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by Gordon R. Dickson



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THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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It looked like a six or seven room house, put together by a child or a madman. But it was a space station, firing at Felix!

NOVEL

PERFECTLY ADJUSTED

The trouble with the old dictum, "Just ignore it, and it'll go away," is, of course, that this doesn't work out, in practice. But...what if you'd been conditioned from childhood not to see, hear, taste, smell, or feel anything—or anyone—your section of society had decided to ignore?

by GORDON R. DICKSON

illustrated by KELLY FREAS

THE FICTIONAL hero, who whips up a necessary invention on the spur of the immediate moment, is frequently cursed by his true-life counterpart, sadly embound and restricted by reality and his own human limitations. Probably none, however, has cursed so wildly well as did a certain knowledge trader by the name of Feliz Gebrod, on that unfortunate occasion when, halfway from the strait-laced world of

Congerman, a Mark III plastic converter he had thrown together from memory, ran wild and vaporized most of his hat.

You see here the disadvantages of being a modern man. Had Feliz lived in the bad old days when all clothing was made of animal or vegetable fiber, he could have ripped up some other item of apparel and sewed or tied or glued it into some sort of head covering. Cast plastic,

unfortunately, being in essence nothing more than a single giant molecule stretched out to whatever length is necessary, does not tear—even if you are half Micturian on your mother's side and can bend steel busbars when sufficiently annoyed. The only way to cut and shape it is with a Mark III plastic converter, which can mold, join, or separate with the greatest ease—when it is properly constructed, with a correct governor.

When it is improperly constructed, with an incorrectly-built governor, it is liable to vaporize large amounts of whatever it is aimed at. For example—a hat. Which, if you'll remember, is where we came in.

Feliz raved and swore and kicked the converter into a corner. Had there been a busbar at hand, he undoubtedly would have bent it. There were none, of course; small single-cabin spaceships do not run to busbars, any more than they run to spare hats. Its only cargo beyond the bare necessities of comfortable existence was the knowledge of skills and techniques that Feliz carried in his head with letter-perfect recall; these he would eventually sell on some planet that knew them not. But what use is an eidetic

memory beneath your skull if there is no hat above it?

Absolutely none, if you are planning to land on the planet, Congerman.

Congerman, unfortunately, was one of those worlds which have gone in extensively for nakedness taboos and an exaggerated moral code. On Congerman, the body is completely covered; the head, also—and the size of the hat is important. An individual with a large hat is respectable; one with a small hat, dubious; (Feliz had been intending to enlarge his with the converter) and one who is hatless, impossible. Impossible, ethically, morally, spiritually, and legally. Without a hat, Feliz could *land* on Congerman; but none would do business with him thereafter, even if he wrapped himself up like a mummy. A true Congermanite would die rather than appear in public without a hat; and illogically, but quite humanly, they expected anybody else they associated with to follow the same tactics.

—And, as has been said, there was no spare hat aboard Feliz's ship. One outfit of spare clothing, he had—but no spare hat. The plans Feliz had once memorized of the Mark III converter had just proved to have an error in the section dealing with the governor. And that was that. The dam-

age was done; there was, in fact, nothing to be done about it, but to grit one's teeth—which in Feliz's case caused his oversize jaw-muscles to stand out on each side of his face like cheek-pouched walnuts—and choose an alternate destination.

HE TURNED to the Galactic Register, and, flipping it on, frowned from beneath shaggy brows at the screen as it reeled off the possible destinations within cruising distance. Hunched over the instrument, and still scowling with the remnants of his rage, Feliz was not a reassuring sight.

Operating on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread at all, you would suppose that there would be virtues in possessing the superior Micturian mutation in even half your blood. Unfortunately, for Feliz, the virtues were lopsided ones. Full-blooded Micturians are very nicely-proportioned ten-foot giants, with a peculiar cellular structure that roughly doubles the tensile strength and rigidity of their flesh and bones. This cellular structure Feliz had inherited in only slightly watered-down condition; and also the strength, or most of the same, that went with it. Sadly, however, he was lacking in one respect

that would have made life with the full-bloods tolerable. To put it bluntly, Feliz was, by Micturian standards, a dwarf—a mere six feet in height.

His head was normal size; so were his hands and feet—more or less. His shoulders, however, were abnormally broad for a human; and if you looked closely at the extremely loose cut of his tunic sleeves where they joined his body, and the great baggy trousers he wore, you might begin to suspect. There was a reason for the tailoring of these clothes—notably a bicep eight inches in diameter when relaxed, and a thigh twelve inches in diameter, under the same conditions. For all practical purposes his waist was so thick as to be indistinguishable from his chest; but the width of his shoulders and the loose tunic served to conceal this.

His face was quaintly humorous, its underlying features being composed of very large bones crammed together in a relatively small area. Literally, it might be said of Feliz that he was one of those men who are so ugly they just miss being handsome. The firm lips of his wide mouth concealed teeth a little too large to put people at ease when he smiled at them; his nose was short and wide, his

eyebrows heavy, and his temples broad. A touch of grey streaked his unruly brown hair, and his eyes were a stormy blue.

Right at the moment, they were, indeed, perhaps a trifle more stormy than usual, for the Galactic Register, having hunted through its own files with mechanical patience, had produced one possible other destination—and one only. A world called, of all improbable names, Dunroamin. All others were outside the range of his ship without a stop to stock up on provisions—a very necessary part of the cargo. Feliz, because of his peculiar body-structure, had an enormous appetite.

He punched for a recheck. The Register clicked, whirred and emphatically refused to change its mind. Dunroamin, and Dunroamin only, it said in effect.

"Hell's boiling buckets!" said Feliz, and punched for more detailed information.

Dunroamin, the Register informed him, had been settled as recently as four hundred years before. It was a park-like world with all the virtues of nature and none of her vices—except for a few of the mild kind that titillate but do not trouble seriously. It was thoroughly modern with regard to the common language and behavior customs of the

human worlds. The people were monogamous, unmutated, and healthy. The average male was etc. etc. etc. The average female was etc. More statistics. They had so many cities, so much of so many kinds of industry. And so forth.

A thoroughly desirable world, concluded the Register. Unfortunately, they had officially closed their frontiers some two hundred years before, pending the settlement of some internal trouble; and the frontiers had never been opened again. A landing would be in violation of local law.

"Mother of Mephis!" yelled Feliz, thoroughly out of temper, and stomped off to throw himself in the pilot's chair and sit fuming for fifteen minutes. At the end of that time he was cooled off enough to go back to the Register and ask it why Dunroamin had closed its frontiers.

Reason unknown, said the Register.

"Well, to hell with them," said Feliz. "I'm going in. anyway!"

After all—all he wanted was a hat.

IT WAS A desirable world—at least in appearance.

Feliz went into an orbit around the planet and looked it over. Two hundred years without contact, eh? A knowl-

edge trader like himself would have a lot to tell them; it might be possible to do a little business while getting that hat. Not that this was any substitute for Congerman, which was still his main destination.

Meanwhile... He went dropping around Dunroamin, picking out the cities, and looking it over, and plotting his plans. It would probably be just as well to pick out some out-of-the-way spot for a first landing. And then—

Feliz jumped suddenly as the alarm bell suddenly split the silence of his small cabin. For a second he stared at the instrument as if doubting its existence, let alone the noise it was making. Then, returning somewhat to his senses, he dived for the communicator, wondering what other ship could possibly be sharing his rubberneck inspection of the planet below.

The screen clouded, wavered, and finally cleared (it had needed overhauling for six months now, that screen) to reveal something that could only be said to resemble a six or seven room house put together in a vacuum by someone who was either a child or a madman. For a long moment Feliz stared at it without comprehension, then memory of a former history course came to his mind.



The girl stared at the sandwich as if it were an hallucination.

"Sweet Susie," he breathed. "A space station!"

He punched assorted buttons. The space station dissolved to the image of a metal walled room and several individuals within it, one of whom leaned forward into the screen and howled at Feliz. He was not a prepossessing-looking character. His black uniform, shirt, breeches and bandolier had been natty once, but now were rumpled and food-stained. He needed a shave; and his black, lank hair needed a haircut.

"Out!" screamed this unwashed policeman. "Get out! We will destroy you. Man the guns! Fire at will! Blast him—"

And, around Feliz, the vacuum began to be filled with hurtling objects which, it struck the half-Micturian suddenly, were probably loaded with high explosive—an ancient and barbarous instrument of war. He snatched at his controls.

"He runs!" yelped the apparition in the speaker. "After him!"

This, of course, since the speaker was broadcasting from a station in free fall, was a manifest impossibility; but Feliz was in no position to appreciate the oddity of it. Acceleration kicked him back into the control seat as he fought for distance. The plan-

et's night side reached sheltering arms toward him; and most of the shells were falling short behind when, just as he passed into the shelter of the penumbra, there was a heavy shock on the rear of his ship. The sound of an explosion transmitted through tortured metal, and he tumbled into the night side of Dunroamin, falling planetward.

WABBLING down on its nose jets, Feliz's ship tottered within a few feet of the ground, flipped, bounced, and stood upright. For a moment there was silence under the peaceful stars in the meadow, where the ship had landed; then slowly the hatch opened, and a battered Feliz crawled out to drop onto the turf with an ungracious grunt.

He looked at the sky. It was dark, of course, since he had come down on the night side of the world; but it shadowed a pleasant, warm summer night under conditions of near normal gravity; and a gentle wind was blowing. Feliz hitched up his baggy pants and went around to inspect the damage.

There was no moon in Dunroamin's sky, but the stars were bright. He discovered the explosion to have taken off about half of one of his stabilizer fins and jammed shut three of his main tubes. He could weld a new piece on

the fin, but the tubes were beyond his repairing. No matter; now that he knew which ones they were, he could alter his firing pattern to balance the thrust. The fin, of course, was only necessary during takeoff and landings in atmosphere, anyway.

He went back through the hatch; regretfully tore out one of the ship's few partitions; folded it lengthwise to get it through the hatch; and debouched once more on the turf with this in one hand and a welding torch in the other. He set about repairing the fin.

He was still occupied at this about an hour and a half later when the night sky began to pale. Casting a glance upward, Feliz became aware that he had not fallen as far inside the dark area of the planet as he had thought, and that daylight would be soon upon him. Congratulating himself on the fact that he had gotten to work on the fin promptly, he put a few final touches on the repair job; then, torch in hand, headed back toward the hatch, the controls, and Congerman. Hat or no hat, a world where antiquated space stations opened fire without warning was no place for him.

As he reached for the hatch to open it, however, he suddenly became fully aware of a sound he had been hearing

now for some time. It was a thin, recurrent little sound, which he had taken to be the ordinary ululation of some night creature, but which he recognized now—with a very definite sense of shock—to be the voice of some human crying. And, in fact, now that he listened closely, he became aware that the crier was a girl or at least a rather young woman—for, interspersed with the sobs were little comments—short and not uninteresting statements like “Oh dear—what will happen to me now—I’m so hungry—why couldn’t I stay adjusted?” and more of the like.

NOW THERE is nothing quite so disturbing to a man as the sight and sound of a woman crying. And even the sound is bad enough; there is something accusing and intensely irritating about it. The male feels in some way responsible, whether he is or not. He stands on one foot; he shuffles his feet. He feels like kicking something—preferably the woman who is doing the crying; but then we’re none of us stoneage savages nowadays, are we? Of course not. So the resentment of the man settles on whatever is causing her to cry in the first place; and he feels like kicking *it*. If the woman has deliberately maneuvered the situa-

tion so that he believes himself to be responsible, he feels like kicking himself; which is, of course, insupportable and a tribute to the woman's ingenuity.

In this particular case Feliz could feel pretty certain that he was not the one responsible for the unknown woman's tears; but the general feeling of being accused, remained. He reached for the hatch cover, let go for a second time, cursed under his breath, slammed down his welding torch; and went to look for the tearful one.

He found her within fifty feet, sitting on a rock and weeping into her hands. He stood over her for several minutes without being able to attract the slightest attention from her, until her repeated statements that she was hungry drove him back to the ship. He rummaged in the food locker and came out with an oversized protein sandwich. He let himself out of the hatch, tramped back to her and thrust it into her hands.

"Here, blast it!" he said.

The girl looked up in surprise, stared at the sandwich in her hands and burst into a fresh wail.

"Now I'm getting tactile hallucinations!" she choked.

"Hallucinations!" exploded Feliz. "That's real, you idiot! Taste it!"

For the first time, she really looked up at him; and in the first pale half-light of approaching day, Feliz could see that she was, indeed young; and, in fact, pretty. Blue eyes, somewhat reddened by the recent overactivity of her tear ducts, looked up at him from out of a pointed little face under a crown of fluffy hair—which, as far as Feliz could tell in that dim light, was a sort of pale blonde in color. She was dressed in sandals and a sort of striped cloak that half-covered a tunic and short skirt beneath.

"Oh, shut up!" she said. "If I hadn't paid any attentions to your h-hallucinations in the first place, I'd be in bed at home right now and I wouldn't have to be out here where nobody is—only I'm not here either—" and she trembled on the verge of going off again.

Feliz, with a great effort, restrained himself from arguing the question of his reality.

"What are you doing out here anyway?" he demanded.

"Where else can I go?" she sniffed dolefully. "I don't exist any more."

"You're out of your head," said Feliz, bluntly.

"No, I'm not," said the girl; "I'm out of my body, and that's worse." And she began to cry again.

"Quit that!" roared Feliz. And so effective was the volume of his voice that she did stop, staring up at him with a shocked expression.

"Look—" said Feliz, savagely. "Forget all this business about hallucinations and reality and tell me how you happen to be here."

"They disintegrated me because I kept seeing hallucinations," whimpered the girl. "Now nobody can see or hear me either—nobody real, that is."

Staring down at her, Feliz made up his mind. The girl was clearly insane, or the next thing to it. And on a backward planet like this with murderous space station operators there was no telling what they'd do with her. The best thing for him to do was to cart her along to Congerman, where they could treat her; the interstellar authorities could decide what was to be done with her after that.

"Here," he said, softening his voice, "you just come along with me—" And he reached for her. But before the thick ends of his fingers could touch her, she gave a sudden scream and tumbled backward off the stone in a frightened swirl of cloak and flashing limbs. Before he could move she had bounced to her feet and run off, still carrying the sandwich.

"Stop, dammit!" roared Feliz; and took off after her at a lumbering gallop.

II

THE MEADOW was surrounded by trees; and the girl vanished almost immediately into these. Feliz Gebrod charged after her, tripped over a root in the false and tricky dawn illumination, fell sprawling, caught a flickering flash of cloak somewhere farther back in the depths of the wood, got up and galloped on again, expecting every minute to come up with her and not doing so—until shortness of wind forced him to halt.

He stopped, leaned against a tree and snorted for breath. His body was built for power rather than speed, though for a short distance he could move very fast indeed. Panting, lungs heaving, he told himself that he was a brass-bound idiot; that the girl, insane or not, obviously knew how to take care of herself; that after all, this was her world—and it was all none of his business, anyway. The thing for him to do was forget her, return to the ship; and get out while the getting was still good.

But just where was the ship?

Jerked suddenly back to an appreciation of his surround-

ings, Feliz snapped upright, away from the tree trunk and looked about him. On all sides, leafy corridors stretched away into green dimness touched with brightness from the first rays of the sun. They all looked alike; they all looked like the way back to the ship. Feliz was lost.

This, thought Feliz, fuming furiously—some five minutes later, after casting around to pick up his bearings—was ridiculous. The ship must be just out of sight, in one direction or another; why, he hardly stepped away from it. To have lost his way in this baby forest! Feliz cursed savagely, then brought himself up short. Better to strike out at random than do nothing; damn that girl! He cast a despairing glance at the rising sun and slogged off in what he still hoped was the right direction.

After he had covered a little distance, however, it struck him that the trees he was passing looked definitely unfamiliar. After a pause to reconsider, he decided that the proper route led off to the right a little more, and altered his course accordingly.

Ten minutes later he changed it again.

Twenty minutes later he changed it for the fourth time.

An hour and a half later, completely bewildered, he was about to give up when he noticed that the trees seemed to be thinning out ahead. He plowed on, and, to his great relief, found that they did widen out and become sparser. They thinned and thinned, gave way to bushes of a rather sickening mauve color; and eventually Feliz emerged, to stand at the head of a gentle open slope. It ran away downhill to a small city below, hemmed about by wooded hills like the one he himself stood upon. To his right, a low, rustic stone wall marched down the tilt of the slope; and seated on the wall was a venerable gentleman in a scarlet kilt and tunic, with a long, white beard tucked into the belt at his waist.

"Greetings and good morning," said this oldster.

Feliz turned to look at him, half expecting that this one, too, would show indications of insanity. But the old man's eyes were bright and sensible. "Something about me surprises you?" he inquired, noting the suspicion in Feliz's stare.

"I just met a woman with a bad psychosis," said Feliz; "I was wondering about you."

The old man gave forth with a delightful chuckle. "Did you really?" he asked, the wrinkles dancing merrily around his old eyes as they

crinkled with his laughter. "Well, you needn't worry about me. I'm perfectly adjusted." He sobered suddenly. "Pity more of us aren't. In fact—" he indicated the city below. "I'm the mayor down there."

"You are, huh?" said Feliz, becoming suddenly wary.

"Yes, indeed," he got up and slipped one long, thin arm through Feliz's. "Hoska's the name; El Hoska. Come on down and meet my people. We see visitors so seldom."

"That's not surprising," grunted Feliz, thinking of the space station. "But," he added, restraining the mayor by the simple expedient of keeping his near three hundred pounds of bone and muscle planted solidly on motionless feet, "I've got to get back to my ship."

"That's too bad," said the mayor, releasing him. "However, if you must, you must. I will, though, be proud to tell people you passed by; would you care to give your name and profession?"

FELIZ, CAUGHT in a cleft stick, hesitated. To identify himself, might involve him with whatever authorities were concerned with the space station. On the other hand, refusal to identify yourself and or giving a false identity to local authorities was

an interstellar crime. He compromised with half an answer. "I'm a knowledge trader," he said.

"But this is magnificent!" cried El Hoska. "You positively *must* stay. You must come down and get acquainted. This is something entirely new. What is a knowledge trader?"

Feliz explained briefly.

"Just what we need worst!" cried the delighted mayor. "I am so delighted, I must express myself. Excuse me, but we don't believe in bottling up the emotions, here; I think I'll stand on my head."

He did so, skinny old legs waving in the air. It was an unlovely sight.

"Not bad for a man my age, eh?" he said, panting somewhat as he came upright again. "You should try it."

"Well, I've got to be going," gulped Feliz, firmly convinced by this latest act of lunacy that Dunroamin was no world for him. He started off, only to discover that—after a few strides toward the woods—his legs turned him firmly around and headed him back toward the city below.

"Hey!" yelled Feliz. "What are you doing to me?"

"The will of one is the will of all," said the mayor, coming up to walk gravely alongside him. "The desires of our community, their corporate

will, is expressed through me. We are a simple people—" he continued modestly, as Feliz's captive feet continued to carry him on down the slope. "Though we live in the city, we are not of it. A clean mind—"

"I'll sue!" roared Feliz, furiously.

"—in a sound body are our only necessities, which is why you had the luck to bump into me on the hillside this morning. I had come up here to do my deep-breathing exercises. With a spiritual return to nature, has come a harmony between the flesh and the spirit which—"

He rambled on as they continued on down the hill, his bright old eyes agleam, his ancient voice expounding the philosophy of a natural life with the simple-hearted warmth of a gentle fanatic. While, captive by whatever psi faculty the old man controlled, Feliz strolled beside him, his feet obediently marching and his own tongue obediently dumb. And who could say that there was murder in his heart?

"Here," said the mayor, "you see our public square." He indicated a plastic-floored area with a wide sweep of his hand. Scowling, but helpless, Feliz was forced to look it over. It was almost deserted

within its ring of low buildings, except for a few individuals dressed in bright colors like the old man, their clothes also cut like his and like the girl's he had seen earlier. Occasionally, a man in the black tunic-and-breeches costume of the men in the space station marched from one building across to another. But these paid no attention to the colorful strollers; or they to the black-clad individuals.

"Wait here," said the mayor, and Feliz felt the compulsion withdrawn from him. "Wander about and notice the fallen grandeur of these ancient buildings, now long ignored and mostly fallen into disuse. Meanwhile I will gather a few people that I am sure you will enjoy." And he skipped away.

Feliz shook himself, feeling the compulsion which had held him depart from his rebellious body. He scowled, wondering at the power the fantastic old mayor wielded. There were supposed to be a few isolated cultures on the settled worlds who had matured in a psi sense to the point where such shenanigans were possible. Feliz had never bumped into any such before. He cut speculation suddenly short in favor of action; the thing for him to do was get out of this city while his feet still obeyed him. He turned on

his heel and almost ran head-on into two of the black-clad men, who were carrying nightsticks in their hand.

"How did you sneak in here?" shouted one. "Spy, you're under arrest."

"But I—" began Feliz.

"Oh, resisting arrest, eh?" roared the other. And the two nightsticks descended as one on Feliz's head.

As he blacked out, Feliz's last thought was that Congerman was evidently not the only planet in the galaxy where it appeared to be advisable for the casual visitor to wear a good, thick, hat.

SPLASH! Feliz snorted water out of his nose and shook his head to clear it. His brain exploded in a piercing pain that faded suddenly to a steady, heavy ache; he blinked his eyes and looked around to discover that he was seated on a hard chair in an ornate black-walled office, facing a desk and a black-uniformed man behind it, flanked on both sides by the boys with the nightsticks.

"All right, spy!" grated the man at the desk. "Talk!"

Feliz sat up in his chair. With a movement of theatrical swiftness, the man whipped out a needle gun and pointed its slim snout across the desk top at Feliz. "Sit still!" he snapped. "Any

tricks and you will be shot."

Feliz stared at him in bewilderment. All three of the men in black wore looks of suspicion upon their tight faces; but the one in the center, there was no doubt, seemed to carry his the most naturally. He was a tall, thin man, with a long, oval face. His nose was fleshy, his lips thick, and a little parted when he breathed. Dark eyes looked out from under untidy brows.

"I'm not a spy," growled Feliz, feeling his dander rising.

"You are a spy!" asserted the man at the desk. "Don't lie to me, spy. If you lie, you will be shot; I will give you three seconds to start telling the truth. One, two—"

"You tin-whistle idiot!" roared Feliz. "I'm a perfectly legitimate knowledge trader."

"Now we're getting someplace," snapped the needle-gunner. "You admit to being a knowledge trader."

"What d'you mean, admit—" Feliz was beginning, when the other interrupted.

"Violence does not impress me," he said. "You must prove yourself. For all I know, you may be lying when you say you are a knowledge trader. Prove yourself; explain to me what knowledge trading is."

"Oh," said Feliz, beginning to scent a rat in the woodpile.

However, just to be on the safe side, he gave a straightforward description of his work.

"That is correct," said the man behind the desk, when he was finished. "You are exonerated on one count of spying. Now—"

But Feliz, in the process of explaining himself, had found time to think. And now he spoke up. "Listen," he interrupted. "Maybe your men didn't notice it when they picked me up, but I had just finished talking to your mayor—"

The slight good impression Feliz had seem to have produced with the explanation of his work, vanished immediately.

"Mayor!" shouted the central figure opposite him. "What is this nonsense? What lies are these? There is no mayor in this city. There is only the Controller—me—Taki Manoai. Talk to me of mayors and I'll have you shot."

"Well, he called himself a mayor," growled Feliz. "An old gink in a red kilt and tunic."

"Enough of such deviationist talk!" stormed the Controller. "Kilts are decadent; tunics are forbidden. The aberrant strain that pretended to see different shades in the One Color Black, eradicated

itself from this planet years ago."

"Look around you, Bub—" began Feliz; but that was as far as he got. Then Controller began to foam at the mouth; and nightsticks approached...

FELIZ NURSED his aching head and contemplated a bowl of synthetic gruel that sat before him. It was the first jail he had been in where a small bribe slipped to the jailer could not manage to arrange a few palatable additions to the ordinary diet. The turnkey in this case had merely looked blank when Feliz had mentioned protein steak.

"What kind of machine does that come out of?" he had inquired.

"The same machine as this," said Feliz.

"No it don't," said the guard. "I been watching that thing for years and the only thing that come out was gruel."

"You nitwit!" roared Feliz, "you've got to change the settings."

"Nunh-uh," said the guard, backing away. "You don't get me to commit no sabotage."

Now, for some hours, Feliz and his bowl of gruel had been left severely alone. He got up now from his cot and stepped over, with an intention of test-

ing his strength against the bars that formed the front of his cell. He could handle most ordinary metal, provided it was not too thick—but these upright shafts seemed to have a particularly tough core. They gave a little, but sprang back into shape. Through the high-barred window of his cell, he could see that night was drawing on. If he could find a soft spot in his cell, and vigilance was sufficiently relaxed during the dark hours, there was a chance he could break out of here. And then—head for the ship and wide open space.

The chances looked good. For a number of hours now, no jailer had approached him; and as far as he could see down the corridor both ways, the cells about him to be deserted. In fact, as far as he had been able to discover, he was the only prisoner in the whole jail building. This situation, if true, was fantastic, but no more so than a host of other things that Feliz was learning to accept as the norm for this screwy world.

The daylight was dwindling and the lights (evidently thousand-year automatics) waxed into brightness to take its place. Feliz eyed the closest glowing spot and calculated whether a well-thrown shoe could put it out of commission.

III

A TIMID little voice said, "Pardon me. Are you really not an hallucination?"

Feliz Gebrod jumped like a startled elephant; he had been certain that he was alone in this part of the building. He jerked his head to the left, and saw, peering at him from the corridor around the wall that separated his cell from the one on its left, the face of the girl in the woods.

"You!" bellowed Feliz, bounding to his feet.

The face jerked back. Feliz rushed to the bars, and, craning his neck, stared down the corridor to his left. He was just able to make her out, shrinking against the bars of the cell next door.

"Come here," ordered Feliz, in the impatient tone of voice people use on a lost puppy when they want to look at the owner's name on its collar, and the pup, not understanding, is shy.

She shook her head.

"Damn it, come here!" said Feliz impatiently; "I won't bite you. Don't you know I can't get through these bars." He shook them—but carefully—to emphasize his point.

Shyly, she approached.

"Are you sure you aren't an hallucination?"

"Do I look like one?" demanded Feliz, exasperated.

"Oh, yes," answered the girl. "You aren't wearing the right kind of clothes for a real person at all."

Feliz stared at her.

"And what kind of clothes would that be?" he asked at length.

"You know," said the girl.

"No, I *don't* know," gritted Feliz, maintaining, a stranglehold on his temper, by heroic effort.

"Why, the kind of clothes I'm wearing," said the girl. "Kilt and tunic. Of course, your things are brown instead of black; that's one of the reasons I came after you."

Feliz hung on the bars, helplessly. "Thank you," he said weakly. "And what're some of the other reasons?"

She blushed. "There's really only one," she said.

Feliz looked at her, puzzled.

"I'm ashamed to admit it," she squirmed. Feliz began to feel a little uncomfortable himself. "—But when I bit into it—"

"You *what?*" cried Feliz.

"Well, after all, there's nothin' more natural than that you would have a hallucination about something you want very much," said the girl, suddenly speaking very rapidly, "and if there was anything I badly wanted, it was something to eat. Who would

have thought there was food of that shape and color and taste that you gave me? —I mean, I didn't realize it was food at first; but after I ran away with you and found I still had it in my hands, I couldn't resist taking a bite because I was so hungry, and it tasted good and I ate it all—" she ran down suddenly and went back to looking embarrassed again "—and I'm not hungry any more."

"Ye gods," said Feliz in a hopeless tone, collapsing on the cot in his cell.

"Oh, are you all right?" cried the girl, with a sudden rush of anxiousness.

