your inferiority complex blows."

"You don't make a bit of sense," said Cal. He turned to Ruth. "What's he talking about?"

She smiled, the same kind of bitter rueful smile that he had seen on Ole's lips. "You'll find out. Here comes Jorgasnovara now."

The Engineer closed the door softly behind him and stood in front of it for a moment. His eyes locked with Cal's and seemed to peer into the depths of his being as if trying to plumb the hidden knowledge and feelings that he possessed.

NEXT ISSUE

THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS

A Complete Novelet of
Strange Fantasy

By JAMES BLISH

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER VI

A Lifetime of Service

CAL understood now the feeling of alienness that diffused from Jorgasnovara. It was not hard to think of him as foreign to earth.

He began walking towards the table suddenly and consulted his watch. "I believe our appointment was for nine, Mr. Meacham. Dr. Warner told me he had arranged with you."

"He didn't mean these particular arrangements," said Cal with faint humor. Somehow he felt a growing sense of ease. He could not erase his initial desire to like Jorgasnovara in spite of the mystery of the man.

"No. We were too busy to pay attention to some of the details of your actions. We did not foresee your attempted escape until you had gone. I'm sorry that it was necessary to subject you to the shock that perhaps resulted from our precipitate method of overtaking you, however. I want to assure you that our purpose is benign."

"You are at war." Cal leaned forward abruptly. "You let us overhear snatches of reports passing between you and others of your group. Why?"

"We wanted you to know about it."

"To what purpose? If you intend to involve Earth or wanted our help in some capacity why didn't you simply say so?"

"We had to find out about you three. We had to know your reaction. We had to know how much you hate war. So we gave you the clues and watched. Of all those with whom we have worked, your reaction has been most satisfactory. We are ready to ask if you will help us."

"How? And why? Why should we involve ourselves and Earth in something that is no concern of ours?"

Jorgasnovara hesitated, speculating, as if wondering what kind of analysis Cal could comprehend.

"You have had experience during

your own recent World War. You saw how the waves of battle washed back and forth over primitive peoples who had little or no comprehension of who was fighting or to what purpose.

"You saw these primitive peoples sometimes employed or pressed into service by one side or the other. On the islands of your seas they built airfields for you, they sometimes cleared jungles and helped lay airstrips. They had no comprehension of the vast purpose to which they were contributing a meager part but they helped in a conflict which was ultimately resolved in their favor."

Cal's face had gone white. He half rose from his seat. "You mean—?"

Jorgasnovara waved him down. "This greater conflict of which I have spoken has existed for hundreds of generations. Your people were barely out of caves when it began. It will not be ended in your generation or mine.

"Its center of origin and the present battle lines are far from your galaxy, far beyond the range of your greatest telescope. The people involved and the principles in dispute are far beyond your powers to comprehend. But we need your help."

"To build an airstrip?"

Jorgasnovara smiled. "These interocitors which you find so interesting are a small item of communication equipment which is used in some of our larger vessels. There are about a score of other, similar devices being made in different parts of the world. They are simple devices, comparable, say, to your pushbuttons. We need you to make some pushbuttons. We need you to make some pushbuttons for us."

Cal understood what Ole had meant now. He *did* want to punch somebody in the face. Rage, frustrated and impotent, swirled within him. The insolence of this superrace that would hire Earthmen to make their pushbuttons!

Jorgasnovara saw it and his expression grew cold. "You have a stupid pride that is the greatest hindrance in the progress of your people. Is it of any real importance that there exists a culture to which you can be only makers of

pushbuttons? Does that lessen your worth in your own eyes? If it does your values are cheap."

FOR a moment Cal hated the Engineer. But his rage began to subside, swallowed up by the infinitely greater wisdom that he glimpsed in the man and the culture of Jorgasnovara.

"There is only one question," he said at last. "What is right? Do you have it? Is there any reason we should help you rather than your enemy, whoever they may be?"

"I think there is," said Jorgasnovara. He slid back a panel in the table top, which Cal had not noticed before. Some kind of instrument panel lay exposed. In a receptacle were several pairs of helmets with cords leading to the panel. Jorgasnovara passed them around the table.

"This is why I wanted you three to come to this base on your moon. You have to see what I am about to show you in order to understand. Put these on and I'll show you."

They examined the instruments in their hands. Cal noticed a fine mesh network that covered the skull. Fitting over the eyes were a pair of soft opaque pads. They completely blinded him when the helmet was in place.

Jorgasnovara touched a panel of switches and dials and abruptly there was vision.

The three of them *felt* that they had been suddenly transported across unthinkable vastnesses though there was nothing but starry void all about them. They seemed to be moving, and more swiftly than light they approached one star that slowly swelled to a galaxy. Its twin spiral arms were a pattern of light against the blackness.

The scene shifted and was replaced by the vision of a planet of that galaxy. There were small cities and vast fields of pleasant color and the world was peopled by creatures not greatly variant from Earthmen. A sense of peace and contentment of mind filled them as they looked upon that scene.

It was midday when the blackness

came. A slow blotting out of light that turned the people's faces skyward and froze them with an unnamed terror. The three earthlings felt that terror as they watched through the instrument of Jorgasnovara. They felt the incalculable evil and death that was in the blackness that shrouded the planet.

Time was condensed and eons became seconds and they looked upon the world again. This time it was like an anthill in the wake of a flaming torch. Crisped and blackened, everything that represented sentience and growth and living hope had died. Through all the eons of time life could never again flourish upon that world.

They could smell the stench of death, and the stifling influence of destruction and war shrouded them. Suddenly it seemed more than they could endure. The wake of the enemy that Jorgasnovara fought was in itself an evil thing that they could not long suffer.

Cal was aware that Ruth had ripped the helmet from her head. He removed his own and saw her sitting white faced and trembling.

"Look again," said Jorgasnovara.

They were in space once more and their vision encompassed a span of light years. As far as they could see a line of titanic warships flowed through space beyond the speed of light.

And then there was battle. Like a spark it began and ignited the whole of space. Vast forces that twisted and wove the fabric of space itself engulfed the ships, imprisoning them in webs of impenetrable time and space and turning their crews into screaming things that would live forever.

Cal hurled the set from his head. Ruth was pale and Ole was breathing heavily. Cal wiped the sweat from his face.

"It is possible," said Jorgasnovara slowly, "that the people of your planet would never know that this war had ever raged, regardless of the outcome. You would be of no concern to the enemy. He has higher goals than the conquest of your little world. And my people would never molest you.

"We do not *have* to have your help,

any more than your armies had to have the help of some savage tribe to clear their jungles. You would have won your war. We will win ours.

"But we need you, speaking collectively of all the primitive worlds to whom our emissaries have come. In each of ten thousand galaxies we have ten thousand planets whose people are making whatever items their culture will permit that will be of use to us.

"Some are even building our warships and the mighty generators that warp space about a galaxy. But they do not know to what purpose they are building—only those whom we have commissioned as our agents understand their part in this cosmic effort.

"So that is why I have come to you, Cal Meacham. My predecessors and I have organized the Peace Engineers and carried it on for many decades now. The story I told you was true. Our work spared your planet the devastation of atomic war for many years.

"We have used the products of your greatest men of science. But none have been able to carry on without our direct leadership. We need someone who understands more directly the psychology of Earthmen and Miss Adams and Mr. Swenberg to assist.

"Will you take charge of our affairs for the rest of your life?"

Cal had known the question was coming. He had sensed it far ahead of Jorgasnovara's actual voicing of it. Still, it was like a blow that numbed his senses and left him only dimly conscious of the reality about him.

ALIFETIME of service in a vast effort of war, the whole of which he could never comprehend. He, who had sworn never again to so much as think of an instrument of war, who had hated the scheming and killing and the designing of scientists for better ways of destroying more of their fellow men. But he thought back to that vision of evil and terror that Jorgasnovara had shown them and he knew there was only one answer.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I'll help you."

He knew that the things he had seen were true. He knew that Jorgasnovara had not lied, that his people were combating a vast force that would destroy the hope of endless races of sentient life on countless planets.

But that did not assuage his despair.

"When will it ever end?" he said in a voice that was almost a whisper. "Will there ever be a time when sentient beings will not murder their own kind?"

Then he remembered that he had once heard Jorgasnovara thinking that same despairing thought. Their eyes met in a look of common understanding.

"Not in your lifetime—nor in mine, which is much longer—but sometime," the Engineer said. "Sometime there will be an end to the destruction and killing."

Suddenly Jorgasnovara looked at Ole, his lips twisting wryly in a smile. "No—not when all men are dead. As a philosopher you are quite a pessimist, Mr. Swenberg.

"But come, it is past lunchtime. Let us enjoy a meal together. After today our only communication will be by interocitor. I shall never see you again in the flesh, you know."

It was midnight when the space-ship landed again beside the plant. It paused only long enough for the three to get out of the way of its crushing field and then it vanished into the night sky again.

Cal put his arm about Ruth as they stood there looking up at the moon.

"It didn't happen," said Ole. "I'll

swear it didn't."

From somewhere they heard the sound of a car as someone drove in from a late show in Phoenix. All about them the prosaic shadows on the desert and the sounds of night lent unreality to the things that they had seen and heard.

But they would never forget. The things that Jorgasnovara had shown were burned into their consciousness.

And Ruth spoke the thing that was in the minds of all of them. "It's lonely," she said. "We'll always be strangers here now. I wish they'd let us see them and visit them—wherever they are."

"Yeah," Ole said.

Cal looked up at the stars. He thought of the battle that raged beyond the farthest of them. The light of the suns that illumined that field of battle would not reach Earth for thousands of millennia. Perhaps Earth itself would be cold and dead after those eons had passed. Was such a war any concern of his?

The evil that Jorgasnovara had shown them was timeless. It was the concern of every being in all creation, thought Cal. As long as it existed there would be no absolute freedom for anyone. And his life would be well spent in working with the forces that Jorgasnovara represented.

He took Ruth's hand and started along the walk. "Let's go. It's getting late and tomorrow we've got to make a lot of—pushbuttons."

THE SKEPTIC

(Concluded from Page 91)

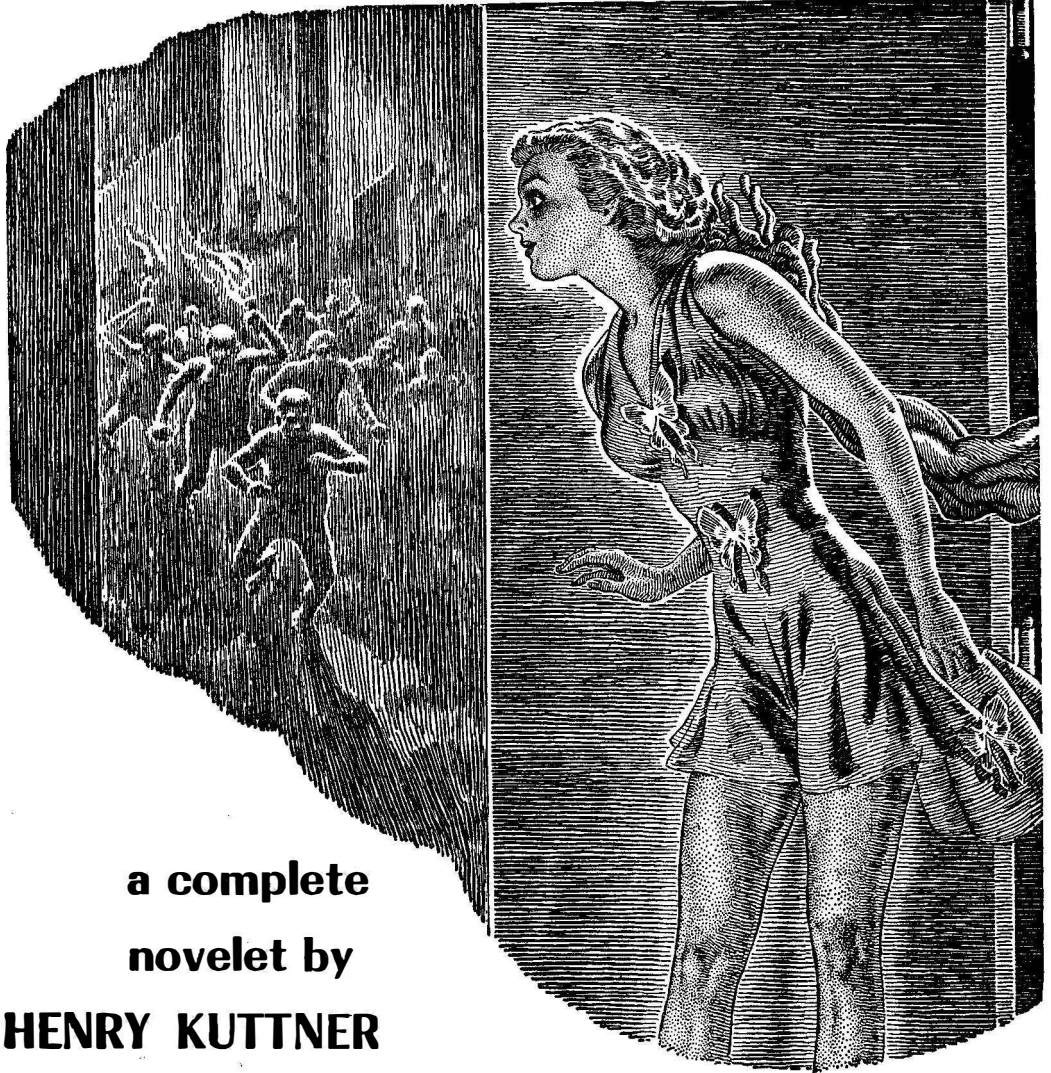
the hospital I had lost my technique. I had hurt my leg again in my struggles and they were changing my water-ruined cast and it hurt and I couldn't even whip up an anaesthesia. Can't to this day. Shock, I suppose. One of the docs believed my story—he was in the Firmament Club that night—and he's working on it. He hadn't clicked yet, though, the last I heard.

The M.P. heard Susie yelling and helped tow me in and Connie and Peggy slipped off after they saw us safe. Of course, they threw Susie out of the cadet

corps for going out on the lake and handed me a stiff fine.

Well, I always said I didn't want my little wife to work. I'm only too glad to give my Susie everything. Like the other day—we're passing a roasted nut shop where they sell nuts at \$1.80 a pound and Susie says, "Gee they smell good!" and I say, "All right we'll stand here and smell awhile," and she says, "You know what I mean—buy me some you cheapskate," and I say, "You're not really hungry it's all in your head."

I know, this is where you came in.



a complete
novelet by
HENRY KUTTNER

The Voice of

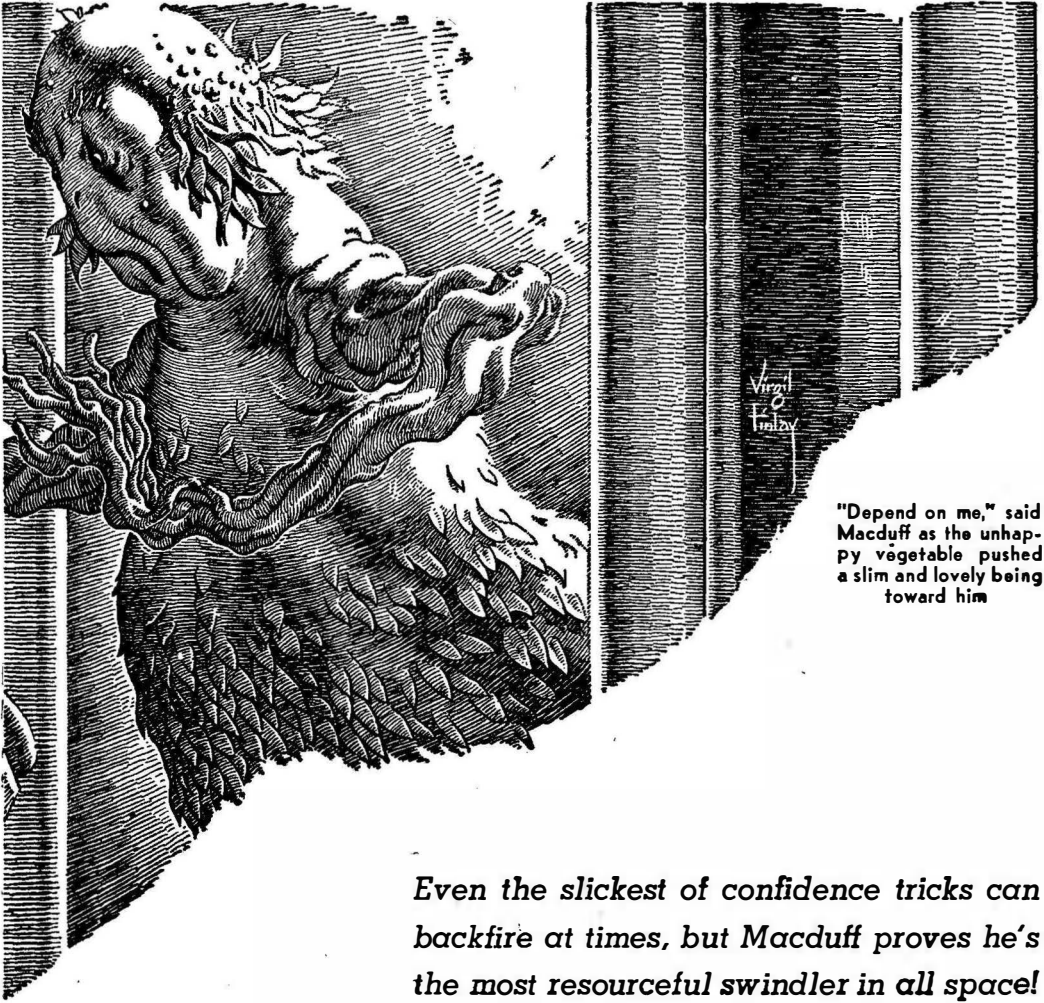
CHAPTER I

Getaway

TILTING his cigar at a safe angle Terence Lao-T'se Macduff applied a wary eye to the peephole in the curtain and searched the audience for trouble.

"A set-up," he muttered under his

breath. "Or is it? I have the inexplicable sensation of wet mice creeping slowly up and down my spine. What a pity I wasn't able to get that Lesser Vegan girl to front for me. Ah, well. Here I go."



"Depend on me," said Macduff as the unhappy vegetable pushed a slim and lovely being toward him

Even the slickest of confidence tricks can backfire at times, but Macduff proves he's the most resourceful swindler in all space!

the Lobster

He drew up his rotund form as the curtain slowly rose.

"Good evening to you all," he said jovially. "I am happy to see so many eager seekers after knowledge, from the parts of the Galaxy, gathered here tonight on this, Aldebaran's greenest world—"

Muffled noises rose from the audience, mingled with the musky odor of Aldebaranese and the scents of many other races and species. For it was Lottery Time on Aldebaran Tau and the famous celebration based on the counting of seeds in the first *sphyghi*-fruit of the season had as usual drawn luck-

worshippers from all over the Galaxy. There was even an Earthman, with shaggy red hair and a scowling face, who sat in the front row, glaring up at Macduff.

Uneasily evading that glare, Macduff went on with some haste.

"Ladies, gentlemen and Aldebaranese, I offer you my All-Purpose Radio-isotopic Hormone Rejuvenating Elixir, the priceless discovery which will give you the golden treasury of youth at a sum easily within the reach of each and every—"

An ambiguous missile whizzed past Macduff's head. His trained ear screened out words in a dozen different interstellar tongues and realized that none of them implied approval.

The red-haired Earthman was bel-lowing, "The mon's a crook! Nae doot about it!" Macduff, automatically dodging an over-ripe fruit, looked pensively at him.

"Oh-oh," Macduff was thinking. "I wonder how he found out those cards were marked for black light?"

He held up his arms dramatically for silence, took a backward step and kicked the trigger on the trap-door. Instantly he dropped out of sight. From the audience rose a tremendous bellow of balked fury. Macduff, scuttling rapidly past discarded flats of scenery, heard feet thundering above him.

"There will be chlorophyl spilled tonight," he mused, sprinting. "That's the trouble with these Aldebaranese, they're still vegetables at heart. No sense of ethics, merely tropisms."

His racing feet tripped over a half-empty box of progesterone, a hormone necessary when a sucker, or customer, was fowl or mammal strain.

"Can't be the hormones," he pondered, kicking boxes out of his path. "It must have been the radio-isotope. I shall write a scorching letter to that Chicago outfit. Fly-by-nights, of course. I should have suspected the quality of their product at that price. Three months, forsooth! Why, it hasn't been a fortnight since I sold the first bottle—and it's taken this long to finish the pay-

offs and start hoping for a net profit."

This was serious. Tonight had been the first occasion on which he hoped to put the profits from All-Purpose Radio-isotopic Hormone Rejuvenating Elixir into his own pocket. Aldebaran officials had a greed which one didn't normally associate with vegetable ancestry. How was he going to get enough money to ensure his passage spaceward in a hurry if speed seemed indicated?

"Trouble, trouble," Macduff murmured, as he fled down a corridor, ducked out of the exit and foresightedly sent a tower of empty boxes crashing down, blocking the door. Screams of rage came from behind him.

"Sounds like Babel," he said, trotting. "That's the trouble with galactic travel. Too many overemotional races." Doubling and twisting along a planned course, he continued to mutter marginal comments, for Macduff generally moved in a haze of sotto voce remarks confidently addressed to himself, usually approving in nature.

AFTER a time, deciding that he had put a safe distance between himself and justice, he slowed his pace, paused at a dingy hockshop and paid out a few coins from his paltry store. In return he was given a small battered suitcase, which contained everything necessary for a hurried departure—everything, that is, except the really vital factor. Macduff had no space-ticket.

Had he anticipated the full extent of Aldebaranese rapacity and corruption he could perhaps have brought along more pay-off funds. But he had wanted his arrival to coincide with the great *sphyghi* festival and time pressed. Still, there were ways. Captain Masterson of the *Sutter* owed him a favor and the *Sutter* was due to take off early next morning.

"Possibly," Macduff ruminated, trudging on, "something might be arranged. Let me see, now. Item one. There's Ao." Ao was the Lesser Vegan girl whose remarkable semi-hypnotic powers would make her such an excellent front man, figuratively speaking.

"Borrowing ticket money won't solve Item One. If I succeed in getting Ao I'll have to deal with her guardian, Item Two."

Item Two represented an Algolian native named Ess Pu.* Macduff had taken pains to keep himself informed of Ess Pu's whereabouts and so knew that the Algolian was no doubt still involved in the same game of dice he had begun two days ago at the UV Lantern Dream-Mill, not far from the center of town. His opponent was probably still the Mayor of Aldebaran City.

"Moreover," Macduff reflected, "both Ess Pu and Ao have tickets on the *Sutter*. Very good. The answer is obvious. All I have to do is get in that dice game, win Ao and both tickets and shake the dust of this inferior planet from my feet."

Swinging the suitcase jauntily, he scuttled along by back alleys, conscious of a distant, mounting tumult, until he reached the door of the UV Lantern Dream-Mill, a low broad arch closed with leather curtains. On the threshold he paused to glance back, puzzled by the apparent riot that had broken out.

Submerged feelings of guilt, plus his natural self-esteem, made him wonder if he himself might be the cause of all that uproar. However, since he had only roused the inhabitants of an entire city against him† he concluded vaguely that perhaps there was a fire.

So he pushed the curtains aside and entered the UV Lantern, looking around sharply to make certain Angus Ramsay wasn't present. Ramsay, as the reader will guess, was the red-haired gentleman last heard defaming Macduff in the theater.

"And, after all, *he* was the one who insisted on buying a bottle of the Elixir," Macduff mused. "Well, he isn't here. Ess Pu, however, is. In all fairness, I've given him every chance to sell me Ao. Now let him take the consequences."

Squaring his narrow shoulders (for it cannot be denied that Macduff was

somewhat bottle-shaped in appearance) he moved through the crowd toward the back of the room, where Ess Pu crouched over a green-topped table with his companion, the Mayor of the city.

To a non-cosmopolitan observer it would have seemed that a lobster was playing PK dice with one of the local plant-men. But Macduff was a cosmopolitan in the literal sense of the word. And from his first meeting with Ess Pu, some weeks ago, he had recognized a worthy and formidable opponent.

All Algolians are dangerous. They are noted for their feuds, furies and their inverted affective tone scale. "It's extraordinary," Macduff mused, looking pensively at Ess Pu. "They feel fine only when they're hating someone. The sensations of pleasure and pain are reversed. Algolians find the emotions of rage, hate and cruelty pro-survival. A lamentable state of affairs."

