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Vol. XXXIII, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION October, 1948

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By LEIGH BRACKETT

A fallen satellite of the Planet Venus is the lure which leads three hunted beings to the mysterious island of smiling death! 13

Two Other Complete Novelets

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Also See Features on Pages 85, 108, 124, 132, and 147

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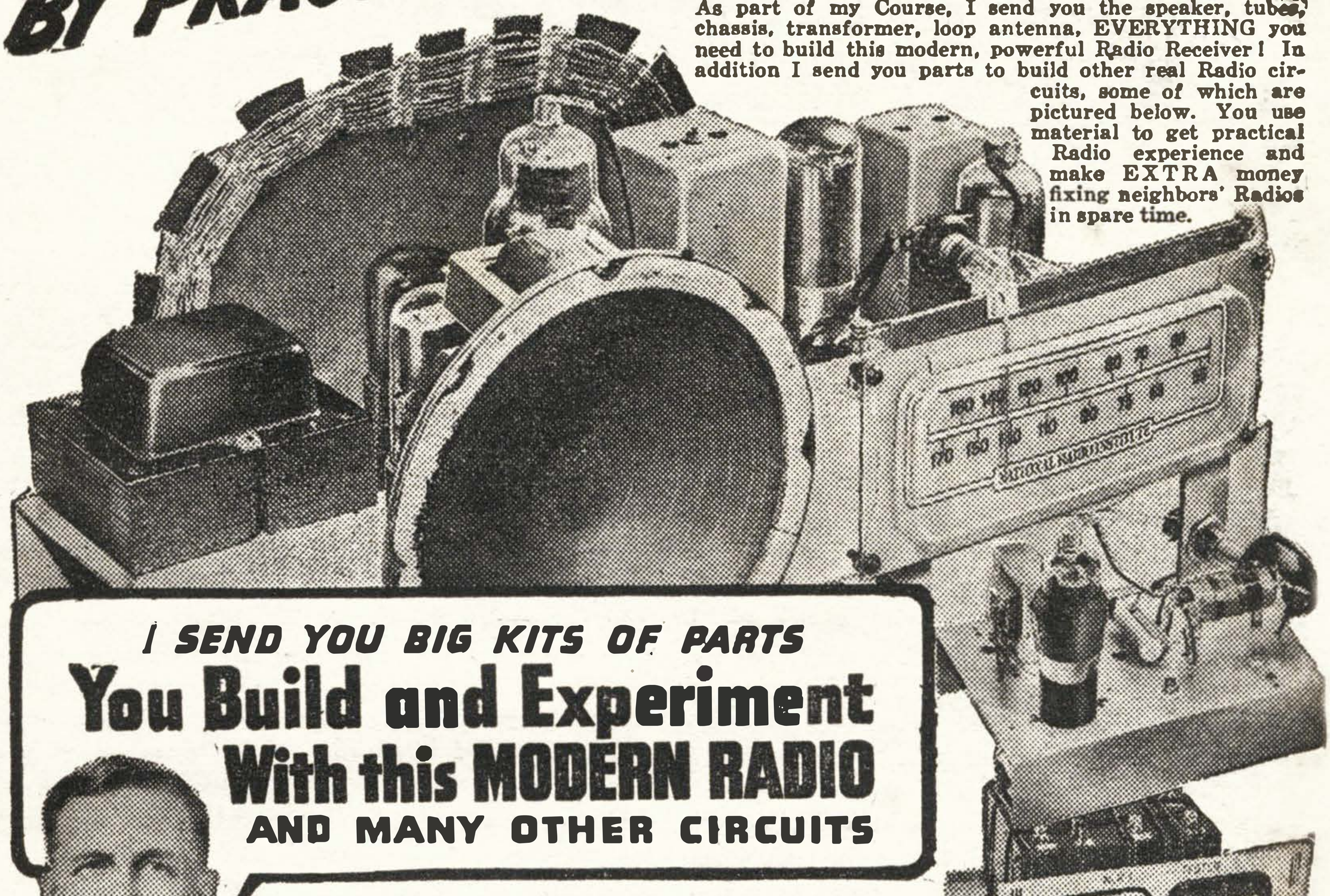

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WELL, here we are, fatter if not sassier than ever before. As those who elect to glance at our final pages will see we have again added 32 pages to THRILLING WONDER STORIES, giving us a grand total of 180 pages of the best science fiction stories and features on the market.

This second enlargement within six months makes 1948 the biggest banner year in our history—for the increase in size means an increase in quality. We can bring you not only a greater variety and balance of story, but are no longer dismayed by the length of a story—which means more of the complete novels all science fiction fans love, as well as more features, more novelets, more shorts!

Next month our companion magazine, STARTLING STORIES, takes the same leap upward in size and quality. As it is a long stride forward in a direction long, earnestly and articulately desired by our readers, we feel certain that few if any of you will object to the extra nickel involved. At any rate, here we are and we hope you like us—BIG!

A Big Subject

Appropriately enough, in view of our new bigness, we are about to tackle a big subject in our introduction to this October issue—with the added appropriateness of its being suggested directly by the letters received over a long period in this department.

During the several years in which we have held down this chair we must have received a minimum of a thousand epistles which suggest in one way or another that the salvation of humanity lies directly in scientific progress. Development of new power sources, of space travel, of new antisepsis to rid humanity of all ailments from the cold, through cancer, to senescence—all or in combination are supposed to guarantee a sort of mechanized Utopia.

All of these developments, even to their Edenic solution, certainly are falling closer and closer within the rim of imminent probability. But in the light of the mounting and general states of confusion and fear into which the first steps along this highway of material progress have cast us, we confess to an increasing belief that science alone will never make the grade.

It is the easy way to believe that a series of inventions which will bring creature comforts undreamed of by our ancestors within the grasp of everyone is the answer to our problems. But let's take a look at a few of the current goings on resulting from such progress.

Powerful groups of people—people who feel themselves fully justified—are still battling the increase of such hydro-electric developments, with their cheap power and light, as TVA. Other powerful groups are fighting tooth and nail against any sort of state or community-backed medical attention. Many millions of folk whose livelihood depends upon the mining and distribution of coal and petroleum are in something close to panic at the vision of cheap and comparatively endless atomic power.

As for the results of the A-bomb—well, nothing need be said here.

The Panic Is On

With Utopia just over the next hill the panic is on. Political leaders and directors of popular opinion, the world over, are grasping at straws and plunging blindly in all directions in a world so rapidly shrunken by sci-

(Continued on page 8)

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

entific increase in the speed of transportation that the old geographical bulwarks have all but ceased to exist.

Russia has jumped back some 4,000 years to the pyramid-building expansionist statism of Ancient Egypt, itself a social pyramid, in an effort to attain control over the growing complexities of modern industrial society. In our own country the pragmatic technocracy of bossism, operating in the name of efficiency, is at constant war with the ideals of individual freedom and dignity set up for us by the Founding Fathers. In England, a compromise socialism is straining desperately not to strangle itself in the choking serpent of its necessary red tape.

Everywhere we see leaders backing and filling in an effort to avoid the ever-more-pressing issues created by a growing age of science. Utopia lies a lot closer to the laboratories than it does to the houses of government or the average family.

Yet science, in fulfilling its allotted progress, is in no way to blame—what is at fault is man's lack of understanding of himself.

We mean this in the historical rather than the psychological sense. For only through study of man's past can any comprehension, any correct interpretation of his present or future be attained.

Churchill's Predictions

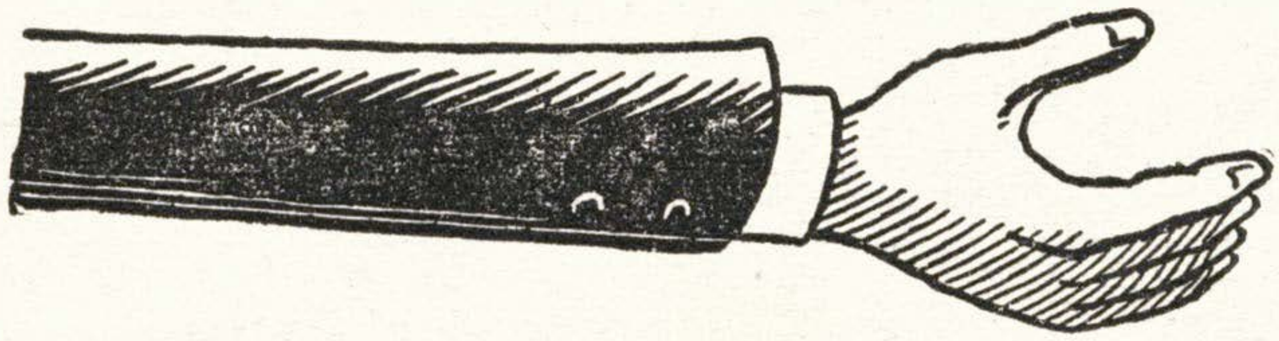
Among present-day statesmen Winston Churchill stands out as a man who understands to the full the issues which divide and confuse the world—this whether or not one agrees with his conclusions. For his refusal to balk at proclaiming unpleasant truth he has, at one time or another, been dropped by most of the major parties of his nation. He has again and again, most recently a few years ago after his speech at Fulton, Missouri, been assailed as a Cassandra.

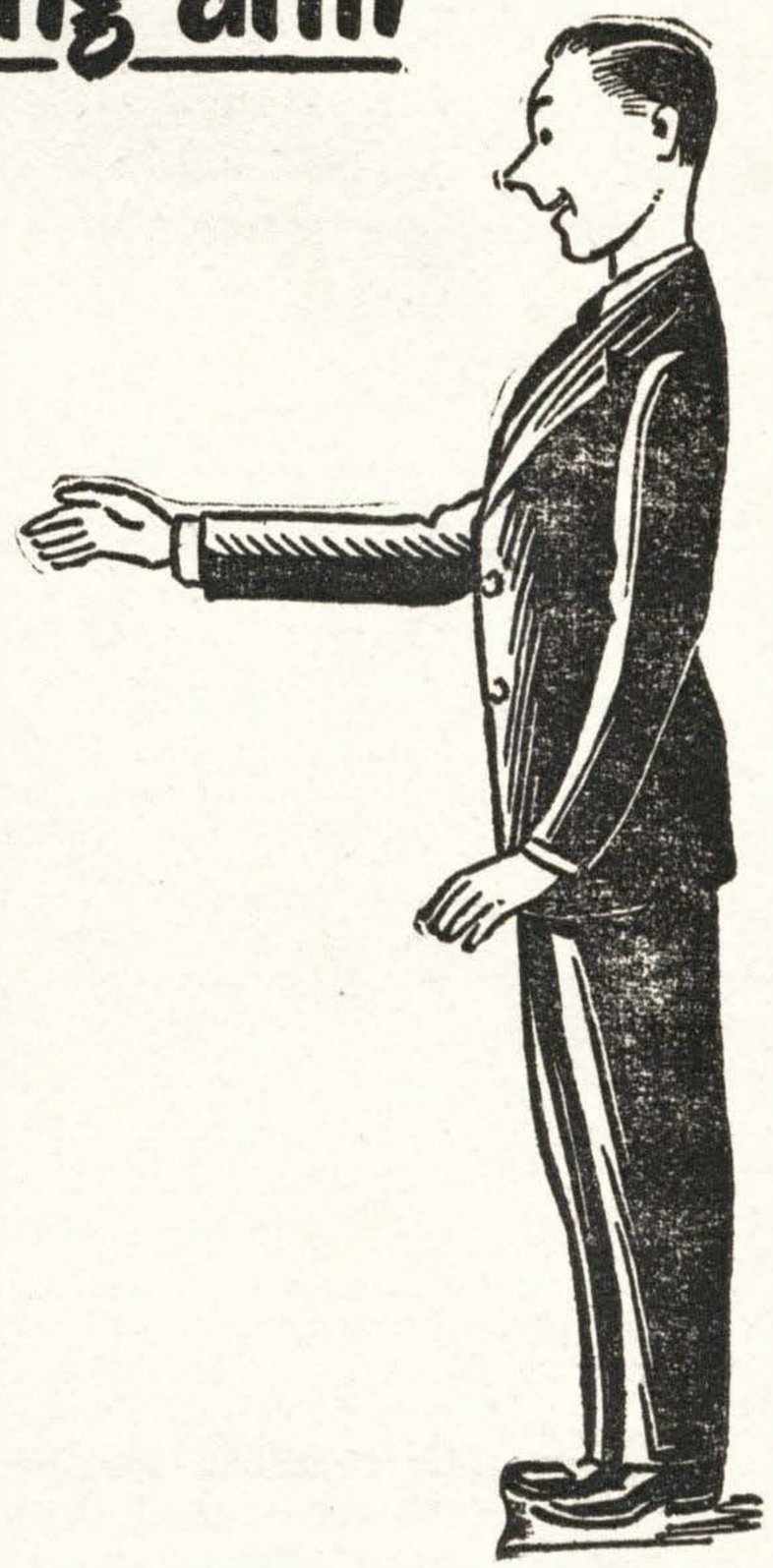
Yet such is his grasp of the state and trends of humanity that almost invariably, as in the lesser case of doom-haunted Henry Adams, his predictions have been borne out by events.

No magic lies behind such correctness of vision—unless it be the magic of history. For Churchill is a historian, one of the ablest of our times. His biography of his famous

(Continued on page 10)

OPPORTUNITY has a long arm





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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough, is accepted as definitive and his memoirs of World War One, "The World Crisis," are among the few truly illuminating documents of that troubled era. Likewise, his current recountal of his recent achievements as war-leader of Britain against the Axis will be studied generations hence.

Churchill knows the score because he knows what has gone before. It is his greatness as a historian that has given him insight.

The Importance of History

One of the major tragedies of our modern "system" of education is that it has managed to surround history and the teaching of history with such an aura of frightening dullness that most pupils flee it like the plague. It is generally considered dead, idle and useless in modern life.

Convinced of the vital value of scientific study, the same students who turn from history with a shudder will spend endless hours boning over the driest sort of formulae or laboratory experiments. And, convinced of their importance, these same students will find them interesting.