"Superb," said Feliz, faintly. He breathed deeply for a couple of minutes, shook himself and stood up again. "Look, can you help me get out of here?"

She nodded.

"Go ahead, then," said Feliz. She moved up to the barred door of his cell and fiddled with it, apparently working some kind of combination from the outside. Eventually it swung open.

Feliz came out. "Fine," he said. "Thanks. Now let's go. It's a long way back to the ship." He started off down the corridor.

"No, it isn't," said the girl, half-running to keep up with his long strides.

"Hah!" said Feliz. "Don't

tell me—I've been through those woods."

"Yes, but you went all crooked," said the girl. "I was watching you. Actually, if you go straight, it's not more than fifteen minutes from the city."

She was right, of course.

FELIZ HELPED the girl through the hatch, and then entered himself. "Mother of Mephis! I could eat a horse and then sleep for a week."

"You could? What's a horse?" asked the girl. Feliz looked at her.

"Ever hear of an accelerated metabolism?" he said. She shook her head. "Well, it's what I've got," said Feliz. "In other words, I need a lot of food and sleep."

"Oh," said the girl.

"Yes, oh," said Feliz, opening the food locker, extracting handfuls of comestibles and piling them on the control room table. He seated himself on a stool and sank his teeth into a three inch hunk of pre-cooked protein steak. "Help yourself," he mumbled.

The girl poked interestedly at the stuff on the table.

"What funny food," she marveled.

"Fummy?" echoed Feliz around a mouthful of steak. "What's fummy about it?" The girl did not answer. He swallowed convulsively. "What do you eat?"

"Natural things," she answered. "Nature's bounty. Fruits and nuts and roots. We find them in the woods."

"How come you were so hungry when I met you, then?" demanded Feliz. The girl hung her head.

"I didn't know where to look," she said; "the old people always did the food hunting."

"I see," said Feliz, severely and was about to add to it by suggesting that she let that be a lesson to her, when a certain native caution silenced him. It never does any harm in cases like this, he reflected sagely, to hold your tongue.

"You should have stolen some of that synthetic gunk they handed out to me in the jail," he said.

"Oh that." She shuddered. "That's what the hallucinations eat."

"Hallucinations!" barked Feliz—this was a sore spot with him. "Don't start that again!"

"Oh, I'm so mixed up," wailed the girl. She seemed to be on the verge of dissolving into tears again. "Hold it—" said Feliz, hastily. "Hold it. Maybe I can help you. Suppose you fill me in on the whole business from the beginning."

The girl sniffed a few times, but willpower won out over waterpower.

"Well, I'm an artist," she said, and looked at Feliz as if that explained everything. Chewing an opportune mouthful, he waved at her to continue.

"—I mean we're all artists, of course, in the sense that we choose one means or another for creative self-expression. But I mean I'm a painter of the Neo-Classic school of expression." Feliz's eyebrows went up in a mute question. "Oh, that's right, you wouldn't know about that. The Neo-Classic school believes in Interpretative Representationalism."

Feliz's eyebrows remained up. "You know!" said the girl, exasperatedly. "Well, you know what representational painting is, anyway, don't you? When you see a house, you paint a house; it's like making a print of it. Well, Interpretative Representationalism is where you represent the house exactly as it is, but through the modified use of color, and the addition of detail, you interpret the essential personalo-creative essential and make it manifest."

FELIZ'S eyebrows came down, defeated. "Never mind," he groaned.

"But you don't understand," the girl rushed on, "it was all right for a while; but after a time I began painting in things that weren't there."

"The hallucinations, I suppose," said Feliz with heavy irony.

"Yes," she signed. "And then, of course, I started seeing them." Her eyes clouded up again. "Oh, I knew it was an aberrant pattern; I knew my adjustment was slipping. But like a fool I closed my eyes to the facts. A fool!" The note of high tragedy in her voice rang a little tinny and practised at the end, and she glanced sideways at Feliz to see how he was taking it. "Don't you think so?" she inquired.

"Damned if I know," said Feliz, unhelpfully. He loosened his belt and pushed the rest of the food away from him. "Now for a short session of sleep."

"But I'm not finished," she protested.

"Oh," yawned Feliz. Sleep was really overpowering him now, and he had to fight to keep his eyes open. "Go on."

"Well, sooner or later it was bound to slip," the girl went on. "Every day I expected to give myself away about what I was seeing. I remember one day I was talking to Esi Malto—she's a girl friend of mine—and she said to me, 'How's the painting coming?' and I said to her..." Feliz dozed off, hearing her voice fade into a drone and then into nothingness.

"—Bang! And so I was disintegrated!"

Feliz sat up with a jerk.

"What? Wh—" abruptly he remembered what had been going on. He licked his lips and swallowed to clear his mouth, which seemed to be filled with the kind of fuzz that collects in corners and under beds. "I tell you what, kid; let me sleep on it." He shoved himself to his feet, staggered across the control room, into the cabin and fell on the left hand bunk.

"Why don't you catch a few winks yourself?" he said; and tumbled off into the deep, deep, bottomless, all-obliterating well of slumber.

When he woke it was daylight again, with sunbeams coming in through the open hatch and casting their reflection through the cabin door, on the wall above his bunk. Filled with a sudden alarm at his carelessness, Feliz thrust himself from the bunk, stumbled to the controls and closed and locked the hatch; then, dropping into the control room pilot's chair with a heavy sigh, he sat back to give himself a chance to wake up. Out of sight behind him, he heard the girl, singing some local song full of odd tremolos and repetitions. He painfully craned his neck around and looked at her. She was

drawing something in his logbook. Suddenly he remembered the shower off the cabin; getting up, he staggered back and fell into it.

After blasting himself first with hot water, then cold, he became sufficiently awake to feel comfortable again. He stepped out of the shower, dressed, and returned to the control room. The girl was still at it. From somewhere she had produced a stick of charcoal and was sketching the figure of a man. Feliz looked closer. It was himself, stretched out on the lefthand bunk and dead to the world. He opened his mouth to protest and then closed it again.

"How do you like it?" asked the girl, turning around.

"I'd like it better if it wasn't in my logbook," growled Feliz. And then, as the girl's face fell— "Never mind, I'm sure the port inspectors will understand." He rubbed his hands together. "Well! How about some breakfast."

"I ate last night," said the girl. "After you went to sleep. Are you hungry *again*?"

"Got to keep my strength up," said Feliz jovially; turning to the food locker, "we've got a long trip ahead of us to Congerman."

"To Congerman?" echoed the girl.

"Why, yes," replied Feliz,

"you see, I figure—" he let go of the locker door handle suddenly and turned. He walked across to the controls, unlocked and opened the hatch. He started to walk toward the open hatch.

THE GIRL stared at him. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," yelled Feliz, climbing out the hatch. "Stop me!"

He reached the ground; and, turning his head toward the distant city, started to walk off. "Help!" he yelled.

The girl scrambled out of the hatch and hurried after him. "Are you under compulsion?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes!" roared Feliz. "Do something!"

The girl wrung her hands. "There isn't anything I can do," she said. "How did you ever get put under compulsion?"

"I met that old unmentionable that calls himself your mayor!" snarled Feliz, his face reddening from the fight he was putting up against the coercion that was being exercised upon him. "The misbegotten, unclean article of refuse did this to me once before."

"Oh, dear," said the girl, "El Hoska is awfully severe. He's the one who decided I had to be disintegrated."

Feliz turned his head side-

ways with an effort to look at her. "What's that?" he asked in sudden alarm.

The girl's lower lip began to quiver at the memory. "He said I had become so greatly maladjusted that there was no hope of correcting me; and that I was a danger to the community." She choked. "He said he'd have to disintegrate me. Then he snapped his fingers. And bang, just like that, I ceased to exist."

"What do you mean?" barked Feliz. "Ceased to exist? You're existing now, aren't you?"

"You're the only one who thinks so," said the girl; "nobody else can see or feel me. And maybe we're both hallucinations."

Feliz grunted in supreme scorn, but conserved his breath and put his mind to work on the situation he now found himself in.

They had been following almost a straight line through the woods. Now they came out near the stone wall where Feliz had met El Hoska before; and sure enough, here he was again, beaming all over his bony, ancient face.

"Good morning, good morning," he cried, as Feliz marched up to him. "I hope you had a pleasant night."

The compulsion ceased abruptly; Feliz, by a great effort of will restrained his nat-

ural impulse to pick up the skinny mayor and break him in half. "Marvelous," he gritted from between clenched teeth. He looked from the mayor to the girl and back again. "You two know each other, I suppose?"

"I beg your pardon," said El Hoska, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"The girl here," roared Feliz, jerking a thumb at her. "The one you disintegrated, remember?"

"But there is nobody here but the two of us," said El Hoska; and the girl began to sob quietly. Suddenly the mayor's face saddened. "You wouldn't—" he began. "You haven't possibly heard of the girl named Kai Miri, who I was forced to disintegrate a few days ago? Would that be who you mean?"

"Well, for the love of Memphis!" cried Feliz. "She's standing right in front of you."

"Now, now," soothed the mayor, paying no attention to Kai Miri at all, "you are obviously a maladjusted young man. Look at the matter logically. When she was disintegrated, the atoms of which she was composed were scattered over a tremendous area, and the natural air-currents will have dispersed them further. Don't you see that it would be impossible to collect them

all together again in one spot, even if by doing so you could put them back the way they were and restore her to life?"

Kai Miri began to sob even louder at the thought of the wide acres over which her atoms had been distributed by the natural air-currents.

"Never mind, never mind," condoled Feliz, reaching an awkward hand over to pat her shoulder comfortingly.

"Tch, tch," clicked the mayor, his eyes on Feliz's pawing hand. "You must let me give you some counselling, my boy; you have a bad hallucination there."

"I'm leaving," said Feliz.

"But you mustn't!" cried the mayor. "Really, we must insist that you stay. There's something we need badly that only you can do for us."

"What?" demanded Feliz, suspiciously.

THE MAYOR folded his skinny hands complacently over the white sheaf of his beard. "As I told you previously," he began in a fond tone, "we have passed through and beyond the stage of a mechanical civilization, sloughing off those maladjusted minds which would have retarded our development some centuries back. We have little use for the city nowadays. Although some of us still sleep and gather in its quaint old halls—"

"Ever been in its quaint old jail?" inquired Feliz, nastily.

"Pardon?" said the mayor.

"Nothing—" said Feliz. "Go on."

"—But we do retain a fondness for one part of it—and that is the public square to which I led you yesterday. There, many of us still love to gather in the sun and hold intelligent conversations. Now—" he paused and squinted roughly at Feliz, "after I left you yesterday, a thought struck me. The one thing needed to perfect the square for our purposes. The sun and the air—two of the three parts of nature are there—but where is the water? In short, what we need in the square is a pool with a tinkling fountain in its center."

"You do?" said Feliz, coldly.

"Exactly," answered the mayor with satisfaction. "And since all of us have passed beyond the knowledge of mechanical things, it occurred to me that you, being of a more primitive order, would be the very man to construct such a pool and fountain."

"Thanks," said Feliz.

"You're welcome," said El Hoska.

"But no thanks," said Feliz, "as I told you I'm leaving."

"But we couldn't permit that," said the mayor, with a

shake of his head, "no, we couldn't permit that at all."

"Gonna make me build you a fountain, huh?" growled Feliz, his ample jaw jutting dangerously.

"Certainly not!" Shocked horror showed on the old man's face. "I know you will be glad to do this, if you only give yourself time to think it over. Merely let me insist that you be our guest until such time as you make up your mind."

"I've already made up my mind," said Feliz.

"No, no," corrected the old man. "You just *think* you've made up your mind." He relaxed, beaming. "But, enough of business for one day. Come with me to the square."

"Charmed," gritted Feliz, as his legs began, willy-nilly, to carry him down the slope alongside El Hoska.

Kai Miri timidly brought up the rear.

They halted on the edge of the square. "Within this city," said the mayor, "you will find inspiration."

"That's not all I'll find," said Feliz. Two of the black uniformed men crossing the area had just spotted him and were now approaching at a run. One was a tall, unhappy-looking man with a watery nose, which he wiped on his sleeve as he ran. The other was short and fat. Both drew

their sidearms as they approached.

"True," replied El Hoska, obliviously. "The city will undoubtedly make its impact upon you in other ways."

"Halt, jailbreaker!" shouted the tall man with the runny nose as he skidded to a halt, covering Feliz with his weapon. "Make a move and you will be shot. Come with me."

"Us," said the short man.

"Us," agreed the tall one.

"I'd like to, boys," said Feliz, "but the old gent here has a mind clamp on me."

"What nonsense is this?" demanded the tall man. "Come at once!"

"Excuse me," said Feliz to El Hoska, "I've got to go."

"Go where?" asked the mayor.

"Wherever these ginks want to take me," said Feliz.

THE MAYOR stared blankly at and through the two uniformed men.

"Young man," he said firmly, to Feliz, "you are obviously badly maladjusted. I would be remiss in my human duty if I did not begin counselling you at once with a view toward returning your mind to a better state of health. You are obviously seeing things. Sit down and relax, now, and let your mind go blank—"

Feliz tried with all his will to fight the compulsion as his

knees folded beneath him and he sank to the ground.

"What obstructionist tactics are these?" shouted the tall man, wiping his nose. "Get up at once, fugitive, or you will be shot!"

"Kai!" called Feliz, desperately.

"Yes?" quavered the girl.

"Can you see these boys with the guns?"

"They were the first hallucinations to obsess me," she sighed.

"Well they're about to obsess me for keeps unless I go with them," yelped Feliz. "Will you kindly clunk the old man over the head with something so I can get loose."

Kai looked doubtful; but took off her right sandal. It had a thick wooden sole, which connected with the mayor's head with a satisfying noise. El Hoska sagged like an empty sack; Feliz, leaping to his feet, literally hurried his captors out of the square, leaving Kai looking down at El Hoska with an odd, pleased expression on her pretty face.

They whisked around a corner and into a building that Feliz did not remember having seen before. An escalator rose before them, but it did not seem to be moving; they went up its steps as if it had been an ordinary stair.

On the second floor was a long hallway. Some distance

down this, the tall man and the short directed Feliz off to the right, into a smaller corridor, which led through a door into a lofty and somewhat overfurnished apartment. Standing by a table with a glass of purple liquid in his hand was the man who called himself City Controller, Taki Manoai.

At the sight of Feliz, his face lit up. "Ah, so you've recaptured him," he said to the two men. "Good."

He turned to Feliz. "What have you to say for yourself, spy?" he demanded. "You broke out of our jail. Jailbreakers—"

"I know," interrupted Feliz, wearily, "jailbreakers are shot. Never mind about that now. The important thing is that at any moment now I may try to get away again; and I'd appreciate it if you restrained me, firmly but—ah, gently."

Taki Manoai scowled. "What is this farce?" he inquired. "If you do not wish to leave, why should you try to leave? Besides, if you do we will shoot you."

"Look," said Feliz desperately, "you don't understand. The man who calls himself the mayor of the people in colored clothes—"

"Silence!" shrieked the Controller. "You are aberrant. Mayors. People in colored clothes. There are no such

things; there is nobody here but us."

IV

BEHIND Feliz Gebrod, the door made an opening and shutting noise; Kai Miri came into the room. None of the three men paid the slightest attention to her.

"Oh, there you are," she said, to Feliz. "I was afraid I wouldn't find you. El Hoska thinks he had a brain-stroke and he's not going to try to locate you mentally until his headache goes away. He's gone home to lie down and rest his head. Some of the real people are looking for you physically, though. But they went off toward your ship, so you're all right for now."

"All right!" exploded Feliz. "All right—when these people here may blow my head off at any minute?"

Kai Miri looked doubtfully at the other three men. "I suppose they could, at that," she admitted slowly. "I'm so used to thinking of them as unreal, it's hard to take them seriously."

The Controller had been shouting at Feliz during this conversation. Now Felix turned to him to see what it was he wanted.

"—and stop talking to empty air. I command you!" the Controller was thundering. "If

I were a mentally weak person, it would be very disturbing. Stop it immediately; that's a direct order."

"All right," said Feliz, mildly.

The Controller stopped shouting and mopped his brow. "That's better," he said in a normal tone of voice. He gulped thirstily from the drink in his hand. "I'll teach you to obey orders. Now sit down; I want to talk to you."

Feliz took the indicated chair and the Controller flopped into one facing it. He set down his empty glass on the desk beside him.

"What about?" asked Feliz.

"Silence," barked the Controller. "I am not going to talk *with* you, I am going to talk *to* you. Your function is to listen and obey."

"Or else I get shot," said Feliz.

"Exactly," said the Controller. He blinked at Feliz; and then glared at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," said Feliz, innocently. "It's the truth, isn't it?"

"Everything I say is the truth," snarled the Controller.

Kai Miri had disappeared through a door into the interior of the apartment. Now she returned, staggering slightly under the weight of a huge, ornate vase, with sharp, metallic corners.

"Shall I clunk him over the head with it?" she asked, taking up her station behind the Controller's chair.

"No!" shouted Feliz, casting a sudden apprehensive glance at the weapons which still covered him in the hands of the tall man and the short.

Disappointed, she lowered the vase to the floor and sat on it. The Controller waved his fist in front of Feliz's nose, foaming at the mouth.

"Do you dare to contradict me?" he shouted.

"Slip of the tongue," said Feliz, hastily.

"It better not slip again," said the Controller, ominously. "Listen and obey; you are full of knowledge about new inventions, aren't you?"

"More or less," said Feliz, cautiously.

"Well, I happen to need your abilities at the moment," said the Controller. "Only when everybody works for the good of all, can good for all be obtained. Since universal good is the universal desire of the general populace, it follows that everybody wants to work for the good of all at all times. But since the individual suffers from human weakness, it follows that a constant reminder of what is universal good would be a great help. Now I want you to build me a reminder which will keep everybody aware of what they

ought to be doing at all times."

Feliz scratched his head. "Just what did you have in mind?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll leave the details up to you," said the Controller, waving his hand, airily. "Just don't take more than three days building it, or you will be shot."

"But," protested Feliz, "I've got to have a clearer picture of what you want."

"It should be obvious," glowered the Controller. "A job for everybody and everybody at his job—that's what I want."

"Tote that barge, lift that bale, eh?" said Feliz.

"What's that?" demanded the Controller sharply.

"Just something out of history," answered Feliz.

"It better be," said the Controller. "I don't like the sound of it." He glared at Feliz. "I want something to make people work."

"Sort of a compulsion gadget?"

"Exactly," said the Controller. "Build it immediately."

"There's only one drawback," said Feliz; "it may look a little like a fountain in the city square when it's finished."

"Drawbacks are prohibited," snapped the Controller. "Make it look like something else."

"If I do, it won't work," said Feliz. "But maybe it

wouldn't be such a drawback at that. Think of the advantages. Nobody would realize it was a compulsion unit; they'd take it for a thing of beauty."

"I don't know if I approve of beauty," scowled the Controller. "Sounds a little bit as if it might distract people from their work. But, if it has to look like a fountain, go ahead. Men—"

The tall and the short of it, who had been guarding Feliz all this time with drawn guns, snapped to attention.

"—Take the spy out and shoo—I mean, give him every facility he needs to complete his job," said the Controller.

They went out, Kai Miri following.

THE MAN with the watery nose, sniffled, "Well spy," when they were once more outside the apartment building. "What sort of stuff do you want to start work with? Answer immediately."

"You go to hell," replied Feliz, gently. The man with the watery nose stared at him. "Be nice to me," Feliz went on, "or I'll report you to the Controller in there for not cooperating." He leered at the two uniformed individuals. "Well, how about it?"

"Yes sir," said the man with the watery nose, nervously; and a murmur from his short

companion echoed the sentiment.

"That's better," said Feliz. "Now, I'll tell you what we're going to do. One of you is going to walk about ten yards ahead of me and point out the way; the other is going to walk about ten yards behind and bring up the rear. You may hear me talking to myself from time to time, but don't let it disturb you; I'll just be working out my plans."

Feliz glared at them to make sure that there was no opposition to this arrangement; but it seemed that his threat about the Controller had settled their relative positions once and for all. In fact, the two men seemed rather glad to be back in the normal position of taking orders, rather than giving them.

"Yes sir, where to sir?" said the tall man, sniffing.

"To your power machine warehouse," replied Feliz. "I've got to see what you've got in the way of equipment for this job."

They led off.

As they went down the street, Feliz reached back for Kai Miri, who was lagging behind him, caught hold of a corner of her cloak and drew her up level with him. "Now listen," he said tensely. "It's high time you and I got down to some facts—"

"There's something you've

got to tell me first," she interrupted.

"What?" said Feliz, remembering at the last minute not to shout his exasperation.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"I told you my name," he said.

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"No, you didn't."

"Didn't I?"

"No."

"Well, for the sake of sweet Mephis! It's Feliz Gebrod; I don't know why you had to wait until just now, when time is short, to ask me that."

"I like it."

"Like what?"

"Your name."

"Ye Gods!" bellowed Feliz, raising his fists to the sky (his two man escort jumped and cringed). "Will you stop maundering on about my name? I'm trying to talk about something important." He took a deep breath. "Now tell me. How long have your bunch and this outfit in black been ignoring each other?"

"Names are important," said Kai. "Ignoring each other?"

"You know what I mean," Feliz said.

Kai sobered suddenly; and a little fear came creeping into her eyes. "Nobody's ever paid any attention to hallucinations," she said. "Nobody. Except—except," her voice

stumbled, "maybe the children."

"The children?" demanded Feliz.

"When you're very young, you see hallucinations all the time," she answered. "But when you get older, they disappear." This reminded her of her own tragedy. "Except in my case," she quivered.

"How long have children been seeing them?" asked Feliz.

"Why," said Kai, "ever since the world began, I suppose. For thousands of years."

"Great Mother!" ejaculated Feliz, in astonishment, looking at her. "Don't you know your history only goes back about four hundred years?"

"Why, it does not!" cried Kai. "The world is millions of years old. If you knew any geology, you'd realize that, yourself." And she stamped on ahead, prettily angry.

FELIZ took two long strides and caught up with her. "Sure," he said, "sure, about three billion years to be exact. But it wasn't colonized—none of the worlds in this sector of the galaxy was colonized by the human race until about five hundred years ago."

"Oh, don't be silly," said Kai, disgustedly. "How could we have reached such a high level of civilization in a thou-

sand years. We're *much* more advanced than a mechanical savage like yourself."

"Who in the name of all that's natural said you'd reached a high level of civilization?" shouted Feliz. The guard behind stopped to fasten his bootstrap; the one ahead quickened his pace. Prudent men, both.

"Isn't it obvious?" she said. "We have, unlike you, passed beyond the need for mechanical things. We have gone back to nature on a higher plane, where material elements are not necessary."

"Oh no?" snapped Feliz. He reached out and grabbed a handful of her cloak. "Look at this. Cast plastic. The same material my clothes are made of. The same material that goes into the uniforms these black-dressed monkeys wear." His last sentence drove all the color from her face. She swayed and would have fallen if he had not caught her.

"Here—" said Feliz, overwhelmed. "What's the matter? Stand up."

With an effort she regained her feet; but she walked beside him, trembling. "Don't ever say that," she whispered. "You make me go sick all over when you say that. Their clothes aren't like ours. They're nothing like us; they're hallucinations!"

"You know better than

that," said Feliz, brutally, and she all but collapsed. "Sweet Mephis!" said Feliz. "What gets into you when I point out similarities between you and them?"

"I don't know," she whimpered.

THEY walked along in silence for a while. Then something occurred to Feliz. He shouted to the tall man ahead to wait and caught up with him.

"What's your name?" asked Feliz.

"Og Lokman, sir," sniffled the guard.

"Well, well, Og Lokman," said Feliz, with a side glance at Kai. "That's a fine old name."

"Do you think so, sir?" said Og, doubtfully. "I invented it myself when name-choosing time came around."

"That so?" said Feliz, in quick recovery. "At what age do they choose names around here?"

("Do you choose names where you come from?" asked Kai, looking at Feliz.)

("Certainly not," said Feliz. *"I'm just gaining his confidence.")*

"Beg pardon, sir?" said Og.

"I didn't hear your answer," said Feliz. Og cleared his throat and spoke forcefully, if somewhat adenoidally.

"I said—twelve years old, sir," he replied.

"Before that, I suppose you're in school, learning things," said Feliz.

"Oh, yes sir," said Og enthusiastically. "We sing—" and without further warning, he broke into a tune:

*"All hail to the Controller
Whoever he may be
And hail to the beautiful
black
Only color I can see."*

"Little nonsense rhymes like that, sir," said Og, dropping suddenly back into prose. "A lot of them don't make any sense—I mean—since black's the only color, how could you see any other kind anyhow. But we play games and dance to them. It improves our coordination."

"But don't you have any history courses?" asked Feliz.

"Oh, yes sir," said Og; and began to recite. "History began with the first Controller. His name was Upi Havo and he was a good man. He improved the lot of the people, and died full of years. The second Controller—"

"How long ago was this first Controller?" interrupted Feliz.

"Two hundred and thirty-eight years, sir," said Og; "before that was Chaos."

"Chaos?" echoed Feliz.

"Yessir," said Og. "The planet was colonized four hundred years ago, but the first two hundred years there was nothing but Chaos, because the world was full of aberrant people." He waved his thin hands in a wide arc. "All the city here was built during Chaos. A terrible time." He shuddered.

"Why?" asked Feliz.

Og looked puzzled. "Why?" he repeated. "I—er—couldn't tell you exactly. It just was. Everybody knows that."

"Tell me," said Feliz, drawing closer to the man confidentially. Og drew back in some apprehension; but Feliz clamped a powerful hand on his wrist and dragged him close. "Tell me, just between the two of us—do you ever see things?"

Beads of sweat burst out on Og's forehead and his knees buckled.

"No, no!" he cried, in a high-pitched, terrified voice. "I never see anything. Never! Never!"

"Come now," growled Feliz, shaking him annoyedly. "Tell the truth. I'm not like the rest of you, you know; I know you see things. I see things myself; that's why I know."

"No!" screamed Og. "I see nothing. Absolutely nothing. Even when I was a child, I didn't see people in impos-

sible-colored clothes like the other children did. I never have glimpses of people; I don't ever feel anyone near me. I'm perfectly adjusted, I tell you. Perfectly!"

"All right," said Feliz, disgustedly. He let go of the man and Og staggered ahead, intent on putting as much space between them as Feliz' order had allowed.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Feliz, turning to Kai. "I—" he stopped. She was deathly pale.

"I don't know!" she cried, suddenly. "Leave me alone!" Abruptly she twisted away from him; and, running off, disappeared down one of the sidestreets. Feliz growled after her, wondering why all these people made such a fuss over admitting to the fact that what they thought were hallucinations were actually realities. Which led him, by a sort of reverse action to speculate idly whether this whole planet might not be a hallucination of his own, a sort of feverish nightmare brought on by the fact that he was in delirium someplace—say in the wreck of his spaceship, which had cracked up on landing, after all. Abruptly he shivered; and began thereafter to think more sympathetically of Kai and the rest.

"Sir," said Og, reluctantly allowing him to approach.

"Here is the power machine warehouse."

Feliz waited a moment for the short man behind to catch up and then they went in, all three of them.

V

THE WAREHOUSE was a lofty building, well filled with rank on military rank of mobile construction equipment. Feliz Gebrod strolled down the center corridor, looking over the ranks like an inspecting general and debating which of the many machines available he could (a) use and (b) run. Then it struck him that undoubtedly there were skilled machine operators among the black-uniformed people. He turned and put the question to Og.

"Sir?" said Og, blankly.

"I said," said Feliz impatiently. "You have men who know how to run these things, don't you?"

"No, sir," said Og.

Feliz stared at him. "You don't?" he echoed incredulously. "Where are the machine operators, then?"