Ess Pu clanked a scaly elbow on the table and rattled the dice-cup in the face of his cringing opponent. As everyone is familiar with Aldebaranese plant-men, in view of their popular video-films, the Mayor need not be described.

Macduff sank into a nearby chair and opened the suitcase on his lap, rummaging through its varied contents which included a deck of tarots, some engraved plutonium stock (worthless), and a number of sample bottles of hormones and isotopes.

There was also a small capsule of Lethean dust, that unpleasant drug which affects the psychokinetic feedback mechanism. As an injury to the cerebellum causes purpose-tremor, so Lethean dust causes PK tremor. Macduff felt that a reasonable amount of psychic oscillation in Ess Pu might prove profitable to Macduff. With this in mind, he watched the game intently.

THE Algolian waved his stalked eyes over the table. Crinkled membranes around his mouth turned pale blue. The dice spun madly. They fell—seven. Ess Pu's membranes turned green. One of the dice quivered, strained, rolled over. The Algolian's claws clicked shut with

* (An approximation. The actual name is unspellable.)

† (As a result of having sold them the Earth.)

satisfaction, the Mayor wrung his hands and Macduff, emitting cries of admiration, leaned forward to pat Ess Pu's sloping shoulder while he deftly emptied the unlidded capsule into the Algolian's drink.

"My lad," Macduff said raptly, "I have traveled the Galaxy from end to end and never before—"

"Tchah!" Ess Pu said sourly, pulling his winnings across the board. He added that he wouldn't sell Ao to Macduff now even if he could. "So get out!" he finished, snapping a claw contemptuously in Macduff's face.

"Why can't you sell Ao?" Macduff demanded. "Though sell, of course, is a misleading verb. What I mean—"

He understood the Algolian to say that Ao now belonged to the Mayor.

Macduff turned surprised eyes on this personage, who furtively evaded the look.

"I didn't recognize your Honor," he said. "So many non-humanoid species are hard to tell apart. But did I understand you to say you *sold* her to the Mayor, Ess Pu? As I remember, Lesser Vegan Control merely leases its subjects to suitable guardians—"

"It was a transfer of guardianship," the Mayor said hastily, lying in his teeth.

"Get out," Ess Pu snarled. "You've got no use for Ao. She's an *objet d'art*."

"Your French is excellent for a lobster," Macduff said with delicate tact. "And as for having a use for the lovely creature my scientific researches will shortly include the prognostication of mood-responses in large groups. As we all know, Lesser Vegans have the curious ability to make people punch-drunk. With a girl like Ao on the platform I could feel perfectly sure of my audience—"

A video screen burst in with a wild squawk. Everyone looked up sharply. Supplementary screens in infra-red and UV, for the use of customers with specialized vision, hummed with invisibly duplicated pictures of an announcer's popeyed face.

"—Citizens' Purity Organization

has just called a mass meeting—"

The Mayor, looking frightened, started to get up and then thought better of it. There seemed to be something on his conscience.

Ess Pu told Macduff profanely to go away. He enlarged insultingly on the suggestion.

"Pah," Macduff said bravely, knowing himself more agile than the Algolian. "Drop dead."

Ess Pu's mouth-membranes turned scarlet. Before he could speak, Macduff offered quickly to buy Ao's ticket, a proposition he had neither intention nor ability to fulfill.

"I haven't got her ticket!" Ess Pu roared. "She still has it! Now get out before I—" He strangled on his own fury, coughed and took a stiff drink. Ignoring Macduff, he threw a six and shoved a stack of chips to the center of the table. The Mayor, with nervous reluctance, glanced at the video screen and faded the bet. At that point the videos broke in with a squeal.

"—mobs marching on Administration! Aroused populace demands ousting of present officials, charging long-term corruption! This political pot was brought to a boil tonight by the exposure off an alleged swindler named Macduff—"

The Mayor of Aldebaran City jumped up and tried to run. One of Ess Pu's claws caught him by the coat-tail. The video squawked on, giving an all-too-accurate description of the Radio-isotopic Elixir swindler and only the thick haze in the air kept Macduff from immediate exposure.

HE hesitated uncertainly, reason telling him that something of interest was developing at the dice table while instinct urged him to run.

"I've got to get home!" the Mayor wailed. "Vital matters—"

"You're staking Ao?" the crustacean demanded, with a significant brandish of his claws. "You are, eh? Right? Then *say so!*"

"Yes," the harassed Mayor cried. "Oh, yes, yes, yes. Anything!"

"Six is my point," said Ess Pu, rattling the dice-cup. His membranes became oddly mottled. He wriggled his eye-stalks unnervingly. Macduff, remembering the Lethan dust, began to edge toward the door.

There was a bellow of surprised rage from the Algolian as the disobedient cubes turned up seven. Ess Pu clawed at his throat, snatched up his glass, and peered suspiciously into it. The jig was up.

Roars of fury reverberated from wall to wall of the Dream-Mill as Macduff slipped out through the curtains and pattered rapidly off down the street in the cool musky dark of the Aldebaran night.

"Nevertheless, I still need a ticket," he reflected. "I also need Ao if possible. This leads me, by obvious degrees, to the Mayor's palace. Provided I'm not torn limb from limb in the meantime," he added, dodging into another alley to avoid the spreading torchlit mobs that were by now seething hither and thither through the aroused city.

"How ridiculous. At times like these I'm grateful for being born into a civilized race. There's no sun like Sol," he summed up, creeping hastily under a fence as a mob poured down the alley toward him.

Emerging on the other side and trotting down a lane, he reached the back door of a luxurious palace done in pink porphyry with ebony edgings and banged the knocker firmly against its plate. There was a soft, sliding noise and Macduff fixed a peremptory gaze upon the one-way Judas mirror in the door.

"Message from the Mayor," he announced in a brisk voice. "He's in trouble. He sent me to bring that Lesser Vegan girl to him immediately. It's a matter of life or death. Hurry!"

A gasp sounded from inside the door. Feet pattered away into inner distances. A moment later the door opened, revealing the Mayor himself.

"Here!" cried that frantic official. "She's yours. Just take her away. I never saw her before in my life. Never

saw Ess Pu. Never saw you. Never saw anybody. Oh, these reform riots! One scrap of incriminating evidence and I'm lost, lost!"

Macduff, a little astonished at finding himself fortune's favorite, rose to the occasion capably.

"Depend on me," he told the unhappy vegetable as a slim and lovely being was pushed out of the door into his arms. "She'll leave Aldebaran Tau on the *Sutter* tomorrow at dawn. In fact, I'll take her aboard immediately."

"Yes, yes, yes," the Mayor said, trying to close the door. Macduff's foot kept it ajar.

"She's got her space ticket?"

"Ticket? What ticket? Oh, that. Yes. In her wrist band. Oh, here they come! Look out!"

The terrified Mayor slammed the door. Macduff seized Ao's hand and sped with her into the shrubbery of a plaza. A moment later the tortuous mazes of Aldebaran City swallowed them up.

CHAPTER II

Scent of Sphyghi

AT the first convenient doorway Macduff paused and looked at Ao. She was worth looking at. She stood in the doorway, thinking of nothing at all. She didn't have to think of anything. She was too beautiful.

Nobody has ever yet succeeded in describing the beings of Lesser Vega and probably nobody ever will. Electronic calculators have broken down and had their mercury memory-units curdled trying to analyze that elusive quality which turns men into mush. Like all her race, however, Ao wasn't very bright. Macduff regarded her with entirely platonic greed.

For she was the perfect come-on. Probably some subtle emanation radiates from the brains of the Lesser Vegans which acts as a hypnotic. With Ao on the stage Macduff knew he could almost certainly have quelled his unruly

audience an hour ago and averted the riot. Even the savage breast of Angus Ramsay might have been soothed by Ae's magical presence.

Curiously enough, male relationship with Ao was entirely platonic, with the natural exception of the males of Lesser Vega. Outside of this dim-brained species, however, it was enough for a beholder simply to look at Ao. And vision really had little to do with it, since standards of beauty are only species-deep. Almost all living organisms respond similarly to the soft enchantment of the Lesser Vegans.

"There's dark work afoot, my dear," Macduff said, resuming their progress. "Why was the Mayor so eager to get rid of you? But there's no use asking you, of course. We'd better get aboard the *Sutter*. I feel certain I can get Captain Masterson to advance me the price of another ticket. If I'd thought of it I might have arranged a small loan with the Mayor—or even a large one," he added, recalling the Mayor's obvious guilt reactions. "I seem to have missed a bet there."

Ao appeared to float delicately over a mud puddle. She was considering higher and lovelier things.

They were nearly at the spaceport by now and the sights and sounds Macduff heard from the far distance gave him an idea that the mob had set fire to the Mayor's porphyry palace. "However, he's merely a vegetable," Macduff told himself. "Still, my tender heart cannot help but—good heavens!"

He paused, aghast. The misty field of the spaceport lay ahead, the *Sutter* a fat ovoid blazing with light. There was a distant mutter of low thunder as the ship warmed up. A seething crowd of passengers was massed around the gangplank.

"Bless my soul, they're taking off," Macduff said. "Outrageous! Without even notifying the passengers—or perhaps there was a video warning sent out. Yes, I suppose so. But this may be awkward. Captain Masterson will be in the control room with a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door. Take-offs

are complicated affairs. How on Aldebaran Tau can we get aboard with only one ticket between us?"

The motors muttered sullenly. Haze blew like fat ghosts across the light-and-dark patterns of the tarmac. Macduff sprinted, dragging Ao, as thistle-down, after him.

"I have a thought," he murmured. "Getting inside the ship is the first step. After that, of course, there'll be the regular passenger check but Captain Masterson will—hm-m."

He studied the purser who stood at the head of the gangplank, taking tickets, checking names off the list he held, his keen eyes watchful. Though the passengers seemed nervous they kept fair order, apparently reassured by the confident voice of a ship's officer, who stood behind the purser.

INTO this scene burst Macduff at a wild run, dragging Ao and screaming at the top of his voice. "They're coming!" he shrieked, dashing through the crowd and overturning a bulky Saturnian. "It's another Boxer rebellion! One would think the Xerians had landed. They're all running around screaming, 'Aldebaran Tau for the Aldebarans'."

Towing Ao and flailing frantically with his suitcase, Macduff burst into the center of a group and disintegrated it. Instantly he dashed through the line at the gangplank and back again, squealing bloody murder.

At the ship's port the officer was trying to make himself heard with little success. He was apparently stolidly sticking to his original lines, which has something to do with the fact that the Captain had been injured but there was no reason to be alarmed—

"Too late!" shrieked Macduff, bundling himself into the center of a growing nucleus of loud panic. "Hear what they're yelling? 'Kill the foreign devils!'—listen to the bloodthirsty savages. Too late, too late," he added at the top of his voice, scrambling through the mob with Ao. "Lock the doors! Man the gunports! *Here they come!*"

By now all thought of order had been lost. The passengers were demoralized into a veritable Light Brigade of assorted species and Macduff, clinging to Ao and his suitcase, rode the tide up the gangplank, over the prostrate bodies of the officer and the purser and into the ship, where he hastily assembled his various possessions and scrambled for cover. He fled down a passage, doubled and twisted, finally slowed to a rapid walk. He was alone, except for Ao, in the echoing corridor. From the far distance came annoyed curses.

"Useful thing, misdirection," Macduff murmured. "Only way to get aboard, however. What was that fool saying about the Captain's being injured? Nothing serious, I hope. I must hit him for a loan. Now where's your cabin, my dear?"

"Ah, yes. Stateroom R and here it is. We'd better hide till we're in space. Hear that siren? That means take-off, which is useful since it delays the passenger-check. Space-nets, Ao!"

He yanked open the door to Stateroom R and urged Ao toward a spider-web filament of mesh that dangled like a hammock.

"Get in there and stay till I come back," he ordered. "I've got to find another shock-hammock." The gossamer net attracted Ao as surf attracts a mermaid. She was instantly ensconced in it, her angelic face looking dreamily out of the softly tinted cloud. She gazed beyond Macduff, thinking of nothing.

"Very good," Macduff told himself, going out, shutting the door and crossing to Stateroom X, which luckily was unlocked and vacant, with a web dangling ready. "Now—"

"You!" said an all-too-familiar voice.

Macduff turned quickly on the threshold. Across the passage, looking at him from the door adjoining Ao's, was the ill-tempered crustacean.

"What a surprise," Macduff said cordially. "My old friend Ess Pu. Just the—ah, Algolian I wanted to—"

He was not permitted to finish. With a bellow in which the words "Lethean dust" could be indistinctly understood,

Ess Pu charged forward, eyes waving. Macduff hastily closed the door and locked it. There was a crash and then someone began to claw viciously at the panel.

"Outrageous assault on a man's privacy," Macduff muttered.

The hammering on the door grew louder. It was drowned out by the ultra-sonic, sonic, and resonating warning of an immediate take-off.

The hammering stopped. The sound of clicking claws receded into the distance. Macduff dived for the shock-net. Burrowing into its soft meshes he focused his mind on the hope that the awkward Algolian would be unable to make his hammock in time and that the acceleration would break every bone around his body.

Then the jets blazed, the *Sutter* rose from the troubled soil of Aldebaran Tau and Macduff really began to get into trouble.

* * * * *

It is perhaps time to deal, in some detail, with a matter which had already involved Macduff, though he didn't know it. Cryptic reference has been made to such apparently unrelated matters as *sphyghi*-seeds and Xerians.

In the most expensive perfumeries of all, on the most luxurious worlds of all, there can be seen in tiny vials drams of a straw-colored fluid which carries the famous label of *Sphyghi* No. ∞. This perfume of perfumes, which bears the same price whether sold in a plain glass phial or in a jewel-studded platinum flagon, is so costly that by comparison *Cassandra*, *Patou's Joy* or *Martian Melée* seem cheap.

Sphyghi is indigenous to Aldebaran Tau. Its seeds have been safeguarded so strictly that not even Aldebaran's great trade rival, *Xeria*, has ever managed, by hook, crook or even honest means, to get hold of a single seed.

For a long time it had commonly been known that *Xerians* would have bartered their souls, or soul, for some of the seed. In view of the *Xerians'* resemblance to termites there has always been

some doubt as to whether an individual Xerian has a mind of his own and operates by free will or whether they are all ruled by a central common brain and determinism.

The trouble with *sphyghi* is that the growth cycle must be almost continuous. After the fruit is detached from the parent plant, its seeds become sterile in thirty hours, and must be planted in the meantime. Finally, the scent of *sphyghi* is unmistakable.

NOT a bad take-off, Macduff mused, crawling out of the shock hammock. It would be too much to hope that Ess Pu suffered at least a simple fracture of the carapace, he supposed.

He opened the door, waited until the opposite door leaped open to reveal the Algolian's watchful bulk and snapped back into Stateroom X with the agility of a frightened gazelle.

"Trapped like a rat," he muttered, beginning a quick tour of the cabin. "Where is that intercom? Outrageous! Ah, here it is. Connect me with the Captain at once, please. Macduff is the name, Terence Lao-T'se Macduff. Captain Masterson? Let me congratulate you on your take-off. A magnificent job. I gathered you have had an accident, which I trust is not serious."

The intercom croaked hoarsely, caught its breath and said, "Macduff."

"A throat injury?" Macduff hazarded. "But to come to the point, Captain. You are harboring a homicidal maniac on the *Sutter*. That Algolian lobster has gone perfectly insane and is lurking outside my door—Stateroom X—ready to kill me if I come out. Kindly send down some armed guards."

The intercom made ambiguous sounds which Macduff took for assent.

"Thank you, Captain," he said cheerily. "There is only one other small matter. It became necessary for me to board the *Sutter* at the last moment and I found it inexpedient to obtain a ticket. Time pressed. Moreover, I have taken a Lesser Vegan girl under my protection, in order to save her from the dastardly machinations of Ess Pu and it

would perhaps be wise to keep any knowledge of her presence in Stateroom R from that lobster."

He took a deep breath and leaned familiarly against the intercom. "Frightful things have been happening, Captain Masterson—I have been subjected to persecution by a bloodthirsty mob, an attempt to swindle me at dice on Ess Pu's part, threats of violence from Angus Ramsay—"

"Ramsay?"

"You may have heard of him under that name, though it's probably an alias. The man was discharged in disgrace from the Space Service for smuggling opium, I believe—"

A knock came at the door. Macduff broke off to listen.

"Quick work, Captain," he said. "I assume these are your guards?"

There was an affirmative grunt and a click. "*Au revoir*," Macduff said cheerfully, and opened the door. Two uniformed members of the crew were standing outside, waiting. Across the corridor Ess Pu's door was ajar and the Algolian stood there, breathing hard.

"You're armed?" Macduff asked. "Prepare yourselves for a possible treacherous attack from that murderous crustacean behind you."

"Stateroom X," one of the men said. "Name, Macduff? Captain wants to see you."

"Naturally," Macduff said, pulling out a cigar and stepping dauntlessly into the corridor, making certain, however, that one of the crewmen was between him and Ess Pu. Nonchalantly clipping the cigar, he paused abruptly, his nostrils quivering.

"Let's go," one of the men said.

Macduff did not stir. From beyond the Algolian a breath of dim fragrance drifted like a murmur from paradise.

Macduff rapidly finished lighting his cigar. He puffed out great clouds of smoke as he hurriedly led the way down the corridor. "Come, come, my men," he admonished. "To the Captain. Important matters are afoot."

"We wouldn't know," a crewman said, slipping in front while the other one

fell in behind. Macduff allowed himself to be escorted into the officers' quarters, where he caught sight of himself in a reflecting bulkhead and blew out an approving smoke-cloud.

"Imposing," he murmured. "No giant, of course, but unquestionably imposing in my fashion. The slight rotundity around my middle merely indicates that I live well. Ah, Captain Masterson! Very good, my men, you must leave us now. That's right. Close the door as you go. Now, Captain—"

THE man behind the desk lifted his gaze slowly. He was Angus Ramsay.

"Smuggling opium—aye!" said Angus Ramsay, exhibiting his teeth to the terrified Macduff. "Discharrged in disgrace—och! Ye nosty libeling scum, what am I going to do with ye?"

"Mutiny!" Macduff said wildly. "What have you done? Led the crew to mutiny and taken over the *Sutter*? I warn you, this crime will not go unpunished. Where's Captain Masterson?"

"Captain Masterson," said Ramsay, repressing his ire with a violent effort and losing the worst of his accent, "is in a hospital on Alderbaran Tau. Apparently the puir man got in the way of one of those raving mobs. The result is that I am captain of the *Sutter*. Offer me no cigars, ye dom scoundrel. I am interested in only one thing. Ye have nae ticket."

"You must have misunderstood me," Macduff said. "Naturally I had a ticket. I gave it to the purser when I came aboard. Those intercoms are notoriously unreliable."

"So is that dom Immortality Elixir of yours," Captain Ramsay pointed out. "So are some poker games, especially when the carrrds are marked for black-light reading." The large hands closed significantly.

"Lay a finger on me at your peril," Macduff said, with faint bluster. "I have the rights of a citizen—"

"Oh, aye," Ramsay agreed. "But not the rights of a passenger on this ship. Therefore, ye wee blaggard, ye'll worrk

your way to the next port, Xeria, and there ye'll be thrown off the *Sutter* bag and baggage."

"I'll buy a ticket," Macduff offered. "At the moment, I happen to be slightly embarrassed—"

"If I catch ye mingling with the passengers or engaging in any games of chance with anyone at all ye will find yourself in the brig," Captain Ramsay said firmly. "Black light, aye! Smuggling opium, is it? Aha!"

Macduff spoke wildly of a jury of his peers, at which Ramsay laughed mockingly.

"If I'd caught up with ye back on Aldebaran Tau," he said, "I'd have taken great pleasure in kicking yer podgy carcass halfway arrround the planet. Now I wull get a deal more satisfaction out of knowing ye are harrd at work in the Hot Gang. Aboard this ship ye will be honest if it kills ye. And if ye have in mind that Lesser Vegan girl I have checked up thoroughly and ye cannot possibly figure out a way to swipe her ticket."

"You can't part a guardian and ward like this! It's inhumanoid!" cried Macduff.

"Oot with ye, mon," Ramsay said irately, rising. "To worrk, for probably the first time in yer misspent life."

"Wait," said Macduff. "You'll regret it if you don't listen to me. There's a crime being committed on this ship."

"Aye," Ramsay said, "and ye're committing it, ye stowaway. Oot!" He spoke into an intercom, the door opened and the two crew members stood waiting expectantly.

"No, no!" Macduff shrieked, seeing the yawning chasm of hard work widening inexorably at his very toes. "It's Es Pu! The Algolian! He—"

"If ye swindled him as ye swindled me," Captain Ramsay began.

"He's a smuggler!" Macduff shrieked, struggling in the grip of the crewmen who were bearing him steadily toward the door. "He's smuggled *sphyghi* from Aldebaran Tau! I smelled the stuff, I tell you! You're carrying contraband, Captain Ramsay!"

"Wait," Ramsay ordered. "Put him down. Is this a trick?"

"I smelled it," Macduff insisted. "You know what growing *sphyghi* smells like. It's unmistakable. He must have the plants in his cabin."

"The plants?" Ramsay pondered. "Noo I wonder. Hm-m. All right, men. Invite Ess Pu to my cabin." He dropped back in his chair, studying Macduff.

Macduff rubbed his hands briskly together.

"Say no more, Captain Ramsay. You need not apologize for mistaken zeal. Having exposed this villainous Algolian, I shall break him down step by step till he confesses all. He will naturally be brigged, which will leave his cabin vacant. I leave it to your sense of fair play—"

"Tush," said Captain Ramsay. "Close yer trap." He scowled steadily at the door. After a while it opened to admit Ess Pu.

The Algolian lumbered ungracefully forward until he suddenly caught sight of Macduff. Instantly his mouth-membranes began to flush. A clicking claw rose ominously.

"Now, now, mon!" Ramsay warned.

"Certainly," seconded Macduff. "Remember where you are, sir. All is discovered, Ess Pu. Facile lies will get you nowhere. Step by step Captain Ramsay and I have uncovered your plot. You are in the pay of the Xerians. A hired spy, you stole *sphyghi*-seeds from Aldebaran Tau and that *sphyghi* is even now in your cabin, a silent accuser."

Ramsay looked thoughtfully at the Algolian.

"Weel?" he asked.

"Wait," said Macduff. "When Ess Pu realizes that all is known he will see the uselessness of silence. Let me go on." Since it was obviously impossible to stop Macduff, Captain Ramsay merely grunted and picked up the Handbook of Regulations on his desk. He began to study the thick volume doubtfully. Ess Pu twitched his claws.

"A feeble scheme from the beginning," Macduff said. "Even to me, a visitor on Aldebaran Tau, it became imme-

diately evident that **corruption** was at work. Need we seek far for the answer? I think not. For we are even now heading straight for Xeria, a world which has tried frantically for years, by fair means and foul, to break the *sphyghi* monopoly. Very well."

HE aimed a cigar accusingly at the Algolian.

"With Xerian money, Ess Pu," Macduff charged, "you came to Aldebaran Tau and bribed the highest officials, got hold of some *sphyghi* seeds and circumvented the usual customs search for contraband. You bought the Mayor's sealed okay by bribing him with Ao. You need not reply yet," Macduff added hastily since he had no intention of cutting short his hour of triumph.

Ess Pu made a revolting noise in his throat. "Lethean dust," he said, reminded of something. "Ah-h!" He made a sudden forward motion.

Macduff dodged hastily around the desk behind Ramsay. "Call your men," he suggested. "He's running amuck. Disarm him."

"Ye cannot disarm an Algolian without dismembering him," Captain Ramsay said rather absently, looking up from the Handbook of Regulations. "Ah—Ess Pu. Ye dinna deny this charrge, I gather?"

"How can he deny it?" Macduff demanded. "The short-sighted scoundrel planted the *Sphyghi-seeds* in his cabin without even setting up an odor-denaturalizer. He deserves no mercy, the fool."

"Weel?" Ramsay asked, in an oddly doubtful manner.

Ess Pu shook his narrow shoulders, crashed his tail emphatically against the floor, and spread his jaws in what might have been a grin.

"*Sphyghi*?" he asked. "Sure. So?"

"Convicted out of his own mouth," Macduff decided. "Nothing else is necessary. Brig him, Captain. We will share the reward, if any."