Yet surely, once the need for knowledge of history to attain adjustment to the urgent present is made plain, these students will not find it dull. For history is the human story, the key to present and future, and if man is ever to attain adjustment to the new age that lies ahead of him, he must know from whence he came.

A heartening beacon in the general darkness is the large and continued sale of Professor Arnold J. Toynbee's "A Study of History"—which has held up well on best seller lists for almost two years. Dr. Toynbee attacks history not from the viewpoint of nationalism or even of internationalism. He approaches it from the study of civilization itself.

There is only one hitch—not enough people will read his book. For history is as im-

(Continued on page 153)

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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a novelet by LEIGH BRACKETT

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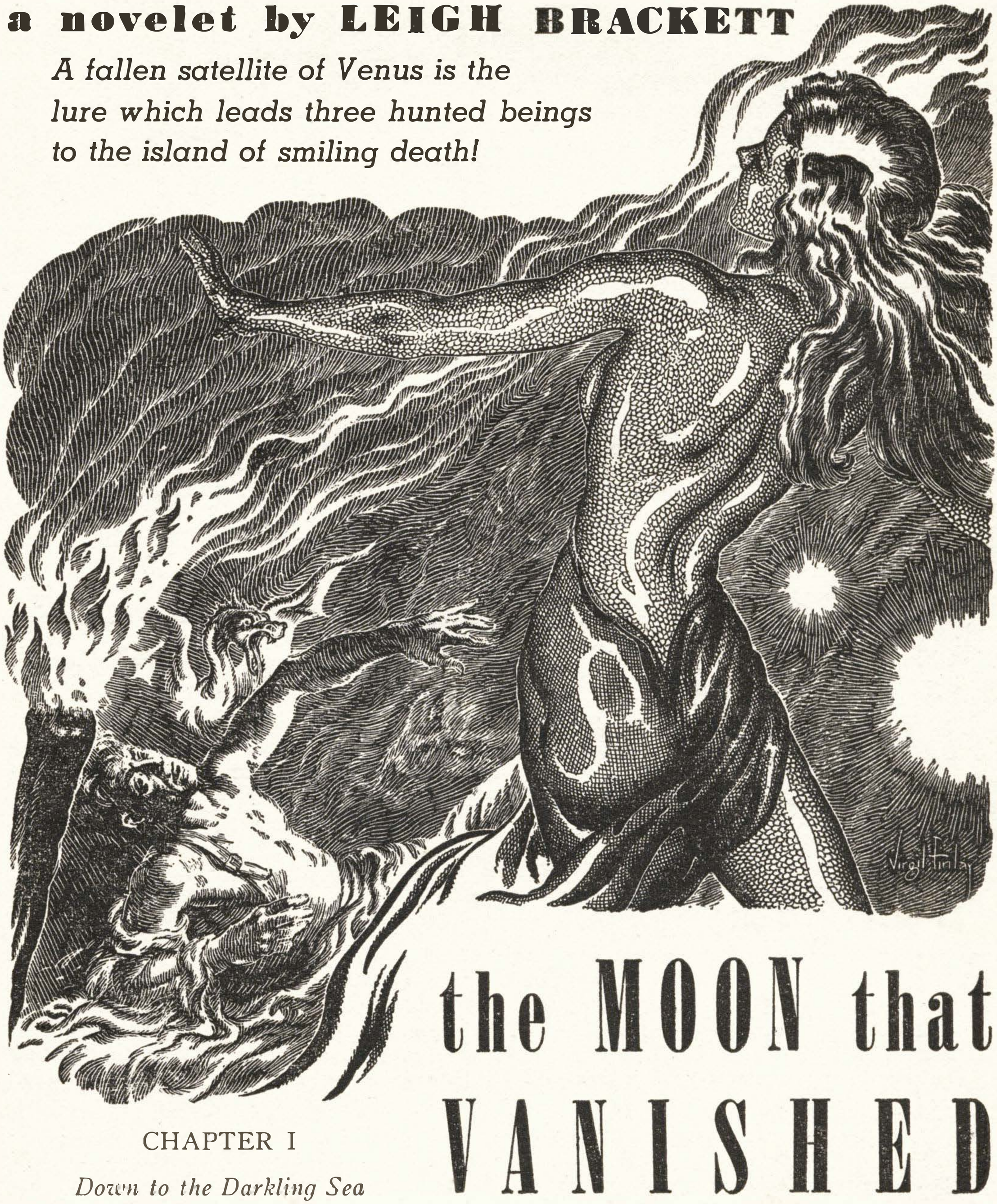


the MOON that VANISHED

CHAPTER I

Down to the Darkling Sea

THE STRANGER was talking about him—the tall stranger who was a long way from his native uplands, who wore plain leather and did not belong in this swamp-coast village. He was asking questions, talking, watching.

David Heath knew that, in the same detached way in which he realized that he was in Kalruna's dingy Palace of All Possible Delights, that he was very drunk but not nearly drunk enough, that he would never be drunk enough and that presently, when he passed out, he would be tossed over the back railing into the mud, where he might drown or sleep it off as he pleased.

Heath did not care. The dead and the

mad do not care. He lay without moving on the native hide-frame cot, the leather mask covering the lower part of his face, and breathed the warm golden vapour that bubbled in a narghil-like bowl beside him. Breathed, and tried to sleep, and could not. He did not close his eyes. Only when he became unconsicous would he do that.

There would be a moment he could not avoid, just before his drugged brain slipped over the edge into oblivion, when he would no longer be able to see anything but the haunted darkness of his own mind, and that moment would seem like all eternity. But afterward, for a few hours, he would find peace.

Until then he would watch, from his dark corner, the life that went on in the Palace of All Possible Delights.

Heath rolled his head slightly. By his shoulder, clinging with its hooked claws to the cot frame, a little bright-scaled dragon crouched and met his glance with jewel-red eyes in which there were peculiar sympathy and intelligence. Heath smiled and settled back. A nervous spasm shook him but the drug had relaxed him so that it was not severe and passed off quickly.

No one came near him except the emerald-skinned girl from the deep swamps who replenished his bowl. She was not human and therefore did not mind that he was David Heath. It was as though there were a wall around him beyond which no man stepped or looked.

Except, of course, the stranger.

Heath let his gaze wander. Past the long low bar where the common seamen lay on cushions of moss and skins, drinking the cheap fiery *thul*. Past the tables, where the captains and the mates sat, playing their endless and complicated dice games. Past the Nahali girl who danced naked in the torchlight, her body glimmering with tiny scales and as sinuous and silent in motion as the body of a snake.

The single huge room was open on three sides to the steaming night. It was there that Heath's gaze went at last. Outside, to the darkness and the sea, because they had been his life and he loved them.

Darkness on Venus is not like the darkness of Earth or Mars. The planet is hungry for light and will not let it go. The face of Venus never sees the sun but even at night the hope and the memory of it are there, trapped in the eternal clouds.

The air is the colour of indigo and it carries its own pale glow. Heath lay watching how the slow hot wind made drifts of light among the *liha*-trees, touched the muddy harbour beaches with a wavering gleam and blended into the restless phosphorescence of of the Sea of Morning Opals. Half a mile south the river Omaz flowed silently down, still tainted with the reek of the Deep Swamps.

Sea and sky—the life of David Heath and his destruction.

The heavy vapor swirled in Heath's brain. His breathing slowed and deepened. His lids grew heavy.

Heath closed his eyes.

An expression of excitement, of yearning, crossed his face, mingled with a vague unease. His muscles tensed. He began to whimper, very softly, the sound muffled by the leather mask.

The little dragon cocked its head and watched, still as a carven image.

HEATH'S body, half naked in a native kilt, began to twitch, then to move in spasmodic jerks. The expression of unease deepened, changed gradually to one of pure horror. The cords in his throat stood out like wires as he tried to cry out and could not. Sweat gathered in great beads on his skin.

Suddenly the little dragon raised its wings and voiced a hissing scream.

Heath's nightmare world rocked around him, riven with loud sounds. He was mad with fear, he was dying, vast striding shapes thronged toward him out of a shining mist. His body was shaken, cracking, frail bones bursting into powder, his heart tearing out of him, his brain a part of the mist, shining burning. He tore the mask from his face and cried out a name, *Ethne!*, and sat up—and his eyes were wide open, blind and deep.

Somewhere, far off, he heard thunder. The thunder spoke. It called his name. A new face pushed in past the phantoms of his dream. It swelled and blotted out the others. The face of the stranger from the High Plateaus. He saw every line of it, painted in fire upon his brain.

The square jaw, hard mouth, nose curved like a falcon's beak, the scars wealed white against white skin, eyes like moonstones, only hot, bright—the long silver hair piled high in the intricate tribal knot and secured with a warrior's golden chains.

Heath looked hungrily into the mists and presently he raised his arms

Hands shook him, slapped his face. The little dragon went on screaming and flapping, tethered by a short thong to the head of Heath's cot so that it could not tear out the eyes of the stranger.

Heath caught his breath in a long shuddering sob and sprang.

He would have killed the man who had robbed him of his little time of peace. He tried, in deadly silence, while the seamen and the masters and the mates and the dancing girls watched, not moving, sidelong out of their frightened, hateful eyes. But the Uplander was a big man, bigger than Heath in his best days had even been. And presently Heath lay panting on the cot, a sick man, a man who was slowly dying and had no strength left.

The stranger spoke. "It is said that you found the Moonfire."

Heath stared at him with his dazed, drugged eyes and did not answer.

"It is said that you are David Heath the Earthman, captain of the *Ethne*."

Still Heath did not answer. The rusty torchlight flickered over him, painting highlight and shadow. He had always been a lean, wiry man. Now he was emaciated, the bones of his face showing terribly ridged and curved under the drawn skin. His black hair and unkempt beard were shot through with white.

The Uplander studied Heath deliberately, contemptuously. He said, "I think they lie."

Heath laughed. It was not a nice laugh.

"Few men have ever reached the Moonfire," the Venusian said. "They were the strong ones, the men without fear."

After a long while Heath whispered, "They were fools."

He was not speaking to the Uplander. He had forgotten him. His dark mad gaze was fixed on something only he could see.

"Their ships are rotting in the weed beds of the Upper Seas. The little dragons have picked their bones." Heath's voice was slow, harsh and toneless, wandering. "Beyond the Sea of Morning Opals, beyond the weeds and the Guardians, through the Dragon's Throat and still beyond—I've seen it, rising out of the mists, out of the Ocean-That-Is-Not-Water."

A tremor shook him, twisting the gaunt bones of his body. He lifted his head, like a man straining to breathe, and the running torchlight brought his face clear of the shadows. In all the huge room there was not a sound, not a rustle, except for a small sharp gasp that ran through every mouth and then was silent.

"The gods know where they are now, the strong brave men who went through the Moonfire. The gods know what they are now. Not human if they live at all."

He stopped. A deep slow shudder went through him. He dropped his head. "I was only in the fringe of it. Only a little way."

In the utter quiet the Uplander laughed. He said, "I think you lie."

Heath did not raise his head nor move.

The Venusian leaned over him, speaking loudly, so that even across the distance of drugs and madness the Earthman should hear.

"You're like the others, the few who have come back. But they never lived a season out. They died or killed themselves. How long have you lived?"

PRESENTLY he grasped the Earthman's shoulder and shook it roughly. "How long have you lived?" he shouted and the little dragon screamed, struggling against its thong.

Heath moaned. "Through all hell," he whispered. "Forever."

"Three seasons," said the Venusian. "Three seasons, and part of a fourth." He took his hand away from Heath and stepped back. "You never saw the Moonfire. You knew the custom, how the men who break the tabu must be treated until the punishment of the gods is finished."

He kicked the bowl, breaking it, and the bubbling golden fluid spilled out across the floor in a pool of heady fragrance. "You wanted *that,* and you knew how to get it, for the rest of your sodden life."

A low growl of anger rose in the Palace of All Possible Delights.

Heath's blurred vision made out the squat fat bulk of Kalruna approaching. Even in the depths of his agony he laughed, weakly. For more than three seasons Kalruna had obeyed the traditional law. He had fed and made drunk the pariah who was sacred to the anger of the gods—the gods who guarded so jealously the secret of the Moonfire. Now Kalruna was full of doubt and very angry.

Heath began to laugh aloud. The effects of his uncompleted jag were making him reckless and hysterical. He sat up on the cot and laughed in their faces.

"I was only in the fringe," he said. "I'm not a god. I'm not even a man any more. But I can show you if you want to be shown."

He pulled himself to his feet, and as he did so, in a motion as automatic as breathing, he loosed the little dragon and set it on his naked shoulder. He stood swaying a moment and then began to walk out across the room, slowly, uncertainly, but with his head stubbornly erect. The crowd drew apart to make a path for him and he walked along it in the silence, clothed in his few sad rags of dignity, until he came to the railing and stopped.

"Put out the torches," he said. "All but one."

Kalruna said hesitantly, "There's no need. I believe you."

There was fear in the place now—fear, and fascination. Every man glanced sideways, looking for escape, but no one went away.

Heath said again, "Put out the torches."

The tall stranger reached out and doused the nearest one in its bucket, and presently in all that vast room there was darkness, except for one torch far in the back.

Heath stood braced against the rail, staring out into the hot indigo night.

The mists rose thick from the Sea of Morning Opals. They crept up out of the mud, and breathed in clouds from the swamps. The slow wind pushed them in long rolling drifts, blue-white and glimmering against the darker night.

Heath looked hungrily into the mists. His head was thrown back, his whole body strained upward and presently he raised his arms in a gesture of terrible longing.

"Ethne," he whispered. "Ethne."

Almost imperceptibly, a change came over him. The weakness, the look of the sodden wreck, left him. He stood firm and straight, and the muscles rose coiled and beautiful on the long lean frame of his bones, alive with the tension of strength.

His face had altered even more. There was a look of power on it. The dark eyes burned with deep fires, glowing with a light that was more than human, until it seemed that his whole head was crowned with a strange nimbus.

For one short moment, the face of David Heath was the face of a god.

"Ethne," he said.

And she came.

Out of the blue darkness, out of the mist, drifting tenuous and lovely toward the Earthman. Her body was made from the glowing air, the soft drops of the mist, shaped and coloured by the force that was in Heath. She was young, not more than nineteen, with the rosy tint of Earth's sun still in her cheeks, her eyes wide and bright as a child's, her body slim with the sweet angularity of youth.