"There aren't any, sir," said Og, almost stuttering in his alarm at having to disappoint Feliz and probably therefore also the Controller. "We've just enough men to run the food plant and the clothing

unit, sir. Nobody was ever trained on these machines, sir. Please, sir—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Feliz, disgruntled. He turned around and stumped back through the machines. Nobody to run their construction equipment. No wonder the city was running downhill. The mayor's people, those bright colored butterflies, would never consider anything so crude as running a machine; and these people didn't have the personnel—besides a social setup which, if any judge, would be sure death to initiative. If the whole planet was like this one city, the world of Dunroamin was going to hell in a hand-basket.

"How about other cities?" he asked. "Could they lend us some machine operators?"

"Sir?" said Og, astounded.

"You heard me," barked Feliz, impatiently.

"N-no sir. I'm sure not," stuttered Og. "They wouldn't have any, either; but anyway we don't have anything to do with each other, since right after the Great Purge."

"What great purge?" asked Feliz.

"Two hundred and thirty-eight years ago, sir, After Chaos. When they got rid of the Color People."

"Go on!" snapped Feliz.

"The Color People were evil," shuddered Og. "They

wouldn't do any work; they just sat around in the sun doing immoral things, like talking and singing about things not connected with duty, and cutting pieces of wood and stone into shapes and making images on paper. So we had to purge them. And then, after they were gone, we discovered all the other cities had set up imposters as Controller; and we haven't had much to do with them since."

"Imposters?"

"Yes sir. The only real Controller is here, sir."

"Hah!" said Feliz.

"Yes, sir," said Og.

Feliz looked back at the machines. His own knowledge was highly specialized, in the sense that it was concerned primarily with theoretic techniques. He could, he told himself, probably teach himself to manipulate the necessary equipment; but his nature revolted against the waste of time and the effort involved. Besides, if he could just avoid these guards of his and the mental lasso El Hoska seemed to be able to manipulate, he was going to take off. And that would be a lot easier to do, if he was busy in a supervisory capacity.

"What the hell," he said. "I suppose you have some men who can use a pick and shovel."

"No, sir," said Og.

"No?" repeated Feliz. He grinned to himself. "Well, don't let that worry you," he went on, patting the tall man on the shoulder, "I'll show your machine shop how to make some and—you *do* have a machine shop operating?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Og.

"Why then, we're all set," said Feliz.

THE MAYOR said, "Young man, your attitude concerns me."

"Swing those shovels faster!" yelled Feliz, looking down into the hole in the middle of the square where a number of the black-clad men were laboring. He wiped his forehead and turned back to the mayor. "What's that?" he asked.

El Hoska looked at him with benign sorrow. It was three days since Feliz's inspection of the machinery warehouse and his decision to use hand tools. That evening El Hoska and his group had caught up with him, and only some very fast talking on Feliz' part had prevented a re-establishment of the mind clamp. He had promised them immediate action on their fountain; and explained that he had run off to make some necessary arrangements preparatory to the actual work. The following day and the next, both the Mayor and the

Controller had come out to the job and breathed on his neck in relays. But on this day he had, so far, been left alone.

In fact, the only thing that wasn't running quite according to schedule was Kai Miri, who had not put in an appearance again since three days before—when she had run away from him down that side street. Feliz frowned unseeing at the black-clad pick-and-shovel workers. To his own constant annoyance, he found himself worrying more and more about her as one day followed another. After all, when he had first bumped into her, she had been headed, it seemed, for sure starvation, since she did not know how to find her ordinary food. He had occasional, infuriating visions of her collapsed in an alley somewhere from weakness, or injured as a result of some accident. But there was nothing he could do about it at present. Two sets of observers kept him quite effectively under surveillance.

"What's that?" he repeated, turning to El Hoska.

"I am concerned," said the mayor, "over this." He waved a hand to indicate the pit where the black-clad men were working.

"What about it?" asked Feliz, suspiciously.

"Come, come, my boy," said

El Hoska, linking a skinny arm through Feliz's tree-trunk like one. "This machinery you're using."

"Machinery?" Feliz blinked at the sweating laborers.

El Hoska chuckled and dug him in the ribs with a skinny thumb. "To be sure, the machinery," he said. "You didn't think I was to be fooled by the fact that it's of some kind of transparent plastic, do you? I admit I had a little trouble seeing it at first; but after all, a pool just doesn't excavate itself, does it? No, no. But that wasn't the aspect of it I wanted to discuss with you. It's your own moral attitude that bothers me."

"Uh—I see," said Feliz.

"But *do* you?" inquired El Hoska, drawing him cozily aside. "The machinery probably does the work faster; but do you realize how you are inhibiting your natural and elemental self, blinding and blunting the sensitivity of your self-identification with Mother Earth by using it? How much better it would have been for you to have gotten down there and labored directly with your hands. Feel the good, rich soil crumble under your eager fingers, and the gratification of your straining muscles."

"Oh?" said Feliz. "If it's so blasted good, why don't you

volunteer for the job yourself?"

"But my boy!" cried El Hoska. "I have spent my life becoming attuned to nature; I have *made* my identification. You are the one who needs help; and that is what has brought me to you. I really think we should start your counselling immediately."

Feliz looked at the old man. There was something hidden behind the faded old eyes; and he was not quite able to read it. He looked about him. The Controller was not in evidence, and the only people of the black clothes around was his laboring crew. This might be his chance.

"Carry on," he said abruptly to the crew; and, turning to El Hoska, went on, "There's something I have to get from my ship for the fountain. Why don't you walk out with me; and you can counsel on the way?"

"Excellent," glowed El Hoska. "The forest, the trees. Nature."

"Exactly," said Feliz. He looked about him. The square was still empty of free Blacks.

"Let's go," he said.

FELIZ could hardly believe his good luck. They had reached the edge of the woods without a single black-clad individual showing up in pursuit. A few strides further

and the leafy branches hid them from view. Feliz let out a long-held breath and turned to El Hoska, who had been babbling steadily since they had left the square.

"—The monotheistic attitude of the divertant ego," the mayor was saying, "embranchiates and impalpitates the conscious mind."

"All right," said Feliz, turning to him. "You can turn it off now; we're alone."

The old man winked and chuckled. "Very well, my boy," he said. "Let's get down to plain language; frankly, you're a danger to the community."

"I'd say it was the other way around," commented Feliz. "But let's not worry about that. I've got a nice, simple solution. Just let me get in my ship and take on off out of here."

"Hum," said El Hoska. "Well, now, it isn't quite that easy. You see, you'll be landing on other worlds shortly, and you might mention us; I don't think that would be a good thing."

"Why not?" demanded Feliz bluntly.

"We have progressed a long way from the barbaric stage of life you represent," said El Hoska. "An influx of backward peoples is the last thing we want."

Feliz stared at him. "You

don't really believe that guff about having progressed?" he said incredulously. "I gave you credit for more intelligence."

A thin film, like a nictating membrane, seemed to flicker down over the old man's eyes, turning their sunny emptiness suddenly cold and hostile. His voice when he spoke again, however, was still constrained to gentleness. "I believe you've had some little experience of how we've progressed," he murmured.

"The compulsion, eh?" said Feliz, grimly. "Look—all right, so you've got one psi faculty developed to a workable degree. Well, I've got news for you. There's a dozen other little independent human cultures that have done as well—though not necessarily in your direction. Believe it or not, we've all got the same level, more or less, of ability, psi-wise. It's an aspect of racial maturity, and we're getting to it—not through practise, but through evolution."

"I don't believe you," said the old man. "Why can't you do the same if that's true?"

Feliz restrained an impulse to tear his hair. "Why can't I do stellar spectroanalysis?" he asked. "Why can't I design a spaceship? Because I've never had the inclination nor the training. Look, El Hoska;

make an effort. This culture of yours is badly out of whack. Tell me honestly; don't you ever see people dressed in black?"

The mayor stiffened, his spare body like a dry reed leaning against the wind. "I," he said, spacing his words so that they dropped, individual and heavy, like single stones into a well, "see nothing but what is real."

Feliz threw up his hands. "I give up," he said.

They walked for some short distance in silence. Then Feliz felt the thistledown weight of the old man's hand on his shoulder, and turned to see the blue eyes on his own, deep with sincere sympathy. "You will feel better after we have reasoned with you," said El Hoska, gently; and Feliz felt a sudden cold shiver of apprehension that trickled icily down his spine.

THEY HAD traversed the green hush of the woods; and now they came out on the meadow. The ship stood as it had stood since the morning of its landing; the common-sense, down-to-earth reality of its appearance almost a shock (but a welcome one) to Feliz after the weirdness of his experiences during the last few days. At the hatch, El Hoska halted.

"I would not go any nearer

to a machine than I can help," he said. "I'll wait for you out here." He turned a slightly troubled face toward Feliz. "You realize—if you try to get away, I can stop you."

Feliz nodded shortly, and climbed in through the hatch.

After the bright sunlight of the meadow, the interior of the ship, illuminated only by what reflected light came through the hatch opening, seemed plunged in gloom. Even Feliz's excellent vision saw things only dimly. He sat down, therefore, on the chair before the control board and waited for his eyes to adjust.

As the room seemed to brighten about him, he began to notice differences about it. Here things had been slightly disarranged. Here they had been put back in an order different from the one he normally used. Feliz's eyes narrowed as it became apparent that someone, or more than one, had been here during his absence. He rose from the chair; his eyes, now fully adjusted, sweeping the room; and he stepped back into the cabin. Here, his searching eyes discovered further small evidence of trespassers. He turned back into the control room and yanked open the door of the food locker. Abruptly, his tension left him and he grinned. Some of the

food was gone; but in addition to that, the charcoal sketch Kai Miri had made of him on a page of the logbook was lying there, only it had been added to in the form of a small devil with tail and horns who was tickling Feliz's unconscious feet with a large feather. So this was where the girl had been hiding out!

Feliz rubbed his nose, a trifle astonished at the relief that flooded over him at this realization. Abruptly he scowled. It was nothing to him what happened to the girl after she had run out that way. Still—it was good to feel that she was making out all right. He wondered where she was now.

He stepped back into the control room and looked out through the hatch. El Hoska was standing not ten feet away, his back to the hatch, apparently absorbed in his own thoughts.

Feliz's eyes narrowed. So he couldn't get away, huh? He remembered how he had broken free of the old man's control once before when Kai had hit El Hoska over the head with her sandal. He stepped over to a locker built in the control room wall and rummaged within it, coming out with a heavy metal object about eight inches in diameter. With this in his hand, he

stepped once more to the hatch.

El Hoska was still with his back turned, still absorbed in contemplation.

Feliz weighed the thing he held, grimly in his hand. A quick throw, and— He frowned suddenly. The thought of Kai Miri had just intruded itself on his mind. She could hardly live off the supplies of the space ship after the ship was gone. He remembered his original intention of carting her off with him to Congerman for treatment. She really should be looked at by a competent alienist, just to make sure there was nothing dangerous still buried in the back of her mind. Feliz cursed softly to himself. He stuck the gadget he held into his pocket and climbed out through the hatch.

"Let's go," he said to the mayor.

THEY walked in silence until they reached the edge of the woods. El Hoska seemed to be lost in his own thoughts still. Then, as they stepped into the shadows of the first trees, he sighed. "When you are old, and in a position of authority," he said, suddenly, with a note almost of wistfulness in his voice, "it is easy to be unfair."

Feliz looked at him sharply.

"It occurs to me," said El

Hoska, turning his head to meet the younger man's eyes, "that I have not been exactly fair with you."

"What sort of new approach is this?" inquired Feliz, sourly.

"You don't trust me," sighed the mayor. "I don't blame you. You are full of suspicions, I wish I could make you see this world of ours as I see it."

"I don't doubt it," said Feliz, with grim humor.

"We have," said El Hoska, striding along beneath the trees, his spare body erect, "a good life here. Not a perfect life; and in many ways there are hardships. But there is a good core to it." He glanced at Feliz, sideways. "Would you like to hear our history?"

"I've heard some of it already," said Feliz, thinking of Kai Miri and Og.

"But probably not the full story," said El Hoska. "Few of us know that. It's not a happy story."

"Go ahead," said Feliz, genuinely interested.

"Most of our people don't know—I think they are better off without knowing—how we made the final break with mechanism. At one time what has become our way of life was—" El Hoska winced—"merely a politician philosophy. You see," he went on, "I don't try to gloss the matter

over. No, originally, we were merely a political party that advocated decentralization of government, and freedom of the individual. There was at that time another party, the Authoritarian Party, which believed in a strict regime and curtailment of individualism. The division was so sharp that, for a time, another people would have gone to war."

"Why didn't you?" asked Feliz.

"For a good reason," said the old man. "Our original colonists had done a wise thing in setting up the law that every child from birth must be hypnotically conditioned against mass violence. Not individual violence, mind you, for that would be an infringement and curtailment of individual rights, but mass or group violence. With this, of course, genocide became intolerable to the individual. Accordingly, we were faced with a split in political beliefs that seemed impossible to heal. So we took the only way out."

The old man turned a face toward Feliz on which pain was written with surprising clarity. "Recognizing that they were, in fact, insane," he said, "we sent all members of the opposing part to Coventry, as the old English expression used to go. In fact,

we ignored them and their existence, and set to work to build a life of our own from which they were excluded."

"And what happened?" asked Feliz

"They died," said the mayor, briefly

"Died?" echoed Feliz, stopping in his tracks and staring at the old man.

"Of course," said El Hoska, calmly. "What else could they do? Adherents of an out-moded culture, they were not able to survive under our new conditions. Our people noticed them grow fewer and fewer, year by year; and eventually there came a time when no one was to be found anywhere."

"Were any bodies found?" demanded Feliz, bluntly.

"Oh, I imagine some must have been," said El Hoska. "Not many though. Most of them, I suppose, just went out and wandered the roads from town to town, looking for some place where the people would recognize them."

"You're sure of that?" said Feliz, looking hard at him.

"Oh—no," said El Hoska, slowly, "but I imagine that's what happened; something of that order must have taken place."

FELIZ came to a decision. Halting, he swung the old man around to face him.

"Look," he said. "Have you got an open mind?"

El Hoska smiled sweetly. "The most important aspect of our advanced culture is an open mind," he said.

"Are you willing to admit the *possibility* of something that would turn your whole system upside down?"

"Of course, my boy," said El Hoska. "After all what is real and what is not? No one can tell. I am perfectly ready to believe that I merely exist in your imagination, if you can prove it to me."

"Fine," said Feliz. "Then try this out. Those political opponents of yours didn't die off. They've gone on living side by side with you all these years, conditioning *their* children to ignore *you!*"

El Hoska neither laughed tolerantly, nor looked startled. The shadow of a sadness crossed his ancient face. "So you've been infected, too," he said, laying a hand sympathetically on Feliz's heavy sleeve. "Tell me—you've been seeing people in odd, stiff-cut black clothes, haven't you?"

"And feeling them—" began Feliz.

"Now, now, let's not embroider the tale," said the mayor, gently reproving, "such hallucinations are, unfortunately, common among my people. Many have come to me, to see if I can't help them

cure themselves of such. However," he sighed, "there's really nothing I can do to help them. The hallucinations are the result of a racial guilt complex for what our ancestors did to the unfortunate ones many years ago. I am a little surprised that you have been affected, however; the group mind must be stronger than I realized."

"Group mind?" echoed Feliz, dumbfounded.

"Certainly," said the mayor. "The control I exercised over your physical body is merely a funneling and directing of the power of the group mind of my people. Is it surprising that a group mind that can do that should not also be able to impress you with its own hallucinations?"

"Oh, for the sake of my dear, deceased Aunt Hannah!" exploded Feliz. "How extensive a rationalization can you get? I tell you those people are alive and real!"

"Tch, tch," the mayor clicked his tongue, looking at Feliz sympathetically. "No, no, my boy. Take my word for it, these are all mere figments of your imagination. Just keep insisting to yourself firmly that they are not real and they will go away. This advice may seem a little like sophistry at first; but if you try it, I think you'll find it's good, down-to-

earth common sense. You, especially, should be able to rid yourself of such fantasies."

"Why me?" asked Feliz.

"Because you come from off-world; and are a barbarian—now, don't be offended, young man—it is precisely because you are a barbarian unable to perceive greater truths, that I am taking this much trouble with you. There are virtues which a primitive way of life instills in backward peoples—notably the ones of energy and a desire to build. And that, I will admit freely to you, is the one thing my people need. To be truthful with you—" the mayor lowered his voice shamefacedly—"there are only two others besides myself I can count on to do the necessary work in the plastic clothes casting works; and the younger generation will go to any lengths to avoid gathering their own nuts and berries. Even a bountiful nature is abused. Of course I could compel each, individually, by impressment of the community will through the direction of my mind—but that would be authoritarianism. Seriously, young man, someone like yourself would be a great help to us." And he stared into Feliz's face with a sort of wistful hope.

Feliz snorted in loud embarrassment.

"Well, think it over," said El Hoska. "I don't like the idea of coercing you; but in conscience I cannot, and I will not, let you go while there is still a chance of you fitting in here."

VI

ON THEIR reentry into the square, Feliz Gebrod found the black-dressed contingent in an uproar over his disappearance. Taking a polite leave of El Hoska, and giving some excuse, he allowed himself to be marched at gunpoint to that office where he had first made the acquaintance of Kai Man-oai, the Controller.

"Saboteur! Traitor!" shrieked that individual, bouncing to his feet as Feliz entered. "I will deal with you personally! Out!" The last word was roared at the guards who had brought him in. They scuttled backward and escaped through the door. Feliz braced himself for violent eventualities; but no sooner had the door slammed, than the Controller sagged limply, mopped his brow with an elaborately embroidered black handkerchief and hastily produced a bottle and two glasses.

"Whew!" he breathed, filling the glasses from the bottle with a trembling hand. "You almost gave me a heart at-

tack." He looked reproachfully at Feliz. "What possessed you to run off like that? I thought you were gone for good. Just walked off. What's the trouble?"

"What's the trouble?" echoed Feliz, staring.

"To be sure. I'm a reasonable man," said the Controller. "If you want your working conditions improved, I'll improve them. I need you. You've no idea what it's like around here."

"Oh, don't I?" growled Feliz.

"No, you don't," said the Controller, his face twisting tragically. "Nobody has any initiative!" He pounded the desk, causing the filled glasses to hop and slop their contents. "They're like cattle. Obey orders—yes, fine. But damn it! I can't issue *all* the orders! There's a limit to what flesh and blood can accomplish in any single twenty-four hour period. Look around you—"

Feliz stared, puzzled, about the ornate office.

"Looks like a soft job, doesn't it?" said the Controller bitterly. "Only, it just so happens that about forty crisis a day go with it." He groaned. "I don't know why it should be that way. All I ask is unthinking obedience; is it too much to want them to use a little intelligence in the process? I ask you?"

Feliz made a non-committal noise.

"'Sir, what do I do about this?'" mimicked the Controller in that unpleasant, weak type of voice that people nearly always seem to have used when someone else is reporting the conversation. "'Please sir, what do I do about that?' 'Sir, may I blow my nose now?' —Next thing they'll want me to blow it for them. Now—" said the Controller, suddenly brightening up—"you're different."

"Me?" said Feliz, taken by surprise.

"Yes, you," said the Controller. "You argued with me the first minute you saw me. It didn't sink in at first; but when I had time to think it over, I realized how wonderful that was. Why, do you realize—" he leaned forward in his chair and tapped Feliz on one baggy knee—"that if two men could approach a problem from two different points of view, they could probably each see the mistakes that the other one was making? And not only that. If they were two men like us, they could just sit down, face to face and come right out and tell each other where they were wrong. Now, what do you think of that?"

Feliz goggled.

"Speechless, eh?" said the Controller, triumphantly. "I thought you would be." He

poured his own glass full for the second time and added a drop to Feliz's almost un-tasted portion. "Well, I'm about to offer you a job."

Feliz growled.

"Now, don't jump before you're hit," went on the Controller, complacently. "I don't mean to put you to work working *for* me, but working *with* me. How'd you like to be Co-Controller, with all rights privileges, and duties appertaining thereto? I'll be honest with you; there's more duties than rights or privileges at the present moment; but with the two of us working together, we should be able to improve that aspect of the situation."

FELIZ FOUND his voice.

"No thanks," he said.

"Now, don't be hasty," reproved the Controller. "I can't afford to have you running around loose. If you say no and mean no, I'll have to shoot you the minute this compulsion gadget of yours is finished. And I'm serious when I say there's a real need for you here. These people are so used to being ordered, that they'd starve to death if there wasn't someone to command them to eat at regular intervals. Think it over."

"All right," growled Feliz. "I'll think."

"That's being sensible," said

the Controller. "You've got until the gadget is finished to make up your mind. By the way, when will it be finished?"

"We'll be flooding the pool with water tonight," said Feliz. "I should be able to turn it on early tomorrow."

"Good," said the Controller. "We'll hold a full scale assembly in the square tomorrow at noon, then, for the celebration of turning it on. I still don't understand, though," he added with a frown, "what you need all that water around it for. It seems to me—look here, what *do* you want a pool of water for?"

"Oh—well," said Feliz, "tell me, do you know very much about the calculus of non-existent integers?"

The Controller looked somewhat taken aback. "Do I?" he said.

"Yes," said Feliz. "Do you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said the Controller, "if you put it that way, no, I don't—any more."

"Oh," replied Feliz. "That makes it a little difficult then, you see. I don't know how I'd go about explaining why I need that water without using derivatives of the functions of non-existent integers."

"Er-yes," said the Controller. "I see the difficulty. Well, go ahead with the plans as they stand. But when you get

around to taking me up on this offer of mine, we'll sit down some afternoon and you can bring me up to date on this. My calculator is a little rusty, I'm afraid. That's what you said, wasn't it—the calculators of non-existing tigers?"

"Correct," answered Feliz.

"I'll make a note of it," said the Controller, ushering Feliz to the door, "and remind you of it at the earliest possible opportunity."

THAT NIGHT Feliz lay in the bedroom of an apartment in the same building that housed the Controller. His door was locked, and an armed guard stood outside it. Nevertheless, at a few hours after midnight there was a small clicking sound and the door swung inward, revealing a glimpse of a small body which slipped through the opening; then immediately closed the door behind it. Lying sleepless on his bed, Feliz saw the sudden flicker of light and shadowy movement; and was on his feet in a minute, moving soundlessly over the thick carpeting, away from the bed.

"It's just me," said an apologetic little voice in the darkness.

Feliz stopped short. "Kai?"

"Yes," Kai's voice came back. "Don't turn the light on. I look awful. I've been crawl-

ing in all sorts of dirty, dusty places and I haven't had any chance to get clean clothes since I first saw you." She moved toward him through the darkness and her outstretched fingers brushed his bare arm. "Oh, you haven't any clothes on."

"I've got enough," said Feliz, shortly. He groped in the darkness, caught her wrist, and led her over to a couch on the far side of the room. "Sit down. Where've you been?"

"Back in the stacks," she answered.

"Stacks?" echoed Feliz. "What stacks?"

"The stacks in the city library—nobody ever goes there any more," she said. "Oh, Feliz, you were right. They aren't hallucinations, they're just as real as we are." Her voice shook in the blackness. "They're even some of them d-distant relatives."

Feliz made a clumsy effort to pat her unseen back reassuringly through the darkness. She crept into his arms like a lost puppy; and he felt her shivering. "Hold me," she said, like a very young child.

Feliz held her. After a while she stopped shaking and began to talk again.

"—After I left you I just ran and hid for a long time. I just wanted to get away from everything; from my people,

from the hallucinations, but mostly from you. I didn't care if I lived or died. I just wanted to crawl into a hole and never come out again."

Feliz cleared his throat uncomfortably in the darkness.

"Oh, that's all right," she said, snuggling closer into his arms. "You were just trying to make me see things for my own good. Well, I found a hole finally—a building neither our people or they went into—and lay there for almost a day feeling sorry for myself. But finally I reached a stage where I had sort of cried myself out—you know? And I had to start being sensible. So I got up and went out again."

She paused.

"Well, I was awfully hungry; and the only place I knew I could get food was on your ship—"

"I know," interrupted Feliz. There was a moment's embarrassed silence from the general region of his arms.

"Oh, you saw it?"

"The drawing?" said Feliz. "I certainly did."

He could almost feel the warmth of her unseen blush. "I'm sorry," she said, in a small voice.

"That's all right," replied Feliz.

"—But you have such big feet."

"Thanks," said Feliz.

"Well, anyway—" she said, taking a deep breath and plunging back into her narrative, "after I'd eaten, I felt so much better, I began to think over everything you'd said, without getting worked up about it. And the more I thought about it, the more determined I was to get it straight. So I decided I'd just go to the library and check up."

"Good for you," approved Feliz.

"Well, I thought it was high time somebody did." Self-satisfaction flowed in her voice. "But Feliz—it was awful. There's all sorts of creeping and crawling things back in there where nobody's been for a hundred years; and dust so thick you can't breathe; and in lots of places the lights don't work; and several times I got l-lost—" She was shaking again.

FELIZ PATTED her, soothingly. "But you found what you went after," he prompted.

"Yes, I did," she said. "And it's all true. First we started not having anything to do with them; and then we began to act and dress differently; and then we began pretending they weren't there. And all the time they were doing the same thing. Feliz, you've got to let me stay with you always, from now on!"

"Well, I—" stammered Feliz.

"I don't have any people but you any more," she clutched at him fiercely. "Can't we go away from the city and live off by ourselves somewhere where they'll never find us? They wouldn't follow us far into the hills; I know they wouldn't."

"Hush," said Feliz, "we'll get away. But I want you to tell me now as much as you can about what you learned about things."

"What do you want to know that for?"

"There's an old saying to the effect that knowledge is power; and it's the truth," replied Feliz, gently. "The more you know about things or people, the easier it is to handle them. Now, tell me—did you ever see either the others or your own people in public without their own special kind of clothes on?"

"Oh, no!" Kai's gasp was scandalized.

"How about in private?"

"Any decent person," she replied primly, "wore clothes *all* the time."

"Night and day, you mean?" demanded Feliz. "Alone, as well as in company?"

"Well, even if you were alone, you could never be sure someone might not come in."

"But nobody ever did, did they?"

"N-no," she admitted reluctantly.

"Then what were you really afraid of?" he asked.

"Well," she said. "There was..." her voice trailed off uncertainly. After a moment she said in an altered tone. "I see; you mean, one of *them* might see you."

"Uh-huh," confirmed Feliz, softly; "you couldn't be sure they were all as blind as you made yourself be."

He heard the sharp hiss of her indrawn breath in the darkness. "Of course," she said, in a tone mixing chagrin and surprise. "I saw them *all* the time."

"All the time?"

"All the time," she repeated sharply. "I saw them when I was a child, but people always hushed me and said they weren't really there. And then I got so I wouldn't see them; but I *did* see them—I mean—" she turned in his arms "—do you know what I mean?"

Feliz nodded, forgetting that she could not see him.

"It's known as mass auto-hypnosis," he explained. "Your mind had to pretend they weren't there; but it still had to remain aware enough of them so that you wouldn't bump into them in the streets, or sit down where one of them was sitting."

"Then everybody knows

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about them!" cried Kai. "And they know about us!"

"That's about it," said Feliz. "You just can't get anybody to admit it to themselves. Those who do get treated the way you did—if they belong to your people. Probably, on the other side, they get shot."

Abruptly, Kai gagged. "I don't want to talk about it any more," she said.

"But I've got to be sure what cues these self-induced reactions," insisted Feliz, quietly. "I still need to know as much as possible. Do you think you can talk about the history part of it—what you picked up in the library?"

Kai hesitated. "I suppose—yes I can!" she said finally, with a mighty effort.

"Good for you," said Feliz, patting her approvingly. "Now start at the beginning and go over everything you found out..."

