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fantastic
SCIENCE FICTION

10 NEW stories

WHAT WOULD YOU DO if you were a skid row bum with a camera that could photograph the future?

See PAWN SHOP CAMERA by Leland Griffin • page 90

EXCLUSIVE FABIAN ILLUSTRATIONS for Daemon 3

A PREVIEW OF TV's "MARTIAN CHRONICLES"

fantastic stories
science fiction • fantasy • sword & sorcery
January, 1980

fantastic SCIENCE FICTION

Science Fiction ● Fantasy ● Sword & Sorcery

January, 1980

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover, by Elinor Mavor, is a kaleidoscopic vision (perhaps seen through the eyes of several "pawn shop" cameras) of some of what happens on the following pages; space travel, time travel, mind control, alien magic, the powers of a radiant woman from the sea, and more.

FEATURES

FICTION 16

off the clipboard

IF YOU would like to dine at a table in a great restaurant that creates the most delectable and imaginative dishes, seasoned with fantastic adventure . . . magic and humor . . . then sit right down and be served!

We have ten author-chefs who have prepared a stunning menu for this January issue of *Fantastic*. Nine imaginations that have soared and stretched and stirred into worlds beyond tomorrow.

On these pages are featured ten *new* stories by authors both just published and often published; each one selected with tender loving thought and care.

And we are adding something new: starting with this issue we will discuss at the end of each story why we liked it and why we chose it for publication. We hope by doing so to stimulate some dialogue with you, our audience. You will discover what our thinking was and may feel like letting us hear your thoughts about a particular story. For instance, if you were editor, would you have chosen as we did?

Another new feature beginning in this issue is the inclusion of auto-biographical sketches from each writer. Meeting our writers is very good fun and will add a new dimension to your enjoyment of their stories. Many of our readers are also writers, and they may identify with much of what our authors have to say.

Here is a letter from one of our reader-writers:

Dear Mr. Gohagen:

I have just purchased the July issue of *FANTASTIC* and, as is my habit, I have read the *INTERCOM* section first. If this issue is as exciting as your April edition, I will indeed be happy. Your art work is excellent and the size of print provides for easy, rapid reading. Add to these items the quality and variety of your stories and it all sums up to just plain good-times, and that's what you want for your money these days.

On page four of your April issue, Mr. Bernhard wrote a most fascinating treatise, a declaration of war, if you will, on stagnation and mediocrity in the field of science fiction and fantasy. His article spoke of "plots you can get your teeth into" and "real heroes and satisfying endings." I just had to cut that page out of the April issue and place it on the wall, just above my typewriter.

I cannot remember having read such a clear-cut, definitive statement by a publisher. I think all of us who are involved in this "art" should set our sights a bit higher, and, in the words of Mr. Bernhard, attain "a new level of science fiction writing — a kind of material that takes inspiration from the Golden Age and weaves a new brand of magic . . ."

Mr. Bernhard, I salute you. You are a true Renaissance man!

Sincerely,
Ralph Annan
New Port Richey, Fla.

We will have artist autobiogs in upcoming issues, *if* we can persuade them to drop their brushes and get to a typewriter. The work of seven artists enlivens the pages of this issue, delivering thoughtful interpretations of visions verbally imagined by each author. These are highly

visual times, influenced by the success of spectacular films such as *Star Wars, Close Encounters* and *Alien.*

WORKING WITH us now on our burgeoning pile of manuscripts are two young writers, Britton Bloom and Anna Gail. They have recently been added to our editorial staff and share our philosophy of giving fair attention to each story we receive. Writers know how writers feel, and will aim to be helpful where possible and courteous always.

May we repeat here our request that all manuscripts be presented as neatly and error-free as possible, typed with double-spacing and sent, unfolded, with SASE enclosed. Incidentally, cover letters are *not* necessary, although we do enjoy them . . . and certain approaches do get quicker attention; one reader recently struggled against the impulse to dash outside with a meticulously foil-wrapped manuscript bearing the ominous message: CAUTION: LIVE INSECTS INSIDE.

WE OFTEN wonder what unbelievable things imagined by our writers will one day become reality. Landing on the moon was once a fantasy. Will we one day be able to consort with aliens, travel in time machines or preserve ourselves for life in another century? Think about it as you encounter these ideas in the pages you are about to read. We think you will find them all entertaining.

SPECIAL NOTE to Orson Scott Card: some of your comments in a recent *Writer's Digest* were based on incorrect information.

OUR PERSONAL thanks to each person who bought this issue of *Fantastic.*

INTERCOM

Kudos and kicks from our audience. We'd like more response from "out there" about our stories. Be sure and read the end-of-story discussion after each piece and let us know what you think.

Editors,

While supposedly in support of a non-sexist turn in SF (could've fooled me), "Sex Queens of Outer Space" was quite a mockery. My God, you had to have been kidding with that title! Trying to sell some magazines, boys?

The copy was fine although the artwork was pointedly sexy . . . (why are women in sci-fi possessed of special support systems that allow them to cavort in constant stages of undress while the men remain demure behind various tubes and paraphenalia? Do you truly think all your reader/writer/fans are male?)

If affirmative action has reached the monthly magazine circuit, I suggest you try for more consistent work. And on this subject, make the author a woman, huh?

I've no doubt I'm speaking for many female sci-fi buffs . . . I've been reading (and writing on my own) for more than fifteen years and have only now gotten to the breaking point with this foolishness.

Honestly!
Jess Sally Brandon
New Haven, Conn.

Would you accept it as a parody? Women have been treated much like the "Sex Queen" illos look, down through the history of SF. Our point is that we can laugh at that kind of thing now; it no longer applies.

Dear Mr. Gohagen:

Let me say at the outset that I had a very good feeling about the new *FANTASTIC* from the moment it appeared on my newsstand. I did not know where you were going with it at first, but now it appears things are sorting themselves out and also getting even better in the process.

My main enthusiasm, however, is reserved for your *approach* to the publication, rather than the actual result (which is fine in and of itself). You are an editor who recognizes that not only are readers human, but writers are too . . . and God bless you for that! Nothing but good can come of this.

Let me explain what I mean by that. A publication is a medium of communication. Communication, whether it is for the purpose of exchanging information or for the purpose of entertainment, is a process of sharing . . . and that is a two-way street. Too many editors do not recognize that, and treat readers (largely) and writers (almost entirely) as passive objects. How much finer it is to give them a feeling of participation!

You are doing a fine job of it, too. I have yet to receive a MS back from you without some thoughtful and useful comment, however brief. I want you to know how much I appreciate it. More than that, the "Between the Lines" sections are valuable contributions . . . and one does not have to agree entirely with Mr. Wilcox to recognize the intrinsic worth of his observations.

I sense in your approach, overall, a firm commitment to make *FANTASTIC* the collective result of the efforts of its editors, contributors, and readers. I cannot praise your intent too highly. And, as I said, the resulting product improves with each issue. May your sales double (at least) in 1980.

Sincerely,
Rod Walker
Encinitas, Calif.

Thanks for your support. If we do it right, your last sentence may come true!

READERSCOPE

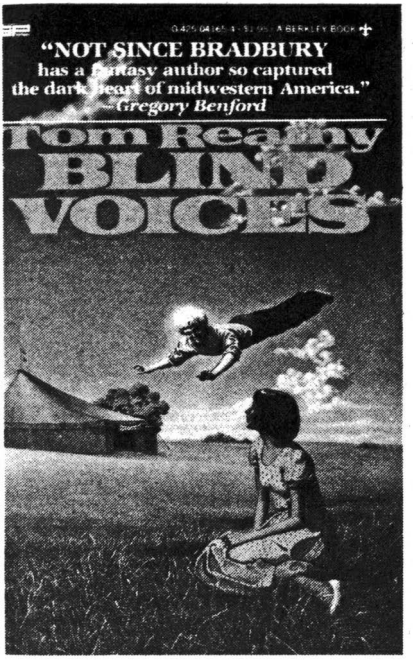
BOOK REVIEWS

by Tom Staicar

Staicar reviews science fiction books for Amazing. In Fantastic, he'll be covering a wider range including SF, fantasy, heroic fantasy and horror — by famous and not-yet-famous authors. All major publishers are increasing their titles in these genres, and Staicar's job will be to give careful consideration to all of them and select some for review that will be especially enjoyable for the readers of Fantastic.

Blind Voices by Tom Reamy *(Berkley, $1.95; SF Book Club)* This fantasy book appeared in hardcover from Putnam a few months ago and created a sensation. It has been nominated for the Hugo and Nebula Awards and has received praise from reviewers. I can say without hesitation that you are cheating yourself if you fail to read *Blind Voices*. The book has a strength and a beauty of its own. I was reminded at times of Ray Bradbury and at other times of E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* as this story of a sinister sideshow unfolded.

The people are so real it sometimes seems like you could look them up in a history book. The characters are all changed in some way by the arrival of Haverstock's Traveling Curiosus and Wonder Show in Hawley, Kansas. The fact that the freaks are genuine and the sideshow stunts real only serves to set the story in motion. The entanglements, involvements and relationships among the townspeople and the new visitors bring the reader into the story.



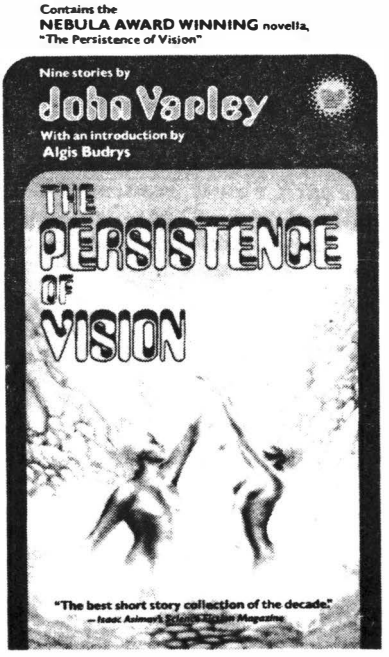
The sensual details, whether of the 1930's agricultural town or of the first experience of sex by its young people, are so vivid that most other books seem lifeless by comparison. The drug store fan slowly revolves to circulate the smells of chocolate and vanilla from the soda fountain into those of the camphor and wormwood of the prescription counter. The door opens too quickly and hits the magazine rack. Outside, cicadas jump in the summer wheatfields.

Talking pictures are coming to town, the Depression is getting under way and changes are coming which no resident of Hawley can escape. The climax of the novel is as powerfully written as any I have read. The ending, as the entire book, cries out to be filmed. Reading *Blind Voices* is a similar emotional experience to viewing a well done film, and that is a tribute to Reamy's ability to communicate directly with the reader.

It would be wonderful to say that Tom Reamy has a bright future in writing. Sadly, he died of a heart attack and *Blind Voices* is his only novel.

The Persistance of Vision by John Varley *(Dell, $2.25; SF Book Club).*

Anyone who has been reading the SF magazines during the past seven years or so has probably read some of the stories in this collection. Varley has already established himself as a master of short fiction. The nine stories in this book, such as "In The Hall of the Mountain Kings" and "The Persistance of Vision" are so superior that they tend to raise the level of the genre by serving as examples to other writers.

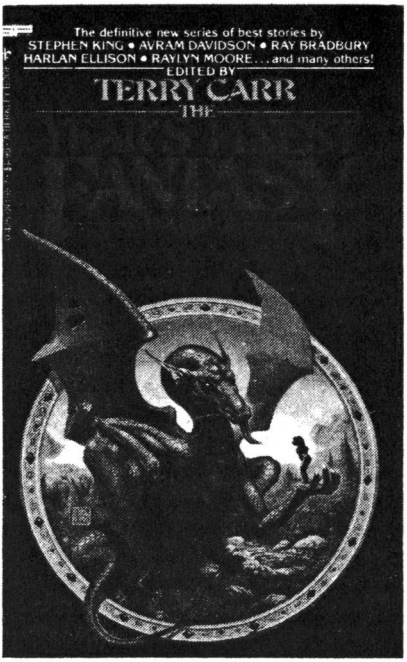


In his stories we take for granted that the people he talks about really exist. He achieves this by plausible behavior, logical reactions to events and small details which bring the characters to life. Some have noted that his work reminds one of Heinlein. Varley has a command of science but the main similarity is the feeling one has that all these stories might happen someday. John W. Campbell once said he often asked his authors to write as though their stories were appearing in non-fiction magazines to be read in a future world. Varley achieves this effect by his backgrounds and dialogue. An example would be the offhand comments about Moon colonists versus Venus colonists and the reactions which tell more about the people of that time than dry lectures to each other about the same topics. Future gadgets are explained by their use in the stories.

This collection might have been another writer's "Best Of . . ." but it is merely the first compilation of Varley's magazine fiction. Let us hope he can bear the burden of the adulation he has been receiving.

The Year's Finest Fantasy, Volume 2, edited by Terry Carr *(Putnam, $8.95; Berkley paperback, $1.95).* Terry Carr edits the annual *Best Science Fiction of the Year* series for Del Rey. Last year he began a series of fantasy annuals for Berkley/Putnam which has quickly established itself as a must-have series for fantasy readers. This second volume includes fiction by leading authors as well as a list of other recommended reading and a valuable summary called "The Year in Fantasy," by Susan Wood.

As always, Carr's taste is impeccable and his selections varied and well-balanced. Because of this balance, however, it is doubtful that a single reader will like all the stories. I wasn't completely satisfied by Ray Bradbury's "Gotcha!" or impressed by R.A. Lafferty's "Selenium Ghosts of the Eighteen-Seventies." On the other hand, I much enjoyed the other entries, especially the gruesome but emotionally-wrenching "Within the Walls of Tyre," by Michael Bishop and the predictably superb Harlan Ellison story, "The Man Who Was Heavily Into Revenge."



The stories vary from short stories to novellas and were drawn from such sources as *Universe 8, Fantastic* and even *Redbook.* Carr omits heroic fantasy (and sword-and-sorcery, depending on one's definitions) and includes only SF which comes under the term fantasy without straining to be there.

Morlock Night, by K. W. Jeter *(DAW, $1.75).* Kenneth W. Jeter wrote two novels for Roger Elwood's defunct Laser Books series (happily not the worst in that uneven group). Jeter has talent but his work is not without flaws. His use of language impressed me throughout this sequel to H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine.* The book is set in 1892 London, immediately after the Time Traveller's tale has been told. The Morlocks steal the Time Machine and commandeer it in a war against London.

Jeter's word choices are consistently good ones, especially in his realistic 1892 dialogue. The background effects such as cabhorse hooves are believably from that era.

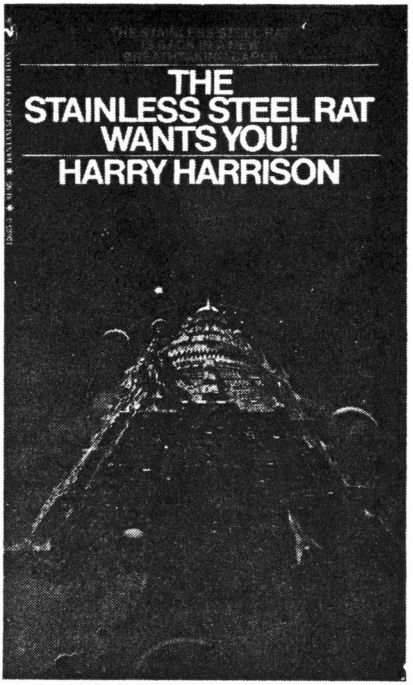
The major flaw is his decision to introduce fantasy into the Wells science fiction story. Jeter adds King Arthur and Merlin to the story and they seem to grate against the existing SF elements, in my opinion. If the Wells book had not been the starting point for the story I would not have minded any science-fantasy or other combination being used. I had hoped that *Morlock Night* would be a sequel which employed only science fictional elements to continue the tale of the Time Traveller.

The discovery of a Jules Verne style submarine beneath London in the sewer waters and the Excalibur swords in the hands of the future Morlocks were straining to my suspension-of-disbelief. I also object to the use of a sequence which is later revealed to have been an illusion caused by Merlin.

Mr. Jeter is a good writer and he will develop his career more quickly if he writes for either the fantasy or the SF audience in a single book. That way he will please either one group or the other. I always knew there was a reason why they didn't put *The Hobbit* and Hal Clement's books on the same shelf at the store.

The Stainless Steel Rat Wants You, by Harry Harrison *(Bantam, $1.95; SF Book Club).* Harry Harrison's popular character James "Slippery Jim" Bolivar diGriz returns in his fourth novel, resourceful, arrogant and heroic as ever. An agent of the Interplanetary Special Corps, he uses his background as an ex-criminal to solve impossible cases.

The new novel has to do with an anti-human war being staged by a conglomeration of the ugliest and most vicious aliens in the galaxy. Humans are deemed too repulsive and



"too dry" to be tolerated. Slippery Jim Infiltrates the alien war council wearing a disguise designed to make him as hideous and vile looking as possible. It works. The aliens love him, partly due to the fact that he has unwittingly disguised himself as one of the most attractive types of female aliens. While fending off the amorous attentions of the alien males (one of whom winks six eyes at one time to attract his attention), he gets the inside story of the deadly war plans.

Harry Harrison is very good at this type of smoothly humorous adventure novel. I recommend it, and also the earlier three-in-one volume, *The Adventures of the Stainless Steel Rat (Berkley, $2.25; SF Book Club).*

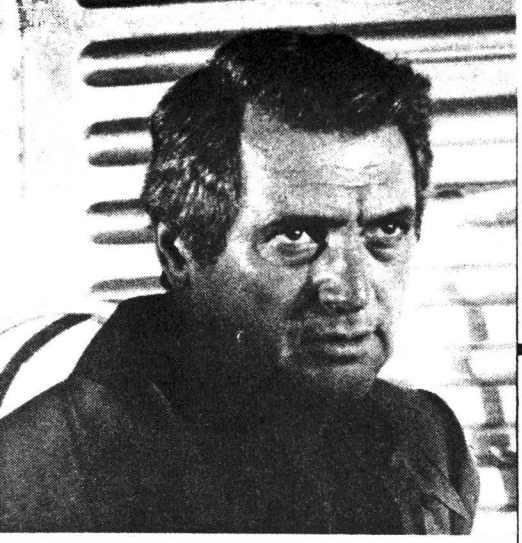
A preview-review of the forthcoming TV production of the Ray Bradbury classic.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES: TV FILM PREVIEW

by Steven Dimeo

AFTER FIFTEEN years of false starts and dead ends, Ray Bradbury's seminal collection of moody science fantasies loosely woven into a "framework" novel, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), has at last been adapted for film at a cost of $8 million, and the results may have mixed reactions from critics when the troubled NBC network airs it as a six-hour miniseries this coming January.

Changes brought on by the passage of time — the theme that dominates Bradbury's fiction — have had much to do with the delays. Originally conceived as a full-length feature film in the mid-sixties, MGM commissioned Bradbury himself to write the script that Robert Mulligan and Alan Pekula of "To Kill a Mockingbird" fame were to produce. When that studio lost interest, Universal picked up the gauntlet and asked Bradbury to do another version. This time his 178-page screenplay used a narrator with an irrepressible penchant for poetic overstatement to unify parts of short stories from *The Martian Chronicles* as well as another tale, "Kaleidoscope," from *The Illustrated Man* (1951) and a new one, "The Lost City of Mars," that was itself an outgrowth of Bradbury's returning to this material. Once again the project was shelved, not so much because of script deficiencies, according to Bradbury, but because photos taken on the Mariner fly-bys suggested life on Mars was an even more remote possibility than previously suspected, and both studios balked at risking an estimated $20



Rock Hudson, neon appropriately flashing in the background, tries to give someone a studied look as Capt. John Wilder from the TV miniseries, "The Martian Chronicles."

million to produce a film about life on Mars that would be painfully dated by the time it was released.

While Bradbury eventually reworked the material as a play which has since been staged in L.A. to favorable reviews, plans for any kind of motion picture adaptation lay fallow until producer Charles Fries assigned novelist and scriptwriter Richard Matheson ("The incredible Shrinking Man," 1957, and "Duel," 1971, just to name two of greatest note) to try his hand at it. Again, ironically, time affected the outcome, in this instance auspiciously. By the summer of 1977 "Star Wars" had made science fiction a more practical investment for notoriously conservative network executives. In the fall of that same year NBC officially picked up the option for the show.

What is even more ironic is that the medium at last should be not theatrical motion pictures but television. Anachronicsm that he is as an SF writer who still never drives a car or flies in planes, Bradbury also resisted introducing television into his home in the fifties, has lampooned its democratic mediocrity in such works as *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and until lately avoided working in the medium unless he could first be assured the time and freedom to try, as he puts it, for "100 per cent perfection." Matheson maintains in a recent *Cinefantastique* story (8: #4), however, that despite a few modifications essential in adapting the SF classic to the TV screen, "the script certainly preserved the spirit of Bradbury's work" and both Bradbury and his wife "seemed very satisfied" with the final screenplay.

Bradbury . . . an SF writer who still never drives a car or flies in planes . . . and who resisted TV in his home.

Charles Fries, co-producer along with Richard Berg, elaborates that, aside from weeding out tales for the sake of compression, the major change has been to make Capt. John Wilder played by Rock Hudson the show's central character. In order to strengthen the overriding theme of man's depredation on both Earth and Mars toward things past, Matheson had to trim such stories as "The Earthmen," the second expedition when the Martians believe the earthlings to be merely psychotic hallucinations, one of the weaker and more pulpish in the collection; "Way in the Middle of the Air," a literate but embarrassingly dated treatment of discrimination that pretends to know the consequences when blacks participate in the colonization of Mars; and "Usher II," a corny tale of another of Bradbury's nostalgia freaks who mechanizes a museum on Mars to preserve the fantasies of Poe which have been banned on Earth. Other than this judicious editing and efforts to update the technological milieu of the expeditions, though, the most obvious tampering is the enlargement of Wilder's character to maintain reader interest, according to Fries. For example, prior to the first Mars expedition when Ylla (British actress Maggie Wright) believes she is only fantasizing a human with whom she falls in love until her husband proves the reality by killing

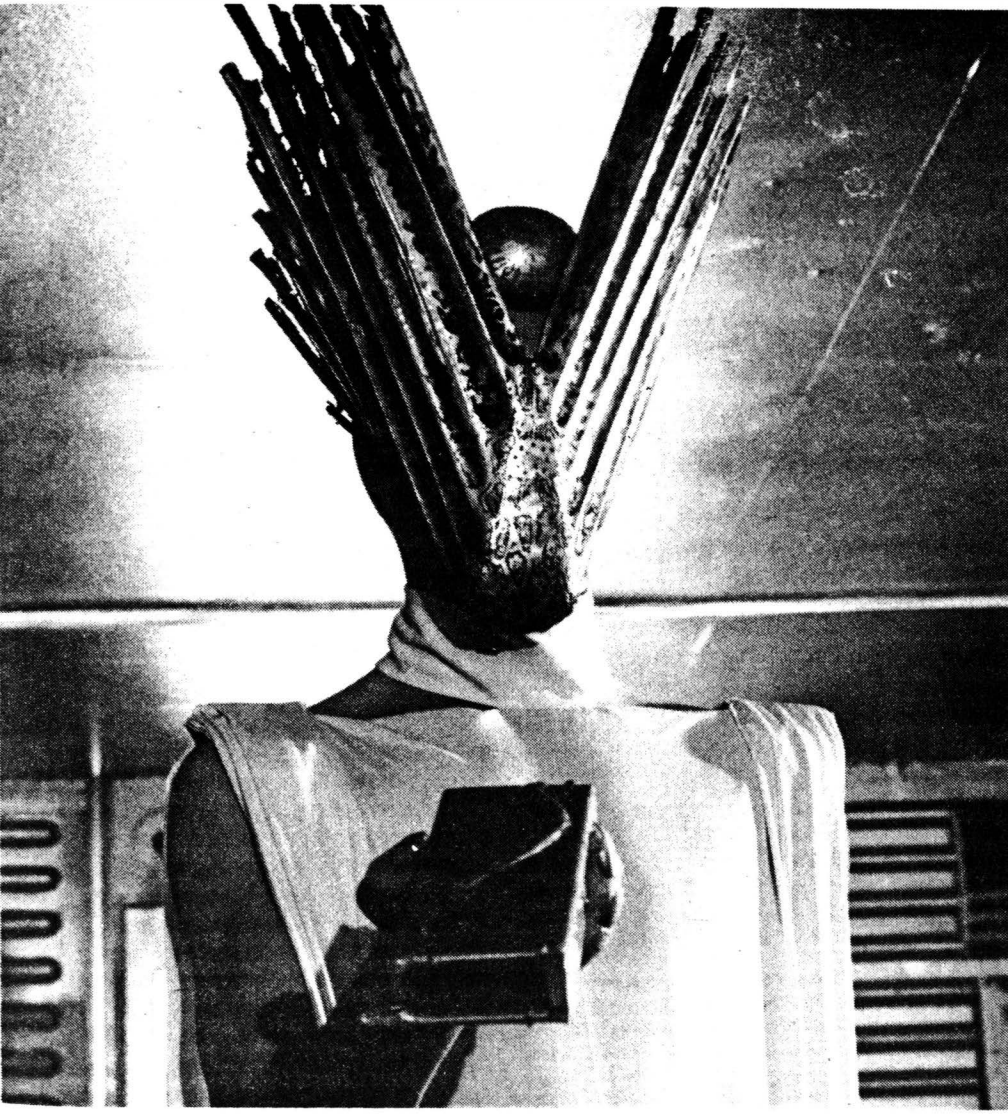
the astronaut, Hudson is introduced in scenes at mission control though he doesn't lead an expedition himself until the third time out. By making Wilder the protagonist, the much-anthologized short story "There Will Come Soft Rains," a tour de force describing the self-destruction of an automated earth dwelling after a global war, should also take on greater meaning, Fries hopes, once the viewer understands that it is not just any house here but that of Wilder's brother's family. Otherwise, as Fries' son Butch who served as associate producer insists, "We're as faithful to Bradbury as anybody has ever been."

Considering many of the talents involved in the project, there is certainly some indication that the miniseries will strive for a quality unusual to television. As the crusty but sensitive Wilder, Rock Hudson, fresh from his last SF feature-length disaster "Embryo," may be the primary exception, the obligatory sell-out to network businessmen hungry for the insurance of a big-name draw. Other principals, however, boast sounder dramatic credentials. Having last worked with Matheson material in TV's "The Night Stalker" (1972) and "The Night Strangler" (1973), Darren McGavin plays Sam Parkhill, the capitalist in two of the best stories — "And the Moon Be Still As Bright" and "The Off Season" — who profanes the Martians and their heritage for the sake of a good time and a fast buck (that means, surprisingly, that he's into guns and hot dogs, *not* oil). Fritz Weaver, late of TV's "Holocaust," shifts from Judaism to Catholism as Father Peregrine. In an episode that dovetails "The Fire Balloons" from *The Illustrated Man* with "The Martian" from the *Chronicles* where earthlings discover the chameleon powers of the native inhabitants and suffer the psychological consequences, Weaver plays a "peregrinating" believer more open to alien faiths than Father Stone (the persistent Roddy McDowall) whose patronym — in typical Bradbury fashion — overstates his more concervative anthropomorphic preferences. On the second expedition in the teleplay (actually the third in the book) from the popular tale anthologized elsewhere as "Mars is Heaven!", Nicholas Hammond has the role of Capt. Black and director-actor Michael Anderson, Jr., that of Lustig, both of whom find on Mars a fatally real image of the Green Bluff, Ohio, from their respective pasts on Earth. And in sequences that may seem today to exploit the ecology faddishness that Bradbury antedated, Bernie Casey plays Jeff Spender, the poetic defender of ancient Martian ways, and Richard Masur fills the role as Benjamin Driscoll, in the book a silly Johnny Appleseed imitator who seeds Mars with Jack-and-the-Beanstalk effectiveness.

"We did our best to recreate" (the lifeless wasteland of Mars)

As for those behind the camera, the miniseries features as director the 60-year-old veteran filmmaker Michael Anderson. Although his career has ranged from the academy-award winning "Around the World in Eighty Days" (1956) to the respectable failure of "The Shoes of the Fisherman" (1968), his only foray into science fiction was a creditable adaptation of Orwell's *1984* in 1955 and the interesting if inconsistent "Logan's Run" (1976) which garnered the Oscar for best special effects that year. Others behind the production include another academy-award winner, John Stears, the special effects director who won previously for "Star Wars"; Ted Moore as cinematographer; Ashton Gorton ("Blow-Up") as set designer; and artist Ray Cappel who painted the more than 45 mattes for the Martian landscape.

When asked about efforts to take into consideration the lifeless wasteland of Mars now authenticated by the Voyager landings, the younger Fries explains, "We did our best to recreate that feeling but we took dramatic license with it." Many of the exteriors were shot on the island of Malta and in the Canary Islands on Lanzarote, two-thirds of which is lava flow. Fries describes both those barren settings and the



The Martian from the TV miniseries, "The Martian Chronicles," looking more like a renegade from a wild Mardi Gras celebration, makes us an offer we might prefer to refuse.

Darren McGavin as Sam Parkhill seems anxious to get into a western rather than any of Bradbury's stories in this scene with Joyce Van Patten who seems distressed about playing his wife in the television miniseries, "The Martian Chronicles," to be aired on NBC this January.

living quarters for Ylla which were constructed on a sound stage as "very, very bizarre." The town of Green Bluff, Ohio, (based upon Bradbury's childhood growing up in Waukegan, Illinois) which was built entirely on Malta is featured along with most of Cappel's mattes during the second two hours of the series, Fries points out.

Despite the producers' effort to make "The Martian Chronicles" into an unusual fantasy for television, NBC has shown some hesitation about scheduling it as it has been about another finished by as yet

unscheduled novel adaptation, "Brave New World." Why the hesitation in the case of the "Chronicles"? "I think what may have been behind it," the younger Fries theorizes, "is that some of the people in the programming department were expecting 'Battlestar Galactica' and, as you well know, this is not 'Battlestar Galactica' at all."

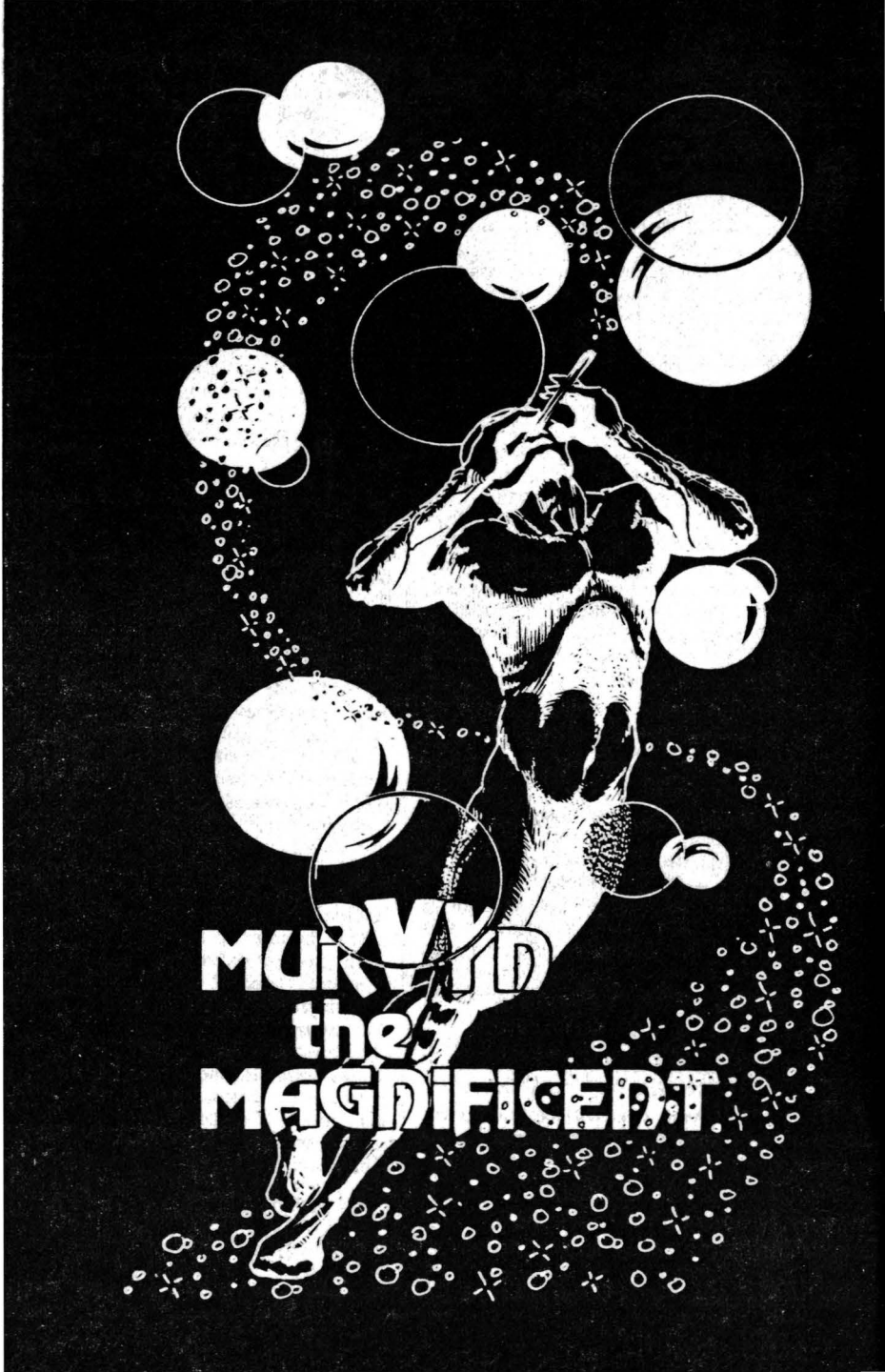
Bradbury, who has not only read the script but seen the entire footage, has apparently received it more enthusiastically. Fries denies the rumor that Bradbury considered the beginning too slow. "I think," Fries counters, "the first hour is the best stuff in the show. We have some fantastic effects there." Bradbury's only real objection to the final product, he continues, was with the omission of "Drink to Me Only" which Ylla sings in the opening sequences. "Otherwise," Fries maintains about that episode's faithfulness to Bradbury's original, "it's verbatim." Asked to give an opinion in his own words on the miniseries, however, the 59-year-old Bradbury, busy with a stage play version of *Fahrenheit 451*, refused comment.