The first time I saw her, when she stepped down the loading ramp for her first look at Venus and the wind took her hair and played with it and she walked light and eager as a colt on a spring morning. Light and merry always, even walking to her death.

The shadowy figure smiled and held out her arms. Her face was the face of a woman who has found love and all the world along with it.

Closer and closer she drifted to Heath and the Earthman stretched out his hands to touch her.

And in one swift instant, she was gone.

Heath fell forward against the rail. He stayed there a long time. There was no god in him now, no strength. He was like a flame suddenly burned out and dead, the ashes collapsing upon themselves. His eyes were closed and tears ran out from under the lashes.

IN THE steaming darkness of the room no one moved.

Heath spoke once. "I couldn't go far enough," he said, "into the Moonfire."

He dragged himself upright after a while and went toward the steps, supporting himself against the rail, feeling his way like a blind man. He went down the four steps of hewn logs and the mud of the path rose warm around his ankles. He passed between the rows of mud-and-wattle huts, a broken scarecrow of a man plodding through the night of an alien world.

He turned, down the side path that led to the anchorage. His feet slipped into the deeper mud at the side and he fell, face down. He tried once to get up, then lay still, already sinking into the black, rich ooze. The little dragon rode on his shoulder, pecking at him, screaming, but he did not hear.

He did not know it when the tall stranger from the High Plateaus picked him out of the mud a few seconds later, dragon and all, and carried him away, down to the darkling sea.

CHAPTER II

The Emerald Sail

A WOMAN'S voice said, "Give me the cup."

Heath felt his head being lifted, and then the black, stinging taste of Venusian coffee slid like liquid fire down his throat. He made his usual waking fight against fear and reality, gasped and opened his eyes.

He lay in his own bunk, in his own cabin, aboard the *Ethne*. Across from him, crouched on a carven chest, the tall Venusian sat, his head bowed under the low scarlet arch of the deck above. Beside Heath, looking down at him, was a woman.

It was still night. The mud that clung to Heath's body was still wet. They must have worked hard, he thought, to bring him to.

The little dragon flopped down to its perch on Heath's shoulder. He stroked its scaly neck and lay watching his visitors.

The man said, "Can you talk now?"

Heath shrugged. His eyes were on the woman. She was tall but not too tall, young but not too young. Her body was everything a woman's body ought to be, of its type, which was wide-shouldered and leggy, and she had a fine free way of moving it. She wore a short tunic of undyed spider silk, which exactly matched the soft curling hair that fell down her back—a bright, true silver with little peacock glints of colour in it.

Her face was one that no man would forget in a hurry. It was a face shaped warmly and generously for all the womanly things—passion and laughter and tenderness. But something had happened to it. Something had given it a bitter sulky look. There were resentment in it and deep anger and hardness—and yet, with all that, it was somehow a pathetically eager face with lost and frightened eyes.

Heath remembered vaguely a day when he would have liked to solve the riddle of that contradictory face. A day long ago, before Ethne came.

He said, speaking to both of them, "Who are you and what do you want with me?"

He looked now directly at the man and it was a look of sheer black hatred. "Didn't you have enough fun with me at Kalruna's?"

"I had to be sure of you," the stranger said. "Sure that you had not lied about the Moonfire."

He leaned forward, his eyes narrowed and piercing. He did not sit easily. His body was curved like a bent bow. In the light of the hanging lantern his scarred, handsome face showed a ripple of little muscles under the skin. A man in a hurry, Heath thought, a man with a sharp goad pricking his flanks.

"And what was that to you?" said Heath.

It was a foolish question. Already Heath knew what was coming. His whole being drew in upon itself, retreated.

The stranger did not answer directly. Instead he said, "You knew the cult that calls itself guardian of the Mysteries of the Moon."

"The oldest cult on Venus and one of the strongest. One of the strangest, too, on a moonless planet," Heath said slowly to no one in particular. "The Moonfire is their symbol of godhead."

The woman laughed without mirth. "Although," she said, "they've never seen it.

The stranger went on, "All Venus knows about you, David Heath. The word travels. The priests know too—the Children of the Moon. They have a special interest in you."

Heath waited. He did not speak.

"You belong to the gods for their own vengeance," the stranger said. "But the vengeance hasn't come. Perhaps because you're an Earthman and therefore less obedient to the gods of Venus. Anyway, the Children of the Moon are tired of waiting. The longer you live the more men may be tempted to blasphemy, the less faith there will be in the ability of the gods to punish men for their sins." His voice had a biting edge of sarcasm. "So," he finished, "the Children of the Moon are coming to see to it that you die."

Heath smiled. "Do the priests tell you their secrets?"

The man turned his head and said, "Alor."

The woman stepped in front of Heath and loosed her tunic at the shoulder. "There," she said furiously. "Look!"

Her anger was not with Heath. It was with what he saw. The tattoo branded between her white breasts—the round rayed symbol of the Moon.

Heath caught his breath and let it out in a long sigh. "A handmaiden of the temple," he said and looked again at her face. Her eyes met his, silvery-cold, level, daring him to say more.

"We are sold out of our cradles," she said. "We have no choice. And our families are very proud to have a daughter chosen for the temple."

Bitterness and pride and the smouldering anger of the slave.

She said, "Broca tells the truth."

HEATH'S body seemed to tighten in upon itself. He glanced from one to the other and back again, not saying anything, and his heart beat fast and hard, knocking against his ribs.

Alor said, "They will kill you and it won't be easy dying. I know. I've heard men screaming sometimes for many nights and their sin was less than yours."

Heath said out of a dry mouth, "A runaway girl from the temple gardens and a thrower of spears. Their sin is great too. They didn't come halfway across Venus just to warn me. I think they lie. I think the priests are after them."

"We're all three proscribed," said Broca, "but Alor and I could get away. You they'll hunt down no matter where you go—except one place."

And Heath said, "Where is that?"

"The Moonfire."

After a long while Heath uttered a harsh grating sound that might have been a laugh.

"Get out," he said. "Get away from me."

He got to his feet, shaking with weakness and fury. "You lie, both of you—because I'm the only living man who has seen the Moonfire and you want me to take you there. You believe the legends. You think the Moonfire will change you into gods. You're mad, like all the other fools, for the power and the glory you think you'll have. Well, I can tell you this—the Moonfire will give you nothing but suffering and death."

His voice rose. "Go lie to someone else. Frighten the Guardians of the Upper Seas. Bribe the gods themselves to take you there. But get away from me!"

The Venusian rose slowly. The cabin was small for him, the deck beams riding his shoulders. He swept the little dragon aside. He took Heath in his two hands and he said, "I will reach the Moonfire, and you will take me there."

Heath struck him across the face.

Ghostly and indistinct, Broca stood with Alor in his arms

Sheer astonishment held Broca still for a moment and Heath said, "You're not a god yet."

The Venusian opened his mouth in a snarling grin. His hands shifted and tightened.

The woman said sharply, "Broca!" She stepped in close, wrenching at Broca's wrists. "Don't kill him, you fool!"

Broca let his breath out hard between his teeth. Gradually his hands relaxed. Heath's face was suffused with dark blood. He would have fallen if the woman had not caught him.

She said to Broca, "Strike him—but not too hard."

Broca raised his fist and struck Heath carefully on the point of the jaw.

It could not have been more than two of the long Venusian hours before Heath came to. He did that slowly as always—progressing from a vast vague wretchedness to an acute awareness of everything that was the matter with him. His head felt as though it had been cleft in two with an axe from the jaw upward.

He could not understand why he should have wakened. The drug alone should have been good for hours of heavy sleep. The sky beyond the cabin port had changed. The night was almost over. He lay for a moment, wondering whether or not he was going to be sick, and then suddenly he realized what had wakened him in spite of everything.

The *Ethne* was under way.

His anger choked him so that he could not even swear. He dragged himself to his feet and crossed the cabin, feeling even then that she was not going right, that the dawn wind was strong and she was rolling to it, yawing.

He kicked open the door and came out on deck.

The great lateen sail of golden spider silk, ghostly in the blue air, slatted and spilled wind, shaking against loose yards. Heath turned and made for the raised poop, finding strength in his fear for the ship. Broca was up there, braced against the loom of the stern sweep. The wake lay white on the black water, twisting like a snake.

The woman Alor stood at the rail, staring at the low land that lay behind them.

Broca made no protest as Heath knocked him aside and took the sweep. Alor turned and watched but did not speak.

The *Ethne* was small and the simple rig was such that one man could handle it. Heath trimmed the sail and in a few seconds she was stepping light and dainty as her namesake, her wake straight as a ruled line.

When that was done Heath turned upon them and cursed them in a fury greater than that of a woman whose child has been stolen.

Broca ignored him. He stood watching the land and the lightening sky. When Heath was all through the woman said, "We had to go. It may already be too late. And you weren't going to help."

Heath didn't say anything more. There weren't any words. He swung the helm hard over.

BROCA was beside him in one step, his hand raised and then suddenly Alor cried out, *"Wait!"*

Something in her voice brought both men around to look at her. She stood at the rail, facing into the wind, her hair flying, the short skirt of her tunic whipped back against her thighs. Her arms was raised in a pointing gesture.

It was dawn now.

For a moment Heath lost all sense of time. The deck lifting lightly under his feet, the low mist and dawn over the Sea of Morning Opals, the dawn that gave the sea its name. It seemed that there had never been a Moonfire, never been a past or a future, but only David Heath and his ship and the light coming over the water.

It came slowly, sifting down like a rain of jewels through the miles of pearl-grey cloud. Cool and slow at first, then warming and spreading, turning the misty air to drops of rosy fire, opaline, glowing, low to the water, so that the little ship seemed to be drifting through the heart of a fire-opal as vast as the universe.

The sea turned colour, from black to indigo streaked with milky bands. Flights of the small bright dragons rose flashing from the weed-beds that lay scattered on the surface in careless patterns of purple and ochre and cinnabar and the weed itself stirred with dim sentient life, lifting its tendrils to the light.

For one short moment David Heath was completely happy.

Then he saw that Broca had caught up a bow from under the taffrail. Heath realized that they must have fetched all their traps coolly aboard while he was in Kalruna's. It was one of the great longbows of the Upland barbarians and Broca bent its massive

arc as though it had been a twig and laid across it a bone-barbed shaft.

A ship was coming toward them, a slender shape of pearl flying through the softly burning veils of mist. Her sail was emerald green. She was a long way off but she had the wind behind her and she was coming down with it like a swooping dragon.

"That's the *Lahal,*" said Heath. "What does Johor think he's doing?"

Then he saw, with a start of incredulous horror, that on the prow of the oncoming ship the great spiked ram had been lowered into place.

During the moment when Heath's brain struggled to understand why Johor, ordinary trading skipper of an ordinary ship, should wish to sink him, Alor said five words.

"The Children of the Moon."

Now, on the *Lahal's* foredeck, Heath could distinguish four tiny figures dressed in black.

The long shining ram dipped and glittered in the dawn.

Heath flung himself against the stern sweep. The *Ethne's* golden sail cracked taut. She headed up into the wind. Heath measured his distance grimly and settled down.

Broca turned on him furiously. "Are you mad? They'll run us down! Go the other way."

Heath said, "There is no other way. They've got me pinned on a lee shore." He was suddenly full of a blind rage against Johor and the four black-clad priests.

There was nothing to do but wait—wait and sail the heart out of his ship and hope that enough of David Heath still lived to get them through. *And if not,* Heath thought, *I'll take the* Lahal *down with me!*

Broca and Alor stood by the rail together, watching the racing green sail. They did not speak. There was nothing to say. Heath saw that now and again the woman turned to study him.

The wakes of the two ships lay white on the water, two legs of a triangle rushing toward their apex.

Heath could see Johor now, manning the sweep. He could see the crew crouching in the waist, frightened sailors rounded up to do the bidding of the priests. They were armed and standing by with grapnels.

Now, on the foredeck, he could see the Children of the Moon.

They were tall men. They wore tunics of black link mail with the rayed symbol of the Moon blazed in jewels on their breasts. They rode the pitching deck, their silver hair flying loose in the wind, and their bodies were as the bodies of wolves that run down their prey and devour it.

Heath fought the stern sweep, fought the straining ship, fought with wind and distance to cheat them of their will.

And the woman Alor kept watching David Heath with her bitter challenging eyes and Heath hated her as he did the priests, with a deadly hatred, because he knew what he must look like with his beaked bony face and wasted body, swaying and shivering over the loom of the sweep.

CLOSER and closer swept the emerald sail, rounded and gleaming like a peacock's breast in the light. Pearl white and emerald, purple and gold, on a dark blue sea, the spiked ram glittering—two bright dragons racing toward marriage, toward death.

Close, very close. The rayed symbols blazed fire on the breasts of the Children of the Moon.

The woman Alor lifted her head high into the wind and cried out—a long harsh ringing cry like the scream of an eagle. It ended in a name, and she spoke it like a curse.

"Vakor!"

One of the priests wore the jeweled fillet that marked him leader. He flung up his arms, and the words of his malediction came hot and bitter down the wind.

Broca's bowstring thrummed like a great harp. The shaft fell short and Vakor laughed.

The priests went aft to be safe from buckling timbers and the faces of the seamen were full of fear.

Heath cried out a warning. He saw Alor and Broca drop flat to the deck. He saw their faces. They were the faces of a man and a woman who were on the point of death and did not like it but were not afraid. Broca reached out and braced the woman's body with his own.

Heath shoved *Ethne's* nose fair into the wind and let her jibe.

The *Lahal* went thundering by not three yards away, helpless to do anything about it.

The kicking sweep had knocked Heath into the scuppers, half dazed. He heard the booming sail slat over, felt the wrenching shudder that shook the *Ethne* down to her last spike and prayed that the mast would stay in her. As he dragged himself back he saw that the priest Vakor had leaped onto

the *Lahal's* high stern. He was close enough for Heath to see his face.

They looked into each other's eyes and the eyes of Vakor were brilliant and wild, the eyes of a fanatic. He was not old. His body was virile and strong, his face cut in fine sweeping lines, the mouth full and sensuous and proud. He was tense with cheated fury and his voice rang against the wind like the howling of a beast.