"No," Captain Ramsay said, putting down the Handbook decisively. "Ye have put yer foot in it again, Macduff. Ye are

no expert in interstellar law. We are now beyond the limits of ionization and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of Aldebaran Tau—with a guid deal of gibble-gabble the lawyers put in.

"But the meaning is clear enough. It was the job of the Aldebaranese to keep that *sphyghi* from being smuggled awa' from them and since they failed, noo it is not my job to meddle. In fact, I canna. Against Regulations."

"That's it," Ess Pu said with complacent satisfaction.

Macduff gasped. "You condone smuggling, Captain Ramsay?"

"I'm covered," the Algolian said, making a coarse gesture toward Macduff.

"Aye," Ramsay said, "he's richt. Regulations make it perfectly clear. As far as I am concerned it makes no difference whether Ess Pu is keeping *sphyghi* or daffodils in his cabin—or a haggis," he added thoughtfully.

Ess Pu snorted and turned toward the door.

Macduff put a plaintive hand on the Captain's arm.

"But he threatened me. My life isn't safe around that Algolian. Just look at those claws."

"Aye," Ramsay said reluctantly. "Ye ken the penalty for murder, Ess Pu? Vurra good. I order ye not to murrder this nae doot deserving miscreant. I am bound to enforce Regulations, so dinna let me catch ye assaulting Macduff with-in earshot of me or any other officer. Ye ken?"

Ess Pu seemed to ken. He laughed hoarsely, ground a claw at Macduff and stalked out, swaying from side to side. The two crewmen were visible outside the door.

"Here," Captain Ramsay ordered. "I have a job for ye two. Take this stow-away doon to the Hot Gang and turn him over to the Chief."

"No, no!" squealed Macduff, retreating. "Don't you dare lay a finger on me! Put me down! Outrageous! I *won't* go down that ramp! Release me! Captain Ramsay, I demand—*Captain Ramsay!*"

CHAPTER III

Award of Ao

DAYS had passed, arbitrarily, of course, aboard the *Sutter*.

Ao lay curled in her shock-hammock, thinking her own dim thoughts and looking at nothing. High up in the wall there was a puffing sound, a scuffle, and a grunt. Behind the grille of the ventilating inlet appeared the face of Macduff.

"Ah, my little friend," he said kindly. "So there you are. Now they have me creeping down the ventilating tubes of this ship like a phagocyte."

He tested the meshed grille cautiously.

"Sealed, like all the others," he observed. "However, I assume you're being well treated, my dear." He glanced greedily at the covered lunch-tray on a nearby table. Ao looked dreamily at nothing.

"I have sent a cable," Macduff announced from the wall. "I bartered some small treasured heirlooms I happened to have with me and raised enough cash to send a cable, by the press rate. Luckily I still have my press card." Macduff's vast collection of credentials very likely may have included a membership in the Little Men's Chowder and Marching Society, to choose the least likely example.

"Moreover, I have just received a reply. Now I must run a grave risk, my dear, a grave risk. Today the conditions of the ship's pool—a lottery, you know—will be announced in the grand lounge. I must be present, even at the risk of being brigged by Captain Ramsay and savaged by Ess Pu.

"It will not be easy. I may say I've been subjected to every indignity imaginable, my dear, except perhaps—outrageous!" he added, as a cord tied around his ankle tightened and drew him backward up the shaft.

His distant cries grew fainter. He announced in a fading voice that he had

a bottle of 2, 4, 5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid in his pocket and that broken glass was a safety hazard. So saying he departed into inaudibility. Since Ao had not really noticed that he was present she remained unaffected.

"Ah, well," Macduff philosophized as he flew down a corridor slightly ahead of the Atmospheric Inspector's hurtling toe-cap, "Justice is blind. This is my thanks for working overtime—at least three minutes overtime. But now I am off duty and free to set my plans in motion."

Five minutes later, having eluded the Inspector and smoothed his ruffled plumage somewhat, he made his way briskly toward the lounge.

"There's one point in my favor," he reflected. "Ess Pu apparently doesn't know Ao is aboard. The last time he chased me he was still speaking bitterly of my part in forcing him to leave her on Aldebaran Tau. Unhappily that's practically the only point in my favor. I must now mingle with the passengers in the grand lounge, while remaining undetected by Ess Pu, Captain Ramsay or any ship's officer. I wish I were a Cerean.* Ah, well."

As Macduff cautiously made his way toward the lounge his memory dwelt all too vividly on his recent progress from riches to rags. His meteoric descent from job to worse job had been little short of phenomenal.

"Would you set a cinematome to digging ditches?" he had inquired. "Would you weigh elephants on a torquemeter?"

He was told to stop gabbling and pick up that shovel. Instantly he began to work out the most efficient application of the law of leverages. There was some delay while he extended his decimals to include the influencing factor of low-threshold radioactivity upon the alpha waves of the brain.

"Otherwise, anything can happen," he explained, demonstrating. There was a crash.

Macduff was then, by request, taken

off the Hot Gang and put to work elsewhere. But, as he took pains to point out, his frame of reference did not include special skills in the block-processing of garbage for fuel, oiling of the symbiotic hemostatic adjustment mechanisms provided for the comfort of the passengers or testing refractive indices of liquid-coated bimetallic thermostats. He proved this empirically.

So he was—by request—removed to Hydroponics, where the incident of the radioactive carbon tracer occurred. He said it wasn't the carbon, it was the gammexene, and besides it wasn't really the gammexene so much as his inadvertent neglect to supplement the insecticide with meso-inositol.

But when thirty square feet of rharb plants began breathing out carbon monoxide as a result of sudden heredity changes brought on by the gammexene Macduff was promptly sent down to the kitchens, where he introduced a growth-hormone into the soup, with mighty catastrophic results.

At present he was an unvalued member of the staff of Atmospheric Controls, where he did the jobs nobody else wanted to do.

MORE and more he had become conscious of the odor of *sphyghi* pervading the ship. Nothing could disguise its distinctive fragrance, which seeped by osmosis through membranes, trickled along the surface of molecular films, and very likely rode piggy-back on careening quanta. As Macduff made his stealthy way toward the lounge he realized that the word *sphyghi* was on every tongue, just as he had anticipated.

He paused warily on the threshold of the lounge, which ran like a belt (or cravat) around the entire ship, so that in two directions the floor seemed to slope steeply, until you tried to walk up it. Then it felt like a squirrel cage, which compensated automatically to your own speed.

Here was luxury. Macduff's sybaritic soul yearned toward the tempting buffets of smorgasbord, *ti-pali* and Gustators. Like a palace of ice an ornate per-

* (The inhabitants of Ceres were long supposed to be invisible. Lately it has been discovered that Ceres has no inhabitants.)

ambulating bar swung slowly past on its monorail track. An orchestra was playing *Starlit Days and Sunny Nights*, an eminently suitable choice for a ship in space, and *sphyghi*-fragrance sent its luxurious breath from wall to wall.

Macduff stood with unobtrusive dignity near the door for some minutes, regarding the crowd. He was waiting for the appearance of Captain Ramsay. Presently a buzz of interested comment began to arise and a throng of passengers converged down the salon's slopes. The Captain had arrived. Macduff melted into the crowd and vanished with the suddenness of a Boojum.

Ramsay stood at the bottom of a concave sectioned amphitheater, looking up at his audience with an unaccustomed smile on his seamed face. There was no trace of Macduff, though a repressed mutter of sotto voce comment came occasionally from behind a broad-beamed member of the Plutonian lepidoptera.

Captain Ramsay spoke.

"As ye probably ken," he said, "we are here to arrange about the ship's pool. Some of ye may not have traveled in space before, so the acting first mate wull explain how this is done. Mister French, please."

Mr. French, a serious young man, took the stage. He cleared his throat, hesitated and looked around as a brief burst of applause came from behind the Plutonian lepidoptera.

"Thank you," he said. "Eh—many of you may be familiar with the old-time ship's pool, in which passengers guessed the time of arrival in port. In space, of course, compensatory feed-back devices, effectors and subtractors control our ship so exactly that we know the *Sutter* will arrive in Xeria at exactly the post-estimated time, which is—"

"Come, come, my man, get to the point," an unidentified voice put in from the audience. Captain Ramsay was observed to glance sharply toward the Plutonian.

"Eh—quite," said Mr. French. "Does anyone have a suggestion?"

"Guessing the date on a coin," a voice said eagerly, but it was drowned out by

a chorus of cries mentioning the word *sphyghi*.

"*Sphyghi*?" Captain Ramsay asked with hypocritical blankness. "The perfume stuff, ye mean?"

There was laughter. A mousy Callistan got the floor.

"Captain Ramsay," he said. "How about running a *sphyghi*-seed lottery here, the way they do on Aldebaran Tau? The way it's done, I think, is by betting on how many seeds there are in the first *sphyghi*-fruit of the crop. The number always varies. Sometimes there are a few hundred, sometimes a few thousand and there's no way of counting them until the fruit's cut open. If Ess Pu could be induced to agree, perhaps—"

"Allow me," Captain Ramsay said. "I'll consult Ess Pu."

He did so, while the crustacean looked blackly around. At first he was obdurate. But finally, in return for a half-share in the pool, he was prevailed upon to cooperate. Only the glamour of *sphyghi* and the unparalleled chance to boast about this lottery for the rest of their lives led the passengers to put up with his inordinate greed. But presently all was arranged.

"Stewards wull pass among ye," Captain Ramsay said. "Write yer guess and yer name on these slips of paper and drop them in a box which wull be provided for the purpose. Aye, aye, Ess Pu. Ye wull be given a chance too if ye insist."

The Algolian insisted. He wasn't missing a bet. After long hesitation he put down a number, angrily scrawled the phonetic ideograph of his name and had turned to stalk away when something subtler than *sphyghi*-fragrance began to breathe through the salon. Heads turned. Voices died away. Ess Pu, glancing around in surprise, found himself facing the door. His infuriated bellow reverberated from the ceiling for several seconds.

Ao, standing on the threshold, paid no attention. Her lovely eyes gazed into the far distances. Concentric circles of magic drifted dreamily out from her.

Already she was increasing the affective tone of all living organisms within the lounge, and Ess Pu was not excluded. However, as has already been disclosed, when an Algolian feels good his rage knows no bounds. Ao didn't care.

"Mine!" Ess Pu mouthed, swinging toward the Captain. "The girl—mine!"

"Get ye claws awa' from my face, mon," Captain Ramsay said with dignity. "If ye wull join me in this quiet corner perhaps ye can state yer case in a more courteous fashion. Noo, what is it?"

ESS PU demanded Ao. He took out a certificate which appeared to state that he had traveled to Aldebaran Tau with Ao as her guardian. Ramsay fingered his jaw undecidedly. Meanwhile there was a scuffle among the thronging passengers who were pressing folded slips of paper upon the stewards. The breathless, rotund figure of Macduff burst out of the crowd just in time to snatch Ao from Ess Pu's possessively descending claws.

"Back, lobster!" he ordered threateningly. "Lay a claw on that girl at your peril." Towing her, he dodged behind the Captain as Ess Pu lunged.

"I thought so," Ramsay said, lifting a cautioning finger at Ess Pu. "Were ye no specifically forbidden to mingle with the passengers, Macduff?"

"This is a matter of law enforcement," Macduff said. "Ao is my ward, not that criminal lobster's."

"Can ye prove it?" Ramsay inquired. "That certificate of his—"

Macduff tore the certificate from Ess Pu's grip, scanned it hastily, crumpled it into a ball and threw it on the floor.

"Nonsense!" he said scornfully, taking out a cablegram in an accusing manner. "Read this, Captain. As you will observe it is a cable from the Lesser Vegan Control Administration. It points out that Ao was illegally deported from Lesser Vega and that an Algolian is suspected of the crime."

"Eh?" Ramsay said. "One moment, Ess Pu." But the Algolian was already hastily clashing his way out of the salon.

Ramsay scowled at the cablegram, looked up and beckoned to a Cephian double-brained attorney among the passengers. There was a brief colloquy, from which Ramsay came back shaking his head.

"Can't do much about this, Macduff," he said. "It isn't a GBI offense, unfortunately. I find I'm empowered only to turn Ao over to her rightful guardian and since she has none—"

"Your error, Captain," Macduff broke in. "You want her richt—I mean, her rightful guardian? You're looking at him. Here's the rest of that cablegram."

"What?" Captain Ramsay demanded. "Exactly. Terence Lao-T'se Macduff. That's what it says. The Lesser Vegan Control Administration has accepted my offer to stand *in loco parentis* to Ao, *pro tem*."

"Vurra weel," Ramsay said reluctantly. "Ao's yer ward. Ye wull have to take that up with the Xerian authorities when ye arrive, for as sure as my name is Angus Ramsay ye'll gae head over basket doon the gangplank the minute we land on Xeria. Ye and Ess Pu can fight it oot there. In the meantime I dinna allow a crewman to mingle with my passengers. *Go for-rard!*"

"I demand the rights of a passenger," Macduff said excitedly, backing up a step or two. "The price of the ticket includes the pool and I demand—"

"Ye are no passenger. Ye're a dom insubordinate member of—"

"Ao's a passenger!" Macduff contended shrilly. "She's entitled to take part in the pool, isn't she? Well, then, a slip, please, Captain."

Ramsay growled under his breath. But finally he beckoned to the steward with the slotted box.

"Let Ao write doon her own guess," he insisted stubbornly.

"Nonsense," Macduff said. "Ao's my ward. I'll write it for her. Moreover, if by any miraculous chance she should happen to win the pool, it will be my duty to administer the dough in the best interests of her welfare, which obviously means buying us both tickets to Lesser Vega."

"Och, why quibble?" Ramsay said suddenly. "If ye're lucky enough to have a miracle happen, fair enough."

Macduff, concealing what he wrote, scribbled busily, folded the paper and pushed it through the slot. Ramsay took a perma-seal from the steward and ran it across the box-top.

"Personally," Macduff said, watching him, "I feel slightly degraded by the atmosphere of the *Sutter*. What with condoning smuggling, slyster tactics and pure vicious gambling, I'm forced to the unsavory conclusion, Captain, that you're running a crime ship. Come, Ao, let us seek purer air."

Ao licked her thumb and thought of something very nice, perhaps the taste of her thumb. No one would ever know.

CHAPTER IV

The Xerian's Dismay

TIME passed, both Bergsonian and Newtonian. On either scale it seemed probable that Macduff's time was running rapidly out.

"Who sups wi' Auld Cloutie should hae a long spoon," Captain Ramsay said to the acting first, on the day of the *Sutter's* scheduled arrival at Xeria. "The wonder is that Macduff has evaded Ess Pu's claws this long, the way he's been trying to get at those *sphyghi*-plants.

"What baffles me is what he hopes to accomplish by sneaking around the Algolian's cabin with sodium iodide counters and microwave spectrosopes. Whatever he wrote doon in the lottery box canna be changed. The box is in my safe."

"Suppose he finds a way to open the safe?" the acting first suggested.

"In addition to the time lock it is keyed to the alpha radiations of my own brain," Captain Ramsay pointed out. "He canna possibly—ah, talk of the devil, Mr. French, Look who's coming."

The rotund yet agile form of Macduff came scuttling rapidly along the corridor, one jump ahead of the Algolian.

Macduff was breathing hard. At sight of the two officers he dived behind them like a quail going to cover. Ess Pu, blind with fury, snapped his claws in the Captain's very face.

"Control yerself, mon!" Ramsay said sharply. The Algolian made a mindless gobbling sound and waved a paper wildly in the air.

"Man, indeed," Macduff said with some bitterness, from his position of precarious safety. "He's nothing but an acromegalic lobster. It's getting so any object can be classified as humanoid these days, the way they keep broadening the requirements. Letting in all the riff-raff of the Galaxy. Martians were the opening wedge. Now the deluge.

"I can see the need for a certain amount of latitude, but we peril the dignity of true humanoids when we apply the proud name of Man to a lobster. Why, the creature isn't even a biped. In fact, there's a certain air of indecent exposure about where he wears his bones."

"Tush, mon, ye ken the word's a mere figure of speech. What is it, Ess Pu? What's this paper ye keep thrusting at me?"

The Algolian was understood to gibber that Macduff had dropped it while fleeing. He recommended that the Captain read it carefully.

"Later," Ramsay said, thrusting it in his pocket. "We're due to land on Xeria vurra soon, and I must be in the control room. Go for-rard, Macduff."

Macduff obeyed with surprising alacrity, at least until he was out of sight. Ess Pu, muttering thickly, followed. Only then did Ramsay pull the paper from his pocket. He studied it, snorted and handed it to the acting first. Macduff's neat handwriting covered one side of the page, as follows:

Problem: Find out how many seeds in the first ripe sphyghi-fruit. How look inside a sealed fruit in which all seeds may not be formed yet? Ordinary vision useless.

First day: Attempted to introduce

radio-tracer in sphyghi so I could count radioactivity day by day and work out useful graphs. Failed. Ess Pu installed booby-trap, sign of low criminal mentality. No harm done.

Second day: Attempt to bribe Ess Pu with Immortality Elixir. Ess Pu outraged. Forgot Algolians regard adolescence as despicable. Small minds value size inordinately.

Third day: Tried to focus infra-red on sphyghi, to pick up secondary radiations with acoustical interferometer. Failed. Experimented in long-distance color-staining of sphyghi-cells with light waves. Failed.

Fourth day: Attempts to introduce chloroform into Ess Pu's quarters failed also. Impossible to get near enough fruit to try analysis through positive ion emissions. Am beginning to suspect Ess Pu was responsible for Captain Master-son's hospitalization back on Aldebaran Tau. Probably crept up from behind in dark alley. All bullies are cowards. Note: try to turn Xerians against Ess Pu on arrival. How?

There the quasi-diary ended. Mr. French looked up quizzically.

"I had na realized Macduff was applying science so thoroughly," Ramsay remarked. "But this merely confirms what Ess Pu told me weeks ago. He said Macduff was constantly trying to get at the *sphyghi*. But he couldna and he canna and noo we must prepare for landing, Mr. French."

He hurried away, trailed by the acting first. The corridor lay empty and silent for a little while. Then an intercom high in the wall spoke.

"General announcement," it said. "Passengers and crew of the *Sutter*, your attention, please. Prepare for landing. Immediately afterward, passengers will assemble in the grand lounge for the Xerian customs search. The results of the ship's pool will also be announced. Your attendance is compulsory. Thank you."

There was silence, a sound of heavy breathing and finally a new voice sounded. "That means you, Macduff," it said grimly. "Ye ken? Aye, ye'd better."

Four minutes later, the *Sutter* landed on Xeria.

YANKED protesting from his cabin, Macduff was dragged to the grand lounge, where everyone else had already assembled. A group of Xerian officials, repressing their joy with some difficulty, was also in evidence, making a rather perfunctory search of the passengers, while other Xerians went through the ship rapidly, testing for contraband.

But it was obvious that the contraband that excited them was the *sphyghi*. A table had been set up in the middle of the big room and upon it, each plant in its own little earthenware pot, the *sphyghi* stood. Plump golden fruit dangled from the branches, the pink glow of ripeness flushing their downy surfaces. An odor of pure delight exhaled from the plants. Ess Pu stood guardian, occasionally exchanging words with a Xerian official, who had already affixed a medal* on the Algolian's carapace.

"Outrageous!" Macduff cried, struggling. "I merely needed another few minutes' work with a vitally important experiment I was—"

"Close your blabber-mouth," Captain Ramsay told him. "I shall take great pleasure in kicking you off the *Sutter* myself."

"Leaving me to the tender mercies of that lobster? He'll kill me! I appeal to our common humanoid—"

Captain Ramsay conferred briefly with the Xerian leader, who nodded.

"Quite right, Captain," he or it said pedantically. "Under our laws debtors work out their debts, mayhem is assessed by its results and the aggressor forced to pay full reparations. Homicide naturally always carries the death penalty. Why do you ask?"

"That applies even to Ess Pu?" the Captain persisted.

"Naturally," the Xerian said.

"Weel, then," Ramsay said significantly to Macduff.

"Weel, then what? He'll be so rich

—

* (With suction-cups, of course.)

he won't even mind paying reparations for the privilege of committing mayhem on my person. I bruise very easily."

"But he wullna kill ye," Ramsay said comfortingly. "And it wull be a fine lesson to ye, Macduff."

"Then at least I intend to get in one good blow," said Macduff, seizing a stout Malacca cane from a nearby avian and giving Ess Pu a resounding smack across the carapace. The Algolian let out a steam-whistle shriek of fury and lunged forward while Macduff, brandishing the cane like a rapier, danced pudgily backward, threatening even as he retreated.

"Come on, you overgrown shore dinner," cried Macduff valiantly. "We'll have it out now, humanoid to lobster!"

"Lay on, Macduff!" shouted an erudite and enthusiastic Ganymedean.

"Lay off!" bellowed Captain Ramsay, waving his officers to the rescue. But the Xerians were before them. They formed a quick barrier between the combatants and one of them twisted the cane from Macduff's reluctant grasp.

"If he has harmed you, Ess Pu, he will make reparations," the leader of the Xerians said. "Law is law. Are you injured?"

Despite Ess Pu's inarticulate gobbles, it was obvious that he was not. And the Xerian jurisprudence takes no notice of injured pride. Termites are humble by nature.

"Let's get this settled," Captain Ramsay said, annoyed at having his grand lounge turned into a shambles. "There are only three passengers disembarking here. Ao, Ess Pu and Macduff."

Macduff looked around for Ao, found her and, scuttling over, tried to hide behind her oblivious back.

"Ah, yes," the leading Xerian said. "Ess Pu has already explained the matter of the ship's pool. We will permit the lottery. However, certain conditions must be observed. No non-Xerian will be allowed to approach this table, and I will do the seed-counting myself."

"That wull be satisfactory," Ramsay said, picking up the sealed ballot box and retreating. "If ye'll cut open the

ripest of the fruit and count the seeds I'll then open this box and announce the winner."

"Wait!" Macduff cried out but his voice was ignored. The leading Xerian had picked up a silver knife from the table, plucked the largest, ripest *sphyghi*-fruit and cut it neatly in two. The halves rolled apart on the table—to reveal a perfectly empty hollow within the fruit.

The Xerian's shout of dismay echoed through the lounge. The silver knife flashed, chopping the fruit to fragments. But not a single seed glittered in the creamy pulp. "What's happened?" Macduff demanded. "No seeds? Obviously a swindle. I never trusted Ess Pu. He's been gloating—"

"Silence," the Xerian said coldly. In a subdued quiet he used the silver knife, again and again in an atmosphere of mounting tension.

"No seeds?" Captain Ramsay asked blankly as the last fruit fell open emptily. The Xerian made no reply. He was toying with the silver knife and regarding Ess Pu.

The Algolian seemed as astounded as anyone else but as Macduff audibly remarked, it was hard to tell, with an Algolian. Captain Ramsay courageously broke the ominous silence by stepping forward to remind the Xerians that he was a representative of the GBI.

"Have no fear," the Xerian said coldly. "We have no jurisdiction in your ship, Captain."

Macduff's voice rose in triumph.

"I never trusted that lobster from the start," he announced, strutting forward. "He merely took your money and made a deal for seedless *sphyghi*. He is obviously a criminal. His hasty exit from Aldebaran, plus his known addiction to Lethan dust—"

At that point Ess Pu charged down upon Macduff, raging uncontrollably. At the last moment Macduff's rotund figure shot toward the open port and the thin Xerian sunlight outside. Ess Pu clattered after him, shrieking with fury, mouth-membranes flaring crimson in his rage.

CHAPTER V

Pollen Double-Cross

AT the Xerian leader's quick command, the other Xerians hurried after Macduff. There were distant, cryptic noises from outside. Presently Macduff reappeared, panting and alone.

"Awkward creatures, Algolians," he said, nodding familiarly to the Xerian leader. "I see your men have—ah—detained Ess Pu."

"Yes," the Xerian said. "Outside, he is of course under our jurisdiction."

"The thought had occurred to me," Macduff murmured, drifting toward Ao.

"Noo wait a minute," Captain Ramsay said to the Xerians. "Ye have na—"

"We are not barbarians," the Xerian said with dignity. "We gave Ess Pu fifteen million Universal Credits to do a job for us and he has failed. Unless he can return the fifteen million, plus costs, he must work it out. The man-hour"—here Macduff was seen to wince—"the-man-hour on Xeria is the equivalent of one sixty-fifth of a credit."

"This is highly irregular," the Captain said. "However, it's out of my jurisdiction now. You, Macduff—stop looking so smug. You get off at Xeria too, remember. I advise ye to stay out of Ess Pu's way."