Prior film adaptations of Bradbury material have not enjoyed much success. The difficulty may be in the very style that has made Bradbury what he is. There can be little doubt about the significance of *The Martian Chronicles*. As fellow science-fiction writer William F. Nolan ("Logan's Run") has written, "It is impossible to over-emphasize the humanizing influence his work has exerted on science fiction." But the humanistic sentimentality and literate symbolism epitomized in this work suggest why written works of similar style translate so poorly to the screen and why film people have been reluctant so long to touch the *Chronicles*. Interestingly, the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review's* assessment of the TV production of *Fahrenheit 451* on October 18, 1953, could have as easily been said of another critical disaster *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962): Bradbury draws "symbols rather than characters, impressionistic settings rather than convincing backgrounds." A strength in the prevailing superficiality of most science fiction even today, but certainly not for the screen where audiences must see an identifiable reality. In a personal letter the late Rod Serling agreed after working with Bradbury on one "Twilight Zone" episode:

> I have found . . . that he is much more effective on the page than he is on the proscenium. The lyrical quality of his work seems to lend itself to the printed page, rather than to spoken dialogue. In the case of "I Sing the Body Electric," the words that seem so beautiful in the story turned out archaic and wooden and somehow unbelievable when a person speaks them.

That executive producers Chuck Fries and Dick Berg have also chosen a six-hour format for their dramatization may only encourage the literary excess that has been Bradbury's nemesis. Whatever their value as SF allegory or "cautionary fairy tales," as Bradbury prefers to call them, the ten tenuously linked stories that have been selected for this series from the *Chronicles* would hardly seem to offer enough in either character or plot for an epic 286 minutes of running time that easily outdistances even a "Ben-Hur" or "Cleopatra" (unless, God forbid, they make a possible series spin-off). Bradbury's visions succeed best when his hemingwayesque brevity is pointedly controlled, not when it is allowed to lapse into overwritten moral mawkishness. At this length the miniseries runs the same risk. In a way it's too bad the *Chronicles* couldn't have reached the screen in the sixties before the height of the manned space program when Bradbury's nostalgic warnings seemed more original, more meaningful because they weren't quite so exploitatively timely. It may well be that at this length, in this era, Bradbury's dated fantasies of men and Martians imperiled by their own pasts may themselves be doomed to TV tedium by the relentless enemy he has written so much about — Time.

All we can be sure of is that we await this miniseries with the same kind of excitement that always accompanies trepidation.


MURVYN
the
MAGNIFICENT

Who would care about the feelings of a "space worm," a creature with no real form or place to call home? His strange abilities made money for people, but he wanted something more ...

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by William E. Fark

THAT WAS a fine meal, ma'am. Good as anything I could get back on earth. You folks don't live so bad, hidden back here on the edge of space.

What? No, I haven't been everywhere, but I guess I've seen more'n most people. Show business is big business, you know.

I'm sure we've met before. No? There's something familiar about you. Have you ever been in the theatre?

Here, can I give you a hand clearin' up? I haven't washed dishes in years, but I guess it's something you don't forget. Sure, I'll have more coffee. It's the first decent cup I've had since I left earth.

I'm sorry your husband couldn't join us. How long's he been sick? Too bad. I wondered why you ended up way out here. It's certainly healthy. Wish we had some of this non-polluted atmosphere. How long you been here? I knew it'd been around ten years that we'd been doing business together. I don't get rich sending my troupes out this way, but it gives 'em experience. And you've sent me a coupla money-makers.

This trip? Sort of a farewell tour. I'm thinkin' of retiring and turning the agency over to my son, Larry. Well, maybe I do have an act or two to look at while I'm swingin' around the galaxy. That way I can charge part of my travel expenses off for tax purposes. I've got a pretty good season lined up. One of the best I've had since I lost Murvyn the Magnificent.

Just now, the way you lifted your head . . . I'm sure I've seen you before. You must look like one of my former clients. I've worked in show business so long I tend to see everyone as an entertainer.

Oh, you've heard of Murvyn? Hank Milby discovered him, but I was the one who launched the act. It's peculiar how something like Murvyn goes over. We've got multi-dimensional projections and laser-vision and all the gimmicks that science can dream up, but some simple act like Murvyn's catches the public imagination and becomes a theatre legend. That's one thing that makes this business worthwhile — being around when one of the real pros gets his first break.

Illustrated by Scott Mavor

I never knew what Murvyn was exactly. Some kind of space worm. Milby got him out on one of the planetoids. Now Hank was one of the worst actors that ever lived, but he had a weird instinct for what would sell. I wasn't overjoyed when he came to see me. I'd had a miserable year, and my business consisted of my office on which I owed two month's rent, a part-time secretary and three clients. I welcomed Hank like an old-time carnival boss would the local sheriff. We went through the usual routine. He lied about his press on Mars — the only thing printed about him was his name on an outgoing passenger list — and I told him what a great season I'd had. Then we got down to business.

Hank put his attache case on my desk and flipped it open. There was a wad of green material inside and a child's musical instrument.

"Okay," he said. The green material stirred and I met Murvyn.

I'll never forget that first encounter. First, there was a faint ripple in the green, then it lifted and looked like a deflated beach ball. It moved again and I saw features — a small elfin face and two enormous dark eyes. Another ripple and the balloon assumed the form of a man, a doll-like, bronze creature with a green glow.

"Ready?" Hank asked. The tiny figure nodded. Hank handed him the instrument and slapped the desk with his hand. That was the start of Murvyn the Magnificent's first performance on earth.

The whistle was a kind of flute. I beg your pardon? You're right, a syrinx, a pan-pipe. Then you *have* seen the act. No? The melody was strange, based on ancient modes, I've been told — faint piping notes with curious rhythmic accents and an insistent theme. But the music wasn't the important thing. The act was Murvyn. He grew! From the first note — he grew!

The process was unbelievable; still is when I think about it. I'd seen Mercurian Mantles that go from leaf-size to rugs in a matter of seconds. They're actually self-contained bladders that expand. But Murvyn grew. It's hard to describe. He grew all at once. His muscles rippled, his skin changed color, and he was larger. And kept on playing that same tune.

Then it stopped. I realized that what I had thought of as instantaneous had actually taken the time required for Murvyn to play an entire composition. By then, the instrument that was oversize for a figure eight inches tall was ridiculously small for a manikin of three feet. He exchanged it for a regular-sized trumpet and let out a wild blast.

His second growth, to the jazz accompaniment, was faster than the first. He gyrated, pointed the horn at the ceiling, danced a few steps and winked at me. And grew. I applauded, tapped my feet and carried on like some old space prospector who hadn't seen the bright lights for five years or so. Hank moved over to my old beat-up piano and swung into a

finale, and when the last note died away, Murvyn stood there, a fully grown man.

I knew he was a gold mine. Hank and I argued over terms and he threatened to walk out, but I didn't think he would. I knew how far down the line my agency was, and Hank had come to me because he couldn't get in to see any of the first-rate agents. We finally agreed on a deal, and I got out a blank contract. Murvyn had retained his man-size during the discussion, and I turned to him.

"Is this okay with you?"

"Don't talk to him," Hank snapped. "He doesn't understand. You deal with me."

Sure enough, the creature didn't seem to comprehend, so I supposed Hank was right. Lots of intelligent life in space doesn't communicate with other species. If Murvyn was willing to put up with Hank Wilby, who was I to interfere? I noticed, however, that Murvyn began to shrink again following this exchange.

"How's he do it?" I asked.

"Hell, I don't know. How does a black cow eat green grass and give white milk?"

I winced. That's the kind of corn that made Hank a third-rater. I decided right then that I'd develop the act for Hank and Murvyn.

I used an old night club routine. Hank did imitations, pretty ghastly ones for that matter, of performers from the twentieth century. Then he pulled out a green handkerchief to mop his face and took an encore his applause didn't warrant. He threw the handkerchief down on top of his piano and started to play. The handkerchief stirred and turned into Murvyn the Magnificent.

Now if everyone saw that first show who claims he did, we couldn't've got them all into the Moon Bowl. It was just an ordinary earth audience, the kind who prefers live entertainment to electronic gadgetry. But a really appreciative one. From the time Murvyn first stirred till he took a bow, the theatre was so quiet I could hear the corn popping out in the lobby. Then I thought another space war had broken out. I've never heard such applause — before or since. Well, maybe it was greater later on, but I didn't hear it. I was so busy counting money.

In this racket, you're only as good as your current billing, and mine was never higher. Some of the biggest names in show business came around to seem me, eager to tie up with the agent who handled Murvyn, the biggest attraction of all time. And I sewed 'em up in long-term contracts. I was on my way.

Soon as Hank was launched, I turned his affairs over to my son. As a third-rate comic, Hank was bearable; as a success, he was a first-rate bastard. One of the first things he did was refuse to appear on a bill with

a non-human performer. You can imagine what that did to my bookings. I'd have refused to go along with such a demand, but I'd been hungry a long time. So, I juggled my acts around to make sure Hank and Murvyn worked in a lily-white environment. I wondered how Hank squared his feelings of human superiority with working as Murvyn's partner, then I remembered the contract signing, and that answered my questions.

Pretty soon I started hearing other things about Hank. His name was a foul word in show business, and other performers delighted in repeating the stories. One of the juiciest concerned Hank's secretary, Hlassa, and Murvyn.

After I got Murvyn and our workload picked up, Hlassa came to work in my office. She was a dark, quiet girl from the Middle East, pretty in an unobtrusive way. She had long hair which she wore around her head in braids, an unusual style at the time. It's fashionable now. Have you ever worn yours that way? I'll bet it'd look good. That's about all I can remember about her, that and the way she'd lift her head from her work and smile. She was efficient, and I recommended her to Hank as a secretary. I talked to her a few times after she left my office, but I never saw her again.

A year or so after she went to work for Hank, he fired her. I heard it was because she and Murvyn were too friendly. The stories must've been true. Murvyn got sick and couldn't work, but he got better when Hank took Hlassa back. But the stories continued, and I sent Larry off to check on the trio.

I didn't get a report from Larry, but Hank paid me a visit. He knew how I felt about him, so he usually avoided me. I realized something was up when he came into my office.

Bio-sketch

William E. Fark

William E. Fark is a staff writer for *AP-PLAUSE*, San Diego's magazine for the performing arts, and freelances for other Southern California publications. Fark's interests and experiences cover a wide range, from performing with a traveling tent show in the Midwest to studying political science at Oxford. In acquiring a B.A. in History and an M.A. in English (along with training in ballet and drama), he attended seven colleges on four continents. He insists this was not an attempt to set a record. He is a former, award-winning military historian and has written music, drama and dance criticism and features for newspapers from Chicago to Tokyo. Before turning to writing, Fark worked at various times and tenures in: welding, sheet metal, automobile assembly, hair-styling, time-study accounting and teaching. He currently has a number of play manuscripts being considered by theatre groups around the country and is working on three novels — one thriller, one science fiction and one about an urban murderer.

"What's the idea of spying on me?" he demanded.

"That's ridiculous."

"Is it? What's your kid doing then?"

"He's in charge of your act."

"Is he?" He sneered. "Then why the hell doesn't he do something? Something worth paying for?"

"You're booked solid for the next year," I told him. "You've got a film ready for release, a Laser-V spectacular coming up and royalty checks rolling in. What more do you want?"

"Stay out of my personal affairs," he said. "I don't like spies." I started to defend myself, but he held up his hand. "Save it. Larry's been folowing me around and talking to Hlassa. I won't have it."

I shrugged, trying to pass it off.

"I've been thinking about our arrangement," he said. "Maybe we ought to look at our contract again."

"Which one? We're tied up so closely, it'd take a laser beam to separate us."

"It may come to that."

I felt no particular fear. I doubted that he could break our contract, although he might stir up a lot of unfavorable publicity. I turned away, stalling for time. I noticed, absently, that the carpet was humped in front of the door to the bath, adding a dimensional design to the weave.

"I've been talking to Irv Leizen," Hank said.

"Irv's a good man, but I doubt if he's going to take ôn a court fight over your contract."

"What court fight? Your contracts aren't worth a damn."

"Maybe not," I said, "but the best lawyers in the universe drew up our agreements, and I'll go along with their legal opinions."

Hank laughed, a dirty, grating sound. "There's one thing you and your lawyers overlooked. The agreement specifies the act by name, 'Hank Milby Vignettes.' There's not one damned thing that says I have to include Murvyn. I own him. I've got a bill of sale, made out to me, for one space worm. I can pull him out of the act any time I want to. I can sell him if I want to. What if his new owner doesn't want him in show business?"

He was right. I had slipped badly. I could fight, but I couldn't win. I might get Hank charged with smuggling Murvyn onto earth, but that wouldn't gain me anything. So I made the best of it.

"All right. What do you want?"

"Nothing. I like our set-up fine. But I won't put up with any interference. Get your kid back here and keep him away from me. And remember, Murvyn the Magnificent belongs to me."

"No!" The word exploded into the room.

Hank and I turned. Murvyn stood in front of the bathroom door, nearly seven feet of compact, greenish-bronze giant.

"Murvyn!" Hank gasped. "You can talk!"

"That's obvious," Murvyn said.

"But how come? You never did before."

"I was too young. I had to learn."

"But —"

"Shut up!" Murvyn ordered. Hank stepped back. "I've wanted to tell you that for years. I've put up with a lot from you, but the worst thing of all was having to listen to your endless, mindless monologues."

"Murvyn —" I began.

"Stay out of this. I've no quarrel with you, but don't interfere."

"How'd you get here?" Hank demanded. "You," he said to me, "you dreamed this up between you."

"I never —"

"You brought me," Murvyn said. "Not that I need to be brought. I can get around. I stretched out along the lining of your jacket."

"Okay," Hank said, "what's your game?"

"I'm leaving," Murvyn said. "I'm breaking up the act."

"You can't. You're my property."

"I can't be owned as long as I'm on a planet where the slavery laws prohibit it. That's inter-planetary law. I'm a citizen of the universe."

"How're you gonna prove that?" Hank asked. "You've no history, no culture, no race. I've never even heard of another like you anywhere. You're an organism, a space worm. Citizen? Ha!"

"It may take time, but I'll prove it."

"Can you turn yourself into money?" Hank asked. "Because it'll take a fortune. I'll fight you in every court from Broadway to Outer Pluto. I'll buy, bribe, subvert, blackmail or whatever it takes to get a favorable decision."

"He will do just that," I offered.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Pop," Hank said, then back to Murvyn. "You've had your say, but it don't mean a damned thing. Now, listen. We're goin' on as we were. Maybe a few changes. For one thing, I'll keep you penned up from now on. I don't want you around me so much. I wouldn't feel safe. And no more of that prima donna act. Hlassa goes, and you don't say a goddam word. I'm the boss. Understand?"

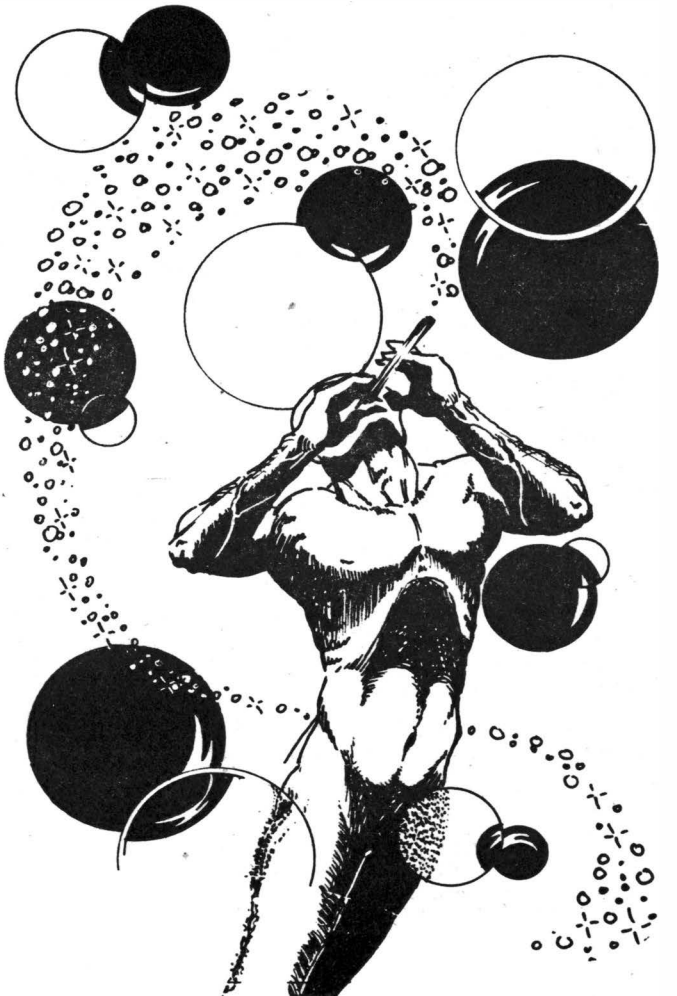
Murvyn didn't answer. Hank went on. "Okay, as long as you've got that straight. Now deflate, or whatever you do, and get back to your natural state and let's get back to the hotel."

I was sorry to see Murvyn respond. He swayed a bit, as he usually did

before assuming his amorphous form, and Hank moved over to gather up the green sheet Murvyn would become. But this time, Murvyn failed to follow his usual pattern. He exploded.

The edge of the blast hit me like the backwash from a missile, slamming me back against my desk. A miniature tornado flew past me, swirling papers and dust in a green funnel, and hit the paneling with a force that cracked my nuclear blast-proof wall all the way through to the outside.

When I got to my feet, Murvyn was gone, and Hank lay on the floor in a heap. I thought at first he was dead, but he was just knocked out. He was all right except for a few bruises, and in a matter of minutes he went chasing out after Murvyn.



Hlassa disappeared the same day. Hank put the police on her trail, accused her of larceny — stealing Murvyn. But that was far as it went.

I found out a little more than the police. Hlassa and Murvyn were pretty close according to Larry. Off earth, Murvyn had gotten the habit of remaining in human form and accompanying Hlassa as a body guard, and their relationship grew from that. Larry was quite sure that they were lovers. Although I was disappointed in losing a money-maker, I was delighted that someone had paid Hank Milby off in his own coin.

And Hlassa and Murvyn were safe — an attractive self-effacing girl and a piece of material that could be a scarf, part of a dress, or any object you'd care to name. As long as they stayed away from show business, there wasn't a chance in the universe of their being discovered.

I'm pretty sure they left earth. About the time they disappeared, I had a call from Ted Graziak — he's a theatre owner on Mars — concerning a contract violation. Seems that nine chorus girls had been booked for passage off-earth, but only eight arrived on Mars. The guy refused to pay the extra passage unless I produced another dancer. I calmed him down and deducted the extra fare from his bill, but I did some checking in our files. Sure enough, Larry had booked the troupe, nine girls included. But I found no photo of the ninth girl, and the name and social security number were both phony.

Hey! No, it didn't scald me, just startled me a little. Shame you spilled it though. Coffee that good shouldn't be wasted.

No, I never checked any further. Larry's a nice, straightforward type, so I didn't think he'd been up to anything illegal. Probably helping some stage-struck kid get back home to Mars, and saw a chance to do it at no expense to the agency. Too bad old Graziak was so shrewd.

Hank? Drank himself to death. Without Murvyn, he was nothing, so he just sat around and lushed it up. He died last fall.

The charges against Hlassa? The statute of limitations ran out on that after ten years.

Hank never did break his contract with me, and when he died, I found he'd named me as executor for his estate. Going through his papers, I found this. A bill of sale for one space worm.

That's right. For Murvyn. I brought it along with me. I thought I might be able to trace it through some of the old record bureaus out here, but it all happened too long ago. It's no good to me anymore.

Would you like to have it? I noticed your collection of old posters and theatre programs in the hall. This piece of paper sort of belongs there, I think. It's not often that I run into anyone who's so well informed on show business as you are. You're the first person I've met who knew

the name for Murvyn's flute.

I've certainly been talkin' haven't I? I get wound up on these space hops with no humans to gab with. No more coffee, thanks. It's great, but I've had enough. Time I headed back to my hotel. I've got an early launch tomorrow.

Thanks again. The dinner was wonderful, and I've enjoyed meeting you after doing business with you for so many years. We'll keep sending our shows out this way, and you stay on the lookout for any new act I might use. Too bad you don't have something in mind right now. I could use a headliner like Murvyn again.

And tell your husband how sorry I am to miss meeting him. I thought I caught a glimpse of him through the window as I came in. He doesn't look too well; his color's a bit off. Liverish, maybe.

Good night. No, I don't need a cab. The walk'll do me good. And if you think of any act you may have forgotten, call me. Any time tonight. It's not really late. In fact, I don't believe it's ever too late for the real pros.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

In the July issue of Fantastic, *Mr. Fark entranced us with "Hessie and the Spaced Out Demon." We thought "Murvyn" just as enticing a tale, and the way it is told a neat bit of craftsmanship. When did you realize that the narrator was talking to Hlassa? And then how did you feel when you realized he knew who she was all along? This is a choice piece of writing, laced with empathy, wit and a certain, alien charm.*


THE CLIFFHANGER SOUND
By Paul Dellinger

Some feel, like the writer Thomas Wolfe, that you can't go home again. What if you did go home and couldn't leave . . .?

The door should have told me that something was not as it should be in Stockton Heights. It was the first thing I saw that didn't ring true — but it was far from the last.

Otherwise, the main street of my little home town looked much as the day I'd left it, after high school more years ago than I cared to count, on a hot summer afternoon not unlike this one. The door looked like it belonged, too. The nondescript gray paint, cracked and peeling from its wooden surface, made it appear to be the same age as the rest of the weathered brick building. And I knew that was impossible.

"Don't you want a refund on your return ticket?" the Greyhound driver had asked as I wrestled my suitcase from its overhead lodging.

"A refund? What for?"

"You sure you won't be staying here?" he asked.

"Just for a day or so. I grew up here, but I don't have any family living here anymore."

"You'll be an exception, then. Three years I've been on this run. Dropped off maybe half a dozen passengers here at this very curb, in all that time. Know how may I've picked up again?" He didn't wait for me to guess. "Nary a one."

I could have said he wouldn't be dropping me off at all if it weren't for Millard's death and Emily's bridge party. But I felt too tired and rumpled after my overnight trip to go into that. So I just smiled politely, hefted my suitcase and stepped down.

That was when I saw the door.

Its ornate metal knob seemed so rusty that I doubted if it had been touched since I'd left for college, and stayed as an English instructor. I'd still be there except for the newspaper Emily had put on the breakfast table yesterday. If you could call it a newspaper.

I'd picked it up automatically along with my second spoon of oatmeal. "Emily?" I called. "What's this tabloid doing here?"

She came bustling in from the hallway, where she'd already made at least two phone calls. "I thought you must have dropped our regular paper and subscribed to this one, dear. The gentleman who delivered it said it was for you."

"What gentleman?" I demanded, not looking up from the cleavage of a Hollywood starlet in the front page photo.

"If you wouldn't stay in bed until the last possible moment, you'd have seen him. Rather an odd little man," she added thoughtfully. "I remember thinking when he knocked that he was somewhat elderly for a paper boy. May he's supplementing his Social Security —"

"Emily!"

"You needn't shout, Charles. I'm right here."

"I didn't mean — look," I said, pointing. "What do you think of that?"

"If you must know, I'd say she's had a silicone treatment."

"Not the picture. This article, underneath."

She bent down over my shoulder. "Oh, how horrible. One of those awful ritualistic murders, I suppose . . ." I could hear her small intake of breath next to my ear. "Millard Watts — is that . . .?"

"It must be. See? It even gives the name of the town."

"Stockton Heights. Oh, Charles, I'm so sorry. And you'd been so close, as boys."

"I hadn't heard from him for years. It says he was a former town councilman. Hmm — the funeral's day after tomorrow, according to this."

She straightened up behind me. "Why don't you go? You've accumulated more time off than you can use. At least it would give you a change of scenery."

"And keep me out from underfoot this weekend," I said.

"Now you know I didn't mean that. Although you probably would be bored to tears by a house full of faculty wives gossiping across bridge tables. If I wasn't already obligated to be hostess for the ladies' tournament, I'd go with you. I'd like to see this little town you're always talking about."

Well, I wouldn't mind visiting it myself. It just seems like such a long drive, for so short a stay."

"Oh, I'll need the car, Charles. I have a million things to do to get ready for this weekend. Why can't you take a bus and leave the driving to them?"

THE BUS ran late, causing me to miss a connection and stranding me overnight in a nearly vacant terminal outside a city full of chemical plants. I could see the red, green and yellow streamers rising into the dawn like gaudy paints splashed across the sky by a monstrous artist. When I tried to sleep sitting up in a chair, a huge dark-skinned policeman woke me to see my ticket. By then I probably looked like a vagrant.

So maybe it was just fatigue. Or it might have been the way the more distant buildings had a spectral look, in the heat waves shimmering from the cracked sidewalks. But when I staggered off the bus in Stockton Heights shortly before noon, I had the feeling I'd stepped back in time. Some buildings were gone, of course, and others had been modernized, but the general configuration was strikingly as I recalled it.

Until my eyes lingered on that door, where I *knew* there had been an unbroken wall before.

As a kid, I'd known every building, alley and back lot along this street. They had been mapped indelibly in my mind, an overlay of their various

incarnations as prairies where we shot it out with the likes of Roy Barcroft and Charlie King; as Mars, or Mongo, where we pursued Ming the Merciless, or as the metropolitan surroundings of Dick Tracy, Batman or Hap Hazard, depending on which serial was playing at the movies that weekend.

From where I now stood, I could see that the old theater had given way to a parking lots — and yet it seemed I could still smell its distinctive combination of popcorn, Tootsie Rolls and hardened chewing gum wads on the backs of its seat. I could almost hear the rousing music of Mischa Bakaleinikoff, Mort Glickman, Joseph Dubin and all the others whose sweeping scores we tried to imitate vocally while re-enacting last Saturday's serial chapter. This street had been our Hollywood set — mine, Millard's, Drew Bradfield's and especially Jasper Hausenburg's, if you could consider him one of our gang. Only later, with the acquisition of driver's licenses and a new interest in the opposite sex, would it beome our avenue for seeking amorous adventures that somehow never materialized.

I clung to the memories. For one mad moment, it seemed I might keep the tragedy of Millard's death at bay by keeping the past alive in my mind. Silly, of course — as silly as my sense of wrongness at a door somebody had obviously built since I'd been gone.

No, Millard was gone — a victim, if you could believe any of the sensationalized tabloid article, of some deranged murderer or maybe a Manson-like group who tortured him and dumped his body somewhere along this very street to be discovered. The story said a medical examiner at the county seat couldn't actually pinpoint the cause of death. The cracked ribs and broken leg he found would not have been sufficient by themselves. His best guess was that the strain had proved too much for Millard's heart.

Madness. The escapism of the old serials was better. There, at least, virtue was rewarded and the baddies got what was coming to them.

"Charlie?"

I winced. Even after all these years, I still winced when I heard that grating, high-pitched voice behind me.

"Charlie Pendleton, it *is* you! I thought maybe you were another nosey reporter when I saw you get off the bus. But reporters wouldn't be too cheap to drive their own cars, would they?"

He looked me up and down with that same condescending squint he'd had as a kid, hands on his hips and a smirk on his face. "Hello, Jasper," I said, almost calling him "Hausenbugger" out of habit as we used to. "You're looking good."

He was, at that. There was no grayness at his temples or thickness

about his waist. Probably dyed his hair, I decided. Watched everything he ate. Jogged four miles every morning to stay in shape. I found myself loathing him as much as ever.

"Well, you're looking . . ." He gave the impression of fumbling for words that wouldn't be too insulting. ". . . Quite distinguished and prosperous yourself, Charlie. Came back for ole Millard's funeral, huh?"

He was still grinning widely. Not even a token hint of regret in his voice. Occasionally I'd wondered if we hadn't all been too hard on Jasper. Now I decided we hadn't been hard enough.

"Well, yes, I just read about it yesterday —"

"Yeah, I thought those nosey reporters would stick around all week. Well, sorry to disappoint you, Charlie, but you can scratch the funeral. Just a graveside service tomorrow, and that's if they can dig up a preacher for it. Ole Millard didn't have a lot of friends left round here — but you've been away so long, you wouldn't know about that. Hey, let me treat you to lunch. Remember the fountain at the old drug store?"

"Thanks, but I'd better find a taxi and get located at a motel somewhere. It's too hot to keep carrying this suitcase around —"

"Forget it. No motels for twenty miles of Stockton Heights anymore," he said, half escorting me by the elbow and half shoving me across the street. I had to give the devil his due, he was still a muscular little guy. "You can can stay at the Belmont here in town. Always room there."

"The Belmont Hotel? It's still open?" I asked, raising my voice over the sound of a nearby transistor radio. Its owner, a hulking youngster in jeans and a cowboy shirt, held it up to his ear as he slouched against a store front. The boy's eyelids drooped and his mouth hung open as though he was mesmerized by the tinny music.

"Course it's open. Got to have some place for newcomers to stay when they first come to town. Hey!" I jumped, but Jasper's yell was directed at the boy. Jasper pointed to my bag. "Watch this thing while we're inside."

To my surprise, the big lad responded with a "Yes sir, Mr. Hausenburg," and practically tore the suitcase from my grip. Jasper bustled through the door ahead of me and led the way to a booth.

I supposed I'd let myself be dragged along out of guilty conscience as much as anything. Kids have no sense of overkill when picking on someone at the bottom of the pecking order, where Jasper had been. Probably we were jealous because his father had owned a local radio station. Back then, before widespread TV, the old radio shows had been second only to the Saturday matinees as our entertainment.

Not that we ever ignored Jasper. You couldn't, even then, any more than you could ignore a cold. Besides, you couldn't have heroes — as

we fancied ourselves — without a bad guy, and Jasper thrived on the role no matter how often we gunned him down with our Texas Jr. cap pistols. He would always claim to have "got" us first, through some elaborate trap he'd imagined and would explain at length. But we won the debates by sheer weight of numbers and Jasper would sulk off into the sunset as we headed for our suppers and homework.

Later, Jasper did more than imagine his traps for us. I still vividly remembered the beehive that fell among us when we stepped on his hidden string, and the leftover Fourth of July firecrackers he'd launched at us from ambush another time. Drew's hearing had never been the same after that.

THE BOOTHS, fountain and magazine racks in the drug store had been rearranged since the days when it served as my major source of comic books, or even since it had become our stopoff on the way home from school in later years when our serial over movie serials had given way to more serious topics: girls, cars, James Dean or someone's dog-eared copy of a Grace Metalious novel.

Jasper ordered for me, waving aside my protests that I no longer specialized in cheeseburgers, French fries and milkshakes. The eager young waitress served us in what would have been record time in the old days. Other customers came and went, the hum of their conversations accompanying the radio playing at the counter. They all took time to say hello to Jasper — or, rather, Mr. Hausenburg, and they didn't mispronounce it, either.

"You seem popular enough to run for town council," I joked.

"I did run. Twice. They voted against me the first time." His mouth twisted in a grim, self-satisfied smile. "Last year, though, I finished at the top of the ballot. I could be mayor if I wanted to."

Well, congratulations. Seems like all the gang but myself came up in the world. Was Millard on council with you?"

"Not exactly. I was the one who beat him." Before I could think up a reply to that, Jasper raised his hand. "Shut up. Listen."

I realized the lunchtime conversations had stopped, too, as if someone had pulled a plug. Only the sound of the radio kept going. But Jasper had said to listen, so I listened.

I continued listening for the next fifteen minutes, during which I don't remember even breathing. "And now," an announcer had begun in an echo-chamber voice over familiar theme music, "another chapter in *The Adventures of Hap Hazard* . . ."

The years slid away and it was as if I was sitting again in the old darkened movie theater with Millard, Drew and the others. We were boys again, watching the special effects of the Lydeckers and the stunt

work of David Sharpe, Tom Steele and company standing in for the actors, and believing it all. I wanted it to go on forever.

It didn't, of course. All too soon the imaginary trip into the past was over, and the sounds around us started up again as though they had never been interrupted.

"Thought you'd like that," Jasper said. "The station's mine, now, and I broadcast a chapter like that every morning. I repeat it about this time and just before signoff." He chuckled, as though at a private joke. "Even after signoff, sometimes."

"It seemed so real," I said. "Like I could see it, even though it was just radio. Say, how did you get the rights from the movie studio to use those characters, anyway?"

He snorted an explosive laugh. "I didn't. The studio doesn't even exist anymore."

"But somebody must control the rights. Aren't you afraid they might sue you or something?"

"Who'd tell 'em? You?" He seemed to find that funny, too. "That doesn't worry me, Charlie. Not a bit." He got up and punched me playfully on the shoulder. It hurt, but I was sure he hadn't meant it. "You go to the Belmont like I told you," he said. "You might get a surprise. See you around, old buddy."

I SAT a while longer, reminiscing until the check came. (Wasn't this supposed to be his treat? Oh well, he was a busy man, he probably forgot.) The big lad outside was still standing guard over my suitcase, and relinquished it without comment when I thanked him. It seemed a lot heavier by the time I reached the hotel.

The high-ceilinged lobby was pierced by shafts of sunlight that angled through two tall windows on one wall. The only other illumination came from a flickering fluorescent light that cast a ghostly pallor over the registration desk. The young woman behind it had her back to me.

"Excuse me —"

She jumped. Her elbow overturned the remains of a soft drink in a cardboard cup. Crushed ice pelleted the tips of my shoes.

"Oh, no. I' m sorry," she said breathlessly, removing a plastic attachment from her shapely little ear. It was attached to a little radio on her lap. But I forgot all about the radio, and my wet feet, when I saw her face.

"Patricia?" I said. "It was almost a whisper.

She smiled uncertainly. She was a pretty girl, perhaps eighteen or twenty, with vivid blue eyes and auburn hair pulled into an old-fashioned pony tail. "No, my name's Margie Rand. I just started working here today."

What was the matter with me? Of course she couldn't have been my high school sweetheart. Patricia would be as old as I was today, and it was unlikely that she even lived here anymore. She had come from a large family, and this girl was probably from some part of it, too. That would explain the startling resemblance.

"I apologize for dumping that ice on you —"

"Don't worry. It feels good on a day like this. I didn't mean to alarm you by sneaking up that way."

She continued regarding me with those wide blue eyes after I'd signed the register. "I spill a Coke on you, and you apologize. You must be nice people, Mr. Pendleton," she said, glancing down at my name. "Are you buying the home that's up for sale here this week?"

I laughed. "Everybody seems to think I'm moving here. No, I'll be going tomorrow evening, or the next day at the latest."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that."

Strangely enough, I reflected on my way up the dark wooden stairs to my room, she sounded like she meant it. I found myself thinking smugly it would serve Emily right if I had a liaison on this trip she'd insisted I

Bio-sketch

Paul Dellinger

My first published sf story appeared in the Jan., 1962 issue of *FANTASTIC STORIES*, so I'm doubly delighted to get in its pages once more. That story, "Rat Race," was successfully adapted into a stage play for Barter Theater, the State Theater of Virginia, and performed in 1970.

Since then, I've had stories published in *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, SIR, CASSANOVA,* Forrest Ackerman's late *PERRY RHODAN* paperbacks published by Ace Books, a Doubleday collection titled *100 GREAT SCIENCE FICTION SHORT SHORT STORIES,* and the Feb., 1979 issue of *AMAZING STORIES.* (These were all short stories. I've done several novels but have not yet been able to interest a publisher in those.)