"We will follow! We will follow, and the gods will slay!"

As the rush of the *Lahal* carried him away, Heath heard the last echo of his cry.

"Alor!"

With all the strength he had left Heath quieted his outraged ship and let her fill away on the starboard tack. Broca and Alor got slowly to their feet. Broca said, "I thought you'd wrecked her."

"They had the wind of me," Heath said. "I couldn't come about like a Christian."

Alor walked to the stern and watched where the *Lahal* wallowed and staggered as she tried to stop her headlong rush. "Vakor!" she whispered, and spat into the sea.

Broca said, "They will follow us. Alor told me—they have a chart, the only one, that shows the way to the Moonfire."

Heath shrugged. He was too weary now to care. He pointed off to the right.

"There's a strong ocean current runs there, like a river in the sea. Most skippers are afraid of it but their ships aren't like the *Ethne*. We'll ride it. After that we'll have to trust to luck."

Alor swung around sharply. "Then you will go to the Moonfire."

"I didn't say that. Broca, get me the bottle out of my cabin locker."

But it was the woman who fetched it to him and watched him drink, then said, "Are you all right?"

"I'm dying, and she asks me that," said Heath.

She looked a moment steadily into his eyes and oddly enough there was no mockery in her voice when she spoke, only respect.

"You won't die," she said and went away.

In a few moments the current took the *Ethne* and swept her away northward. The *Lahal* vanished into the mists behind them. She was cranky in close handling and Heath knew that Johor would not dare the swirling current.

For nearly three hours he stayed at his post and took the ship through. When the ocean stream curved east he rode out of it into still water. Then he fell down on the deck and slept.

Once again the tall barbarian lifted him like a child and laid him in his bunk.

All through the rest of that day and the long Venusian night, while Broca steered, Heath lay in bitter sleep. Alor sat beside him, watching the nightmare shadows that crossed his face, listening as he moaned and talked, soothing his worst tremors.

He repeated the name of Ethne over and over again and a puzzled strangely wistful look came in the eyes of Alor.

When it was dawn again Heath awoke and went on deck. Broca said with barbarian bluntness, "Have you decided?"

Heath did not answer and Alor said, "Vakor will hunt you down. The word has gone out all over Venus, wherever there are men. There'll be no refuge for you—except one."

Heath smiled, a mirthless baring of the teeth. "And that's the Moonfire. You make it all so simple."

And yet he knew she spoke the truth. The Children of the Moon would never leave his track. He was a rat in a maze and every passage led to death.

But there were different deaths. If he had to die it would not be as Vakor willed but with Ethne—an Ethne more real than a shadow—in his arms again.

He realized now that deep in his mind he had always known, all these three seasons and more that he had clung to a life not worth the living. He had known that someday he must go back again.

"We'll go to the Moonfire," he said, "and perhaps we shall all be gods."

Broca said, "You are weak, Earthman. You didn't have the courage."

Heath said one word.

"Wait."

CHAPTER III

Over the Bar

THE days and the nights went by, and the *Ethne* fled north across the Sea of Morning Opals, north toward the equator. They were far out of the trade lanes. All these vast upper reaches were wilderness.

There were not even fishing villages along the coast. The great cliffs rose sheer from the water and nothing could find a foothold there. And beyond, past the Dragon's Throat, lay only the barren death-trap of the Upper Seas.

The *Ethne* ran as sweetly as though she joyed to be free again, free of the muddy harbour and the chains. And a change came over Heath. He was a man again. He stood shaved and clean and erect on his own deck and there was no decision to be made anymore, no doubt. The long dread, the long delay, were over and he too, in his own bitter way, was happy.

They had seen nothing more of the *Lahal* but Heath knew quite well that she was there somewhere, following. She was not as fleet as the *Ethne* but she was sound and Johor was a good sailor. Morever, the priest Vakor was there and he would drive the *Lahal* over the Mountains of White Cloud if he had to—to catch them.

He said once to Alor, "Vakor seems to have a special hatred for you."

Her face twisted with revulsion and remembered shame. "He is a beast," she said. "He is a serpent, a lizard that walks like a king." She added, "We've made it easy for him, the three of us together like this."

From where he sat steering Heath looked at her with a remote curiosity. She stood, long legged, bold-mouthed, looking back with sombre smoky eyes at the white wake unrolling behind them.

He said, "You must have loved Broca to break your vows for him. Considering what it means if they catch you."

Alor looked at him, then laughed, a brief sound that had no humor in it.

"I'd have gone with any man strong enough to take me out of the temple," she said. "And Broca is strong and he worships me."

Heath was genuinely astonished. "You don't love him?"

She shrugged. "He is good to look at. He is a chief of warriors and he is a man and not a priest. But love—"

She asked suddenly, "What is it like—to love as you loved your Ethne?"

Heath started. "What do you know about Ethne?" he asked harshly.

"You have talked of her in sleep. And Broca told me how you called her shadow in Kalruna's place. You dared the Moonfire to gain her back."

She glanced at the ivory figurehead on the high curving bow, the image of a woman, young and slim and smiling.

"I think you are a fool," she said abruptly. "I think only a fool would love a shadow."

She had left him and gone down into the cabin before he could gather words, before he could take her white neck between his hands and break it.

Ethne—Ethne!

He cursed the woman of the temple gardens.

He was still in a brooding fury when Broca came up out of the cabin to relieve him at the sweep.

"I'll steer a while yet," Heath told him curtly. "I think the weather's going to break."

Clouds were boiling up in the south as the night closed down. The sea was running in long easy swells as it had done for all these days but there was a difference, a pulse and a stir that quivered all through the ship's keel.

Broca, stretching huge shoulders, looked away to the south and then down at Heath.

"I think you talk too much to my woman," he said.

Before Heath could answer the other laid his hand lightly on the Earthman's shoulder. A light grip but with strength enough behind it to crack Heath's bones.

He said, "Do not talk so much to Alor."

"I haven't sought her out," Heath snapped savagely. "She's your woman—you worry about her."

"I am not worried about her," Broca answered calmly. "Not about her and you."

He was looking down at Heath as he spoke and Heath knew the contrast they made—his own lean body and gaunt face against the big barbarian's magnificent strength.

"But she is always with you on the deck, listening to your stories of the sea," said Broca. "Do not talk to her so much," he repeated and this time there was an edge to his voice.

"For heaven's sake!" said Heath jeeringly. "If I'm a fool what are you? A man mad enough to look for power in the Moonfire and faithfulness in a temple wench! And now you're jealous."

HE HATED both Broca and Alor bitterly in this moment and out of his hate he spoke.

"Wait until the Moonfire touches you. It

will break your strength and your pride. After that you won't care who your woman talks to or where."

Broca gave him a stare of unmoved contempt. Then he turned his back and settled down to look out across the darkening sea.

After a while, the amusing side of the whole thing struck Heath, and he began to laugh.

They were, all three of them, going to die. Somewhere out there to the south, Vakor came like a black shepherd, driving them toward death. Dreams of empire, dreams of glory and a voyage that tempted the vengeance of the gods—and at such a time the barbarian chief could be jealous.

With sudden shock he realized just how much time Alor had spent with him. Out of habit and custom as old as the sea he had helped to while away the long hard hours with a sailor's yarns. Looking back he could see Alor's face, strangely young and eager as she listened, could remember how she asked questions and wanted to learn the ways and the working of the ship.

He could remember now how beautiful she looked with the wind in her hair, her firm strong body holding the *Ethne* steady in a quartering sea.

The storm brewed over the hours and at last it broke.

Heath had known that the Sea of Morning Opals would not let him go without a struggle. It had tried him with shallows, with shifting reefs, with dead calms and booming solar tides and all the devices of current, fog and drifting weed. He had beaten all of them. Now he was almost within sight of the Dragon's Throat, the gateway to the Upper Seas and it was a murderous moment for a storm out of the south.

The night had turned black. The sea burned with white phosphorescence, a boiling cauldron of witch-fire. The wind was frightening. The *Ethne* plunged and staggered, driving under a bare pole, and for once Heath was glad of Broca's strength as they fought the sweep together.

He became aware that someone was beside him and knew that it was Alor.

"Go below!" he yelled and caught only the echo of her answer. She did not go but threw her weight too against the sweep.

Lightning-bolts as broad as comet's tails came streaking down with a rush and a fury as though they had started their run from another star and gathered speed across half the galaxy. They lit the Sea of Morning Opals with a purple glare until the thunder brought the darkness crashing down again. Then the rain fell like a river rolling down the belts of cloud.

Heath groaned inwardly. The wind and the following sea had taken the little ship between them and were hurling her forward. At the speed she was making now she would hit the Dragon's Throat at dawn. She would hit it full tilt and helpless as a drifting chip.

The lightning showed him the barbarian's great straining body, gleaming wet, his long hair torn loose from its knots and chains, streaming with wind and water. It showed him Alor too. Their hands and their shoulders touched, straining together.

It seemed that they struggled on that way for centuries and then, abruptly, the rain stopped, the wind slackened, and there was a period of eerie silence. Alor's voice sounded loud in Heath's ears, crying, "Is it over?"

"No," he answered. "Listen!"

They heard a deep and steady booming, distant in the north—the boom of surf.

The storm began again.

Dawn came, hardly lighter than the night. Through the flying wrack Heath could see cliffs on either side where the mountain ranges narrowed in, funneling the Sea of Morning Opals into the strait of the Dragon's Throat. The driven sea ran high between them, bursting white against the black rock.

The *Ethne* was carried headlong, a leaf in a millrace.

The cliffs drew in and in until there was a gap of no more than a mile between them. Black brooding titans and the space below a fury of white water, torn and shredded by fang-like rocks.

The Dragon's Throat.

When he had made the passage before Heath had had fair weather and men for the oars. Even then it had not been easy. Now he tried to remember where the channel lay, tried to force the ship toward what seemed to be an open lane among the rocks.

The *Ethne* gathered speed and shot forward into the Dragon's Throat.

She fled through a blind insanity of spray and wind and sound. Time and again Heath saw the loom of a towering rock before him and wrenched the ship aside or fought to keep away from death that was hidden just under the boiling surface. Twice, three times, the *Ethne* gave a grating shudder and

he thought she was gone.

Once, toward the last, when it seemed that there was no hope, he felt Alor's hand close over his.

The high water saved them, catching them in its own rush down the channel, carrying them over the rocks and finally over the bar at the end of the gut. The *Ethne* came staggering out into the relative quiet of the Upper Seas, where the pounding waves seemed gentle and it was all done so quickly, over so soon. For a long time the three of them stood sagging over the sweep, not able to realize that it was over and they still lived.

The storm spent itself. The wind settled to a steady blow. Heath got a rag of sail up. Then he sat down by the tiller and bowed his head over his knees and thought about how Alor had caught his hand when she believed she was going to die.

CHAPTER IV

"I Will Wait!"

EVEN this early it was hot. The Upper Seas sprawled along the equator, shallow landlocked waters choked with weed and fouled with shifting reefs of mud, cut into a maze of lakes and blind channels by the jutting headlands of the mountains.

The wind dropped to a flat calm. They left the open water behind them, where it was swept clean by the tides from the Sea of Morning Opals. The floating weed thickened around them, a blotched ochre plain that stirred with its own dim mindless life. The air smelled rotten.

Under Heath's direction they swung the weed-knife into place, the great braced blade that fitted over the prow. Then, using the heavy sweep as a sculling oar, they began to push the *Ethne* forward by the strength of their sweating backs.

Clouds of the little bright-scaled dragons rose with hissing screams, disturbed by the ship. This was their breeding ground. They fought and nested in the weed and the steaming air was full of the sound of their wings. They perched on the rail and in the rigging, watching with their red eyes. The creature that rode Heath's shoulder emitted harsh cries of excitement. Heath tossed him into the air and he flew away to join his mates.

There was life under the weed, spawning in the hot stagnant waters, multiform and formless, swarming, endlessly hungry. Small reptilian creatures flopped and slithered through the weed, eating the dragon's eggs, and here and there a flat dark head would break through with a snap and a crunch, and it would watch the *Ethne* with incurious eyes while it chewed and swallowed.

Constantly Heath kept watch.

The sun rose high above the eternal clouds. The heat seeped down and gathered. The scull moved back and forth, the knife bit, the weed dragged against the hull and behind them the cut closed slowly as the stuff wrapped and coiled upon itself.

Heath's eyes kept turning to Alor.

He did not want to look at her. He did not wish to remember the touch of her hand on his. He wished only to remember Ethne, to remember the agony of the Moonfire and to think of the reward that lay beyond it if he could endure. What could a temple wench mean to him beside that?

But he kept looking at her covertly. Her

[*Turn page*]

white limbs glistened with sweat and her red mouth was sullen with weariness and even so there was a strange wild beauty about her. Time and again her gaze would meet his, a quick hungry glance from under her lashes, and her eyes were not the eyes of a temple wench. Heath cursed Broca in his heart for making him think of Alor and he cursed himself because now he could not stop thinking of her.

They toiled until they could not stand. Then they sprawled on the deck in the breathless heat to rest. Broca pulled Alor to him.

"Soon this will all be over," he said. "Soon we will reach the Moonfire. You will like that, Alor—to be mated to a god!"

She lay unresponsive in the circle of his arm, her head turned away. She did not answer.

Broca laughed. "God and goddess. Two of a kind as we are now. We'll build our thrones so high the sun can see them." He rolled her head on his shoulder, looking down intently into her face. "Power, Alor. Strength. We will have them together." He covered her mouth with his, and his free hand caressed her, deliberate, possessive.

She thrust him away. "Don't," she said angrily. "It's too hot and I'm too tired." She got up and walked to the side, standing with her back to Broca.

Broca looked at her. Then he turned and looked at Heath. A dark flush reddened his skin. He said slowly, "Too hot and too tired—and besides, the Earthman is watching."

He sprang up and caught Alor and swung her around, one huge hand tangled in her hair, holding her. As soon as he touched her Heath also sprang up and said harshly, "Let her alone!"

Broca said, "She is my mate but I may not touch her." He glared down into Alor's blazing eyes and said, "She is my mate—or isn't she?"

He flung her away. He turned his head from side to side, half blind with rage.