VII

FELIZ GEBROD squinted at the sun of Dun-roamin, which was almost at its zenith. He stood on a small circle of foundation material, a tiny, artificial island from which the narrow neck of the fountain protruded and which hid the power pack he had buried at its base and connected to the bulge of

apparatus at its tip; and his stormy blue eyes looked up and beyond the city to where the trees hid the ship and—he fervently hoped—Kai within it.

There had been some small discussion in the early hours of the morning before the guard had knocked on his door, summoning him to leave the room and supervise the last of the construction work in the square.

"—But how do I know you'll get away all right?" Kai had kept insisting.

"You'll just have to take my word for it," Feliz had repeated.

"But why can't you tell me how you're going to do it?"

"Because you've been subjected to the same kind of conditioning the rest of them have; and I don't know how you'd react to the knowledge," said Feliz, exasperated. "If everything goes all right, I'll be back at the ship by noon. If I don't make it—"

"I don't care what happens if you don't make it!" cried Kai and, tearing herself away from him, she had hammered on the door until the guard outside opened it and stood blinking foolishly at Feliz; while she ducked under the black arm and ran off.

Now it was almost noon; and Feliz could only hope that she had made it to the

ship. Fervently he hoped that, wherever she was, she was not still in the city. From his little island he looked out on a square thronged with black-clad and color-clad people alike; men, women, and children, half of whom were ghosts and less than ghosts to the opposite half. Did they realize the multitude of each others' presences? Here—inches apart only, in some cases—the deeply implanted convictions that blinded them must be strained to the breaking point by the nearness and numbers of the people whose existence they did not wish to acknowledge. The black-clad men were drawn up in military order, rank on rank, with their women and children gathered apart. But the color-clad people circulated amongst and between the rows of the others, paying scant attention to the little speech that El Hoska was trying to give them—the tenor of which was that the labor of the hands could also be satisfying to the artistic mind.

The only exception to all this was the behavior of the children, both of the black-clad and the color-garbed variety. Universally, they sensed and were troubled by the gathering and hung back, wherever possible, near the outskirts of the square. Feliz

found time and opportunity to feel glad about that.

ON THE FAR side of the square from El Hoska, in front of the ordered rows of black uniforms, the Controller was also speechifying. More noisy, less original, and infinitely less gentle, his speech hammered home ad nauseum the virtues of blind obedience. "Yours not to reason why, yours but to do or die," was the burden of his message and he missed no opportunity to ram it down his listeners' throats. They did not seem to mind.

Eventually, however, he managed to run out of wind, and brought his peroration to a close. Leaving his people, he turned and walked down to the edge of the pool, and looked across six feet of water at Feliz.

"Well," he said, surreptitiously wiping his brow. "What did you think of it?"

"Instructive," said Feliz.

"Do you think so?" beamed the Controller. "I never miss an opportunity to reiterate the principles that have made our society efficient." He looked across at the fountain and the apparatus bulge at the top of it. Fishing in his pocket, he produced a sealed plastic box Feliz had prepared for him and from which several im-

pressive looking wires protruded. "Ready?"

"Uh—not just yet," answered Feliz, looking over at El Hoska, who was still talking. "I have to hagiate the beltansprung."

"Well, get on with it," said the Controller. "By the way, what have you decided about that little offer of mine?"

"I'm still thinking it over," said Feliz.

"No rush," the Controller told him, equably. "But keep an eye on him there, you men."

"Yes, sir," replied one of the five guards who stood around the pool, guns at the ready and their eyes on Feliz.

El Hoska finished his speech and came down to the opposite poolside.

"I'm through," he announced. Feliz nodded.

"I have been looking forward to this," the old man went on. "These young people have never seen anything like this and they are bound to be greatly impressed when the fountain actually starts playing. I anticipate quite a reaction."

Feliz nodded, a trifle grimly, and looked about the square. Now that there was nothing else to occupy their attention, all eyes were on him; and both the Colors and the Blacks were clustering close about the pool. The

black uniforms had not really broken ranks, but they had edged forward and the brilliant cloaks were among them.

"Ready," said Feliz to El Hoska and the Controller alike. The Controller lifted his impressive looking plastic box.

"Ah," he said, beaming at his own people about him, "in a minute you will all be reacting as extensions of my own personality—"

Feliz threw a switch handily placed on the long, upright metal tube of the fountain's mouth; and the sentence was never completed.

A MARK III plastic converter is a very handy little tool when operated on low power with caution and restraint. With its governor operating properly, it can be set to soften, weld, cut or shape cast plastic (of which clothes are made) with the greatest of ease. But with its power stepped up, its governor removed, and with a general broadcast head that allows it to radiate in all directions, what it does instead of casting plastic is practically what Kai believed had been done to her at one time. In short, and for all practical purposes—it disintegrates the cast plastic.

Therefore, at one moment in the square of the city there was a horde of dressed people

standing staring at Feliz; and in the next, in fact in the merest fraction of a second, there was only a horde of people. For a moment they held their positions, like startled statues; then the realization of their nakedness struck home, with results that would have gratified Satan himself, let alone the barrel-chested stepson of his spirit who stood at that moment in awesome nudity beside the switch he had just pulled.

People who have grown up in a normal civilization can imagine the effect produced at any public gathering if all those present were suddenly stripped to the buff. For these inhabitants of Dunroamin, it was infinitely worse. During the last two hundred years they had been distinguishing carefully between those whose existence they admitted and those whose existence they did not, by the color and cut of the clothes each wore. The nakedness taboo was much more deeply implanted than in a normal society. But, in addition and worse than that, was the fact that now, with no means to distinguish, their conditioning began to break down; and the horrified onlooker in the square, a split-second after realizing his own nakedness, looked around to recognize the fact that he was not only

surrounded by other naked people, *but there were twice as many of them as there had been the minute before.* And in the instant of this last and most horrible realization, the crowd in the square melted into a seething, howling riot of humanity all fighting to escape in different directions.

It was Feliz's moment. Naked as the rest, he was the one man there who had been prepared and had his purpose firmly in mind; and his short, enormously thick legs drove him in a dive off the platform and straight through the crowd toward the exit nearest the hills above the city. No ordinary man could have made it through that struggling, screaming mob; and, powerful as Feliz was, he was tossed first to this side and then that, of his line of escape, like a swimmer in heavy rapids. But three hundred pounds of more solid flesh and bone than the lighter stuff around him told their story; and in a matter of minutes, bruised and bleeding from innumerable scratches, but otherwise unharmed, he broke free into the lease dense section of the crowd at the edge of the square and headed toward the hills.

The streets were filled with city inhabitants, fleeing for sanity's sake toward the safe darkness of their homes and the full closets they expected

to find there, but which would, as a matter of fact, almost certainly be empty. For the vibrations of a Mark III converter are not stopped by ordinary substances; there had been power enough in that one brief burst that had burnt out the power-pack in the fountain base to blanket the whole city area and some distance beyond as well. These fugitives Feliz joined—and passed.

A HALF-BREED Micturian can run very swiftly for a short distance. Feliz passed the people of the city at about thirty miles an hour; but by the time he had reached the outskirts he was wheezing badly, and heaving lungs forced him to slow to a jog trot. This, however he grimly kept up, as he breasted the slope beside the stone wall and fought his way uphill until he reached the woods.

Here, indeed, he collapsed, crumpling to earth like a broken pillar; and lay helpless for several minutes, while his lungs fought to return a sufficiency of oxygen to his starving body and remove the fatigue poisons from the muscle tissues.

After a short interval, however, he began to recover; he swiveled about on his stomach and stared back down the way he had come. The route behind

him lay bare of pursuers; and, as he watched, no small, naked forms erupted from the outskirts to head his way.

Thanking whatever gods there be, Feliz forced himself to his feet and tottered on into the wood. He had marked the direction in his memory as well as he was able from the time in daylight that El Hoska had walked with him to his ship. Now he followed what he believed was the proper way; but his heart stayed inconveniently near his mouth until, finally, the trees thinned ahead of him; and, looking through them, he saw the welcoming grey bulk of his ship, with the hatch open and waiting.

FELIZ staggered to the hatch and crawled through, collapsing in the chair before the control board. Gradually, the specks swimming in front of his eyes faded and disappeared, his breathing slowed and became more natural, and he found himself able to think beyond the present moment. He heaved a deep sigh and looked around the control room. And suddenly his heart congealed as if his chest cavity had abruptly become filled with liquid air.

For the ship appeared to be empty of any human life but his own.

Where was Kai?

"Kai!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. His voice thundered in the narrow metal confines of the ship; but there was no answer. "Hell's bloody buckets!" he raved in a frenzy. Ahead of him he could see through the narrow cabin entrance and to the arms locker in the other room where his guns hung. He took one plunging step cabinward; and was halted by a shriek.

"Don't you dare come in here!" cried the voice of Kai.

Feliz thrust out his hands to check himself on the doorposts and backed away.

"Are you in there?" he asked foolishly. "Where are you?"

"I'm behind the partition to one side of the door," came back a very irate voice. "And if you try to come in here I'll hit you over the head with a thing."

"What kind of a thing? What have you got in there?" called Feliz, worriedly thinking of the guns, which were always loaded and which might have their safeties off.

"Never mind," said Kai. "It's a round thing with edges so it holds things and a handle and it's heavy."

"Oh," said Feliz, relieved, recognizing, from this rather sketchy description, his only culinary utensil, an electronic cooker-pan. He reflected that a diet of raw nuts and

fruits would be the probable reason she had not recognized it as a kitchen accessory and wondered what instinct had caused her to pick that, out of all the mayhem-suitable tools in the cabin. He was about to return to the essential question of her reason for all this odd behavior, when a casual glance through the hatch revealed three very angry-looking and very unclothed men breaking forth from the edge of the wood with guns in their hands and heading for the ship. The distance was a little great but Feliz almost thought he recognized the Controller as one of them.

"Strap yourself into your bunk!" he yelled, in the general direction of the cabin; and jumped for the control board. The hatch slammed shut, the firing chambers rumbled, the power needle rose up the scale to *ready*, and he threw in the switch. The ship lifted and the planet fell away on the outside screen.

A tense half-hour later they were in space.

Feliz leaned back and wiped sweat from his forehead. Free at last to turn his attention to more personal things, he turned once more, toward the cabin.

"Did you get yourself strapped in all right?" he called.

"Yes," came the answer.

"Why didn't you tell me you had clothes in a box-thing here?" And his spare trousers and tunic waddled into the control room with Kai's face looking absurdly small above them.

"You've got my clothes!" howled Feliz, as trousers, tunic and face, perceiving his unencumbered condition, retreated in some panic to the cabin.

"Don't come in here," ordered the once more invisible voice of Kai. "I'll hit you with my thing."

Feliz choked on the desire to tell her simultaneously that (a) it was an electronic cooker-pan (b) it was *his* electronic cooker-pan (c) that all this business of hitting him over the head was becoming somewhat repetitious and (d) *what was she doing in his clothes?*

He compromised on the last.

"What are you doing in my clothes?" he bellowed.

"What did you do to mine?" she retorted. A horrible realization suddenly dawned on Feliz. The effect of the Mark III converter must have been far-reaching enough to make itself felt even at the ship. The ship itself would damp

out such radiation; so Kai must have been outside at the time he threw the switch. That would explain why his spare suit was all right, but her clothes were gone. Grinning a little, he gave her an account of what he had done; and the results thereof. He was still grinning when his memory reminded him, with a nasty jar, that there had been only one spare outfit in the locker.

"Listen," he called, nervously, "I've got to have my clothes."

"And leave me without any? No thank you," the invisible voice of Kai responded.

"But I can't land on the planet we're going to without clothes," he shouted.

"I can't either," she retorted.

"They're my clothes."

"Possession is nine points of the law."

"You give me those clothes!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll come and get them myself."

"You step a foot a single inch through that door," said Kai, "and I'll hit you over the head with my thing."

It was an interesting situation.

★

*When you know you're being used,
the role of catspaw can be very
convenient, at times.*

DECOY

by JOHN CHRISTOPHER

illustrated by ED EMSH

THE HOLY Year was 2175 and, Director Hewison being a Catholic, the United Chemicals congress was held in Rome. It was the first congress Max had attended since the Philadelphia of '54; it had been impossible to refuse Hewison's invitation with the function taking place, as it were, in his own backyard. He went protesting and stayed to enjoy himself. There was the nuisance of having to speak alongside Hewison in the refurbished ruins of the Coliseum, but there was also the delight of festival Rome; he wandered around the sunny streets, a little wrinkled man whom nobody noticed.

Hewison traced him the day before the speeches were due. He had put up in a small di-



Max knew the air-current would not carry his sphere too close to those jagged rocks...

lapidated hotel in the via Sforza and the proprietor was clearly awed by, and scared of, the leather-jacketed young man with the UC badge whom he ushered up to Max's second floor room.

"Signor..." he began.

"Yes, I know," Max said; "thank you." He turned to the messenger. "What does Director Hewison want?"

The young man clicked his heels, stamping himself as an Israeli, presumably one of the handful who year by year abandoned the world's last refuge of nationalism for the greater attractions of the managerial world outside. Max did not like those he had met. It was natural enough that they should display an almost aggressive devotion to the managerial ideal, but that didn't make it any more attractive.

This one was typical: blond and over six feet tall.

"Director Hewison presents his compliments," he said, "to Manager Larkin." There was just enough emphasis on the 'Manager' to show that he was aware of Max's aversion for the title and determined not to truckle to it. He looked at Max directly. "The Director has been trying to get hold of you for a week."

Max said with some satisfaction: "Bogey was four days. What does he want?"

"You were requested to communicate on reaching Rome."

"...Manager Larkin," Max supplied gently. "Tell Director Hewison I will be on the rostrum tomorrow; without fail."

"You are required to communicate now, Manager Larkin."

"No callscreen." Max gestured round the bare room. "Sorry."

The messenger smiled very slightly. "I brought a portable."

"Touche." Max watched him wheel the callscreen in. He fixed the controls and then stood by, self-satisfied and attentive, while Hewison's face swam into focus. Hewison recognized Max and his own naturally sour expression lightened perceptibly.

"Got you," he said happily. He directed his gaze beyond Max for a moment, "Nice work, von Akkut."

Von Akkut, Max thought. Yes, of course. He said to Hewison: "I'll be there tomorrow."

"I want you to come over tonight," Hewison said. "I'm at the Palazzo Nuovo."

Max paused. "No clothes," he said after a moment.

Hewison chuckled. "I shan't be dressing either."

"I was thinking of running

over that speech you want me to make."

"Tell you what," Hewison said, "I'll help you out with it; I make a lot of speeches. Come right on over, Max. I've got someone who wants to meet you."

The screen blacked as Hewison cut from his end. Max thought of trying to get through to him again to explain that, while he had no desire to see Hewison himself, the prospect of an evening with one of his friends as well had brought on an attack of angina. But Hewison, he had recognized, was in one of his masterful moods. He turned to von Akkut. "All right, Siegfried. We're off."

"Siegfried?" the blond ex-Israeli asked him.

"Never mind."

HEWISON, of course, had the Mussolini suite at the Palazzo Nuovo. They had a replica of Mussolini's marble map of empire set high up in the flamboyant entrance hall, and every room had something from the fascist or one of the later neo-fascist periods. The only thing in the show that was any good was a boxwood relief of Benito and Clara on their lamp-posts. That was hideous, but it was good; Max was looking at it when Hewison came in.

"Powerful, eh?" Hewison asked him.

"Da Pozzo," Max said. "Third period—around 1990; very powerful."

"I've got a later one at Graz. 1995 or '96."

"Yes," Max said. "He went mad in '92. People wouldn't leave him alone."

Hewison laughed, showing his teeth, including the diamond one. He put an arm around Max's shoulders. "Come in and have a drink. And meet the person who wants to see you." He began to laugh. "Cousin Max. All these years and I never knew we were related."

Max abandoned all attempt at figuring out what Hewison was talking about and allowed himself to be guided into the lounge. A young girl rose up to greet them from one of the sofas. He noticed that she had light chestnut hair, falling down to shoulder length, and a fresh pink-and-white complexion; but it was her vitality that made the most immediate impression. Freshness, and wonder at the world's strangeness, and animation; and, with those qualities, the capacity to be hurt. The other side of so beautifully minted a coin. But she was happy enough at the moment. He thought she was about twenty.

Hewison said: "This is

Sylvia Ashburn, my niece. I've only just learned that she's a cousin of yours. That makes you my nephew, Max."

He satisfied his sense of humour in a grand outburst of mirth.

Max said: "Ashburn..."

"Second or third cousin, really," Sylvia said. "And Uncle Duncan—that's once removed, to; it's all very tenuous."

"Ashburn," Max repeated. "I remember. Your mother would be a Smith. Lola Smith. I met her once, a long time ago; she was a little girl then."

Sylvia nodded. She looked at Max, a little abashed now that the impetus of first meeting was spent. "I hope we didn't take you from something important. I've always wanted to meet you."

Max bowed. "You reconcile me even to the fact of my new uncle."

Hewison, who had begun to recover his composure, broke out again into laughter. "That's the way it is in U C," he said. "Just one big happy family."

THERE were the speeches the next day, but early in the evening Max got away. He took Sylvia to a little restaurant in one of the out-of-the-way squares, and they sat a long time over their meal, talking. There was no

telescreen on the wall; only a three-piece string orchestra whose soft strummings blended with the never-ending rush of the fountain in the square.

It was a good evening, for both of them, and when, late at night, Max helped her out of the gyrocar to her hotel foyer, they had arranged a joint expedition for the following day, to Frascati.

On the fourth morning of their time together they lay in the sun on the shore of the Tivoli lido, a seemingly natural lake, but fitted with every artificial convenience, including a cafe-ballroom reached only by diving through the preternaturally blue waters. The little artificial suns, threaded on near-invisible wires, were not at present in operation; the great sun itself beat down onto the green velvet lawns, interwoven with golden sands.

Max said: "I'm not decrying this sort of thing. I'm enough of a humanist to feel rather proud of it; but it makes me feel a little uncomfortable as well."

Sylvia said: "Mm. Me too. We trippers clutter the place up so. They can make nature behave tidily, but not human beings."

"In some human beings," Max said, "the natural transcends the artificial. In you,

my dear. But I agree you are an exception."

"That's awfully nice of you, Uncle Max."

He said: "You must come down to my place some time. I have a little beach that's reserved for myself and the local peasants. No submarine grottos, no telescreens, no artificial suns—but nature cooperates most of the time and it's quite pleasant."

She said: "Of course, I'd love to. Any time."

Max leaned on one scrawny elbow and surveyed her. During four days he had seen the intermittent flicker of unhappiness behind her natural gaiety, and it was there again. He said quietly: "At your age, your time should not be free enough to fall in so easily with the whims of an elderly uncle."

"Why shouldn't I like being with you?"

"For a good enough reason. You should be in love."

"With...?"

"With anyone. That doesn't matter."

She paused, looking out across the lake where a fat woman was floating in a crystal hemisphere. "And if I am?"

"You should be with him. They tell you so in all the teledramas."

She turned towards him, her eyes soft brown and now

clearly unhappy. "And what if I be Capulet, and he a Montague?"

"Today? In the twenty second century?"

"Put it another way. What if he is in Genetics Division?"

Max said: "I didn't think of that."

ORIGINALLY the ban imposed by Genetics Division on intermarriage with those from other managerials had had a kind of logic behind it. GD, apart from its duties to the world at large, had nourished some idea of a self-perfecting process within its own corpus, and it had been reasonable to maintain purity, granted the initial nonsense of assuming one. The idea had long passed, but the custom had hardened into tradition. There was the added difficulty in the case of men with any kind of career ahead of them that flouting tradition brought automatic expulsion from GD. It wasn't all that easy to start an entirely new career in another managerial.

Max said: "Tell me about it."

"We met in England about six months ago. He was sent to the new GD lab at Southampton. One doesn't pay much attention normally to GD men"—she smiled at Max ruefully—"for the obvious

and very good reason. But we're both keen on air-sphering; it happened before we knew there was any danger."

Max said: "I don't really need to ask this—to him, too?"

Sylvia nodded.

"I think we could arrange things," Max said, "—your Uncle Duncan and I—so that he got a job fitting his talents if he came over to UC."

She made a grimace. "UC. He's very loyal to Genetics. And UC—there isn't any managerial they dislike more."

Max said: "I'm afraid I may have had something to do with that."

She leaned forward, smiling. "Uncle Max, you're lovely! Yes, you have got in their hair quite a lot."

"But to put that sort of thing before..."

"He thought there could only be unhappiness for both of us, so we should make a clean break; I hope it's being easier for him, poor darling."

She had turned as though to watch a man limbering across the pool on waterskis, but the real object, Max saw, was to avoid meeting his eyes. Her own were liquid. And auto-telescreen trundled past them on its score of tiny wheels, answering a call for entertainment from someone. As it

passed it was flickering and mumbling to itself.

"It is not my view," he said, "that much good can come of interfering in people's personal lives. That being understood, I would like to meet this young man of yours. He is still at Southampton?"

"Yes. Uncle Max..."

He smiled. "No. I don't propose tackling him in my avuncular capacity. I've had some practice in striking up acquaintance with strangers. What hobbies has he got?"

"I told you. Air-sphering."

Max groaned. "I know. Apart from that."

Sylvia considered. "Nothing that I know of."

"Then," said Max, "air-sphering it must be. It might even be good for me."

"There's nothing you can do," she said.

"Be a good girl," he said gently. "Check me the next boat from Ostia to Southampton."

HEWISON, having provided a car for the journey to Ostia, insisted on accompanying them. He got Max on his own in the one place where there was no possible chance of Sylvia coming in unexpectedly. Around them there was the steady rush of water, a common phenomenon in anything run by Health, but crescendo here.

"Storm in Biscay," Hewison said conversationally. "I just checked with T & C. It *might* be quieter by the time that tub you're travelling on gets past Gib."

Max said: "Hope you weren't offended by my turning down the stratoliner reservation."

"Go your own way. What's the trip for, anyway?"

Max glanced at him. "It's a long time since I was in England; I feel like the change."

Hewison eased his bulk into an automasseur and Max stood waiting for him. Over the machine's high-pitched hum, Hewison said: "Sylvie's a nice kid; I hope you can do something for her."

Max said: "I suppose you do things like this to make sure Contact Section don't succumb to their natural idleness. Hewison, the man who knows."

But something nagged at him; it wasn't really Hewison's kind of thing at all. He watched the plump figure emerge from the machine and reflected, as he had done before, on the strange manifestations of human power. And on its stranger effects.

Hewison laughed. "They're a queer bunch in GD. By the way, what are you going as, Max? Not with a UC badge on, I take it."

"No," Max said. "Leisure

Group. I'm half of a cross-talk act, taking rest if not refuge from the other half, who is staying behind in Rome."

"Yes," Hewison said. "I'll be here for the rest of the summer. Come back when you've fixed things up; there's a lot I still want to talk over with you."

Max looked at him. "Sometimes, you know, Duncan, you worry me."

Hewison was still laughing when they went out to join Sylvia.

AIR-SPHERING was a fairly recent activity, which LG had sponsored, and which had taken them by surprise in its rocketing popularity. It derived from the Soki-je valve, which was an entirely new thing in midget compressors. The spheres themselves were of a very tough transparent polyethylene plastic formed in a segmented double skin. For elevation, the whole of the interspace between the two skins carried helium. For descent, the Soki-je valve compressed the helium into less than half its original space and the rest of the skin was flooded with ordinary air. The process was indefinitely reversible, permitting the air-spherer to bob up and down between ground level and 30,000 feet as long as the fancy took him.

There were all kinds of variations to be got out of the simple up-and-down travel on which air-sphering was based. At an overall density approximating the surrounding atmosphere, the spheres bobbed like thistledown in any air-current that took them. It was this that gave the sport the touch of danger, without which it could hardly have become so popular. Air-sphering clubs were commonly sited under the lee of mountain ranges so that the air-spheringers, with a minimum of inconvenience, could crowd in close to the peaks, gliding up and over on the drafts of air. They did not always glide quite over; then the sharp-edged rocks sliced through the plastic skins, spilling the occupants down precipitous depths.

North Wales was the nearest resort to Southampton. Max spent a couple of weeks learning to handle his air-sphere above the rolling Hampshire downs, before he went in for the real thing. When, on the next weekend, he joined the cloud of gleaming bubbles rising up from Beddgelert, it was with a reasonable confidence in his ability as an air-spheringer. The dexterity which, thirty eight years ago on Mars, had enabled him to win the Mare Cimmerium sandyacht race

for three successive summers, was still there to be summoned up. His reflexes, he reflected, were somewhat less sharp; but in the almost equally important talent of bluffing, the years had brought improvement.

He made his reputation right from the start, gliding close in under a razor-edged face of Snowdon where a little meteorological checking in advance had shown him that the up-draft was bound to be constant and that it would keep him a good deal further away from the rockface than the other air-spheringers would imagine. He got back to very respectful attention at the Club, and basked in the sun-lounge for an hour before going out again on another flight—equally breakneck in appearance, and equally safe in practice. When he returned, most eyes were following him. He did not discourage the bolder ones who spoke to him, complimenting him.

It was not until the following weekend that Peter O'Shane approached him. He was a very stockily-built young man and of no more than medium height. He had red hair and a healthy raw complexion. He was the kind of young man who took the world as he found it, and did as he was told, providing the

telling was indirect enough. Max could see now how such a person might identify social custom with duty, and place them both before love.

He could not, for the life of him, see what Sylvia had found attractive in him, but that, anyway, had not been part of his problem. He accepted O'Shane's rather puppyish admiration, and arranged a trip with him round The Gribin.

As the two spheres chased each other up the jagged slopes of air, he was aware of the exhilaration to be derived from this pursuit. For Sylvia, engaged in this ethereal waltz with her true love, it must have been like drinking the wine of the gods. Max skimmed his own sphere close under O'Shane's and on the same current of air leapt high, a hundred feet above the other in a matter of seconds.

They scaled The Gribin and came back to the Club, fixed in a determination to go air-sphering together on future occasions. Max was pleased to observe that O'Shane had made no attempt to pick up with one of the assortment of attractive young women there, although two of them at least were GD and so suitable. Max had seen him glance at them once or twice with a moody preoccupation that made it certain Sylvia was not forgot-

ten. Not, of course, that O'Shane was the forgetting kind; loyalty with him was a quality accentuated to a point not far short of stupidity.

A COUPLE of weekends later they took their spheres in an extended ramble round the Cader Idris massif. Max had packed a luncheon basket in his sphere, and in the middle of the day he dropped down to a small grassy knoll under the south side. O'Shane followed him. They anchored the two spheres side by side and lay out in the sun.

"What do you think keeps this grass so short?" O'Shane asked lazily.

Max's assumed identity was that of an official retired from Agriculture. "Sheep," he said briefly.

It was a reasonable chance that he was right; there were sheep lower down on the mountain. He had always found that the main thing was to give a positive answer. One could always marshal supporting arguments later, and generally it wasn't even necessary. O'Shane, eating a plankton and lobster patty, merely nodded his head. "I guess you must miss things," he said.

This was the opportunity. Max said casually: "Miss things?"

"Having a job to do. Time hangs heavy?"

"The thing to do," Max explained, "is to keep yourself active. Take up a new life when you put down the old one. I've taken up air-sphering, for instance."

"It's a good hobby," O'Shane acknowledged. "But a hobby. I should have thought..."

Max chuckled. "Not a new life? No. As a matter of fact, I took it up with a purpose. There's a young lady I met in Italy who's a keen air-spherer. I'm hoping... I'm still pretty fit for my age."

"I'll back that. Well, congratulations."

Max demurred. "Not yet." From his pocket he drew a small stereo-viewer, adjusted the controls, and passed it across to his companion. "That's her."

O'Shane took it without much interest. Lying on his back, he put his eyes to the viewing lenses. Max saw him stiffen. He put the stereo-viewer down slowly. "When you say 'Not yet,'" he said, "I take it you are optimistic about—fixing something, in the fairly near future?"