"I expect he'll be busy most of the time," Macduff said cheerfully. "I hate to remind a supposedly competent officer of his duties, but haven't you forgotten the slight matter of the ship's pool?"

"What?" Ramsay glanced blankly at the pulped fruit. "The pool's called off, of course. Yer money, ladies and gentlemen, will be refunded—"

"Nonsense," Macduff interrupted. "Let's have no evasions. One might suspect you of trying to avoid a pay-off."

"Mon, ye're daft. How can there be a pay-off? The lottery was based on guessing the seed-count in a *sphyghi*-fruit and it's perfectly obvious the *sphyghi* has no seeds. Vurra weel. If no one has any objections—"

"I object!" Macduff cried. "On behalf of my ward, I demand that every single guess be counted and tabulated."

"Be reasonable," Ramsay urged. "If ye're merely delaying the evil moment when I kick ye off the *Sutter*—"

"You've got to wind up the pool legally," Macduff insisted.

"Pah, shut yer clatterin' trap," Ramsay snapped sourly, picking up the sealed box and attaching a small gadget to it. "Just as ye like. But I am on to ye, Macduff. Noo, quiet please, everybody."

He closed his eyes and his lips moved in a soundless mumble. The box flew open, disgorging a clutter of folded papers. At Ramsay's gesture a passenger stepped forward and began to open the slips, reading off names and guesses.

"So ye gain pairhaps five minutes reprieve," Ramsay said under his breath to Macduff. "Then oot ye go after Ess Pu and let me say it is pairfectly obvious ye lured the Algolian out of the *Sutter* on purpose."

"Nonsense," Macduff said briskly. "Am I to blame if Ess Pu focused his ridiculous anti-social emotions on me?"

"Aye," Ramsay said. "Ye ken dom well ye are."

"Male Kor-ze-Kabloom, seven hundred fifty," called the passenger unfolding another slip. "Lorma Secundus, two thousand ninety-nine. Ao, *per*—"

There was a pause.

"Well?" Captain Ramsay prompted, collaring Macduff. "Well, mon?"

"Terence Lao-T'se Macduff—" the passenger continued and again halted.

"What is it? What number did he guess?" Ramsay demanded, pausing at the open port with one foot lifted ready to boot the surprisingly philosophical Macduff down the gangplank. "I asked ye a question! What number's on the slip?"

"Zero," the passenger said faintly.

"Exactly!" Macduff declared, wriggling free. "And now, Captain Ramsay, I'll thank you to hand over half the ship's pool to me, as Ao's guardian—less, of course, the price of our passage to Lesser Vega. As for Ess Pu's half

of the take, send it to him with my compliments.

"Perhaps it will knock a few months off his sentence, which, if my figures are correct, come to nine hundred and forty-six Xerian years. A Macduff forgives even his enemies. Come, Ao, my dear. I must choose a suitable cabin."

So saying, Macduff lit a fresh cigar and sauntered slowly away, leaving Captain Ramsay staring straight ahead and moving his lips as though in slow prayer. The prayer became audible.

"Macduff," Ramsay called. "*Macduff!* How did ye do it?"

"I," said Macduff over his shoulder, "am a scientist."

THE Lesser Vegan cabaret hummed with festivity. A pair of comedians exchanged quips and banter among the tables. At one table Ao sat between Macduff and Captain Ramsay.

"I am still waiting to hear how ye did it, Macduff," Ramsay said. "A bargain's a bargain, ye know. I put my name on yon application, didn't I?"

"I cannot but admit," Macduff said, "that your signature facilitated my getting Ao's guardianship, bless her heart. Some champagne, Ao?" But Ao made no response. She was exchanging glances with a Lesser Vegan young man at a nearby table.

"Come, noo," Ramsay insisted. "Remember I wull have to turn over my log at the end of the voyage. I must know what happened concerning yon *sphyghi*. Otherwise, d'ye think I'd hae gone oot on a limb and guaranteed yer tortuous character, even though I carefully added, 'to the best of my knowledge?' No. Ye wrote thot zero when I saw ye do it, long before the fruit ripened."

"Right," Macduff said blandly, sipping champagne. "It was a simple problem in misdirection. I suppose there's no harm in telling you how I did it. Consider the circumstances. You were going to maroon me on Xeria, side by side with that lobster.

"Obviously I had to cut him down to my size by discrediting him with the Xerians. Winning the pool was an unex-

pected secondary development. Merely a stroke of well-deserved good luck, aided by applied scientific technique."

"Ye mean that stuff ye wrote down on the paper Ess Pu found—the gibble-gabble aboot interferometers and ion-analyzers? So ye did find some way to count the seeds—och, I'm wrong there, am I?"

"Naturally." Macduff twirled his glass and preened himself slightly. "I wrote that paper for Ess Pu's eyes. I had to keep him so busy protecting his *sphyghi* and chasing me that he never had a spare moment to think."

"I still dinna ken," Ramsay confessed. "Even if ye'd known the richt answer in advance, how could ye foresee the pool would be based on *sphyghi*?"

"Oh, that was the simplest thing of all. Consider the odds! What else could it be, with the Aldebaran Lottery fresh in every mind and the whole ship reeking of contraband *sphyghi*? If no-one else had suggested it I was prepared to bring it up myself and—what's this? Go away! Get out!"

He was addressing himself to the two comedians, who had worked their way around to Macduff's table. Captain Ramsay glanced up in time to see them commence a new act.

The laugh-getting technique of insult has never basically changed all through the ages, and Galactic expansion has merely broadened and deepened its variety. Derision has naturally expanded to include species as well as races.

The comedians, chattering insanely, began a fairly deft imitation of two apes searching each other for fleas. There was an outburst of laughter, not joined by those customers who had sprung from Simian stock.

"Tush!" Ramsay said irately, pushing back his chair. "Ye dom impudent—"

Macduff lifted a placating palm. "Tut, tut, Captain. Strive for the objective viewpoint. Merely a matter of semantics, after all." He chuckled tolerantly. "Rise above such insularity, as I do, and enjoy the skill of these mummers in the abstract art of impersonation. I was

about to explain why I had to keep Ess Pu distracted. I feared he might notice how fast the *sphyghi* were ripening."

"Pah," Ramsay said, but relapsed into his chair as the comedians moved on and began a new skit. "Weel, continue."

"Misdirection," Macduff said cheerfully. "Have you ever had a more incompetent crew-member than I?"

"No," Ramsay said, considering. "Never in my—"

"Quite so. I was tossed like spindrift from task to task until I finally reached Atmospheric Controls, which was exactly where I wanted to be. Crawling down ventilating pipes has certain advantages. For example, it was the work of a moment to empty a phial of two-four-five-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid" he rolled the syllables lushly—"trichlorophenoxyacetic acid into Ess Pu's ventilator. The stuff must have got into everything, including the *sphyghi*."

"Trichloro—what? Ye mean ye gimmicked the *sphyghi* before the pool?"

"Certainly. I told you the pool was a later by-product. My goal at first was simply to get Ess Pu in trouble on Xeria to save my own valuable person. Luckily I had a fair supply of various hormones with me. This particular one, as the merest child should know, bypasses the need for cross-pollination. Through a law of biology the results will always be seedless fruit. Ask any horticulturist. It's done all the time."

"Seedless fruit—" Ramsay said blankly. "Cross-pollin—och, aye! Weel, I'll be dommed."

A MODEST disclaimer was no doubt on Macduff's lips, but his eye was caught by the two comedians and he paused, cigar lifted, regarding them. The shorter of the two was now strutting in a wide circle, gesturing like one who smokes a cigar with great self-importance. His companion whooped wildly and beat him over the head.

"Tell me this, brother!" he cried in a shrill falsetto. "Who was that penguin I seen you with last night?"

"That wasn't no penguin," the strutter giggled happily. "That was a Venu-

sian!" Simultaneously he gestured, and a spotlight sprang like a tent over Macduff's shrinking head.

"What! What? *How dare you!*" screamed the outraged Macduff, recovering his voice at last amid ripples of laughter. "Libelous defamation of—of—I've never been so insulted in my life!" A repressed snort came from the Captain. The ruffled Macduff glared around furiously, rose to his full height and seized Ao's hand.

"Ignore them," Ramsay suggested in an unsteady voice. "After all, ye canna deny ye're Venusian by species, Macduff, even though ye insist ye were hatched in Glasga'. Borrn, I mean. Aye, ye're Scots by birth and humanoid by classification, are ye na? And no more a penguin than I'm a monkey."

But Macduff was already marching toward the door. Ao trailed obediently after, casting back angelic looks at the Lesser Vegan male.

"Outrageous!" said Macduff.

"Come back, mon," Ramsay called, suppressing a wild whoop. "Remember the abstract art of impersonation. 'Tis a mere matter of semantics—"

His voice went unheard. Macduff's back was an indignant ramrod. Towing Ao, his bottle-shaped figure stiff with dignity, Terence Lao-T'se Macduff vanished irrevocably into the Lesser Vegan night, muttering low.

For Macduff, as should be evident by now to the meanest intellect,* was not all he claimed to be. . . .

"Tush," said Captain Ramsay, his face split by a grin, "that I should ha' seen the day! Waiter! A whusky-and-soda—no more of this nosty champagne. I am celebrating a red-letter occasion, a phenomenon of nature. D'ye ken this is probably the first time in Macduff's life that the unprincipled scoundrel has taken his departure without leaving some puir swindled sucker behind?"

"D'ye—eh? What's that? What bill, ye daft loon? Pah, it was Macduff who insisted I be his guest tonight. Och, I—ah—eh—*Dom!*"

* (By which we mean the reader who skipped all the science, elementary as it was, in this chronicle.)



Payment in Full

By **RAY BRADBURY**

*They were three left of
Earth's millions, three men
marooned on Mars. . . .*

*"To Earth."
"To Mars."
"To the atom bomb!"
"To the explosion."*

THEY DRANK again. Three men sitting under Martian stars, on a Martian sea bottom. Three men from a small silver rocket ship. Three trembling and violent men, the whiskey burning their mouths. Sweating and shivering and crying out. The rocket did not move. The Martian canal waters lay black in the stone channels. They opened a new bottle.

"Here's to good old beautiful, dumb, exploded and gone forever Earth," cried Jones.

"Marry me, Williams," said Comfort. "Marry me and be my love, and we will all the pleasures prove . . ."

"Shut up."

"Marry me. We'll start civilization again."

"Sit down!"

Comfort sat down and cried.

Comfort hit his hand and felt the tears on his fingers, quick and hot. Only six hours ago, Jones, Williams and himself were provisioning their rocket to return to Earth. They were the last ones on Mars. They had wondered if the atom war was as bad as the space radio claimed. They had joked about it. They had figured to be in New York in a month.

And then—that violent blue flash in the sky.

Earth, burning, a new small sun, had set over the horizon.

They had started drinking immediately.

Here they were, numb with time and the night, with the burning and the terror, with the whiskey and the nightmare.

Jones swallowed a drink, looking at nothing. "Here's to Alice and my sister and my brother Herb and grandmother and mom and dad and—" He stopped.

"Here's to the Milwaukee zoo." Comfort laughed quietly. "Here's to the snow I shoveled off the Mellin Town sidewalks in Illinois. Here's to spring in Central Park. Here's to a Venice, California spaghetti joint, April, 1968—"

"Here's to President F. Roosevelt Jr., here's to Premier Kavolevsky, here's to Prime Minister Barrington-Smith. Here's to all the world's atoms. Here's to atoms named Wanamook Creek and atoms named brook-trout I fried in a pan in the North Woods. Here's to those atoms that blew through the tall trees nights when I was lying there awake, listening. Here's to all kinds of atoms," said Williams.

Jones swore bitterly. "Dammit! I wish there was something I could do." He stared at the sky until his eyes watered.

"Me, too!" Williams smashed his bottle. "We've got to do something. There must be some way to fight back, do something, anything!"

"There's nothing you can do," whispered Comfort, eyes shut.

"We've got to, I tell you, we've got to!"

A minute later, the Martian appeared.

HE WALKED softly across the sea bottom, alone. He paused in the aura of light from the yellow electric torches. He wore a bronze mask in which his eyes glittered like blue diamonds.

"Hold on." Williams struggled to his

feet. "I'm crazy. I think I *see* someone!"

The others saw it, too.

The Martian greeted them. There were no words. There were only his thoughts. These moved in the air, like a breath.

Comfort put his hand out. "He's real. I can feel him!"

The bronze mask nodded. A thought moved on the air about their heads.

"My name is Yio."

"Then there *are* Martians!" The men were numb.

The mask turned. "In the high mountain towns a thousand of us survive. We saw your ships arrive ten moons ago. We saw them go back into the sky. We waited for all of you to go. Tonight, we saw the sky burn. That is why I am here. I come to offer refuge to you last three."

"Keep your refuge!" snapped Williams. "Get out, we'll shift for ourselves!"

"But—"

"We're doing okay," said Jones.

"It sure took you long enough," said Williams. "Why didn't you come down months ago and face up to us, you lousy cowards? Were you afraid? Scared witless, I bet. Right, Comfort? Right, Jones?"

"Right!"

"What you afraid of?" Williams walked a stumbling circle around the Martian, fingering the blue silks that covered the thin body, looking him up and down swiftly. "Us? By Saturn, you should be! We're *Earth!* Earthmen Best in the universe! Best damn men anywhere, if any men are left, which I doubt! What are *you*?" He snorted. "Man or woman? Let's see behind your mask. I hate people running around in masks!"

The Martian stepped back. "I've come to help you survivors."

"How'd you learn our language? Telepathy? Sneaking all these months, prying at our minds? Sure!" Williams spat. "Well, we're doing no surviving for you, mister. We're well-adjusted, college-graduated gentlemen; we don't want a thing from you!"

"But is there nothing I can do?"

"Get out," said Comfort. "I'm feeling damn mean."

"More than that." Jones hit one fist into the wet palm of his other hand. "I'm mad and I feel sick. I feel a whole lot I can't say. Don't *push* me, mister."

Comfort thought, we've got to stop. We're rushing somewhere, to something bad, I've got to stop it. We're insane. This Martian can't be here, we've made him up out of our being scared and angry and frustrated. We've got to stop and—

The Martian moved his hands.

"We Martians, too, endured much in our time. We learned wisdom. We turned away from atomic power before it destroyed us. We survive today with libraries, towns, mosaics, fountains—"

"Pretty proud, aren't you?" Williams slapped his gun holster. "Pretty big for your britches. Don't rub it in, mister. Don't say you're here and our friends aren't. A thousand of you left while all our men are gone. Don't give us that kind of talk, you—"

"One must be philosophical," the Martian responded quietly. "Civilizations, planets, rise and fall, some luckier than others. Weapons are bad. On Mars we've used no weapons for ten thousand years."

"Get out," said Williams.

They all felt very nervous and warm. Their mouths twitched and their eyes blinked.

The Martian shrugged. "You are welcome to live in our city. A delightful place; a rose, a jewel, all colors at night, hidden in the hills, lit for the first time tonight because the danger is past. You must see our little gem of a city, its green lawns, its fountains rising and misting the soft air, the children laughing on the blue mosaic promenades, the people drinking rare wines in the villa patios, the women golden, the men handsome in bronze masks, the music singing; all of this you must see."

COMFORT, Jones, and Williams moved stiffly forward, their faces rigid.

The Martian named the places. They must visit the deep fount pools where colored inks mixed into patterns every second, they must see the flame pictures in the walls, burning and changing. They must climb the crystal minarets where flowers ten centuries old bloomed forever and forever as delicate as white children, as warm, as tender. They must hear the music composed fifty thousand years ago, played on instruments all wire and wind and memory and porcelain throat . . .

The three men swayed. The land seemed to melt. Their eyes were fixed wide and their faces were wet.

"Shut up," said Williams.

The Martian opened his mouth.

"I warn you, stop!" said Williams.

The Martian gestured, his voice quiet.

"All right," said Williams.

He drew his gun and fired.

The mask burst into smoking flinders, sparks, fragments. The Martian fell into a soft ruin of veil and body.

Comfort drew his gun and fired into the inert mass. Jones pushed the bundle together and let it fall into the canal waters.

"Now," Williams held his gun tightly. His eyes were bright, his voice was quick. "Where's that town he was talking about?"

The three men nodded at each other.

"We'll find it," they said.

They climbed into their rocket.

"My college was U.C.L.A.," said Comfort, at the rocket controls. They drifted north over the low blue hills. Peering from their rocket windows, they scanned the deep valleys.

"I went to Michigan," said Williams.

"Good old Michigan," said Jones. "I went to S.C. Have a drink on that."

Their mouths were pressed tight. They all felt hot and excited as if something big was going to happen any minute.

We can't do it, thought Comfort, we can't go on. This is crazy and terrible, I'm intelligent, I won't put up with it, I'm educated not to act this way, not at all. I've got to stop it.

He said nothing.

"See anything below?" asked Williams.

"I'm looking." Comfort licked his rough lips. "I'm looking hard."

"When you find it, just let us know."

"Three college men, that's a laugh."

"What's college?"

"I don't know."

"An institution with a campus in a city on Earth."

"What's an institution, what's a campus, what's a city, what's Earth?"

"Atoms."

"Some day I'm going to go back and see what my old Alma Mater looks like."

"Charcoal and sulphur, mummy-dust, ashes, smoke and cinders."

"Good old Michigan; have a drink?"

"Shut up!"

They peered from the rocket ports and blinked.

"There's the city," said Comfort. He smiled.

They all looked.

They all began to smile.

"Well, well," said Jones.

They landed the silver rocket.

They stepped out into the middle of a town where men in bronze masks escorted women in emerald mists. Children ran all about, laughing. Fountains pulsed high into the cool night air. Everything was the color of a rose, of a gardenia, of a water flower, diffusing, shifting. There was fine music playing somewhere. It was a calm night and

the air was washed with freshness. Everybody was happy. A cotillion was being danced, people were gliding behind a blue crystal window. Flowers grew, grass was very green. In libraries, people sat with ancient books, playing them like harps so that ancient voices sang old knowledge in the sweet stillness.

The city hardly knew the rocket had landed.

Those who saw the rocket port swing open had time only to turn, to smile behind their masks.

"Now," said Comfort, with his machine gun.

"Now," said Jones.

"Now," cried Williams.

They pressed the triggers of their three guns.

BULLETS KICKED towers down in dazzling, clattering heaps. Bullets struck fountains and shattered them into floods of sound and broken pumpings. The three men turned and turned, firing the bullets out. And everywhere lanterns exploded, drapes fell, dancing stopped, music blew apart, glass pillars and walls and stones were uprooted! One tower at which Williams fired jumped out into a million crystals and flowered down like a giant butterfly, with a glass roar and a kind of music. There was nothing solid in the city, bullets touched and did away with all. Masks were punctured, the population lay like fallen grain. Explosions followed one upon another. The Martians did not cry out. They stood where they were.

The bullets sought and silenced, sought again, until source after source, music after music was put asunder, dances spoiled, libraries turned into red fire.

The three men's faces were intent and half smiling.

In the silence, they reloaded their guns and fired again.

"There's a tower we missed!"

They all aimed at it.

"Watch it! A man's escaping!"

They cut him down.

"Music's still playing!"

One last musical instrument, a recording perhaps, played from one of the crystal terraces.

They experimented with their guns until the music ceased.

The city was quiet.

One last tinkle of glass fell.

Then, only the warm, consuming sound of the burning libraries, the lifting wings of

light and color and warmth into the blue air.

Their guns were hot and empty.

They walked out of the city, sweating, tired.

They didn't say anything.

THEY stopped and looked back at all of it where it lay strewn and cluttered. They wiped their lips.

They swabbed out their eyes, blinking rapidly, dazedly, weakly, dully. They held their guns drooping in their hands. They pulled out a final bottle and had a raw hot drink of it and suddenly were so tired they could not walk.

They fell down upon the sand of the sea and lay there, eyes shut.

"Jonesy, Jonesy, Jonesy," Williams began to wail in the long night. "Jonesy?"

"What?"

"Have a drink?"

"Don't mind."

"Here."

They all drank thirstily, spilling it on their dirty uniforms, hands greasy with sweat. The night wind was cold.

"I guess we showed them."

"You bet, you bet, you bet we did!"

Comfort held his head in his hands. "Williams, you didn't say yet, you didn't tell me your answer."

"What?"

They did not move. The night was very dark.

"You didn't say whether you'd marry me, Williams?"

"Oh."

"And we will all the pleasures prove, Willie; we *got* to have seven children to start the new world."

"Sure, sure," said Williams, tired. "The new world. *Ten* children."

"Jones will marry us, won't you, Jonesy old man? You'll be parson, right, Jonesy?"

"Sure, sure."

"That's a boy," said Comfort. "Did you *hear* that, Williams?"

"I heard it. Shut up and go to sleep now, I'll marry you in the morning."

"Promise?"

His voice was high and far away and pleading.

"I promise, yes!"

"Because I need you, Willie, oh, how I need you, I'm so scared!"

"Yeah, sure, I know. Go to sleep. Tired. Tired."

They all shut their eyes and lay in the cold sand.

"Pleasant dreams," said Jones.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

in it you can look up quickly such things as the escape velocity of Neptune, the name of Jupiter's third satellite, the reflecting power of the earth or the exact length of the Martian day. Such facts are annoyingly hard to dig up when you need one in a hurry—and what science fiction and space-travel addict does not?

All this and Bonestell too! Can you afford not to own it?

To which we can offer only a hearty Amen. *THE CONQUEST OF SPACE* is beyond question the most magnificent publishing achievement in science fiction history. We recently had occasion to talk to Mr. Ley about his gorgeous collaboration. In the course of the talk we mentioned the fact that we were having a difficult time retaining possession of our review copy.

Mr. Ley sighed and said, "I know—I've had a half dozen copies lifted myself."

Once in possession you may have to become a hermit to keep the book—but take it from us it's worth it.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

MMURRAY LEINSTER once more steps into the lead-off spot in the April TWS with a brilliant display of his inventive genius in *PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN*, a short novel which may well be destined for Hall of Fame honors at some future date. For this is Leinster at his best in a story of incredible space-spanning and the unbelievable creatures to be found on distant worlds.

Its action—and there is action aplenty—occurs in an era when men have mastered interstellar distances as well as themselves and are engaged in utterly peaceful exploration of the galaxy. They travel in yachts rather than destroyers and their interest lies not in conquest but in learning of the existence of far suns and planets and the things, living and dead, upon them.

The *Carintha* is such a ship of peaceful exploration. It is piloted by Lon Howel and the company includes his fiancee, Caryl, her father, a noted botanist, and Burton, a noted interplanetary hunter. They are enjoying their jaunt through the spaceways when suddenly they are attacked by a ship from an ugly yellow planet, pursued through overdrive to another distant globe and shot down.

But they do not crash. Some unforeseen force slows the fall of the damaged spacecraft and they escape its wreckage just in time to avoid annihilation by an atomic

missile fired by their pursuer. They are trapped in a hopeless situation.

And then they discover or are discovered by the very human inhabitants of their new planet. Pygmies they are in size but it quickly becomes apparent that, descended from man's common ancestor, they have developed far beyond in culture, in science and, ultimately, in courage.

Their life is simple and casual but their devices are such as to keep the Earthly visitors goggle-eyed. And when the destroyers from the yellow planet return in force, bent on destruction, their methods of defense are as unusual as they are effective.

If you want to know how a garbage disposal unit can be used to check an atomic attack, how compressed air can be used for flight, how television can be used to conquer both time and space—you'll want to read this story. It is Murray Leinster in top vein—which is enough said.

James Blish takes over one of the novelet spots with *THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS*, a terrifying tale of lycanthropy (werewolfism to you) and its effect upon folk of today, gathered in an isolated country estate. His explanation of the phenomenon is as ingenious as his motivation and characterization are sound.

We have not run a story about lycanthropy in many years—not because we have not wished to but because the bulk of such stories submitted have been unbelievable to the point of the ridiculous. In *THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS* Mr. Blish has come up with a magnificent exception to this all-too-definitive rule.

Our second novelet should be, to many readers, the outstanding story of the issue, if not of many. *JOURNEY FOR SEVEN* by John D. MacDonald, whose new full length novel to appear in the May issue of our companion magazine, *STARTLING STORIES*, may well be the stf novel of the year, is a very different type of science fiction story.

It involves the driver and passengers of a battered bus who happen to be passing an atomic power plant when something goes a little wrong. They receive a full charge of the unpredictable power with some very astonishing results. Their reactions to a strange mutation and their effect upon society make this a powerful and welcome novelty in the field of pseudo science.