"Do you think I didn't see you?" he asked thickly. "All day, looking at each other."

Heath said, "You're crazy."

"Yes," answered Broca, "I am." He took two steps toward Heath and added, "Crazy enough to kill you."

Alor said, "If you do you'll never reach the Moonfire."

Broca paused, trapped for one moment between his passion and his dream. He was facing the stern. Something caused his gaze to waver from Heath and then, gradually, his expression changed. Heath swung around and Alor gave a smothered cry.

Far behind them, vague in the steaming air, was an emerald sail.

THE *Lahal* must have come through the Dragon's Throat as soon as the storm was over. With men to man the rowing benches she had gained on the *Ethne* during the calm. Now she too was in the weed, and the oars were useless but there were men to scull her. She would move faster than the *Ethne* and without pause.

There would be little rest for Heath and Broca and the woman.

They swayed at the sculling oar all the stifling afternoon and all the breathless night, falling into the dull, half-hypnotized rhythm of beasts who walk forever around a water-wheel. Two of them working always, while the third slept, and Broca never took his eyes from Alor. With his tremendous vitality it seemed that he never slept and during the periods when Heath and Alor were alone at the oar together they exchanged neither words nor glances.

At dawn they saw that the *Lahal* was closer.

Broca crouched on the deck. He lifted his head and looked at the green sail. Heath saw that his eyes were very bright and that he shivered in spite of the brooding heat.

Heath's heart sank. The Upper Seas were rank with fever, and it looked as though the big barbarian was in for a bad go of it. Heath himself was pretty well immune to it but Broca was used to the clean air of the High Plateaus and the poison was working in his blood.

He measured the speed of the two ships and said, "It's no use. We must stand and fight."

Heath said savagely, "I thought you wanted to find the Moonfire. I thought you were the strong man who could win through it where everybody else has failed. I thought you were going to be a god."

Broca got to his feet. "With fever or without it I'm a better man than you."

"Then work! If we can just keep ahead of them until we clear the weed—"

Broca said, "The Moonfire?"

"Yes."

"We will keep ahead."

He bent his back to the scull and the *Ethne* crept forward through the weed. Her golden sail hung from the yard with a terrible stillness. The heat pressed down upon the Upper Seas as though the sun itself were falling through the haze. Astern the *Lahal* moved steadily on.

Broca's fever mounted. He turned from time to time to curse Vakor, shouting at the emerald sail.

"You'll never catch us, priest!" he would cry. "I am Broca of the tribe of Sarn and I will beat you—and I will beat the Moonfire. You will lie on your belly, priest, and lick my sandals before you die."

Then he would turn to Alor, his eyes shining. "You know the legends, Alor! The man who can bathe in the heart of the Moonfire has the power of the High Ones. He can build a world to suit himself, he can be king and lord and master. He can give his woman-god a palace of diamonds with a floor of gold. That is true, Alor. You have heard the priests say it in the temple."

Alor answered, "It is true."

"A new world, Alor. A world of our own."

He made the great sweep swing in a frenzy of strength and once again the mystery of the Moonfire swept over Heath. Why, since the priests knew the way there, did they not themselves become gods. Why had no man ever come out of it with godhead—only a few, a handful like himself, who had not had the valor to go all the way in.

AND yet there was godhead there. He knew because within himself there was the shadow of it.

The endless day wore on. The emerald sail came closer.

Toward mid-afternoon there was a sudden clattering flight of the little dragons and all life stopped still in the weed. The reptilian creatures lay motionless with dragon's eggs unbroken in their jaws. No head broke the surface to feed. The dragons flew away in a hissing cloud. There was utter silence.

Heath flung himself against the sweep and stopped it.

"Be quiet," he said. "Look. Out there."

They followed his gesture. Far away over the port bow, flowing toward them, was a ripple in the weed. A ripple as though the very bed of the Upper Seas was in motion.

"What is it?" whispered Alor, and saw Heath's face, and was silent.

Sluggishly, yet with frightened speed, the ripple came toward them. Heath got a harpoon out of the stern locker. He watched the motion of the weed, saw it gradually slow and stop in a puzzled way. Then he threw the harpoon as far away from the ship as he could with all his strength and more.

The ripple began again. It swerved and sped toward where the harpoon had fallen.

"They'll attack anything that moves," said Heath. "It lost us because we stopped. Watch."

The weed heaved and burst open, its meshes snapping across a scaled and titanic back. There seemed to be no shape to the creature, no distinguishable head. It was simply a vast and hungry blackness that spread upward and outward and the luckless brutes that cowered near it hissed and thrashed in their efforts to escape, and were engulfed and vanished.

Again Alor whispered, "What is it?"

"One of the Guardians," Heath answered. "The Guardians of the Upper Seas. They will crush a moving ship to splinters and eat the crew."

He glanced back at the *Lahal*. She, too, had come to a dead stop. The canny Vakor had scented the danger also.

"We'll have to wait," said Heath, "until it goes away."

They waited. The huge shape of darkness sucked and floundered in the weed and was in no hurry to go.

Broca sat staring at Heath. He was deep in fever and his eyes were not sane. He began to mutter to himself, incoherent ramblings in which only the name Alor and the word Moonfire were distinguishable.

Suddenly, with startling clarity, he said, "The Moonfire is nothing without Alor."

He repeated "Nothing!" several times, beating his huge fists on his knees each time he said it. Then he turned his head blindly from side to side as though looking for something. "She's gone. Alor's gone. She's gone to the Earthman."

Alor spoke to him, touched him, but he shook her off. In his fever-mad brain there was only one truth. He rose and went toward David Heath.

Heath got up. "Broca!" he said. "Alor is there beside you. She hasn't gone!"

Broca did not hear. He did not stop.

Alor cried out, *"Broca!"*

"No," said Broca. "You love him. You're

not mine anymore. When you look at me I am nothing. Your lips have no warmth in them." He reached out toward David Heath and he was blind and deaf to everything but the life that was in him to be torn out and trampled upon and destroyed.

In the cramped space of the afterdeck there was not much room to move. Heath did not want to fight. He tried to dodge the sick giant but Broca pinned him against the rail. Fever or no fever, Heath had to fight him and it was not much use. Broca was beyond feeling pain.

His sheer weight crushed Heath against the rail, bent his spine almost to breaking and his hands found Heath's throat. Heath struck and struck again and wondered if he had come all this way to die in a senseless quarrel over a woman.

Abruptly he realized that Broca was letting go, was sliding down against him to the deck. Through a swimming haze he saw Alor standing there with a belaying pin in her hand. He began to tremble, partly with reaction but mostly with fury that he should have needed a woman's help to save his life. Broca lay still, breathing heavily.

"Thanks," said Heath curtly. "Too bad you had to hit him. He didn't know what he was doing."

Alor said levelly, "Didn't he?"

HEATH did not answer. He started to turn away and she caught him, forcing him to look at her.

"Very likely I will die in the Moonfire," she said. "I haven't the faith in my strength that Broca has. So I'm going to say this now —I love you, David Heath. I don't care what you think or what you do about it but I love you."

Her eyes searched his face, as though she wanted to remember every line and plane of it. Then she kissed him and her mouth was tender and very sweet.

She stepped back and said quietly, "I think the Guardian has gone. The *Lahal* is under way again."

Heath followed her without a word to the sweep. Her kiss burned in him like sweet fire. He was shaken and utterly confused.

They toiled together while Broca slept. They dared not pause. Heath could distinguish the men now aboard the *Lahal,* little bent figures sculling, sculling, and there were always fresh ones. He could see the black tunics of the Children of the Moon who stood upon the foredeck and waited.

The *Ethne* moved more and more slowly as the hours passed and the gap between the two ships grew steadily smaller. Night came and through the darkness they could hear the voice of Vakor howling after them.

Toward midnight Broca roused. The fever had left him but he was morose and silent. He thrust Alor roughly aside and took the sweep and the *Ethne* gathered speed.

"How much farther?" he asked. And Heath panted, "Not far now."

Dawn came and still they were not clear of the weed. The *Lahal* was so near them now that Heath could see the jeweled fillet on Vakor's brow. He stood alone, high on the upper brace of the weed-knife, and he watched them, laughing.

"Work!" he shouted at them. "Toil and sweat! You, Alor—woman of the gardens! This is better than the Temple. Broca—thief and breaker of the Law—strain your muscles there! And you, Earthman. For the second time you defy the gods!" He leaned out over the weed as though he would reach ahead and grasp the *Ethne* in his bare hands and drag her back.

"Sweat and strain, you dogs! You can't escape!"

And they did sweat and strain and fresh relays of men worked at the sweep of the *Lahal,* breaking their hearts to go faster and ever faster. Vakor laughed from his high perch and it seemed futile for the *Ethne* to go on any longer with this lost race.

But Heath looked ahead with burning sunken eyes. He saw how the mists rose and gathered to the north, how the color of the weed changed, and he urged the others on. There was a fury in him now. It blazed brighter and harder than Broca's, this iron fury that would not, by the gods themselves, be balked of the Moonfire.

They kept ahead—so little ahead that the *Lahal* was almost within arrow-shot of them. Then the weed thinned and the *Ethne* began to gain a little and suddenly, before they realized it, they were in open water.

Like mad creatures they worked the scull and Heath steered the *Ethne* where he remembered the northern current ran, drawn by The-Ocean-That-Is-Not-Water. After the terrible labour of the weed it seemed that

they were flying. But as the mists began to wreath about them the *Lahal* too had freed herself and was racing toward them with every man on the rowing benches.

The mists thickened around them. The black water began to have a rare occasional hint of gold, like shooting sparks beneath the surface. There began to be islands, low and small, rank with queer vegetation. The flying dragons did not come here nor the Guardians nor the little reptiles. It was very hot and very still.

Through the stillness the voice of Vakor rose in a harsh wild screaming as he cursed the rowers on.

The current grew more swift and the dancing flecks of gold brightened in the water. Heath's face bore a strange unhuman look. The oars of the *Lahal* beat and churned and bowmen stood now on the foredeck, ready to shoot when they came within range.

Then, incredibly, Vakor gave one long high scream and flung up his hand and the oars stopped. Vakor stretched both arms above his head, his fists clenched, and he hurled after them one terrible word of malediction.

"I will wait, blasphemers! If so be you live I will be here—waiting!"

The emerald sail dwindled in the *Ethne's* wake, faded and was lost in the mist.

Broca said, "They had us. Why did they stop?"

Heath pointed. Up ahead the whole misty north was touched with a breath of burning gold.

"The Moonfire!"

CHAPTER V

Into the Moonfire

THIS was the dream that had driven Heath to madness, the nightmare that had haunted him, the memory that had drawn him back in spite of terror and the certainty of destruction. Now it was reality and he could not separate it from the dream.

Once again he watched the sea change until the *Ethne* drifted not on water but on a golden liquid that lapped her hull with soft rippling fire. Once again the mist-enwrapped him, shining, glowing.

The first faint tingling thrill moved in his blood and he knew how it would be—the lying pleasure that mounted through ecstasy to unendurable pain. He saw the dim islands, low and black, a maze through which a ship might wander forever without finding the source that poured out this wonder of living light.

He saw the bones of ships that had died searching. They lay on the island beaches and the mist made them a bright shroud. There were not many of them. Some were so old that the race that built them had vanished out of the memory of Venus.

The hushed unearthly beauty wrenched Heath's heart and he was afraid unto dying and yet filled with lust, with a terrible hunger.

Broca drew the air deep into his lungs as though he would suck the power out of the Moonfire.

"Can you find it again?" he asked. "The heart of it."

"I can find it."

Alor stood silent and unmoving. She was all silver in this light, dusted with golden notes.

Heath said, "Are you afraid, breaking the tabu?"

"Habit is hard to break." She turned to him and asked, "What is the Moonfire?"

"Haven't the priests told you?"

"They say that Venus once had a moon. It rode in the clouds like a disc of fire and the god who dwelt within it was supreme over all the other gods. He watched the surface of the planet and all that was done upon it. But the lesser gods were jealous, and one day they were able to destroy the palace of the Moon-god.

"All the sky of Venus was lighted by that destruction. Mountains fell and seas poured out of their beds and whole nations died. The Moon-god was slain and his shining body fell like a meteor through the clouds.

"But a god cannot really die. He only sleeps and waits. The golden mist is the cloud of his breathing, and the shining of his body is the Moonfire. A man may gain divinity from the heart of the sleeping god but all the gods of Venus will curse him if he tries because man has no right to steal their powers."

"And you don't believe that story," said Heath.

Alor shrugged. "You have seen the Moonfire. The priests have not."

"I didn't get to the heart of it," Heath said. "I only saw the edge of the crater and the light that comes up out of it, the lovely hellish light."

He stopped, shuddering, and brooded as he had so many times before on the truth behind the mystery of the Moonfire. Presently he said slowly, "There was a moon, of course, or there could be no conception of one in folklore. I believe it was radioactive, some element that hasn't been found yet or doesn't exist at all on Earth or Mars."

"I don't understand," said Alor. "What is 'radioactive'?" She used the Terran word, as Heath had. because there was no term for it in Venusian.

"It's a strange sort of fire that burns in certain elements. It eats them away, feeding on its own atoms, and the radiation from this fire is very powerful." He was silent for a moment, his eyes half closed. "Can't you feel it?" he asked. "The first little fire that burns in your own blood?"

"Yes," Alor whispered. "I feel it."

And Broca said, "It is like wine."

Heath went on, putting the old, old thoughts into words. "The moon was destroyed. Not by jealous gods but by collision with another body, perhaps an asteroid. Or maybe it was burst apart by its own blazing energy. I think that a fragment of it survived and fell here and that its radiation permeated and changed the sea and the air around it.

"It changes men in the same way. It seems to alter the whole electrical set-up of the brain, to amplify its power far beyond anything human. It gives the mind a force of will strong enough to control the free electrons in the air—to create . . ."

He paused, then finished quietly, "In my case, only shadows. And when that mutation occurs a man doesn't need the gods of Venus to curse him. I got only a little of it but that was enough."

BROCA said, "It is worth bearing pain to become a god. You had no strength."

Heath smiled crookedly. "How many gods have come out of the Moonfire?"

Broca answered, "There will be one soon." Then he caught Alor by the shoulders and pulled her to him. looking down into her face. "No." he said. "Not one. Two."