The "Mr. Lazarus" character of "The Cliffhanger Sound" also appeared in my "Dobbs County Vampire" (*SIR*, May, 1974) and "Werewolf of West Point" (*F & SF*, May, 1978).

Otherwise: I was born in Woodstock, Va., August 20, 1938; grew up enjoying comic books (which led into sf magazines and paperbacks), B-western movies (I've published several articles on those in *UNDER WESTERN SKIES*, a magazine started because of a recurring or nostalgic interest in those old shoot-'em'ups) and the sf films of the 1950's which are still my favorites; graduated in 1960 from Roanoke College, Salem, Va., with a B.A. in English; spent three years in the Army as an enlisted man, where I published that first story in *FANTASTIC STORIES* and a musical comedy, "The Army Way," showing the military from the enlisted men's viewpoint; performed at West Point, N.Y. in 1962; treated myself to attendance at my first World Science Fiction Convention in Washington after being discharged in 1963 and met some of the writers whose works I'd been admiring for years; joined a newspaper — *Roanoke Times & World-News*, serving western Virginia — as chief of a regional news bureau here at Wytheville, where I have been since late 1963; married a fellow reporter, Maxine Cates, in 1966 — two children, Mark, 10, and Katie, 7. All that pretty well sums me up.

take. Modern science could pretty well control the social consequences of such affairs these days, leaving only the moral ones — and those had seemed to vanish when James Bond replaced the cowboy hero who used to ride away from the girl at the end. Actually, I'd never before thought of being unfaithful. Or was it, that I'd just never had an offer? I reminded myself that I still hadn't. Delusions of grandeur, that was all, simply because this girl resembled one I'd once known so well — or so it seemed in retrospect. I guess there's always something special about your first love, even if it's not your last one.

The flowered wallpaper in my room was peeling at the edges, but the frayed green carpet was clean and there was more space than in your average motel cubicle. There was no shower, just an old-fashioned tub, and the first thing I did was take a long soak in it. The second was to stretch out on the big double bed.

The room had no TV set, either, but there was a radio on my bedside table. I would have to switch it on at six that evening to hear the Hap Hazard serial chapter again. It occurred to me to wonder how I knew the exact time as I was dozing off . . .

I woke to darkness. There was a moment of disorientation as I sat up. Then it all came back by driblets, and I finally made out a bit of light coming beneath the drawn curtains of the room's single window. I managed to cross to it without stumbling over too much furniture.

The lights of the old town looked reassuring. I almost wished I was moving back. I turned on the dresser lamp and unpacked some clothes. I started to try the radio, but the local sunrise-to-sunset station would be off the air by now.

Margie Rand was waiting for me when I got down to the lobby.

"Dinner," she said, getting up from the cushioned sofa where she'd apparently been waiting. "Right?"

She had changed into a soft blue dress that enhanced her eyes, and put up her hair in a way that added an aura of maturity to her other charms. She had been replaced behind the desk by a man.

"Dinner," I agreed without a stammer, and was proud of myself for that. I felt as though I was being swept along by things beyond my control. "Does the hotel still have its restaurant here?"

"No, but there is one a few blocks away," she said, taking my arm. "We can just make it before it closes. I thought you were going to sleep the clock around."

The restaurant had been a frozen custard stand when I'd lived here, but its menu was good. So was our dinner conversation. Actually, I remember none of the things we said, only that we laughed at the same things and took the same ones seriously. Margie confessed a desire to go to college one day, when she learned I was on a college faculty, and I

suggested some scholarships I knew about if money was a problem.

"But that would mean I'd have to leave Stockton Heights," she replied, as it that explained why college was impossible.

"Well, it's been done," I said, laughing. "Look at me —"

"I know, I know. You're leaving in a couple of days, you say. But I'm still betting you'll end up buying the Watts house this week."

"You mean Millard Watts?"

"Sure. You can't convince me it's just a coincidence that you reappear here just a few days after one of our residents passed away and made room."

"No," I agreed softly. "It's not a coincidence."

The fun had gone out of the meal for me. By the time we left the restaurant, my main interest was to see how far she would go to entice me to stay, although I still couldn't puzzle out why she'd want to do so. My thoughts were interrupted by Margie's fingers tightening on my arm.

"I didn't realize it had gotten so late," she whispered. "You'd better hurry back to the hotel. My home is nearby —"

Only then did it strike me that we were the only ones on the street. There were a few lighted windows, but no people. I stopped to look both ways. Granted, Stockton Heights was a small town, but not so small that everyone was in bed by ten.

What I did see was something small leaning against the base of a nearby lamppost. A wallet, I thought at first, but as I leaned toward it I saw it was a cheap little transitor radio someone had apparently lost.

"Don't touch that!"

The intensity of Margie's voice startled me. She looked perfectly calm again, though, when I turned toward her.

"I hope I'll see you again before you go," she said quickly. "Good night." Then, walking so swiftly it was almost a run, she left me alone on the deserted street.

Before I could decide what to do next, the radio came on.

At least I guessed it was the radio. The sound seemed to come from all around me. It was a sound like rushing water, and grew louder as I stood there. When I saw the more distant streetlights reflecting off what looked like a rolling wall of water at one end of town, I decided it wasn't the radio, after all.

I didn't think to question the absurdity of a tidal wave cascading through the main street of Stockton Heights. My body took over from my mind in a survival reflex as I turned to run the other way — only to see what appeared to be a second approaching flood coming my way from that end of the street. And fast. The roar's volume increased still more, numbing my mind to anything but blind panic.

There was no place to run. I had nothing with which to smash open any of the locked doors along the street. I barely had time to yank instinctively at the nearest doorknob, without any real hope that it would open an escape route.

But it did.

I jumped inside, slamming the door behind me and looking for a stairway to climb out of this insanity. It was too dark to see if there was one, so instead I braced my back grimly against the door, expecting a torrent of rushing water to crash through any time.

Nothing happened. I couldn't even hear the roaring of the water anymore. It was as though, with the closing of that door, I'd stepped into another world entirely.

My fears relaxed to the point where I could study my surroundings. It was a dimly-lit little room — I couldn't even pinpoint the source of what little light there was — and yet it looked somehow familiar to me. The smooth, black marble-like walls, the big swivel chair with its back to me, they left me with a sense of *deja vu*. The dark cloak and masking garments that hung against the far wall — all that was missing was some deep, muted music to set it off . . .

And then I had it.

Not the Batcave, not the hidden lair of The Shadow, or the passageway from the Green Hornet's apartment, but close. It was the secret chamber of Hap Hazard, mysterious hero of at least two serials of which I'd seen every chapter, most of them twice. But it couldn't be!

"Of course it could," contradicted a mild little voice.

My heart leaped into my throat. At least it felt that way. Soundlessly, the swivel chair in the middle of the chamber turned toward me. I don't know who I expected to find seated there — the ancient wizard Shazam, perhaps, or the Masked Marvel. But it was only a little old man, leaning back with his hands folded comfortably across his middle and beaming at me over a pair of old-fashioned rimless spectacles. Tufts of snow-white hair, the most visible thing about him in the semi-darkness, stuck out from behind his ears.

"Forgive me for startling you," he said, smiling. "But since I was instrumental in getting you back to Stockton Heights, the least I could do was offer an escape route from a danger you couldn't have anticipated."

"Getting me back?" I managed to say. Then I made the connection. "You left that tabloid with my wife yesterday!"

"Excellent, Mr. Pendleton. Very quick. I knew I had chosen one with the qualifications to combat the evil that is here."

"What qualifications? I'm just a college English teacher, not a —" I stopped, and pondered his words for a moment. "What evil?"

"Haven't you seen for yourself?" The little old man gestured toward the closed door. "I would remind you that your friend was found in an inexplicably battered condition — as though from floodwaters, perhaps? Or some other cliffhanger out of an old movie serial?"

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"I am called Mr. Lazarus. I will assist you where I can, Mr. Pendleton. But you, as the human agency, must be the one to set right what has happened in this community."

"Look, whoever you are, I don't even *know* what's happened!"

"As I said, an evil beyond the bounds of your logical and scientific world, Mr. Pendleton. An evil that creates its own world, in defiance of your so-called natural laws. But for every action, there exists an equal and opposite reaction somewhere. I am here to bring that counter-balance to bear on this evil and, hopefully, to cancel it out."

"I still don't get it? What's this counter-balance of yours?"

"You, Mr. Pendleton," said the little old man as he slowly turned the chair away from me again. "You."

I walked quickly around to the front of it. "That's what you think, mister. I'm not about to —"

And then I stopped, with my mouth hanging open. The seat was empty.

I don't know what happened next. Maybe I ran. Or I could as easily have fainted. The next thing I remembered was sitting up in bed again with that momentary sense of not realizing where I was. It didn't last as long this time, because sunlight streaming through my window allowed me to recognize my hotel room.

GOD, WHAT a dream! It had seemed so *real*. At this moment, I wanted nothing more than to climb back aboard a bus and get as far from my old home town as I could. But that was silly. I'd come here for a reason, to pay my last respects to an old friend, and I was going to do it come hell or high water . . .

My thoughts ground to a halt at that innocent old expression. The first thing I did when I reached the lobby was look for puddles of water in the potholes outside, but everything still looked as dry as it had yesterday. I turned and grinned at the man behind the desk this morning. "Thought I heard a real storm sometime last night," I prompted.

"Yeah? I must've slept through it," he said unhelpfully.

The confidence I got from the dry street left me when I walked the few blocks to where there had once been a frozen custard stand, and found a restaurant. I couldn't tell by daylight if the interior was the same I'd seen last night. My attention, after all, had been on my charming

dining companion. By the time I ordered breakfast, I'd figured out that I must have seen the restaurant from the bus yesterday and it had thereby become a natural part of the setting for my nightmare. What other explanation could there be?

I sat out the rest of the morning in the Belmont lobby, perusing the town's weekly newspaper. There was no mention of Millard's death, not even an obituary. It was as though it never happened. I hoped that tabloid had been right about the burial being at noon although, come to think of it, that did seem an unusual time.

When I got up to leave, the guy was still at the registration desk. "When does Miss Rand come on duty?" I asked casually.

"Margie? She was just filling in yesterday at the last minute. She's not regular. Why? Did you need to see her?"

"No, it doesn't matter." After all, it would sound a little silly to ask her if we'd dined out the night before in actuality.

I grabbed a quick sandwich at the drug store — no French fries or milkshake — and started walking toward the cemetery at the edge of town. I passed the door that I was still convinced shouldn't have been there, but resisted the impulse to turn its knob. Only after I had gone several blocks did it occur to me that I had tried it. Until that moment, I hadn't connected it with the one in my dream.

Jasper had been right. Millard apparently had few mourners. There were only two men near the open grave. One, with his back to me, I took to be the minister by his dark suit and the Bible in his hand. The other was Drew Bradfield, but I almost didn't recognize him. The Drew I remembered had been an athletic clean-cut kid with wavy black hair, not a gaunt chain-smoker with long untrimmed sideburns.

"Drew?" He didn't look up until I'd repeated his name twice, louder each time. I'd forgotten about his hearing problem, too.

He glanced at me, then did a double take. "Charlie!" he whispered. "What the devil are you doing here?"

Hesitant to raise my voice in a place and time like this, I pointed at the plain wooden coffin in place over the grave before us.

"I mean what are you doing in Stockton Heights?" he hissed, his fingers biting into the shoulder of my suit like talons. "He'll have you, too, unless . . ." His red-rimmed eyes narrowed. "Or is he controlling you already? Is that it?"

"Drew, take it easy." I made shushing gestures, and motioned toward the man in the black suit, with his back still toward us.

"How long have you been here? Have you listened to any of his radio broadcasts yet?" Drew pressed. When I didn't answer, he released his grip and fumbled another cigarette from his frayed jacket pocket. He lit

it with trembling fingers.

But I'd lost interest in Drew. I had remembered that, by coming here just now, I was missing the *Hap Hazard* serial again. It was probably on right now. I found myself wanting to run back into town in search of a radio — certainly Millard would have understood — but it was too late. The third man at the graveside had turned, and started into the funeral sermon.

Drew and I just stood there, heads more or less bowed, each with his own thoughts. Mine were jumbled as I tried to make sense out of the things Drew had been saying. They sounded as crazy as my dream.

"We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes," the speaker was saying. "We stumble at noonday as in the night . . ."

It sounded Biblical, but hardly the verses for a funeral. And there was an unsettling familiarity about the voice, too — so unsettling that I couldn't bring myself to look and see who it was at first.

"For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries . . ."

A cloak, I thought. *A helmet, a breastplate* . . . The description sounded uncomfortably like the hero's costume in the old *Hap Hazard* serial — and like the garments I'd seen in that dark chamber last night.

Only when the voice reached "amen" did I make myself look up at the speaker. He was closing his Bible as my eyes met his across the closed coffin. He beamed at me over his rimless, old-fashioned spectacles.

It was Mr. Lazarus. I hadn't imagined him.

Before I could start around the grave, determined to get some answers this time, Drew grabbed my shoulder again and spun me around to face him. "You didn't answer me before, Charlie. How much exposure have you had to his radio shows?"

So I told him the whole story, starting with my seeing the article about Millard's death in that tabloid, about meeting Jasper and hearing that program in the drug store, even about Margie Rand, which was something I wouldn't even have mentioned to Emily. It took a while, because I had to talk slowly and practically yell for him to hear me. But at least we seemed to have the whole graveyeard to ourselves. Mr. Lazarus had gotten away again before I could catch him.

Drew stood there, frowning thoughtfully, until I wondered if he had heard me at all. But he had.

"Okay. I don't believe you've gotten enough of a dose. Sounds like it

was close, though. The smart thing for you to do, Charlie, is not even to go back to town again. Just start walking toward the highway and hitch a ride away from this place."

"Look, I don't pretend to understand all this," I shouted, "but if that's a good idea for me, it's probably a good idea for you, too. Why don't you leave with me?"

Drew shook his head. "I've got a promise to keep to Millard first."

I raised my eyebrows in an unspoken question.

"It's my fault he's dead," Drew went on, looking away guiltily. "I broke Jasper's spell over him, Charlie. Figured the two of us might be able to get to Jasper, and wreck whatever it is he's got that gives him power over everyone here. He works it over the radio somehow. You listen long enough, and you're hooked."

"Some kind of subliminal suggestion?" I asked, and had to repeat it twice before he understood. He shook his head impatiently.

"Nothing like that. I don't know how it works, except it's not natural. And the two of us were determined to put a stop to it."

I couldn't help thinking that Drew sounded dangerously paranoid about Jasper. I wondered whether that old hearing injury had instilled a desire for revenge, one that grew over the years enough to unbalance Drew. Perhaps *he* had killed Millard, to convince himself that Jasper merited some drastic retribution. But Drew hadn't tried to enlist my help. Quite the opposite — he'd told me to run. And I remembered what Mr. Lazarus had said last night, about an evil that existed in defiance of natural laws and my being brought here to help restore the natural balance of things.

"So what happened?" I asked.

"We made our move at night, after Jasper's station was off the air. At least it was supposed to be off. But he was one step ahead of us, as usual. He'd left little transistor radios in spots all over town, and started broadcasting again just when we thought we had him."

I was almost willing to believe radio sounds could somehow reach into the mind and cause illusions, or perhaps even direct one's actions to a certain extent. But how could mere sounds do, physically, what had been done to Millard? It took a few minutes to get the question across, and even then Drew wouldn't answer.

"Believe me, Charlie, you don't want to know. I watched it happen to him, and I couldn't do a thing about it. Nothing!" He shuddered, visibly, then regained a measure of control. "Remember the cliffhangers at the end of all those old serial chapters we used to see? Well, just imagine falling into all those traps, and not having a new chapter next week to show how you got out of them. It was like that."

"Why didn't it happen to you?" I shouted. And then my yelling provided me the obvious answer, even before Drew gave it.

I GOT as far as the highway. My common sense told me to follow Drew's advice and keep going. Even if all he'd told me this afternoon stemmed from an unsettled mind, it was still a good idea not to get involved in whatever might happen tonight.

It would be plain stupid to turn around and start hiking back now.

I'm not sure why I did. Partly, I believe, looking back, it was that I *had* to find out for certain if Drew was right. Otherwise, I'd never be able to listen to a radio, TV set or even a phone conversation without wondering whether I was being subconsciously manipulated in some way. The world, after all, was full of inexplicable murders and suicides for which many blamed a form of mind control.

Another reason was my recollection of what this Mr. Lazarus had told me last night — that I was, somehow, the counter-balance to the unnatural situation that had grown up in Stockton Heights.

My hotel room seemed as safe as place as any to hide until nightfall. There wouldn't be any question of my falling asleep this time, and wondering what was a dream and what was reality. I sat in a chair by the window, watching the sun set over the familiar buildings of my home town. The only other thing I'd done was to unplug the room's radio.

The knock at my door brought me straight out of the chair.

Well, I reflected, as my thumping heartbeat began slowing down to normality once more, I certainly couldn't leave the room by scaling the hotel wall. The door was my only exit. So I might as well open it and face Jasper, or Drew, or whatever was there.

Margie Rand looked even more lovely than last night, standing in the hallway smiling at me. "May I come in?" she asked softly. I gulped, still couldn't come up with an answer, and stepped aside.

She closed the door behind her and leaned against it, clutching her purse in front of her with both hands. The slim curves of her youthful body swelled against the smoothness of a silky off-the-shoulder blouse. The smile wavered and became uncertain. "Mr. Pendleton —"

I wasn't smiling, either. "Just tell me one thing," I said. "Why did you lead me into that trap last night?"

Her vivid blue eyes widened slightly, and she fumbled with her little black purse. "This is why," she said, opening it and holding it up between us.

There was the heavy, creaking sound of some ponderous machine activated somewhere in the building. The walls of the room began to vibrate — and then they began to move!

I pushed Margie away from the door and pulled at it. It was wedged, or locked, or as solid as the rest of the wall that moved toward us. It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RAVEN

looked at though we'd have to try scaling the outside wall, after all, or be crushed when the walls of the room came together.

Margie screamed. I felt like screaming, too, when I saw the bars slipping down over the window. I lunged toward them and tried to push them back up into the top of the frame, where they had emerged. It was no use. They descended inexorably until they clunked against the window sill and completed our imprisonment.

The walls closed on us more slowly but just as certainly. Had I been The Copperhead, I'd have smashed the mechanism's control panel with a mirrow shot from my trusty pistol. If I'd been Hap Hazard, I'd have located and destroyed the control device . . .

Of course!

Margie and I were crushed so closely together that neither of us could bend down. Luckily, she'd held onto her purse. I tore it from her and pushed it through the small opening which was all that remained of the window.

The walls didn't grind to a halt. Rather, it was as though they were on top of us and, in the blink of an eye, back in their proper places once more. At least that was how they appeared to me. Margie still had her hands up in front of her, gasping and pushing at something I could no longer see.

"Margie! Snap out of it! They're gone!"

As far as she was concerned, they weren't. The walls were still crushing in on her and, I was suddenly sure, would kill her just as surely as Millard had been killed by whatever he imagined was happening to him. Her own mind would convince her she was doomed. It would force her body to resist to the point of broken bones and finally, a heart strained to the point of bursting.

I hit her as hard as I could on the point of the chin.

From what Drew had said, it was probably her longer exposure to Jasper's broadcasts that left her still susceptible even after I'd thrown her purse with the radio in it out the window. I lowered her unconscious form to the bed which, I now realized, had vanished along with the other furniture when we were having our induced hallucination. At least she couldn't imagine the illusion killing her while she was out cold.

But I had to get her away from these surroundings before she came around. Otherwise, her perception of things might take up right where I'd stopped it.

I could think of only one place in town that might be safe.

Regular listeners to Jasper's station must have, consciously or unconsciously, gotten the word again tonight to stay off the street. Nobody had been either there or in the lobby to stop me and demand to know where I thought I was going with the limp body of a young woman

slung over my shoulder. The main street of Stockton Heights lay shadowed in twilight, its streetlights not having come on yet. I made my way along it, straining my eyes for any little transistor radios to kick away or stomp into the sidewalk.

I never did see them. They were there somewhere, though. I soon had more than enough evidence of that.

The gasoline station to my right erupted in a thunderous roar, hurling debris into the air and down on top of us — or seemed to. I staggered on, feeling myself pelted and stung to the point that I fell to my knees once. I squeezed my eyes shut, but that didn't help. Covering my ears might have helped more, but I couldn't do that without dropping Margie.

Another explosion took out the building containing the drug store, practically beside me. The next thing I knew, I was picking myself up from the sidewalk, trying to ignore the throbbing of my bloodied knees and elbows along with the ringing in my ears. Coughing, barely able to breathe in the smoky haze, I looked around for Margie.

Finally I spotted her head and shoulders. She was lying in the street, still unconscious, half-covered with rubble. I broke two fingernails digging her free, and then half-dragged and half-carried her along with me.

The third explosion was right on top of us. The upper story of the brick building broke like a rotten tree trunk in a hurricane. There was simply no way we could get out from under it in time.

My fingers found the door knob I'd been seeking. Pulling it open, I practically fell inside, dragging Margie with me.

Once more, as soon as I pushed the door shut again, the noise from outside stopped like a movie when the film broke.

The chamber was empty this time. No Mr. Lazarus. I placed Margie in the swivel chair, leaning her back so she wouldn't topple off. At first, I was surprised to see that she wasn't as bruised and battered as I was. Her blouse was smudged and torn, but that probably happened when I dropped her out there.

But as for me, I was a mess. I ached all over, and my suit looked as though I'd dragged it across concrete and rammed myself repeatedly into a brick wall. Probably that was exactly what I'd done, too, reacting to what I'd perceived as buildings blowing up all around me. Margie was relatively unscathed — naturally, since she'd been unconscious and hadn't tried to batter herself to death as I had. And, I thought, as Millard had, more successfully.

But, since she was still out, I began to worry that I might have killed her myself with that blow. I draped what was left of my suit jacket over her, to try and keep her warm and from going into shock. Then, having

started, I stripped off the rest of my rags, too. After all, there was a perfectly good set of clothes hanging on the chamber wall — a little bizarre looking, perhaps, but there was nobody around to see what they looked like on me but myself.

"For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance . . ."

Like the slouch hat of The Shadow, the metal hood of The Copperhead and the mask of The Spider, the black helmet of Hap Hazard left my face unrecognizable — handy in the serials, allowing stunt men to double for actors. Unfortunately, there was nobody to double for me.

I pulled on the rest of the costume, surprised to find that it fit me, even the shiny black boots that felt every bit as springy as the old PF tennis shoes I wore every summer as a boy. The costume itself was not unlike a modern-day jumpsuit, except for the "HH" on the chest connected by a jagged lightning bolt. Yes, come to think of it, it did resemble a breastplate — like Batman's symbol, Superman's "S" and Captain Marvel's lightning bolt on the chest of Tom Tyler's red suit. I decided I might as well put on the cape,too —

"Who are you?"

I hadn't seen Margie's eyes flutter open. I turned back to her, glad to see she hadn't come around still seeing walls pushing in on her. Well, Drew said he'd snapped Millard out of it, too — at least temporarily.

"You'll be safe in here, Miss Rand," I heard myself saying, but it didn't sound like my own voice. Probably it was the acoustics of the chamber, or perhaps the face-plate of the helmet muffled it. "Don't open the door until I come back." *If I come back,* I added mentally.

"Where is Mr. Pendleton? Is he all right?"

"As much as we are, yes." I couldn't get over it — I sounded different. And I felt different — like in a dream, when you can do impossible things like take a running start and soar into the air. Under other circumstances, I'd have guessed that someone slipped me some LSD or another hallucinogenic.

Margie sat up, and my jacket fell to her lap. "Now I recognize you. You're the one he's been waiting for all this time — the one he fears . . ."

I was still pondering the ramifications of that when I stepped outside again. I couldn't just wait for Jasper's imaginary disasters to seek us out. I had to at least try some sort of counterattack, even if it was in vain.

The street was clear of any residue from the explosions. There wasn't even any smoke. I could see all the buildings I'd watched crumbling were back in place again. It shouldn't have surprised me. After all, it hadn't really happened anywhere outside my mind and Jasper's.

So what was next? Another flood? A stampede of wild horses? An avalanche? I continued walking along the deserted street, trying to watch all sides at once. I didn't hear the truck until it was almost on top of me.

The huge tractor-trailer rolled ponderously by me. The DANGER signs on various parts of it showed up clearly in the streetlights' glare. Obviously I wasn't its target. And if it wasn't some manifestation of Jasper's, it had to be real.

I knew who the driver must be even before I glimpsed Drew at the wheel, when the big vehicle lumbered around a corner. I thought I knew where he must be heading, too. I ran across the street and through an alley which, thank goodness, was still there.

A few similar shortcuts brought me out on the uphill road leading to the local radio station. The block-like silhouette of the building was barely visible at the summit, beneath the radio tower with its blinking red lights. But I was too late to head off Drew's truck. It was already halfway up the hill when I saw it.

A section of road, just in front of the truck's headlights, opened.

As though in slow motion, the cab toppled into that square black hole, pulling its trailer in behind it. A thunderous explosion lit up the countryside, knocking me to the pavement. I picked myself up and ran into the cloud of smoke. When I reached the spot, the road seemed whole again but Drew and his truck full of explosives were gone.

It had been a good try. But Drew, even with his hard-of-hearing advantage, had done no better than Millard. That left only me.

It didn't occur to me then how ludicrous I must appear, rising from my examination of the road to stand in that ridiculous costume flexing my fists impotently as I turned grimly up the hill. All that was missing was an underlying drum roll, blending into low-key music paced in time to my steps and becoming more agitato as I neared the building which now looked to me more like a bunker than a radio station.

Last chapter, I thought. *Hazard versus the Radio Monster.*

I didn't even test the front door to see it if was unlocked. The tradition of smashing into it shoulder-first was too strong. Luckily, the shoulders of my costume seemed more padded than I'd realized and, to my surprise, the door fell in as though the bolts had been lifted from its hinges.

My eyes grew accustomed to the darkness as I moved past the vacant receptionist's desk into a darkened studio, with a table and a chair and a metallic microphone hanging from the ceiling. Suddenly lights flared up in the room, dazzling me momentarily. I could see Jasper, looking at me through a window of what was probably the control room, a look of horror on his face.

"You're not part of this program," I heard his voice saying, apparently through some hookup from his soundproof control booth. "Get out of here! Go away!"

"It's a case of equal and opposite reactions, Hausenbugger," I said, remembering Mr. Lazarus' words. "You can't conjure up one part without creating the other, too."

"You can't be real. I've already gotten rid of the only three who could've hit on something like this!" So he thought I'd been killed, too, I reflected with satisfaction. That might help a little.

"You're forgetting, Hausenbugger — nobody knows until the last chapter which Texas ranger is the Lone Ranger, which flying G-man is the Black Falcon, which insurance investigator is the Masked Marvel —"

Lightning flashed from both walls, reaching for me in the middle. At least that was what I saw. I dived forward, under the table, and heard it shatter above me. I tried to scramble clear but just managed to turn over on my back whan the pairs of table legs snapped into the floor, each pinning one of my arms beneath it. I lay between the broken edges of the table, looking up at the heavy microphone hanging above me.

Except it was no longer a mike. It was a silvery half-moon blade, hissing back and forth like a pendulum and descending with each swing a little closer to where I lay.

I'd seen this predicament often in the old serials. Invariably, some comrade of the hero would show up in time to switch off the mechanism or remove the victim during the opening of the next chapter. But I had no one.

Or did I?

The next swing would have done it, but the slender form of Margie Rand was suddenly in the room and blocked the descending blade with the chair. Then she darted to one side and threw a switch, on a little box I hadn't noticed on the wall, and my arms came free.

And then she screamed.

Jasper was behind her, one hand holding her by the material of her soft blue dress and the other pointing an ugly little revolver at her head. "Too bad, Hazard," he said, once more the arrogant kid that I remembered, lording it over the rest of us. "You lose, after all."

I stood up, wondering how he'd gotten from the control room into this one. A hidden door in the wall, maybe. "Let her go, Jasper. This is between us."

"So it is. I could shoot you where you stand, of course, but that would be too easy. I have something much more elaborate in mind for you."

How many times had I heard that? The villain, having the hero in his power, but insisting on a more complicated death — from which the

hero inevitably escaped. Perhaps there was hope, after all.

"Turn around, and walk back into town, Hazard. I'll be watching you from the upstairs window. If you go anywhere except right back down into Stockton Heights, I'll shoot her."

I knew he would have hidden radios all over the streets of town. Once there, I would be at the mercy of his audio illusions again. But I saw no way out. Serial heroes never risked the life of the heroine and, somehow, I felt I had to play the game if I was to have any advantage at all.

"All right. I'm going."

"I thought you would. Remember, I'll be watching every move you make." God, he even *sounded* like the traditional serial villain.

I half-expected a bullet in my back at any instant, as I walked downhill from the station, although that wouldn't make sense. He could more easily have shot me at close quarters inside. I risked a quick glance over my shoulder. Sure enough, I could see his silhouette at the upstairs window.

But I couldn't see Margie.

There was no way Margie could have gotten up here so quickly after I did. And, even if she had managed it, she wouldn't have taken the time to change from her tattered blouse into the blue dress she'd been wearing last night.

I had imagined Margie coming to my rescue! Somehow I had drawn on whatever source of power Jasper used to checkmate him. There was no way in the world I could have dived under that table so fast, much less broken down a door with my shoulder.

That meant Jasper probably hadn't been in the room with me at all. He had probably been in the control booth the whole time, but had made me imagine him there using my rescuer for a shield.

I stopped. I held my hands tightly over either side of my masking helmet to cover my ears.

Drew's truck was suddenly right in front of me, where it had been all the time. Inside I could see Drew's bloodied body, behind the shattered windshield that he'd probably hurled himself against when he imagined himself caught in Jasper's road trap.

"Don't worry, Drew," I whispered, even though he could no longer hear me. "What you started, I'll finish."

Gently, as if it mattered, I eased Drew's body away from the driver's side and climbed in. The ignition key was switched on, but the motor was dead. I tried to start it, hoping the battery wouldn't be too weak for the engine to turn over now.

"Hazard! Get out of there!" Jasper's voice blasted at me as the engine roared into life. I had a vision of his cocked revolver being pointed at Margie's head, and thought I heard her scream again. It almost stop-

ped me — but not quite.

"Turn back! Turn around," Jasper ordered as the truck lurched forward, gathering speed. "All right, you asked for it!" The road ahead of me opened up, just as it had for Drew.

I reached down to shut off the truck's radio.

It had been turned up full volume. No wonder Drew couldn't avoid hearing it when the broadcast came on. Jasper had probably been giggling aloud over leaving it turned on without Drew noticing it. He'd always been one step ahead of us — until now.

The explosion and flames were quite real, this time. I had jumped from the truck, in time-honored serial fashion, just before it tore into the square building and turned it into an inferno.

Emily later told me it was an even bigger newspaper story than Millard's death — how Drew Bradfield, apparently deranged, must have rammed the volatile cargo into the radio station on a kamikaze mission against Jasper. The theory was that, rightly or wrongly, he blamed Jasper for Millard's death and was out for revenge.

NOBODY REALLY missed the radio station very much. Nobody could even remember much about its programming and, anyway, they were looking forward to the town council extending a franchise to a TV cable company in the near future. It seemed that Councilman Hausenburg had been blocking that until now.

I hadn't expected it, but I was quietly pleased when Margie Rand joined me at the bus stop to say good-by.

After a few generalities, she got around to what was really on her mind. "Tell me, Mr. Pendleton — did you see him, too?"

"Him?"

"The man in the helmet and cape. Maybe I dreamed him." Her eyes took on a faraway look. "I don't know — I feel like I've been sleepwalking through life for the past year or so, in a way. Do you know what I mean?"

"Sure. We all have our plateaus and our slack periods. maybe now you'll leave here for college, as you said you'd like to do."

"Or maybe they'll have a community college here in a few years. It seems like the whole town is suddenly on the move. I'll bet Stockton Heights will progress more in the next decade than it has in the past three."

I found myself remembering those colorful streamers in the morning sky over that chemical plant city where I'd waited for my connection here, and hoped not.

I also hoped that Margie would indeed continue her education, but

not at the college where I worked. I didn't want the obvious temptation twice. It hadn't been so hard to overcome this time, because of the game I'd had to play to survive. Serial superheroes never had time for any hanky-panky with the beautiful girls they'd been rescuing. It was always on to the next assignment.

Except there would be no next assignment for me, I reflected thankfully as I climbed aboard the bus and gave Margie one last wave. The Hap Hazard costume was back where I'd found it. I'd returned it after coming back to let Margie out, and tell her the streets were safe once more. Maybe that's why she still remembered the man in the helmet and cape. She'd seen him — me — after Jasper and his station had been wiped out.

I parked my suitcase and sat next to the window as we pulled out, wondering vaguely what had become of Mr. Lazarus. Had he been brought into being through Jasper's broadcasts, too? But that wouldn't explain him showing up to deliver that tabloid to Emily at our home, so far away from Stockton Heights. Even Jasper's power hadn't reached that far. At least, not yet. One day, it might have.

The familiar buildings of the town's main street eased by as we moved toward the highway. As we approached one particular weathered brick structure, I found myself wondering if I'd ever be tempted to slip back one day and prowl the streets of Stockton Heights once more in that costume . . .