There shall be shorts—of course and in

ample quantity as well as quality. It is our humble opinion that, for the past couple of years, our briefer tales have been on a high level that we at any rate never knew in the past. And from recent purchases it does not appear that any letdown is in prospect. For which we bow humbly toward Mecca each sundown.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

WE drew another prize parcel of sweet peas and shillelahs via the U. S. Mail—some silly, many thoughtful, a few downright provocative. The poetasters seem to be back in considerable puissance and on the whole the crop seems a rich one. So here goes—

GOOD OLD DAYS ROOTER by Roger N. Dard

Dear Ed: I usually leave it up to the editor of a science fiction magazine to decide how to run his magazine, he being better qualified than I in this respect. But for once I'm going to stick my neck out, and offer you a few suggestions, which maybe you would consider:

(1) Revive the Science Fiction League. This has been asked for before, and I am adding my voice to those other readers' who have requested the reappearance of SFL. In view of the tremendous fan activity in almost every country can you doubt that the SFL would be a success?

(2) Give us a Quarterly. I still get nostalgic when I think of the old Wonder Quarterlies.

(3) Give us more science fiction stories set right here on earth, in our own day. A story does not have to be a thousand years into the future, on another planet, to be good science fiction. Such a classic as "The Island of Dr. Moreau" would have been no more enthralling if it had been set on, say, Venus. Too much modern stf is ultra-technical, and full of philosophical double-talk. The oldtime writers had terrific imagination, and could weave an imaginative yarn around a comparatively prosaic subject. We had stories of monstrous plant growths, strange biological experiments and the like. So let's have more stories of monsters in the New York subway (no cracks, you straphangers) and less of monsters on Mars.

(4) An article each issue, on a well-known fan, would go well. "The Adventures of Ackerman," "The Saga of Sneary"—need I go on?

From some of the above suggestions you have probably gathered that I am a rooter for the "good old days." Yes, I am. So much so, I would even like you to delete the word "Thrilling" from your title, and revert back to "Wonder Stories." With all due respect to the present publishers, who have done a really wonderful job, don't you think a title that was good enough for the great Gernback should also be good enough for you? However, I guess it is a little late in the day to start objecting to your title which is now over a decade old.

I can't agree with those fans who are always complaining about Bergery's covers. I like. However, just as a change could we have a really horrific bug-eyed monster gracing the next cover? I'm all for gory gaudy covers.—232 James Street, Perth, Western Australia.

Well, we've heard of fans living on or off authors before, Mr. Dard, but aren't you just a trifle blatant about subsisting on poor Jimmy Street?

Kidding aside, let's take up your queries in order. No, we won't revive the SFL, if only to annoy you. Yes, you are going to get your quarterly of old WS material as announced *déjà*. Yes, we have for some time been trying to hook our stf stories to the present—but when we get a good one that isn't so hooked we're darned if we'll

turn it down for that reason only. As for the fanprofile idea—all we can say is, "GGGGaaaaaHHHHH!"

You'll get a good clean shot at your "good old days" when the new quarterly puts in its appearance next month. Let us know how you like it.

STF BREAKDOWN by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: Well, here I am again. Grin and bear it. Mighty Man Smith is here to stay. Guess what? I have finally developed your super duper stf character . . . not one but three of 'em. All I have to do is write a story about 'em.

Thanks to you for printing R. H. Harding's letter. I sent him a couple of mags. We are now corresponding. He saw my letter in the Apr. ish and wrote me first. Good ole TWS. If you were a beautiful blonde I'd make violent love to you—but you're only a pulpy mag so all I can do is read you. Yak. Yak.

THE GARDENER by Maggie St. Clair was very good. This gal has improved. Don't ever let her bring Oona and Jick back. PARADOX by Edwin James was also great. In fact it was better than the Bradbury story. Who cares, anyway? Writers are human beans just like everyone else. No writer can turn out masterpiece after masterpiece—in fact, stories have to stand on their own merit, regardless of who wrote them, and since it is largely a matter of personal taste, what's the use of comparing stories?

Mind if I make some predictions? In a few days or weeks or months someone else will say it anyway—so I might as well say it now.

Science-fiction (read carefully) will one day be the greatest literary field of them all. The signs have been many. The detective story has fallen to pieces. Thomas Thursday admits it. John D. MacDonald who used to grind out dozens of detective stories has switched to stf. Anthony Boucher has switched to stf and is co-editor of a new stf mag. The whole stf field is getting healthier. All because of a new trend in thinking. People are gradually realizing that there is no need to keep their imaginations hampered by a lot of superstitions, rules and fears.

The stf field is a background field unlike the limited western and detective fields. For instance, any kind of science-fiction story can be written. Someday, the stf field will no doubt break up into different sections:

THE ADVENTURE SCIENCE-FICTION STORY: A type of material written by Brackett and a few others. Adventure stories with science or fantasy backgrounds.

THE DETECTIVE SCIENCE-FICTION STORY: In which the detective shall chase his criminals against a stf background with stf action and adventure.

THE WEIRD SCIENCE-FICTION STORY: A type of blood-chilling literature with a science-fiction background. Stories like THE GARDENER, et al.

THE LOVE SCIENCE-FICTION STORY: Believe it or not, people in the future will have emotions and love stories with a stf background would sell to a limited field.

THE SLICK SCIENCE-FICTION STORY: Stories of the type now in Satevepost. TWS, SS will probably be tops in this material which will be a mixture of all the other specialized fields. The stories will be of the Bradbury type or somewhere near.

Besides the five mentioned, there will be other specialized fields. The whole science-fiction market is like one big gravy train—for readers, writers and publishers. (Editors too—I guess.) Eventually, there will probably be stf movies, video shows (television) and everything else. The stf novel is already finding its market.

TRS is getting better all the time. I especially enjoyed Ann Nelson's letter. She thinks that stories of space-ships, gods, etc. are possible history seen through the writer's psychic powers. I would say—not history but something else. At the risk of being called names, I would like to say that all possible worlds exist, each variable world existing from this one—separated by an extradiimensional abyss.

So there are worlds in which Dopelle is actually a master of space and which everything conceivable and every adventure conceivable is taking place. These worlds however are separated from ours by the abyss which is an absence of space and time, both. Material objects could not span the abyss, but the mind might. To do so, however, it would have to achieve a "materiallessness" (is that the right word?) and a "timelessness." This is not as easy as you might think. Since it is not only of the conscious mind but also of the subconscious.

You might scoff at the theory of all possible variable worlds existing. But remember who said: I think, therefore—I am. The human mind is not limited to space, time or even reality as everyone knows.

Oops, I almost forgot. I'm writing a story about the

variable-world theory and how a lot of people have spanned it with the subconscious mind (through their emotions, etc.) but only one jerk ever got through with his conscious and subconscious. If the Editor can tell what movie he's going to see I can tell what story I'm going to write. 6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Del.

An extremely intriguing letter after the first two lamentable paragraphs, Richard. We have a strong hunch you're right on the future of stf. However, you're a trifle slow on some of your predictions. We can recall stf movies going all the way back to Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS and Will Rogers' ONE GLORIOUS DAY, both of which are more than twenty-five years old. And there have been scores of others both before and since. How about the Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon serials, to say nothing of those two Wells epics, THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME and THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES?

There are already close to a half-dozen television stf or fantasy shows on the visiscreen at present with more promised. As it happens on this very day John Crosby of the New York Herald Tribune devotes his entire column to one Captain Video, "electronic wizard, master of time and space and guardian of the safety of the world." Real cliff-hanger stuff.

As for your "all possible worlds" theory—well, we've got to be shown. But confidentially we have such a story in the works ourselves at the moment. Let's have a look at yours.

COLE COMFORT by Les & Es Cole

Cher Petit: Wha hoppen, bub, you wanna fight? Item: What science-fiction editor got up on the wrong side of the bed? You realize that in attacking our little squib—you're leading with your chin and science-fiction editors notoriously have glass jaws!

The point is, in view of your having thrown down the gauntlet, are we to be allowed to pick it up, or are we merely to serve as fools for thy rapier wit? Having come in the last two years, to respect and admire thee, we shall proceed on the former assumption. Prithee, sir, prepare for your joust.

First of all regarding the manuscript(s), unfortunately the senior author is at present busily engaged in writing a thesis, so all science-fiction projects are temporarily postponed. Heh, heh—of course, we could send you a copy of the thesis, but no amount of remuneration will pay for that saga of blood, sweat and tears. Besides, we doubt if your readers would be interested in "The Geology of a Portion of the Morgan Valley and Rumsey Quadrangles, California". But come September and acceptance by the thesis committee (Interject here one loud noise of crossed fingers!), there will commence a flow of at least five manuscripts for you to reject.

This confusion about the meaning of science-fiction may be directly attributed to an old gent named Aristotle. We speak the same language but we mean different things.

Our definition of science-fiction is that it "is the logical projection of scientific endeavor into imagined although possible or even probable situations." (See also Cole, L. and Cole, E.: "SFTPOBEMOTCOSP AGAIN". Bull.SS. V18:1, September, 1948, Pp 129-130). It's readily apparent that our ideas on science-fiction differ radically. However, YOU are the editor.

So to the attack. We find, with a slight shaver of horror that you are taking the same stand on modern science as that fanatic to the west. Burn the books, boys! There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight while we roast scientists over the flames. Hoo, hal Listen! Get this straight—and this goes for everyone else in the ranks—you can doubt scientific

doctrines, truth, publications etc., to your heart's content. Only when you doubt, do so on a tangible and not emotional basis. Merely saying you don't believe something is not enough; you have to show why you don't believe it.

We are so damned sick of having people—with that triumphant look in their eye—tell us about the "long chances in scientific history paying off at far better than track odds". Granted, it's happened. It's happened in every field. But 99.44% of scientific advance is nothing but some guy (or gal) sweating his guts out, enduring ulcers as an occupational hazard of microscopy, blowing off a few fingers playing with Cl₂O₇ or developing cataracts because of atomic research.

Let's not carry this thing too far. OK, so you don't believe that the radius of the Cd ion is 0.97 x 10⁻⁴ cm. Nertz! A lot of men do. You drive a car, doncha? Get ice-cubes for that scotch out of a refrigerator? Get to a doctor fast when something goes wrong? You bet you do! I use objects and the doctors didn't arrive at a present state of efficiency because of a shaky scientific foundation.

Sure, scientists are often wrong. But the world you live in was evolved because scientists are more often right. (May we digress just a moment to point out that we are not defending the merits of our mechanistic society. We merely use it as an example 'cause it does exist. Notice the lack of the adjectives "good" or "bad.") So there!

Just a bit more discussion is needed here. (a) We not only think it "most unlikely" but definitely unlikely "that anything even faintly resembling ourselves should be found on other planets" in this solar system. That goes for all 2nd order evolution life forms and possibly most 1st order too. We've a firm basis for that belief (including, among other things, 22 units of upper division and graduate paleo) and will cheerfully give our reasons if so challenged. Our so-called scientific training forces us to concede a slight possibility in the matter, but heck, we'll also concede a slight—very slight—possibility in the matter of Atlantis.

(b) You may question the ecological possibilities of a Neanderthal wench—YOU are the editor—but we don't. Compared to the four-armed, eight-eyed (and bloodshot!), orange colored, befanged, oozing, drooling, amorphous blob of monstrosity we'll find on Planet X, this solar system, that Neanderthaloid wench will be a beauty. How the devil you could prefer fried octopus is something we don't understand. Seriously, the Neanders weren't all the hulking brutes our s-f boys have made them out to be, and some of 'em—the ones (Owl!) the senior author (Ouch!) would pick (Ouch! Honey! Stop!) out—would fit quite nicely into a "world dedicated to the various and sundry 'feminine daintinesses' of our advertisers".

The stories this month: "Hibited Man" (de Camp), "Planet Makers" (Hubbard), and "Paradox" (James) in that order. After the third attempt on the second page, we gave up on the story "Lake of Gone Forever". Whew! Whatta bromine that gave off.

Oh, yeah! Was ist das wort "approbrious"? Couldn't find it in Funk and Wagnalls or Roget's. Were you callin' us doity names? Our most enjoyable hobby, next to America's most popular indoor sport, is collecting words, so, if you please, give.—1616 Costa Avenue, Richmond, California.

Well—heck! We seem to have bought something. Just to put the carte before the horsemeat, however, the word was opprobrious—originally at any rate. You'll find that one in your lexicon. And frankly we used the fried octopus simile as an expression of violent—but violent—distaste. However, disguised as *calameres* it continues on the menu of our favorite Mexican restaurant.

Furthermore we have no intention of denying the virtual nil possibilities of discovering human or humanoid forms on alien globes. But as long as the possibility, however faint, remains not disproved we shall continue to count it in the realm of the possible. It would raise unholy hob with both writers and stories otherwise.

As for the semantic confusion—you are scientists first, writers second at present. We are editor-writer first and scientist far behind. Hence the diametric opposition of

our angles of approach to stf. But we have a hunch that, as in a dimly remembered story by Frank R. Stockton, the smallest giant and the largest dwarf will turn out to be exactly the same size—that of an ordinary man.

By the time this appears we sincerely hope the thesis is a thing of the triumphant past and the stories are pouring in.

DIVINE DESTRUCTION

by Ann B. Nelson

Honorable Editor: The Les & Es Cole letter, wondering "how in the name of Le Bon Dieu" you print what you print—sounds like no little conceit in that family. They've got it all! How dare they pose such a question? Personally, if I didn't like the way you run your business, I'd save my quarters.

They should learn something about how delicate the balance of life is too—it can exist under the most trying horrible conditions and continue so for eons without even committing suicide. Delicate? It's very raw in spots—in case you've lived on the borderline so long you've forgotten.

Just now the Coles seem rather raw too. They will have to know someone pretty close to Le Bon Dieu to produce better than LIKE A KEEPSAKE or SEA KINGS OF MARS and I'll have them boiled in hog oil if they don't. Remember, Les & Es, "those whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad"—and you've said you were mad, which of course nullifies your elaborate if nil opinions.

Now, getting out of that murky atmosphere—I find myself looking forward to the James Blish story, LET THE FINDER BEWARE. By the way, can you whisper what his real name is? Or give me his initials?—2702 Melbourne Street, Houston 16, Texas.

Gladly, Ann. His name is James Blish, his initials J. B.—no kidding. He's an ex-G.I., married, who lives on Staten Island. And a good imaginative writer too. Hope you enjoyed LTFB in the December issue as much as you looked forward to enjoying it.

As for the rest of your missive—why don't you and the Coles have it out between you? We love all three of you.

POST-PUERILE

by Donald V. Allgeier

Dear Editor: I used to be a steady reader of both your publications. Then, a few years ago, I got pretty busy and had to cut down on my science-fiction reading. The TWS stories struck me as being rather puerile, so I didn't renew my subscription.

Why this letter then? Well, the magic name of A. E. van Vogt lured me back and I found that the magazines had changed for the better. Oh, of course, there are still quite a few stories that are an insult to the intelligence, but a fairly decent proportion of thought-provoking and well-written stories seems to be appearing.

I am not yet ready to subscribe again (I'm pretty busy working on my Ph. D.) but I am buying quite a few copies on the stands. I go pretty largely by the names of the authors and the authors I look for are van Vogt, Leigh Brackett, Kuttner and Bradbury. Has Bradbury ever done anything in the longer (novelet) story?

"The Weapon Shops of Isher" was fine, though with some typical van Vogt obscurities. For example, it wasn't too clear to me just why the Empress felt herself so defeated. However, I enjoyed it immensely. It ranks with the rest of the series. The title was quite unimaginative—too similar to the first story, "The Weapon Shops."

I was interested to note the readers' comments on this story. Most of your readers admittedly couldn't follow the story. However, I hope you'll continue to print similar yarns anyway, in accordance with your promise not to "slant" the stories.

"Sea-Kings of Mars" is Brackett at her best. It's very reminiscent of Burroughs in its adventurous sequences and Merritt or Moore in fantasy. I regard Brackett as the leading feminine practitioner, since C. L. Moore seems not to be writing. "Lake of the Gone Forever" is equally fine. If I

didn't know better I'd think L. B. really was Catherine Moore.

Why is it that these marriages of authors seem to result in one partner's doing all the writing? Kuttner is prolific while C. L. Moore is silent. Of course, she may have a hand in his stories. Leigh Brackett is writing but husband Edmond Hamilton isn't turning out much work. He should. His stories in recent years have been splendid. Then there's van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull. Hull, too, seems to be letting her husband do all the writing. Can't there be two successes in one family?

In your October number I am glad to see de Camp and Cartmill as well as Wellman, Hubbard, and old reliable Bradbury. Quite a lineup. West is not bad in the lead position.

I'm not crazy about Kuttner's Hogbens but they're better than your other series. I'll never know why some of the poorest sets of characters have to be perpetuated in a series. Yes, I'm getting around to Oona and Jick. I'll never read another of those, even if I do buy the magazine they're in. They're just plain silly if "The Himalachalet" is a fair sample.

As for Orig Prem, all I can say is the skunks in the recent story are just like the stories. They certainly have an odor in common. If Miller's stories are humorous then let's go back to serious stuff for good. Such tired jokes and terrible puns! And the stories are just plain boring and disgusting. I certainly hope you don't print any more. "Monsters from the West" hit a new low for the magazine.

On the other hand Jones' "Alien Machine" deserved a sequel and I'm glad to see it's getting several.

If this story dwells overmuch in the past it's because now, during vacation, was the first chance I had had to read the last three or four issues. At least I get a sort of perspective. So I say, the novels are usually very good. The short stories range from hack and painful attempts at humor to really good yarns.

As I said in the beginning, I think the magazine is on the right track and is improving right along. But don't you think it would be more consistent with the adult level of your fiction and your excellent readers' column if you would cut out the cheese cake in the illustrations?—1851 Gerrard Avenue, Columbus 12, Ohio.

Glad you're back with us. As for Ed Hamilton, he is very definitely still writing and still writing very well indeed. He has been slowed up this past year by the lingering illness and ultimate death of his father.

But he has been far from idle in stf. We recently purchased from him a very fine piece of Hamilton entitled THE CITY AT WORLD'S END, which will appear as a novel in SS later this year. Also two novelets for the revived Captain Future in the same magazine—both of them grand of their type.

Mrs. Moore-Kuttner has some stories in work for us as well as for her usual markets. As for Mrs. Hull-van Vogt, we'd like to see her by-line if she chooses to send it to us.

The Jones series is a honey, *n'est-ce pas*? We also have a gorgeous novelet by him, SUNDAY IS THREE MILLION YEARS AWAY, scheduled for early publication in one of the magazines and he has a STARTLING STORIES novel on the way. So perhaps you won't feel so badly about Oona, Jick and Orig Prem. And we thought they were pretty darned funny. Oh, well. . . .

ALBANY A-BOMB

by Marion "Zarathustra" Zimmer

Dear Editor: Whaddya mean, "La Zimmer is a former contributor to TRS"? I, La Zimmer, have written to THE READER SPEAKS and THE ETHER VIBRATES every month since I began reading either. I thought you just didn't love me any more (boo-hoo) since you wouldn't print my letters! Come to think of it I did miss two months but that's be-

cause I was sick . . . and when I did come back to fandom I found out I was only a has-been!

However (if I regain my place in your charmed circle), the reason for this letter is a vast huzzah for your statement that "the whole concept of science fiction is that of fantasy or legend—with the magic wand replaced by super-electronic theory or some equivalent!"

In the same line I want to mention (and disagree with) Don Nardizzi, who dislikes stories in which a great part is played by an archaic sword. Why not? After all the sword lasted for perhaps 30 centuries of known history. Other weapons—pistols, etc.—have been known only since about 1500—and did not replace the sword till the late 1700's.

In 1745 the Scottish soldier's weapon was his claymore—in the charge at Preston (which routed the English in five minutes) the Scottish clans fired one round—then threw away their guns and charged with swords.

Then, too, the sword is better adapted to fiction, since firearms are not a highly personal weapon. Any fool can pull a trigger. But (and most fiction stories depict one character overcoming obstacles) the sword is the weapon adapted to personal skill. Anyone who has ever studied either fencing or broadsword-play knows this.

Because the sword is the weapon of personal skill the sword can also become the symbol of integrity—the steel of the sword referring to the steel of strength and character. "So help me heaven and my good blade" is the best demonstration of the old adage that "Heaven helps those who help themselves."

Besides, though Nardizzi may consider that a story about a magic sword is silly—a story about a magic pistol would be sillier yet. Wouldn't it now?—YMCA Building, 5 Lodge Street, Albany, New York.

All we can say is—don't get sick again, Marion. We miss 'em. As for your favorite weapon—well, you've given us an idea. We shall try to translate it into fiction before you read this. Frankly, however, in our opinion, sword-bearing chivalry died at Fontenoy—which also occurred in 1745.

That was the engagement in which, with the French and Allied-English armies drawn up facing each other fifty yards apart, a French officer stepped forward and said, "Gentlemen of England, fire first." The English retaliated in kind but the French finally won the Alphonse-Gaston duel and the British fired the first volley—only to lose the engagement to the sedan-chaired Marshal Saxe. Possibly the French won because they were more polite. We never could figure it out. But nobody ever tried that trick again against gunpowder. And your Scots got the tar whaled out of them later that year at Culloden.

WOT—NO CLINKERS?

by John W. Jakes

Dear Ed: The October issue was consistently good. No world-beaters present but no utter clinkers, either. Here we go with the race results in the TWS derby:

1. KALEIDOSCOPE. Excellent. Sure is swell how Ray can get away with no plot (in the physical-conflict sense of the word) and come up with the little miracles he produces. Primarily a work of philosophy, RB did a good job of cataloging the death-emotions of man, a hard task for a living writer. (Some writers, though, might do a good job, since their stf prose of beams-beams-and-bosoms is ready for the graveyard.) Very neat ending. Satisfying. All in all, a thought-provoking piece of much ado about something called death.

2. THE PLANET MAKERS. Yoicks! Ring the bells and beat the drums. An stf story with some really fine characterization. Sleepy, Doyle, Tommer and the rest, all different personalities working for their own ends. A very ordinary plot turned into a cracking good yarn by a masterful delineation of character. L. Ron should be proud of this one purely from the point of style.

3. THE LURE OF POLARIS. Best idea in the book. Nice epic sweep to the plot, plenty of room for the characters to move around in. All the elements—world doom, passion, queer entities, dictators and men's self-redemption. Unfor-

tunately, though, WW's characterization comes quite near to George O. Smith's wooden-Indian people. Not quite as bad, however. Occasional good flashes of character show promise. Note, however, the way Hubbard's PLANET MAKERS has a name for each character that actually fits the personality. West's names seem merely dug out of a hat and tacked on for-the-hell-of-it. Still, good entertainment.

4. COLD WAR. Not too much of a laugh-riot but very clever, especially the twist ending. This style of writing intrigues me. If anyone told me a writer could combine backwoods dialect and stf, I'd have said they were crazy. But HK did a good job. By the way, I just sneezed. I can feel of Junior Pugh writhing around inside me, drat his stinkin' hide.

5. THE GARDENER. St. Clair style holding up well as usual, putting this yarn fifth. But it doesn't belong in stf. Change a few words here and there, and presto—a nice ghost story. But with no plain fantasy mags on the market where can the little lost stories like THE GARDENER go?

6. THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER. One of the first Leinster stories I've actually enjoyed. Colorful writing with swashbuckling trappings thrown in. Good.

7. THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER. Egad, how did Queen Leigh get way down here? The story was too short to do justice to her style and the secret of the Lake of the G-F seemed like a wet firecracker. Bad slip for my favorite author.

8. THE HIBITED MAN. Not de Camp's usual funny style. The third chapter was the best but the whole confusion, ended much too soon, should be billed thus—Olsen & Johnson present L. S. de Camp's new laugh riot, "Inhibitions a-Poppin'." Not good, not bad. Good way to waste some time.

9. HIGH JACK AND DAME. Technically good story, with some attempt at characterization but not particularly inspiring. I prefer Brackett's Martian women with the little bells in their ears and her outcast blood-stained heroes to the clank-clunk of Cartmill's salvage squad.

10. PARADOX. Well-written but an awfully old theme.

11. BACKWARD. OH TIME! Passable idea, bad writing. The "visitor's" identity was obvious after the first page.

Well, that's that. Illustrations nice, especially Astarita. Napoli must have come up with those new art styles you referred to in answer to my first letter. I liked his work this time.