"Perhaps," said Heath, "there will be three."

Broca turned and gave him a chill and level look. "I do not think," he said, "that your strength is any greater now."

After that, for a long while, they did not speak. The *Ethne* drifted on, gliding on the slow currents that moved between the islands. Sometimes they sculled, the great blade of the sweep hidden in a froth of flame. The golden glow brightened and grew and with it grew the singing fire in their blood.

Heath stood erect and strong at the helm, the old Heath who had sailed the Straits of Lhiva in the teeth of a summer gale and laughed about it. All weariness, all pain, all weakness, were swept away. It was the same with the others. Alor's head was high and Broca leaped up beside the figurehead and gave a great ringing shout, a challenge to all the gods there were to stop him.

Heath found himself looking into Alor's eyes. She smiled, an aching thing of tears and tenderness and farewell.

"I think none of us will live," she whispered. "May you find your shadow, David, before you die."

Then Broca had turned toward them once more and the moment was gone.

Within the veil of the Moonfire there was no day nor night nor time. Heath had no idea how long the *Ethne's* purple hull rode the golden current. The tingling force spread through his whole body and pulsed and strengthened until he was drunk with the pleasure of it and the islands slipped by, and there was no sound or movement but their own in all that solemn sea.

And at last he saw ahead of him the supernal brightness that poured from the heart of the Moonfire, the living core of all the brightness of the mist. He saw the land, lifting dark and vague, drowned in the burning haze, and he steered toward it along the remembered way. There was no fear in him now. He was beyond fear.

Broca cried out suddenly, "A ship!"

Heath nodded. "It was there before. It will be there when the next man finds his way here."

Two long arms of the island reached out to form a ragged bay. The *Ethne* entered it. They passed the derelict, floating patiently, untouched here by wind or tide or ocean rot. Her blue sail was furled, her rigging all neat and ready. She waited to begin the voyage home. She would wait a long, long time.

As they neared the land they sighted

other ships. They had not moved nor changed since Heath had seen them last, three years ago.

A scant few they were, that had lived to find the Dragon's Throat and pass it, that had survived the Upper Seas and the island maze of the Moonfire and had found their goal at last. Some of them floated still where their crews had left them, their sad sails drooping from the yards.

Others lay on their sides on the beach, as though in sleep. There were strange old keels that had not been seen on the seas of Venus for a thousand years. The golden mist preserved them and they waited like a pack of faithful dogs for their masters to return.

Heath brought the *Ethne* into shore at the same spot where he had beached her before. She grounded gently and he led the way over the side. He remembered the queer crumbling texture of the dark earth under his feet. He was shaken with the force that throbbed in his flesh. As before it hovered now on the edge of pain.

He led the way inland and no one spoke.

The mist thickened around them, filled with dancing sparks of light. The bay was lost behind its wreathing curtain. They walked forward and the ground began to rise under their feet slowly. They moved as in a dream and the light and the silence crushed them with a great awe.

They came upon a dead man.

He lay upon his face, his arms stretched out toward the mystery that lay beyond, his hands still yearning toward the glory he had never reached. They did not disturb him.

Mist, heavier, the glow brightening, the golden motes whirling and flickering in a madder dance. Heath listened to the voice of pain that spoke within him, rising with every step he took toward a soundless scream.

I remember, I remember! The bones, the flesh, the brain, each atom of them a separate flame, bursting, tearing to be free. I cannot go on, I cannot bear it! Soon I shall waken, safe in the mud behind Kalruna's.

But he did not wake and the ground rose steadily under his feet and there was a madness on him, a passion and a suffering that were beyond man's strength to endure. Yet he endured.

The swirling motes began to shape themselves into vague figures, formless giants that towered and strode around them. Heath heard Alor's moan of terror and forced himself to say, "They're nothing. Shadows out of our own minds. The beginning of the power."

Farther they went and farther still, and then at last Heath stopped and flung up his arm to point, looking at Broca.

"Your godhead lies there. Go and take it!"

The eyes of the barbarian were dazed and wild, fixed on the dark dim line of the crater that showed in the distance, fixed on the incredible glory that shone there.

"It beats," he whispered, "like the beating of a heart."

Alor drew back, away from him, staring at the light. "I am afraid," she said. "I will not go." Heath saw that her face was agonized, her body shaken like his own. Her voice rose in a wail. "I can't go! I can't stand it. I'm dying!" Suddenly she caught Heath's hands. "David, take me back. *Take me back!*"

Before he could think or speak Broca had torn Alor away from him and struck him a great swinging blow. Heath fell to the ground and the last thing he heard was Alor's voice crying his name.

CHAPTER VI

End of the Dream

HEATH was not unconscious long, for when he lifted his head again he could still see the others in the distance. Broca was running like a madman up the slope of the crater, carrying Alor in his arms. Ghostly and indistinct, he stood for an instant on the edge. Then he leaped over and was gone.

Heath was alone.

He lay still, fighting to keep his mind steady, struggling against the torture of his flesh.

"Ethne, Ethne," he whispered. "This is the end of the dream."

He began to crawl, inch by bitter inch, toward the heart of the Moonfire.

He was closer to it now than he had been before. The strange rough earth cut his hands and his bare knees. The blood ran but the pain of it was less than a pinprick against the cosmic agony of the Moonfire. Broca

must have suffered too, yet he had gone running to his fate. Perhaps his nervous system was duller, more resistant to shock. Or perhaps it was simply that his lust for power carried him on.

Heath had no wish for power. He did not wish to be a god. He wished only to die and he knew that he was going to very soon. But before he died he would do what he had failed to do before. He would bring Ethne back. He would hear her voice again and look into her eyes and they would wait together for the final dark.

Her image would vanish with his death, for then mind and memory would be gone. But he would not see the life go out of her as he had all those years ago by the Sea of Morning Opals. She would be with him until the end, sweet and loving and merry, as she had always been.

He said her name over and over again as he crawled. He tried to think of nothing else, so that he might forget the terrible unhuman things that were happening within him.

"Ethne, Ethne," he whispered. His hands clawed the earth and his knees scraped it and the brilliance of the Moonfire wrapped him in golden banners of mist. Yet he would not stop, though the soul was shaken out of him.

He reached the edge of the crater and looked down upon the heart of the Moonfire.

The whole vast crater was a sea of glowing vapor, so dense that it moved in little rippling waves, tipped with a sparkling froth. There was an island in that sea, a shape like a fallen mountain that burned with a blinding intensity, so great that only the eyes of a god could bear to look at it.

It rode in the clouds like a disc of fire.

Heath knew that his guess was right. It did not matter. Body of a sleeping god or scrap of a fallen moon—it would bring Ethne back to him and for that was all he cared.

He dragged himself over the edge and let himself go, down the farther slope. He screamed once when the vapor closed over him.

After that there was a period of utter strangeness.

It seemed that some force separated the atoms that composed the organism called David Heath and reshuffled them into a different pattern. There was a wrench, an agony beyond anything he had known before and then, abruptly, the pain was gone. His body felt well and whole, his mind was awake, alert and clear with a dawning awareness of new power.

He looked down at himself, ran his hands over his face. He had not changed. And yet he knew that he was different. He had taken the full force of the radiation this time and apparently it had completed the change begun three years ago. He was not the same David Heath, perhaps, but he was no longer trapped in the no-man's-land between the old and the new.

He no longer felt that he was going to die and he no longer wished to. He was filled with a great strength and a great joy. He could bring his Ethne back now and they could live on together here in the golden garden of the Moonfire.

It would have to be here. He was sure of that. He had only been into the fringe of the Moonfire before, but he did not believe that that was the whole reason why he could create nothing but shadows. There was not a sufficient concentration of the raw energy upon which the mind's telekinetic power worked.

Probably, even in the outer mists of the Moonfire, there were not enough free electrons. But here, close to the source, the air was raging with them. Raw stuff of matter, to be shaped and formed.

David Heath rose to his feet. He lifted his head and his arms reached out longingly. Straight and shining and strong he stood in the living light and his dark face was the face of a happy god.

"Ethne," he whispered. "Ethne." This is not the end of the dream, but the beginning!

And she came.

By the power, the exultant strength that was in him, Heath brought her out of the Moonfire. Ethne, slim and smiling, indistinct at first, a shadow in the mist, but growing clearer, coming toward him. He could see her white limbs, the pale flame of her hair, her red mouth bold and sweet, her wistful eyes.

Heath recoiled with a cry. It was not Ethne who stood before him. It was Alor.

For a time he could not move but stared at what he had created. The apparition smiled at him and her face was the face of a woman who has found love and with it the whole world.

"No," he said. "It isn't you **I want. It's**

Ethne!" He struck the thought of Alor from his mind and the image faded and once again he called Ethne to him.

AND when she came it was not Ethne but Alor.

He destroyed the vision. Rage and disappointment almost too great to bear drove him to wander in the fog. Alor, Alor! Why did that wench of the temple gardens haunt him now?

He hated her, yet her name sang in his heart and would not be silenced. He could not forget how she had kissed him and how her eyes had looked then and how her last desperate cry had been for him.

He could not forget that his own heart had shaped her image while only his mind, his conscious mind, had said the name of Ethne.

He sat down and bent his head over his knees and wept, because he knew now that this was the end of the dream. He had lost the old love forever without knowing it. It was a cruel thing, but it was true. He had to make his peace with it.

And already Alor might be dead.

That thought cut short his grieving for what was gone. He leaped up, filled with dread. He stood for a moment, looking wildly about, and the vapor was like golden water so that he could see only a few feet away. Then he began to run, shouting her name.

For what might have been centuries in that timeless place he ran, searching for her. There was no answer to his cries. Sometimes he would see a dim figure crouching in the mist, and he would think that he had found her but each time it was the body of a man, dead for God knew how long. They were all alike. They were emaciated, as though they had died of starvation and they were all smiling. There seemed to be lost visions still in their open eyes.

These were the gods of the Moonfire—the handful of men through all the ages who had fought their way through to the ultimate goal.

Heath saw the cruelty of the jest. A man could find godhead in the golden lake. He could create his own world within it. But he could never leave it unless he were willing to leave also the world in which he was king. They would have learned that, these men, as they started back toward the harbor, away from the source.

Or perhaps there was more to it. Perhaps they never tried to leave.

Heath went on through the beautiful unchanging mist, calling Alor's name, and there was no answer. He realized that it was becoming more difficult for him to keep his mind on his quest. Half-formed images flickered vaguely around him. He grew excited and there was an urgency in him to stop and bring the visions clear, to build and create.

He fought off the temptation but there came a time when he had to stop because he was too tired to go on. He sank down and the hopelessness of his search came over him. Alor was gone and he could never find her. In utter dejection he crouched there, his face buried in his hands, thinking of her, and all at once he heard her voice speaking his name. He started up and she was there, holding out her hands to him.

He caught her to him and stroked her hair and kissed her, half sobbing with joy at having found her. Then a sudden thought came to him. He drew back and said, "Are you really Alor or only the shadow of my mind?"

She did not answer but only held up her mouth to be kissed again.

Heath turned away, too weary and hopeless even to destroy the vision. And then he thought, "Why should I destroy it? If the woman is lost to me why shouldn't I keep the dream?"

He looked at her again and she was Alor, clothed in warm flesh, eager-eyed.

The temptation swept over him again and this time he did not fight it. He was a god, whether he wished it or not. He would create.

He threw the whole force of his mind against the golden mist, and the intoxication of sheer power made him drunk and mad with joy.

The glowing cloud drew back to become a horizon and a sky. Under Heath's feet an island grew, warm sweet earth, rich with grass and rioting with flowers, a paradise lost in a dreaming sea. Wavelets whispered on the wide beaches, the drooping fronds of the *liha*-trees stirred lazily in the wind and bright birds darted, singing. Snug in the little cove a ship floated, a lovely thing that angels might have built.

Perfection, the unattainable wish of the soul. And Alor was with him to share it.

He knew now why no one had ever come

out of the Moonfire.

He took the vision of Alor by the hand. He wandered with it along the beaches and presently he was aware of something missing. He smiled, and once again the little dragon rode his shoulder and he stroked it and there was no least flaw in this Elysium. David Heath had found his godhead.

But some stubborn corner of his heart betrayed him. It said, *This is all a lie and Alor waits for you. If you tarry you and she will be as those others, who are dead and smiling in the Moonfire.*

He did not want to listen. He was happy. But something made him listen and he knew that as long as the real Alor lived he could not really be content with a dream. He knew that he must destroy this paradise before it destroyed him. He knew that the Moonfire was a deadly thing and that men could not be given the power of gods and continue sane.

And yet he could not destroy the island. He could not!

Horror overcame him that he had so far succumbed. that he could no longer control his own will. And he destroyed the island and the sea and the lovely ship and it was harder than if he had torn his own flesh from the bones.

And he destroyed the vision of Alor.

He knew that if he wished to escape the madness and the death of the Moonfire he must not again create so much as a blade of grass. Nothing. Because he would never again have the strength to resist the unholy joy of creation.

CHAPTER VII

To Walk Divine

ONCE more he ran shouting through the golden fog. And it might have been a year or only a moment later that he heard Alor's voice very faintly in the distance, calling his name.

He followed the sound, crying out more loudly, but he did not hear her again. Then, looming in shadowy grandeur through the mist, he saw a castle. It was a typical Upland stronghold but it was larger than the castle of any barbarian king and it was built out of one huge crimson jewel of the sort called Dragon's Blood.

Heath knew that he was seeing part of Broca's dream.

Steps of beaten gold led up to a greater door. Two tall warriors, harness blazing with gems, stood guard. Heath went between them and they caught and held him fast. Broca's hatred for the Earthman was implicit in the beings his mind created.

Heath tried to tear himself free but their strength was more than human. They took him down fantastic corridors, over floors of pearl and crystal and precious metals. The walls were lined with open chests, full of every sort of treasure the barbarian mind could conceive. Slaves went silent-footed on their errands and the air was heavy with perfume and spices. Heath thought how strange it was to walk through the halls of another man's dream.