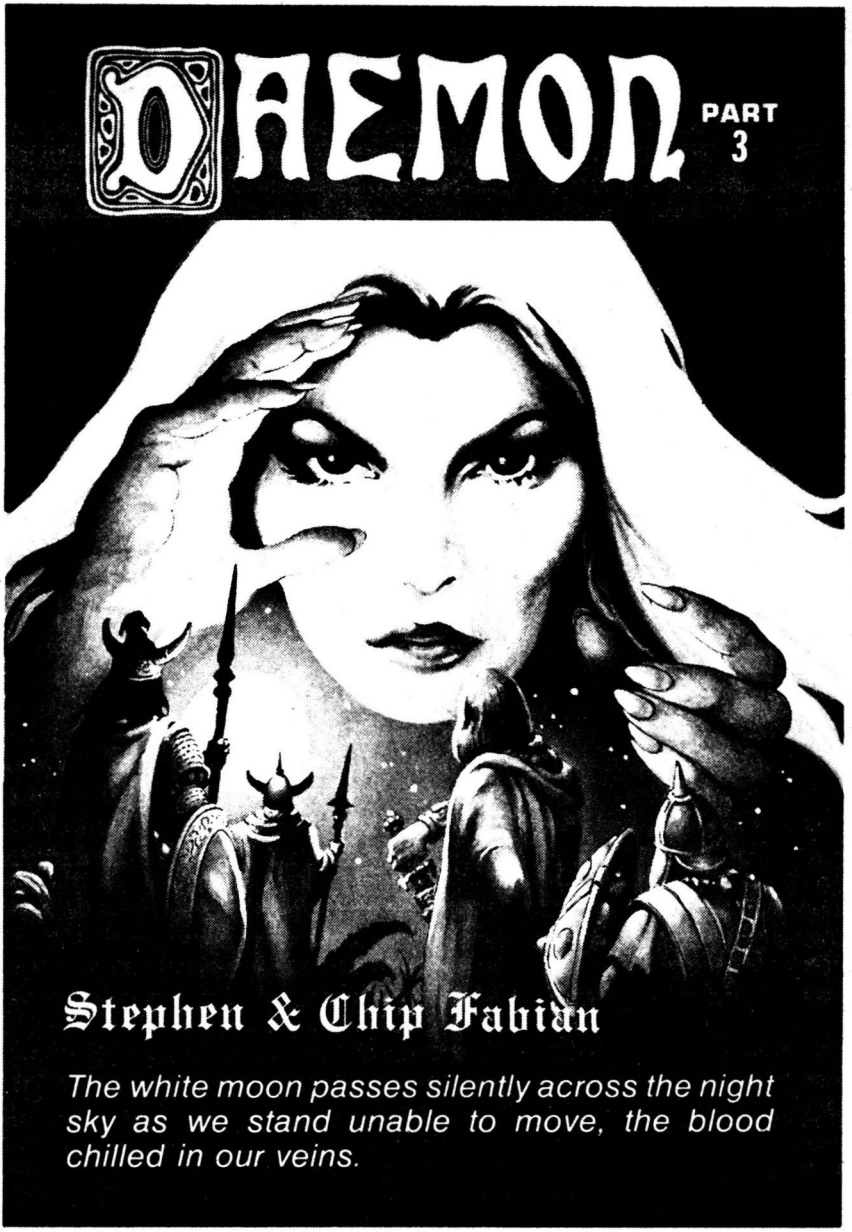
I half-rose out of my seat, and placed both my hands flat against the window as I stared at the structure, my mouth hanging open in shock.

I was looking at a solid brick wall once more. The door was gone.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

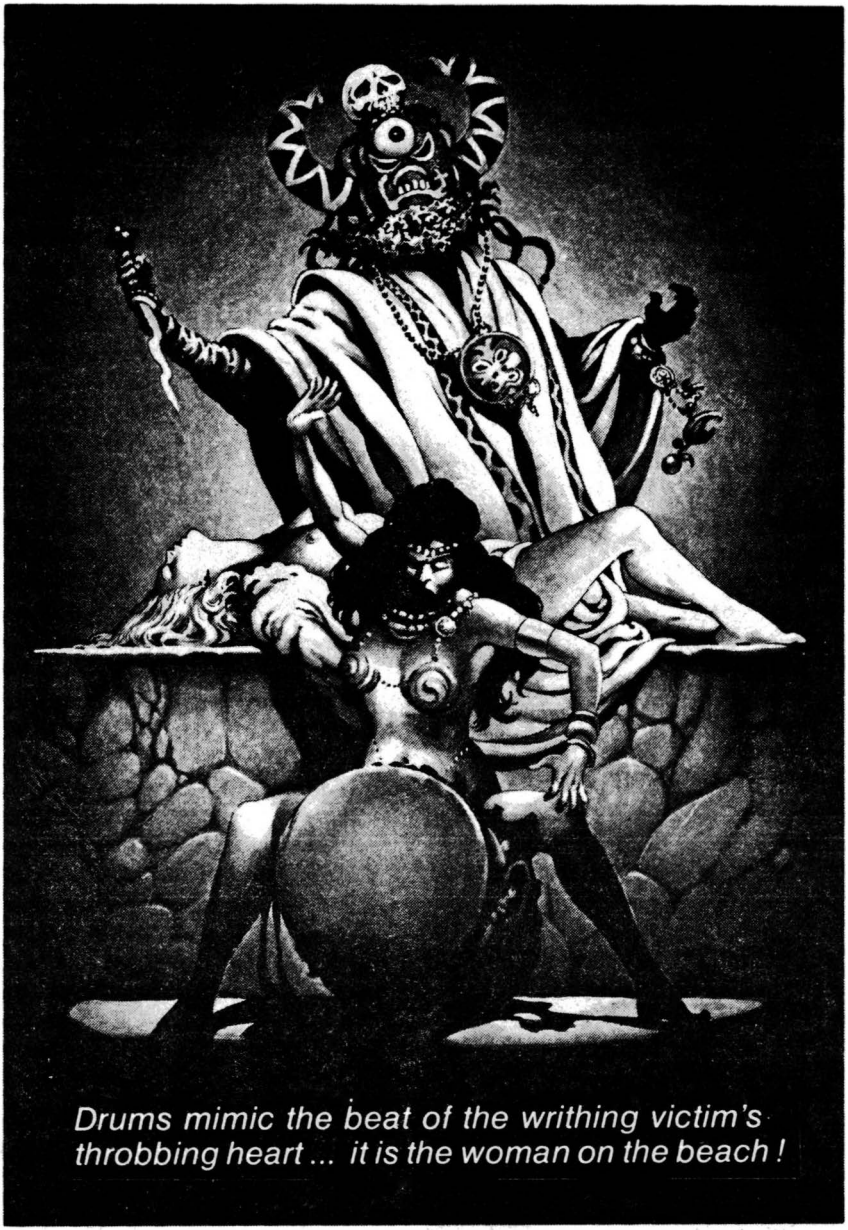
Mystery, nostalgia and some intriguing brand of magic made this an irresistable choice for the pages of Fantastic. *We felt compelled, along with Charles, not only to "go back home again," but to stay and help unravel the spell that had taken over the town and everyone in it. The elusive Mr. Lazarus has served as catalyst in other stories by Dellinger. He does his job well, doesn't he? And did you share our appreciation of that strange door that appeared to lead us into mystery and then disappeared when the spell was broken?*

Anybody have anything to say about the radio characters mentioned in this story?


DAEMON
PART 3
Stephen & Chip Fabian
The white moon passes silently across the night sky as we stand unable to move, the blood chilled in our veins.

Hypnotic veils of moon-mist surround us, pale and dim, shimmering before our eyes.
Slowly they fade away, revealing images inside a huge cavern.
Before a monstrous stone god, over a living sacrifice, a mad high priest gestures from some phallic rite handed down a thousand years, while human beasts mutter savage prayers.

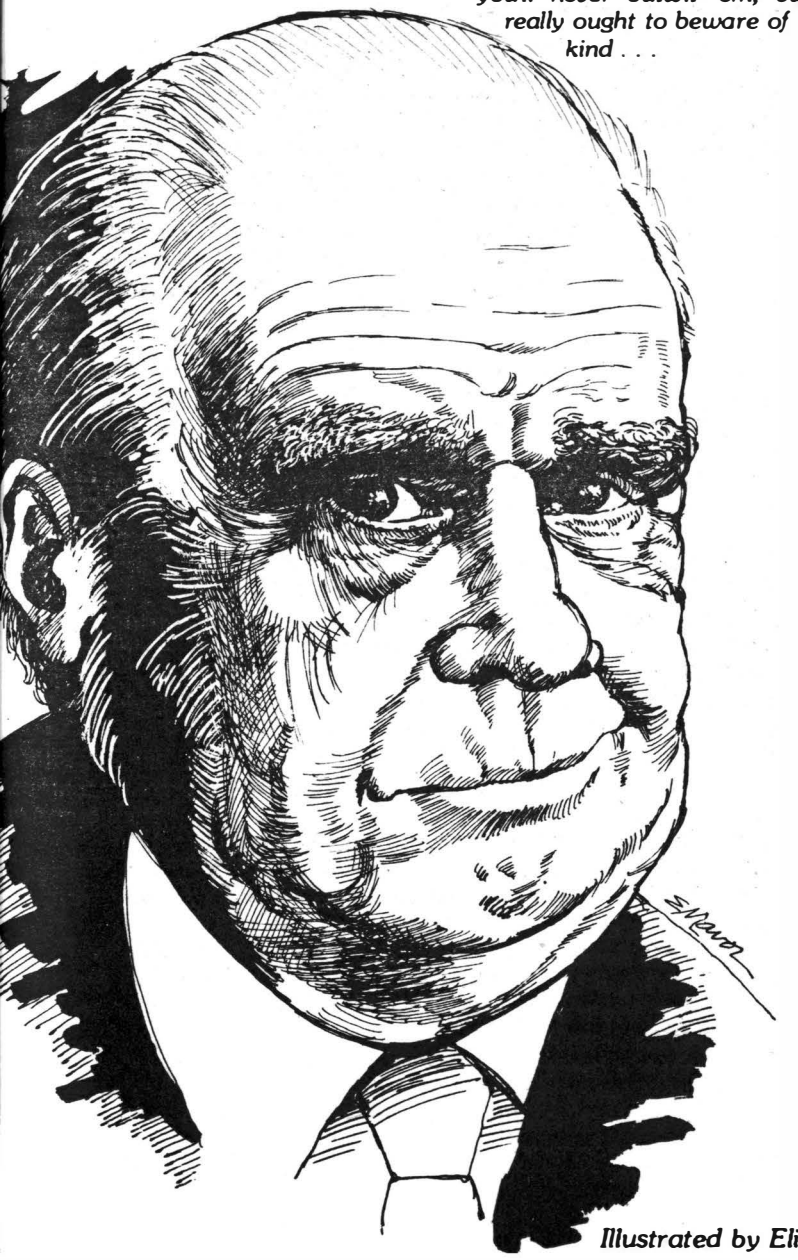
In a hidden part of the cavern, imprisoned, sits another monstrous god, like some mythical beast of old, born of a madman's dream and torn from its resting place centuries before time began.
It moves to shape a protecting, enveloping curve in which a sleeping child is gently repositioned.
You are not alone child, I am not alone, How long it takes to know that, how terribly long.
The creature lifts its eye upward and a silent call reaches out ... Come swiftly Daemon, come swiftly !


Drums mimic the beat of the writhing victim's throbbing heart ... it is the woman on the beach !

NEVER ARGUE WITH ANTIQUE DEALERS

By Darrell Schweitzer

Clever fellows, antique dealers, and you'll never outwit 'em; but they really ought to beware of their own kind . . .



Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

NEVER ARGUE with antique dealers, especially ones like Lafcadio Smith. He was unique for his ability to lull you into semi-consciousness with tricks of the trade, nostalgia, and folksy stories, then turn on you a few hours later and clobber you when you least expected it. If you were haggling about a price he'd probably raise it and make you feel like you got off with a bargain. He was the pro's pro, the ultimate professional, and I should have known better than to try arguing with him.

It had been a hot day, and it was just beginning to cool off. Fading sunlight slanted through the westward windows, reflecting fantastically off all the bric-a-brac in the barn which served as his shop. It was musty in there as usual, and I couldn't see anything in the far corners or the lofts above me because of the cigar smoke and the shadows which shrouded all details.

The two of us sat on rickety chairs in the ground level of the barn. Above us were three lofts filled with old furniture: the widest selection of Hutch, Queen Anne, Arrowback, and everything back to neolithic. I'm sure that if the guillotine they beheaded Louis XVI with was still around, he'd have had it. We were surrounded by his miscellaneous stock, his books which ranged from three for a dollar former best sellers to an Elizabethan bible he was asking three hundred dollars for, plus stacks and stacks of pulps, slicks, penny-dreadfuls, comic books, farmer's almanacs, and old girly magazines. I was casually paging through some HARPER's issues from the turn of the century, while he leaned back, his hands folded over his enormous stomach, puffing away on an antique cigar. Yes, an antique cigar. A genuine Havana of the time that hadn't been on sale in years. He said he'd found them in a Spanish-American War footlocker, and I couldn't dispute him at the moment. He was spilling out more and more of his usual run of anecdotes, but beneath it all he was serious.

Our drawn-out and frequently interrupted debate was over a book he was trying to sell me. It wasn't a book in the strictest sense, which is what made it so interesting. He had called me up at my office one day, telling me that he'd come across one of those ancient Chinese volumes handwritten on slats of wood, the kind they had before the invention of paper, which gave the overall impression of a venetian blind held sideways. Supposedly it was over two thousand years old, and contained the complete text of a lost work by the philosopher Mo Tzu, complete with commentaries. I was very excited when I heard the news. Surely the museum would give me a raise if I got the thing for them. It was virtually priceless, and the thousand dollar price-tag he had on it was peanuts by institutional standards.

But when I saw it I was sure it was a fake. The wood wasn't browned

at all hardly. It couldn't have been more than two-hundred years old on the outside, if that. More likely than not it was merely a forgery done on old wood. I refused to buy it and insisted Laf was putting me on. I'd been doing business with him for years, both privately and in the name of the museum, and I knew that he wasn't the kind of amateur to be taken in by some cheap bit of con artistry. It had to be a gag.

"Laf," I said, "I've been your customer and your friend for I-don't-know-how-long, and still I don't believe this for one minute. You're carrying this hoax a bit too far, and I'm getting tired of it." Then I picked up another magazine and began skimming over the synopsis to one of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's women's novels, circa 1900. She's always good for a few laughs.

He got very angry then. In all the years I'd known him, I'd never seen him this close to losing his temper before. He crushed out his cigar on the concrete floor, and made fists at his sides. His face got red and his voice went up in pitch. Besides that he addressed me as *Sheldon* rather than merely Fred, which is something he rarely did.

"Look here Sheldon, it's obvious that you don't believe me. You won't listen even though I'd stake my professional reputation on it. Some kind of friend you are!"

"Now I didn't mean it that way. Nothing personal, but I just don't believe the thing is as old as you say it is. Even if my mother said that, I'd demand proof. Now tell me the truth for once. Where did you get it?"

He was almost screaming. "Well, you'll have your proof goddamnit. As for where I got it, I got it from the Ch'in library right before the place burned down. You've heard of the Ch'in library I hope."

I dropped my magazine, stirring up a cloud of dust. Having been an amateur Sinologist for years, I'd heard of the Ch'in library. Ch'in was the name of the first really big dynasty of China. It didn't last very long, but it united the country, and it s one emperor was famous for two things: The building of the Great Wall and the burning of all the books in the country. He wanted to control all knowledge, so he kept a copy of every book that had been written at the time under lock and key in his library, and burned the rest. Nothing would have been lost if the library hadn't been destroyed during the revolt that overthrew the dynasty.

"But that was around 200 B.C.! This is ridiculous!"

"I'm perfectly serious, and since you seem to insist, I'll prove everything to your satisfaction. Here, help me move this junk here. It's amazing how quickly something can get buried in this place. It's only been a couple weeks since I had this thing out."

"What thing?"

"You'll see when we get it out."

So we moved the junk, digging through a pile of stuff in one corner of

the room, carrying to other parts of the store an old gramophone, a complete run of HEARST'S INTERNATIONAL, a dozen or so kerosene lamps, a sword, some sheet music for World War I marching songs, a crate filled with pewter plates and another filled with Canton-ware, a wooden butterchurn, a sack of lead soldiers, and I don't remember what else. At last we unearthed a large black steamer trunk and pulled it into the relatively uncluttered center of the room.

He opened it, and took out what appeared to be an old time radio with an overlarge antenna on top. He extended the antenna up about seven feet, then over four, then down to the floor again and back into the side of the radio, forming a rectangle the size of a small doorway.

"This," he said with a grand sweep of his hand, "is a time machine. It was invented by Thomas Edison around 1890, but put aside because he couldn't think of any practical use for it. I found it among a collection of things I bought from the grandson of one of his closest friends."

"A time machine now? This place is getting to you. Possibly you've become dust-crazed. You really ought to take a vacation."

I was beginning to enjoy myself, but at the same time I was worried that the old boy had flipped.

"You amaze me with your thickness sometimes, Fred. Very well, I'll show you what it can do. Pick a historical event. Anything you like."

"Washington crossing the Delaware."

"Good as any." He rummaged around in the trunk again, and came up with an L-shaped crank, which he fitted into the back of the machine and started to turn.

"They didn't have power lines in those days," he said. "That's why I can't just plug the thing in."

In a minute or two the machine began to sputter, and after a while longer, it let out a low, steady hum. He opened a hidden compartment in the tombstone-shaped wooden casing, and fiddled with some dials.

"Let's see now. December 26, 1777 . . ."

"That's 1776."

"Silly of me. No matter, though. Here we go now, Washington on the Delaware, take one."

A mist formed in the doorway, and pretty soon I couldn't see the store behind it. There was a vague outline of something moving, followed by a clear image. It was more realistic than a movie because sight and sound weren't the only things involved. A cold blast of damp air came at me, just the kind you'd expect to feel if you opened a door in the wintertime.

There was George in a longboat, surrounded by his men. Everybody was rowing or pushing chunks of ice away with their musket butts except him. He was huddled in the middle of the boat beneath a pile of

blankets. Only his hat and the top half of his face stuck out.

"Can't you move this cursed thing a little faster? I'm cold," he moaned.

The soldiers ignored him.

"A lot of history could get rewritten with this thing," I said. "If it were real, I mean. Still, Laf, I'm impressed."

Now my friend *was* mad. He was furious, in fact. "What do you mean, *if* it were real? Can't you see? Can't you feel?"

"An elaborate projection, a refrigerator, and a fan."

"Oh really? Watch this!" He took a pencil out of his pocket, a Ticonderoga #2, and tossed it into George Washington's lap.

I mean that literally. He threw the thing into the projection or whatever it was, and it didn't pass through and land on the floor behind. No, it *became part* of the image, and landed in General Washington's lap. A gloved hand emerged from the blankets, took it between thumb and forefinger, held it up in front of the face for a second, then retreated back inside, presumably to deposit the pencil in a pocket for a later examination. George seemed too miserable at the moment to wonder where it came from.

"Convinced now? With this machine I can get all sorts of fabulous antiques. The cigars and the Chinese book are only the first. I got the book by popping into the library right before it burned, snatching up an armload of books, and returning to the present. I set the machine to snatch me back in two minutes, so there wasn't any problem."

"But the whole idea of time travel is illogical. You've read the stories.

Bio-sketch

Darrell Schweitzer

Born 1952. Degrees in Geography and English Literature. Graduate of Clarion Workshop, 1973. Presently assistant editor of *ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE*. Previously interviewer for *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC*. One story published previously in *FANTASTIC*, "Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out," September, 1977. Fiction credits in other magazines include *GALAXY, ASIMOV'S, WHISPERS, WEIRDBOOK, VOID* (Australian), *ORBIT* (Dutch), *COMET* (German) and anthology appearances include *Swords Against Darkness III, Heroic Fantasy, The Year's Best Horror Stories VII, Other Worlds, Alien Worlds,* and *Andromeda III*. Two fantasy novels, *The White Isle* and *We Are All Legends* forthcoming from Borgo Press. Critical works include *The Dream Quest of H.P. Lovecraft, Conan's World* and *Robert E. Howard,* and *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany*. Editor of *Essays Lovecraftian* and *The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer* (uncollected material by Lord Dunsany). Well known for interviews, of which two books have been published to date. Native of New Jersey, but long time Pennsylvania resident. Unlike many authors, does not keep a single cat, although there is a land hermit crab in the household.

Suppose somebody went back and killed their parents. They'd never be born, so there wouldn't be anyone to kill their parents. Thus, there wouldn't be any reason why they wouldn't be born. So they would. A contradiction. The whole thing is absurd."

I stopped fidgeting with the magazines now, and sat perfectly still. This was getting interesting.

"Well," he said, "I never thought about killing my parents, so I don't know about that. I don't really worry about those things, since I just take little items that won't mean a thing to history anyway. Like the books, which would have been reduced to ashes in a few minutes anyway. Nobody ever missed them."

"Yes, but the whole idea violates the laws of thermodynamics. You can't get something for nothing. Let's suppose that five minutes from now I were to come back to this instant, step out of the machine, reset the dial, and return to the future. There would be two of me. My mass would be duplicated. A hundred and sixty pounds out of this air."

"Okay, we'll try it. Here you come now."

I turned. The river scene faded into a red haze, then blanked out completely. The cold wind stopped. There was a flash of green light, a pop, the sound of rushing air, and there I was. Me, or someone like me. An exact duplicate of myself stepped out of the machine, waved to both of us, turned the dial a notch, and went back into the machine.

I was quiet shaken by that. I didn't know what I could do to save face. Quite frankly, Laf had made an ass out of me, and I resented it. He was right. He had a real time machine there, not just a fancy home movie projector. The implications of such a thing were enormous. I stalled for time, trying to come up with a way to salvage my scuttled pride.

Laf giggled, and his blubber throbbing reminded me of a huge hump of jello, and then he got back to business. He was having a grand time, but selling the book was still at the top of the agenda.

I wasn't so methodical. At the moment I was thinking of revenge, and it was only when a buzzer went off on the time machine that I figured out how to get back at the guy. This alarm started ringing, and suddenly Laf wasn't quite so jolly. In fact, he went pale. He looked at the machine, then at me, then back at the machine.

"Your five minutes are up. It's time for you to go back."

"No," I said.

"But you must! You saw yourself back there. You . . . if I can put it this way . . . you have to go because you *already did.*"

"Uh-uh!"

It was then that things really broke loose. The machine started to wail like a police siren, shoot off sparks, and almost jump off the floor. The antenna began to twist around like a pretzel. For a minute I was afraid

the device would either melt into a puddle of slag or blow us both to bits.

Laf was horrified. Today had been the first time I'd ever seen him angry, and now it was the first time I ever saw him blank with terror. He mumbled something I didn't catch, then ran over to the machine, working furiously with the dials and switches again. Finally it calmed down. Then he looked up at me, his face livid with rage.

"Well, you got your goddamn paradox, didn't you, wise guy? Yeah, you showed me something new, but you could've gotten us both killed. Christ, for all I know you could have made a hole in the country big enough to run the rest of it through. Nobody really knows *what* this machine can do if you play around with it like that. For all I know it might just destroy the whole universe. Think about *that* on your way out. Yes, I said on your way out. I don't want to see you in this place ever again. Out!"

"Now Laf, old buddy, don't get so upset. I didn't mean . . ."

"OUT!"

So I went. To the doorstep anyway.

"Jesus God!"

"What now?" He sounded bitchier than ever.

"Look at that!"

He looked. We both looked, and saw a solid wall of blackness moving towards us. It was at the end of the driveway, in the process of swallowing my car. I glanced up to see how high it was and realized that it was curved. Not a wall, but the inside of a *sphere.* A sphere of absolute void closing in on us. It was as if the universe were dissolving like a giant alka-seltzer.

"I'll kill you!" Laf grabbed a Civil War saber and charged at me. I ducked, tripped him, and sent him sprawling through the doorway. By that time the blackness had reached the steps, and he vanished. Then the wall in front of me was swallowed up, followed by those on the other three sides.

I retreated back into the store, as the void greedily gulped up Laf's junk. I was alone in a closing circle of reality. I'll never understand the physics of the matter, but it seems that the universe was cancelling itself out, the annulment moving inwards to the point of the paradox.

I had only a few seconds left. All that remained was me, the machine, and a few old magazines. I was already beginning to feel the cold sucking of non-existence.

Then at the last possible instant I wiggled through the tangled "doorway" of the machine. It was the only place I could go, since there wasn't enough floor left for me to stand on. The machine was still on the same setting, so with a single lurch and a flash of light I was back five

minutes in the past. Or maybe six by then. I was back where I should have been. I stepped out of the wire frame, which was again in perfect shape, readjusted the dial, and returned.

I got back just in time to see the walls reappear. Then the doorstep. Then Laf.

I rushed to a window, to see how the universe was doing. The black wall was receding across a neighbor's cornfield, picking up speed. It was clearly moving away slower than it had come at us, but I suppose that is to be expected. After all, it takes far longer to inflate a balloon than to deflate it. I imagined that the world would be completely recreated in about half an hour, and the stars would come on by around midnight. It might take a couple of days for some of the remoter galaxies though.

I was standing there thinking these things when I heard three rushes of air, and three pops. I turned and saw three bald, palefaced men wearing identical silver long-johns standing over Laf, who still lay on the floor, looking like he had a severe hangover.

They spoke in high, nasal tones, with an accent I didn't recognize.

"Why look! In perfect condition! Lucky the disturbance was big enough for us to zero in."

"Just what we need for the Hall of Time Travel exhibit."

"Pre-androgynous, too. How quaint."

"We'll take the machine too. It should bring forty trillion at least. A real relic."

"Hey, what're you doing?" I yelled.

Suddenly one of them pointed a metal rod at me, and I couldn't move. I was paralyzed.

"We don't want him. Leave him here."

So there was nothing I could do to help Lafcadio Smith. Nothing at all. I try to console myself, though, thinking that even if I'd been able to move I couldn't have stopped those men when they picked up the screaming fat man and vanished along with his time machine. He had met his match and was beyond rescuing. He of all people should have known better than to argue with antique dealers.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We didn't argue over this one a bit: a delightful piece of writing. Couldn't you picture those two characters haggling over all that stuff and continuing to do so in the face of the extraordinary time-tangling wrought by that mysterious machine? One of them even tried to cheat the machine and almost destroyed the universe; and the other was such a haggler and snitcher of goodies from the past, that he was punished by becoming himself the "collectee." Just the kind of thing you sometimes wish would happen to people who get away with too much!

Author's Note:
. . . the "ghazal" is an ancient Persian verse form, revived by a few contemporary poets, in which there is no "logical" connection between the couplets, the meaning contained in the metaphorical leap.

Alternative Worlds ghazal

by Steve Rasnic

Become what you might have been Sitting Bull
first President of these Amerindian colonies.

A world where you don't exist floats with dolphins
chanting your name in their political speeches.

Reimagine the earth as woman this time, bearing
sons without other men to judge their fitness.

The one you really were abandons his ship for
poetry and women who love him out of uniform.

Your forgotten name is whispered nightly
by the wife and children you've never seen.

This sometimes world shrinks and vanishes as you
recite the secret code of childhood nightmares.

Bio-sketch

Steve Rasnic

Steve Rasnic edits *UMBRAL*, a Quarterly of Speculative Poetry, out of his home in Denver, Colorado. He has published over ninety poems in various magazines, twenty stories, and a variety of non-fiction. He is currently a member of the Denver Area Science Fiction Workshop, and has recently made sales to *Destinies*, *Whispers*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, Ramsey Campbell's *New Terrors* horror anthology, Fred Saberhagen's *A Spade Full of Spacetime* anthology, and Roy Torgeson's new anthology, *Imaginary Worlds*. He holds an M.A. in creative writing from Colorado State University.

Alpha Centauri A Nine

By L.A.P. Moore

What's in a name? . . . daring adventure, unrequieted love and much more . . .

Illustrated by Chris Carlson

Cadet Alan Stitch fell in love for the first time when he was a Junior at the Space Academy. Unfortunately, he fell in love with one of the Seniors, which was very much against regulations. For all of its heat and passion, the romance went undetected. This was due in part to the lovers' superior skill and cunning, but mainly to the great god Chance. The year passed all too swiftly for them; Alan went to graduation ceremonies, they had their last weekend together, and Suzanne was gone. Her last message from Lunabase said, "Assigned to Alph Centauri A Nine. I loved you, I love you, I will always love you."

Alpha Centauri, Sol's closest neighbor at 4.40 light-years, consisted of three stars: A and B were a binary system, and C orbited them. Of the three, A was most like Earth's sun, and of A's fourteen planets, the ninth was most like Earth. After the settlements on Mars and Titan, the next step had been Alpha Centauri A Nine. Man had yet to develop a faster-than-light ship, so it still took nearly six years to make the trip.

EACH NEW ship went a bit faster, but none quite reached that magic mark. They were close — very close — and as soon as a successful FTL drive was developed, Alan planned to transfer to Alpha Centauri A Nine. He had two reasons. Once they had an FTL, Nine would become the frontier for deeper exploration of the galaxy; and, Suzanne was there. They had kept in touch over the years by tachyon transmitter, but the "tackyphone" was no substitute for being there. It had been nearly ten years, and they had each been through a lot of changes. Along with Alan's fervent desire to get to Nine, there was a bit of fear that they would be different people; that they had been apart too long. Alan was in a brown study, thinking about Suzanne and about ships' drives, when there was a knock on the study door.

"Come on in."

A hand, holding a urine-specimen bottle full of golden liquid, preceded its owner into the room.

"Some friend you are," Alan said, "bringing second-hand booze."

"Don't let the fancy flask fool you, friend. This is the purest of Irish whiskeys, after a drop of which I'll tell you the news.

A sniff, a taste, a healthy swallow, and then, "The new ship is ready for testing, Alan."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"Professional ethics forbid me to reveal my source, but the head of Research came in today with a dose of Venerian disease. What's so special about this new drive?"

"It's simplicity itself, in theory. As a ship accelerates, its mass increases. The more mass you have, the more energy it takes to move it faster. So, as you approach the speed of light, you need an infinite

amount of energy to go that last step, because you've built up an infinite amount of mass.

"Now. This new drive, in *theory*, uses the problem as the solution. Remember good old $e = mc^2$? That gives the relationship between mass and energy. What they're trying to do, is convert the ship's mass-due-to-acceleration into energy. Not only would that provide an incredible amount of energy near light speed, but it would decrease the ship's mass — which is the main problem in trying to crack the barrier."

They talked long into their sleep period about physics and future and philosophy. Alan spent the next day curing a hangover, packing his gear, and roughing-out a request for transfer to Alpha Centauri A Nine.

NINE'S YEAR was very close to Earth's. Its axis was tilted a few degrees less, though, making for less seasonal variation. The planet was Earth-like, but it was not Earth. The atmosphere was too low in oxygen to keep a human body going for extended periods, and the annual variation in temperature ran from cool to cold. With abundant energy from a stationary power satellite, though, life inside the domes was downright comfortable. The domes of Town housed people and machinery, while acres of pliofilm were supported by air pressure above the fields of greenery which contributed both food and oxygen.

Suzanne sighed with contentment as she looked out over Town from an observation dome. The longest day of the year — which they called Summer Solstice, because Summer Alpha Centauri Astice just wouldn't do — had just passed. The sun was high and warm, and she was just drifting off into a pleasant daydream when an alarm klaxon shattered the mood. She looked quickly over Town, saw nothing unusual, then took off for her post.

"What's wrong?" she asked as she burst into Communications.

"Power satellite. Not transmitting. Don't know yet. Get on a comm board and answer some of those calls. Tell them we're working on it. Everybody's okay, and there's no immediate danger. And tell them to turn off everything they can, especially heaters."

"Does Earth know?"

"Got a quick message off to them, but there's nothing they can do. They're six years from us. Get on that comm unit before all of Town comes over here for information."

WORD OF the power failure on Nine spread through Lunabase like an airborne virus. Alan was somewhere between the orbits of Neptune and Pluto when he heard.

"What happened?"

"All we know is, the power satellite is out. Soon as we hear anything else, we'll let you know."

"How long can they last without the satellite?"

"Nine isn't all that bad a planet. They should be okay for a while."

Alan went back to testing the new ship, but part of his mind was light-years away. He called in several hours later, when that part of his mind had come up with some interesting possibilities.

"Lunabase, this is Commander Stitch. Give me Project Engineering."

"Project Engineering, here. Whatcha need, Alan?"

"Definitely some information, and probably a miracle."

"Miracles we keep in stock, but information is hard to come by. You having problems with the ship?"

"Not a one, and I've finished the full sequence. Any reason I can't skip ahead to acceleration testing?"

"Several. This is a shakedown flight, and that's all. You try to jump schedule, and they'll assign you to Earth-orbit shuttles for the rest of your life."

"Any technical reason?"

"Yes, again. The team here now can advise you on engineering, but you need an entirely different bunch for the new drive. Theoretical physicists, astronomers, and probably a philosopher."

"No witch doctor?"

THE GOVERNOR of Nine sat in front of the main screen in Communications. His face looked heavy, drawn, and defeated. His features changed as he reached for the switch, and by the time he appeared on Town's viewers he was a calm, confident, kindly symbol.

"Friends, we have a problem. Our power satellite, as you know, was struck by a small piece of space debris. The odds against such a thing happening were incalculably small, but it did happen. Had the satellite been merely damaged, we could probably have repaired it. Unfortunately, it was knocked out of orbit, and burned up in our atmosphere.

Bio-sketch

L.A.P. Moore

L.A.P. Moore, a native of Earth, shares his home on the northwest coast with seagulls, deer, leprechauns, and raccoon.

"Less than an hour ago, we launched our reserve satellite. There was a malfunction in the firing of the second stage booster, and the satellite was destroyed. We do not have another, but an around-the-clock program to build a new one has already been started. We need very little energy to survive here, although some adjustments will have to be made. A message has just been sent to Earth explaining our problem. The tackyphone takes a great deal of power, so that will be our last transmission until we have a new power source.

"More than half of our energy has gone to heating the domes. At least temporarily, we are all going to have to live together in the larger domes such as Town Hall. Energy will be shut off to private residence domes, and to all other nonessential areas. Once this is done, our ground-based energy supplies will be adequate. I don't want to minimize the difficulties we will have to face, but I believe that when this crisis is over, we will be better people for having lived through it."

The Governor turned the transmitter off, and slumped in his seat. Suzanne, sitting next to him, asked the first question. There were many more.

"What about the crops?"

"We'll maintain them through the summer, because we have to. In the meantime, we'll start large tanks of algae in the major domes. That will help with the oxygen, and with the food if necessary. I don't think food is going to be our major problem."

"How long will our power last?"

"I don't know yet. Shutting down ninety percent of Town will help. First estimates say about a year."

"How about ground-based sun collectors?"

"We don't have the energy to manufacture them. The same goes for most other technological solutions. We're like a submarine running on batteries."

"COMMANDER STITCH, this is Lunabase. We've received another transmission. They say it's the last, because the tackyphone takes so much power. They can still receive, but no more sending. I'll play the message for you."

Alan listened to the tape with fading hope. When it ended, he sat in silence for several seconds, then came to a decision.

"Lunabase, patch me into Ground Control."

"Ground Control, here. You are requested to return to Lunabase immediately."

"Do you have the team assembled for acceleration test?"

"Commander Stitch, you are *ordered* to return to Lunabase immediately."

"Will I have telemetry, or am I going solo?"

"Very well, Commander Stitch. We can't force you back, but as of now you are technically in violation of orders. You have telemetry. Preflight check now coming through. Hold!"

"What's the problem?"

"Your onboard computer has Alpha Centauri A Nine as target."

"That is correct."

"That's not an acceleration test, that's a six-year flight."

"That may be correct. If it *is* that long a hike, I'd better get started."

"Be reasonable, Commander. Even if you make it to Nine, what good will it do? At our most optimistic estimate, the colony will be dead in just over a year. Without resupply, you wouldn't be able to make it back. You'd be throwing your life away for nothing."

"I wish I could believe that you're half as worried about losing me as you are about losing this ship. Now, take that hold off and I'll be on my way."

"Negative. You'll never make it without data from here, and you will not get that data. Return to Lunabase."

"Look at it this way, Ground Control. With the information from this flight, you'll learn more about the new drive than you would from years of planet-hopping. Everything you've got is in this ship, and this ship is going to Nine. If you don't tie me into your systems, I'll shut down transmission, and you'll never know what happened to your ship, *if* anything happens to your ship. Not one byte of information. Your move, Ground Control."