But please, no more baby-blue covers. I'm liable to pick up Children's Activities instead of TWS. Aloha.—5300 Glenwood Avenue, Chicago 40, Illinois.

Nobody can ever predict our covers with any assurance, John. But nobody! As for the rest, write us again when the mood seizes you.

OOPS—POEM!

by Dan Hetrick

Dear Ed: Gad! What innovations are being made in cover design! First one of your competitors revolutionizes things by doing in the hero—now on the October cover of TWS a heroine is plunging to certain death. Soon the covers will become the scenes of bloody massacres, with the survivors hacking the editors to liddle pieces to feed to the BEMs. This would make the BEMs violently ill and the hero could kill the BEMs at his leisure.

Only trouble with this setup is—who would get TWS out on time?

Seriously the cover this ish is better than usual and the stories are superb, especially THE LURE OF POLARIS and PARADOX. Keep up the good work, Ed., and TWS will land on top of the heap. Which reminds me of a poem by Grantland Rice called THE ANSWER. . . .

When battle breaks against you
And the crowd forgets to cheer,
When the anvil chorus echoes
With the ess nce of a jeer,
When the knockers begin panning
In the knockers' nimble way,
With a rap for all your errors
And a josh upon your play,
There is one reply forthcoming
That will wipe away the sting,
There is one quick answer ready
That will nail them on the wing,
There is one elastic comeback
That will hold them as it should,
Make good.

Sorry to use so much space, pliz excuse.—386 Duke Street, Northumberland, Pennsylvania.

Grantland Rice yet! Who's on first, what's on second and all that! Well, there's only one answer that will hold him. So here goes—

*When Dan pulls the Hetrick on us
And feeds us to the BEMs
Who are lurking in the foothills
Like too-vivid delir-trems
When he would upset the setup
And our covers would decry
And get us all too het-up
With his insults far from sly
In re our October cover
But one answer can we make
It wasn't Brackett's heroine
Who was pushed into the lake
'Twas her mother!*

Which is giving you and the venerable but still very spry Grant Rice a pretty full run for your money. Okay?

INDULGENCE

by Robyn le Roy

Dear Editor: With your indulgence I should like to express a thought or two about your entertaining magazines. Noting HIBITED MAN, LURE OF POLARIS, COLD WAR and such I became aware that scientists are looking more fervently to the Realm of Mind for their literary escape without the need for a Holmes, Tarzan or Superman to wield the cudgel of right.

Unless I am in error the increasing number of sf stories which supply drama, tragedy and even comedy through recourse to the "psychological" theme indicates a growing tendency of the buying public to seek (even though it be indirectly through escape fiction) the type of entertainment most nearly representative of their unconscious desires for less thalamic reaction and more logical reasoning.

If this is so it would appear that no para-normal mortal character would capture the reader's imagination as much as would (or should I say "has") a way of social thinking—the aptly named Nutt-A philosophy of semantic reasoning? Such a fictionalized philosophic field offers by way of literary relaxation all the potentials of mystery, art, pseudo-educational writings, religion and sociology without the gravity implied by the latter pair and sans the burdensome weight of philosophy and pure reason.

In other words perhaps the "new" situation for which Ye Ed claims to be waiting is here—not as a new character but as a new concept of social thought.

Now to other things—and I hope I'm better versed in what I'm going to say than in what I've just said. This correspondent would muchly enjoy a good educational feature per issue. You know, an article each issue offering a generalized text on some phase of scientific knowledge or research, either serialized or packaged. And with many different fields covered over a period of time, with the fans' preference receiving the most detailed attention.

Openmindedness and imagination are the common factors of mind that sell WS for you. And those two qualities are seldom found where the thirst for wider knowledge has been sated. No doubt many readers are as interested in major philosophies, in higher mathematical concepts, in philology, semantics, electronics, sociology and psychological concepts, eugenics, etc., ad infinitum.

Perhaps for purposes of adding to the value of TWS and/or SS if Ye Ed were to request a poll of most-wanted articles, such a feature to be initiated upon receipt of enough requests, accompanied by two one-year subscriptions from new readers and the articles were instructive to a point of worth equivalent to the undertaking—well, perhaps TWS could become slicker and thicker and the readers happier and wiser.—1005 West Grace, Richmond, Virginia.

We'll welcome the poll without subscriptions or box-tops, Robyn. And incidentally, aren't you the coy lad who used to terrorize us with that phonetic spelling horror?

ARCHIE SPINS IN HIS GRAVE

by Shelby Vick

Dear Editor:

I have read the latest issue of TWS.

have been inspired to a new style. ViN (Very Important

Nouns— or maybe a few pronouns) are hereby isolated.

In order of preference: LURE OF POLARIS.

This story was

good

good

good.

In fact, the only

mistake

I

could find was in one of the illustrations. (All of which, save for page 56 and 135, were also good.)

But, on page 9, it says that Sergeant

Schultz stared out the door. The only trouble is, it gives the impression

that the fat-jowled guy is Sergeant

Schultz

and that he is staring at her. (Whistle! Woof, woof! So would I.)

KALEIDOSCOPE

Bradbury

can really write emotions. Vast

simplicity

of plot, and

simplicity

of style made this story—or, actually, fragment—as good

as it was.

Now, the reason that

Brackett

is in third place is not that she is dropping—just that it

wasn't long enough.

HIGH JACK AND DAME

Long may this series reign.

Jake

is quite a character.

Cleve

is smart to have him get knocked around.

People

get tired of near-invincible heroes.

COLD WAR

HIBITED MAN

make a tie. Both we

enjoyable.

The latter was different, because the hero did not get the

girl

I was led to think he would. Whole gang of good stories. In

fact, it was a

very

good issue. Why, even Bergey's

cover

was good.

I

PLANETMAKERS

tops the shorts (other than the Wonder Young'n). And then

PARADOX

which style was a trifle difficult at times.

QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER

was really better, but it took it a little too long to get that

way. And then

BACKWARD OTIME

just managed to deserve separation. Only its clarity of style

—that is,

style

—rescued it. Its ending was obvious, and not very satisfactory.

Bare possibility of a sequel—I hope not.

Now, as for THE GARDENER, by St. Clair—need

I

say more?

Letter

column:

I have used up too much space already. Always like

letters.

Especially when one of them happens to be

mine!

Ah, joy! (And hip, hip hoorah for the return of the red-

headed planet-buster,

Captain

Future.

Prod ye author along on this, huh?)

Well, this is enough of

me

for now. Be seeing

you.—Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida.

Has no one told

you

mr vick

thatarchie

did not use

*or punctuation
because
he was too small
to handle the
shift key
on the typewriter
if no one
has
then
someone
very definitely
should
sotheresotheresothere*

CRITS FROM PITTS by Bill Venable

Buenos dias Senior Editor: CONGRATULATIONS to Mr. Wallace West! Didn't know he could do that well. THE LURE OF POLARIS certainly rates everybody's cheers. I don't agree with his theory that distance causes forgetfulness but that only makes his story seem more wonderful, since I am judging it on quality of writing alone. Let's have more and more of this.

As to the other stories I'll list them according to the order in which I liked them.

COLD WAR—good!! Hurray for Henry and dish out some more stories about the Pappas (I'll like the joke I just had to get in there).

THE PLANET MAKERS—the plot was awful but the writing was so extremely nice that I enjoyed it fully. There will be a whole series of Sleepy McGee stories, no?

KALEIDOSCOPE—me for Bradbury!

HIGH JACK AND DAME—can't understand the title but nice story.

THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER—didn't think I'd like this at first but I did after all. La Brackett has a nice style.

THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER—interesting theory.

PARADOX—didn't like the ending to this one, nohow.

THE GARDENER—if you must fill up space why not print copies of old Esquire calendar covers, instead?

THE HIBITED MAN—catchy title, rank story. The subject is trite in the first place and if L. Sprague can't do any better than this with it he had better "decamp." (Oh, yuk yuk)

Let me get this straight: Lewis Padgett works under the pen-name of Henry Kuttner, but who uses the pen-name of Murray Leinster? Could it be S. Fowler Wright? Or is it William Fitzgerald? And what is the pseudonym that Jack Williamson uses? Ah, me, I guess I'm hopelessly caught in the toils of pen-names. Take my pen, now. It's name's Bill. Like me. In fact, you can't tell us apart.

BUT, so I don't hurt yer feelings with all my nasty criticism, dry your tears, ed., here's to ya:

Here's to the Ed. of THRILLING WONDER
He hardly ever makes a blunder
(Or not too often, anyway)
The stories, almost all are good,
He prints our letters as he should
(Si, for my money, he's okay!)

Yes, in spite of all my gripes, I still think TWS and SS are the two best sf magazines in Los Estados Unidos. Where would we all be without them?—32 Park Place, R.D. No. 4, Pittsburgh 9, Pa.

*We wish we'd a position tenable
To make a stand against Bill Venable
How'er his onslaught is so vague—
With "hardly ever" he does plague
Us as with "almost all" and then
A "not too often" he does pen—
That we should not go on the pan
For calling him a fuzzy man.*

Let's forget the whole thing right now.
Okay?

FROM GWEN'S DEN by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Ed: I liked West's LURE OF POLARIS and the illustrations but maybe high heels on the lovely Yahna were a bit peculiar. De Camp's HIBITED MAN was good for a laugh and the down-to-earth ending, though unromantic,

was for that reason more as real men act—I ruefully surmise.

St. Clair's GARDENER I admired for its macabre morality and the "leaf for a leaf" tag line fitted beautifully. She's a darned good writer. Brackett's LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER I enjoyed throughout. If only he could turn out twice as much work and keep it as good. Too bad that's a large order for I like his work.

Leinster's QUEEN ASTROLOGER was a fine piece of characterization without overmuch description. The astrologer won me completely. But what a gory story! Cartmill—he's fairly new I think. HIGH JACK AND DAME was not a wonder story but for adventure and speed it was good. More on this same subject would suit me very well.

Kuttner's Hogben series I dearly love. If he ever quits them I'll feel blue indeed. Each is better than the last and COLD WAR was no exception. Wellman's time opus was well written and well characterized—fine work throughout. But I confess it left me in a hole somewhere and I still can't get out. At the end all I could say was, "So what?" The story had a problem—but after stating it came to a rather sudden end. I was very disappointed.

Hubbard has done better than PLANET MAKERS before, so I won't holler too much about it but you could have left it out and I'd never have had a qualm. Bradbury's KALEIDOSCOPE was horrible. Don't get me wrong—the story was truly wonderful. But the horror of the fates of those poor men is very strong. Best praise to author and editor for printing this work. James' PARADOX still leaves me chuckling. A good story, well worth the effort.

All in all, a swell issue and a swell way to use a quarter. More and more am I proud that I am a steady subscriber now, so I don't miss a thing. It just goes to show you get rewards for being smart!—8519 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland 5, California.

Okay, Gwen, we think Messrs Hubbard and Wellman will forgive you. But "Mr." Brackett—never, we fear. "He" you see, is a lady—and married to Edmond Hamilton to boot. Cartmill is definitely not new neither. File these points away so your car will run better (or for future reference). And write us again.

LONG TIME NO SEA

by Sergeant Charles W. Postak, USMC

Dear Wheel: One of the most startling incidents of my life has occurred this day. If I remember correctly I wrote you a letter sometime in July or August of 1948 and shortly thereafter was transferred to China. Therefore I was unable to acquire a copy of your October issue in which I was in hopes of seeing my initial fan letter in print.

During the course of my tour of duty in China I was unable to secure any but a few science fiction magazines and even those were well-thumbed "oldies." With the passing of time I had quite forgotten about my letter and then it happened.

As I was hobbling around on my three legs (cane included) today with a copy of your latest issue in hand, I was stopped by a fellow patient who inquired whether I would be interested in a barter. It seemed that he had your October, 1948, issue, which, as mentioned above, I had not seen.

I immediately tore it out of his hand, taking same (mag, not hand) with me to a well-lighted but secluded corner and proceeded to devour its contents. I glanced at the table of contents, noting titles and authors, then turned to THE READER SPEAKS and began to read. All of a sudden my letter—my own unselfish brilliant work of art—struck my eye.

I was dumfounded for several seconds until my well-integrated mind gave me the answer in a matter of micro-seconds. Then, as befitting a genius in his own right, I reread my own letter and of course the brilliant and witty inserts made by Ye Ed. Then I reread it several hundred times and then decided it should be framed appropriately as to its author's point of view.

Undoubtedly thousands of people have written you in regards to the letter since then and I do want to thank you for the protection you gave me as I am extremely self-conscious due to being an introvert of the first water as evidenced from this letter.

Seriously I was delighted to see my letter after having even forgotten its existence. I've been operated on for (name of ailment illegible and incomprehensible—Ed.). But I wanted you to know you still have a staunch and loyal reader here.—Ward 10-2, U.S. Naval Hospital, San Diego, California.

Sergeant, we are touched. Seriously, we're glad you saw the letter (and brilliant inserts, of course) and hope your incomprehensible ailment is quickly cured. Also that

you don't have to take a slow boat to and from China before you see this one in print. Maybe you'll hear from some California fans while still in hospital. How about it, girls? Want the lowdown on China? Might be good for that introversion.

ONE LOUD YAK

by Dorothea M. "Grandma the Demon" Faulkner

Dear Ed (that seems so familiar!): Just have to write while I am still guffawing over Sprague de Camp's HIBITED MAN. Am particularly interested because I met the Great Man himself a few weeks ago at a fanclub in L. A. He looks and acts so darned dignified to be the author of anything so ribald. I have rather a "hibited" taste in humor myself for my years—slightly over the age of consent—sixty, if you have to know.

I also happen to like the Hogbens. Could use one of them around the house to stir things up when they get unbearably dull.

KALEIDOSCOPE was an odd one. Does one fall out in space? I didn't think so. Enlighten me. Anyway it was a nice gruesome little nugget in the true Bradbury vein.

Another thing which intrigued me was that first paragraph in LURE OF POLARIS. I quote—"A one-winged fly . . . zommed around the room." I can't carry scientific research to such lengths that I would pull a wing off a fly to test the correctness of the aerodynamics in that statement but personally I don't believe the fly could do it.

As for the other stories—well, you just can't be expected to hit the jackpot every time as you did in the August issue. That really was a diller!—164 Geneva Place, Covina, California.

Sprague de Camp *does* have a certain resemblance to Anthony Eden in appearance, dress and deportment. As for "falling" in space—that is what is known as "free fall." But when the planet's attraction made itself felt Bradbury's boys were falling. And remember, the one-winged fly was Polarian. Write us again when the spirit moves you.

SEARLES IS WRONG

by Bill Searles

Dear Editor: I had finished all the many novelets in the October, '49, TWS and was sadly thinking, "There's not anything to write the Editor about this time. West was good and de Camp was poor and I certainly can't make those two statements into an interesting letter."

But I was WRONG! Yes, the great Searles was wrong. I found not one, not two—but three things to write about. And they are all good!

1. In a letter that will have or have not been printed by the time this is printed (if), I said that Bradbury had lost his genius touch somewhere. BELIEVE ME, I TAKE THAT BACK! FORGET IT. FORGET THAT I EVER SAID ANYTHING SO UNTRUE! The reason for this hysterical outburst? "Kaleidoscope," of course. It was a miniature masterpiece. Better than "Zero Hour," the equal of "Million-Year Picnic," very nearly as wonderful as "And the Moon be Still as Bright." Everyone bear witness—I say—Bradbury is as good as he ever was!

2. Blessings on you for bringing back Cap. Future. It sure was a slap at fandom's intelligence, though. Here's all the fans sittin' around on their fannies trying to figure out how to get CF back and all they think of was "bring back the mag." Even I didn't think of bringing it back as a series of novelets. Tell me—what genius did think of it? Suggestion—Why don't you let CF take the place of Magnus Ridolph, transfer MR to TWS and throw out Orig Prem to give him room?

3. I'd like to second everything you have said about "A Martian Odyssey." It's the best thing F.P.'s put out. Weinbaum is the most imaginative writer in imaginative fiction. But—ahem—maybe you paid \$0.00 for your copy (as you've got printed on your heading), the rest of us mortals have to shell out \$3.00. I know I did.

Now that I'm here, I may as well comment on the rest of the ish with a bunch of questions (but you won't answer 'em all). Who illustrated "The Gardener," "Paradox"? Style looks familiar, but is he new? Reminds me of Finlay.

Whahappend to de Camp? PDI How come the quality of the Hogbens changed so horribly when they graduated to novelets? How long will the Salvage series be salvaged from the dump it was originally in? Where the heck was the setting of "The Queen's Astrologer"? Past or future? 'Twas good, wherever.

And finally, please give info on the "Bergey Mystery." He's the mystery character of S.F. and it's killing me and couple of hundred other fans with curiosity. Who is he? Why does he do every cover? Why can he never be accurate? And finally, who gives him "orders" (as you put it) for the garish colors? You? Ahem!

Did anyone besides me see the article in August 8 "Quick" news mag on the possibility that Hollywood will try to cash in on the boom in pseudo-scientific fiction in mags and books and that story editors are watching for suitable material? I, for some reason, always resented the term "pseudo-science," but even so, this is occasion for three long, loud cheers.

To end, I'm not going to say "This probably won't be printed." I frankly think it will be and hope it will be, because I like to see my views and name in print. So there!—827 Nathan Hale Road, West Palm Beach, Fla.

But where is that, Bill? For the rest, the "genius" who thought up the CF return is named Leo Margulies. He is also our editorial director. The \$0.00 thing on the Weinbaum review was a typo both pure and simple, we hope. Napoli did the illustrations in question and the Leinster QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER setting was neither past nor future—it was alien, that's all.

BANNED IN DURBAN

by Miss Pearle Appleford

Dear Sir: I have never before had the courage to write to a science-fiction magazine, but now I have become really desperate. Ever since import control came into force in this country in November of last year all pulp magazines have been banned from the overseas market—which, of course, includes the science-fiction magazines.

Just imagine what it is like to walk into a bookshop and find not a single science-fiction publication on view for sale!

I have been reading these magazines ever since the tender age of about thirteen, when I "discovered" science-fiction for the first time and have been a perfectly satisfied customer ever since—why, I would weep tears of joy right now at the sight of just one untrimmed edge and lurid cover!

Well, this is frankly a begging letter and it is written in the hopes that maybe one of your readers who throws his magazines away when he has finished with them instead of hoarding them as (I do) would take pity on my plight instead, and send them over to me. I would not even be able to pay for the postage but I would be eternally grateful and I know of several other enthusiasts who would be very glad to have them after I have finished.

Your magazines are my favourites, but of course I would be only too happy to get any of the others, even fantasy!

I know you are not running a pen-friend column but perhaps if there are no magazines to spare, there may be someone who would like to exchange letters and let me know what is going on.

I am just living for the day when the import ban is lifted (and I hope it will be soon) but until then I will have to rely on the generosity of others, because the goods can still come into the country if they are "Bona-fide gifts" and so cost nothing. When that day comes I think I will spend all my money placing a huge order for every magazine on the market!—75 Kensington Drive, Durban North, Durban, Natal, South Africa.

Okay, people, is chivalry dead in stf?

A PLEA

by Erik Fennel

Dear Editor: This is a plea.

Please, for God's sake, kick those "Science Oddities" and other scientific (?) fillers out of TWS. And keep them out. They give me the pip—and inquiring around has given me the notion they give a good many other readers the pip also.

Reason—They have a disquieting, even disgusting, sense of familiarity. They are such uncomfortably close kin to the sort of crud that has been ruining a rival magazine for quite a while now, in subject and writing style and even in for-

not, that they send cold chills up the spines of a good many fans.

Let's keep the fillers all out. If you can't make pages any tighter than at present, use that space for blurb-ing forthcoming stories. Not very useful, because most of the readers will buy the next issue anyhow. But at least it doesn't make fans shudder and gag, and it is pleasant ego-boo for your featured writers.—P. O. Box No. 101, Waiialua, Oahu, Hawaii.

We have recently purchased a story from Mr. Fennel, whose DOUGHNUT JOCKEYS appeared in THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES of 1949 and shall try to give him satisfactory blurb-ing. But a steady diet of blurbs in a "loose" magazine can become awfully awfully repetitious.

LULLWOOD LULLABY by Jo Ann Bernhardt

Dear Editor: Three cheers for Ray Bradbury. 'Scuse please. I just had to get that in.

I have been reading Science Fiction for six years and this is my first letter to any type of magazine so I don't expect to see it published, but I can try can't I?

I will now speak my mind (Oh nol don't try to sneak away, I've got my head made up).

First favorite author: Bradbury.

L. Brackett and H. Kuttner are also very good.

Keep on publishing a grand Mag. It's the best in the market.

On with Bradbury.—1338 W. Lullwood, San Antonio, Texas.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jo Ann. We agree of course. Write us again—any time—when you're in the same rose-colored mood. We can always use a bit of non-comic relief from the more usual slings, arrows, et cetera.

BRACKETTOPHILE by James E. Hamilton, Jr

Dear Editor: The October TWS arrived yesterday. I liked all the stories except PARADOX but I am only going to comment upon one of them.

That one is THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER by Leigh Brackett. This is one of those hauntingly indescribably beautiful stories that come but seldom in a man's lifetime. It is the story for which one will wait half his life and when it comes there are no words in his tongue that can be fitted to it.

I have read a few such stories in my time. Edmond Hamilton wrote a couple, COME HOME FROM EARTH and WATCHER OF THE AGES. Henry Kuttner has written a few, notably SWORD OF TOMORROW.

Bergey's cover was good as usual, though it deviated a bit from the story. But who did the interiors for Miss Brackett's masterpiece? I couldn't find any signatures on them. Finlay, I suppose they look like his work, which has been improving in recent issues.

So much for art and literature. On to THE READER SPEAKS, where both are apparently unknown. Some tribal taboo, perhaps?

There seems to have been a slight mishap in your announcements of the next issue. You describe THE SHROUD OF SECRECY as the second of two sequels to THE ALIEN MACHINE. As you then go on to praise it as a prelude to Jones' windup story it would seem that you meant to say the first of two sequels. Wanna buy a proofreader?

Before leaving the subject of Raymond F. Jones I would like to answer Richard Smith's question as to whether Jones can write without using his engineering background.

I first encountered Raymond F. Jones' byline in one of your competitors several years ago. The story is one that I would like to bring up for several reasons. If you read your competitors at all you probably remember THE SEVEN JEWELS OF CHAMAR.

The first reason I mention this story is by way of answering Mr. Smith's question. But that is not my main reason. The main reason is that this story was one of those few to which I referred at the beginning of this letter, one of those stories that are not readily forgotten. There is still a third reason for raising the subject, and that is your will

for a character to do for STF what Sherlock Holmes did for detective stories.

The central figure of Jones' story was a girl known as the Firebird, who certainly was dramatic enough to be the unknown character of your dreams.

There was another novel in that same magazine, a Gardner F. Fox story, which involved mainly a character known as Tyr. The story was THE MAN THE SUN-GODS MADE, and there is certainly a made-to-order hero.

Getting back to Richard Smith's letter, he wails that all the series characters are too limited. Who said that the unknown had to appear as a series character? You didn't. I didn't certainly.

And I guess that covers what I had to say, so farewell.—P. O. Box No. 145, Hartwick, New York.

Let's take up the items in order. Glad you like the atmosphere of the Brackett novelet. You'll be seeing more of her work in the forthcoming issues. She certainly is a great little atmosphere-builder. Might be useful on the moon or some other airless planet. So you liked a story by her husband too? Sure you're not a relative, Jymes? It was Vern Stevens, not Finlay, who did the illustrations in question. Don't quite know how you can confuse their two styles.

As for the skull in that "second sequel" business re THE ALIEN MACHINE, we spotted it too—but too late to do anything about it. Jones is also due in force as already mentioned. We didn't catch the CHAMAR epos although we do read that particular hunk of competition frequently and find it fun. As for the catalyst character, our Mr. Smith seems already to have met that issue. The time for the emergence of such a creation seems silently to have passed.

HI, DICK AND NO DAME by Richard F. Dikeman

Dear Editor: I want very much herein to comment on the very fine story by Cleve Cartmill in the October issue. It isn't often that one finds a piece of true literature such as this in a lowly pulp magazine. What I can't see is why they rave about the Bradburys, Kuttners and Merritts when there exists a man who can write such authentic, sincere science-fiction as Mr. C. C. in "High Jack and Dame."