He was brought into a vast room where many people feasted. There were harpists and singers and dancing girls and throngs of slaves, men who wrestled and men who fought and danced with swords. The men and women at the long tables looked like chieftains and their wives but they wore plain leather and tunics without decoration, so that Broca's guardsmen and even his slaves were more resplendent than they.

Above the shouting and the revelry Broca sat, high on a throne-chair that was made like a silver dragon with its jeweled wings spread wide. He wore magnificent harness and a carved diamond that only a high king may wear hung between his eyebrows. He drank wine out of a golden cup and watched the feasting with eyes that had in them no smallest flicker of humanity. God or demon, Broca was no longer a man.

Alor sat beside him. She wore the robes of a queen but her face was hidden in her hands and her body was still as death.

Heath's cry carried across all the noise of the feast. Broca leaped to his feet and an abrupt silence fell. Everyone, guards, chieftains and slaves, turned to watch as Heath was led toward the throne—and they all hated him as Broca hated.

Alor raised her head and looked into his eyes. And she asked, in his own words, "Are you really David or only the shadow of my mind?"

"I am David," he told her and was glad he had destroyed his paradise.

Broca's mad gaze fixed on Heath. "I didn't think you had the strength," he said,

and then he laughed. "But you're not a god! You stand there captive and you have no power."

Heath knew that he could fight Broca on his own grounds but he did not dare. One taste of that ecstasy had almost destroyed him. If he tried it again he knew that he and the barbarian would hurl their shadow-armies against each other as long as they lived and he would be as mad as Broca.

He looked about him at the hostile creatures who were solid and real enough to kill him at Broca's word. Then he said to Alor, "Do you wish to stay here now?"

"I wish to go out of the Moonfire with you, David, if I can. If not I wish to die."

The poison had not touched her yet. She had come without desire. Though she had bathed in the Moonfire she was still sane.

Heath turned to Broca. "You see, she isn't worthy of you."

Broca's face was dark with fury. He took Alor between his great hands and said, "You will stay with me. You're part of me. Listen, Alor. There's nothing I can't give you. I'll build other castles, other tribes, and I'll subdue them and put them in your lap. God and goddess together, Alor! We'll reign in glory."

"I'm no goddess," Alor said. "Let me go."

And Broca said, "I'll kill you, first." His gaze lowered on Heath. "I'll kill you both."

Heath said, "Do the high gods stoop to tread on ants and worms? We don't deserve such honor, she and I. We're weak and even the Moonfire can't give us strength."

He saw the flicker of thought in Broca's face and went on. "You're all-powerful, there's nothing you can't do. Why burden yourself with a mate too weak to worship you? Create another Alor, Broca! Create a goddess worthy of you!"

After a moment Alor said, "Create a woman who can love you, Broca, and let us go."

For a time there was silence in the place. The feasters and the dancers and the slaves stood without moving and their eyes glittered in the eerie light. And then Broca nodded.

"It is well," he said. "Stand up, Alor."

SHE stood. The look of power came into the face of the tall barbarian, the wild joy of molding heart's desire out of nothingness. Out of the golden air he shaped another Alor. She was not a woman but a thing of snow and flame and wonder, so that beside her the reality appeared drab and beautiless. She mounted the throne and sat beside her creator and put her hand in his and smiled.

Broca willed the guardsmen to let Heath free. He went to Alor and Broca said contemptuously. "Get out of my sight."

They went together across the crowded place, toward the archway through which Heath had entered. Still there was silence and no one moved.

As they reached the archway it vanished, becoming solid wall. Behind them Broca laughed and suddenly the company burst also into wild jeering laughter.

Heath caught Alor tighter by the hand and led her toward another door. It, too, disappeared and the mocking laughter screamed and echoed from the vault.

Broca shouted, "Did you think that I would let you go—you two who betrayed me when I was a man? Even a god can remember!"

Heath saw that the guardsmen and the others were closing in, and he saw how their eyes gleamed. He was filled with a black fear and he put Alor behind him.

Broca cried, "Weakling! Even to save your life, you can't create!"

It was true. He dared not. The shadow-people drew in upon him with their soulless eyes and their faces that were mirrors of the urge to kill.

And then, suddenly, the answer came. Heath's answer rang back. "I will not create—*but I will destroy!*"

Once again he threw the strength of his mind against the Moonfire but this time there was no unhealthy lure to what he did. There was no desire in him but his love for Alor and the need to keep her safe.

The hands of the shadow-people reached out and dragged him away from Alor. He heard her scream and he knew that if he failed they would both be torn to pieces. He summoned all the force that was in him, all the love.

He saw the faces of the shadow-people grow distorted and blurred. He felt their grip weaken and suddenly they were only shadows, a dim multitude in a crumbling castle of dreams.

Broca's goddess faded with the dragon throne and Broca's kingly harness was only a web of memories half-seen above the plain leather.

Broca leaped to his feet with a wild, hoarse cry.

Heath could feel how their two minds locked and swayed on that strange battle-ground. And as Broca fought to hold his vision, willing the particles of energy into the semblance of matter, so Heath fought to tear them down, to disperse them. For a time the shadows held in that half-world between existence and nothingness.

Then the walls of the castle wavered and ran like red water and were gone. The goddess Alor, the dancers and the slaves and the chieftains, all were gone, and there were only the golden fog and a tall barbarian, stripped of his dreams, and the man Heath and the woman Alor.

Heath looked at Broca and said, "I am stronger than you, because I threw away my godhead."

Broca panted, "I will build again!"

Heath said, "Build."

And he did, his eyes blazing, his massive body shaken with the force of his will.

It was all there again, the castle and the multitude of feasters and the jewels.

Broca screamed to his shadow-people. *"Kill!"*

But again, as their hands reached out to destroy, they began to weaken and fade.

Heath cried, "If you want your kingdom, Broca, let us go!"

The castle was now no more than a ghostly outline. Broca's face was beaded with sweat. His hands clawed the air. He swayed with his terrible effort but Heath's dark eyes were bleak and stern. If he had now the look of a god it was a god as ruthless and unshakeable as fate.

The vision crumbled and vanished.

Broca's head dropped. He would not look at them from the bitterness of his defeat. "Get out," he whispered. "Go and let Vakor greet you."

Heath said, "It will be a cleaner death than this."

Alor took his hand and they walked away together through the golden mist. They turned once to look back and already the castle walls were built again, towering magnificent.

"He'll be happy," Heath said, "until he dies."

Alor shuddered. "Let us go."

They went together, away from the pulsing heart of the Moonfire, past the slopes of the crater and down the long way to the harbor. Finally they were aboard the *Ethne* once again.

As they found their slow way out through the island maze Heath held Alor in his arms. They did not speak. Their lips met often with the poignancy of kisses that will not be for long. The golden mists thinned and the fire faded in their blood and the heady sense of power was gone but they did not know nor care.

They came at last out of the veil of the Moonfire and saw ahead the green sail of the *Lahal,* where Vakor waited.

Alor whispered, "Good bye, my love, my David!" and left the bitterness of her tears upon his mouth.

THE two ships lay side by side in the still water. Vakor was waiting as Heath and Alor came aboard with the other Children of the Moon beside him. He motioned to the seamen who stood there also and said, "Seize them."

But the men were afraid and would not touch them.

Heath saw their faces and wondered. Then, as he looked at Alor, he realized that she was not as she had been before. There was something clean and shining about her now, a new depth and a new calm strength, and in her eyes a strange new beauty. He knew that he himself had changed. They were no longer gods, he and Alor, but they had bathed in the Moonfire and they would never again be quite the same.

He met Vakor's gaze and was not afraid.

The cruel, wolfish face of the priest lost some of its assurance. A queer look of doubt crossed over it.

He said, "Where is Broca?"

"We left him there, building empires in the mist."

"At the heart of the Moonfire?"

"Yes."

"You lie!" cried Vakor. "You could not have come back yourselves, from the heart of the sleeping god. No one ever has." But still the doubt was there.

Heath shrugged. "It doesn't really matter," he said, "whether you believe or not."

There was a long, strange silence. Then the four tall priests in their black tunics said to Vakor, "We must believe. Look into their eyes."

With a solemn ritual gesture they stepped back and left Vakor alone.

Vakor whispered, "It can't be true. The

law, the tabu is built on that rock. Men will come out of the fringe as you did, Heath, wrecked and cursed by their blasphemy. But not from the Moonfire itself. Never! That is why the law was made, lest all of Venus die in dreams."

Alor said quietly, "All those others wanted power. We wanted only love. We needed nothing else."

Again there was silence while Vakor stared at them and struggled with himself. Then, very slowly, he said, "You are beyond my power. The sleeping god received you and has chosen to let you go unscathed. I am only a Child of the Moon. I may not judge."

He covered his face and turned away.

One of the lesser priests spoke to Johor. "Let them be given men for their oars."

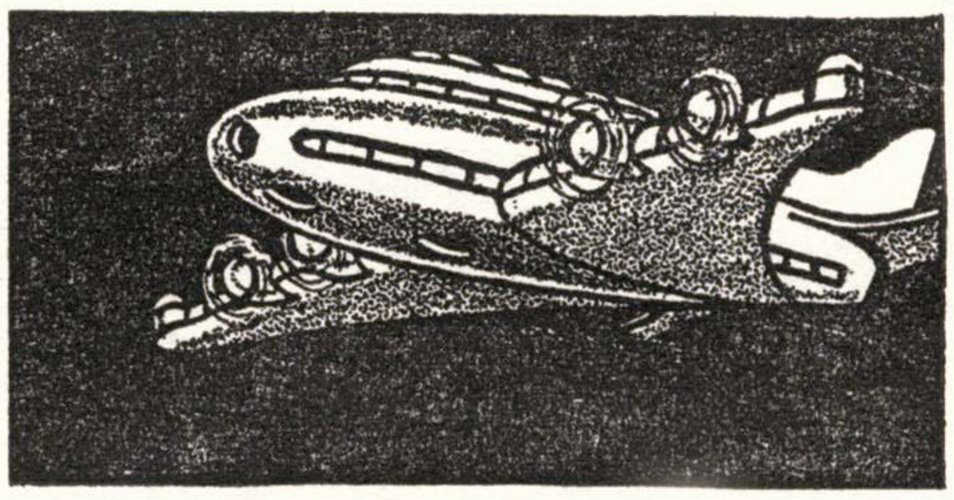
And Heath and Alor understood that they were free.

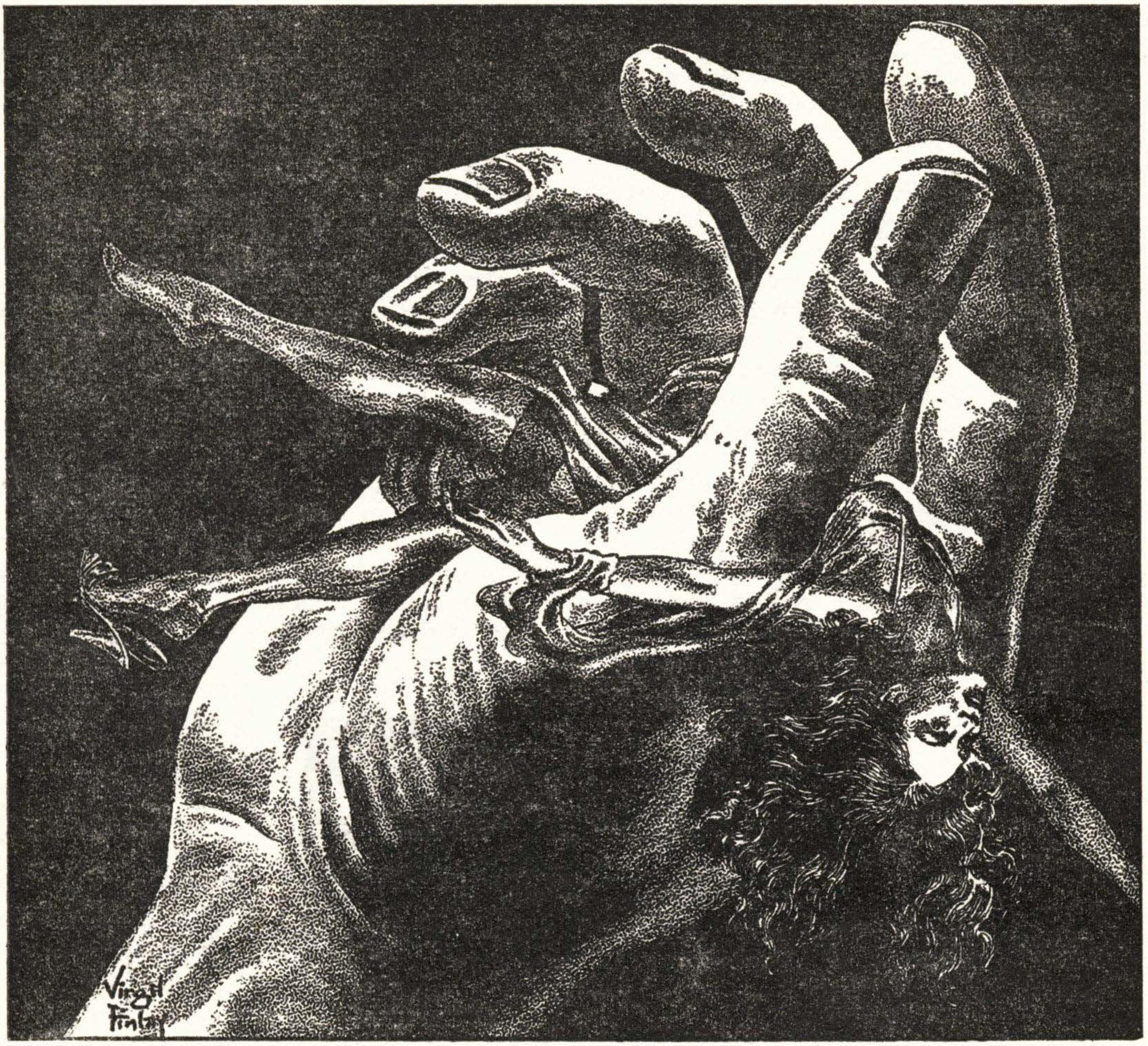
Weeks later, Heath and Alor stood at dawn on the shore of the Sea of Morning Opals. The breeze was strong off the land. It filled the golden sail of the *Ethne,* so that she strained at her mooring lines, eager to be free.