There was a long pause, then the same voice.

"The hold is off, Commander. Too many Credits and too many people's lives have gone into that ship to let you throw it away. But, if you ever get back here Stitch, I'll personally see to it that . . ."

"This is Flight Control, Commander. Disregard previous transmission and prepare for acceleration. Onboard systems are green. Transmitting coordinates and flight data now."

The ship turned slowly as it oriented itself to the new coordinates. There was a pause, then the ion drive pushed gently against the tail of the ship. Pressure increased to one Earth gravity, and continued to climb. When the ion drive had boosted him to two gravities, pressing him down into his couch, he was ready.

"Flight Control, I am engaging the mass drive."

"Good luck, Commander. Lock this channel open, and keep us with you all the way."

Alan had the computer bring the mass drive on line, but with zero energy-feed to the propulsion system. Although he could sense no change, the board said it was engaged. He instructed the computer to

increase acceleration slowly. The new drive drew mass from the ship, as it would with any matter with which it was in contact, and converted it into energy. Alan was no longer pressed down into his couch. Having been calibrated at a mass of one Earth gravity, the new drive would not function below that level, but that was no problem. As the ship's acceleration edged upward, so did its mass, which was immediately converted into energy for more acceleration.

The stars ahead edged toward the blue end of the spectrum, while the ones behind slipped toward the red. Fascinated, Alan watched the process gain momentum until he saw only a cone of blue-shifted stars ahead of him, and a red-shifted cone behind. Slowly, these too began to disappear, as they shifted beyond the visible spectrum. Following its last instruction faithfully, the computer continued acceleration long after Alan had lost consciousness.

To the tackyphone operator at Lunabase, it seemed as if the ship had simply blinked out of existence. Only hours before, Earth had sent a message to Nine that Commander Alan Stitch was on his way. There was no hope of his reaching them in time, so the message didn't include the fact that he had no replacement satellite aboard. Hope was still high on Nine. They, too, knew that he wouldn't reach them for nearly six years, but they took him to their hearts as a modern-day Don Quixote — *their* Don Quixote. That's why the new message from Earth hit them so hard. "Commander Stitch's ship, while testing a new, experimental drive, suddenly stopped transmitting. While it is possible that his tachyon transmitter failed, it is more probable that the drive malfunctioned, and Commander Stitch has been lost in the line of duty."

MOST OF Town was shut down and sealed off, crowding the entire population into a few domes. Efforts to build a new power satellite had failed, as much from lack of energy as from lack of specialized parts. Basic crops had been substituted for everything else in the fields, and the harvest had been good. There was no winter garden because they couldn't afford the energy drain, but whatever else might happen to them, they would not starve.

Suzanne stared out at a dark, cold Town, thinking of Alan. A keening wind blew ice crystals through the evening air, as dim lights came on behind her in the crowded dome. Like cattle in a barn, the people themselves provided much of the necessary heat, but the ventilation systems were straining to keep the air breathable.

They had food, water, and heat. Unless something unexpected happened, they would survive the winter. They would not survive the

spring. Cutting everything down to an absolute minimum, they would be completely out of energy before midsummer day.

ALAN CAME to with a jolt. He was weak, confused, and sick. The first thing he did was to check the time. He'd been out several hours. The next thing he did was to check his location. Then he checked it again, and stared blankly at the board for long minutes. During those minutes, the computer located the ninth of Alpha Centauri A's fourteen planets, and calculated an orbit. The mass drive was disengaged, and so was Alan's mind.

Before the ship had established orbit above Nine, Alan cancelled the automatic program and flew in new coordinates. As he passed over Town the first time, he knew that he was too late. No matter what the ship's clock said, time had passed. Town was a ghost town. No lights, no vehicles, no people. Not even the emergency beacon at the spaceport was transmitting, so he had to come in on his own.

Stepping out of the ship, he stared at the nearby city. Spring was in the air, making the tragedy that much sharper. With the look of a man going to make *sure* that his dog is dead, Alan trudged heavily toward Town.

"Alan!"

His head jerked up so fast that his eyes bobbed. Someone was running toward him from Town. At first his mind wouldn't believe what his eyes and ears were telling him, but it was true.

"Suzanne!"

They hugged, and held, and held. By the time the flood of words came, a flood of people were pouring toward them from Town.

Coherent conversation came later, when Alan, Suzanne, and a small group went into the ship for a conference. Joy drained from the faces of all the colonists except Suzanne, as Alan told them.

"I don't have a replacement satellite."

"What did you have in mind when you left, Commander?" the Governor asked.

"Getting here," Alan said, looking at Suzanne. "I'm afraid I didn't think much beyond that."

"How did you get here? We heard that you'd been lost."

"I was testing a new drive that was supposed to reach light speed. I don't know what happened, but I got from just outside the Sol system to just outside the Alpha Centauri A system in a matter of hours. Now, as for the satellite, I can return to Earth, pick up a new one, and have it back here in no time."

"It may have been a matter of hours for you, Commander, but not for Nine. It was summer solstice here when you started, and now it's nearly

spring. Assuming that you could duplicate your feat, you wouldn't get back here for a year and a half. Our experts give us less than two months."

The conversation went on, but it had all been said. The ships available could take a small percentage of the colonists back to Earth, but only a very small percentage.

Alan and Suzanne spent the night making love, talking, and thinking. Alan drifted off into a troubled sleep, and woke with a dream-inspired idea. Suzanne woke to Alan's voice.

"That's right, Governor. Your science and technology staff, here on the ship, as soon as possible."

It took less than half an hour.

"Okay, here's my plan. If it won't work, I want to know why. If it will work, I want to know how. Now, the new drive that got me here does only one thing. It converts mass into energy. It will draw that mass from any matter it's in contact with. On the ship, the energy is fed into the drive, but it doesn't have to be. It could be fed into Nine's power grid."

"You're overlooking a basic problem," a voice said. "The mass you had to work with in flight was not the resting mass of your ship, but the mass due to its great acceleration. Your ship is at rest relative to Nine, and its mass is so small as to be useless."

There was a hum of conversation, but no one spoke up with a solution. The hum was dying down into despair as Alan broke in.

"What is one gravity on this planet, compared with Earth?"

"One point three nine."

"That's it, then. The mass converter will operate at any acceleration, or gravity, greater than one Earth. If we disconnect it from the ship's drive and remove it, it can draw on Nine's mass."

There was chaos, as objections were thrown into the air like confetti. "It the mass of the planet is negated, it will fly apart!" "There's no way to anchor such a device against the acceleration it will develop!" "Once started, the process will build until . . ."

"One at a time!" Alan shouted over the din. "Now. The mass of Nine will not be negated. This will have to be calculated before we do anything, but Nine's mass is so great that we can supply all the energy we want using a percentage so small that it's practically nonexistent. $E = mc^2$. A very, very small amount of mass translates into a very, very large amount of energy. Second. The device will be producing energy, not acceleration, so there is no need to anchor it any more than a normal generator. Now, as to a runaway reaction, I have to make a confession. The last order I gave the computer before blacking out was to increase acceleration slowly. I should have put some limit on that command, or at least a deadman cutoff. It may have shut the drive

down because it was approaching its pre-programmed target, or for some other reason, but that doesn't matter here. We'll take it in small, self-limiting stages, so there won't be any heart attacks. Now, are there any other objections?"

There were, but they were minor compared to the first ones. Having dealt with why it wouldn't work, they got on to how it would work. Then, from theory to construction, and on the day of the spring equinox it was as ready as it ever would be.

"How sure are you," Suzanne whispered in Alan's ear, "that this monster isn't going to blow us up?"

"Now, what kind of an experiment would it be if we already knew the results?" Alan threw the switch.

There was a low hum, increasing in frequency as he slowly increased the power. Seconds dragged out like hours. Finally, Engineering dome reported all needles in the green. There was a fearful, expectant silence, followed by cheering, dancing, and general pandemonium.

By the time Alpha Centauri A had set, every light in Town was on, and Spring Equinox was declared an annual holiday. Almost as an afterthought, the tachyon transmitter was turned back on, and reoriented for Earth. The first message was sent by the hero of the day, Alan Stitch.

"A. Stitch in time, saves Nine."

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

This yarn ensnared us immediately with adventure in outer space plus unrequieted love, and then led us an enjoyably merry pace right up to that last line, which was so unexpected that it worked where many puns fail. For us, it was the frosting on a cake of a story; delightful from one end to the other. What was your reaction?

As an automated society becomes more and more of a reality, how far do you think you'd be willing to go . . .?

By Robert H. Brown

PERSON TO

"YOU MEAN that box can actually make conversation with someone over the phone? That's fantastic!"

"Isn't it, though?" Dr. Quimet said. "Of course, it was a logical development after automatic answering machines and automatic phone dialing machines. It is, however, much more advanced. A brilliant application of minicomputer technology, if I do say so myself."

"Yes, it certainly is." When my editor called me to give me the assignment to interview Quimet, I had thought he was sending me off to talk with some nut with an automatic dialing tape recorder, like some of those pesky phone advertisers use. I'd had no idea it was something like this.

"How does it work, doctor?"

"Well . . . how much do you know about computers?"

"Very little, I . . . *oh!* No, I don't mean how does it *work*, I mean, how is it operated?"

"Well, that is really very simple. I have worked out a program so that all you have to do is speak to it for a while, let it hear how you talk, how you sound, your language, all of that. Then, when someone calls you and you can't talk, it does your talking for you — it can even *make* calls for you if you wish."

"You mean, it would hold a conversation just like I would?"

"Exactly."

"Um . . . do you think you could demonstrate?"

"Of course." He leaned over to the little black box and turned it on. It made a very low hum as it warmed up, then it was silent. "Now, do you see that phone over there on the wall? Good. It's on a separate line, so I

PERSON

Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

can call the box on it. Better yet, I'll let you call."

He dialed, and I heard what sounded like Dr. Quimet say: "Hello?"

"Hello. Dr. Quimet?" I said, slowly.

"Yes? Oh, you're that reporter that called earlier, aren't you? What can I do for you?" I looked over at Dr. Quimet, he had been silent during the whole conversation.

"Well, doctor, I'd just like to say that I think your answering machine is fantastic."

"Why, thank you, young man." The voice had the right note of pride in it. I hung up.

"Satisfied?" Dr. Quimet asked.

"Quite."

I WROTE the article and turned it in. The only thing I heard about it was when my editor called to say that the response to the article was really fantastic; the public was really interested. I did a follow up article on it, a filler really, mentioning that Dr. Quimet had gone into business for himself, manufacturing the machines. I went on to other things.

I was researching an article on TV game shows, when I noticed something strange. In order to get some kind of statistics for it, I started counting how much money was won on them and how many people won. I had been doing that for about a month and had pretty good curves on performance, when there was suddenly a marked increase in

Bio-sketch

Robert H. Brown

Although born in Miami, I am currently living in Tampa, Florida, and majoring in Mass Communications/Film at the University of South Florida. I am a member of the USF Science Fiction Art and Literature Association (which was mentioned in Ellen Lindow's letter which appeared in *Fantastic* a couple of issues ago, under the Mickey Mouse name of "Science Fiction Club." Really, Ellen!) and I am at the tender age of 19, single, and interested in writing, reading, acting, traveling, thinking, eating, money, music, poetry, drama, films, wine, women, song, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I first started getting interested in SF (I think people who use the unspeakable "Sci-fi" should be shot on sight) from watching *The Outer Limits* and *Twilight Zone* on TV as a kid, and from reading E.A. Poe and H.G. Wells. Then, in seventh grade, when looking for something to do a book report on, I stumbled upon Robert A. Heinlein's *Have Space Suit — Will Travel*, and I was hooked, soon becoming a full blown Science Fiction Freak (which, come to think about it, is how some of the local illiterates think of me, too, though with different connotations). In 1975 I started sending my stories off to magazines, off and on, and I have since then decided to give it up — about four times, but now, I think I'll keep trying. For a while, anyway. "Person to Person" is, of course, my first sale, but hopefully not my last.

winnings on one show: "Dialing for Dollars." It started off small at first; it seemed that more and more people were beginning to answer their phones at the right time, and know the amount and their silly numbers. It slowly mushroomed, until right before the show went off the air, they had only had one call that didn't have a winner in a week. I called the production company to find out if they had an explanation.

"It was just one of those things, I guess." The Producer told me. "Show biz is full of ups and downs, after all."

"Yes, but this is something too coincidental to chalk up to chance. Things like this just don't happen."

"Oh? They obviously do, because it just did."

"But . . ."

"I'm afraid you're worrying about nothing. Forget about it."

"I'm afraid I just can't do that."

"Too bad."

"Look, could I come and talk to you about this, in person."

"I'm afraid not."

The one thing I learned in journalism school was *never take no for an answer,* so I decided to go see him. I drove down to the building, shoved past the receptionist at the door, and barged on in.

It was a typical office: wood paneling on the walls; a bookshelf full of unused books; framed still photographs from past shows; big desk with a matching pen and pencil set and green blotter in the center; in/out basket, window looking down on the street; telephone; and a funny little black box.

The phone rang, and the box made a low hum as it warmed up. "Johnston here," It said, using the producer's voice.

"Listen, Jim," I yelled into the phone at my editor, "this is big, *really* big. I went into every office in that building I could, and half of them were manned by little black boxes!"

"Calm down." Jim said, "That's what those boxes are for, after all."

"Calm down?" I said, calmer, "You talk as if it's nothing."

"I'm afraid you *are* worrying about nothing. Forget about it." There was something strangely familiar about that.

"Look, Jim, why don't I come into the office and talk about it?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm just too busy. In fact, I've taken up too much time talking to you already. Well, it was nice talking to you." He hung up.

SOMEHOW, I wasn't surprised to find a little black box filling the editorial chair. This one was a little more peculiar, however. It had a reading attachment on it, and it was busy scanning the slush pile of unsolicited manuscripts. It hummed, happily.

I decided to go see Quimet.

I found him fishing; with my editor.

"So there you are!" I yelled at Jim. "I don't suppose I have to tell you the big story about the *'rise of the answering machine,'* do I?"

"No, I pretty much have first hand knowledge."

"How could you let it happen?"

"How could I stop it? It was designed to free people of useless work, and it does its job damn well."

"Don't you realize what you've done?" I asked Quimet.

"I think so. I have freed mankind of being slaves to the office and the all-mighty red tape. What's wrong with that?"

"But what about the people who can't just buy a machine to do their work for them?"

"Well, if they enjoy their job, no harm done. If they hate their job, well, I am currently working on more and more attachments for the machines, so they can help more and more people. For example, there's that curse of paperwork . . . you've already seen my reading machine — now, come inside and see my new writing machine."

"Writing machine?"

I LIKED it so much that I decided to buy one, and let it do my work while I fished with Jim and Quimet. In fact, it is writing this article right now.

My machine does its job very well, and makes me lots of money. But my machine never gets any recognition. No. And it never, never gets any thanks for its tireless labor. No.

My machine hates me. *Hates* me.

My machine can't wait until I come back into the office.

■

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

The idea of machines overtaking man is an idea that increasingly nurtures a germ of truth: machines make more efficient space travelers; they calculate much more rapidly than man; they may be able to match the thinking power of the human brain in ten years or so, as predicted by some scientists . . . and on and on. Most of us find this a little hard to accept . . . a fearful notion to brush aside and perhaps deny. So what better way to dissolve our uneasiness than in this light-hearted piece where we can comfortably laugh over the preposterous idea of . . . a machine writing one of our stories?

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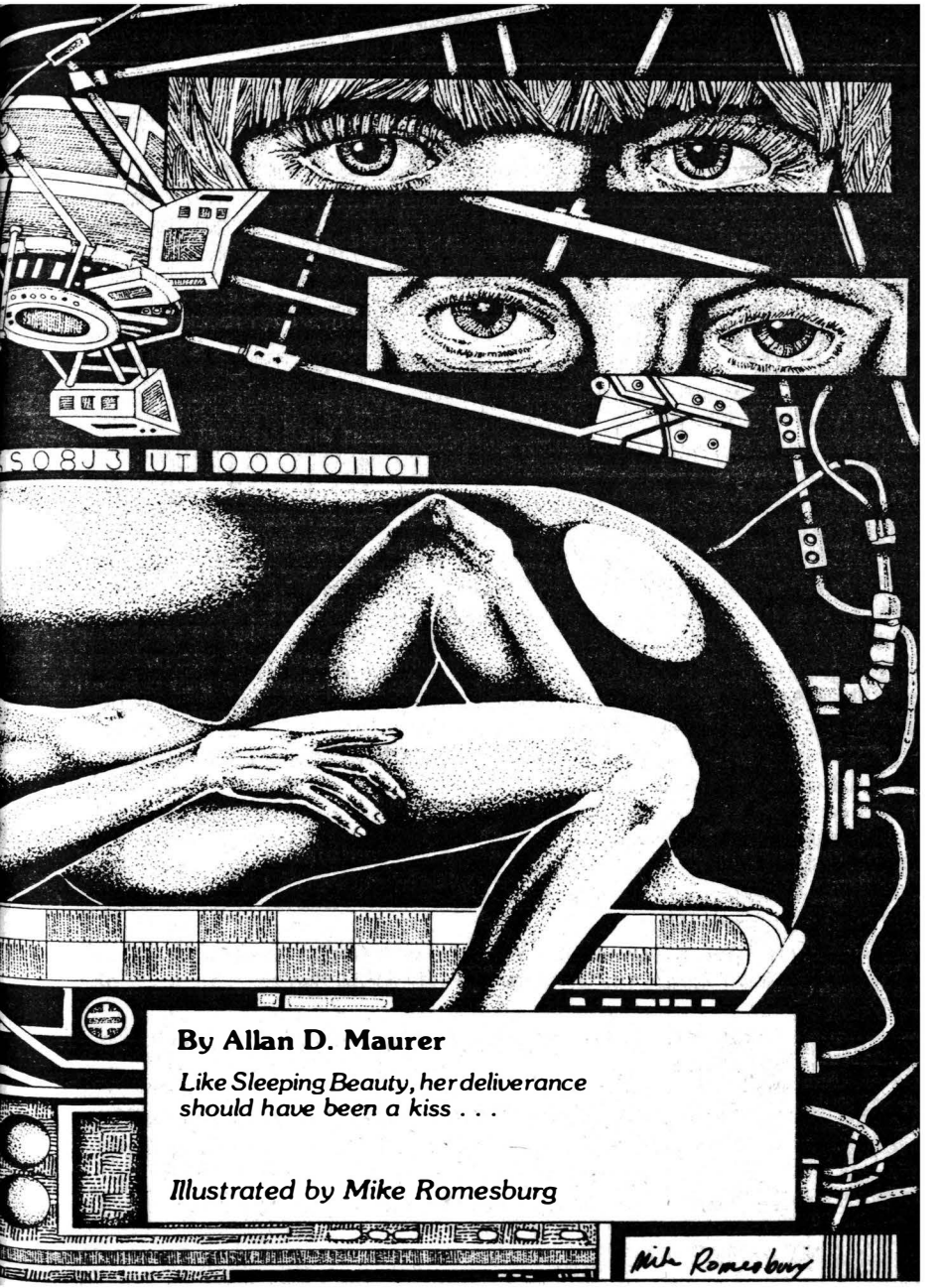


By Allan D. Maurer

Like Sleeping Beauty, her deliverance should have been a kiss . . .

Illustrated by Mike Romesburg

Cold . . . so cold, Miranda thought. It had been her last thought before the long sleep, and now it was back, as fresh as a frozen pea.

She tried to reach for a blanket and discovered she could not move. *I'll catch my death if I don't cover up,* she thought, trying to open her eyes. The lids would not budge.

She had no control over her body. It was as if the nerve endings connecting her mind and body had been severed; her mental commands ordering her fingers and toes to move did not get through.

It felt like death. *I have to wake up,* she thought, struggling to open her eyes, to move an arm, a leg, anything.

"Please, be calm," said a deep, masculine voice that penetrated the darkness. "Let me assure you that all is well, Miss Merriweather," the voice said. "The warming process cannot be rushed and you will feel some unpleasant sensations, but all is well."

Even as the voice spoke, the sensations began, a tingling that started at her extremities and flowed through her body. It felt as if carbonated water had been pumped into her veins, she thought. Then she recognized it as kin to the feeling you got from sticking your hands in warm water after being out in the cold.

Gradually, her body warmed. Her eyelids parted slightly, the wet lashes sticking together. Through blurred slits, she saw the cryogenic bubble that held her. And she remembered.

MIRANDA MERRIWEATHER had been a top box office attraction for a decade. The day she found the lump in her right breast, she had begun work on her thirty-first picture.

She probed at the lump with her fingers. *Cancer,* she thought, and a chill slid up her spine.

It took her two weeks to get up the nerve to see a doctor. He confirmed her own diagnosis.

It's malignant," he said. "I recommend immediate surgery, a radical mastectomy followed by radiation treatment and chemotherapy.

"No," Miranda said.

"You don't have much time," the doctor said. "If we act now . . ."

"No," Miranda said, concentrating on keeping the terror out of her voice.

She went to half a dozen other doctors who issued the same verdicts with minor variations.

To all of them, she said, "No."

She told her former husband, who remained one of her closest friends. He argued with her and cajoled her to no avail, and finally, enlisted the aid of her agent, Angello Costello.

She had been with Costello since the beginning, when he told produ-

cers, "You want Rob Richards in this picture, you find a part for Miranda."

She trusted Angie enough to pour out her feelings to him.

"Angie," she said, "you of all people must know what it takes for a woman to stay on top in this competitive jungle. When I started the producers used to pass me around for lunch. I've been on a starvation diet since I was twenty. I work out in a spa two hours a day, every day, and come out so hungry I cry.

"Then I eat a green salad and listen to friends make jokes while they eat chocolate cake with butter cream icing.

"I spend hours in makeup and wardrobe when I'm on a picture, and almost as long anytime I want to leave the house. When my husband said choose between me and a kid or your career, I told him to get lost. And I love him, Angie.

"I just can't let them take all of that away in a few hours on an operating table."

"Ah, kid, you could do character parts. You can't be a sex goddess forever," Angie said.

"I've never kidded myself that I could act," Miranda said. "Audiences pay to look at me. That's all I ever had or will have. I'm only thirty. I should have another ten or fifteen years. I want those years, Angie."

"You could retire," Angie said. "You're loaded. Got more money than you could spend in three lifetimes. Then you'll have those years and more."

"I'm not Greta Garbo," Miranda said. "I couldn't retire for thirty or forty years. Making movies is all I've ever done or want to do."

Angie understood. They had been together a long time; he knew that when she made up her mind no amount of arguing would change it.

So he suggested the cryogenic sleep.

She put off the decision until the pain began. She went to a group of specialists who told her that with immediate surgery and supportive treatment, she might still have a chance.

"I won't do it," she said.

"You'll die," they said.

"I won't do that either," she said.

ANGIE CALLED in favors people all over town owed him and spread Miranda's money around liberally to arrange for her to be frozen using a special technique. Developed to give surgeons more time during open heart operations, it involved lowering her body temperature gradually until her vital signs were undetectable. Unlike most of the frozen dead, Miranda would not be a "corpsicle." Theoretically, she would not be dead at all. Although maintenance costs were

incredibly expensive, scientists said the method offered the most promising chances for eventual revival.

Angie invested what was left of her money in ventures that would produce income that went into a maintenance trust. He explained it all to Miranda before the freeze. He was the last person to speak to her.

"I'll make you immortal, Miranda. I'll make sure they remember you whenever you wake up. Your legend will be greater than any of them, greater than Valentino, Garbo, Dean and Presley put together."

They were good words, Miranda thought. The right words for her.

FULLY AWAKE now and warm, Miranda would see the world outside her plastic bubble was not the one she had left. It resembled something out of one of the sci-fi chillers she'd played in early in her career, a set dominated by unfamiliar machines, walls full of dials and flashing lights, and sleek, futuristic tables and chairs.

Two persons, a man and a woman, stood about ten feet in front of her cubicle. They were tall and thin. Their heads seemed too large for their spindly bodies, but Miranda wasn't sure the images were not distorted by her bubble plastic.

"She's warming quickly," the woman said. Miranda heard her through a speaker in the bubble.

"Yes, I hope she will be helpful," the man said. "So many of them are difficult."

Their speech was rapid and oddly inflected. Miranda thought it might be an accent, but none she was familiar with.

"Do you feel like answering questions now?" the woman asked.

"Yes, we're quite interested in your time period," the man said.

"Questions . . ."Miranda said. The word came out of her mouth like cold molasses. Her tongue and lips felt huge and numb, as if they were

Bio-sketch

Allan Maurer

I am 32 and have been addicted to science fiction for as long as I can remember. Currently a full-time free-lance writer, I've been a reporter on daily newspapers in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, an editor on magazines and trade papers, and an English teacher in New Jersey, where I taught courses in science fiction and the future. I've done stints as a hospital orderly, amusement park ride operator, printer's devil, and highway construction worker.

When I quit my last full-time job to write, I expected to starve for a year. Fortunately, it did not turn out that way. I've sold articles and fiction to *Omni, Future Life, Starlog, Psychic Dimensions,* and numerous trade magazines.

I've been married ten years and my wife, Ginny, tolerates my weird habits, such as filling every room in the house with books and writing from midnight until six in the morning. She says it's a good thing I didn't do that when we first got married or she would have thought I was a vampire.

Besides Ginny and science fiction, I'm fond of cats, butter almond ice cream, Japanese restaurants, chess, German Expressionist art, and the weather in North Carolina, which is kind to people, trees, birds, bugs and other living things.

loaded with novacaine. "I . . . I'll be glad to answer your questions soon as I get out of here and into a hot bath," she said. "I have a few questions of my own."

"Oh, that does not sound promising," the woman said. "We must be the first to have awakened her."

"Ah . . . am I all right," Miranda asked. "I mean, am I cured?"

"You're perfectly healthy," the man said. "But I'm afraid we can't remove you from your . . . ah . . . cubicle just yet. Perhaps you would talk to us a bit first?"

"Now wait a minute," Miranda said. "I paid a fortune for this and I expect some service. I deserve a little consideration . . ."

"I don't believe she's going to be much help," the woman said. "Sounds very stubborn and agressive. She'll probably require extensive hypnoconditioning."

"Yes, a pity," the man said. "She looked very promising."

"Never judge a source by its face," the woman said. "We better have the librarian arrange for psycho-repair."

"Yes, and return her immediately before she suffers serious trauma."

"Return me . . ." Miranda said. "What do you mean return me? What are you talking about? When will I get out of here?"

The man pushed a series of buttons on an instrument in front of him. Miranda heard a hissing sound and felt the cold seeping around her feet.

"What are you doing?" she said as loudly and shrilly as she could. She felt the cold creep up her legs.

"Wait," she said, "please . . ."

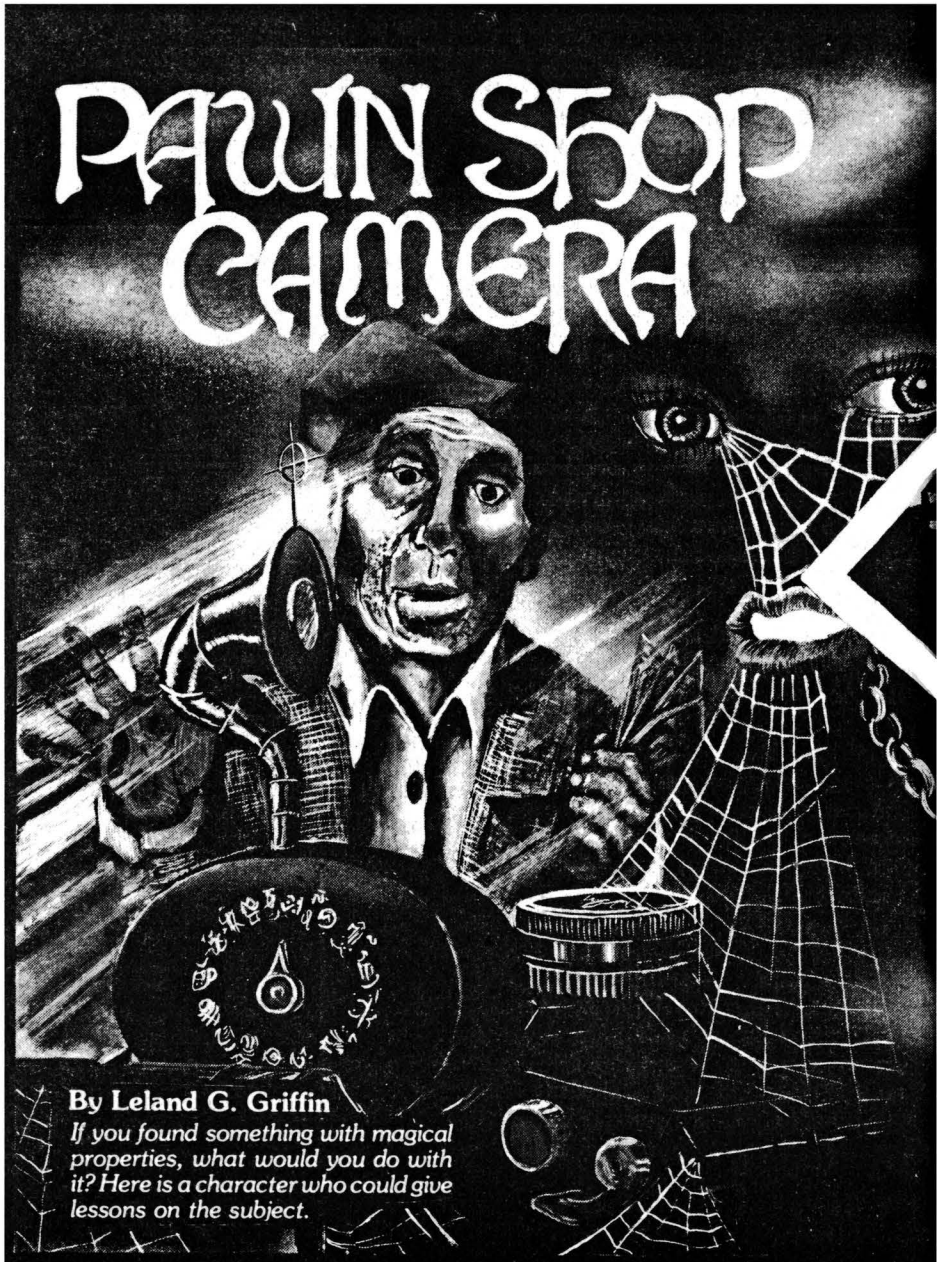
She felt sleepy. She opened her mouth to scream, but the sound froze in her throat.

The cryogenic bubble made a half turn, exposing its labeled spine, and rose on its elevator to the shelf marked: "Twentieth Century History."

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

A disfiguring illness is devastating for anyone, but imagine how intense the grief may be for someone who has reached the peaks of fame and stardom. To live in a future where a cure might be possible seemed a reasonable choice for our heroine to make. Any way you look at it, though, cryogenic preservation will be a risky business, with no guarantees at the other end. This woman was desperate enough to try such a method of survival, but we thought the final outcome far more chilling than her frozen hibernation. How about you?

PAWN SHOP CAMERA



By Leland G. Griffin

If you found something with magical properties, what would you do with it? Here is a character who could give lessons on the subject.

Illustrated by Raven

HE WAS a skid row bum with a fortune in his pocket. It was not really a fortune by ordinary standards, but to Don Garson the $538.48 in his pocket made him one with the Rockefellers and Astors.

He stared into the window of the pawn shop at the motley array of objects in view. There were electric drills, binoculars, hair-dryers and guitars, diamond rings and chess sets, cameras . . .

Garson wanted to buy something. Anything. Just to show that he could, and finally he went inside.

Back of the counter Jake Morris stared at him over the tops of his glasses. His attitude was not that of the chairman of the welcoming committee, and his first words stressed the fact.

"No touch, Don," he said. "The well has run dry."

Garson leaned an elbow on the counter. "You do me wrong," he said in an aggrieved tone. "I came neither to beg nor borrow, but to buy. In short, I would make a purchase."

Jake stirred slightly. "Yeah?" he said. "What? I'm fresh out of bottled goods."

"A . . . a camera," Garson said. Then, more positively, "Yes, a camera by all means."

Jake got slowly to his feet and moved along the counter to his left, pausing where half a dozen cameras rested under the dirty glass of the counter top. "See anything you like?" he asked.

Garson stared through the glass at the instruments, knowing nothing about any of them. Finally he tapped lightly above one of them, and Jake took it out and set it on the counter.

The black object was like no camera Garson had ever seen, or Jake either for that matter. The main body was oval in shape, but the sides were flat, and there were four tiny carved feet on the bottom. The lens, if it was a lens, was rather small, and situated at the end of a gooseneck that rose from the top of the camera box and curved back, then forward; much like the s aker horn on some ancient radio. The aiming device was a cross hair above the lens. On the left side of the main body was a pointer which could be set to either of two positions. On the right side was another pointer which could move through a 360^0 arc. There were countless tiny symbols around the circle.

Garson stared at the camera for a long moment. Then, "What can you tell me about this one?" he asked.

Jake shrugged. "You sight through here . . ." he pointed to the cross hairs . . . "and you press this button. I think."

"How much?" Garson asked.

"Twenty-five," Jake answered.

Garson frowned as if considering the amount, then smiled. "I presume that includes a roll of film?"

Jake nodded. He got a sack and put the camera in it, then reached for a roll of film. He put the film in the bag and took the twenty-five dollars Garson counted out. One part of his mind wondered faintly where Don Garson had got twenty-five dollars. Another part reminded him that it was no concern of his, no concern at all.

Garson left the shop and meandered slowly along the street. He had an almost full bottle of wine in the inside pocket of his tattered coat, the rest of his windfall of money deep in a trouser pocket, and the camera swinging in his hand. He passed by an alley and looked up it with his heartbeat quickening as he thought of the events of the night before; of seeing one man fleeing from a

prone body, and of checking that prone body to see if the fleeing man had overlooked anything. He re-lived the moment when his hand had closed over the fat roll of bills, and the frantic haste with which he had then fled the scene. He remembered how his uncertain heart had fluttered dangerously.

Two blocks farther on Garson came to the Athens Hotel. He usually slept in a flophouse, but he could no longer dare that with the roll of bills he still had. Besides, for a few days at least, he could afford the comparative luxury of the Athens.

He entered the dingy foyer, crossed to the desk, and registered for a room. He took a long drink from his bottle in the creaky elevator that took him to the fifth floor, then walked a short distance to room five oh eight.

Inside the room, Garson took his purchases out of the sack, then stared for a long moment at the unfamiliar object. How did you load a camera? He hadn't the faintest idea, but he turned the oddly shaped thing over and over in his hands, and finally one finger pressed a small button on the underside. The camera popped open.