Beyond its obvious quality, one can see that Mr. C. writes not merely for the commercial side of it—such as an editor's check—but from an inner, burning compulsion to share his talent with the reading public. This is attested to by Mr. Cartmill's commendable restraint, his lack of pandering to the baser natures of the reader. No slapstick, sex or scientific jabberwocky in this fine story! And what a plot! I was completely taken over by its originality. This was truly a feast for epicures.

I can find no further words of praise with which to laud this story. Please give us many more of these fine space-operas by Mr. Cartmill!

Thank you, Mr. Editor, for permitting me this space. I just had to get this off my chest—it was building up within my breast to an almost intolerable degree. Perhaps now I can breathe easier and return to the anti-climax of the remainder of the stories.—Church Street, Brooktondale, N. Y.

By this time you should have enjoyed a number of Mr. Cartmill's other SALVAGE series. They seem to us like very competent and well executed space-opera. Needless to say we are gratified by your response. Better take breath exercises, however, as we may send you even further with something else.

IMPERFECT

by Elizabeth M. Curtis

Dear Editor: No, the October issue of TWS was not perfection. But it was certainly worth at least half a dollar. Eleven stories and not one real piece of dull space filler from an antique inventory! This is the advance in the publishing business that I have been waiting for (I haven't been waiting for any special reason—just waiting because there wasn't anything else to do).

A couple of the stories (won't mention names) failed to "thrill me with wonder," only because they were on themes recently overtreated in other mags (won't mention names, naturally). But at last I have an issue that I can lend around and smile smugly as should the purveyor of first class entertainment.

Miss Brackett, in abandoning Mars and the E. R. B. tradition, seems to be on the brink of a Brackett tradition. Bully for her.

"The Queen's Astrologer" is pretty writing, a pretty gimmick, pretty thinking. I hope Murray Leinster won't be insulted by the adjective. "Neat" sounds too trivial and "excellent integration of attractive elements" sounds too highfalutin for a piece of real art.

"Cold War" is richer than any preceding saga of the Hogbens and that's saying something. It is so full of quotable quotes (just like Shakespeare) that it may permanently affect our language. I got the feeling of really knowing Saunk and the way he looks into things and sees the little critters jumping around. Saunk may not be the character scific is waiting for (the readers seem to go for something more muscular and urbanized) but he is a character and we love him.

Margaret St. Clair is also doing her own kind of writing again. I don't mean that Jick and Oona aren't hers—or aren't rollicking—but I have been waiting a long time, for her to get back toward the days when she wrote "Piety."

I have no idea how long after stories are purchased they are generally printed but if these stories in the October issue were by any chance, written contemporarily, scientists ought seriously to begin a study of the extra-personal sources of inspiration. The October issue is a high point.

Nevertheless I said the issue is not perfection. One of my few reasons for thinking so is as follows:

I believe Harry Clarke is a great and effective illustrator of fantasy. I am immensely pleased to find his work in TWS. But I am not pleased to find it a mere rehash of previous illustrations: The pic for "Paradox" on page 135 seems to be a carefully exact composite of two of his illustrations for Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" with a few gadgets thrown in on top. Miss St. Clair's "The Gardener" (she certainly rates Clarke) is an inaccurate hodgepodge (inaccurate because it doesn't fit the action) taking place in and around the bedcover (only slightly altered) from Poe's "The Telltale Heart."

Perhaps the fans are too busy writing fanzines to read the classics—perhaps Clarke owns his own copyrights and is justifiably picking up the price of pokechops in this day of such prices—but I don't like it. I want illustrations which help me to feel the story and these are sad distractions. Better luck next time. Anyhow, I'd like to know whom I hope to lend the mag probably won't know the difference.

And it is a commendable issue.—201 Veterans Village, Canton, New York.

Thank you, thank you, Mme. Betsy, but that wasn't Clarke, that was Napoli. For the rest, we'll do our very best to keep you feeling smug about TWS. Not to mention SS, our alter ego, editorially speaking. We like your letters, be they pro or con where we are concerned.

TYRO TWO

by Bob Johnson

Dear Sirs: Right now I wish to tell you that this is not my first letter to a magazine (the second to be correct, but the first one didn't get published) so you don't need to think you'll be a-doing me a favor if you publish this one.

The reason I am writing this letter is to congratulate you on the best issue of TWS I've seen since I started reading about five issues ago. Your October ish, I mean. This is the first TWS that I've read that I didn't see a real stinker in the lot.

I would like to rate your stories in a different way than most people: above and below Average, and how much so. But first the cover. Why, why, why, oh why don't you let EB paint a happy cover for once? He does quite well when painting happy peaceful people without a grudge with the

world? Why don't you let him do something on that line once in awhile? He simply cannot portray an honest emotion besides that.

For instance in this ish, the girl seems to be hurtling at a terrific speed toward some rocky doom beyond the bottom of the page. Her emotion—she seems mildly horrified that the hero, standing on a crag at the top, didn't get to see her last with her new shade of lipstick on. Ehem! However, I will say one thing for EB—his colors weren't quite so pure and glaring as usual. This time I didn't have to hide the zine under my coat when I came from the magazine stand.

To get back to listing the stories.

A.
1. COLD WAR. Oh me, oh my, those fabulous Hogbens are at it again. I positively died screaming with laughter over this one. More of the Hogbens, please! They make this life of mine ever so much lighter.

2. PARADOX. I'm a sucker for "angle" stories. I suppose, but gosh that angle left my head spinning. The ending was an anti-climax, but still kept the story way above average. Not the exact ending, I mean. That was good. I mean the next to the last three paragraphs or so. Seemed to leave one hanging.

3. KALEIDOSCOPE. You can always count on good ol' Ray. The story was perfect. Nothing could have been improved. He has a genius for making you feel the inevitable!

B.
1. THE GARDENER. M. St. Clair is steadily improving. Gaaah! One more of those Oona and Jick series and I would have banged my head against the floor (no rugs, yet!). Another one of those inevitable things, however seemed like the middle sagged a little.

2. THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER. Hey nonny nonny for Leigh Brackett! It's the first of her stories I have actually enjoyed. It is one of those few stories that shouldn't be lengthened or shortened. Just right as it is!

3. THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER. Almost as good as TLOTGF—just a thin dividing line. I liked the note of the whole story. Sort of a martyred feeling, but a nice martyred feeling.

4. HIGH JACK AND DAME. Well, wheel! At last a more-or-less-love story without a "Depraved-love-and-mush" ending to it. At last you're beginning to see the writing on the wall!

C.
1. THE HIBITED MAN. Not at all well written. However, the plot more than carried it through. With a lot better writing and a few more twists this plot could rival those of the hibited author himself: Thorne Smith.

2. THE PLANET MAKERS. Terribly uneventful—the ending was good though. I had a nice chuckle out of the story. Don't you think the reader should have been let in on the secret though? I sorta suspicioned what was going on, but couldn't be sure, because the beginning didn't give enough clues. Tskk. You could have done better than this. Mr. Hubbard.

3. BACKWARD, O TIME. Left me absolutely cold. I guessed the end after the first page. However its one redeeming feature was—it was well written and plotted. All it needed was development. Maybe I'm not observant, but isn't M. W. Wellman a new writer. Maybe my eyes are bad. Anyway, if so, this guy should be encouraged, he may develop into something. Let's hope so.

And now I suppose you're wondering what has happened to Wallace West's wonderful story, The Lure of Polaris. Very simple. I couldn't even rate it by an ABC method. I won't attempt to display all its beauties. I will just say "I LIKED IT BEST!" For once a feature story that is nicely simple and easy to figure out without being stupidly so. Also, on the other hand, you don't have to worry about such things as dual time-streams and time pendulums that have to be wound every eight parsecs, etc., etc.

Just a parting note—I would like any correspondents that would be interested in writing. In case they're snobbish and don't like to write to teen-agers, I'll tell the world right now, I'm fourteen and proud of every second of it! So, there!

Egoboo to TWS!—811 Ninth Street, Greeley, Colo.

Aren't you sweet, Bob! Now let's see—Bergey does covers as ordered by the art department and does them pretty darned well on the whole. As for Manly Wade Wellman—oh dear. What does an author have to do anyway to be known in and/or out of stf?

Manly first appeared in WONDER STORIES with a since-printed-in-the-HoF-in-SS novelet, THE DISC-MEN OF JUPI-

TER way back in September, 1931. For years thereafter he was a regular contributor to TWS and SS and his novel, STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS, in the latter magazine, is still remembered among stf-cionados. He also wrote THE SOLAR INVASION, last of the full-length CAPTAIN FUTURE novels, which appeared in the Fall, 1946, STARTLING. His UNDERMOST, THE TONGUE CANNOT TELL and THE TIMELESS TOMORROW have all appeared in TWS during recent years.

He was the winner of the first Ellery Queen detective story contest with a tale of a Navajo sleuth some three years ago, has written a number of well-received mystery novels and is the author of a definitive biography of his grandfather, the great Confederate Cavalry leader, Wade Hampton, which Scribner's is currently publishing. Hence the lessening of his later stf writing.

He ain't new—but he's a mighty good man to have around.

RAPPED! by Arthur H. Rapp

Tally-Ho, Old Bean: October TWS purchased, perused and 'preciated. "The Lure of Polaris" was astoundingly excellent, mainly because the whole background was so delightfully whacky that even my agile brain couldn't figure out what weird twists and turns the plot would take next. Upon consulting my index, I find Wallace West has written only five yarns in the past decade. Here's hoping you induce him to better that record in the next five years. Particularly if his future work is of the caliber of "Polaris."

The other outstanding tale of the ish was RayBrads "Kaleidoscope." The best he's done since "And the Moon Be Still As Bright." You know, when I read a story that is artistically and/or technically perfect, it gives me a sort of shivery feeling, like riding a descending elevator. Only about one yarn in a hundred has that effect. "Kaleidoscope" had it.

The rest of the book was adequate, which means that if you'd published those stories a couple of years back, they'd have been the stars of the issue. That's how much TWS has come up in the world lately.

A word on this cover controversy. There's no doubt that the lurid outside of TWS drives off some readers who would like the inside. But no doubt it attracts others, which is why you use it. And I've noted in my own attempts to convert non-fans to stf, that those who take their science so seriously that the cover outrages 'em, usually haven't the temperament, or maybe it's the imagination, to appreciate science-fiction anyhow.

They'll read a few yarns, if there's enough heavy science in 'em—but only for the purpose of tearing the authors' assumptions to bits and demonstrating their own superior intelligence. So until you feel the need to swing stf back to the ultra-technology of the thirties I guess Bergey isn't so bad after all.

So Cap Future is returning, eh? Well, you're the boss—but I have a feeling he's going to sound awful corny alongside the stuff you've been printing lately.

How starry-eyed The Reader Speaks
Within thine hallowed pages,
Each one admiring phrases seeks
And never rants and rages.

Where are the bitter feuds of yore,
The rantin' and the ravin'?
Have they declined forevermore
To Zimmer vs. Slavin?

There is no choice before me, then;
There's but one course in sight:
Come, are you mice, or are you fen?
Who wants to start a fight?—2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan.

We have two more Wests on hand at present—NOCTURNE and THE WEARIEST RIVER. Both are novelets and both about as unlike LURE OF POLARIS as can be. If he keeps up his recent rate and quality of production his record of the past decade should be amiably atomized.

As for the versification, well, we'll give it a try, to wit—

Who says our rodents never rave
Nor 'dulge themselves in ranting
To us it seems most of them crave
To strip Ye Edde of panting.

Their feuds are ever in the wings,
Onstage or in the offing
Ready to launch their poisoned slings
Or 'sail Ye Edde with scoffing.

You claim we draw from puling brats
Laudations by the tankful
May we point out hefans are rats
Girls mice—and are we thankful!

And that should be about enough of that for the nonce as it were.

ONE-TWO-THREE AND OUT! by Norm Storer

Dear Editor: Back to the fold again. It's been a good year or better since I've been stirred enough to heave a letter your way, but, as the editor said, what's time to a fan? Ha.

The October ish, seized upon and devoured this very afternoon, strikes me as a pretty darn good one. In fact I am having a hard time deciding which story to pan. Oh what, what is TWS coming to when this happens? Well, the law of averages will see to it that the next ish simply reeks and I shall have my opportunity to sit and cuss at it for a spell. Even the cover was above average. You can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but Storer is sometimes difficult even to calm down to a coherent state. You seem to have succeeded this time, but I'll getcha nextime bub!

What has become of the time-honored one-two-three system of rating the tales? Nary a one in TRS this time. Never one to beat about the asteroid I shall amend this:

1. THE LURE OF POLARIS.
2. THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER.
3. KALEIDOSCOPE.
4. THE HIBITED MAN.
5. COLD WAR.

The rest follow, helter-skelter, in no particular order. If I started to comment at all you couldn't stop me, so I shall be brave and draw back from the temptation. All I'll say is that if the others weren't better, I should rate Bradbury's neat study of death in space first. Really a difficult subject, and quite well handled.

Pardon me. There is something that needs panning, but badly. That, much to my dismay, is Miss Brackett's offering, LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER. Simply foul—no plot or even realistic blood and guts. But this must be one of her bad days. She can and occasionally does write tip-top thud-and-blunder like SEA KINGS OF MARS. The dusty evil-riden city-skeletons like Jekkara, Valkis and Barrakesh are enough to take me back to my First-Stage Fan days when anything and everything thrilled me.

TRS is becoming a mite more intellectual. Whether my sacrifice at the altar of egoboo will confound this trend or not is a moot point. I shall bitterly contest any and all opinions. Sex rears its lovely head in this ish, I believe, more than in any two previous issues. Interesting, even fascinating but I'm afraid it has led to disappointment for the sex-fiends that may leaf through TWS's pages on the stands. Still I guess such pics sell more copies to them than to all the dyed-in-the-wool fans in the country. Such hypocrisy, Ghudness!

Since you seem to take any excuse for a bit of your own—uh—poetry, try this for size:

Your blue pencil
 Is quite prehenctil;
 It always cuts
 The verse with guts
 And so the man
 Whose poems scan
 Will never see
 In good old T
 RS his verse,
 And what is worse,
 You did it just
 So you'd be best.
 I say in rhymes:
 Drop dead, three thymes!

He, I gasp. Beat that. I got muh doubts about this, but I'll say it just on the feeble chance that my dream may come true. If there are any real fans who will be attending Park College, Parkville, Missouri, I wish you'd look me up. I'll be a soph and will gladly beat the devil out of you during Hell Week. Any takers?

Again I cry, "Well done, Sir Editor!" and retire to my casket for another unguessable length of time.—1724 Mississippi Street, Lawrence, Kansas.

Lordy, the rhyme-and-slyme folk are really out in force this session. Well—wearily—here we go again—

*We'd like to go
 On record so—
 We never cuts
 If, ands and buts
 From any verse
 To make it worse
 Than our horrif-
 Ic heiroglyph-
 Ics. When we rhyme
 We spend our time
 Seeking to match
 In offbeat, match
 The many slips,
 And are they pips!
 In line and beat
 That give us heat.*

In other words, if we come out any better (a highly moot question at best) than our poetic contributors, it is sheerly a matter of luck, good or otherwise.

WE DIDN'T EITHER by Mrs. Sherry Andris

Dear Editor:

I never thought that I would see
 A poem writ by a fool like me;
 If poems you want, poems you'll get,
 Though I think Poetry's all wet.

This is not my first to an editor written,
 But the first time I've been by a poem bug bitten.
 To heck with poetry, let's concentrate
 On your authors and stories that really rate.

I like your readers, I like your book,
 Even your covers rate a second look;
 I've read your mags since they were born,
 That's all, brother—corn, oh, corn!

Seriously, I do read every issue of your mags and I think there has been a wonderful improvement in them. The stories are getting better and better, and I fully agree with one of your readers who says if we can't understand the science part of some stories why not concentrate on the fantasy and not condemn them for other fans. No suggestions this time, just keep it up. Only one gripe—why, oh, why can't you be a monthly?—2181 Shurtleff Avenue, Napa, Calif.

We didn't figure on three in a row when we put this department together—but here's our response:

*Shades of Humphrey Bogart's pandas
 We plead with Mrs. Sherry Andris
 To give us surcease from such toil
 And leave us in accord with Hoyle.*

*She says that poetry leaves her unsmitten
 In which case 'twould best have been left
 unwritten*

*To heck with her, she's not our date
 And she seems to think she's going great.*

*She says she likes, to that we bow,
 Then says we're corn to be fed to sow.
 Shall we forgive or shall we nay
 This all too beatless roundelay.*

That one really went from one-step to tango to jitterbug to samba without pausing to give this imitator a chance to gasp his breath. Seriously, Sherry, we liked it too in a gruesome sort of way.

MARCHING ORDERS by Rodney Palmer

Dear Editor: Thrilling Wonder Stories sits waiting at the right, scintillating and brilliant and altogether lovely. Perhaps I'm too ecstatically overjoyed to see it. I bubble over with emotion. It seems that it has been such a very long time since Startling appeared and was consumed.

Are the days getting longer? Or is it my patience getting shorter? I am inclined here most emphatically to suggest that something be done, and immediately. Really, you know, it can hardly go on. One can stand only so much and then something snaps. Something for some reason, is always snapping. But I am not at the moment wearing suspenders and I am therefore confused as all get out. Go Bi-weekly.

But too, there are many issues, such as the last few that seem wasted. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE ABOUT THESE BLANK SPOTS! Let me in all humble grovelling disrespect ask that the lead spots be consigned quickly to Hamilton, Wellman, Brackett, Clarke or Bradbury. The lead comprises the bulk of the issue. If the novel flops, the remainder of the book goes down with it. Or has somebody in TRS said that already. Fresh novel stuff. It is the decision.

Oh Great and Exalted Ray Bradbury is back this time with his usual superb copy. And Wellman, the name I revere without quite knowing why (maybe because he won't conform). And I'd like here to leap over the deep end with some comment on THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER by Mr. Murray Leinster.

In the yarn itself the stranger states that he does not believe either in the religion he stands for or in the methods of the astrologer. He is emphatic. "A fig for astrology. Pish on incantations or enchantments. . . , or something near to that. Well, you know, people who look into astrology come to wonder if there mightn't be something in it.

It is rather challenging, and it remains today as exact a science as, say, mathematics. Funny, too, how some pretty prominent persons, otherwise intelligent, believe in it faithfully. But it does conflict with religion, doesn't it? So let's not sin, but instead let's sublimate. It's so much easier, it seems.

THE GARDENER by Margaret St. Clair seemed to me to be a very good story, thoughtfully written, dwelt upon till it was fashioned into a work of art. The yarn approaches greatness but just doesn't hit the mark. What's missing here? I don't know. Add whatever is not quite there and we have another NOON or THE LOTUS EATERS. Mrs. St. Clair has done very well of late. I see no reason at this moment why the present editor-writer relationship should be discontinued. More.

And then the end. We reach it as we skim through TRS. It's lively, it's whacky, and it's interesting. Variety here. The inane babblings of new fans going overboard with a rush "every story wonderful" etc., the serious letter dealing pedantically with some insane subject, the host of merciless

calmly-plotting fans who plead to know the editor's name so they know where to rig up the machineguns.—225 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Illinois.

Thanks for not adding a poem—we're beat just now. As for your leaning toward astrology, well, we have a theory after contact with many astrologers of note in our Sunday supplement days from Myra Kingsley on down.

Without saying a word as to our beliefs in astrology's truth, scientific or otherwise, we have a hunch we know why "some pretty prominent persons, otherwise intelligent, believe in it faithfully."

Most persons are plagued by indecision. There are millions of high and low and middle estate in this country alone who have difficulty in selecting a meal they want from a varied restaurant menu. They are constantly in torment over any choice for fear that they will take the wrong one, are thus virtually in a state of kinetic paralysis.

In most instances where several courses of action are indicated virtually any decision is better than none. Those who cannot make decisions and who lean on astrological readings for their choices are thus at least relieved of the necessity of making a choice themselves. They follow the charts and on the average do better therefore than if left to their own muddle-headedness.

The other side of the coin should be readily apparent, especially on the level of high policy, be it industrial or diplomatic. In too many cases a wrong decision can be worse than none at all. But the person incapable of making any at all probably won't think so.

HE'S GOTTA COMMENT by Dave Hammond

Dear Editor: I simply have got to comment on the October issue. It was very good. I would like to be able to say that it was better than the last one but I can't. Lately TWS and SS have been publishing the best science-fiction around. Coming from me that is real praise, because I am prejudiced.

You see I first discovered STF in a certain competitor. I've been reading it ever since. It was more than a year later when I first stumbled across the October '48 STARTLING. Subconsciously I preferred the first mag for a few months—"first impressions are always strongest!"—but lately your duo has risen to the topmost heights with yours truly.

Now for some comment on the commentators: the first letter by John A. Mercer was well-written (Note: any reader who mentions Edgar Rice Burroughs can count on his letter being called well-written by the guy-which-is-writing-this-letter) and interesting. I liked the heading of the letter, "Not for all the Rice in Burroughs" pretty good.

Wilkie Conner's views on the character that will make stf presentable to the masses were very enlightening. What did the "Aussie" mean when he asked about the Science-Fiction League? What is it? Kuttner's "See You Later" received some comment, mostly good, but w. paul ganley who says, "SEE you Later". An ingenious title, I presume he thought of it himself.

The sarcasm in those words cannot go unanswered. (even if quoted incorrectly) Doesn't he know a short story does NOT have to have some super daring flashing title? I think Kuttner's choice of a title was excellent. Ganley also says he doesn't like Kuttner! That angers me! It is too bad you live in New York or I would pay you a visit. On second thought, maybe it is a good thing because you're probably bigger than I am.

Let us look over the stories. Leading the issue is the lead novelet, THE LURE OF POLARIS. I delayed reading this because I didn't think much of you, the editor's, comments in your last issue. My fears were groundless, however. Maybe I am stupid, but I have never heard of Wallace West. Is he a new writer or just one of Kuttner's pen names?

I enjoy your editorials very much and it came as a double treat to discover that the LURE OF POLARIS seems to be written around the editorial in the June '49 TWS. Following closely was L. Sprague DeCamp's HIBITED MAN. Quite an illustration. Holding third place down with ease is Kuttner's COLD WAR. I would have classed it second if it had had a better title. I read part of HIGH JACK AND DAME and the LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER, but couldn't get interested in either. Brackett is usually wonderful, too.

COMMENTS ON THE SHORT STORIES:

THE GARDNER by Margaret St. Clair.

"Woodman spare that tree!"

THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER by Murray Leinster.

"Sounds a little cracked" fine piece of writing. 3rd place.

BACKWARD, O TIME by Manly Wade Wellman.

This is the best in the issue. This shows real craftsmanship.

It was pleasant reading.

THE PLANET MAKERS by L. Ron Hubbard.

This didn't hit me. I wasn't even amused. A gambling alcoholic has the brains to lead such a project. Make them reasonable, eh? I want tales like "LEST SHADOWS FALL".

KALEIDOSCOPE by Ray Bradbury.

No comment except to give this story second place.

PARADOX by Edwin James.

Very nice. If all the others were not so good this would rate higher than fourth place. Edwin James sounds suspiciously like a pen name to me.

All in all a good issue. Wait a minute I just looked at the cover. We shouldn't blame Bergey for the covers, right? Who can we blame? I have lots more I could say, but I'll save it for STARTLING STORIES next month.—806 Oak Street, Runnemeade, New Jersey.

Neither Wallace West nor Edwin James are other than themselves—although the latter is a nom-de-plume. However, its user is a definite entity on his own. As for the June editorial, it was written after the purchase of the POLARIS piece and was actually an entirely separate operation. And—oh, yes, West is far from a new author to stf although he has only recently begun submitting to us.

OH, NO—ANOTHER PO by Del Close

Dear Editor: (I hope I'm sending this to the right place. Never did see the address of The Reader Speaks). I hear it's customary to fling the bouquets before the overripe eggs, so here goes. Mr. Genius, you've printed a Bradbury classic. Never in all my born days have I seen a strictly stf tale I liked as well as "Kaleidoscope." Wonderful! Use any complimentary adjective you can think of and it'll fit. "The Lure of Polaris" was very good too. However, I have one complaint. The cover that illustrated a scene (?) from the L of P.

Take a gal in fur-lined panties
Loose-hung bra, and other scanties.
Off an icy promontory
Drops she down to death quite gory.
Ice and snow and crud around her.
Chilly arctic winds to pound her
Bergey, didn't you ever know
When you're naked in the snow
Showing off your dimpled knees
Don't ever think that you won't freeze.
Amen.

De Camp did a fine job on "The Hibited Man". Quite good.