"I hope so; I most sincerely hope so. I want to settle down to that new life. In Italy, I think. It's a pleasant enough country."

O'Shane had stopped eating. He picked up the stereo-view-

er again, and looked a long time through the lenses. "She's very attractive," he said at last.

Max bit into a *foie gras* sandwich. "Yes, indeed. I'm a lucky man—I hope. Between you and me, I'm taking advantage of someone else's stupidity; some young fellow, I gather. A tiff, or something. I'm very grateful to that young man."

"Yes," O'Shane said, "I suppose so." He stood up. "I think I'll get back to the Club now, if you don't mind. I've remembered there's someone I must get in touch with."

Max grasped his arm. "Let's make it a race back there. Double brandies on the one who touches down last."

He beat O'Shane by a clear three minutes.

HE PUT A routine call through to Sylvia's hotel on arriving back in Rome. He was not surprised when the receptionist smiled back at him out of the screen.

"Miss Ashburn regrets that she has been unexpectedly called away."

"To England?"

"Yes." She glanced away from the screen towards the bulletin board which would hang on her left side. "Is this Manager Larkin calling?"

"Mr. Larkin here," he said.

"Director Hewison would



like to see you. Mussolini suite, Palazzo Nuovo. Whenever you can find the time."

"Thank you," Max said.

He flicked off the call-screen. 'Whenever you can find the time...' He put a call through to the Palazzo Nuovo.

"Director Hewison in?"

Off-guard, the receptionist said "Yes" straight away. She began to say: "Who...?" but Max had cut off again. He went out into the street and picked up a gyrocar.

Hewison said: "Max! I was hoping to see you."

"Yes," Max told him drily. "I got that extremely pressing invitation of yours."

Hewison smiled fatly. "Things aren't urgent now. You've done a good job, Max. He called her on a double-priority personal link, and spent quarter of an hour telling her what a fool he had

been. On his salary that means business."

"You have an infallible yardstick for measuring the emotions." Max looked at him. "You are more emotional yourself than an old cynic like I would have thought. Finding time from the weighty concerns of UC to be anxious over the romantic troubles of a niece, once removed. It only goes to show that human feeling extends into the most unlikely corners."

Hewison said: "I hope they will be married by now. If they were..."

"Have you put Contact Section out to grass, then?"

Hewison adjusted his call-screen. He spoke into it: "Vallira, give me the latest report from Southampton."

"While we're waiting," Max said, "perhaps..." He gestured towards the sideboard.

"Help yourself," Hewison said. "A small one for me."

As he brought the glass over, Max heard the voice talking from the screen. Hewison said: "That's definite? Thank you." He switched off, and took the glass from Max's hand. "A toast for you, Max. Here's to the happy young couple, and here's to United Chemicals."

Max said: "I'll join you in the first half of the toast with

pleasure. As for the second, I'm listening."

Hewison said apologetically: "I would have liked to let you in on things from the beginning. But I figured it might cramp your style."

"It wasn't all faked," Max said. "Sylvia is a distant cousin of mine."

"Hell, yes," Hewison said indignantly. "She's my niece all right, too." He paused and smiled. "And I'm by way of being your uncle. That tickled me. It all came out by accident; very providential."

"Go on," Max said.

"I'm not as inhuman as you think," Hewison said. "When Sylvia came to stay with me I knew there was something wrong. I made my inquiries. We found O'Shane and had the picture neatly laid out. I thought it worth checking whether he was the type who would be likely to stick to his course, or whether he might waver with time. We conducted a minor burglary at GD Personnel HQ, and picked up O'Shane's psychoplan. We found..."

"That he was likely to stick to his course."

"Yes. We found that. But we found something else; something that made us sit up."

MAX SIPPED his brandy. "Now," he said, "we're coming to it."

"You never knew about Mc-Ivar's experiments, did you?" Max shook his head. "It would be while you were on Venus."

"A weapon of some kind?"

"You knew that much?"

"No," Max said wearily. "I know you; I know UC. That's all."

"A weapon," Hewison said. "Now the trouble is that a weapon, to be effective in the modern world, has got to be of a very special kind. It's got to have enough impact to be overwhelming and it's got..."

"...To be selective," Max finished. "You've got to be able to use it in a crowded room, because that's the way the world is now. I prefer to take my lectures on managerialism from a book, Duncan."

"A book? Anyway, you know the score. So did Mc-Ivar. He was working on a particular kind of nerve gas. I won't go into details, but there was no possible mechanical defense to it. That made it useless, as it stood. The interesting part was that Mc-Ivar was convinced that it could be tackled on the same basis as leothine—by a preparatory immunization process. If it could, we were there."

"Yes," Max said. "All UC personnel immunized, and one swift trick would pull the lot. What does it do to people, by the way?"

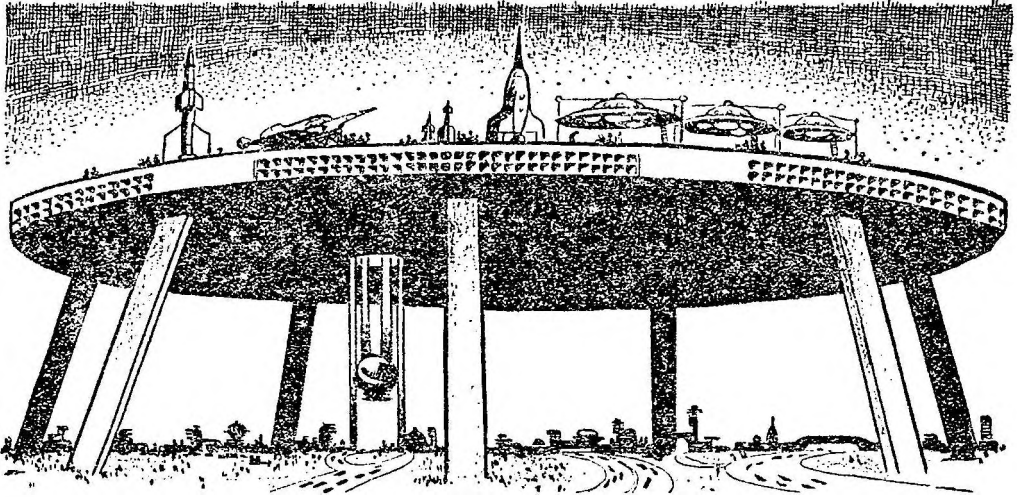
"Knocks them out for long enough. Only a small percentage of fatalities. Not more than three per cent."

"Three per cent," Max echoed. "And McIvar?"

"He died. Assapai—one of those Venus viruses. Odds were millions to one against

most to the last degree. It's a duplication we've been looking for ever since McIvar's death; according to the Psycho & Medicine people we weren't likely to turn it up in a thousand years. But we kept looking."

"And found O'Shane."



him being affected by it, but he was. They didn't normally do more than give human beings a heavy cold. And McIvar was the one man who might have cracked it."

"On Long Province," Max said, "that virus killed a hundred natives in one season. I knew nearly all of them personally; I never thought I would thank the Lord for it."

Hewison extended his hands. "There you are! It was for that reason we couldn't let you in on anything. Now to get back to O'Shane. His psychoplan matched McIvar's al-

"Yes. He is our man to carry on where McIvar left off. It doesn't matter that he's had a Genetics training; we can pump the stuff into him fast enough. It was the mind pattern we wanted; loyalty is part of that pattern. It wouldn't have been possible to detach him from GD at all without this affair of his with Sylvie. And even with that, we knew it would be damned hard."

"But I managed it," Max said.

He contemplated his empty brandy glass. Hewison went

over for the bottle himself and poured it out. He put the bottle down and stared at Max. A grin spread slowly across his face. "I'm sorry, Max. But you had to be fooled."

Max looked up. He smiled himself. "No, Duncan. You didn't quite manage it. I didn't know it was as big as this, of course, but I knew there was more to it than a late-flowering philanthropy. It was obvious you wanted O'Shane, and wanted him badly. It couldn't be for any good reason, or you would have told me. So I weighed things up for myself."

"But we've got him!" Hewison said. "He applied for UC affiliation today, at the same time as he married Sylvie. There's nothing you can do about that, Max."

"You've got him," Max said; "but he isn't going to be any use to you."

"You think he'll jib at the work? That's all covered by the psychoplan. Humanitarian scruples well compensated for by loyalty drive; it's a pity you aren't more that way, Max. He'll do what we want him to do."

"The psychoplan," Max said gently, "is for Peter O'Shane, bachelor. He is now married. His plan phases with another's and is affected by it."

Hewison looked at him sharply. "Affected in minor modifications. But a major change like the one you are suggesting doesn't happen once in a thousand cases."

"Fancy you being unlucky twice, Duncan. The odds in favour of UC pulling it off must have been, to start with, astronomical."

Without answering Hewison applied himself to the callscreen again. He said brusquely: "Urgent, Vallira. Phase O'Shane's psychoplan with my niece's. I'll wait."

Max said: "You are getting a better quality brandy than you used to do."

Hewison looked at him with some annoyance. "I told the dealer what you said about the last case."

"Wise of you," Max said.

Hewison stiffened. Max heard Vallira's voice, and relaxed smiling.

Hewison said: "There can't be any mistake about that?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," Vallira's voice said.

Hewison switched off. He lowered himself in his chair and stared for some time at the ornate neo-fascist nymphs on the ceiling.

Max said encouragingly: "You can always try again."

Hewison regarded him balefully. "Thanks. You can tell me one thing. Why were you

so sure about this. It doesn't happen once..."

"...In a thousand cases. Perhaps it's because I understand Sylvia better than you do."

THEY WERE at the Tivoli lido again.

Max said: "It's good of you to spare the time for me."

She said, honestly: "Peter's got to be away for three days for the change of affiliation. But I wanted to have some time with you again, Uncle Max. More than anything, I wanted to thank you. I don't know how you did it."

"Simply enough," Max said. "You could have done it yourself, had you been a different kind of girl from the one you are."

What might easily have been the same fat woman was drifting by in the same crystal hemisphere. Sylvia wrinkled her brows; she did it charmingly.

"How?" she asked.

"Men have unworthy emotions," Max said. "Even, though you will find it hard to believe it, your husband. I found the right chord, and plucked it. Just jealousy. It made it a great deal worse, of course, that he should have to contemplate the possibility of your marrying someone as senile as myself, but you

could have done it as well simply by staying at hand and being nice to other men. Or rather, you could have done it if you hadn't been you; that was why I was necessary."

She smiled disbelievingly. "Anyway, everything's perfect now."

"Perfect," Max agreed.

"You know, you ought to get married yourself, Uncle Max. You're not a bit too old. Find someone nice."

He did not look at her. "I fell in love once," he said.

"And what happened? Why didn't you marry?"

"She preferred a younger man; it was very natural."

"She was a fool," Sylvia said.

Max looked out, over the tracery of sands and lawns.

"Over there, on the verandah," he said, "isn't it—?"

"Peter!" She got swiftly to her feet. She paused for a moment. "You must fall in love again, Uncle Max." Then she was away, running eagerly towards the verandah.

He spoke the words after her: "Not again, my lovely."

He watched her until the auto-telescreen, searching for someone to entertain, came between them. It was mumbling to itself and its voice had a peevish note.



WANT AD

WANTED: Indefinite number of persons with scientific orientations, well-rounded understanding of human behavior and aspirations, keen story-sense and immunity to the fast-buck virus, to revive the art of science fiction. Age, sex, etc., no object. Rewards indeterminate.

NOT TOO long ago, you heard a great deal about the "boom" in science fiction. The number of magazines devoted entirely to the subject had reached an all-time high. Numerous trade book houses added a science fiction line to their lists; science fiction appeared in most, if not all, of the "big slicks"; newspapers featured it; there were science fiction series on radio and television, and Hollywood started producing science fiction in all grades—

though mostly from mediocre to deplorable.

Long-term science fictionists found that their favored reading-matter had gained a sort of spurious respectability; they were no longer regarded as queer in their tastes, for science fiction had arrived, as it were.* Unfortunately, most of what had arrived under the science fiction label was a travesty of it, processed for a public which neither wanted nor cared for anything like the genuine product. (It can be argued that the public never had anything to say on the subject, since the producers of popular fiction tend to decide for the public what it wants; however the pre-boom fare was available for a couple of decades.) Both caring readers and writers found themselves in the position that Damon

Knight described in a recent review: indifference to the success of most of the offerings. If these failed, then new openings would be closed; if they succeeded, then various *ignorantes* would be sure that they *knew* what made good science fiction.

It is more or less plain to all, now, that the "boom" is over; still, some gains have been made. The general public remains considerably more conscious of the existence of science fiction than ever before. There's reasonable grounds for assuming that the audience for the product is larger than it was before 1950—even if it is nothing like what was prophesied for it during the period when we were told that science fiction magazines would drive detective and western magazines off the market.

That phrase about the "genuine product" as opposed to

"travesties" is rhetorical, of course, and will mean nothing to readers who have not experienced samplings of both. It will also mean something a little different to each individual reader who *has* experienced both, and who might agree that the two classifications have existed in offerings labelled "science fiction"—particularly during the boom period. I might add that I am using "travesties" to cover two types of story, the mass production of which has contributed to the present depressed status of the art: phony science fiction and formula science fiction. We can still single out a pretty high percentage of the spurious offerings, by examining the qualifications necessary to produce "good" examples of the real thing.

First, there is the matter of scientific orientation. The

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* Isaac Asimov delivered a humorous monologue on this aspect, some time back, where he contrasted the position of the science fiction reader in the '30s and in the '50s. In the '30s, the reader would slink into a newsstore, look around furtively, and not seeing the latest issue, whisper hoarsely, "Have you the new *Flabbergasting Stories*?" Whereupon the dealer would roar out, "*Flabbergasting Stories!*", look at the customer more in pity than censure, and pull a copy

out of some obscure corner. At this point, crowds of people would suddenly appear and glare, titter, and exclaim at the poor wretch who wanted this crazy stuff. In the '50s, the reader would stroll blithely into a newsstore, pick up a copy of *Flabbergasting Stories* from the prominent display rack whereon it rested, and pay for it—to the admiring glances of the dealer and other folk about; and someone would whisper in awed tones, "He must be an atomic physicist!"

If an allegedly supernatural happening is real, then it's logical—providing you dig down far enough to find the logic...



SARABAND IN C SHARP MAJOR

by ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

OLD LUKE LAMPERT came over the hill in the dark of the night. The moon was a wan sickle frequently obscured by bilious clouds. The path was a dark mosaic to be followed more by instinct than by sight. All around, the pines and moun-

tain ash shivered and whispered and nudged each other and whispered again.

"Tss-sst! Luke's drunk! Tss-sst!"

It wasn't true. Luke was warm in the belly and slow in the wits, but not downright inebriated. If he had been

drunk he would not be walking home: he'd be supine in a ditch, snoring his head off. He is not a drunk who on the floor can lie and loudly shout for more.

Luke had never got to that extreme of alcoholic idiocy. His present condition was the nearest he'd come, namely, that of being pleasantly pickled. And there was justification for it. It isn't every day a no-account oldster is called upon to give away the bride, she being an orphan.

He licked appreciative lips as he thought of this rare event. Nice girl, Maisie. He'd done her proud, having washed, patched his pants, trimmed his beard, got the loan of a pair of boots that didn't gape at the toes, and generally made himself respectable.

And when the preacher asked, "Who giveth this woman to this man?" he had responded with great dignity, "I do!" and made Maisie very happy.

He hiccuped and stumbled over a root. The trees whispered. The moon leered from the edge of a cloud. It could see what he could not see: the pointed cylinder of bronze shining in the glade beyond the hill.

Not that it would have meant much to him had he been able to view the cylinder.

In its present state, his mind would have registered only two things: that the object was strange and that it had not been there at mid-day. The limit of his conjecture would have been something about nosy-pokes looking for oil or maybe a government project getting started. The morning would be the proper time to investigate further. In the hill country, there is always tomorrow morning.

So he weaved onward in his borrowed boots, hiccuping at intervals and mightily pleased with the social status he'd achieved. It would be in the local sheet come Saturday.

"The bride was given away by Mr. Luke Lampert."

Right on the crest he stopped alongside a lightning-riven tree whose skeletal arms remained fixed in attitudes of agony. He could smell the damp grass and the rustling pines and the fading carnation in his buttonhole. Also something else, something vaguely reminiscent of the hot-metal odors that permeated Rafe Dickinson's smithy. But Rafe wouldn't be working at past midnight. Besides, his forge was more than three miles away.

He was smitten with vague uneasiness. Twenty times a month he mooched along this track and knew all its varying odors, but he had not sniffed

the like of this before. The whole area was a mass of trees, bushes and undergrowth. No plant growth smells like superheated metal.

The alien scent wasn't all, either. His momentary jumpiness was due in part to something else he couldn't quite identify. A kind of feeling that he wasn't alone where he should be alone. A sense of presence. A nervy tickle such as one gets when other eyes are staring at the back of one's neck. Warily he sneaked a look along the way he'd just come. There was nothing, nothing but the dark and the sibilant trees.

It did not occur to him to leave the route and explore the vicinity. If he'd gone ten yards to his left, climbed a small bank and passed between a pair of mountain ash, he'd have seen the cylinder poised in the dip with its nose aimed at the stars. His inward feelings were more those of faint alarm than intense curiosity, so he stayed on the path and slouched onward, grumbling into his beard.

Down the steep bend toward the rivulet that flowed through the tiny valley. He was no longer thinking about the wedding. His mind was now on the subject of the drinks that flowed with the nuptial feast. They had tasted

all right, and he'd not had too many. Just enough to become happy and dance to Willy Dane's fiddle and show all and sundry that there was life in the old dog yet.

Perhaps his calculations had slipped slightly and he'd had a drop too much, just a tiny drop. Or maybe the stuff had been bad. Hardened toppers had been known to claim that they could see rainbow-colored snakes or were surrounded by red-eyed rats. It was conceivable that an extra glass of the wrong stuff could make one smell hot metal and think he was being followed.

LUKE LOOKED around again, eyes rheumy, ears straining for a cautious footstep, the betraying crack of a twig. Nobody there. He got the eerie notion that something was laughing at him, giggling in the shadows, watching his every step, staring him into gazing backward, and snickering whenever he turned.

It wasn't so good, especially in his case. Old Luke was not given to delusions. Except on some remote occasion such as had occurred today, he was a reasonably sober character, taciturn, a mite unsociable, and had lived by himself too long to be fooled by the noises and smells of the woods. What he sensed now

was different, unfamiliar, an elusive something that wasn't quite right.

A man must be getting old when he starts imagining things, living in a dream-world of his own, building it crazily around the stink of a forge, the glare of an unseen eye, the unhearable chuckles of what doesn't exist.

Arriving at the bottom of the slope, he found himself in deeper darkness where trees grew thickly and spread their branches across the stream. Buried in the gloom somewhere in front of him should be the plank that served as a bridge. One couldn't see the darned thing no matter how one tried. He struck a match. It was blown out the moment it flared. Cupping his hands, he tried again, succeeded in burning a finger before that one, too, was extinguished.

His neck-hairs went erect as once again he developed that overwhelming sensation of being watched. Deep in his mind, rather than with his ears, he thought he detected a soundless snicker way back and high up, somewhere among or over the tree-tops.

Swivelling around, he called hoarsely, "Who's there?"

"Who's there?" jeered his voice, running along the course of the stream and playing hide and seek among the

rocks. "Who's there...there...there?"

Except for this, and the whispering of the pines, and the screech of a distant owl, there was nothing, nothing.

Turning back to face the stream, he put out a foot, felt around for the end of the plank. A stone slipped sideways from under the heel of his other boot; he lost balance, fell over. The sound that wasn't a sound entered his brain again as he went down; an appreciative chortling as of an invisible witness vastly amused by his antics.

OLD LUKE did not hit earth. He tumbled helplessly leftward, heard the unearthly chuckle, put out a hand to break his fall, touched nothing. The feeling was much as if he'd teetered halfway over when somebody abolished the law of gravity. One instant he was heading for a thump. The next he was light and floating, peculiarly buoyant.

His body gyrated like a blown feather, soared up in a great arc, came gracefully down. The clouds, the moon and the stars spun dizzily. If this were the penalty of too much drink he'd never touch another drop. He vowed that earnestly as he swooped earthward, too preoccupied by peril and personal recriminations to

be conscious that something was holding him.

What resembled a long row of pale, luminescent ribbons shot up from the darkness toward his descending feet. The grasp upon him was released, his weight returned; he plunged straight into the ribbons, landed squarely upon the middle one.

It gave slightly under his bulk, blending and stretching like a great length of yard-wide semi-visible elastic. Still supporting him, it retracted and straightened.

At the same time it gave out a noise, a deep, skull-splitting *whoo-oo-oong!*

Luke scrambled upright, sweating and swaying like a tightrope walker who suddenly has lost his nerve. There was abysmal darkness below, darkness all around, darkness above save for the thin moon smirking through a cloud-gap.

Whoo-oo-oong!

It made him leap frantically backward, missing the adjacent ribbon and hitting the one beyond.

Whee-ee-eeng!

The sound was pitched higher. It cut through him like a knife, excruciating, unbearable. A soul-searing sound. A gong-note from infernal depths. He sprang forward, trembling, and filled with fear, struck two ribbons, fell across a third.

Whee-ang-ing!

A triple blast this time. A hellish tune on three notes. Each one as much as he could endure, a little more than could be endured by anything made of ordinary flesh and blood.

There was an end to this series of glistening, insubstantial strips that stretched and sprang back and twanged in the night, a ribbonless place of appalling gloom where one could find blessed silence even if one fell a thousand feet. He came laboriously erect, bouncing and swinging while the ribbon boomed, took a grip on himself, raced for the nearer limit.

It was like trying to run across a row of sprung hammocks. They sank and stretched, jerked and shrilled while their noises grew progressively more piercing, more agonizing.

Tormented nerves compelled him to stop at a point where he felt that one note higher and more penetrating would addle his brain for keeps. He couldn't bear it. The end was so near, a mere dozen jumps away, but he couldn't bear it. The human mind can tolerate only so much, and Old Luke's was no exception.

For a moment he remained in one place, stupefied by events and the bombardment

of vibrations that he could sense only as mentally-felt sounds. There was another noise now, not from the ribbons, but from somewhere else a fraction nearer the moon. A long, convulsive cackle. It made him think of an enormous imbecile holding a monstrous paunch and shedding tears of insane laughter.

But he couldn't see anyone. Only the phantom ribbons, the black gulf beneath them, the dim halo far above where the moon had become shrouded by a wisp of cloud. There was only this nightmare in which he pranced around like an involuntary high-wire performer in a Big Top emptied and dark.

The other end! Despite his mental confusion it struck him suddenly and forcefully that if the sounds created more anguish in one direction they should be correspondingly less painful in the other. The last dozen jumps should be easy. What lay beyond them he neither knew nor cared. Anything, anything at all was better than *this*.

HE STEELED himself in the manner of one preparing to face a brief period of extreme agony in order to escape for all time. Then he ran as fast as he could on a surface too resilient for real swiftness. The strips twanged

and shrieked and roared. He lost balance, dived headlong into the middle one on which he'd first landed.

Whoo-oo-oong!

But he was up and on, racing through a jet black world in which there was only the shattering strum of a super-banjo and the joyous howls of a super-idiot.

Twelve steps from the end he collapsed on a ribbon that went taut with a terrible *Zee-ee-ink!* which reverberated up his spine and battered at his brain. The notes did not go down as expected. They went up, matching those that had defeated him in the opposite direction. There was no escape. Nothing human could suffer the last few chords and still retain a thinking mind.

All at once he became filled with a dull but vicious fury born of torment that had neither sense nor reason. Beard bristling, watery eyes afire, he found enough resolve to make for the slightly more endurable middle. The ribbons hummed and gonged and throbbed shatteringly while he flourished a skinny fist at the sky and tried to out-howl the sounds with vivid curses.

Whoo-oo-oong!

By the time he got there he was too much beyond himself to know whether it was the middle or not. For a minute that dragged like an hour

he hopped to and fro, seeking the minimum agony while the sounds tore at him and the unseeable maniac laughed without cease.

"Ha-ha-ha! Ho-ho-ho!"

Old Luke dropped, able to stand no more. He clung to his swinging support while the vibrations of his crazy dance died down. If he remained still, perfectly still, maybe the ribbons would be silent. Complete inanimation would be no solution of his problem, no effective way out, but at least it would give gracious peace, sweet silence in this dreadful night.

Sobbing with exhaustion, he lay embracing the hellish strip and at that point an escape was created for him. The lunatic giggling that had penetrated deep into his mind suddenly cut off. He heard or seemed to hear or imagine that he could hear a new and different voice that spoke no words.

This fresh phenomenon created a powerful impression of impatience and reproof. The thing that had laughed now whined pettishly. The other became severe and the laughter went sulky and silent.

Then the ribbons were snatched away into nothingness and Old Luke dropped. He whirled through the air, head first, feet first, slowed down at the last moment with-

out being aware of it, found himself standing ankle-deep at the edge of the stream.

Utter bewilderment did not keep him there even for a moment. His glands rather than his brain gave urgent orders to his legs, he scrambled out of the shallow water, up the bank, fled among the murmuring trees, found the path. He held his head as he ran. It felt like a boiled egg that had been cracked by a hungry monster.

The brown-edged, faded carnation dropped from his lapel as he went away. A borrowed boot crushed it into the dirt. It lay in the dark like a memento of life—and death.

DOCTOR FANSHAW watched Old Luke mooch out of the room then said to Wingrove Taylor, "There you are. You've heard his story. It's identically the same as the one he gave me a week ago."

"And you've found nothing wrong with him?"

"Not a thing. He came to me in somewhat shaky condition. He'd had a severe shock from which he has now recovered. At that time he suspected himself of going scatty."

"No wonder. I've investigated some queer phenomena in my time but have come across nothing like this."

"Well, I thought you might

be interested," Doctor Fanshaw went on. "I've known Luke Lampert a long time. Whatever else he may be, he's no liar. Neither is he a hopeless drunkard. Neither is he *non compos mentis*. He doesn't scare easily. I reckon that anything able to shake him up would have to be real enough."

"Nothing has been found where he claims to have performed his saraband in the sky?" Taylor asked.

"Nothing of obvious significance. A gang of locals scouted all around there the next day. They discovered a burned-out patch of vegetation half a mile upstream, but it might well have been caused by a natural fire. Spontaneous combustion or something like that."

"H'm!" Taylor massaged his heavy jaw. "I think it's just another fairy tale from the hills."

"I don't blame you—but I know Luke!"

"Yes, he seems sincere enough," Taylor conceded with a mite of reluctance. He leaned forward. "The yarn suggests a brief and unpleasant encounter with some other previously unheard-of form of life."

"Well?" Doc. Fanshaw's plump features showed that this corresponded with his own notions.

"A lonely, under-populated area such as this one is just where such a life-form might choose to land. Furthermore, what is said to be a brilliant meteor was observed arcing toward this vicinity around the same time."

"Well?" repeated the other.

Taylor said, "Those are two items in Luke Lampert's support. There are others against his story. Firstly, there's no proof that the so-called meteor actually landed."

"That's negative evidence."

"Maybe. But let's try apply some logic to the situation. A life-form able to come here from somewhere else in the cosmos *must* be highly intelligent."

"Yes, I agree with that."

"Being intelligent it won't tend to indulge stupidities; anything it does will have excellent motive. It will be well-nigh incapable of wasting time and energy on anything pointless, anything without purpose."

"That's reasonable, too," said Doc. Fanshaw.

"You bet it is! I've found from long experience that all allegedly supernormal happenings fall into two classes. If real, they're logical—providing you dig down far enough to find the logic. If not logical, they aren't real—they're imaginary."

"Maybe you're right."