There was much more to the inside than he had thought cameras possessed. There were wires in many colors in an intricate scheme. There was a pair of small glittering prisms, a tightly wound roll of extremely thin white material, and a small translucent cube of unknown purpose. What there was not was room for the roll of film that Jake had given him. Garson poked with one finger at the insides, started to move one of the wires to try to find space for the film. The shock he received discouraged any further poking around. He shrugged, placed his palms on the opened sides of the camera and pushed. There was a firm snap, and the camera was closed. But . . . was it really a camera? Garson realized that he didn't really know what he had.

Now that he thought about it, he realized that it didn't matter. He didn't need a camera in the first place. He had no friends. He cared nothing about scenery, if there had been any around to take pictures of.

He got up, still holding the camera and crossed to a sagging easy chair. While seated, he faced the bed, held the camera up to his face and idly sighted through the cross hairs at the bed. His finger pressed the button Jake had indicated. The instrument began a low whirring sound, and after a moment a section of the thin white material from the roll inside issued slowly through a slot at the front of the camera, a slot Garson had not noticed before. When about four inches of the material had emerged it stopped and the whirring sound ceased. An image began slowly forming on the thin material.

Garson sat fascinated until the image was clear, then tore it from the machine and held it close to his eyes. He could not believe what he was seeing. It was a picture of the bed, alright, but not as it was just then. A half clad girl lay on it, laughing upward at a young man who smiled down at her.

Garson stared at the picture for a long time. His mind was telling him that it could not be the picture he had just taken, that it could not even be a picture taken in this room. It must have been in the camera waiting to come out! If he had taken a picture at all it would probably come out on the next snap.

But facts told him something different. The picture was of that room. Was there another room with that particular zig zag tear in the wallpaper? That same brown stain beneath the wall clock? The picture was of that room, but not of that time.

After a few moments Garson held the camera up to his face again and aimed toward the bed. Once more he pressed the button. Again came the whirring,

and the slow emergence of filmy material. The picture had changed. The boy and girl lay on the bed together, both completely nude, smiling at each other, caressing each other. Garson felt vaguely embarrassed. Sex had never held much interest for him.

He sat back in the chair and thought. It was an activity he was not accustomed to, and his brow wrinkled deeply with the effort. The camera was . . . special. Very special. He knew that. But was he really getting pictures of the past? Had the boy and girl spent the previous night in this room, or some night long before than, or had he been on the bottle too long?

He turned the camera over and over in his hands, around and around, examining every detail. He looked at the pointer on the left side, the one with only two positions, and cautiously moved it to the other position, then turned toward the bed and snapped his third picture.

The whirring came, the film emerged, the picture formed, and Garson stared at it in renewed fascination. It was a picture of himself. He was dressed in new slacks with a contrasting plaid sport coat, and had just laid several packages on the bed. It was an event that had never happened, but it was unquestionably himself, so . . . perhaps it was a picture of what was going to happen.

The idea formed slowly, and Garson's heartbeat speeded up. He had a camera that took pictures of the past . . . and of the future. He turned the camera so that he could look at the right hand dial with its full circle of symbols. He could not read the symbols, but he had an idea that they indicated different lengths of time, forward or backward.

An important question came to mind. How could you make money out of a thing like that?

Casually he looked at the old pocket watch he carried and noted that it was now six-thirty. Staring at the second picture he had taken he noted that the time on the wall clock when the boy and girl had lain on the bed together was precisely seven o'clock. Twenty-three and a half hours, he thought. And at just what time had he gone into the alley the night before? Excitement touched him. It was just a little after seven.

Garson got to his feet and left the room, pulling the door to behind him. The elevator doors slid open almost as he touched the button. Inside, he pressed the ground floor button and moments later was on the street and headed for the alley. His heart was beating hard when he reached the place, not from fear, but from the walk. No one would think anything about his taking a picture of an empty alley. He turned the lever back to what he hoped was the past, sighted down the alley and took a quick snap, then waited impatiently for the film to emerge and the picture to form, then stared in unbelief at what he saw. Two men were squared off, facing each other. The man who faced in his direction had a knife tightly gripped in his right hand, and his face was contorted with rage and hate. Garson aimed the camera and took another shot.

The picture he held in his hand a moment later was of a murder just committed. The victim lay on his back, his face staring upward reflecting shock and disbelief. The murderer straddled him with knees on the pavement, the right hand still gripping the knife that had been plunged deep into the heart . . . Garson felt smothering pain in his own chest, gasped, and leaned against the building until the feeling passed.

And Don Garson wondered . . . how much was a picture like that worth? And who would buy it?

If he knew the man with the knife . . .

He shook his head. No, no. The man with the knife would be more apt to use it again with Garson as the object. Perhaps the police? Sergeant Melrose? He

despised Melrose as an officer on the take, but he was not in a position to be choosy.

Going to a telephone he called headquarters and asked for the sergeant. There was a short delay, then the policeman's voice came.

"Yeah?"

"This is Garson, Don Garson. I did you a favor once, remember?"

"I remember," the sergeant replied, but the voice sounded unimpressed. "What do you want?"

"Well . . . I just happened on a bit of evidence you could use to solve a case. Good evidence."

"What case?"

"Man I read about in the paper this morning . . . murdered in the alley back of McCauley's."

"Hmm." The voice was careful. "What kind of evidence?"

"Pictures."

There was a pause, then Melrose spoke again, derisively. "Pictures of the murder itself, I suppose."

"That's right."

The derision was replaced by excitement when Melrose spoke again. "Where are you, man?"

"First," Garson said, "there's a little matter of a bit of financial assistance to, ah . . . reimburse me for the danger I went through getting the pictures. Say five hundred dollars?"

Melrose laughed. "Say six months in jail for withholding evidence unless I get the pics."

Garson knew the game. "What pics?" he asked. "I don't know nothin' about no pics. See you around."

"Hold on," Melrose said. "Call it one hundred, even one-fifty if the pics are real good."

Garson gave the address, and minutes later the policeman was looking the pictures over with evident relish. He fingered the odd material on which they were printed, and looked back to Garson. "How'd you come by these?" he demanded.

Garson shook his head. "I'll have to keep that a secret, but could be I'll be able to get more. If the pay is good."

Melrose laughed. "So? You don't just happen to have any pics of the Scranton Jewelry Store robbery, do you?"

Garson shook his head. "When did it happen?"

"Three nights ago." Melrose grinned. "There's a two thousand reward for evidence that could convict, if you are interested."

"Dunno," Garson said. "Might be, might not. I'll let you know."

TWO GRAND! Two . . . thousand . . . dollars! Could he do it? Garson went back to his room and sat on the bed, holding the camera in his hands. He turned it over and over, studied the dials on the sides. It was set now, he knew, for approximately twenty-four hours into the past. He studied the time dial carefully, looked at the little markings, then finally set his lips firmly and moved the pointer. It was now three times as far from the beginning point as it had been, hopefully, set for three days instead of one day into the past.

Just before dark he set out for the Scranton Jewelry store, a walk of several blocks. When he arrived it was full dark and nobody was in sight. He took his first picture from across the street, then waited for the thin film to slide out. The

picture was a daylight picture. Too early in the day, or was it of a different day entirely? Garson felt almost hopeless. There was no way to gauge the time, other than by guess. Reluctantly, he set the dial a bit farther and snapped a second shot. Now, the scene was night. A man was just entering the edge of the picture . . . a slouching figure of a man, bill cap pulled low over his forehead, hands deep in the pockets of a too large overcoat. Garson felt hopeful.

He waited a moment then crossed the street, stood on the sidewalk and snapped his third picture. He felt his pulse quicken. Quickly, hoping the timing would be about right, he snapped his fourth shot. He heard footsteps then, to his right, and glanced nervously in that direction. A cop walking his beat. Garson turned and hurried away, glancing furtively over his shoulder, but the police officer did not quicken pace. Breathing a sigh of relief, Garson rounded a corner, then stopped to tear the last picture from the camera.

Jackpot! The jewel thief was facing directly toward the camera as he scrambled out of the store window. Every line of his face was sharp and clear, looking almost three dimensional.

Back in his room at the Athens, Garson paced up and down, up and down. He was wild with excitement. He had a fortune to be made if he just worked it right . . . a fortune to enjoy if his heart would behave itself. Of course, he had to make some notes, try to find out exactly how far to turn the dial to get a certain distance forward or backward. He had lucked out so far, but he couldn't always count on it. And, he had to figure out other ways of using it.

Suddenly his mind stopped cold. How much film was in the thing? He had used . . . he paused, tried to think . . . seven shots? Eight? Nine? He just didn't know. Once more he sat down on the bed and opened the camera. This time he took a long look at the tightly wound roll of thin film, then breathed a sigh of relief. It looked like there were lots of shots left. The roll looked no smaller than it had at first.

Bio-sketch

Leland G. Griffin

I was born on the nineteenth of October, 1914. The place was a farmhouse near Tecumseh, Oklahoma. I attended elementary schools in a number of places: Shawnee, Oklahoma; Cushing, Oklahoma; Grants Pass, Oregon, and other places. When I was about eight years of age my family drove a Model T Ford from Shawnee, Oklahoma to Portland, Oregon and back. Today's automobiles would certainly have sounded like science fiction at that time.

I attended three separate colleges before receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree at Southeastern State College, Durant, Oklahoma. I spent forty-one and a half years as a Methodist minister, and nineteen years as a teacher, usually teaching junior high mathematics. Don't add those two figures together — the ministerial years and teaching years overlapped.

I was married to Helen Chandler on my twentieth birthday, and that marriage is still going strong. We have two sons, and five grandchildren.

I have been interested in writing for as long as I remember, but am doing more of it now than ever before. Most of my early published stories were juveniles, published in various church magazines. Several were science fiction themes, some on scuba diving and other sports. Strangely, since I have read science fiction since the early nineteen thirties, I am just lately getting serious about this particular field of writing and have several things in mind I hope to do.

My hobbies are traveling, woodwork, fishing, water skiing, and a few other things. And, in spite of the fact that I am now retired, I hope to keep turning out stories for a number of years.

One more thought came. The camera was too valuable to leave lying around in the room. He would have to carry it with him at all times. But meanwhile, he had a pleasant task to perform.

He dialed the police station and asked for Sergeant Melrose. "Yeah?" the officer spoke into the telephone.

"Garson here, Sergeant. How do I go about collecting that two thousand?"

"You're not trying to tell me that you've got the pics, are you?" the sergeant asked.

"I've got them," Garson replied, "but they're well hidden. Now, what do I do?"

"Give 'em to me, of course. I'll see that you get the reward."

"Tell you what," Garson said cautiously. "You write me out a receipt for evidence received. Make it clear that I'm the one who came up with it, sign the paper, and I give you the pics."

"Don't you trust me?" Melrose asked.

"No." Garson hung up. He drew a deep breath, suprised and pleased at his new assertiveness. But . . .

He wanted a drink. Desperately. He had been sober now for much longer than usual, but he was afraid to go off the wagon. He had plenty to drink and could buy more, but now he had a responsibility. The camera. For a moment he felt he almost hated it. But, he thought, it wouldn't always be this way. Some day soon he could put it away, hole up somewhere, and drink to his heart's content.

The phone rang.

"Garson, this is Melrose." The voice was tight, angry. "Where you want to meet me? And when?"

Garson licked his lips. "Scott's bar, an hour from now. That should give you time to get that paper written out."

THE EXCHANGE was made at the bar. Garson refused Melrose's offer of a drink and shrugged off the officer's sneer at his being on the wagon. A week later, wearing a new sport coat and slacks, Garson collected two thousand dollars. During the week he had not let the camera out of his sight except when he was asleep, and then it was under the covers with him. Every time he had left the hotel he had seen Sergeant Melrose, and he knew that the officer was trying to find out how he got his pictures. He was afraid of what would happen if the officer ever learned.

In fact, he was afraid of Melrose, period. The more he thought about the sergeant, the more certain he was that he was out to get the information at any cost. He began to feel that perhaps he should leave the city, go somewhere, anywhere, just so it was a long ways away.

On Saturday, two days after collecting the reward, he tried to give Melrose the slip, ducking down an alley, into a side door and back through to the front of a building. A bus was just loading and he managed to get inside quickly. He sat down on the far side, out of sight of anyone on the sidewalk he had just left. His heartbeat was alarming, his breath in gasps.

The bus was headed for the beach, and he thought, "Why not?" He hadn't been to the beach since he was a kid. Maybe it would be fun to take off his shoes and walk on the sand. Maybe it would calm his nerves, make him feel better. The camera was with him, of course, so it was safe.

There was no sign of Melrose as he walked out on the beach. For the first time, walking slowly along on the sand, past bathers, people carrying parasols,

lunch baskets, fishing gear, surf boards and, of course, cameras, Garson did not feel conspicuous.

He hung his shoes around his neck by the laces, and walked and walked and walked. Suddenly it came to him that he had passed beyond most of the people. Only an occasional lone fisherman was near, and the thought came that Melrose might like just such a chance to close in on him, maybe to get a look inside the bag he carried. Perhaps, he thought, he had better get back to the comforting crowds.

But first . . . He stopped beside a huge boulder, took the camera from the bag, aimed toward the ocean and took a snap, then waited for the now familiar emergence of the picture. When he held it in his hand, he stared in amazement, his greatest yet.

It was a picture of a girl. But such a girl as Garson had never seen or expected to see. She was striding from the water, a tall willowy figure with hair of an impossible color but incredibly beautiful. Her skin was the yellow of molten gold and it glistened with a sheen that seemed to light up the surface of the water around her. She wore two glittering wisps of clothing that seemed molded to her figure. Beautiful, Garson thought; beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

His tongue felt dry in his mouth but perspiration had started from every pore in this body. As stated before, he had never cared about girls, had seldom thought about them. But the picture he tucked into his bag as he turned back toward the more crowded part of the beach was now the most important thing in his life.

Halfway back to the crowds he met Sergeant Melrose. Somehow he was not surprised, only angry at the officer's wide ingratiating grin.

"Got any goodies for me today?" Melrose asked.

Garson shook his head. "Afraid not. Anything special you're wanting?"

"Not right now. I may give you a ring, though."

"You do that," Garson said, and hurried away.

He couldn't help noticing that Melrose was eyeing the bag that swung from his shoulder. It was just a matter of time, he thought, until the officer would get a search warrant on some pretext and discover the camera. Miserably he brushed the sand from his feet, then slipped on his shoes and socks. He caught the bus back to his own street and rode the creaking elevator up to his room. He locked and chained the door behind him, then lay down on the bed. A feeling of hopelessness spread through him, a feeling of the inevitability of losing the only real treasure he had ever owned. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them, and fearfully, reverently took the last picture from the bag.

His feelings of awe deepened and he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen. The picture . . . had changed. The expression on the golden girl's face had been sober, he knew. He remembered wondering how a face could be so impossibly beautiful without even the ghost of a smile. But now the lips were curved upward, forming a smile that drove straight to the heart of skid row bum Don Garson. Somehow the feeling came through that the smile was for him, just for him, and that it promised unimaginable joys and pleasures.

Garson swallowed hard, then took the camera from the bag. He looked at the two dials. This picture was of something that was going to happen. Wonderful that it was not already in the past, unattainable, gone forever. He studied a moment. His best guess was that the time should be tomorrow morning, perhaps around sunup. Well, he had to be there, he had to see this one girl with

his own eyes, had to fall at her feet in worship.

He stepped to the window and looked out, down and across the street. Melrose was there, leaning against a wall by the door of the corner drug.

Garson's room was a corner room, one window facing the street, one facing the alley. He studied Melrose's position and decided that he could not see the alley side. Quickly, Garson pushed the window up, then crawled out on the fire escape keeping as close to the building as he could. Once in the alley, he trotted the length of the block, crossed the street and walked down that alley to a cross alley, then turned left. Pain was searing his chest, but he had to get to the beach, had to see the golden girl.

Out of the alley and on the street he caught the first bus that came along, rode it for some distance, then got off to take another bus. Two hours and several buses later, he was back at the beach.

The crowd was still there, though not as large as it had been earlier in the day. There were cooking fires going at a number of fireplaces. Young people were singing, playing party games, listening to ear splitting rock and roll records. The smell of roasting weiners and frying bacon, of toasting marshmallows and freshly baked clams filled the air. Garson walked on through the group, intent on his goal, hoping against hope that he had been successful in giving Melrose the slip.

He came to the big rock where he had stopped to take the picture, walked just past it and sat down, the boulder at his left, the ocean in front. The night would be cold and he was not very well dressed, but what did it matter? What did anything in the world matter except the chance to see with his own eyes the girl of the picture? Then, even if he had to lay down and die, he would have lived.

The night wore on. Stars dotted the black sky overhead. The moon was a silver crescent. The sea waves rolled in, their crests sparkling in the moonlight. The coldness Garson had expected did not come. Instead, he grew warm, filled with an inner glow of excitement and expectation. He was neither hungry nor tired, but warm and rested. Even his heartbeat lost its raggedness with his feeling that all of his mixed up life would be justified in a matter of hours.

The stars paled slowly with the advent of dawn. Garson had not slept at all, and now he got to his feet. He stretched luxuriously, as though he had slept on eiderdown, then fastened his gaze on the water before him. The girl would be coming soon, he knew. She would be coming soon, but . . . from where?

He did not have long to wait. There was a small disturbance on the surface of the water, then her head came into view. Garson stared as she waded toward him, slowly, gracefully. The perfect tower of her neck became visible, the rounded golden shoulders, her breasts with the tiny glittering garment, the long smooth flowing arms, the hourglass curve of her waist, the strong golden thighs.

She stopped when she was completely out of the water. Not a drop had clung to her body or her hair. She stood as dry as if she had just toweled vigorously. Then her smile came, like sunrise over the mountains, Garson thought.

He heard his name called from behind him, and anger raged through him. Melrose had traced him, caught up with him, and just at the most important moment of his life. Well, he would take nothing from the man, he would not be cowed or intimidated, not this time. He stooped down and picked up a fist-sized rock that lay at his feet, hoping that Melrose had not noticed what he was doing.

The officer came on, then a strange fact came into Garson's mind. Melrose had not seen the girl. The line of vision was right, but the lack of all surprise on

his face, the calmness of it, was full proof. He had not seen her. No one could possibly see and ignore her.

"The bag," Melrose was saying as he came close. "The fun and games are over. I want to see what's in that mysterious bag you carry all the time." He held out his hand.

Garson gave him the rock instead. He swung with all his strength and both felt and heard the crunch of bone as Melrose fell. For one terrifying moment he thought of the possible consequences of having killed a policeman. Then he turned his gaze back to the girl and it didn't matter any more.

She was still there, still smiling. She paid no attention to Melrose, but held out her hand to Garson . . . wanting something. Without being told, he knew what it was. Slowly he reached inside the bag and took the camera out and held it toward her. If possible, he would have reached inside himself and taken out his tired heart if she had wanted it.

She took the camera and as she did so her hand brushed Garson's. He felt the touch from head to toe as a surge of energy, an electric pulse that spread through his whole being.

The girl stepped closer, then she spoke, her voice like the sound of rippling waters. "What you have returned to me is of the greatest value, and although you will never see me again, I will do for you all that I may."

She stepped still closer to him, rested her fingers along each side of his head and the balls of her two thumbs lightly on his eyelids. He felt heat in his eyes, then a sense of renewed vision, a certainty that when he opened his eyes again he would have better vision even than he had had as a youth.

She moved her hands from his head, then reached inside his shirt with one hand and rested it over his heart. The feeling of warmth, the strange electric tingle was there, then . . . his heartbeat slowed, steadied, strengthened. It was beating as a heart should beat, and the breath that he drew was deep, strong, without distress.

Her other hand came to rest on his forehead. He closed his eyes again, and it seemed that he could actually feel subtle mental connections in his brain stirring like mad. He had a sense of wisdom and understanding filling him. And she had one more gift.

The golden girl leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips, and he thought of the Biblical prophet Elijah and the purifying coal of fire placed on his lips.

Garson felt both great joy and great sadness. He knew that many things had happened inside him, that he would never be a skid row or any other kind of bum again. But also, his eyes would never again behold the beautiful face that swam before him. Then, in his new-found sense of reason, he thought again of Sergeant Melrose, of what the officer's murder could do to him, how it could destroy his new possibilities.

He looked down at the sergeant's body, lying bloody-headed in the sand. Somehow it looked smaller, shrunken. Then as he watched the shrinking became positive. The body grew in reverse, becoming smaller, smaller, smaller. After a short time Garson realized that he was staring, and had been staring for several seconds, at empty beach. No trace of Sergeant Melrose was left. The golden girl had done one last thing for him. No body . . . no *corpus delicti* . . . no crime.

He turned back to the girl. She smiled again, the radiant smile that could turn midnight to noonday or a mouse to a man. "That is all I can do," she said softly, then turned away.

Garson watched her walk back into the sea, watched her wade out until she slowly disappeared from view, and he knew she was gone. He turned away.

Things went well for Garson after that. Whatever he turned his hand to prospered. He married a rather plain woman and bought the section of land overlooking the golden girl's beach. He was kind to his wife and children at all times, demonstrated unfailing care and concern for all their needs. But never once did he say to his wife, "I love you."

She always wondered why.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

A down-on-his-luck bum finds a magic device and meets a beautiful goddess-woman who bestows happiness and wealth on him forever after . . . here is a real "princess and the frog" fairy tale for adults, always a successful formula for capturing a reader's imagination. We felt it offered a nice serving of escapist therapy, especially soothing in these hectic times! Were you bothered by the fact that our fortunate "bum" sort of "got away with murder," so to speak? (It was really self-defense, right?) In the movie, "The In-Laws," Peter Falk and Alan Arkin blithely pocket $5-million of government money each, . . . to the cheers of the audience. Another sign of the times, perhaps?

A FANTASTIC CLASSIC:

This issue's Fantastic Classic. Don't miss Robert Wilcox's current analysis immediately following the story.

by Murray Leinster

THE RUNAWAY SKYSCRAPER

THE WHOLE THING started when the clock on the Metropolitan Tower began to run backward. It was not a graceful proceeding. The hands had been moving onward in their customary deliberate fashion, slowly and thoughtfully, but suddenly the people in the offices near the clock's face heard an ominous creaking and groaning. There was a slight, hardly discernible shiver through the tower, and then something gave with a crash. The big hands on the clock began to move backward.

Immediately after the crash all the creaking and groaning ceased, and instead the usual quiet again hung over everything. One or two occupants of the upper offices put their heads out into the halls, but the elevators were running as usual, the lights were burning, and all seemed calm and peaceful. The clerks and stenographers went back to their ledgers and typewriters, the business callers returned to the discussion of their errands, and the ordinary course of business was resumed.

Arthur Chamberlain was dictating a letter to Estelle Woodward, his sole stenographer. When the crash came he paused, listened, and then resumed his task.

It was not a difficult one. Talking to Estelle Woodward was at no time an onerous duty, but it must be admitted that Arthur Chamberlain found it difficult to keep his conversation strictly upon his business.

He was at this time engaged in dictating a letter to his principle creditors, the Gary & Milton Company, explaining that their demand for the immediate payment of the instalment then due upon his office furniture was untimely and unjust. A young and budding engineer in New York never has too much money, and when he is young as Arthur Chamberlain was, and as fond of pleasant company, and not too fond of economizing, he is liable to find all demands for payment untimely and he usually considers them unjust as well. Arthur finished dictating the letter and sighed.

"Miss Woodward," he said regretfully, "I am afraid I shall never make a successful man."

Miss Woodward shook her head vaguely. She did not seem to take his remark very seriously, but then she had learned never to take any of his remarks seriously. She had

been puzzled at first by his manner of treating everything with a half-joking pessimism, but now ignored it.

She was interested in her own problems. She had suddenly decided that she was going to be an old maid, and it bothered her. She had discovered that she did not like any one well enough to marry, and she was in her twenty-second year.

She was not a native of New York, and the few young men she had met there she did not care for. She had regretfully decided she was too finicky, too fastidious, but could not seem to help herself. She could not understand their absorption in boxing and baseball, and she did not like the way they danced.

She had considered the matter and decided that she would have to reconsider her former opinion of women who did not marry. Heretofore she had thought there must be something the matter with them. Now she believed that she would come to their own estate, and probably for the same reason. She could not fall in love and she wanted to.

She read all the popular novels and thrilled at the love-scenes contained in them, but when any of the young men she knew became in the slightest degree sentimental, she found herself bored, and disgusted with herself for being bored. Still, she could not help it, and was struggling to reconcile herself to a life without romance.

She was far too pretty for that, of course, and Arthur Chamberlain often longed to tell her how pretty she really was, but her abstracted air held him at arm's length.

He lay back at ease in his swivel-chair and considered, looking at her with unfeigned pleasure. She did not notice it, for she was so much absorbed in her own thoughts that she rarely noticed anything he said or did when they were not in the line of her duties.

"Miss Woodward," he repeated, "I said I think I'll never make a successful man. Do you know what that means?"

She looked at him mutely, polite inquiry in her eyes.

"It means," he said gravely, "that I am going broke. Unless something turns up in the next three weeks, or a month at the latest, I'll have to get a job."

"And that means—" she asked.

"All this will go to pot," he explained with a sweeping gesture. "I thought I'd better tell you as much in advance as I could."

"You mean you're going to give up your office—and me?" she asked, a little alarmed.

"Giving up you will be the harder of the two," he said with a smile, "but that's what it means. You'll have no difficulty finding a new place, with three weeks in which to look for one, but I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, Mr. Chamberlain," she said, her brow puckered.

She was not really frightened, because she knew she could get another position, but she became aware of rather more regret than she had expected.

"Jove!" said Arthur, suddenly. "It's getting dark, isn't it?"

It was. It was growing dark with unusual rapidity. Arthur went to his window and looked out.

"Funny," he remarked in a moment or two. "Things don't look just right, down there, somehow. There are very few people about."

He watched in growing amazement. Lights came on in the streets below, but none of the buildings lighted up. It grew darker and darker.

"It shouldn't be dark at this hour!" Arthur exclaimed.

Estelle went to the window by his side.

"It looks awfully queer," she agreed. "It must be an eclipse or something."

They heard doors open in the hall outside, and Arthur ran out. The halls were beginning to fill with excited people.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked a worried stenographer.

"Probably an eclipse," replied Arthur. "Only it's odd we didn't read about it in the papers."

He glanced along the corridor. No one else seemed better informed than he, and he went back into his office.

Estelle turned from the window as he appeared.

"The streets are deserted," she said in a puzzled tone. "What's the matter? Did you hear?"

Arthur shook his head and reached for the telephone.

"I'll call up and find out," he said confidently. He held the receiver to his ear. "What the—" he exclaimed. "Listen to this!"

A small-sized roar was coming from the receiver. Arthur hung up and turned a blank face upon Estelle.

"Look!" she said suddenly, and pointed out of the window.

All the city was now lighted up, and such of the signs as they could see were brilliantly illumined. They watched in silence. The streets once more seemed filled with vehicles. They darted along, their headlamps lighting up the roadway brilliantly. There was, however, something strange even about their motion. Arthur and Estelle watched in growing amazement and perplexity.

"Are—are you seeing what I am seeing?" asked Estelle breathlessly. "I see them *going backward!*"

Arthur watched and collapsed into a chair.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed softly.

He was roused by another exclamation from Estelle.

"It's getting light again," she said.

Arthur rose and went eagerly to the window. The darkness was becoming less intense, but in a way Arthur could hardly credit.

Far to the west, over beyond the Jersey hills—easily visible from the height at which Arthur's office was located—a faint light appeared in the sky, grew stronger and then took on a reddish tint. That, in turn, grew deeper, and at last the sun appeared, rising unconcernedly *in the west.*

Arthur gasped. The streets below continued to be thronged with people and motor-cars. The sun was traveling with extraordinary rapidity. It rose overhead, and as if by magic the streets were thronged with people. Every one seemed to be running at top speed. The few teams they saw moved at a breakneck pace—backward! In spite of the suddenly topsy-turvy state of affairs, there seemed to be no accidents.

Arthur put his hand to his head.

"Miss Woodward," he said pathetically. "I'm afraid I've gone crazy. Do you see the same things I do?"

Estelle nodded. Her eyes wide open.

"What *is* the matter?" she asked helplessly.

She turned again to the window. The square was almost empty once more. The motor-cars still traveling about the streets were going so swiftly they were hardly visible. Their speed seemed to increase steadily. Soon it was almost impossible to distinguish them, and only a grayish blur marked their paths along Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street.

It grew dusk, and then rapidly dark. As their office was on the western side of the building, they could not see the sun had sunk in the east, but subconsciously they realized that this must be the case.

In silence they watched the panorama grow black except for the street-lamps, remain thus for a time, and then suddenly spring into brilliantly illuminated activity.

Again this lasted for a little while, and the west once more began to glow. The sun rose somewhat more hastily from the Jersey hills and began to soar overhead, but very soon darkness fell again. With hardly an interval the city became illuminated, and the west grew red once more.

"Apparently," said Arthur, steadying his voice with a conscious effort, "there's been a cataclysm somewhere, the direction of the earth's rotation has been reversed, and its speed immensely increased. It seems to take only about five minutes for a rotation now."

As he spoke darkness fell for the third time. Estelle turned from the window with a white face.

"What's going to happen?" she cried.

"I don't know," answered Arthur. "The scientific fellows tell us if the earth were to spin fast enough, the centrifugal force would throw us all off into space. Perhaps that's what's going to happen."

Estelle sank into a chair and stared at him, appalled. There was a sudden explosion behind them. With a start, Estelle jumped to her feet and turned. A little gilt clock over her typewriter-desk lay in fragments. Arthur hastily glanced at his own watch.

"Great bombs and little cannon balls!" he shouted. "Look at this!"

His watch trembled and quivered in his hand. The hands were going around so swiftly it was impossible to watch the minute-hand, and the hour-hand traveled like the wind.

While they looked, it made two complete revolutions. In one of them the glory of daylight had waxed, waned, and vanished. In the other, darkness reigned except for the glow from the electric light overhead.

There was a sudden tension and catch in the watch. Arthur dropped it instantly. It flew to pieces before it reached the floor.

"If you've got a watch," Arthur ordered swiftly, "stop it this instant!"

Estelle fumbled at her wrist. Arthur tore the watch from her hand and threw open the case. The machinery inside was going so swiftly it was hardly visible. Relentlessly, Arthur jabbed a penholder in the works. There was a sharp click, and the watch was still.

Arthur ran to the window. As he reached it, the sun rushed up, day lasted a moment, there was darkness, and then the sun appeared again.

"Miss Woodward!" Arthur ordered suddenly. "Look at the ground!"

Estelle glanced down. The next time the sun flashed into view she gasped.

The ground was white with snow.

"What *has* happened?" she demanded, terrified. "Oh, what *has* happened?"

Arthur fumbled at his chin awkwardly, watching the astonishing panorama outside. There was hardly any distinguishing between the times the sun was up and the times it was below now, as the darkness and light followed each other so swiftly the effect was the same as one of the old flickering motion-pictures.

As Arthur watched, this effect became more pronounced. The tall Fifth Avenue Building across the way began to disintegrate. In a moment, it seemed, there was only a skeleton there. Then that vanished, story by story. A great cavity in the earth appeared, and then another building became visible, a smaller, brown-stone unimpressive structure.

With bulging eyes Arthur stared across the city. Except for the flickering, he could see almost clearly now.

He no longer saw the sun rise and set. There was merely a streak of unpleasantly brilliant light across the sky. Bit by bit, building by building, the city began to disintegrate and become replaced by smaller, dingier buildings. In a little while those began to disappear and leave gaps where they vanished.

Arthur strained his eyes and looked far downtown. He saw a forest of masts and spars along the waterfront for a moment, and when he turned his eyes again to the scenery near him it was almost barren of houses, and what few showed were mean, small residences, apparently set in the midst of farms and plantations.

Estelle was sobbing.

"Oh, Mr. Chamberlain," she cried. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

Arthur had lost his fear of what their fate would be in his absorbing interest in what he saw. He was staring out of the window, wide-eyed, lost in the sight before him. At Estelle's

cry, however, he reluctantly left the window and patted her shoulder awkwardly.

"I don't know how to explain it," he said uncomfortably, "but it's obvious that my first surmise was all wrong. The speed of the earth's rotation can't have been increased, because if it had to the extent we see, we'd have been thrown off into space long ago. But—have you read anything about the Fourth Dimension?"

Estelle shook her head hopelessly.

"Well, then, have you ever read anything by Wells? *The Time Machine*, for instance?"

Again she shook her head.

"I don't know how I'm going to say it so you'll understand, but time is just as much a dimension as length and breadth. From what I can judge, I'd say there has been an earthquake, and the ground has settled a little with our building on it, only instead of settling down toward the center of the earth, or sidewise, it's settled in this fourth dimension."

"But what does that mean?" asked Estelle uncomprehending.

"If the earth had settled down, we'd have been lower. If it had settled to one side we'd have been moved one way or another, but as it's settled back in the Fourth Dimension, we're going back in time."

"Then—"

"We're in a runaway skyscraper, bound for some time back before the discovery of America!"

It was very still in the office. Except for the flickering outside everything seemed very much as usual. The electric light burned steadily, but Estelle was sobbing with fright, and Arthur was trying vainly to console her.

"Have I gone crazy?" she demanded between her sobs.

"Not unless I've gone mad, too," said Arthur soothingly. The excitement had quite a soothing effect upon him. He had ceased to feel afraid, but was simply waiting to see what had happened. "We're way back before the founding of New York now, and still going strong."

"Are you sure that's what has happened?"

"If you look outside," he suggested, "you'll see the seasons following each other in reverse order. One moment the snow covers all the ground, then you catch a glimpse of autumn foliage, then summer follows, and next spring."

Estelle glanced out of the window and covered her eyes.

"Not a house," she said despairingly. "Not a building. Nothing, nothing, nothing!"

Arthur slipped his arm about her and patted hers comfortingly.

"It's all right," he reassured her. "We'll bring up presently, and there we'll be. There's nothing to be afraid of."

She rested her head on his shoulder and sobbed hopelessly for a little while longer, but presently quieted. Then, suddenly, realizing that Arthur's arm was about her and that she was crying on his shoulder, she sprang away, blushing crimson.

Arthur walked to the window.

"Look there!" he exclaimed, but it was too late. "I'll swear to it I saw the *Half-Moon*, Hudson's ship," he declared excitedly. "We're way back now, and don't seem to be slackening up, either."

Estelle came to the window by his side. The rapidly changing scene before her made her gasp. It was no longer possible to distinguish night from day.

A wavering streak, moving first to the right and then to the left, showed where the sun flashed across the sky.

"What makes the sun wobble so?" she asked.

"Moving north and south of the equator," Arthur explained casually. "When it's farthest south—to the left—there's always snow on the ground. When it's farthest right

it's summer. See how green it is?"

A few moments' observation corroborated his statement.

"I'd say," Arthur remarked reflectively, "that it takes about fifteen seconds for the sun to make the round trip from farthest north to farthest south." He felt his pulse. "Do you know the normal rate of the heart-beat? We can judge time that way. A clock will go all to pieces, of course."