The Hogben series is touching rock bottom. They have been getting worse and worse and, I'm sorry to say, the latest one was foul.

If you will kindly remain indulgent for a few more lines I will leave you. In the event that this is printed (HINT), any fan wanting to correspond with a 15-year-old ditto, come ahead. Come one, come all. All letters will be answered.—1726 Poyntz, Manhattan, Kansas.

Lordy! How to answer this one! Well, all we can do is our little old best, however mangy. So—

Out in Iskar's chilly climes
 Natives, be they guys or dymes,
 Prance amid the snow-topped heather
 Ungoose-pimpled by the weather.
 Barefoot on the ice they hike it,
 For they've learned to live and like it.

Sorry you don't care for the horrendous
 Hogbens, Del. Fortunately a lot of readers
 disagree with you.

GIVE HER STRENGTH by Carol Lowrey

Dear Eddy-tor: After a long and hardfought battle with my typewriter, I find the strength to scribble my faint message to you, whom I love (in my first letter too). I love you all (except Bergey) and you have the best mag on the stands!

I just finished the Oct. TWS, and it was wonderful, especially THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER. For the first time in years of devouring stf I have read a whole mag and liked it (more or less). All except Bergey.

More words fail me on this momentous (?) occasion, but someone had to say it. Down with Bergey!

Now to more pleasant subjects. The stories. Ahh! Brackett is wonderful. THE LURE OF POLARIS was good but would someone please tell me what the lure was? THE HIBITED MAN carried a faint odor of stale limburger. The Hogben story and HIGH JACK AND DAME were fair to middling.

The shorts were all right, with THE PLANET MAKERS and PARADOX at the top, KALEIDOSCOPE a close second. The others were lost in the dust (along with Bergey).

Now about TRS. Good as usual but how would you like it if I closed my eyes and pounded away until I got an equation proving the whole tortured world is just a figment of some stf writer's mad brain? If some of these jerks want to let them, but do we poor dumb readers have to read it? Seriously, though, it was a good issue (all except Bergey) and you deserve a lot of praise.—4162 Dalton Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

Careful, Carol, or we'll let Bergey out of his pen. We keep him hungry between cover jobs, you know, and he is ferocious when in want of a meal. However, we remain grateful that you liked the rest of the issue.

THE LONG PULL by Michael Varady

Dear Ed.: You've pulled us (we're a schizophrenic, which is fortunate, for we can enjoy TWS and SS twice as much) out of our silence. And it's all your fault. How could you let a cover like Bergey's pass like the one on the Oct. '49 ish?

First off, how could any human being—well, she looks human—live in such a cold place with such few clothes? The man is bundled up pretty well, so why shouldn't the girl be? Not even shoes yet! And that expression on her face! She can't decide, it looks like, whether she enjoys the sensation of falling thru the air to her doom.

And where did she get that sunburn? Certainly not on Iskar. Of course this might all take place on the white cliffs of Dover—but then why would the man be wearing such heavy clothes?

Now to the ratings. THE LURE OF POLARIS by Wallace West took first place by a long shot. It's just what I've wanted—a little change in the science in fantascience. He uses psychology to an advantage. Not only that, the story's well-plotted and well-written. You've made the Discovery of the Year. Make sure you get some more stories from him.

Second place was taken by Margaret St. Clair with THE GARDENER. I think Mrs. St. Clair is going to find new popularity with her sudden change to the serious. However let's not have the pictures give away the end of the story as in this one.

We think Margaret will develop quite a following—almost as much as Bradbury—if she keeps writing seriously. Her plots are different, her style of writing is changing and all in all she's great! Even so we always did like Oona and Jick.

HIGH JACK AND DAME by Cleve Cartmill was third. The first of this series was lousy but if they keep up like this second one they'll really be popular.

Fourth was Ray Bradbury's KALEIDOSCOPE. We'll not forget that shooting star for a long time. Bradbury would've gone into a higher spot if one thing hadn't bothered us.

We always learned there could be no sound where there was no matter. Since there is no air in space how could they keep talking to each other? If it was by wireless there would be nothing for the sound wave on which to vibrate. If with wires they could not have fallen thirty thousand miles apart. If we're wrong we'll apologize but please, somebody, show us how we're wrong.

Manly Wade Wellman was good for once! His BACKWARD, O TIME! takes fifth. However on this one there was something bothering us also. Man is not four-dimensional. Therefore if he could by any chance travel forward or backward in time it could only be within his one life span. And, as he traveled forward he'd grow older. As he traveled backwards he'd grow younger. We're probably wrong on this count too but it seems logical to us.

Murray Leinster's short, THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER, is next. This was more fantasy than fantascience tho.

THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER was seventh. This was good but the others were better. That's the only reason why it came in only seventh.

Eighth is THE HIBITED MAN. For a while I thought it would be fun to hiberate one's self but if you get in so much trouble the hell with it. Of course, it would be fun to be caught in a chorus girl's dressing room but who wants a can of paint and a paint brush to hinder him. That'd be inhibiting himself and we're hiberating. From the reviews of all his stories, I'd think DeCamp would be a good writer but he ain't. Not as good as I thought, I mean. The story wasn't bad, only mediocre.

L. Ron Hubbard has written better than THE PLANET MAKERS. It comes ninth.

Tenth is Henry Kuttner's COLD WAR. First halfway decent story I've read by Kuttner, Padgett or any of the others. Of course, Padgett's generally better with C. L. Moore helping him.

PARADOX by Edwin James is eleventh. I don't mean it was bad, it was quite good. I just don't understand the scientific part of it.

All in all, an excellent ish, ed.

Now then, authors I'd like to see more of in TWS and SS (give, those who don't appear very often); Wallace West, William F. Temple, myself, L. Ron Hubbard, Frederic Brown, John Taine.

Whatever happened to that plan to have some fantascience put out by your Popular Library? I hope something comes of it.

I don't have time to write a whole letter about the current SS, so I hope you don't mind my mentioning a couple of things in this letter. Gracias. First off, Marvin Williams' idea of changing the titles of SS and TWS is what I've been wanting for quite a while. The titles are very gawdy and cheap. Change SS to Williams' idea, TOMORROW'S UNIVERSE, and TWS's title to FUTURISTIC FANTASCIENCE STORIES and you'll have toned them down quite a bit.

Jack Marsh, if you think Gerry Carlye's dead read THE HOTOUSE PLANET in the very ish your letter was published.

Is there anyone in England or Australia who has any fantascience magazines he doesn't need? I'll reciprocate for them with American ishes or pocket books with fantasy and fantascience in them (by the by, why were American magazines banned from Australia?) If possible make sure they have a story in them by William F. Temple which was not printed in U.S.A. However, nem kell lenni (you'd better bush up on your languages if you don't know that, ed. It's Hungarian for 'it doesn't have to be' or 'it isn't necessary').

In conclusion this poem:

Great are the THRILLING TWINS,
 Altho they have their sins;
 Bergey, and untrimmed edges,
 Which cause the fans' dins.
 (well, I had to do sumpin' for rhythm, didn't I?)

But with the course of time,
 They'll grow even more sublime
 And, if they'll change their titles, I'm
 Willing to pay an extra dime.

'Nuff sed.—210 South Avenue 57, Los Angeles, 42, Calif.

All right, you ask Bergey, Michael. And we'll leave your request re (Ray) Bradbury's communications problem to the mercies of our more scientifically-minded readers. Lay off time travel, will you—or do you want to put stf out of business entirely?

James' PARADOX was simple enough. All that happened was that his hopelessly fouled-up pathological "hero" drove the super-logical minds of the would-be invaders completely out of focus.

What's with this TOMORROW'S UNIVERSE and FUTURISTIC FANTASCIENCE STORIES stuff? Are you kidding, Mike? What good is the first if we wish to take a dive into the past as we often do—or even the present? As for the second—try pronouncing it after the third zombie.

Hope you have luck in your Australian correspondence. As for the poem—

*Here's a fan named Michael Varad,
Probably a shorted farad
Who, knowing not his yangs and yins
Tries to grease us with "fans' dins."*

*Now this et/mologic crime,
Rates him lots of prison time.
Should conviction be denied
Let his readers have his hide.*

Don't know quite what brought the poetasters swarming out of the woodwork in such profusion but, brother, 'tis a sweat upon us. Too bad we enjoy it.

HIS TWO BITS by A. B. Krueger

Dear Sir: May I add my two-bits worth to your readers' comments on your selections?

As a white-haired old suchandsuch who has been reading Science Fiction (I capitalize it) for more years than I care to look back over, I feel that I have the right to do some criticizing (famous last words).

Well, here's at you. I think you are doing a swell job. Many of the famous writers of yesteryear who had that certain something in their selection of words, have passed away. Merritt was one of them and a master of phrasing. Works like his shall live forever among the classics.

You have some up and coming writers now, among them Kuttner, Brackett, Leinster and Wellman. To them I say, "Patience. Do not hurry your story and it will work out smoother." And so, with what you have to choose from, you, Mr. Editor, are doing alright.

Now to turn to the primary reason for this script—"The Reader Speaks". In most cases, "Squeaks" is the word for them. Do these raving egocentrics actually believe that they can pick up accurate science interwoven into a fiction story and build a spaceship or time machine from the formulee therein, all at the price of a quarter of a dollar? Or is it a case of where they were permitted a glance at some real science notes and thus feel themselves now experts.

Though preferring to leave out names and thus avoid a senseless argument I must refer to Miss Ruth Bernstein by name. Now there is a smooth gal. She knows what she likes and that seems in this case to be entertaining reading. More, much more, power to her. I like the same thing. In fact, I have liked it for years and shall continue to like it as long as it is served up as you serve it.

As you have no doubt noticed, I am a consulting engineer. My work is an exact science. There is no such thing as "close enough" or "good enough" in engineering. That is the main reason I read science fiction. It is not exact. It is entertaining. It takes you out of mundane things in flights of fancy. That's for me.

My only question is—why do the artists insist on unclothing the lovelies they depict on the covers? Is it necessary to employ America's standard formula, "cheesecake," in a science fiction magazine? I really would like to know.—6300 Old San Jose Road, Santa Cruz, California.

We've discussed our covers pro and con so many times that further comment on that score is unnecessary. Some likes 'em and some don't, just as is the case with everything else you might name.

[Turn page]

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at some of our READER SPEAKS quasi-
scientists who expect to get scientific
knowledge from science fiction. The idea is
absurd—like acquiring education from lis-
tening to radio quiz programs.

Actually, outside of its escape and en-
tertainment values, all science fiction can
accomplish is to stimulate the thinking of
the more creative-minded readers along
paths they have not before walked. If this
stirs some scientist into tackling a problem
from a new front and solving same, swell.
If it opens up new lines of thought on the
part of any reader, swell again.

But that's a far cry from replacing
physics 2.

**FIRST COMPLETE READING
by William N. Austin**

Dear Sir: With the reading of Cartmill's HIGH JACK
AND DAME I completed, last night, my first cover-to-cover
reading of one of your stf. magazines—the October TWS
in this instance. And in general my impressions are favorable.

I've been reading fantasy fiction enthusiastically for less
than a year excepting, of course, Jules Verne, Burroughs,
H. G. Wells, Sax Rohmer, Haggard and the classic ghost
tales of M. R. James, Onions, et al. Usually I read all the
van Vogt, Bradbury and Sturgeon in TWS and STARTLING
STORIES and let it go at that, time being something of a
premium for me.

But then a lot of fantasy fans who frequent my book
shop kept mentioning how much both SS and TWS has
improved during the past several years, citing items like
AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT and WHAT MAD UNIVER-
SE? in SS—and WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHTAR and others
in TWS—convincing me that a complete reading of both
magazines, despite their garish covers, was imperative.

- Preliminary reactions:
1. While TWS specializes in stf it includes non-stf weird
material also—which is good! Nothing I like more than a
fine weird yarn—which undoubtedly accounts for the high
ratings assessed St. Clair's THE GARDENER and Leinster's
THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER, both of which are primarily
weird in nature.
 2. I noticed a weakness in handling female characters
in some of the stories. It seems the writers see too many
movies and listen to too many soap operas, because their
women perform in the same old stereotyped pattern (In
HIGH JACK AND DAME and THE LURE OF POLARIS
especially and, to some extent, in THE LAKE OF THE GONE
FOREVER).

My conception of the future involves not only the dis-
covery of gadgets—the material side of science—but in-
cludes also the development of sociology, philosophy and
psychology to the point where they can be classified as
sciences themselves. This notion implies that man's intel-
lectual faculties will need to keep abreast of the material
sciences—or perish!

3. Third discovery—an editorial policy leaning heavily
towards entertainment instead of toward ideas. Nearly all
the stories, in this issue at least, rate highest in the cate-
gories of plotting, narration and suspense but most of them
de-emphasize the importance of theme. Which is all right.
I know of other magazines which stress the letter, often to
the detriment of the former—mentioning no names, of course.

- And now, my ratings of the stories:
1. Bradbury's KALEIDOSCOPE. I never grow tired of his
tales, and even though this one rates no better than most
of his it remains unforgettable, a classic in kind.
 2. St. Clair's THE GARDENER, a grisly little yarn, unique
and beautifully written.
 3. Hubbard's THE PLANET MAKERS. Highly entertaining.
 4. Brackett. THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER. Smooth
narration, tight construction and plenty of suspense charac-
terize this one.
 5. James' PARADOX rates well on all counts. Good-plus.
 6. West's THE LURE OF POLARIS deserves a higher rating
than sixth despite the mediocrities of characterization but
the competition is too keen. Pleasurable nevertheless.
 7. Leinster's THE QUEEN'S ASTROLOGER reveals the au-
thor at his best, especially in the validity of his characters
and atmosphere.

8. BACKWARD, O TIME! Climax was revealed prematurely.
 9. COLD WAR. Amusing and convincingly narrated.
 10. THE HIBITED MAN. The above applies here also.
 11. HIGH JACK AND DAME. Held my attention.
 Altogether, a very good issue and a most pleasurable formal introduction to your magazine.

One thing about fantasy fandom that amazes me is—fantasy fandom. Where else in the whole field of literature does one discover a comparable situation? Despite the precocity of some of the habitual correspondents there permeates the letter columns of the prozines and the club gaffests an unsullied enthusiasm, a pervasive spirit of optimism that is most heart-warming.

In science-fiction, most noticeably, one is struck with the impression that as science evolves new concepts the writers elaborate these concepts by means of fantastic devices, and the results in some cases are reaped in turn by the scientists for still-further elaboration, the process continuing in a never-ending circle.

It may be this very reason that impels me to throw my hat into the circle of fantasy fandom—this spark of optimism amid the sombre grays of contemporary pessimism and the blacks of Existentialism. It seems reasonably certain that some day, before many years pass, there will come into existence a national fan organization of the type of the old Science Fiction League but consisting of strongly integrated state organizations from which will originate the representatives which will actuate the national federation. Fans in Wenatchee, Yakima, Spokane, Bellingham, Tacoma, Everett, and in the other towns: let's hear from you!—WOLF DEN BOOK SHOP, 724 Pike St., Seattle 1, Wash.

Thanks not only for the praise but for the thoughtfulness toward the entire field revealed in your letter, Mr. Austin. I wish for your bookshop a long and profitable stf and general future and from you, many more letters, whether they apply the gold leaf, like the above, or the essence of skunk cabbage.

All in all, a fitting epistle with which to wind up what seems to us to be a very live READER SPEAKS. Thanks, all of you.
 —THE EDITOR.

P. S. For that spot of entertainment between more profound pursuits, the editor recommends "The Big Wheel," a new United Artists film featuring Mickey Rooney and co-starring Thomas Mitchell, Mary Hatcher, Michael O'Shea, Spring Byington and Hat-tie McDaniels. Presented by Harry Polkin, Sam Stiefel and former heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey, this picture is an exciting drama of the Indianapolis auto races which hits thrill-speed on all cylinders!

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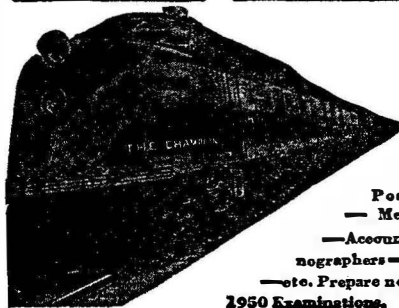
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The FRYING PAN



A REVIEW OF FANZINES

WE hate to use the trite and shopworn wha' hopen—but something new (at any rate in our extremely limited fanexperience) seems to be stirring in fandom. A couple of fanzine editors—apparently after backing away and getting a good firm perspective on the busy and dizzy field in which their leisure (?) hours are occupied—have teed off on their colleagues and themselves.

In an elegant thing called RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, published at 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, California, Editor George Blumenson has opened with the following in explanation of his co-founding of *The Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society*, of which RHODO is the official digest—

TO HELL WITH FANZINES!

Crackpots and lunatic fringers exist in almost every new field, whether it be architecture, atomic power, semantics or science-fiction. And science-fiction has more than its share of crackpots.

This group undoubtedly was the reason for the article, highly derisive and eminently facetious, which appeared some months ago in *Harper's*, explaining (?) the sudden up-swing which science-fiction has been experiencing since the end of the war.

There is much more to science-fiction than the making up of new languages, on which some fans spend all their time, the writing of whacky letters to editors or the explaining of "mysteries" to a predominantly adult audience which somehow seems at times to be made up of adolescent mentalities.

Science-fiction, to a great extent, is the sounding board for new ideas, the proving ground for experiments, both in literature and science, which are being brought to fruition every day.

There is such a thing as carrying "fandom" too far and it seems to us that the majority of "fanzine" editors are missing the boat in catering to infantile and adolescent minds. Science-fiction, for the sake of the fans themselves, must be taken seriously. And "fanzines" are detracting from both these fields.

The Elves, Gnomes and Little Men's Science-Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society of Berkeley is embarking on what seems to be a unique experiment in fantasy and science-fiction fan magazines. We are attempting to raise the level of sanity in fandom with the RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST. But we are not going stuffy or particularly highbrow. We plan to offer articles, features, book reviews, humor, written by some of the biggest names in the fantasy and science-fiction field. . . .

Editor Blumenson makes good in his inaugural issue by coming up with a non-Derlethian basic science-fiction library offered by none other than Anthony Boucher, the sage of San Francisco himself. And then Boucher's current colleague in a rival prozine, J. Francis McComas, contributes [Turn page]

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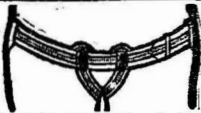
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an exceedingly interesting selection of fifteen "best" science-fiction shorts.

There is much more to this new fanzine, of course (20c per copy, 8 copies \$1.50), much of it good, some bad. But more important than the success of the first issue is the fact that any fan or group of fans should have managed to try it at all. We wish them luck, not only for RHODO but for the projected and larger quarterly which is to co-run with it.

A "Purposeless" Publication

The other unexpected item is far less pretentious and strikes for the same end through a modestly satiric bent. It is called MAKHZAN, "The Purposeless Publication," and is printed, published and otherwise perpetrated by one J. E. Edmiston, Star Route, Buckhorn Road, Upper Altoona, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Edmiston enthusiastically tables a

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS



PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN

A Complete Short Novel
By MURRAY LEINSTER

THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS

A Fantastic Novelet
By JAMES BLISH

JOURNEY FOR SEVEN

A Novelet of The Atomic Age
By JOHN D. MACDONALD

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stand in support of "Sexocratic Roscoism" and has composed the following poem (?) to express his views—

*When our Solar neighbors have rotted
Away
And full of flames the depths of space
Are aglow,
And the last sound in the Universe
Quivers the Earth below,
You, unaffected, will smile at the
All embracing fire
And will ignite your lantern light
At the universes pyre
Because you've lived and worshiped
The Roscoe way.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, move over and make room. A new poet has arisen to challenge thee just for the Eliot.

Clowning aside, we kind of like it. It has a certain bathetic majesty which all but atones for its more horrid lubricities. And surely it tees off on the greater absurdia of much of fandom (not you, Don Day) with as straight a left arm and as full a pivot as does the less elfin RHODO.

This is all to the good, let the feuds fall where they may. But we have a sort of left-handed hunch that fandom will remain the same blankety-blank ornery amorphous terrible and wonderful thing it has been from the beginning, is now and probably ever shall be. Long may it wave!

—THE EDITOR.

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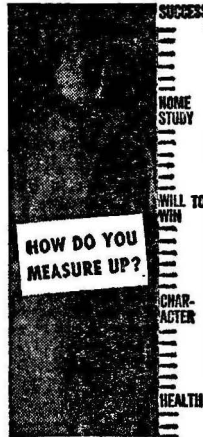
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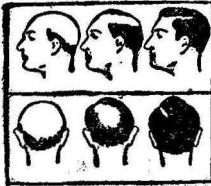
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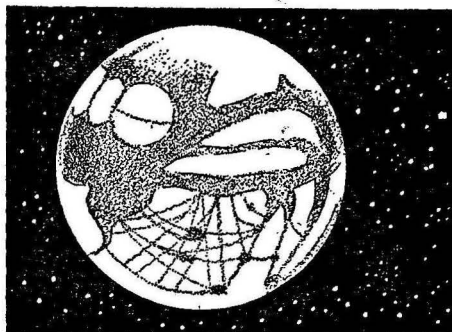
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ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

THE KID FROM MARS by Oscar J. Friend, Frederick Fell, Inc., New York (\$2.50).

This quondam **STARTLING STORIES** lead, modernized and developed by its author, makes for a combination of reader suspense and laughter that combine to verge on agony—somewhat the same as that induced by viewing a rerun of a W. C. Fields picture. The American adventures of Llamkin, come to Earth to make a scientific study of the human sense of humor without which



his otherwise superior species is dying out, run from the ridiculous to the riotous in a literal sense.

In the first place, no one on Earth believes Llamkin is a Martian at all (he has been carefully bred to withstand our atmosphere and looks as human as you or I—or do we?). In the second place, his arrival is so timed and placed that he becomes the focal point in a pair of gargantuan big-business exploitation schemes that make him the Martian rope in an appalling tug of war.

In the third place—but from here on you're on your own. Mr. Friend's **THE KID FROM MARS** is a wonderful spoofing jaunt through the time-honored purlieu of science fiction—and it is certainly a bargain not only in price but in content. For those who like a spot of fun with their stf it is a must.

LORDS OF CREATION by Eando Binder, The Prime Press, Philadelphia (\$3.00).

A fine version of *The Sleeper Wakes*

theme which is also the stuff of which stf dreams are made. Unlike H. G. Wells' classic, in which the hero slept a mere two centuries, Homer Ellory, the hero of this jaunt through time, is time-capsuled for some three thousand years, being awakened at last to find himself in an utterly demechanized Hudson Valley civilization in which metal and machines are known only to the insolent Antarctic overlords.

Abetted by the lovely Sharina, he organizes the U.S.A. against these despots, to be foiled and taken captive by the fascinating Lady Ermaine, a despot among despots. He rises to fight again but in a state of considerable emotional confusion, which helps set the stage for the inevitable rousing finale.

LORDS OF CREATION follows tried and true stf patterns—but it follows them well and with sufficient artistry to keep the compliant reader engrossed all the way. And the name of Binder has a certain magic in its own right.

FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE by William F. Temple, John Long, Ltd., London (9s. 6d.).

The author of this volume, certainly not unknown to readers of this magazine and [Turn page]

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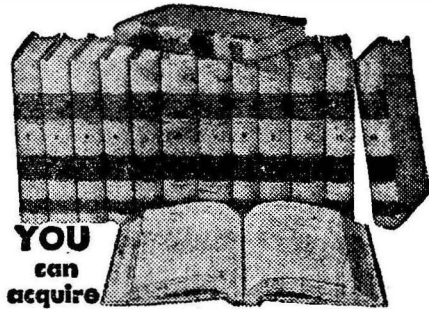
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The combination has great possibilities which are, in part, realized. But after the English fashion Mr. Temple takes an abominably long time getting into his real story (which is tremendous) and his males are without exception afflicted with that bumbling shyness in the face of any female which seems to be beloved of British readers and which gives most of us an utter lack of sympathy with his masculine characters.

An interesting and entertaining pioneer job which we hope will do extremely well. It deserves a wide public.

ADDRESS UNKNOWN by Eden Phillpotts, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London (9s. 6d.).

One of the classic detective authors of the past several decades here turns his hand to stf with a story of ill-fated contact with a member of a super alien race who calls himself *Zoom*. Ultimately the hero blows up the contact and himself to save humanity from slavery.

The book is slow-paced and very very British in its underwriting.

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