"I know I am," declared Taylor, positively. "Intelligent life-forms don't act crazy for no reason whatsoever. It's plain nonsense to suppose they'd have even a weird alien purpose in making a hairy-faced oldster do a jig in mid-air long after midnight."

"That is what beats me." Doc. Fanshaw frowned to himself. "Luke's all right as far as I can tell. There doesn't appear to be anything the matter with him. But he's seventy-two and getting no younger. Guess I'd better keep an eye on him."

"You do that," Taylor approved. "Remember that motiveless deeds are the prerogative of incurable morons. Any

form of life with claim to a modicum of intelligence doesn't—" He broke off as an irritating cacophony of sound came from the next room. It suggested an imbecile prodding a piano. "What the deuce is that?"

"Pardon me." Doctor Fanshaw went into the other room. The noise ceased. He came back, smiling apologetically. "Boys will be boys. It was my son Jemmy. He'd dumped the kitten on the keys. You were about to say—?"

"I forget," said Taylor, straring at him, face suddenly looking strained.



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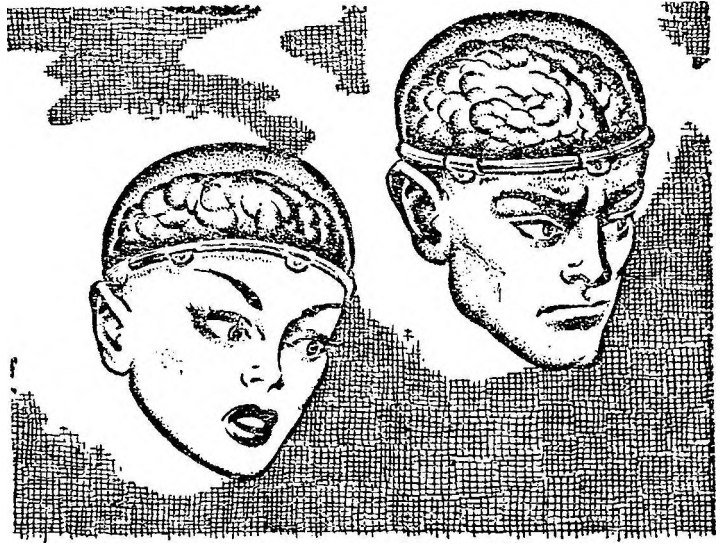
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CITY of GLASS

by
NOEL LOOMIS

If you own a swibble, you see, you'll never have to worry about any loyalty problems...



SERVICE CALL

by PHILIP K. DICK

IT WOULD be wise to explain what Courtland was doing just before the doorbell rang.

In his swank apartment on Leavenworth Street, where Russian Hill drops to the flat expanse of North Beach and finally to the San Francisco Bay itself, David Courtland sat hunched over a series of routine reports, a week's file of technical data dealing with the results of the Mount Diablo tests. As research director for Pesco Paints, Courtland

was concerning himself with the comparative durability of various surfaces manufactured by his company; treated shingles had baked and sweated in the California heat for five hundred and sixty-four days. It was now time to see which pore-filler withstood oxidation, and to adjust production schedules accordingly.

Involved with his intricate analytical data, Courtland at first failed to hear the bell. In the corner of the living room his high-fidelity Bogen am-

plifier, turntable, and speaker were playing a Schumann symphony. His wife, Fay, was doing the dinner dishes in the kitchen. The two children, Bobby and Ralf, were already in their bunk beds asleep. Reaching for his pipe, Courtland leaned back from the desk a moment, ran a heavy hand through his thinning gray hair...and heard the bell.

"Damn," he said. Vaguely, he wondered how many times the demure chimes had sounded; he had a dim subliminal memory of repeated attempts to attract his attention. Before his tired eyes the mass of report sheets wavered and receded. Who the hell was it? His watch read only nine-thirty; he couldn't really complain, yet.

"Want me to get it?" Fay called brightly from the kitchen.

"I'll get it." Wearily, Courtland got to his feet, stuffed his feet into his shoes, and plodded across the room, past the couch, floorlamp, magazine rack, the phonograph, the bookcase, to the door. He was a heavy-set middle-aged technologist, and he didn't like people interrupting his work.

In the hall stood an unfamiliar visitor. "Good evening, sir," the visitor said, intently examining a clip-board; "I'm sorry to bother you."

Courtland glared sourly at the young man. A salesman, probably. Thin, blond-haired, in a white shirt, bow-tie, single-breasted blue suit, the young man stood gripping his clip-board in one hand and a bulging black suitcase with the other. His bony features were set in an expression of serious concentration. There was an air of studious confusion about him; brow wrinkled, lips tight together, the muscles of his cheeks began to twitch into overt worry. Glancing up he asked, "Is this 1846 Leavenworth? Apartment 3A?"

"That's right," Courtland said, with the infinite patience due a dumb animal.

The taut frown on the young man's face relaxed a trifle. "Yes, sir," he said, in his urgent tenor. Peering past Courtland into the apartment he said, "I'm sorry to bother you in the evening when you're working, but as you probably know we've been pretty full up the last couple of days. That's why we couldn't answer your call sooner."

"My call?" Courtland echoed. Under his unbuttoned collar, he was beginning to glow a dull red. Undoubtedly something Fay had got him mixed up in; something she thought he should look into, something vital to gracious

living. "What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded. "Come to the point."

The young man flushed, swallowed noisily, tried to grin, and then hurried on huskily, "Sir, I'm the repairman you asked for; I'm here to fix your swibble."

THE FACETIOUS retort that came to Courtland's mind was one that later on he wished he had used. "Maybe," he wished he had said, "I don't want my swibble fixed. Maybe I like my swibble the way it is." But he didn't say that. Instead, he blinked, pulled the door in slightly, and said, "My *what?*"

"Yes, sir," the young man persisted. "The record of your swibble installation came to us as a matter of course. Usually we make an automatic adjustment inquiry, but your call preceded that—so I'm here with complete service equipment. Now, as to the nature of your particular complaint..." Furiously, the young man pawed through the sheaf of papers on his clip-board. "Well, there's no point in looking for that; you can tell me orally. As you probably know, sir, we're not officially a part of the vending corporation... we have what is called an *insurance*-type coverage that comes into existence automatically, when your

purchase is made. Of course, you can cancel the arrangement with us." Feebly, he tried to joke. "I have heard there're a couple of competitors in the service business."

Stern morality replaced humor. Pulling his lank body upright he finished, "But let me say that we've been in the swibble repair business ever since old R. J. Wright introduced the first A-driven experimental model."

For a time, Courtland said nothing. Phantasmagoria swirled through his mind: random quasi-technological thoughts, reflex evaluations and notations of no importance. So swibbles broke right down, did they? Big-time business operations... send out a repairman as soon as the deal is closed. Monopoly tactics... squeeze out the competition before they have a chance. Kick-back to the parent company, probably. Interwoven books.

But none of his thoughts got down to the basic issue. With a violent effort he forced his attention back onto the earnest young man who waited nervously in the hall with his black service kit and clip-board. "No," Courtland said emphatically, "no, you've got the wrong address."

"Yes, sir?" the young man quavered politely, a wave of stricken dismay crossing his

features. "The wrong address? Good Lord, has dispatch got another route fouled up with that new-fangled—"

"Better look at your paper again," Courtland said, grimly pulling the door toward him. "Whatever the hell a swibble is, I haven't got one; and I didn't call you."

As he shut the door, he perceived the final horror on the young man's face, his stupefied paralysis. Then the brightly painted wood surface cut off the sight, and Courtland turned wearily back to his desk.

A swibble. What the hell was a swibble? Seating himself moodily, he tried to take up where he had left off... but the direction of his thoughts had been totally shattered.

There was no such thing as a swibble. And he was on the in, industrially speaking. He read *U. S. News the Wall Street Journal*. If there was a swibble he would have heard about it—unless a swibble was some pipsqueak gadget for the home. Maybe that was it.

"Listen," he yelled at his wife as Fay appeared momentarily at the kitchen door, dishcloth and blue-willow plate in her hands. "What is this business? You know anything about swibbles?"

Fay shook her head. "It's nothing of mine."

"You didn't order a chrome and plastic a.c.-d.c. swibble from Macy's?"

"Certainly not."

Maybe it was something for the kids. Maybe it was the latest grammar-school craze, the contemporary bolo or flip cards or knock-knock-who's-there? But nine-year-old kids didn't buy things that needed a service man carrying a massive black tool kit—not on fifty cents a week allowance.

Curiosity overcame aversion. He had to know, just for the record, what a swibble was. Springing to his feet, Courtland hurried to the hall door and yanked it open.

The hall was empty, of course. The young man had wandered off. There was a faint smell of men's cologne and nervous perspiration, nothing more.

Nothing more, except a wadded-up fragment of paper that had come unclipped from the man's board. Courtland bent down and retrieved it from the carpet. It was a carbon copy of a route-instruction, giving code-identification, the name of the service company, the address of the caller.

*1846 Leavenworth Street
S.F. v-call rec'd Ed Fuller
9:20 pm 5-28. Swibble
30s15H(deluxe). Suggest
check lateral feedback &*

neural replacement bank.
AAw3-6.

The numbers, the information, meant nothing to Courtland. He closed the door and slowly returned to his desk. Smoothing out the crumpled sheet of paper, he re-read the dulled words again, trying to squeeze some meaning from them. The printed letterhead was:

**ELECTRONIC SERV-
ICE INDUSTRIES**

455 Montgomery Street,
San Francisco 14. Ri8-
4456n Est. 1963

That was it. The meager printed statement: Established in 1963. Hands trembling, Courtland reached mechanically for his pipe. Certainly, it explained why he had never heard of swibbles. It explained why he didn't own one...and why, no matter how many doors in the apartment building he knocked on, the young repairman wouldn't find anybody who did.

Swibbles hadn't been invented, yet.

AFTER AN interval of hard, furious thought, Courtland picked up the phone and dialed the home number of his subordinate at the Pesco labs.

"I don't care," he said carefully, "what you're doing this evening. I'm going to give you

a list of instructions and I want them carried out right away."

At the other end of the line Jack Hurley could be heard pulling himself angrily together. "Tonight? Listen, Dave, the company isn't my mother—I have some life of my own. If I'm supposed to come running down—"

"This has nothing to do with Pesco. I want a tape recorder and a movie camera with infra-red lens. I want you to round up a legal stenographer. I want one of the company electricians—you pick him out, but get the best. And I want Anderson from the engineering room. If you can't get him, get any of our designers. And I want somebody off the assembly line; get me some old mechanic who knows his stuff. Who really knows machines."

Doubtfully, Hurley said, "Well, you're the boss; at least, you're boss of research. But I think this will have to be cleared with the company. Would you mind if I went over your head and got an okay from Pesbroke?"

"Go ahead." Courtland made a quick decision. "Better yet, I'll call him myself; he'll probably have to know what's going on."

"What is going on?" Hurley demanded curiously. "I never heard you sound this way, be-

fore...has somebody brought out a self-spraying paint?"

Courtland hung up the phone, waited out a torturous interval, and then dialed his superior, the owner of Pesco Paint.

"You have a minute?" he asked tightly, when Pesbroke's wife had roused the white-haired old man from his after-dinner nap and got him to the phone. "I'm mixed up in something big; I want to talk to you about it."

"Has it got to do with paint?" Pesbroke muttered, half-humorously, half-seriously. "If not—"

Courtland interrupted him. Speaking slowly, he gave a full account of his contact with the swibble repairman.

When Courtland had finished, his employer was silent. "Well," Pesbroke said finally, "I guess I could go through some kind of routine. But you've got me interested. All right, I'll buy it. But," he added quietly, "if this is an elaborate time-waster, I'm going to bill you for the use of the men and equipment."

"By time-waster, you mean if nothing profitable comes out of this?"

"No," Pesbroke said. "I mean, if you *know* it's a fake; if you're consciously going along with a gag. I've got a migraine headache and I'm not going along with a gag. If

you're serious, if you really think this might be something, I'll put the expenses on the company books."

"I'm serious," Courtland said. "You and I are both too damn old to play games."

"Well," Pesbroke reflected, "the older you get, the more you're apt to go off the deep end; and this sounds pretty deep." He could be heard making up his mind. "I'll telephone Hurley and give him the okay. You can have whatever you want... I suppose you're going to try to pin this repairman down and find out what he really is."

"That's what I want to do."

"Suppose he's on the level...what then?"

"Well," Courtland said cautiously, "then I want to find out what a swibble is. As a starter. Maybe after that—"

"You think he'll be back?"

"He might be. He won't find the right address; I know that. Nobody in *this* neighborhood called for a swibble repairman."

"What do you care what a swibble is? Why don't you find out how he got from his period back here?"

"I think he knows what a swibble is—and I don't think he knows how he got here. He doesn't even know he's here."

Pesbroke agreed. "That's reasonable. If I come over,

will you let me in? I'd sort of enjoy watching."

"Sure," Courtland said, perspiring, his eye on the closed door to the hall. "But you'll have to watch from the other room. I don't want anything to foul this up...we may never have another chance like this."

GRUMPILY, the jury-rigged company team filed into the apartment and stood waiting for Courtland to instruct. Jack Hurley, in aloha sports shirt, slacks, and crepe-soled shoes, clodded resentfully over to Courtland and waved his cigar in his face. "Here we are; I don't know what you told Pesbroke, but you certainly pulled him along." Glancing around the apartment he asked, "Can I assume we're going to get the pitch now? There's not much these people can do, unless they understand what they're after."

In the bedroom doorway stood Courtland's two sons, eyes half-shut with sleep. Fay nervously swept them up and herded them back into the bedroom. Around the living room the various men and women took up uncertain positions, their faces registering outrage, uneasy curiosity, and bored indifference. Anderson, the designing engineer, acted aloof and blase. MacDow-

ell, the stoop-shouldered, pot-bellied lathe operator, glared with proletarian resentment at the expensive furnishings of the apartment, and then sank into embarrassed apathy as he perceived his own work boots and grease-saturated pants. The recording specialist was trailing wire from his microphones to the tape recorder set up in the kitchen. A slim young woman, the legal stenographer, was trying to make herself comfortable in a chair in the corner. On the couch, Parkinson, the plant emergency electrician, was glancing idly through a copy of *Fortune*.

"Where's the camera equipment?" Courtland demanded.

"Coming," Hurley answered. "Are you trying to catch somebody trying out the old Spanish Treasure bunco?"

"I wouldn't need an engineer and an electrician for that," Courtland said drily. Tensely, he paced around the living room. "Probably he won't even show up; he's probably back in his own time, by now, or wandering around God knows where."

"Who?" Hurley shouted, puffing gray cigar smoke in growing agitation. "What's going on?"

"A man knocked on my door," Courtland told him briefly. "He talked about some machinery, equipment I never

heard of. Something called a swibble."

Around the room blank looks passed back and forth.

"Let's guess what a swibble is," Courtland continued grimly. "Anderson, you start. What would a swibble be?"

Anderson grinned. "A fish hook that chases down fish."

Parkinson volunteered a guess. "An English car with only one wheel."

Grudgingly, Hurley came next. "Something dumb. A machine for housebreaking pets."

"A new plastic bra," the legal stenographer suggested.

"I don't know," MacDowell muttered resentfully. "I never heard of anything like that."

"All right," Courtland agreed, again examining his watch. He was getting close to hysteria; an hour had passed and there was no sign of the repairman. "We don't know; we can't even guess. But someday, nine years from now, a man named Wright is going to invent a swibble, and it's going to become big business. People are going to make them; people are going to buy them and pay for them; repairmen are going to come around and service them."

THE DOOR opened and Pesbroke entered the apartment, overcoat over his arm,

crushed Stetson hat clamped over his head. "Has he showed up again?" His ancient, alert eyes darted around the room. "You people look ready to go."

"No sign of him," Courtland said drearily. "Damn it—I sent him off; I didn't grasp it until he was gone." He showed Pesbroke the crumpled carbon.

"I see," Pesbroke said, handing it back. "And if he comes back you're going to tape what he says, and photograph everything he has in the way of equipment." He indicated Anderson and MacDowell. "What about the rest of them? What's the need of them?"

"I want people here who can ask the right questions," Courtland explained. "We won't get answers any other way. The man, if he shows up at all, will stay only a finite time. During that time, we've got to find out—" He broke off, as his wife came up beside him. "What is it?"

"The boys want to watch," Fay explained. "Can they? They promise they won't make any noise." She added wistfully, "I'd sort of like to watch, too."

"Watch, then," Courtland answered gloomily. "Maybe there won't be anything to see."

While Fay served coffee around, Courtland went on with his explanation. "First of

all, we want to find out if this man is on the level. Our first questions will be aimed at tripping him up; I want these specialists to go to work on him. If he's a fake, they'll probably find it out."

"And if he isn't?" Anderson asked, an interested expression on his face. "If he isn't, you're saying..."

"If he isn't, then he's from the next decade, and I want him pumped for all he's worth. But—" Courtland paused. "I doubt if we'll get much theory. I had the impression that he's a long way down on the totem pole. The best we probably can do is get a run-down on his specific work. From that, we may have to assemble our picture, make our own extrapolations."

"You think he can tell us what he does for a living," Pesbroke said cannily. "but that's about it."

"We'll be lucky if he shows up at all," Courtland said. He settled down on the couch and began methodically knocking his pipe against the ashtray. "All we can do is wait. Each of you think over what you're going to ask. Try to figure out the questions you want answered by a man from the future who doesn't know he's from the future, who's trying to repair equipment that doesn't yet exist."

"I'm scared," the legal sten-

ographer said, white-faced and wide-eyed, her coffee cup trembling.

"I'm about fed up," Hurley muttered, eyes fixed sullenly on the floor. "This is all a lot of hot air."

It was just about that time that the swibble repairman came again, and once more timidly knocked on the hall door.

THE YOUNG repairman was flustered. And he was getting perturbed. "I'm sorry, sir," he began without preamble. "I can see you have company, but I've rechecked my route instructions and this is *absolutely* the right address." He added plaintively, "I tried some other apartments; nobody knew what I was talking about."

"Come in," Courtland managed. He stepped aside, got himself between the swibble repairman and the door, and ushered him into the living room.

"Is this the person?" Pesbroke rumbled doubtfully, his gray eyes narrowing.

Courtland ignored him. "Sit down," he ordered the swibble repairman. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Anderson and Hurley and MacDowell moving in closely; Parkinson threw down his *Fortune* and got quickly to his feet. In the kitchen, the

sound of tape running through the recording head was audible...the room had begun moving into activity.

"I could come some other time," the repairman said apprehensively, eyeing the closing circle of people. "I don't want to bother you, sir, when you have guests."

Perched grimly on the arm of the couch Courtland said, "This is as good a time as any. In fact, this is the best time." A wild flood of relief spilled over him: now they had a chance. "I don't know what got into me," he went on rapidly. "I was confused. Of course I have a swibble; it's set up in the dining room."

The repairman's face twitched with a spasm of laughter. "Oh, really," he choked. "In the dining room? That's about the funniest joke I've heard in weeks."

Courtland glanced at Pesbroke. What the hell was so funny about that? Then his flesh began to crawl; cold sweat broke out on his forehead and the palms of his hands. What the hell was a swibble? Maybe they had better find out right away—or not at all. Maybe they were getting into something deeper than they knew. Maybe—and he didn't like the thought—they were better off where they were.

"I was confused," he said,

"by your nomenclature. I don't think of it as a swibble." Cautiously, he finished, "I know that's the popular jargon, but with that much money involved, I like to think of it by its legitimate title."

The swibble repairman looked completely confused. Courtland realized that he had made another mistake; apparently *swibble* was its correct name.

Pesbroke spoke up. "How long have you been repairing swibbles, Mister..." He waited, but there was no response from the thin, blank face. "What's your name, young man?" he demanded.

"My *what*?" The swibble repairman pulled jerkily away. "I don't understand you, sir."

Good Lord, Courtland thought. It was going to be a lot harder than he had realized—than any of them had realized.

Angrily, Pesbroke said, "You must have a name. Everybody has a name."

The young repairman gulped and stared down red-faced at the carpet. "I'm still only in service group four, sir. So I don't have a name, yet."

"Let it go," Courtland said. What kind of a society gave out names as a status privilege? "I want to make sure you're a competent repairman," he explained. "How

long have you been repairing swibbles?"

"For six years and three months," the repairman asserted. Pride took the place of embarrassment. "In junior high school I showed a straight A record in swibble-maintenance aptitude." His meager chest swelled. "I'm a born swibble-man."

"Fine," Courtland agreed uneasily; he couldn't believe the industry was that big. They gave tests in junior high school? Was swibble maintenance considered a basic talent, like symbol manipulation and manual dexterity? Had swibble work become as fundamental as musical talent, or as the ability to conceive spatial relationships?

"Well," the repairman said briskly, gathering up his bulging tool kit, "I'm all ready to get started. I have to be back at the shop before long...I've got a lot of other calls."

BLUNTLY, Pes broke stepped up squarely in front of the thin young man. "What is a swibble?" he demanded. "I'm tired of this damn fooling around. You say you work on these things—*what are they?* That's a simple enough question; they must be something."

"Why," the young man said hesitantly, "I mean, that's hard to say. Suppose—well,

suppose you ask me what a cat or a dog is. How can I answer that?"

"We're getting nowhere," Anderson spoke up. "The swibble is manufactured, isn't it? You must have schematics, then; hand them over."

The young repairman gripped his tool kit defensively. "What in the world is the matter, sir? If this is your idea of a joke—" He turned back to Courtland. "I'd like to start work; I really don't have much time."

Standing in the corner, hands shoved deep in his pockets, MacDowell said slowly, "I've been thinking about getting a swibble. The missus thinks we ought to have one."

"Oh, certainly," the repairman agreed. Color rising in his cheeks he rushed on, "I'm surprised you don't have a swibble already; in fact, I can't imagine what's wrong with you people. You're all acting—oddly. Where, if I may ask, do you come from? Why are you so—well, so uninformed?"

"These people," Courtland explained, "come from a part of the country where there aren't any swibbles."

Instantly, the repairman's face hardened with suspicion. "Oh?" he said sharply. "Interesting. What part of the country is that?"

Again, Courtland had said

the wrong thing; he knew that. While he floundered for a response, MacDowell cleared his throat and inexorably went on. "Anyhow," he said, "we've been meaning to get one. You have any folders with you? Pictures of different models?"

The repairman responded. "I'm afraid not, sir. But if you'll give me your address I'll have the sales department send you information. And if you want, a qualified representative can call on you at your convenience and describe the advantages of owning a swibble."

"The first swibble was developed in 1963?" Hurley asked.

"That's right." The repairman's suspicions had momentarily lulled. "And just in time, too. Let me say this—if Wright hadn't got his first model going, there wouldn't be any human beings left alive. You people here who don't own swibbles—you may not know it—and you certainly act as if you didn't know it—but you're alive right now because of old R. J. Wright. It's swibbles that keep the world going."

Opening his black case, the repairman briskly brought out a complicated apparatus of tubes and wiring. He filled a drum with clear fluid, sealed it, tried the plunger, and straightened up. "I'll start out

with a shot of dx—that usually puts them back into operation."

"What is dx?" Anderson asked quickly.

Surprised at the question, the repairman answered, "It's a high protein food concentrate. We've found that ninety percent of our early service calls are the result of improper diet. People just don't know how to care for their new swibble."

"My God," Anderson said feebly. "It's alive."

Courtland's mind took a nose-dive. He had been wrong; it wasn't precisely a repairman who stood gathering his equipment together. The man had come to fix the swibble, all right, but his capacity was slightly different than Courtland had supposed. He wasn't a repairman; he was a veterinarian.

LAYING out instruments and meters, the young man explained: "The new swibbles are a lot more complex than the early models; I need all this before I can even get started. But blame the War."

"The War?" Fay Courtland echoed apprehensively.

"Not the early war. The big one, in '75. That little war in '61 wasn't really much. You know, I suppose, that Wright was originally an Army engi-

near, stationed over in—well, I guess it was called Europe. I believe the idea came to him because of all those refugees pouring across the border. Yes, I'm sure that's how it was. During that little war, back in '61, they came across by the millions. And they went the other way, too. My goodness, people were shifting back and forth between the two camps—it was revolting.”

“I'm not clear on my history,” Courtland said thickly. “I never paid much attention in school...the '61 war, that was between Russia and America?”

“Oh,” the repairman said, “it was between everybody. Russia headed the Eastern side, of course. And America the West. But everybody was in it. That was the little war, though; that didn't count.”

“Little?” Fay demanded, horrified.

“Well,” the repairman admitted, “I supposed it looked like a lot of time. But I mean, there were buildings still standing, afterward. And it only lasted a few months.”

“Who—won?” Anderson croaked.

The repairman tittered. “Won? What an odd question. Well, there were more people left in the Eastern block, if that's what you mean. Anyhow, the importance of the '61 war—and I'm sure your his-

tory teachers made that clear—was that swibbles appeared. R. J. Wright got his idea from the camp-changers that appeared in that war. So by '75, when the *real* war came along, we had plenty of swibbles.” Thoughtfully, he added, “In fact, I'd say the real war was a war over swibbles. I mean, it was the last war. It was the war between the people who wanted swibbles and those who didn't.” Complacently, he finished, “Needless to say, we won.”

After a time Courtland managed to ask, “What happened to the others? Those who—didn't want swibbles.”

“Why,” the repairman said gently, “the swibbles got them.”

Shakily, Courtland started his pipe going. “I didn't know about that.”

“What do you mean?” Pesbroke demanded hoarsely. “How did they get them? What did they do?”

ASTONISHED, the repairman shook his head. “I didn't know there was such ignorance in lay circles.” The position of pundit obviously pleased him; sticking out his bony chest he proceeded to lecture the circle of intent faces on the fundamentals of history. “Wright's first A-driven swibble was crude, of course. But it served its pur-

pose. Originally, it was able to differentiate the camp-shifters into two groups: those who had really seen the light, and those who were insincere. Those who were going to shift back...who weren't really loyal. The authorities wanted to know which of the shifters had really come over to the West and which were spies and secret agents. That was the original swibble function. But that was nothing compared to now."

"No," Courtland agreed, paralyzed. "Nothing at all."

"Now," the repairman said sleekly, "we don't deal with such crudities. It's absurd to wait until an individual has accepted a contrary ideology, and then hope he'll shift away from it. In a way, it's ironic, isn't it? After the '61 war there was really only one contrary ideology: those who opposed the swibbles."

He laughed happily. "So the swibbles differentiated those who didn't want to be differentiated by swibbles. My, that was quite a war. Because that wasn't a messy war, with a lot of bombs and jellied gasoline. That was a *scientific* war—none of that random pulverizing. That was just swibbles going down into cellars and ruins and hiding-places and digging out those Contrapersons one by one. Until we had all of them. So now," he fin-

ished, gathering up his equipment, "we don't have to worry about wars or anything of that sort. There won't be any more conflicts, because we don't have any contrary ideologies. As Wright showed, it doesn't really matter what ideology we have; it isn't important whether it's Communism or Free Enterprise or Socialism or Fascism or Slavery. What's important is that every one of us agrees completely; that we're all absolutely loyal. And as long as we have our swibbles—" He winked knowingly at Courtland. "Well, as a new swibble owner, you've found out the advantages. You know the sense of security and satisfaction in being *certain* that your ideology is exactly congruent with that of everybody else in the world. That there's no possibility, no chance whatsoever that you'll go astray—and that some passing swibble will feed on you."

IT WAS MacDowell who managed to pull himself together first. "Yeah," he said ironically. "It certainly sounds like what the missus and I want."

"Oh, you ought to have a swibble of your own," the repairman urged. "Consider—if you have your own swibble, it'll adjust you automatically. It'll keep you on the right

track without strain or fuss. You'll always know you're not going wrong—remember the swibble slogan: Why be *half* loyal? With your own swibble, your outlook will be corrected by painless degress... but if you wait, if you just *hope* you're on the right track, why, one of these days you may walk into a friend's living room and his swibble may just simply crack you open and drink you down. Of course," he reflected, "a passing swibble may still get you in time to straighten you out. But usually it's too late. Usually—" He smiled. "Usually people go beyond redemption, once they get started."