"Why did your watch explode—and the clock?"

"Running forward in time unwinds a clock, doesn't it?" asked Arthur. "It follows, of course, that when you move it backward in time it winds up. When you move it too far back, you wind it so tightly that the spring just breaks to pieces."

He paused a moment, his fingers on his pulse.

"Yes, it takes about fifteen seconds for all the four seasons to pass. That means we're going backward in time about four years a minute. If we go on at this rate in another hour we'll be back in the time of the Northmen, and will be able to tell if they did discover America, after all."

"Funny we don't hear any noises," Estelle observed. She had caught some of Arthur's calmness.

"It passes so quickly that though our ears hear it, we don't separate the sounds. If you'll notice, you do hear a sort of humming. It's very high-pitched, though."

Estelle listened, but could hear nothing.

"No matter," said Arthur. "It's probably a little higher than your ears can catch. Lots of people can't hear a bat squeak."

"I never could," said Estelle. "Out in the country, where I come from, other people could hear them, but I couldn't."

They stood a while in silence, watching.

"When are we going to stop?" asked Estelle uneasily. "It seems as if we're going to keep on indefinitely."

"I guess we'll stop all right," Arthur reassured her. "It's obvious that whatever it was, it only affected our own building, or we'd see some other one with us. It looks like a fault or a flaw in the rock the building rests on. And that can only give so far."

Estelle was silent for a moment.

"Oh, I can't be sane!" she burst out semi-hysterically. "This can't be happening!"

"You aren't crazy," said Arthur sharply. "You're as sane as I am. Just something queer is happening. Buck up. Say something sensible, and you'll know you're all right. But don't get frightened now. There'll be plenty to get frightened about later."

The grimness in his tone alarmed Estelle. "What are you afraid of?" she asked quickly.

"Time enough to worry when it happens," Arthur retorted briefly.

"You—you aren't afraid we'll go back before the beginning of the world, are you?" asked Estelle in sudden access of fright.

Arthur shook his head.

"Tell me," said Estelle more quietly, getting a grip on herself. "I won't mind. But please tell me."

Arthur glanced at her. Her face was pale, but there was more resolution in it than he had expected to find.

"I'll tell you, then," he said reluctantly. "We're going back a little faster than we were, and the flaw seems to be a deeper one than I thought. At the roughest kind of an estimate, we're all of a thousand years before the discovery of America now, and I think nearer three or four. And we're gaining speed all the time. So, though I am as sure as I can be of anything that we'll stop this cave-in eventually, I don't know where. It's like a crevasse in the earth opened by an earthquake which may be only a few feet deep, or it may be hundreds of yards, or even a mile or two. We started off smoothly. We're going at a terrific rate. *What will happen when we stop?*"

Estelle caught her breath.

"What?" she asked quietly.

"I don't know," said Arthur in an irritated tone, to cover his apprehension. "How could I know?"

Estelle turned from him to the window again.

"Look!" she said, pointing.

The flickering had begun again. While they stared, hope springing up once more in their hearts; it became more pronounced. Soon they could distinctly see the difference between day and night.

They were slowing up! The white snow on the ground remained there for an appreciable time; autumn lasted quite a while. They could catch the flashes of the sun as it made its revolutions now, instead of seeming like a ribbon of fire. At last day lasted all of fifteen or twenty minutes.

It grew longer and longer. Then half an hour, then an hour. The sun wavered in midheaven and was still.

Far below them, the watchers in the tower of the skyscraper saw trees swaying and a bending in the wind. Though there was not a house or a habitation to be seen and a dense forest covered all of Manhattan Island, such of the world as they could see looked normal. Whatever, or rather in whatever epoch of time they were, they had arrived.

Arthur caught at Estelle's arm and the two made a dash for the elevators. Fortunately one was standing still, the door opened, on their floor. The elevator-boy had deserted his post and was looking with all the rest, at the strange landscape that surrounded them.

No sooner had the pair reached the car, however, than the boy came hurrying along the corridor, three or four other people following him also at a run. Without a word the boy rushed inside, the others crowded after him, and the car shot downward, all of the newcomers panting from their sprint.

Theirs was the first car to reach bottom. They rushed out and to the western door.

Here, where they had been accustomed to see Madison Square spread out before them, a clearing of perhaps half an acre in extent showed itself. Where their eyes instinctively looked for the dark bronze fountain, near which soap-box orators aforetime held sway, they saw a tent, a wigwam of hides and bark gaily painted. And before the wigwam were two or three brown-skinned Indians, utterly petrified with astonishment.

Behind the first wigwam were others, painted like the first with daubs of brightly colored clay. From them, too, Indians issued, and stared in incredulous amazement, their eyes growing wider and wider. When the group of white people confronted the Indians, there was a moment's deathlike silence. Then, with a wild yell, the redskins broke and ran, not stopping to gather together their belongings, nor pausing for even a second glance at the weird strangers who invaded their domain.

Arthur took two or three deep breaths of the fresh air and found himself even then comparing its quality with that of the city. Estelle stared about her with unbelieving eyes. She turned and saw the great bulk of the office building behind her, then faced this small clearing with a virgin forest on its farther side.

She found herself trembling from some undefined cause. Arthur glanced at her. He saw the trembling and knew she would have a fit of nerves in a moment if something did not come up demanding instant attention.

"We'd better take a look at this village," he said in an off-hand voice. "We can probably find out how long ago it is from the weapons and so on."

He grasped her arm firmly and led her in the direction of the tents. The other people, left behind, displayed their emotions in different ways. Two or three of them—women—sat frankly down on the steps and indulged in tears of bewilderment, fright and relief in a peculiar combination defying analysis. Two or three of the men swore, in shaken voices.

Meantime, the elevators inside the building were rushing and clanging, and the hall filled with a white-faced mob, desperately anxious to find out what had happened and why. The people poured out of the door and stared about blankly. There was a peculiar expression of doubt on every one of their faces. Each one was asking himself if he were awake, and having proved that by pinches, openly adminstered, the next query was whether they had gone mad.

Arthur led Estelle cautiously among the tents.

The village contained about a dozen wigwams. Most of them were made of strips of birch-bark, cleverly overlapping each other, the seams cemented with gum. All had hide flaps for doors, and one or two were built almost entirely of hides, sewed together with strips of sinew.

Arthur made only a cursory examination of the village. His principal motive in taking Estelle there was to give her some mental occupation to ward off the reaction from the excitement of the cataclysm.

He looked into one or two of the tents and found merely couches of hides, with minor domestic utensils scattered about. He brought from one tent a bow and a quiver of arrows. The workmanship was good, but very evidently the maker had no knowledge of metal tools.

Arthur's acquaintance with archeological subjects was very slight, but he observed that the arrow-heads were chipped, and not rubbed smooth. They were attached to the shafts with strips of gut or tendon.

Arthur was still pursuing his investigation when a sob from Estelle made him look at her.

"Oh, what are we going to do?" she asked tearfully. "What *are* we going to do? Where are we?"

"You mean, *when* are we," Arthur corrected with a grim smile. "I don't know. Way back before the discovery of America, though. You can see in everything in the village that there isn't a trace of European civilization. I suspect that we are several thousand years back. I can't tell, of course, but this pottery makes me think so. See this bowl?"

He pointed to a bowl of red clay lying on the ground before one of the wigwams.

"If you'll look, you'll see that it isn't really pottery at all. It's a basket that was woven of reeds and then smeared with clay to make it fire-resisting. The people who made that didn't know about baking clay to make it stay put. When America was discovered nearly all the tribes knew something about pottery."

"But what are we going to do?" Estelle tearfully insisted.

"We're going to muddle along as well as we can," answered Arthur cheerfully, "until we can get back to where we started from. Maybe the people back in the twentieth century can send a relief party after us. When the skyscraper vanished, it must have left a hole of some sort, and it may be possible for them to follow us down."

"If that's so," said Estelle quickly, "why can't we climb up it without waiting for them to come after us?"

Arthur scratched his head. He looked across the clearing at the skyscraper. It seemed to rest very solidly on the ground. He looked up. The sky seemed normal.

"To tell the truth," he admitted, "there doesn't seem to be any hole. I said that more to cheer you up than anything else."

Estelle clenched her hands tightly and took a grip on herself.

"Just tell me the truth," she said quietly. "I was rather foolish, but tell me what you honestly think."

Arthur eyed her keenly.

"In that case," he said reluctantly, "I'll admit we're in a pretty bad fix. I don't know what has happened, how it happened, or anything about it. I'm just going to keep on going until I see a way clear to get out of this mess. There are two thousand of us people, more or

less, and among all of us we must be able to find a way out."

Estelle had turned very pale.

"We're in no great danger from Indians," went on Arthur thoughtfully, "or from anything else that I know of—except one thing."

"What is that?" asked Estelle quickly.

Arthur shook his head and led her back toward the skyscraper, which was now thronged with the people from all the floors who had come down to the ground and were standing excitedly about the concourse asking each other what had happened.

Arthur led Estelle to one of the corners.

"Wait for me here," he ordered. "I'm going to talk to this crowd."

He pushed his way through until he could reach the confectionery and newsstand in the main hallway. Here he climbed up on the counter and shouted:

"People, listen to me! I'm going to tell you what's happened!"

In an instant there was dead silence. He found himself the center of a sea of white faces, every one contorted with fear and anxiety.

"To begin with," he said confidently, "there's nothing to be afraid of. We're going to get back where we started from! I don't know how, yet, but we'll do it. Don't get frightened. Now I'll tell you what's happened."

He rapidly sketched out for them, in words as simple as he could make them, his theory that a flaw in the rock on which the foundations rested had developed and let the skyscraper sink, not downward, but into the Fourth Dimension.

"I'm an engineer," he finished. "What nature can do, we can imitate. Nature let us into this hole. We'll climb out. In the meantime, matters are serious. We needn't be afraid of not getting back. We'll do that. What we've got to fight is—starvation!"

"We've got to fight starvation, and beat it," Arthur continued doggedly. "I'm telling you this now because I want you to begin right at the beginning and pitch in and help. We have very little food and a lot of us to eat it. First, I want some volunteers to help with rationing. Next, I want every ounce of food in this place put under guard where it can be served to those who need it most. Who will help?"

The swift succession of shocks had paralyzed the faculties of most of the people there, but half a dozen moved forward. Among them was a single gray-haired man with an air of accustomed authority. Arthur recognized him as the president of the bank on the ground floor.

"I don't know who you are or if you're right in saying what has happened," said the gray-haired man. "But I see something's got to be done, and—well, for the time being I'll take your word for what that is. Later on we'll thrash this matter out."

Arthur nodded. He bent over and spoke in a low voice to the gray-haired man, who moved away.

"Grayson, Walters, Terhune, Simpson and Forsythe, come here," the gray-haired man called at the doorway.

A number of men began to press dazedly toward him. Arthur resumed his harangue.

"You people—those of you who aren't too dazed to think—are remembering there's a restaurant in the building and no need to starve. You're wrong. There are nearly two thousand of us here. That means six thousand meals a day. We've got to have nearly ten tons of food a day, and we've got to have it at once."

"Hunt," someone suggested.

"I say Indians," someone else shouted. "Can we trade with them?"

"We can hunt and we can trade with the Indians," Arthur admitted, "but we need food by the ton—by the ton, people! The Indians don't store up supplies, and, besides, they're much too scattered to have a surplus for us. But we've got to have food. Now, how many

of you know anything about hunting, fishing, trapping, or any possible way of getting food?"

There were a few hands raised—pitifully few. Arthur saw Estelle's hand up.

"Very well," he said. "Those of you who raised your hands then, come with me up on the second floor, and we'll talk it over. The rest of you try to conquer your fright, and don't go outside for a while. We've got some things to attend to before it will be quite safe for you to venture out. And keep away from the restaurant. There are armed guards over the food. Before we pass it out indiscriminately, we'll see to it there's more for tomorrow and the next day."

He stepped down from the counter and moved toward the stairway. It was not worthwhile to use the elevator for the ride of only one floor. Estelle managed to join him, and they mounted the steps together.

"Do you think we'll pull through all right?" she asked quietly.

"We've got to!" Arthur told her, setting his chin firmly. "We've simply got to."

The gray-haired president of the bank was waiting for them at the top of the stairs.

"My name is Van Deventer," he said, shaking hands with Arthur, who gave his own name.

"Where shall our emergency council sit?" he asked.

"The bank has a board-room right over the safety vault. I dare say we can accommodate everybody there—everybody in the council, anyway."

Arthur followed into the board-room, and the others trooped in after him.

"I'm just assuming temporary leadership," Arthur explained, "because it's imperative some things be done at once. Later on we can talk about electing officials to direct our activities. Right now we need food. How many of you can shoot?"

About a quarter of the hands were raised. Estelle's was among the number.

"How many are fishermen?"

A few more went up.

"What do the rest of you do?"

There was a chorus of "gardener." "I have a garden in my yard," "I grow peaches in New Jersey," and three men confessed that they raised chickens as a hobby.

"We'll want you gardeners in a little while. Don't go yet. But the most important are huntsmen and fishermen. Have any of you weapons in your offices?"

A number had revolvers, but only one man had a shotgun and shells.

"I was going on my vacation this afternoon straight from the office," he explained, "and have all my vacation tackle."

"Good man!" Arthur exclaimed. "You'll go after the heavy game."

"With a shotgun?" the sportsman asked, aghast.

"If you get close to them, a shotgun will do as well as anything, and we can't waste a shell on every bird or rabbit. Those shells of yours are precious. You other fellows will have to turn fishermen for a while. Your pistols are no good for hunting."

"The watchmen at the bank have riot guns," said Van Deventer, "and there are one or two repeating rifles there. I don't know about ammunition."

"Good! I don't mean about the ammunition, but about the guns. We'll hope for the ammunition. You fishermen get to work to improvise tackle out of anything you can get hold of. Will you do that?"

A series of nods answered his question.

"Now for the gardeners. You people will have to roam through the woods in company with the hunters and locate anything in the way of edibles that grows. Do all of you know what wild plants look like? I mean wild fruits and vegetables that are good to eat?"

A few of them nodded, but the majority looked dubious. The consensus seemed to be that they would try. Arthur seemed a little discouraged.

"I guess you're the man to tell about the restaurant," Van Deventer said quietly. "And as this is the food commission, or something of that sort, everybody here will be better for

hearing it. Anyway, everybody will have to know it before night. I took over the restaurant as you suggested, and posted some of the men from the bank that I knew I could trust about the doors. But there was hardly any use in doing it.

"The restaurant stocks up in the afternoon, as most of its business is in the morning and at noon. It only carries a day's stock of foodstuffs, and the—cataclysm, or whatever it was, came at three o'clock. There is practically nothing in the place. We couldn't make sandwiches for half the women that are caught with us, let alone the men. Everybody will go hungry tonight. There will be no breakfast tomorrow, nor anything to eat until we either make arrangements with the Indians for some supplies or else get food for ourselves."

Arthur leaned his jaw on his hand and considered. A slow flush crept over his cheek. He was getting his fighting blood up. At school, when he began to flush slowly, his schoolmates had known the symptom and avoided his wrath. Now he was growing angry with mere circumstances, but it would be nonetheless unfortunate for those circumstances.

"Well," he said at last deliberately, "we've got to— What's that?"

There was a great creaking and groaning. Suddenly a sort of vibration was felt under foot. The floor began to take on a slight slant.

"Great Heaven!" someone cried. "The building's turning over and we'll be buried in the ruins!"

The tilt of the floor became more pronounced. An empty chair slid to one end of the room. There was a crash.

Arthur woke to find someone tugging at his shoulders, trying to drag him from beneath the heavy table, which had wedged itself across his feet and pinned him fast, while a flying chair had struck him on the head.

"Oh, come and help," Estelle's voice was calling deliberately. "Somebody come and help! He's caught in here!"

She was sobbing in a combination of panic and some unknown emotion.

"Help me, please!" she gasped; then her voice broke despondently, but she never ceased to tug ineffectually at Chamberlain, trying to drag him out of the mass of crumpled wreckage.

Arthur moved a little, dazedly.

"Are you alive?" she called anxiously. "Are you alive? Hurry, oh, hurry and wiggle out. The building's falling to pieces."

"I'm all right," Arthur said weakly. "You get out before it all comes down."

"I won't leave you," she declared. "Where are you caught? Are you badly hurt? Hurry, please hurry!"

Arthur stirred, but could not loosen his feet. He half-rolled over, and the table moved as if it had been precariously balanced, and slid heavily to one side. With Estelle still tugging at him, he managed to get to his feet on the slanting floor and stared about him.

Arthur contined to stare about.

"No danger," he said weakly. "Just the floor of the one room gave way. The aftermath of the rock-flaw."

He made his way across the splintered flooring and piled-up chairs.

"We're on top of the safe-deposit vault," he said. "That's why we didn't fall all the way to the floor below. I wonder how we're going to get down."

Estelle followed him, still frightened for fear of the building falling upon them. Some of the long floor-boards stretched over the edge of the vault and rested on a tall, bronze grating that protected the approach to the massive strong-box. Arthur tested them with his foot.

"They seem to be pretty solid," he said tentatively.

His strength was coming back to him every moment. He had been no more than stun-

ned. He walked out on the planking to the bronze grating and turned.

"If you don't get dizzy, you might come on," he said. "We can swing down the grille from here to the floor."

Estelle followed gingerly and in a moment they were safely below. The corridor was quite empty.

"When the crash came," Estelle explained, her voice shaking with the reaction from her fear of a moment ago, "everyone thought the building was coming to pieces, and ran out. I'm afraid they've all run away."

"They'll be back in a little while," Arthur said quietly.

They went along the big marble corridor to the same western door, out of which they had first gone to see the Indian village. As they emerged into the sunlight they met a few of the people who had already recovered from their panic and were returning.

A crowd of respectable size gathered in a few moments, all still pale and shaken, but coming back to the building which was their refuge. Arthur leaned wearily against the cold stone. It seemed to vibrate under his touch. He turned quickly to Estelle.

"Feel this!" he exclaimed.

She did so.

"I've been wondering what that rumble was," she said. "I've been hearing it ever since we landed here, but didn't understand where it came from."

"You hear a rumble?" Arthur asked, puzzled. "I can't hear anything."

"It isn't as loud as it was, but I hear it," Estelle insisted. "It's very deep, like the lowest possible bass note of an organ."

"You couldn't hear the shrill whistle when we were coming here," Arthur exclaimed suddenly, "and you can't hear the squeak of a bat. Of course, your ears are pitched lower than usual, and you can hear sounds that are lower than I can hear. Listen carefully. Does it sound in the least like a liquid rushing through somewhere?"

"Y-yes," said Estelle hesitatingly. "Somehow, I don't quite understand how, it gives me the impression of a tidal flow or something of that sort."

Arthur rushed indoors. When Estelle followed him, she found him excitedly examining the marble floor about the base of the vault.

"It's cracked," he said excitedly. "It's cracked! The vault rose all of an inch!"

Estelle looked and saw the cracks.

"What does that crack in the floor mean?"

"It means we're going to get back where we belong," Arthur cried jubilantly. "It means I'm on the track of the whole trouble. It means everything is going to be all right."

He prowled about the vault exultantly, noting exactly how the cracks in the floor ran and seeing in each a corroboration of his theory.

"I'll have to make some inspections in the cellar," he went on happily, "but I'm nearly sure I'm on the right track and can figure out a corrective."

"How soon can we hope to start back?" asked Estelle eagerly.

Arthur hesitated; then a great deal of the excitement ebbed from his face, leaving it rather worried and stern.

"It may be a month, or two months, or a year," he answered gravely. "I don't know. If the first thing I try will work, it won't be long. If we have to experiment, I daren't guess how long we may be. But"—his chin set firmly—"we're going to get back."

Estelle looked at him speculatively. Her own expression grew a little worried, too.

"But in a month," she said dubiously, "we—there is hardly any hope of our finding food for two thousand people for a month, is there?"

"We've got to," Arthur declared. "We can't hope to get that much food from the Indians. It will be days before they'll dare to come back to their village, if they ever come. It will be weeks before we can hope to have them earnestly at work to feed us, and that's leaving aside the question of how we'll communicate with them, and how we'll manage to trade with them. Frankly, I think everybody is going to have to draw his belt tight before

we get through—if we do. Some of us will get along, anyway."

Estelle's eyes opened wide as the meaning of his last sentence penetrated her mind.

"You mean—that all of us won't—"

"I'm going to take care of you," Arthur said gravely, "but there are liable to be lively doings around here when people begin to realize they're really in a tight fix for food. I'm going to get Van Deventer to help me organize a police band to enforce martial law. We mustn't have any disorder, that's certain, and I don't trust a city-bred man in a pinch unless I know him."

He stooped and picked up a revolver from the floor, left there by one of the bank watchmen when he fled, in the belief that the building was falling.

Arthur stood at the window of his office and stared out toward the west. The sun was setting, but upon what a scene!

Where, from this same window, Arthur had seen the sun setting behind the Jersey hills, all edged with the angular roofs of factories, with their chimneys emitting columns of smoke, he now saw the same sun sinking redly behind a mass of luxuriant foliage. And where he was accustomed to look upon the tops of high buildings—each entitled to the name of "skyscraper"—he now saw miles and miles of waving green branches.

The wide Hudson flowed on placidly, all unruffled by the arrival of this strange monument upon its shores—the same Hudson Arthur knew as a busy thoroughfare of puffing steamers and chugging launches. Two or three small streams wandered unconcernedly across the land that Arthur had known as the most closely built-up territory on earth. And far, far below him—Arthur had to lean well out of his window to see it—stood a collection of tiny wigwams. Those small bark structures represented the original metropolis of New York.

His telephone rang. Van Deventer was on the wire. The exchange in the building was still working. Van Deventer wanted Arthur to come down to his private office. There were still a great many things to be settled—the arrangements for commandeering offices for sleeping quarters for the women, and numberless other details. The men who seemed to have best kept their heads were gathering there to settle upon a course of action.

Arthur glanced out of the window again. He saw a curiously compact dark cloud moving swiftly across the sky to the west.

"Miss Woodward," he said sharply. "What is that?"

Estelle came to the window and looked.

"They are birds," she told him. "Birds flying in a group. I've often seen them in the country, though never as many as that."

"How do you catch birds?" Arthur asked her. "I know about shooting them, and so on, but we haven't guns enough to count. Could we catch them in traps, do you think?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Estelle thoughtfully. "But it would be hard to catch very many."

"Come downstairs," directed Arthur. "You know as much as any of the men here, and more than most, apparently. We're going to make you show us how to catch things."

Estelle smiled, a trifle wanly. Arthur led the way to the elevator. In the car he noticed that she looked distressed.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "You aren't really frightened, are you?"

"No," she answered shakily, "but—I'm rather upset about this thing. It's so—so terrible, somehow, to be back here, thousands of miles, or years, away from all one's friends and everybody."

"Please"—Arthur smiled encouragingly at her—"please count me your friend, won't you?"

She nodded, but blinked back some tears. Arthur would have tried to hearten her

further, but the elevator stopped at their floor. They walked into the room where the meeting of cool heads was to take place.

Not more than a dozen men were in there talking earnestly but dispiritedly. When Arthur and Estelle entered, Van Deventer came over to greet them.

"We've got to do something," he said in a low voice. "A wave of homesickness has swept over the whole place. Look at those men. Every one is thinking about his family and contrasting his cozy fireside with all that wilderness outside."

"You don't seem to be worried," Arthur observed with a smile.

Van Deventer's eyes twinkled.

"I'm a bachelor," he said cheerfully, "and I live in a hotel. I've been longing for a chance to see some real excitement for thirty years. Business has kept me from it up to now, but I'm enjoying myself hugely."

Estelle looked at the group of dispirited men.

"We'll simply have to do something," she said with a shaky smile. "I feel just as they do. This morning I hated the thought of having to go back to my boarding house tonight, but right now I feel as if the odor of cabbage in the hallway would seem like heaven."

Arthur led the way to the flat-topped desk in the middle of the room.

"Let's settle a few of the more important matters," he said in a businesslike tone. "None of us has any authority to act for the rest of the people in the tower, but so many of us are in a state of blue funk that those who are here must have charge for a while. Anybody have any suggestions?"

"Housing," answered Van Deventer promptly. "I suggest that we draft a gang of men to haul all the upholstered settees and rugs that are to be found to one floor, for the women to sleep on."

"M-m. Yes. That's a good idea. Anybody have a better plan?"

No one spoke. They all still looked much too homesick to take any great interest in anything, but they began to listen more or less halfheartedly.

"I've been thinking about coal," said Arthur. "There's undoubtedly a supply in the basement, but I wonder if it wouldn't be well to cut the lights off most of the floors, only lighting up the ones we're using."

"That might be a good idea later," Estelle said quietly, "but light is cheering, somehow, and everyone feels so blue that I wouldn't do it tonight. Tomorrow they'll begin to get up their resolution again, and you can ask them to do things."

"If we're going to starve to death," one of the other men said gloomily, "we might as well have plenty of light to do it by."

"We aren't going to starve to death," retorted Arthur sharply. "Just before I came down I saw a great cloud of birds, greater than I had ever seen before. When we get at those birds—"

"When," echoed the gloomy one.

"They were pigeons," Estelle explained. "They shouldn't be hard to snare or trap."

"I usually have my dinner before now," the gloomy one protested, "and I'm told I won't get anything tonight."

The other men began to straighten their shoulders. The peevishness of one of their number seemed to bring out their latent courage.

"Well, we've got to stand it for the present," one of them said almost philosophically. "What I'm most anxious about is getting back. Have we any chance?"

Arthur nodded emphatically.

"I think so. I have a sort of idea as to the cause of our sinking into the Fourth Dimension, and when that is verified, a corrective can be looked for and applied."

"How long will that take?"

"Can't say," Arthur replied frankly. "I don't know what tools, what materials, or what workmen we have, and what's rather more to the point, I don't even know what work will

have to be done. The pressing problem is food."

"Oh, bother the food," someone protested impatiently. "I don't care about myself. I can go hungry tonight. I want to get back to my family."

"That's all that really matters," a chorus of voices echoed.

"We'd better not bother about anything else unless we find we can't get back. Concentrate on getting back," one man stated more explicitly.

"Look here," said Arthur incisively. "You've a family, and so have a great many of the others in the tower, but your family and everybody else's family has got to wait. As an inside limit, we can hope to begin to work on the problem of getting back when we're sure there's nothing else going to happen. I tell you quite honestly that I think I know what is the direct cause of this catastrophe. And I'll tell you even more honestly that I think I'm the only man among us who can put this tower back where it started from. And I'll tell you most honestly of all that any attempt to meddle at this time with the forces that let us down here will result in a catastrophe considerably greater than the one that happened today."

"Well, if you're sure—" someone began reluctantly.

"I am so sure that I'm going to keep to myself the knowledge of what will start those forces to work again," Arthur said quietly. "I don't want any impatient meddling. If we start them too soon, God only knows what will happen.

Van Deventer was eyeing Arthur Chamberlain keenly.

"It isn't a question of your wanting pay in exchange for your services in putting us back, is it?" he asked coolly.

Arthur turned and faced him. His face began to flush slowly. Van Deventer put up one hand.

"I beg your pardon. I see."

"We aren't settling the things we came here for," Estelle interrupted.

She had noted the threat of friction and had hastened to put in a diversion. Arthur relaxed.

"I think that as a beginning," he suggested, "we'd better get sleeping arrangements completed. We can get everybody together somewhere, I dare say, and then secure volunteers for the work."

"Right." Van Deventer was anxious to make amends for his blunder of a moment before. "Shall I send the bank watchmen to go on each floor in turn and ask everyone to come downstairs?"

"You might start them," Arthur said. "It will take a long time for everyone to assemble."

Van Deventer spoke into the telephone on his desk. In a moment he hung up the receiver.

"They're on their way," he said.

Arthur was frowning to himself and scribbling in a notebook.

"Of course," he announced abstractedly, "the pressing problem is food. We've quite a number of fishermen, and a few hunters. We've got to have a lot of food at once, and everything considered, I think we'd better count on the fishermen. At sunrise we'd better have some people begin to dig bait and wake our anglers. They'd better make their tackle tonight, don't you think?"

There was a general nod.

"We'll announce that, then. The fishermen will go to the river under guard of the men we have who can shoot. I think what Indians there are will be much too frightened to try to ambush any of us, but we'd better be on the safe side. They'll keep together and fish at nearly the same spot, with our hunters patrolling the woods behind them, taking pot shots at game, if they see any. The fishermen should make more or less of a success, I think. The Indians weren't extensive fishers that I ever heard of, and the river ought fairly

to swarm with fish."

He closed his notebook.

"How many weapons can we count on altogether?" Arthur asked Van Deventer.

"In the bank, about a dozen riot guns and a half dozen repeating rifles. Elsewhere, I don't know. Forty or fifty men said they had revolvers, though."

"We'll give revolvers to the men who go with the fishermen. The Indians haven't heard firearms and will run at the report, even if they dare attack our men."

"We can send out the gun-armed men as hunters," someone suggested, "and send gardeners with them to look for vegetables and such things."

"We'll have to take a sort of census, really," Arthur suggested, "finding what everyone can do and getting him to do it."

"I never planned anything like this before," Van Deventer remarked, "and I never thought I should, but this is much more fun than running a bank."

Arthur smiled.

"Let's go and have our meeting," he said cheerfully.

But the meeting was a gloomy and despairing affair. Nearly everyone had watched the sun set upon the strange, wild landscape. Hardly an individual among the whole two thousand of them had ever been out of sight of a house before in his or her life. To look out at a vast, untouched wilderness where hitherto they had seen the most highly civilized city on the globe would have been startling and depressing enough in itself, but to know that they were alone in a whole continent of savages and that there was not, indeed, in all the world a single community of people they could greet as brothers was terrifying.

Few of them thought so far, but there was actually—if Arthur's estimate of several thousand years' drop back through time was correct—there was actually no other group of English-speaking people in the world. The English language was yet to be invented. Even Rome, the synonym for antiquity of culture, might still be an obscure village inhabited by a band of tatterdemalions under the leadership of an upstart Romulus.

Soft in the body as these people were, city-bred and unaccustomed to face other than the most conventionalized emergencies of life, they were terrified. Hardly one of them had even gone without a meal in all his life. To have the prospect of having to earn their food, not by the manipulation of figures in a book, or by expert juggling of profits and prices, but by literal wresting of that food from its source in the earth or stream was a really terrifying thing for them.

In addition, every one of them was bound to the life of modern times by a hundred ties. Many of them had families, a thousand years away. All had interests, engrossing interests, in modern New York.

One young man felt an anxiety that was really ludicrous because he had promised to take his sweetheart to the theater that night, and if he did not come, she would be very angry. Another was to be married in a week. Some of the people were, like Van Deventer and Arthur, so situated they could view the episode as an adventure, or, like Estelle, who had no immediate fear because all her family was provided for without her help and lived far from New York, so they would not learn of the catastrophe for some time. Many, however, felt instant and pressing fear for the families whose expenses ran always so close to their incomes that the disappearance of the breadwinner for a week would mean actual want or debt. There are very many such families in New York.

The people, therefore, that gathered hopelessly at the call of Van Deventer's watchmen were dazed and spiritless. Their excitement after Arthur's first attempt to explain the situation to them had evaporated. They were no longer keyed up to a high pitch by the startling thing that had happened to them.

Nevertheless, although only half comprehending what had actually occurred, they began to realize what that occurrence meant. No matter where they might go over the whole face of the globe, they would always be aliens and strangers. If they had been carried away to some unknown shore, some wilderness far from their own land, they might have thought of building ships to return to their homes. They had seen New York

vanish before their eyes, however. They had seen their civilization disappear while they watched.

They were in a barbarous world. There was not, for example, a single safety match on the whole earth except those in the runaway skyscraper.

Arthur and Van Deventer, in turn with the others of the cooler heads, thundered at the apathetic people, trying to waken them to the necessity for work. They showered promises of inevitable return to modern times; they pledged their honor to the belief that a way would ultimately be found by which they would all yet find themselves safely back home again.

The people, however, had seen New York disintegrate, and Arthur's explanation sounded like some wild dream of an imaginative novelist. Not one person in all the gathering could actually realize that his home might yet be waiting for him, though at the same time he felt a pathetic anxiety for the welfare of its inmates.

Everyone was in a turmoil of contradictory beliefs. On the one hand they knew that all of New York could not be actually destroyed and replaced by a splendid forest in the space of a few hours, so the accident or catastrophe must have occurred to those in the tower, and on the other hand, they had seen all of New York vanish by bits and fragments, to be replaced by a smaller and dingier town, had beheld that replaced in turn, and at last had landed in the midst of this forest.

Everyone, too, began to feel an unusual and uncomfortable sensation of hunger. It was a mild discomfort as yet, but a few of them had experienced it before without an immediate prospect of assuaging the craving, and the knowledge that there was no food to be had somehow increased the desire for it. They were really in a pitiful state.

Van Deventer spoke encouragingly, and then asked for volunteers for immediate work. There was hardly any repsonse. Everyone seemed sunk in despondency. Arthur then began to talk straight from the shoulder and succeeded in rousing them a little, but everyone was still rather too frightened to realize that work could help at all.

In desperation the dozen or so men who had gathered in Van Deventer's office went about among the gathering and simply selected men at random, ordering them to follow and begin work. This began to awaken the crowd, but they wakened to fear rather than resolution. They were city-bred, and unaccustomed to face the unusual or the alarming.

Arthur noted the new restlessness, but attributed it to growing uneasiness rather than selfish panic. He was rather pleased that they were outgrowing their apathy. When the meeting had come to an end, he felt satisfied that by morning the latent resolution among the people would have crystallized, and they would be ready to work earnestly and intelligently on whatever tasks they were directed to undertake.

He returned to the ground floor of the building feeling much more hopeful than before. Two thousand people all earnestly working for one end are hard to down even when faced with such a task as confronted the inhabitants of the runaway skyscraper. Even if they were never able to return to modern times, they would still be able to form a community that might do much to hasten the development of civilization in other parts of the world.

His hope received a rude shock when he reached the great hallway on the lower floor. There was a fruit and confectionery stand here, and as Arthur arrived at the spot, he saw a surging mass of men about it. The keeper of the stand looked frightened, but was selling off his stock as fast as he could make change. Arthur forced his way to the counter.

"Here," he said sharply to the keeper of the stand, "stop selling this stuff. It's got to be held until we can dole it out where it's needed."

"I—I can't help myself," the keeper said. "They're takin' it anyway."

"Get back there," Arthur cried to the crowd. "Do you call this decent, trying to get more than your share of this stuff? You'll get your portion tomorrow. It is going to be divided up."

"Go to hell!" someone panted. "You c'n starve if you want to, but I'm going to look out f'r myself."

The men were not really starving, but had been put into a panic by the plain speeches of Arthur and his helpers, and were seizing what edibles they could lay hands upon in preparation for the hunger they had been warned to expect.