"And your job," Pesbroke muttered, "is to keep the swibbles working?"

"They do get out of adjustment, left to themselves."

"Isn't it a kind of paradox?" Pesbroke pursued. "The swibbles keep us in adjustment, and we keep them in adjustment...it's a closed circle."

The repairman was intrigued. "Yes, that's an interesting way of putting it. But we must keep control over the swibbles, of course. So they don't die." He shivered. "Or worse."

"Die?" Hurley said, still not understanding. "But if they're built—" Wrinkling his brows, he said, "Either they're

machines or they're alive. Which is it?"

Patiently, the repairman explained elementary physics. "Swibble-culture is an organic phenotype evolved in a protein medium under controlled conditions. The directing neurological tissue that forms the basis of the swibble is alive, certainly, in the sense that it grows, thinks, feeds, excretes waste. Yes, it's definitely alive. But the swibble as a functioning whole, is a manufactured item. The organic tissue is inserted in the master tank and then sealed. I certainly don't repair *that*; I give it nutriments to restore a proper balance of diet, and I try to deal with parasitic organisms that find their way into it. I try to keep it adjusted and healthy. The balance of the organism, is, of course, totally mechanical."

"The swibble has direct access to human minds?" Anderson asked, fascinated.

"Naturally. It's an artificially evolved telepathic metazoan. And with it, Wright solved the basic problem of modern times: the existence of diverse, warring ideological factions, the presence of disloyalty and dissent. In the words of General Steiner's famous aphorism: War is an extension of disagreement from the voting booth to the battlefield. And the preamble of the

World Service Charter: War, if it is to be eliminated, must be eliminated from the minds of men, for it is in the minds of men that disagreement begins. Up until 1963, we had no way to get into the minds of men. Up until 1963, the problem was unsolvable."

"Thank God," Fay said clearly.

THE REPAIRMAN failed to hear; he was carried away by his own enthusiasm. "By means of the swibble, we've managed to transform the basic sociological problem of loyalty into a routine technical matter: to the mere matter of maintenance and repair. Our only concern is keep the swibbles functioning correctly; the rest is up to them."

"In other words," Courtland said faintly, "you repairmen are the only controlling influence over the swibbles. You represent the total human agency standing above these machines."

The repairman reflected. "I suppose so," he admitted modestly. "Yes, that's correct."

"Except for you, they pretty damn well manage the human race."

The bony chest swelled with complacent, confident pride. "I suppose you could say that."

"Look," Courtland said thickly. He grabbed hold of

the man's arm. "How the hell can you be sure? Are you really in control?" A crazy hope was rising up inside him; as long as men had power over the swibbles there was a chance to roll things back. The swibbles could be disassembled, taken apart piece by piece. As long as swibbles had to submit to human servicing it wasn't quite hopeless.

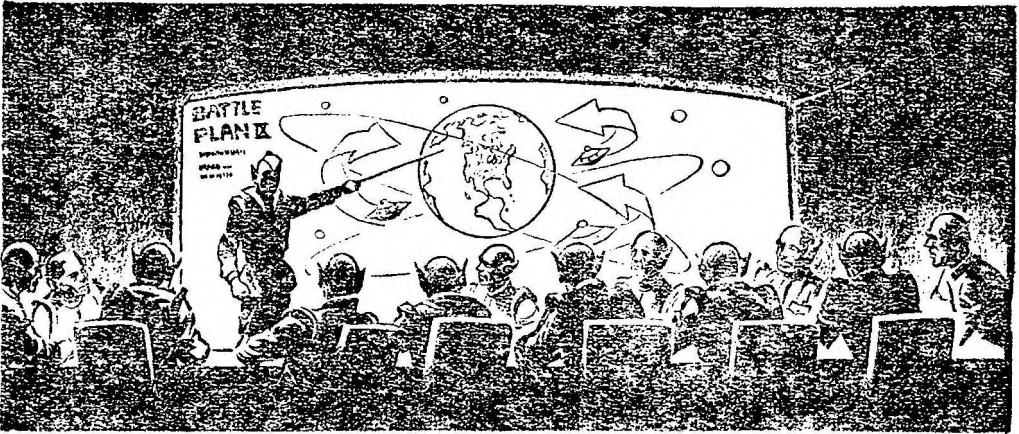
"What, sir?" the repairman inquired. "Of course we're in control. Don't you worry." Firmly, he disengaged Courtland's fingers. "Now, where is your swibble?" He glanced around the room. "I'll have to hurry; there isn't much time left."

"I haven't got a swibble," Courtland said,

For a moment it didn't register. Then a strange, intricate expression crossed the repairman's face. "No swibble? But you told me—"

"Something went wrong," Courtland said hoarsely. "There aren't any swibbles. It's too early—they haven't been invented. Understand? You came too soon!"

The young man's eyes popped. Clutching his equipment he stumbled back two steps, blinked, opened his mouth and tried to speak. "Too—soon?" Then comprehension arrived. Suddenly he looked older, much older. "I wondered. All the undamaged



buildings...the archaic furnishings. The transmission machinery must have mis-phased!" Rage flashed over him. "That instantaneous service—I knew dispatch should have stuck to the old mechanical system. I told them to make better tests. Lord, there's going to be hell to pay; if we ever get this mixup straightened out I'll be surprised."

Bending furiously down, he hastily dropped his equipment back in the case. In a single motion he slammed and locked it, straightened up, bowed briefly at Courtland.

"Good evening," he said frigidly. And vanished.

The circle of watchers had nothing to watch. The swibble repairman had gone back where he came from.

AFTER A time Pesbroke turned and signalled to the man in the kitchen.

"Might as well shut off the tape recorder," he muttered bleakly. "There's nothing more to record."

"Good Lord," Hurley said, shaken. "A world run by machines."

Fay shivered. "I couldn't believe that little fellow had so much power; I thought he was just a minor official."

"He's completely in charge," Courtland said harshly.

There was silence.

One of the two children yawned sleepily. Fay turned abruptly to them and herded them efficiently into the bedroom. "Time for you two to be in bed," she commanded, with false gaiety.

Protesting sullenly, the two boys disappeared, and the door closed. Gradually, the living room broke into motion. The tape recorder man began rewinding his reel. The legal stenographer shakily collected her notes and put away

her pencils. Hurley lit up a cigar and stood puffing moodily, his face dark and somber.

"I suppose," Courtland said finally, "that we've all accepted it; we assume it's not a fake."

"Well," Pesbroke pointed out, "he vanished. That ought to be proof enough. And all that junk he took out of his kit—"

"It's only nine years," Parkinson, the electrician, said thoughtfully. "Wright must be alive already. Let's look him up and stick a shiv into him."

"Army engineer," MacDowell agreed. "R. J. Wright. It ought to be possible to locate him. Maybe we can keep it from happening."

"How long would you guess people like him can keep the swibbles under control?" Anderson asked.

Courtland shrugged wearily. "No telling. Maybe years... maybe a century. But sooner or later something's going to come up, something they didn't expect. And then it'll be predatory machinery preying on all of us."

Fay shuddered violently. "It sounds awful; I'm certainly glad it won't be for awhile."

"You and the repairman," Courtland said bitterly. "As long as it doesn't affect you—"

Fay's overwrought nerves

flared up. "We'll discuss it later on." She smiled jerkily at Pesbroke. "More coffee? I'll put some on." Turning on her heel, she rushed from the living room into the kitchen.

While she was filling the Silex with water, the doorbell quietly rang.

The roomful of people froze. They looked at each other, mute and horrified.

"He's back," Hurley said thickly.

"Maybe it's not him," Anderson suggested weakly. "Maybe it's the camera people, finally."

But none of them moved toward the door. After a time the bell rang again, longer, and more insistently.

"We have to answer it," Pesbroke said woodenly.

"Not me," the legal stenographer quavered.

"This isn't my apartment," MacDowell pointed out.

Courtland moved rigidly toward the door. Even before he took hold of the knob he knew what it was. Dispatch, using its new-fangled instantaneous transmission. Something to get work crews and repairmen directly to their stations. So control of the swibbles would be absolute and perfect; so nothing would go wrong.

But something had gone wrong. The control had fouled itself up. It was working up-

side down, completely backwards. Self-defeating, futile: it was too perfect. Gripping the knob, he tore the door open.

Standing in the hall were four men. They wore plain gray uniforms and caps. The first of them whipped off his cap, glanced at a written sheet of paper, and then nodded politely at Courtland.

"Evening, sir," he said cheerfully. He was a husky man, wide-shouldered, with a shock of thick brown hair hanging over his sweat-shiny forehead. "We—uh—got a little lost, I guess. Took awhile to get here."

Peering into the apartment,

he hitched up his heavy leather belt, stuffed his route-sheet into his pocket, and rubbed his large, competent hands together.

"It's downstairs in the truck," he announced, addressing Courtland and the whole living room of people. "Tell me where you want it, and we'll bring it right up. We should have a good-sized space—that side over there by the window should do." Turning away, he and his crew moved energetically toward the service elevator. "These late-model swibbles take up a lot of room."



Down to Earth . . .

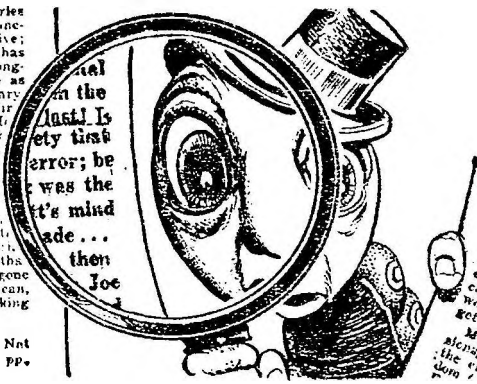
There have been requests for the restoration of the letter department; rather than answer those requests individually, I'll reply here: it's up to you.

If you readers write enough letters to justify a letter department, we'll run one. If you write long letters, we'll run long letters and vice versa. Blessings and blastings alike are welcome; we loved to be loved—we also like to have the errors of our ways pointed out to us. Arguments doubly welcome; we like to see the interchange of opinion, and you'll doubtless see our two cents worth, now and then.

You take it from here.

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READIN' and WRITHIN'

Book Reviews by Damon Knight

EARTHMAN, COME HOME, by James Blish. Putnam, \$3.50.

Putnam's first venture into science fiction is a big, complex landmark of a book. It represents several years' work by one of the most painstaking and devious plotters in the business: full of second and third thoughts, it's as hard to take in at one look as an Edwardian-Georgian-Victorian mansion.

Most of it was originally published in the form of four novelets, three in *Astounding Science Fiction*, one in *Two Complete Science Adventure Novels*. But piecemeal it never had the impact it has here, as one bound-together entity; moreover, Blish's involute text is so dense, not to say opaque, that many readers may have failed, as I did, to

make much sense of it the first time around.

"Once antigravity was an engineering reality," says the author's prologue, "it was no longer necessary to design ships especially for space travel, for neither mass nor aerodynamic lines meant anything any more. The most massive and awkward object could be lifted and hurled off the Earth, and carried almost any distance. Whole cities, if necessary, could be moved."

New York was one of those that were moved, and never came back. Set free by the antigravity "spindizzy," some hundreds of years after the fall of the West in 2105, it became a migrant worker city. This is its story, and by extension, the story of all the interstellar cities—the "Okies."

In form this is an epic, and the most revealing comparison in science fiction, I think—though it's not likely to please Blish—is the Zorome series by Neil R. Jones, which appeared almost endlessly in the old *Amazing Stories*, and later in *Super Science Stories*.

Both groups of stories have the same cosmic scale, the same limitation to a series of visited worlds—all of whose inhabitants exhibit certain similarities—; in both, the immortality of the voyagers contributes a curious dreamlike effect; and in both the dominant impression is that the chief characters are fine fellows off to have adventures, although Blish pretends that his spacegoing cities are hobos looking for work.

Add the recurrent conflict of Good-vs.-Evil, as in *The Lone Ranger*, et al., and you have a formula that is probably as old as tale-telling, and I suppose as durable.

The difference, aside from Blish's considerably greater talent, lies in his insistence on imposing the Okie parallel—the idea referred to above, that light can be shed on the cities' career by comparing them with displaced migratory workers.

This is the deepest flaw in the book, and there's no way of justifying it within this

framework—you simply have to accept it or forget it.

On the author's own showing, the space cities are virtually self-sufficient. They grow their own food, and manufacture it by cracking petroleum. They're equipped to mine and drill for any mineral they need. And what one Okie city can't handle, another can.

Blish has his Okies seeking out inhabited worlds: "Where there's people, there's work."

But the city doesn't need work: it needs petroleum, and it can get that—but perversely doesn't try—for the taking, on an uninhabited planet. Blish's other answers to this question are not sufficient, either: the cities need repair and docking facilities: So they do, but they could and logically should run such facilities themselves, as the buccaneers did at Tortuga. They need anti-agathic drugs to prolong their lives? All right, but somebody has to grow the plants and extract the drugs—why not Okies?

BLISH, IN a talk given at the Little Monsters of America convention in New York, July 1952, (*Reprinted as an article in Redd Boggs' amateur magazine "Skyhook," Autumn 1952.*) coined the terms "template series" and

“evolutionary series” to distinguish those groups of stories which merely repeat themselves from those which develop and go somewhere. The Okie stories were his example of the latter type, and they do develop, do go somewhere—but there are template elements in them, all the same.

In each of the four long episodes which make up the book, the city is forced to land in an inhabited system of planets. In the first two, they land in the middle of a local war. In the others, not finding any, they stir one up. In all four cases, the Earth cops—inimical to Okies in order to fit into the parallel, and for no other evident reason—show up to complicate matters. In all four, Amalfi, the thousand-year-old mayor of New York (and by far the roundest and most likeable character in the book), pulls a last-minute rabbit out of his hat and saves the city.

If this sounds to you uneasily reminiscent of van Vogt, you’re right. In form the book is an epic; in method it’s a van Vogt story. A born technician, Blish will pursue any technical device that interests him to its last gasp—in this case, what William Atheling, Jr., calls van Vogt’s “intensively recompllicated” story. My own term is simpler; I call it the Kitchen

Sink Technique.

Briefly, this consists of packing as much as possible of everything into a given space. I mean almost everything: plot, incident, background, allusion, confusion; character usually gets left out.

Some of it is wonderful. There’s Blish’s breathtaking description of the Rift, for example—“a valley cut in the face of the galaxy”—so inconceivably vast that from its center the stars form a double curtain of haze: too far away even to be seen as individual points of light.

There’s a poetry of courage in the city’s venturing into that chasm, like the fantastic bravery of Kon-Tiki or Columbus’ fleet...but not for long. This is a Kitchen Sink story; the Rift, like the African jungle or the interior of the Earth in a Burroughs epic, turns out to be as cozily populated with friends and enemies as a Broadway drugstore. And off we go.

I think this is a bad method: it makes spectacular trickery, but seldom a sound story. In Blish’s hands, brilliantly effective as it often is, it results in an incessantly doubled-back plot that is often confusing and sometimes directly self-contradictory. Worse, as a subsidiary effect, the human changes are all sprung on you so suddenly

that they're unbelievable. Blish's resolution of the Amalfi-Hazleton relationship, for example, is as unconvincing as it is unpleasant...and then, by heaven, he retrieves it with exactly the right symbol.

The whole book is like that. There's no time to puzzle over such questions as why Mayor Amalfi, with his "direct intuition of spatial distances and mass pressures"—and spindizzy fields, apparently—couldn't determine the location of the buried bindlestiff city on the planet He. Things are moving too fast; He is whirled off into intergalactic space, the bindlestiff destroyed, and before you know it, you're caught up again in the rapid, powerful movement that is the K-S story's one major virtue.

And gradually, in spite of all the repetition and confusion, the packrat crowding of irrelevant information, a symmetrical and moving story appears. Out of all the details in the book, some will be for you—not the same ones that hit me, very likely, but they will build up much the same impressive picture. Blish's scale is the whole galaxy, a view that has to be awe-inspiring if he can only make you see it: and he does, I think, more successfully than any previous writer.

From a publishing stand-

point the most interesting thing about this book is its relative complexity and purity as science fiction. When one of the big trade publishing houses enters this field for the first time, you expect it to turn instinctively to phony science fiction—oversimplified until even the publisher himself can understand it, adulterated with anything handy, and as chockfull of scientific errors as breakfast cereal of crackle and pop. This book, on the contrary, bristles with scientific correctness, and is about as written down as the Smyth Report. If it sells, as I hope, we will all have some revaluation to do.

THE ATTENTION Bantam Books has been paying to science fiction, following trail broken by Ballantine and others, is one of the most encouraging things about our microcosm of late. A recent release of Bantam's is one of science fiction's few genuine classics, out of print in this country since 1937—Karel Capek's wonderful **WAR WITH THE NEWTS**.

The publishers' cover blurb ("...a great novelist's electrifying story of what *might happen to our world tomorrow...*") is of course pure space gas, as Tom Corbett would say. This is a satire, one

of the great ones. It has enormous charm, tenderness, humor, wit...and all the time, gently, patiently, it is flaying human society inch by inch.

The Newts (a giant species hitherto known only as a fossil) were discovered on the shore of Tanah Masa by gloomy old Captain J. van Toch, who took a paternal liking to them. ("What's the use, you ought to be honest even with animals.") At first they brought up pearl shells in exchange for tools to build their dams and breakwaters, and weapons to fight sharks. Later, when it was discovered that they could talk, it was natural for more and more people to try to find other uses for them.

With great ingenuity and in spite of the most disheartening obstacles, they succeeded:

The flesh of the Newts has also been taken to be unfit for human consumption and even poisonous; if eaten raw, it causes acute pains, vomiting, and mental hallucinations, Dr. Pinkel ascertained after many experiments performed on himself. That these harmful effects disappear if the chopped meat is scalded with hot water (as with some toadstools), and after washing thoroughly it is pickled for twenty-four hours in a weak solution of permanganate of potash. Then it can be cooked or stewed, and tastes like inferior beef. In this way we ate a Newt called Hans;

he was an able and intelligent animal with a special bent for scientific work; he was employed in Dr. Pinkel's department as his assistant, and even refined chemical analysis could be entrusted to him. We used to have long conversations with him in the evenings, amusing ourselves with his insatiable thirst for knowledge. With deep regret we had to put Hans to death, because my experiments in trepanning him made him blind...

Fed, protected, dissected, exploited, armed by every nation against every other, the Newts continued to grow in numbers and knowledge. Not so many years after old Captain van Toch passed away, there were already twenty billion worker and warrior Newts in the world, or about ten times more Newts than people.

The world awoke one day to find an earthquake had sunk three hundred square miles of Louisiana under shallow water, and a strange croaking radio voice came out of the sea: "Hello, you people! Don't get excited.... There are too many of us. There is not space enough for us on your coasts any longer. Therefore we must break down your continents..."

This is the sort of book that makes the reviewer want to quote it endlessly; but if you once start, it's hard to know

what to leave out. Here's one last sample:

...The Young Newts apparently stood for progress without any reservations or restrictions, and declared that below the water they ought to assimilate all land culture of every kind, not omitting even football, fascism, and sexual perversions...

Only out of a landlocked and tired little nation could have come such raw despair, so incredibly blended with gentle, calm affection. "The Newts," says Egon Hostovsky in his *Note On the Author*, "are, of course, symbols of nazis and communists." So they are, fleetingly at the end of the book, which tails off into a nightmare much as Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee" does; but most of the time, I think, the Newts are ourselves as Capek saw us—gentle, long-suffering, mute; the natural prey of businessmen, politicians, experimenters, militarists, and all other sharks of the land.

A RTHUR C. CLARKE'S third Ballantine novel, *EARTHLIGHT* (\$2.75 and 35¢), is another unhurried, low-key job or work like his "Prelude to Space". Unlike the latter, though, and still more unlike "Childhood's End", this is a workmanlike treatment of nothing very

much—the Clarke version, in fact, of space opera.

It has the virtues of Clarke's keen, scholarly speculation, his mystic-travelogue imagination (the description of a sunset on the Moon's *Mare Imbrium* is particularly fine), and his sedately Rabelaisian sense of humor, to name a few, not forgetting a cloak-and-dagger plot which might have become thoroughly exciting in other hands: but somehow Clarke the future historian has got mixed in here where he doesn't belong, shoving his characters out of the way at the damndest moments to comment on the story himself, anticipating, philosophizing, and in general making the whole thing seem as remote as possible. It grows very real, all the same, in that wrong-end-of-the-telescope way that you associate with history, and at its tamest, it makes pleasant reading.

I'm sorry to say that Ballantine's hardbound editions in their new format, barely larger all around than the paperbacks, don't seem to me to be worth the price.

T H E I M M O R T A L *STORM*, by Sam Moskowitz. Atlanta Science Fiction Organization Press, 713 Coventry Road, Decatur, Ga.—\$5, direct from the publisher.

[Turn To Page 124]



Eventually, they got around to what we were waiting for. They hit the keys and ship one was gone, out over the ocean. . . .And I knew something they didn't. . .and wondered.

The most important thing of all, once the first moon-ship was constructed, was that it didn't succeed.

THE WILHELM SPOT

by LES COLE

THERE WAS no sound when it struck; there wouldn't be, of course. There was no sound *where* it struck, but 240,000 miles away sound was generated in great quantity. Regardless of whether it was the physical definition or the physiological, sound emerged: "Monstrous! My constituents will demand an investigation of this cheap advertising trick... Monumental! A real tribute to scientific endeavor... Classified? Hell, we didn't have anything to do with it... Corn, pure corn. You'd think they could come up with something a little more subtle. I'll never use their products again..."

However, the sound affect-

ed me not one whit; its presence was merely indicative of success and that I'd had complete confidence in. It was the first one—the failure—that intrigued me and made me hopeful, but I'll get to that shortly.

The wild dream started as such one evening up at Russ' house. Russell Arthur I am pleased to call a friend. He's a guy just under average height with sandy hair, glasses, and a spare frame. Unprepossessing to look at, Russ is what I call a "specialized genius." He's one of those people who know just about all there is to know about his own particular field, and while I could battle like crazy with him over most any subject, when it came to publicity

or publications, I sat up and listened. You had to. In addition—or maybe it's more important than his know-how—he has one of the most flexible minds I've ever seen in action.

That night Russ had just landed a job as editor on one of Wilhelm's trade magazines. It was a big step for him, and although Russ is one of those guys who likes to play it steely-hard, I could tell he was pleased and excited. And after we'd drunk a beer or two in celebration, we began kicking things around.

That night I didn't get the drift right away. Russ had muttered something about "concatenation of forces" and "the right person in the right place at the right time." I was all set to drag in Korzybski, whom I knew Russ hadn't read, because I was confused.

And right there he said, "Wilhelm is one of the biggest industrialists in the country."

OK, I thought, so we're back to him again. If you want to discuss your new-found job, well I guess you've got a right. So I just answered him with a non-committal "Umm."

Russ went on, "I don't imagine that anyone really knows the extent of his holdings. Steel, coal, magnesium, cement, aluminum, and Lord

knows what-all, as well as intangibles: brain teams, legal staffs, and everything that goes into the makeup of a leader of industry. Plus a very, very bright management policy. If you can handle your job, you go up; if not, you're out. But if you have an idea that's good enough, you can always get to see Wilhelm himself; you can go right to the top. Only Lord help you if the idea or problem could be handled by the lower echelons; you'll be on your way out again."

I figured it was about time to throw in another "Umm." Frankly, I wasn't too much interested in the industrialist or his workings.

Russ continued to discuss Wilhelm. He seemed to know pretty much about the man and his background, but I was only listening with half an ear.

And then apropos of nothing Russ asked me, "Suppose you were going to build the first rocket to the moon. How would you go about it?"

"I'm no rocket engineer. Haven't you got a copy of 'Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel' around?"

"Stop hedging," he replied. "Suppose somebody came up to you and told you to go ahead. What would you need?"

I tried to think. "Well," I

began, "I suppose I'd organize a company to get funds. Sell shares, check with the UN—"

Russ broke in. "You don't need to make like Harriman. What would you need to build it?"

He was pushing me, and I just said what popped into my mind. "Oh, industrial minerals and metals, I guess. Not too much steel but some. Magnesium and aluminum in large quantities; concrete, maybe, for building the launching platforms..."

And suddenly it came up and beat my brains out. Some body turned on the lights. What was that Russ had said about Wilhelm's holdings? No wonder he had been talking about him so much.

I jumped out of my chair, looking at Russ' grin. "Hey! Do do you know something I don't? Is it being built?" My voice was tense with excitement.

He shook his head, regretfully. "No, nothing is being built that I know of." Then the gleam came back into his eye. "But can you think of a better man to do the job? If there were only some way of getting the idea over to him, of convincing him that it would be worth the effort. I know the value of the publicity he'd get; actually it would probably exceed the cost of the ship itself, consid-

ering that Wilhelm has everything he needs to start going. In addition, it probably is deductible."

We spent a lot of time that evening discussing the problem. We couldn't think of a way to get it across. It wasn't simply a case of Russ walking in to see Wilhelm. He'd still have had to go through channels, and the next step up probably would have thrown him out. He didn't want to risk his job on what was, after all, a crazy idea, and I couldn't say that I blamed him. But we had fun kicking that one around.

THAT ENDS act one. Skip a year when we forgot about it. Get to me.

I'm a drifter, a labor dilantante if you will, though I dislike the use of the term. I'd like to find a job that could hold my interest, although I must admit that there are a few things I haven't tried yet. In fact, I'd love to hire out on one of those expeditions on the Trail of Ancient—it doesn't particularly matter Ancient *what*; I'm a sucker for the title. The only drawback is a wife and family that have to be supported, so instead of looking around for old, living Metasequoia, I found myself tossing around new, deadweight 100-pound sacks.

A couple of weeks of that and you begin to look for the fastest way out.

One morning, about four o'clock, I got this brilliant idea. Why not get into publicity? And how? Easy! Sell Mr. Wilhelm the moon. Crazy? You know how good ideas look at 4:00 A.M. So I sat down and wrote the gentleman a long letter pointing out that I'd heard if you have an idea good enough you could get in to see him. I was also friendishly clever, I thought, in piquing his curiosity. I asked for an appointment—he lives in the area—and sealed the letter. Then I went back to sleep.

The next day, in the cold light of the cement sacks, I realized that I had been foolish; that I wasn't facing my particular problem squarely; and that I was going to tear the letter up when I got home and do some mature thinking. Only, when I did get home, I found that my wife had mailed the letter. And anyway, I was a little tired that night for constructive thinking...

Three days later I got an answer to that letter. An appointment had been made for me to see the industrialist. Of all things, I hadn't expected that; but sometimes it's surprising what you can get by just asking. I put on my best suit, shined my shoes, and

started for the interview feeling like a damn fool. Now that I had his attention, just what was I going to say?

I was ushered in and, to make matters worse, it hit me then that what I had to do was a selling job. I'm no salesman—I tried selling furnaces door to door once—and I just don't go for this "positive thinking" stuff or the Big Smile.

Wilhelm was slightly stout and balding. I judged him to be six-footish, but he was sitting down, so I wasn't sure. You've seen the pictures; you don't need any more of a physical description. What you can't know until you come into contact with it is the aura that surrounded him. I have a pretty fair opinion of myself, and I've always figured that when the time came for leadership I could do all right, but this Wilhelm was something else again. He was a big man. Now I know what they meant by "Captain of Industry." Here was a man who *had* to make a name for himself; it was something inherent like blue eyes or big bones.

I LOOKED around at the furnishings, the desk, and the rest of the office. And my first words were completely banal: "Just like the movies." I felt silly, and smiled.

He smiled back. "Some-

what." Then he looked me over, smiled again, and asked, "No briefcase?"