Arthur pushed against the mob, trying to thrust them away from the counter, but his very effort intensified their panic. There was a quick surge and a crash. The glass front of the showcase broke in.

In a flash of rage Arthur struck out viciously. The crowd paid not the slightest attention to him, however. Every man was too panic-stricken, and too intent on getting some of this food before it was all gone, to bother with him.

Arthur was simply crushed back by the bodies of the forty or fifty men. In a moment he found himself alone amid the wreckage of the stand, with the keeper wringing his hands over the remnants of his goods.

Van Deventer ran down the stairs.

"What's the matter?" he demanded as he saw Arthur nursing a bleeding hand cut on the broken glass of the showcase.

"Bolsheviki!" answered Arthur with a grim smile. "We woke up some of the crowd too successfully. They got panic-stricken and started to buy out this stuff here. I tried to stop them, and you see what happened. We'd better look to the restaurant, though I doubt if they'll try anything just now."

He followed Van Deventer up to the restaurant floor. There were picked men before the door, but just as Arthur and the bank president appeared two or three white-faced men went up to the guards and started low-voiced conversations.

Arthur reached the spot in time to forestall bribery.

Arthur collared one man, Van Deventer another, and in a moment the two were sent reeling down the hallway.

"Some fools have got panic-stricken!" Van Deventer explained to the men before the doors in a casual voice, though he was breathing heavily from the unaccustomed exertion. "They've smashed the fruitstand on the ground floor and stolen the contents. It's nothing but blue funk! Only, if any of them start to gather around here, hit them first and talk it over afterward. You'll do that?"

"We will!" the men said heartily.

"Shall we use our guns?" another asked hopefully.

Van Deventer grinned.

"No," he replied, "we haven't any excuse for that yet. But you might shoot at the ceiling, if they get excited. They're just frightened!"

He took Arthur's arm, and the two walked toward the stairway again.

"Chamberlain," he said happily, quickening his pace, "tell me why I've never had as much fun as this before!"

Arthur smiled a bit wearily.

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself!" he said. "Because I'm not. I'm going outside and walk around a bit. I want to see if any cracks have appeared in the earth anywhere. It's dark, and I'll borrow a lantern down in the fire-room, but I want to find out if there are any more developments in the condition of the building."

Despite his preoccupation with his errand, which was to find if there were other signs of the continued activity of the strange forces that had lowered the tower through the Fourth Dimension into the dim and unrecorded years of aboriginal America, Arthur could not escape the fascination of the sight that met his eyes. A bright moon shone overhead and silvered the white sides of the tower, while the brightly-lighted windows of the

offices within glittered like jewels set into the shining shaft.

From his position on the ground he looked into the dimness of the forest on all sides. Black obscurity had gathered beneath the dark masses of moonlit foliage. The tiny birch-bark teepees of the now deserted Indian village glowed palely. Above, the stars looked calmly down at the accusing finger of the tower pointing upward, as if in reproach at their indifference to the savagery that reigned over the whole earth.

Like a fairy tower of jewels the building rose. Alone among a wilderness of trees and streams it towered in a strange beauty; moonlit to silver, lighted from within to a mass of brilliant gems, it stood serenely still.

Arthur, carrying his futile lantern about its base, felt his own insignificance as never before. He wondered what the Indians must think. He knew there must be hundreds of eyes fixed upon the strange sight—fixed in awestricken terror or superstitious reverence upon this unearthly visitor to their hunting grounds.

A tiny figure, dwarfed by the building whose base he skirted, Arthur moved slowly about the vast pile. The earth seemed not to have been affected by the vast weight of the tower.

Arthur knew, however, that long concrete piles reached far down to bedrock. It was these piles that had sunk into the Fourth Dimension, carrying the building with them.

Arthur had followed the plans with great interest when the Metropolitan was constructed. It was an engineering feat, and in the engineering periodicals, whose study was part of Arthur's business, great space had been given to the building and the methods of its construction.

While examining the earth carefully he went over his theory of the cause for the catastrophe. The whole structure must have sunk at the same time, or it, too, would have disintegrated, as the other buildings had appeared to disintegrate. Mentally, Arthur likened the submergence of the tower in the oceans of time to an elevator sinking past the different floors of an office building. All about the building the other skyscrapers of New York had seemed to vanish. In an elevator, the floors one passes seem to rise up.

Carrying out the analogy to its logical end, Arthur reasoned that the building itself had no more cause to disintegrate, as the buildings it passed seemed to disintegrate, than the elevator in the office building would have cause to rise because its surroundings seemed to rise.

Within the building, he knew, there were strange stirrings of emotions. Queer currents of panic were running about, throwing the people to and fro as leaves are thrown about by a current of wind. Yet, underneath all those undercurrents of fear was a rapidly growing resolution, strengthened by an increasing knowledge of the need to work.

Men were busy even then shifting all possible comfortable furniture to a single story for the women in the building to occupy. The men would sleep on the floor for the present. Beds of boughs could be improvised on the morrow. At sunrise on the following morning many men would go to the streams to fish, guarded by other men. All would be frightened, no doubt, but there would be a grim resolution underneath the fear. Other men would wander about to hunt.

There was little likelihood of Indians approaching for some days, at least, but when they did come Arthur meant to avoid hostilities by all possible means. The Indians would be fearful of their strange visitors, and it should not be difficult to convince them that friendliness was safest, even if they displayed unfriendly desires.

The pressing problem was food. There were two thousand people in the building, soft-bodied and city-bred. They were unaccustomed to hardship, and could not endure what more primitive people would hardly have noticed.

They must be fed, but they must be taught to feed themselves. The fishermen would help, but Arthur could only hope that they would prove equal to the occasion. He did not know what to expect from them. From the hunters he expected but little. The Indians were wary hunters, and game would be shy if not scarce.

The great cloud of birds he had seen at sunset was a hopeful sign. Arthur vaguely remembered stories of great flocks of wood-pigeons which had been exterminated, as the buffalo was exterminated. As he considered, the remembrance became more clear.

They had flown in huge flocks which nearly darkened the sky. As late as the forties of the nineteenth century they had been an important article of food, and had glutted the market at certain seasons of the year.

Estelle had said the birds he had seen at sunset were pigeons. Perhaps this was one of the great flocks. If it were really so, the food problem would be much lessened, provided a way could be found to secure them. The ammunition in the tower was very limited, and a shell could not be found for every bird that was needed, nor even for every three or four. Great traps must be devised, or bird-lime might might possibly be produced. Arthur made a mental note to ask Estelle if she knew anything of bird-lime.

A vague, humming roar, altering in pitch, came to his ears. He listened for some time before he identified it as the sound of the wind playing upon the irregular surfaces of the tower. In the city the sound was drowned by the multitude of other noises, but here Arthur could hear it plainly.

He listened a moment, and became surprised at the number of night noises he could hear. In New York he had closed his ears to incidental sounds from sheer self-protection. Somewhere he heard the ripple of a little spring. As the idea of a spring came into his mind, he remembered Estelle's description of the deep-toned roar she had heard.

He put his hand on the cold stone of the building. There was still a vibrant quivering of the rock. It was weaker than before, but was still noticeable. He drew back from the rock and looked up into the sky. It seemed to blaze with stars, more stars than Arthur had ever seen in the city, and more than he had dreamed existed.

As he looked, however, a cloud seemed to film a portion of the heavens. The stars still showed through it, but they twinkled in a peculiar fashion that Arthur could not understand.

He watched in growing perplexity. The cloud moved very swiftly. Thin as it seemed to be, it should have been silvery from the moonlight, but the sky was noticeably darker where it moved. It advanced toward the tower and seemed to obscure the upper portion. A confused motion became visible among its parts. Wisps of it whirled away from the brilliantly lighted tower, and then returned swiftly toward it.

Arthur heard a faint tinkle, then a musical scraping, which became louder. A faint scream sounded, then another. The tinkle developed into the sound made by breaking glass, and the scraping sound became that of the broken fragments as they rubbed against the sides of the tower in their fall.

The scream came again. It was the frightened cry of a woman. A soft body struck the earth not ten feet from where Arthur stood, then another, and another.

Arthur urged the elevator-boy to greater speed. They were speeding up the shaft as rapidly as possible, but it was not fast enough. When they at last reached the height at which the excitement seemed to be centered, the car stopped with a jerk and Arthur dashed down the hall.

Half a dozen frightened stenographers stood there, huddled together.

"What's the matter?" Arthur demanded. Men were running from the other floors to see what the trouble was.

"The—the windows broke, and—something flew in at us!" one of them gasped. There was a crash inside the nearest office, and the women screamed again.

Arthur drew a revolver from his pocket and advanced to the door. He quickly threw it open, entered, and closed it behind him. Those left out in the hall waited tensely.

There was no sound. The women began to look even more frightened. The men shuffled their feet uneasily, and looked uncomfortably at one another. Van Deventer ap-

peared on the scene, puffing a little from his haste.

The door opened again and Arthur came out. He was carrying something in his hand. He had put his revolver aside and looked somewhat foolish but very much delighted.

"The food question is settled," he said happily. "Look!"

He held out the object he carried. It was a bird, apparently a pigeon of some sort. It seemed to have been stunned, but as Arthur held it out it stirred, then struggled, and in a moment was flapping wildly in an attempt to escape.

"It's a wood-pigeon," said Arthur. "They must fly after dark sometimes. A big flock of them ran afoul of the tower and were dazed by the lights. They've broken a lot of windows, I dare say, but a great many of them ran into the stonework and were stunned. I was outside the tower, and when I came in, they were dropping to the ground by the hundreds. I didn't know what they were then, but if we wait twenty minutes or so I think we can go out and gather up our supper and breakfast and several other meals, all at once."

Estelle had appeared and now reached out her hands for the bird.

"I'll take care of this one," she said. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to see if there aren't some more stunned in the other offices?"

In half an hour the electric stoves of the restaurant were going at their full capacity. Men, cheerfully excited men now, were bringing in pigeons by armfuls, and other men were skinning them. There was no time to pluck them, though a great many of the women were busily engaged in that occupation.

As fast as the birds could be cooked they were served out to the impatient but much cheered castaways, and in a little while nearly every person in the place was walking casually about the halls with a roasted, broiled, or fried pigeon in his hands. The ovens were roasting pigeons, the frying pans were frying them, and the broilers were loaded down with the small but tender birds.

The unexpected solution of the most pressing question cheered everyone amazingly. Many people were still frightened, but less frightened than before. Worry for their families still oppressed a great many, but the removal of the fear of immediate hunger led them to believe that the other problems before them would be solved, too, and in as satisfactory a manner.

Arthur had returned to his office with four broiled pigeons in a sheet of wrapping-paper. As he somehow expected, Estelle was waiting there.

"Thought I'd bring lunch up," he announced. "Are you hungry?"

"Starving!" Estelle replied, and laughed.

The whole catastrophe began to become an adventure. She bit eagerly into the bird. Arthur began as hungrily on another. For some time neither spoke a word. At last, however, Arthur waved the leg of his second pigeon toward his desk.

"Look what we've got here!" he said.

Estelle nodded. The stunned pigeon Arthur had first picked up was tied by one foot to a paperweight.

"I thought we might keep him for a souvenir," she suggested.

"You seem pretty confident we'll get back, all right," Arthur observed. "It was surely lucky those blessed birds came along. They've heartened up the people wonderfully!"

"Oh, I knew you'd manage somehow!" said Estelle confidently.

"I manage?" Arthur repeated smiling. "What have I done?"

"Why, you've done everything," affirmed Estelle stoutly. "You've told the people what to do from the very first, and you're going to get us back."

Arthur grinned, then suddenly his face grew a little more serious.

"I wish I were as sure as you are," he said. "I think we'll be all right, though, sooner or later."

"I'm sure of it," Estelle declared with conviction. "Why, you—"

"Why I?" asked Arthur again. He bent forward in his chair and fixed his eyes on Estelle's. She looked up, met his gaze and stammered:

"You—you do things," she finished lamely.

"I'm tempted to do something now," Arthur said. "Look here, Miss Woodward, you've been in my employ for three or four months. In all that time I've never had anything but the most impersonal comments from you. Why the sudden change?"

The twinkle in his eyes robbed his words of any impertinence.

"Why, I really—I really suppose I never noticed you before," said Estelle.

"Please notice me hereafter," said Arthur. "I have been noticing you. I've been doing practically nothing else."

Estelle flushed again. She tried to meet Arthur's eyes and failed. She bit desperately into her pigeon drumstick, trying to think of something to say.

"When we get back," went on Arthur meditatively, "I'll have nothing to do—no work or anything. I'll be broke and out of a job."

Estelle shook her head emphatically. Arthur paid no attention.

"Estelle," he said, smiling, "would you like to be out of a job with me?"

Estelle turned crimson.

"I'm not very successful," Arthur went on soberly. "I'm afraid I wouldn't make a very good husband; I'm rather worthless and lazy!"

"You aren't," broke in Estelle; "you're—you're—"

Arthur reached over and took her by the shoulders.

"What?" he demanded.

She would not look at him, but she did not draw away. He held her from him for a moment.

"What am I?" he demanded again. Somehow he found himself kissing the tips of her ears. Her face was buried against his shoulder.

"What am I?" he repeated sternly.

Her voice was muffled by his coat.

"You're—you're dear!" she said.

There was an interlude of about a minute and a half, then she pushed him away from her.

"Don't!" she said breathlessly. "Please don't!"

"Aren't you going to marry me?" he demanded.

Still crimson, she nodded shyly. He kissed her again.

"Please don't!" she protested.

She fondled the lapels of his coat, quite content to have his arms about her.

"Why mayn't I kiss you if you're going to marry me?" Arthur demanded.

She looked up at him with an air of demure primness.

"You—you've been eating pigeon," she told him in mock gravity, "and—and your mouth is greasy!"

It was two weeks later. Estelle looked out over the now familiar wild landscape. It was much the same when she looked far away but nearby there were great changes.

A cleared trail led through the woods to the waterfront, and a raft of logs extended out into the river for hundreds of feet. Both sides of the raft were lined with busy fishermen—men and women, too. A little to the north of the base of the building a huge mound of earth smoked sullenly. The coal in the cellar had given out and charcoal had been found to be the best substitute they could improvise. The mound was where the charcoal was made.

It was heartbreaking work to keep the fires going with charcoal, because it burned so rapidly in the powerful draft of the furnaces, but the original fire-room gang had been recruited to several times its original number from among the towerites, and the work was divided until it did not seem hard.

As Estelle looked down, two tiny figures sauntered across the clearing from the woods with a heavy animal slung between them. One was using a gun as a walking stick. Estelle

saw the flash of the sun on its polished barrel.

There were a number of Indians in the clearing, watching with wide-open eyes the activities of the whites. Dozens of birch-bark canoes dotted the Hudson, each with its load of fishermen, industriously working for the white people. It had been hard to overcome the fear in the Indians, and they still paid superstitious reverence to the whites, but fair dealings coupled with a constant readiness to defend themselves, had enabled Arthur to institute a system of trading for food that had so far proved satisfactory.

The whites had found spare electric-light bulbs valuable currency in dealing with the redskins. Picture-wire, too, was highly prized. There was not a picture left hanging in any of the offices. Metal paper-knives bought huge quantities of provisions from the eager Indian traders, and the story was current in the tower that Arthur had received eight canoe-loads of corn and vegetables in exchange for a broken-down typewriter. No one could guess what the savages wanted with the typewriter, but they had carted it away triumphantly.

Estelle smiled tenderly to herself as she remembered how Arthur had been the leading spirit in all the numberless enterprises in which the castaways had been forced to engage. He would come to her in a spare ten minutes, and tell her how everything was going. He seemed curiously boylike in those moments.

Sometimes he would come straight from the fire-room—he insisted on taking part in all the more arduous duties—having hastily cleaned himself for her inspection, snatch a hurried kiss and then go off, laughing, to help chop down trees for the long fishing-raft. He had told them how to make charcoal, had taken a leading part in establishing and maintaining friendly relations with the Indians, and was now down in the deepest sub-basement, working with a gang of volunteers to try to put the building back where it belonged.

Estelle had said, after the collapse of the flooring in the boardroom, that she heard a sound like the rushing of waters. Arthur, on examining the floor where the safe-deposit vault stood, found it had risen an inch. On these facts he had build up his theory. The building, like all modern skyscrapers, rested on concrete piles extending down to bedrock. In the center of one of those piles there was a hollow tube originally intended to serve as an artesian well. The flow had been insufficient and the well had been stopped up.

Arthur, of course, as an engineer, had studied the construction of the building with great care, and happened to remember that this partly hollow pile was the one nearest the safe-deposit vault. The collapse of the board-room floor had suggested that some change had happened in the building itself, and that was found when he saw that the deposit vault had actually risen an inch.

He at once connected the rise in the flooring above the hollow pile with the pipe in the pile. Estelle had heard liquid sounds. Evidently water had been forced into the hollow artesian pipe under an unthinkable pressure when the catastrophe occurred.

From the rumbling and the suddenness of the whole catastrophe, a volcanic or seismic disturbance was evident. The connection of volcanic or seismic action with a flow of water suggested a geyser or a hot spring of some sort, probably a spring which had broken through its normal confines sometime before, but whose pressure had been sufficient to prevent the accident until the failure of its flow.

When the flow ceased the building sank rapidly. For the fact that this "sinking" was in the fourth direction—the Fourth Dimension—Arthur had no explanation. He simply knew that in some mysterious way an outlet for the pressure had developed in that fashion, and that the tower had followed the spring in its fall through time.

The sole apparent change in the building had occurred above the one hollow concrete pile, which seemed to indicate that if access were to be had to the mysterious, and so far only assumed spring, it must be through that pile. While the vault retained its abnormal elevation, Arthur believed that there was still water at an immense and incalculable pressure in the pipe. He dared not attempt to tape the pipe until the pressure had abated.

At the end of the week he found the vault slowly settling back into place. When its re-

turn to normal was complete, he dared begin boring a hole to reach the hollow tube in the concrete pile.

As he suspected, he found water in the pile—water whose sulfurous and mineral nature confirmed his belief that a geyser reaching deep into the bosom of the earth, as well as far back in the realms of time, was at the bottom of the extraordinary jaunt of the tower.

Geyers were still far from satisfactory things to explain. There are many of their vagaries which we cannot understand at all. We do know a few things which will affect them, and one thing is that "soaping" them will stimulate their flow in an extraordinary manner.

Arthur proposed to "soap" this mysterious geyser when the renewal of its flow should lift the runaway skyscraper back to the epoch from which the failure of the flow had caused it to fall.

He made his preparations with great care. He confidently expected his plan to work, and to see the skyscraper once more towering over mid-town New York as was its wont, but he did not allow the fishermen and hunters to relax their efforts on that account. They labored as before, while deep down in the sub-basement of the colossal building Arthur and his volunteers toiled mightily.

They had to bore through the concrete pile until they reached the hollow within it. Then, when the evidence gained from the water in the pipe had confirmed his surmises, they had to prepare their "charge" of soapy liquids by which the geyser was to be stirred to renewed activity.

Great quantities of the soap used by the scrub-women in scrubbing down the floors were boiled with water until a sirupy mess was evolved. Means had then to be provided by which this could be quickly introduced into the hollow pile, the hole then closed, and then braced to withstand a pressure unparalleled in hydraulic science. Arthur believed that from the hollow pile the soapy liquid would find its way to the geyser proper, where it would take effect in stimulating the lessened flow to its former proportions. When they took place he believed that the building would return to normal, modern times, as swiftly and as surely as it had left them.

The telephone rang in his office, and Estelle answered it. Arthur was on the wire. A signal was being hung out for all the castaways to return to the building from their several occupations. They were about to soap the geyser.

Did Estelle want to come down and watch? She did! She stood in the main hallway as the excited and hopeful people trooped in. When the last was inside, the doors were firmly closed. The few friendly Indians outside stared perplexedly at the mysterious white strangers. The whites, laughing excitedly, began to wave to the Indians. Their leave-taking was premature.

Estelle took her way down into the cellar. Arthur was awaiting her arrival. Van Deventer stood near, with the grinning, grimy members of Arthur's volunteer work gang. The massive concrete pile stood in the center of the cellar. A big steam-boiler was coupled to a tiny pipe that led into the heart of the mass of concrete. Arthur was going to force the soapy liquid into the hollow pile by steam.

At the signal steam began to hiss in the boiler. Live steam from the fire-room forced the soapy sirup out of the boiler, through the small iron pipe, into the hollow that led to the geyser far underground. Six thousand gallons in all were forced into the opening in a space of three minutes. Arthur's grimy gang began to work with desperate haste. Quickly they withdrew the iron pipe and inserted a long steel plug, painfully beaten from a bar of solid metal. Then, girding the colossal concrete pile, ring after ring of metal was slipped on, to hold the plug in place.

The last of the safeguards was hardly fastened firmly when Estelle listened intently. "I hear a rumbling!" she said quietly.

Arthur reached forward and put his hand on the mass of concrete.

"It is quivering!" he reported as quietly. "I think we'll be on our way in a very little while."

The group broke for the stairs, to watch the panorama as the runaway skyscraper made its way back through the thousands of years to the times that had built it for a monument to modern commerce. Arthur and Estelle went high up in the tower. From the window of Arthur's office they looked eagerly, and felt the slight quiver as the tower got underway. Estelle looked up at the sun, and saw it mend its pace toward the west. Night fell. The evening sounds became high-pitched and shrill, then seemed to cease altogether.

In a very little while there was light again, and the sun was speeding across the sky. It sank hastily, and returned almost immediately, *via* the east. Its pace became a breakneck rush. Down behind the hills and up in the east. Down in the west and up in the east. Down and up— The flickering began. The race back toward modern time had started.

Arthur and Estelle stood at the window and looked out as the sun rushed more and more rapidly across the sky until it became a streak of light, shifting first to the right and then to the left as the seasons passed in their turn.

With Arthur's arms about her shoulders, Estelle stared out across the unbelievable landscape, while the nights and days, the winters and summers, and the storms and calms of a thousand years swept past them into the irrevocable aeons.

Presently Arthur drew her to him and kissed her. While he kissed her, so swiftly did the days and years flee by, three generations were born, grew and begot children, and died again! Estelle, held fast in Arthur's arms, thought nothing of such trivial things. She put her arms about his neck and kissed him while the years passed them unheeded.

Of course you know that the building landed safely, in the exact hour, minute, and second from which it started, so that when the frightened and excited people poured out of it to stand in Madison Square and feel that the world was once more right side up, their hilarious and incomprehensible conduct made such of the world as was passing by to think a contagious madness had broken out.

Days passed before the story of the two thousand was believed, but at last it was accepted as truth, and eminent scientists studied the matter exhaustively.

There has been one rather queer result of the journey of the runaway skyscraper. A certain Isidore Eckstein, a dealer in jewelry novelties, whose office was in the tower when it disappeared into the past, has entered suit in the courts of the United States against all holders of land on Manhattan Island. It seems that during the two weeks in which the tower rested in the wilderness he traded independently with one of the Indian chiefs, and in exchange for two near-pearly necklaces, sixteen finger-rings, and one dollar in money, received a title-deed to the entire island. He claims that his deed is a conveyance made previous to all other sales whatever.

Strictly speaking, he is undoubtedly right, as his deed was signed before the discovery of America. The courts, however, are deliberating the question with a great deal of perplexity.

Eckstein is quite confident that in the end his claim will be allowed and he will be admitted as the sole owner of real estate on Manhattan Island, with all occupiers of building and territory paying his ground-rent at a rate he will fix himself. In the meantime, though, the foundations are being reinforced so the catastrophe cannot occur again, his entire office is packed full of articles suitable for trading with the Indians. If the tower makes another trip back through time, Eckstein hopes to become a landholder of some importance.

No less than eighty-seven books have been written by members of the memorable two thousand in description of their trip to the hinterland of time, but Arthur, who could write more intelligently about the matter than anyone else, is too busy to bother with such things. He has two very important matters to look after. One is, of course, the reinforcement of the foundations of the building so that a repetition of the catastrophe cannot occur, and the other is to convince his wife—who is Estelle, naturally—that she is the most adorable person in the universe. He finds the latter task the more difficult because she insists that *he* is the most adorable person—

AN ANALYSIS OF
"THE RUNAWAY SKYSCRAPER"

Between the Lines

by Robert H. Wilcox

Professor Wilcox teaches a course in science fiction literature and has prepared a text on the subject. His articles are designed to give readers a taste of what might be discussed in his classroom about an effective piece of creative writing.

OUR TECHNOLOGICAL society tends to look down its nose at earlier cultures. Powered toothbrushes, can openers, and snooze alarms place us light years beyond the achievements of Greece and Rome. And so it is that we read the fantasy of the past with a sort of condescension. Those "primitives" lacked the skills and tools of expression which modern writers manipulate with great effect — or so we may think. Look again, however, at some of those ancients and you may modify that thinking.

As an example, consider a true oldtimer, "The Runaway Skyscraper," which first appeared in *Argosy* sixty years ago. Our first impulse may be that a yarn so far in the past can't possibly offer any appeal to modern readers. Did people even speak English that long ago? Don't forget that classic stories are like classic automobiles — the older they get, the greater their value. We may have to examine both kinds of classics differently, but we can discover their lasting appeal if we are willing to look at them closely.

One appeal that is timeless is social criticism. No matter what period of man's history we read, we can recognize similar problems which people have to deal with. In "The Runaway Skyscraper" we see the most fundamental problem of all: the feeding of two thousand persons trapped in time. This group represents a small slice of society at large, a microcosm or little universe of all sorts of individuals. When they realize the crisis of starvation, what do they do? Most of them behave like animals, fighting to snatch for themselves whatever fragments of food they can find — even if they have to trample someone else to survive. This is the way mobs have acted throughout six thousand years of recorded history, so our classic story is ultramodern in this fundamental respect.

Under desperate conditions someone must take command, but almost no one ever wishes to assume responsibility. Let George do it. Let him take the obligation, as well as the criticism if the plan fails. Isn't this the way most of us are? In our story only two men, an engineer and a banker, step forward and lay out some sort of program aimed at the survival of the group. Notice that Leinster has picked the most likely leaders, men who must think and direct their business in organized fashion. Everyone else holds back, drags his feet, complains, but does nothing. This is the way our society works, isn't it? We are dissatisfied with our governments, but do nothing to remedy the faults. In a way, we gain comfort from letting others make the decisions and then seeing their ideas come to nothing. So we can put the blame for shortages, inflation, and mismanagement on someone else, and not on us. Notice the excuse that pours out of the crowd in the story. "I want to get back

to my family," they sob as their answer to the problems which face them. Only our two men have the courage to deal practically with the matter of hunger. Most of us today would starve very quickly if the local supermarket ran out of goods.

Such concern with masses of people, some readers may say, focusus upon a fundamental weakness of the story: faulty characterization. We see really only three individuals — Arthur, Estelle and Van Deventer — and even there we get stingy details. Arthur is young, profligate and a bad businessman; Estelle is pretty, romantic, and backward; Van Deventer is gray-haired and commanding. That's about all we know about our cast. Is this because Leinster doesn't know better? It is too pat to suggest that he has resorted to the use of cheap cardboard figures. Rather, since the story is a classic, let us examine the classical past for reasons behind apparently thin characterization. In the distant past, writers employed types or representatives of social levels in their works deliberately because they aimed at getting across themes or ideas primarily. It wasn't that individuals were not important, but rather that the ideas were even greater forces to direct and control. Leinster is working with mass behavior in "The Runaway Skyscraper." A few persons may be isolated to give useful identification, but his main objective is to examine the actions of a great number of people under stress. Our three individuals stand out in this crowd as examples of what the rest of the mob is not, and so the author's dramatic purpose is effectively accomplished by such contrast. The three are types, or examples, of human tendencies which all of us have known about. They stand for the heroism which overcomes catastrophes, the personal qualities of worth which emerge under stress, the ability to plan and direct when everyone is falling prey to hysteria. A vivid instance of the human condition is seen, for example, when Van Deventer asks if Arthur's refusal to say when their peril can be eased depends upon his being paid. Arthur's righteous but unspoken denial of that charge dispatches one of the most common waknesses of all of us: that every man has his price.

Leinster knows people, that is evident, and he inserts a couple of additional appeals in his story to make it eternally modern. You probably raised an eyebrow or two in noting that the elevator worked, that telephone calls went through, that electrical lighting was available — all on an isolated skyscraper stuck in time's whirlpool. The author seems unwilling to deal with logic under these fantastic conditions, and we shouldn't let such details trouble us. We delight in television, convenient refrigeration, private transportation, and other modern conveniences. But what happens when we flip a light switch? It's too simple to reply that a room is illuminated. We aren't even sure about the source of that light. For example, is it a wave or a particle that works for our convenience? Has anyone ever seen electricity? But we don't trouble ourselves with these trivial questions. We simply go on about our miraculous living, taking such things for granted. The same pleasant ignorance prevails in "The Runaway Skyscraper", and we must not let anomalies and paradoxes spoil our reading enjoyment.

A final appeal is the story's humor - or perhaps you overlooked it? A bit about Eckstein is obvious, although somewhat in advance of the alleged purchase of Manhattan by the Dutch. Funnier is the implicit act of "giving the country back to the Indians", which some of us have observed would be a very good idea. Shoveling coal and charcoal in the building's basement makes an amusing tie-in to the Hell our people are in, and life was certainly "for the birds" when that flock crashed through the window just in time for dinner. The whole business of clock springs bursting from the backward motion of time, and of time rising and falling like a tide, is enjoyable since many of us would give a great deal if we could only turn back the clock. And soaping the geyser to coax it into activity, to tease it into lifting the building on a sea of bubbles, is a sight gag that would challenge the most inventive of Hollywood producers to materialize.

Our closer examination, then, has shown us the values of one more old object. Seasoned stories can stand this kind of inspection, for the years have equipped them with lasting qualities we can enjoy. As with all antiques, classic short stories contain priceless attributes if we are willing to expend the time and patience to search them out.

INNER SPACE *Continued from Back Cover*

"Well, for now, put in a new fuse," she called.

A second later the lights came on as he took care of that.

She decided to join her husband in the basement to find out exactly what all the hammering was about. She soon found out. He had constructed something that looked like a phone booth. Now she noted that he had placed a series of light bulbs in it, and what puzzled her was that some were white and some black, spaced one-for-one.

"How do you like it sweetheart?" he asked.

"How much did the lumber and the lights cost?" she asked.

"What's the difference?" he said. "This invention is going to make us so rich we'll never have to worry about anything again."

"Where did I hear that and when?" she asked. "Only about a hundred times."

"Sweetheart, trust me," he said. "Last time I was playing golf I got the idea. Did you ever stop to wonder where the baseballs and golf balls

and other things disappear to when they get lost?"

"Frankly, no, I'm too tired keeping house and working parttime so we can at least eat, what with you spending our money on your dumb inventions."

"And your're right, almost," he said. "Get the picture. I hook a conveyor to this booth and feed the garbage and trash into the booth, turn on the special electrical energizer which creates a thick fog in the booth. Then I turn on the flashing white and black lights and 'presto', the door opens to inner space and we can feed anything we want into the conveyor. Oh, by the way, I need some more money for some sheet metal and also some for the shunt."

"Honey," she said, "I hate to get angry with you and give you the impression I don't have any confidence in you, but about a hundred failures ought to be enough to convince you that work is the answer to our problems, *not* some crazy invention."

"Please dear," he literally begged, "think of how this world needs something like this. Why, trash disposal is the *number one* problem in the world."

"What does that mean to us?" she asked.

"When this machine starts working, the whole world will want to buy one like it. It will revolutionize the refuse problem."

"All right," she said. "But this is the last time."

A few days later he called her down to witness his test of the machine. It was a weird looking thing, but then you had to take into account the job it was designed to do.

"Ready dear?" he asked. "Oh, here is a pair of dark glasses to protect your eyes from the terrific glare."

She watched as he emptied the vacuum cleaner contents onto the conveyor. Then he switched on the current. Even with the dark glasses, the fog and lights seemed intense, but to her amazement it worked. The trash *disappeared.*

"It worked!" she shrieked. "You finally came up with a winner."

Things happened quickly after the first test. The next day, he exhibited his invention to the mayor of the city and shortly the booth and lights and assorted parts were disassembled, taken to an open field and reassembled. City trash trucks brought the trash to the conveyor and the operation began. A large crowd assembled and cheered as the trash disappeared into the nothingness of inner space.

Things went along smoothly for weeks as the city bought two of the machines and poured the trash into inner space. Thousands of tons of garbage went this route and hundreds of orders were received for the machines throughout the world.

"Just to think," she said, "I doubted you. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry honey, you can't be blamed for that. After all, it looked like I was born to lose."

The trash disposal problem appeared to have been solved, but one day while the operation was going full blast, a terrible electrical storm came up and lightning struck the energizer. Suddenly the fog multiplied a thousand times and the machine disappeared.

"What happened?" gasped the operations manager.

"My machine, my beautiful machine, disappeared into inner space."

"What's going to happen no. . . ."

She didn't finish the statement for a tremendous load of trash and garbage suddenly came pouring into the area followed by baseballs, basketballs and even boccie balls. They ran for their lives and an alert was sounded in the city. Trash piled up burying the homes and parks and filling the river — it cluttered the highways and obscured the fields. The earth was in peril.

"What do we do now? *You* and your inventions!"

"How was I to know there was someone living in inner space?" He showed his wife a message that had been sent from whomever or whatever occupied that dimension, on a large piece of cardboard.

"Keep your . . . . . to yourself."

Bio-sketch

Vincent Argondezzi

I have been writing for thiry-two years, part-time since graduating from Charles Morris Prince Evening school of Journalism. I also completed a course with the United States Armed Forces Institute in Feature Writing, and had a year's training by correspondence from the Magazine Institute in New York.

I spent twenty years writing, whenever possible, juveniles and sold to the following magazines: *Treasure Chest, Aim Higher, Catholic Youth, Catholic Digest, Sunday School Digest, Partners,* and others. Had a "Talking Points" column in *Partners* and also sold them short stories over a period of years.

My stories have appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer, The Sunday Bulletin, The Norristown Times Herald,* and other publications.

I was a full-time computer analyst but was recently terminated when the plant was sold to the Germans. I am a World War II veteran, married, and have three sons, one of whom is a veteran of the Vietnam war, and Robert, recently discharged after three years with the paratroopers. Vince is studying Commercial art and I am enclosing two samples of his work.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We thought this piece summed up man's chauvinism toward the universe in a nice, neat little package. Funny, too. If we view outer or "inner" space (as the case may be) as our personal dumping ground (a suggestion that has actually been proposed), perhaps we will someday simply get it all dashed back right in our faces. Guess what? Maybe there is just possibly someone else in the universe who might object to our folly and open our eyes.

Inner Space

By Vincent Argondezzi

SHE WAS watching her favorite program on television when the set and the lights went out.

"Henry," she screamed. "What are you doing down there?"

"This is it," came the excited answer. "All I have to do is shunt this thing and we'll all be rich!"

Continued on Page 129

Illustrated by Scott Mavor