I shook my head. "I'm a virgin at this business."

"So I see." Wilhelm glanced at his watch. "You've wasted almost a minute with platitudes; got anything to say in the next four?"

That busy-executive-looks-at-watch act made me a little mad; I'd met the type before and it struck me that he was too big a guy to try that hard to impress me. "Don't blame me for being a little nervous," I shot back, which really wasn't indicative of my best repartee.

"I don't," he replied, and added, "We can sit here for the rest of the time staring at each other if you wish. I've given you five minutes, so you can do what you want with it."

So here it was. Brass had carried me that far—brass and a screwy idea. Brass wouldn't get me any farther, not with that personality across from me, so it was put up or shut up.

And the first of three good inspirations hit me. I suddenly remembered my first look at Saturn through a twelve-inch refractor; it had been cloudy during the day and that night there was just enough of a few tenuous wisps left to make the ringed beauty almost unreal. I remembered

a conversation I'd had with one of the older kids when I was seven; he'd located Venus for me in the early evening sky and asked, "Do you think there are any people up there?" and I couldn't sleep for hours wondering.

I remembered the occasion when I was five that a mining engineer stuck a hunk of fossiliferous sandstone in my hand and said, "Those animals are one hundred seventy million years old" and I felt the wonder of time in the palm of my hand.

I remembered *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, *Doc Savage*, and *Air Wonder Stories*. I remembered my first look at a mounted dinosaur skeleton and how, when the guard wasn't looking, I'd timidly stuck out a hand and felt those live dead bones; I remembered asking a lecturer in the Hayden Planetarium for her autograph.

It was easy. I gave Wilhelm both barrels. The words weren't important. I had to get the emotion over to him.

And then I said, "How would you like me to build you a monument that would last for the lifetime of man and longer? A monument that would need no upkeep, that wouldn't be affected by weather, and that every human would see at some time or other in his life?"

He asked, "Where?" But I was willing to bet my bottom dollar he knew.

"The moon."

I liked that guy. There was no double take, no stupidly uttered, "Huh?" That he was big enough for the biggest job I had confirmed for me in that moment. "How do you propose to get there?" was all he asked.

"I don't," I said and happened to note the time. My five minutes were up. He saw what I'd seen. "Keep talking; you've earned more time."

I exulted and went on, "Nobody will go. We'll build that monument right here and smear it all over a portion of the moon's surface. If the payload of a multi-step rocket was a couple of hundred pounds of powered aluminum or gypsum or any good light-reflector, and if the rocket crashed, why you'd have the...the..." I groped for the right words and then that second inspiration took hold. "You'd have the Wilhelm Spot."

He kind of smiled and said, "Neat touch that—the 'Wilhelm Spot'."

I blushed; he seemed to be able to see through me and my machinations. But in spite of the blushing, I could tell that down under he liked the name. I continued, "This is going to cost you."

"Now you're getting ama-

teurish again," he snapped. "Of course it'll cost. How much?"

"I haven't more than just a vague idea, and I'd hate to put a price on it at this shaky stage. But it'll probably be more than you think you can possibly spend and, since it isn't my money, less than what I'd estimate."

He was more than just a bit sarcastic. "You certainly have a practical head on your shoulders, young man. Don't you know that you're supposed to carry that briefcase in here, all packed with facts and figures?"

"I can't give you facts and figures; that'll be up to your engineering staff. But I think part of it may be deductible." He began to look interested. "I really don't know anything about corporation tax, so I might be wrong," I said, and he shook his head at me.

Then I went on to tell him about the ideal position he was in and how he was the one man in the country who could carry it off. And as I talked, I began to be swept by a feeling of failure. It was hard to describe. It just seemed as though the light in his eye, which I lit by my emotional appeal, was slowly going out. I was desperate—I had a feeling that there wasn't going to be another chance—and then that third inspiration came up.

It was born out of something Russ had said during the conversation a year before. Something that I hadn't paid any attention to, but something that buried itself in my subconscious waiting to blossom out.

I leaned forward in my chair and looked him full in the face. I didn't allow myself to think that this was the final appeal, that this had to do it. "They say that at our present stage of technology the thing can't be done. They say it is impossible. I'm betting that you could do it; I've heard that you've done the impossible."

The light flickered, went out, flickered on again. I sat there almost exhausted and... I...couldn't...tell!

He said, "I want to think about this; I'll let you know."

They were discouraging-sounding words, but I wasn't sure which way the dice had fallen. Frankly, I don't think Wilhelm knew either.

THE NEXT day, those sacks weighed one thousand pounds a piece, and it took me five minutes to move each one. I worked hard all day and discovered that it was ten o'clock in the morning. Something had happened to my space and time sense; but, fortunately for my sanity, a month later that day came to

an end. And during the day my wife had received a phone call summoning me back for more discussion. I was excited enough to forget to shine my shoes.

I walked in and—well, have you ever gotten a hunch over a roulette table? *Known* that the number you played was coming up? Or, if you're not the gambling sort, have you ever watched a football game and known after a minute of play that the three-to-one underdog was going to win? I was hot; I knew we were going to try it, and Wilhelm knew I knew.

"What do you want out of it?" he asked.

"I could be altruistic—" I began.

"You've been honest up to now," he put in.

"—so," I continued, "let's say three things. First, I'd like to see how a full-fledged publicity campaign is run. I would like to work along with the guy who is going to handle the publicity on this."

"At a good salary," he interjected dryly.

That burned me. "You might be surprised," I said and told him; he was surprised.

"I'm trying to figure out for some years now, myself." And then I got back on the subject: "Second—and this one is going to be hard for

you to take—I want to name the man to handle the publicity.”

It was hard for him to take. He didn't like the idea. I told him about Russ Arthur and his capabilities; he still didn't like it.

“Why should I trust what will be the world's biggest story to someone I don't know?” he asked.

“Because it *is* the world's biggest story,” I replied. “Hell, a trained chimpanzee could get you results on this. And, without Russ, the whole thing is off.”

He sat there looking at me coldly. “Do you really think that would bother me? What's to stop me from going ahead on my own?”

Suddenly my head came down out of the clouds. My bubble was bursting. Here I'd been playing big wheel for the last few minutes, and I was forcibly reminded that my part in this was at the sufferance and grace of Wilhelm. “Well,” I said, “there's really nothing except that I have ideas and sources that might take you a while to dig up.”

IT WAS THE first and only time I ever tried to bluff him. I had nothing, really, that any informed layman couldn't get in fifteen minutes thought. But it had popped out so suddenly and

without much thought that I didn't have a chance to build up an emotional charge—and he didn't thereby have a chance to judge it for what it was. Still, I often wondered whether he didn't suspect that I was bluffing; basically he was pretty nice, and he may have been giving me a break.

“I'll accept the first two conditions tentatively,” he said after a few seconds. “What was the third?”

“That you turn over the results to whichever of the government bodies is engaged in rocket research.”

“Why?”

“Because it'll be helpful when they start putting men in them.”

“I don't like it,” he frowned.

“Look, you aren't and won't be in the business of building two-way rockets.” I noticed look on his face and amended hastily, “At least, not for the next few years. But by helping the people who are, you may be hastening the exploration of the solar system.” I hated the phrase the minute I said it; it was too trite. But then I realized that Wilhelm hadn't heard it a tenth so much as I, and it didn't seem to affect him as it had me. “Besides,” I added, “it might be deductible.” I couldn't help it; when I get nervous I try to get funny.

He was interested again. “It

might at that; that is, it might be saleable.”

That didn't hit me too well, but I said, "I don't care how it gets to them as long as it does. The information is the important thing."

That seemed to tie it all up in ribbons. Wilhelm went back to discussing Russ and me. "I wonder how long you'll last. There are going to be a hundred and one very capable people trying to edge you out. They'll push and pressurize, all in a very subtle way."

"Russ can take care of himself. As for me, if things get too bad, I can always throw myself on your mercy."

"It won't do you any good," he replied, "unless you can prove you're capable of handling your job. Either do or get out; you're in for a rude shock."

We exchanged a few more amenities, and I left. I was going to dig up Russ and spring it on him. But when I was by myself, what was happening dawned on me. I shook and a sweat—I was too nervous to note whether it was hot or cold—broke out all over. Visualize it, if you can. Here I was, a science fiction habitue, who was going to have a hand in getting the first rocket to the moon. The hope of a hundred thousand of us, and I was going to be allowed to convert part of it into reality.

I was proud and scared, and if the long-dead dream of an eleven-year-old of actually building the first rocket was gone—all I knew about rocketry you could stuff into equals emmay—well, I could at least spread the word around. It was one of those moments in your life that you keep and hang onto and drag out to re-indulge in later on.

Saying that Russ was excited is, of course, an understatement. How can you describe an emotion like that? But he still managed, after a moment, to maintain a poker expression. He said, "It took you long enough."

My mouth dropped open. "You mean...I was supposed to—"

He nodded.

"You haven't any research you'd like done," I asked, "about jumping off a bridge with me doing the research?"

"No," he replied, "but if this doesn't work out, you might be trying it on your own."

But what the heck. I imagine I'm the first catspaw who was ever so pleased to be a catspaw. Russ got right to work, cooking up ideas. This was his baby, and he'd had a lot of time thinking what to do with it.

Me? Call it the perversity of animate objects. I finished out my week with the sacks.

I wanted everything to be right.

MOST OF what follows was made public in broad outline. Russ and I worked hard enough for that effect. But there are some of those behind the scenes workings that should be told.

Russ planned it this way: until we were ready to make it public, there would be no word of what we were doing. We were going to keep it silent until we hit them with everything we had, and then we were going to keep hitting until we had everyone groggy—and incidentally, the name Wilhelm and its products known all over the world. I had envisioned part of the fun of this as being able to mention casually to friends that I was working on Wilhelm's rocket, but—well, it was the hardest part of the job to keep quiet. We did it, too, and without Security regulations.

Part of our job was initial organization, before the publicity began, and I'll never forget that interview with Ley. We played it close to the vest, although I wanted badly to give him the story, and I have a feeling he thought we were crazy. But I guess when you get right down to it, the hardest person in the world to convince that a science fiction event is actually occurring

would be a science fiction "name." Only maybe he wasn't too sure; he gave us some good leads to follow.

Von Braun didn't need much urging. He jumped right in—and nearly jumped out of his skin when we finally told him. Ever see the cat that just ate the canary? That expression typified him for the next months.

And the organization began to grow. Russ was a hard taskmaster. If we were going to make the publicity on this, we were going to know all about it, or he'd know why. So, while we were still in the planning stage, we attended conferences. Conferences on this, conferences on that. Math that I couldn't begin to follow paraded across my eyelids when I had 'em shut at night—that is, when I was allowed to sleep. Words like "feed" and "calorie" and "inject," which to me had always had dietary connotations, were now thrown around with abandon. Liquidus and solidus and what were the diffraction patterns in that last batch of magnesium alloy? What about crystallization? What about it? Two, four, six, eight; add 'em up and integrate. Nuts. I was bored sick, and I wouldn't have missed a second of it.

A not-so-subtle-to-me direction began to appear in our

advertising. Remember the double spread in that was done by Bonestell? The one in blue that showed, through the blast pattern, the Earth dropping away and with the words across the top "*When We're Ready—*" and at the bottom, simply, "*Wilhelm Industries?*" We did it. We framed, amidst hysterical laughter, the letter that said the writer, if he had the occasion, would use Wilhelm products because he liked our dignified advertising.

Then there was the series that followed it in the national magazines. We doubled in spades "*Conquest in Space.*" We had Bonestell working overtime. There wasn't a billboard in a large city that didn't have "*When We're Ready—*" lettered on it.

There was the Chicago Round Table series of discussions; that was a plant. So was that nut who stood up while Congress was in session and started screaming what defense were our two friendly oceans from the attackers from the moon. We spread it out, of course; we wanted just enough to get the idea over without saturation, and I think we succeeded.

We even trotted out, towards the end, that old dog about claiming a hunk of the moon's surface. That one almost backfired; the guy who

was doing it almost got inundated in a wave of crackpots who wanted to form a Moon Cult—but we should have expected that from California.

THE DAY finally came when we could take the wraps off, when we could announce it. Russ sweated like mad over the release; it was going to be short, terse, and the dam would break in back of it.

"Why can't you use as a lead," I suggested, "something simple like '*Wilhelm announced today that he is beginning construction on a moon rocket?*'"

He shook his head. "It's like a literary hook: you have to have a lead that will knock the pins out."

"Well sure, but it strikes me that the 'respectfully submitted' lead *would* knock the pins out."

"But why not make it as effective as possible?" And then he had it and typed out the lead that everyone knew very shortly, the one that began, "*We're Ready—*"

Russ may have been; I wasn't. If I'd thought the previous rat-race was something, it was only because I had nothing to compare it with. We were caught up in a small-sized atomic explosion. I've always liked newspaper men; that's because I'd met them

singly. Newspapermen en masse I can do without. I hate the sight of them. Questions and pictures and more questions; stale cigaret smoke and staler gags; and I was on the fringe of all this. How the people in the middle ever took it is something I can't understand. But in a sense those cigaret butts were paving the road up there, so I couldn't complain.

And right about here another factor came into the picture: a safety factor. Because of it, my neck was saved; and, I found out later, it was Russ who'd instigated it. It was after one of those interminable conferences when he casually asked one of the top engineers, "Is this thing going to work?"

The engineer knew Russ for a humorist. "Why yes," he said with a straight face, "you see, it really doesn't have to *push* against anything—"

"I'm serious!" Russ interrupted. "What if it blows up or something? I understand that we still can't predict the behavior of chemical fuels too well. How much would it cost to build a second, parallel ship?"

And the engineer began to calculate, and he eventually convinced Production that if two couldn't live as cheaply as one, at least two could be made almost as cheaply as one

in terms of overall, comparative expense.

WITH IT all there were compensations: like those visits to the construction site. Somehow, though I guess I should have known better, I'd always thought that building a ship would be delicate and precisioned. There was nothing delicate about the way those gantry cranes would set down their loads of material; there'd be a dull thud and more of the after-end of step one would be scattered around the assembly area. Stiffeners and braces and strong-boys were set with screeches and stronger language. Serrated angles went into place with a clang that would jar your nerves. Meanwhile, burners and welders—specially trained because of the alloys involved—would wiggle in and out like worms, cutting by eye a piece here, measuring to maybe an eighth there. Delicate? Precisioned?

I even tried it myself because I wanted to say that I had a hand in the actual construction. Plates would come out of the shop milled to the proper curvature—only they weren't quite proper and they'd miss fitting say an eighth of an inch. So you'd get up on a rigging with an eight pound sledge and beat the bejaysus out of the corner

of the plate that didn't fit. If you didn't hit the plate head on, but with the corner of the sledge, you'd make a dent or you'd plow a furrow in the alloy. The Red Sea never had a furrow in it like the one I put in plate seven, step one, of ship one. Delicate, precisioned?

However, it was wonderful because the ships grew. Each day, each week the dream came closer to reality. In spite of what the Freudians will sneer about the conventional shape of a rocket ship, I thought they were lovely. And so did the people working on them.

There were other compensations, too. With the wraps off, of course, it was no longer a secret—not completely a secret, that is. There are still some things, like total cost, that haven't been made public. I was allowed to talk, within limits, and nothing is as much fun as having people think you're giving them The Word. Then, too, I was feeling pretty cocky because not only had I hung onto my job, but I'd asked for—and received—a raise. I *thought* it was because I'd begun to learn some of the ins and outs.

Finally the time that we'd pointed for, that we worked and sweated for, came. They were sitting out there, shining

in the sunlight, finished, pretty—and you want more background? Try: the assembled big-wigs, the blockhouse, the heat, the dials and tubes and the frantic looking young man with the radio. The hushed voices were saying what had to be said, and there was sweat between my fingers and on my forearms. Part of me drew back, looked at the scene, and wondered if we'd be sued for plagiarizing "Destination Moon." It was that standard.

Eventually, they even got around to what we were waiting for. They hit the keys and ship one was gone, out over the ocean. And a little while later a man said that step one had given her some trouble, that it didn't disengage immediately, but that it finally had. And after some more waiting the man said that step two was gone. We all went home and got drunk.

Not too drunk. We had to be sober for Wilhelm's celebration in a few days. We were. We sobered up in time to get drunk all over again for his blow-out; only we didn't.

It was daylight here, inconveniently enough, so we couldn't watch when she hit. But we had a teletype and were getting constant reports. Contact time came—and went. Minutes dragged by. Nothing.

Something like that was pretty well calculated. By the time she was ten minutes overdue we all knew that she was going to be indefinitely overdue.

Somebody, in a terribly weary voice, said, "When step one failed to disengage properly—if it dragged her butt down...a tiny angular displacement here would be magnified over 240,000 miles. She missed."

THE SILENCE was loud but not very long. And then I knew why I'd hung onto my job all that time; I was to be the whipping-boy, the sacrificial goat. I got it but good. Wilhelm spoke quietly and without a single cuss word. It was worse that way. I was taken apart; my ancestors were examined; up and down and around we went. Each atom of me was examined for something good, and failing to pass the test, each atom was discarded. I was Judas and Benedict Arnold and the Man Without A Country. And at that time I believed it, and wondered how I could be so low. I don't want to go through that again, ever.

Russ, again. He'd waited, quietly and calmly, until the proper moment. Wilhelm's words—the awful ones I'd been expecting along the lines of "*You're through*"—never materialized. Russ made him

see that it wasn't my fault; really, there was no trick involved. Wilhelm knew it, and knew also—Thank God for that second ship—that he still had an ace up his sleeve.

The man gained my everlasting loyalty and respect by turning to me and saying, "I was extremely disappointed, and quite a bit of money out of pocket, when the ship didn't hit. What I was indulging in was an immature display of emotion; you have my deepest apologies." And he said it in front of everyone there.

So we went back to work. Ship Two had become the most important thing in everyone's life who was working on the project. Wives, mothers, and mistresses went by the board. No, they were all rolled into one and personified in our last remaining hope: Ship Two. She *had* to do it, had to succeed. There was something more at stake here than simply our ability and pride—and jobs. The world was ready for space travel; and—if you'll excuse this horror of a phrase—nothing succeeds like success. We didn't want to think of what two failures would mean.

We went over every inch of Two. The disengaging mechanisms were checked and rechecked and checked again. Every nook and cranny were

examined and you'd be surprised how many there are in a ship that at first glance has so few angles. Short of disassembling her and starting all over, we gave her the most complete examination possible.

The Big Day arrived—again. The same background sights and smells were present but something new had been added. Observers were more cynical: the press outspokenly so; the military more subtly so.

Again they fired, and Ship Two was gone in a burst of anticlimax.

THAT WAS a few years ago, but all you have to do any clear night is look at the moon, and you'll see where it was that Two made contact. I don't know whether Two was the inspiration or not, but we are out, into the Solar System at least, and with inefficient chemical fuels. Someday that atomic drive is going to come along, too.

For me the Wilhelm Spot meant a change from mediocrity to, perhaps, financial competence. But more important for me was the Wilhelm Spot's failure: Ship One.

Occasionally, in my less ra-

tional moments, I fantasy. Of course, the odds against it happening are impossibly long, but some day, somewhere that payload is going to splatter itself on a landscape. In a billion or two billion years or longer, if need be. It'll crash—because they always do—in some farmer's field. He'll scratch his orange colored head in puzzlement when he sees the wreckage. (And if the purely anthropomorphic action of head-scratching is objectionable, remember that this is my fantasy.)

The farmer will call in the University people, and they'll recognize the payload for what it is. They'll even think there is a message on the scrap that's stamped "*Product of Wilhelm Industry.*"

Maybe this race will be of a different psychology from ours; maybe they'll have explored their system and not found any life. Maybe they'll need further encouragement, and we'll have given it to them. This is my dream and humanity's conceit: the payload will have been our way of smiling, sticking out a hand, and saying, "There is other life around. Come on out and be neighborly."



READIN' and WRITHIN' (continued from page 107)

Sam Moskowitz's monumental history of science-fiction fandom, from 1930 to 1939, will be for special but intense interest to those who have got themselves involved in this peculiar group. Others will probably be scared or repelled by it, if this aficionados' volume comes into their hands at all. Embryo sociologists looking for thesis material might do worse than to look into it, though: within limits, as Moskowitz shows in frightening detail, the science fiction fan world was (and is) a miniature world to itself, full of social structures, literary movements, struggles for power—politics in a hatbox.

Probably there is material here for psychological inves-

tigation, too: although fans are not the supermen they have occasionally tried to convince themselves they are, an astonishing number of professional writers, artists, editors, agents, publishers and even a few scientists have come out of their ranks.

The book is beautifully photo-offset, with 13 pages of photographs and an index.

(Readers interested in a longer review of this book will find one in the current issue of the Irish fan magazine *Hyphen*, available at two issues for 25¢ from Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, North Ireland.)

**WANT AD** (continued from page 73)

writer who has this may or may not have technical training in any or several of the sciences; he does, however, have a healthy grasp of the scientific method and a regard for accuracy when he wants to present specific scientific information as a basis for his fictional projections. (Many general practitioners in the medical field, for example, have scientific orientations: they know that medicine is

not a science, in itself, but they follow scientific methods to as great an extent as they can, making as sound use of statistical averages as possible, etc., without any illusions of knowing *the cure* for anything.)

A scientific orientation makes it possible for its owner usually to be able to distinguish science from pseudoscience. For example, if an author with this qualification

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is writing a story about the so-called psi functions, he may state that these were discovered by exhaustive tests of the general types used by Dr. Rhine—but not employing Rhine's methods, as these have been reported, which amount to pseudo-science. (Lack of adequate controls; lack of proper allowance for coincidence; improper evaluation of statistic; absence of protection against forcing issues and outright deception; failure to present a method which allowed duplication of proclaimed results by others.)

The let's-take-the-science-out-of-science-fiction movement came from writers, editors, and publishers without scientific orientations, and frequently with an attitude of contempt toward science fiction, in the first place. Such attitudes have resulted in some stories which may have been better written and generally better constructed, as stories, than other tales authored by persons who knew and cared what they were writing about. This is simply because one person may be able to write a better story, as story, than another—irrespective of basic attitudes toward a given field of fiction. (At no time is it the *amount* of science in a given work of science fiction that is essential to its worth; at all times,

the *manner* in which the science is presented and employed, and the writer's attitude toward it, is crucial.)

WITH REFERENCE to a well-rounded understanding of human behavior and aspirations, this is merely a requisite for good work in any type of fiction. It is a temptation to assert that this lack has been keenly felt in science fiction, and that there has been considerable progress in this regard during the last few years. But I am not sure that the situation here has actually been any worse formerly, and better lately, than in other forms of popular fiction, proportionately speaking. The members of the commercial writing field have been undergoing active self-examination and self-criticism for a number of years, as the number and extent of writers' magazines and books, writers' courses in various schools, writers' conferences and fraternal associations has grown.

Twenty-five to twenty years ago, for example, pulpwood editors were often expected to write a good deal of copy for their own magazines because the comparatively small group of "regulars" could not produce sufficient and sufficiently varied copy; and the general run of submissions from would-be writers

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was mostly beyond hope. Today, despite the fact that a large percentage of manuscripts an editor receives are in the "hopeless" class, the ratio of intelligent and well-directed effort on the part of "unknowns" has risen sharply. Far more manuscripts are returned simply because they're beaten out by a narrow margin of better grade competition. A given magazine just doesn't have room for all the "good" stories received and the editors can afford to hold out for quality offerings.

The matter of characterization has been given heavy consideration by contributors to writers' magazines, and by speakers at writers conferences. There is a feeling these days that the subject may have been overstressed. Perhaps so; in any event, this is an improvement. On balance, science fiction needs interesting people in stories, rather than outworn "believable" stereotypes undergoing cliché situations and reacting to them in such tiresomely familiar and predictable ways that the sole interest in a given story lies in a clever gimmick. Realism has been rubbed under our noses, and the cult of the common man has borne its boring fruit—until it's a relief to read the totally unbelievable but intensely fascinating adventures

of someone like Conan the Barbarian.

But what has been forgotten in science fiction has been the fact that the recently much-talked-about "sense of wonder" so essential to it also plays a part in human behavior and aspirations. Science itself was still visualized under the Victorian spell of never-ending progress, and wonders of the future, through early years of the first science fiction magazines. In the last decade, the unpleasant and horrible possibilities in scientific application have crowded out the former glamor. It is often hard to remember that not only were great wonders dreamed by early science-fiction writers, but that the potentials are still there; and many of them have come true, along with the threat of total disaster. We cannot, today, write stories as if the horrors of the 20th Century never happened, or do not exist; we cannot imagine fondly, as so many once did, that science *alone* will lead humanity into a new Garden of Eden without serpents; but science fiction can still explore other tracks than those of decline and fall.

IN THE drive to make science fiction more "mature", through realism and characterization and minute portrayal

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als of the common man's common innards, the one-time art of story-telling has suffered a lapse. Maturity, significance, carefully-worked-out devices, etc., are all worth striving for in any field of creation; but a fundamental base of what I've called "intelligent entertainment" cannot be neglected long if we expect to have a continuing and growing audience.

Science fiction—the kind of fiction that we point to as examples when we try to define it—requires active participation on the part of the reader. The spurious or phony varieties require nothing from the reader except the ability to follow from one simple sentence to the next without getting lost. Now, the take - the - science - out - of - science - fiction clique also had "the story's the thing" blazoned on their shields; but the stories they offered as science fiction were, at best, vehicles for passive entertainment. There was nothing in them to make the

reader think, or feel anything more than the second-hand thoughts and feelings he would receive from soap opera or quiz shows. One editor in this school put the matter bluntly some years ago at a science fiction conference, where he outlined a feature story soon to appear. A "man" from some other planet comes to Earth where he meets a woman. I am told that the story was well-written and had a good deal of enjoyable humor in it, but as science fiction it was as phony, though by no means as amusing, as phrenology.

When it comes to talking about "immunity from the fast-buck virus", we enter the province of idealism; no one can rationally *demand* that a writer ignore personal economics for the sake of his art. It can only be pointed out that, other things being equal (a weasel phrase, admittedly), authors who manage to refrain from the temptation of degrading themselves and

their talents for ready cash usually emerge with more self respect, and more progressive worth as authors, than those who do not. As one writer said recently, a big check is a wonderful thing at the time; but when the money is gone—and regardless of the amount, it seems to go very quickly—a feeling that one has done the best work he could do at the time remains. There's no getting away from the aphorisms about well-founded pride in achievement being more solid than the figures on the bankbooks—but who is qualified to start throwing stones?

If we cannot, in all fairness, condemn individual writers and anthologists, we can nonetheless abhor sloppy and hasty writing, and collaboration with ignorance. Huckster-mentalities sensed that there was a gold mine in science fiction, during the boom, and the results have been horrid. Quite a bit of failure was deserved, and the worst is that failures thus built made it impossible to find out whether worthwhile products, issued by the same producing combinations, would have succeeded. We have seen ignorance attempting to cash in on facile fakery, and contempt for the medium posing as superior comprehension of it. And perhaps the saddest has been careless

love on the part of some writers and anthologists. Overgreat willingness to compromise for the sake of opening up new markets, overeagerness to spread science fiction to a possible new audience, has blinded some to the fact that what has often emerged from such attempts has been a falsification and degradation of science fiction.

Thus, the want ad with which we started. Since the market has dwindled, and the actual number of persons trying to sell science fiction is larger now than ever before, the reward for good work can't be listed as anything but "indeterminate". To recapitulate: the art of science fiction needs reviving, if it is to continue as anything like the form in which it attained a loyal and devoted audience. And in addition to editors and publishers who are willing to present nothing less than as high in quality a product as they can obtain, we need writers who, with affection for and understanding of the medium, will refuse to offer anything less than the highest quality they can produce. It was such combinations which succeeded in raising the standards before the boom, and similar combinations can do it again.

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