Heath bent and cast them off.

They stood together silently and watched as the little ship gathered speed, going lightly, sweetly and alone into the glory of the morning. The ivory image that was her figurehead lifted its arms to the dawn and smiled and Heath waited there until the last bright gleam of the sail was lost and with it the last of his old life, his memories and his dreams.

Alor touched him gently. He turned and took her in his arms, and they walked away under the *liha*-trees, while the young day brightened in the sky. And they thought how the light of the sun they never saw was more beautiful and full of promise than all the naked wonder of the Moonfire that they had held within their hands.





McGee was still holding Katherine in his hand

That Mess Last Year

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

When the Walrus experiment goes wrong, McGee becomes one whale of a problem!

THIS IS Bud Lide's story and I heard it in a Third Avenue bar and it is pretty obvious that Bud will never put it in his terse journalese because he, as much as anyone, wants to avoid one of those quilted cells that they give you for writing about that sort of thing.

We were in a booth, four of us, and it was that afternoon last week when little Jimmy Derider swung on Walker, the City Editor, and was tossed out. Bud Lide, who had been out west for several months doing something or other, sat and listened while the conversation turned from Jimmy Derider and became general—the topic being all of the people in the world who are small, weak,

afraid and ineffectual. Jimmy was one of those. After fifteen years of being bullied by Walker, he had finally made a weak attempt to punch Walker's face in.

One of the things that none of us mentioned was the way Bud Lide was drinking. He had been drinking ever since he got back from his extended stay in the mesa country. It worried the rest of us and we had the idea that by ignoring him, he'd be helped to fight his way up out of his alcoholic haze.

Bud Lide is maybe forty—a gaunt dark man with hollow cheeks, deep-set eyes, stringy limbs and a perpetual slouch. He does a lot of special assignment work.

Anyway, in the middle of our little talk, Bud Lide came up for air and said, "You fellows better be thankful that you've never seen what happens when one of the little guys of this world gets unlimited power."

"Like Hitler?" I asked.

"No. I mean unlimited physical power. Individual power."

"That doesn't make sense, Bud," Joe said. "If a man is a weakling, how's he going to get unlimited physical power? It's a contradiction of terms."

Bud drained the rest of his drink and yelled for a refill. He put his sharp elbows on the table and looked around at us, his deep-set eyes glowing in a way that made me uncomfortable.

"Any of you guys ever hear of Los Ojos, New Mexico?" he asked.

"Some place where they got government projects," Danny said. "Secret stuff."

"That's the place," Lide said. "Stay away from that spot, boys. I wish I had. You go out there now and right in the middle of town you'll find boulders too big to fit through the streets. The population is a lot smaller than it was a year ago. Everybody in town has a look in their eye like they got bodies home in the closet. It's that kind of a place now. And all because one of the little guy gets muscles."

"Tell us about it, Bud," Joe said.

HE SIGHED. "Sure, I'll tell you. I'm safe telling you. You won't believe me. You're too smart. You're all big city boys. You don't go for fairy tales."

He took a big gulp of his fresh drink. "About eight months ago the publisher of the sheet I work for is having a drink with a pal in D.C. and gets a telegram that something big will pop on a secret research project called Walrus, which is being handled by a science shark named Dr. Garson Partridge. The publisher tells the managing editor to subtract one good reporter and send him out to Los Ojos to be on the spot when the news breaks. I am the guy they send.

"You know how it is out there in New Mexico. The sun is a mile wide and it hangs about three hundred feet in the air and everything is white and it is like living inside a bake-oven. Everything is built of dried mud and the women look like they got skin made of nice brown corduroy. The men they got those big hats and the soft voices and out of every beer joint comes noises of cowboys moaning with guitar music—juke box stuff, courtesy Hollywood.

"I like going out as there is a local dolly who is getting those forever ideas about me, and a change is always a good thing, and lately the subways have been giving me a headache. I find a room in town for a twenty bribe on the side which goes on the expense account. The same day I find that the lab where this Walrus arrangement is going on is two miles outside of town up kind of a little notch in the rocks. It has barbed wire around it and maybe twenty people work in there all under the orders of this Doc Partridge. My orders are to smell around these twenty people and find out what goes on, so when the news breaks I'll know what to expect and maybe I can give the sheet a little warning so that the head can be locked up anyway.

"For three days I tramp around trying to be agreeable to a tall dark dolly named Katherine, who works there and, from all the return play I get, I can be one of those tumbleweeds. She is stacked and she walks it around good and, even though my interest is somewhat more than professional, I get no place. When she does happen to notice me, the board says Tilt and the lights go out.

"While I am considering methods of attack on this tall dark and lush dish I notice another citizen who gets the same reaction I do and when I shake the dazzle out of my eyes and take a good look, I see the little guy also is one of the twenty.

"That makes it simple. I buy a bottle and entice him to my room and get him loaded by talking about how we both think this Katherine is the most wonderful thing

walking around on wonderful legs. It seems the little guy is named Joe McGee, though it maybe should have been Hector Truelove. His is a stalwart five three, maybe a hundred and twenty and pale as the underside of a hoptoad. I never before saw such a pallid skin. On his temples you can see the little blue veins under his hide. He is half bald, and has scruffy brown hair like what the cat claws out of the mattress.

"After three rough jolts out of my bottle he opens up like a book called "Forever Amber" and soon I know all. It seems he is what is called a lab technician and he is on civil service and spent the war in Washington and he has adored Katherine, who can spot him half a head and twenty pounds, for maybe a year. She has no time for him, as she prefers another lab technician, one with muscles.

"I prime him in my delicate fashion to let me know what goes on with this Operation Walrus project, and in a bored way he says that it is an idea of Partridge's whereby you take a certain space and give it a big jolt of some special kind of electricity and it upsets the time stream or something and knocks the area where you point it back to yesterday or maybe the day before.

"It is a defense against atomic bombs because you jolt the area where the bomb is back to the day before yesterday and it isn't there any more. You figure out where it comes from and send something up there to explode it and then you let the area fit back into the normal time stream and boom, you knock it off before it does damage. Joe McGee looks at me with his sad little blue eyes and says it is something even Partridge doesn't know a lot about. It is discovered by accident and they are getting set to try it on a laboratory scale.

"He acts so mysterious that I pump him until he tells me that, in order to impress this Katherine, he has volunteered to step into the laboratory area they are going to jolt back to the day before yesterday and he has signed all the Government releases and Partridge has told him he is a very brave man but his Katherine still looks at him with nothing but indifference, and that is why he is drinking. I find out that the experiment goes on in three days, at eight o'clock in the morning.

"When he finally passes out, I get him down into my rented car and take him on out to the project area and leave him on the doorstep, so to speak. That same night I write a letter to the managing editor and I am about to mail it when I think how silly I look if this Joe McGee is kidding me. I don't send it. You can't tell what these pale little guys will do for a laugh.

"I loaf around and at eight in the morning on the right day, I am sitting in the rented car parked on the shoulder staring out toward the white buildings which have a nasty glare in the sun, even at eight in the morning. I don't know what I expect to see, but when you are on a newspaper, you always take the long chances.

"I wish this one hadn't worked out. I sat in the car and smiled about little McGee becoming the scientific hero in order to impress a babe like Katherine. Anyway, a few minutes after eight, as I am watching the main building which McGee has told me is the lab, there is one devil of an explosion.

THE FLAT roof goes flying off, and the sides bust out and a great white column rises up toward the sky. Poor McGee, I am thinking, when I notice that there is something pretty solid about this white column. I squint at it and suddenly my my heart is going *poom, poom, poom!*

"The white thing is Joe McGee and he is about two hundred feet tall. I squint into the sun and see that he is shaking his head, as though dazed. The only answer I can think of is that when Partridge jolted the area with his electricity—field of force, I think McGee called it—maybe he knocked McGee back a day or two, but he knocked him out of balance with the rest of the world. McGee expanding like that was sort of like blowing up a life raft in your vest pocket. Something had to give quickly.

"I glance down at the buildings that are left and I see McGee's feet planted among them and people running like crazy to get away from the place. Each of his feet is maybe thirty feet long and they take up a lot of room. McGee sways a little, then I see him look down. On a face that big you can't read expression. He picks up his feet, one at a time, and gingerly steps out of the area, out into the open desert. The steps he takes are about a hundred feet long.

"I have seen enough to last me forever. I am suddenly filled with a great desire to be back here in New York. It is the first time I ever forget I work for a newspaper.

My hands are shaking so bad I can't get the car started. I have stopped only a hundred yards or so from the main gate. I got a big U turn on my mind when I see Katherine coming down the road. In front of her by a good ten feet, is the fellow I know from McGee's description as being the lab technician with muscles. The eyes of both of them are like marbles glued to white plaster walls. Before I can get the car rolling, the technician claws the back door open and the two of them pile into my car.

"We don't need words at that point, and who could have said any? I yank the bus around in a screaming turn and hunch over the wheel with the gas pedal flat on the floor. The dish looks out the back and screams. A few minutes later the gas pedal is still on the floor and the scenery isn't going by. It stands still. But not for long. All of a sudden it drops away and the car goes up so fast that I am pushed down into the seat like I hear happens when airplane drivers pull out of dives.

"Katherine has no more breath for screaming and her boy friend is trying to eat the fingers off both hands. When we stop I look out my window and see nothing but space. I look out the other side and see the big white expanse which is the chest of our boy McGee. You notice funny things at such a time. I notice that he has three hairs on his chest, each about the diameter of a good fly rod.

"What I figure is the tip of his little finger comes in through the window and when it goes out, it takes the door with it. The same procedure goes on in the back and we have no doors on one side of the car. It tips up and I hang onto the wheel. It makes one little shake and the wheel is torn out of my hands. I slide out and land on this wide pink wrinkled thing which is, of course, the palm of his hand. Katherine and her boy friend and I land all in a heap. She has passed out cold.

"I look up at his huge face and see that he holds the car up to his eye level and peers in. When he sees that he has emptied it, he throws it away like a guy throws away a butt. I giggle now when I try to think of what I put on the insurance questionnaire. McGee apparently sees that Katherine is out like a light so he blows on her, gently like. Her boy friend and I drop flat or else the wind would have blown us off into space.

"There is a noise like thunder, and for a moment I can't figure it. I look up and see his lips moving. By watching them and listening, I can make out that he is telling me to revive the lady. I crawl over to her and start rubbing her wrists, and patting her cheeks, while McGee picks the boy friend up between thumb and finger and holds him in the other hand.

"When Katherine begins to moan, I look over and notice that the boy friend has taken out a little pocket knife, opened the blade and is about to stab McGee in the thumb with all his strength. I look over and yell at him, but he ignores me. McGee is watching Katherine. When the blow lands, McGee gives a grunt that sounds like a cliff being blasted. He jerks so bad that Katherine and I go about three feet in the air. McGee gives a little flicking motion with his hand and the boy friend sails off toward town. I find out later that he lands flat against the front of the bank on the main drag. The later publicity does McGee no good at all.

"Katherine is quite a kid. She turns white when she sees the boy friend sail away, but she looks up into McGee's face and smiles. It is the same kind of a smile you give out when you break your leg. McGee lifts us up close to his lips and tries to kiss Katherine. Luckily he only catches her on the shoulder. The suction rips the shoulder out of her blouse. With Katherine in one hand and me in the other, he walks toward town.

"The way he holds me, I can see behind us. With every step he takes his heels go down into the asphalt like a baby walking across a pie crust. He is smart enough to hold us loosely, but there is no way I can make him hear me so I can tell him to stop swinging his arms. Each swing spins my stomach into an outside loop and leaves it hanging behind us in space.

AT THE edge of town he stops and looks down. People disappear off the street as though they are rubbed out with an eraser. McGee squats on his heels and giggles. The giggle sounds like a field howitzer with a rapid fire attachment. He dumps me back into the same hand with Katherine, reaches out and lifts the flat roof off a store. The people race out into the street and disappear into other buildings. He scales the roof off into the desert and giggles again. He reaches out and pulls down all the phone lines and

electric cables.

"I begin to understand why he does all these things. Here he is a fellow who hasn't ever made anybody look at him twice and all of a sudden he has become pretty important to everybody in the vicinity. He is just about the most important thing there is. He's got his gal in the palm of his hand. Naturally he has expanded out of his clothes, but the sort of cosmic nakedness McGee possessed was actually not nakedness at all.

"After picking up some empty trucks and putting them upside down in the main drag and putting a few others on top of the buildings and pulling the freight train that was standing in the station out into the main drag, he tired of the whole thing. I was yelling at him to put me down but apparently he couldn't hear me.

"Just as he set me down of his own accord, there was a rattle of rifle fire and McGee jumped back about fifty feet. I looked up and saw the scowl on his face and the spots of blood on his cheek and rolled into a shallow ditch. McGee stamped once at the town with his foot, turned and headed off into the desert, staring at Katherine.

"I wandered into town. It was a mess. All communications with the outside world were gone. Only two people had been killed when McGee had stamped a building flat but that was enough to take him out of the joke category. We stood in the main drag and stared until at last his head and shoulders went out of sight around a high slope in the hills. Then at last it was as though the entire town had taken a deep breath.

"In fifteen minutes, after a wild ride to the next town, Washington knew about what had happened and had clapped a lid of censorship over the entire area. Technicians were flown out, and a motorized detachment of the Army, complete with bazookas and mountain howitzers arrived by noon. By then, of course, the fighter-bombers were looking for him.

"The town was a scene of wild confusion when McGee came running out of the desert a little after one. He still held Katherine. I saw him look back over his shoulder and duck to the right. A bomb crumped in the sand behind him. McGee was smart enough. He came right into the town, running right over the gun crews.

"At the last moment one of the 75's made a direct hit on his forearm, breaking it and mangling the flesh. He stamped the crews to death and squatted in the park in the middle of town. The planes buzzed by but they couldn't unload because they would be killing innocent people. One of them flashed down with fifties blazing, but he stood up suddenly, and smashed at it with his good fist. The plane crashed near the railroad station and McGee caught Katherine before she had a chance to get out of sight.

"Orders were given over a P.A. system for everybody to leave town, but McGee caught onto that. He flattened two cars that sped out the other side of town and they were the only two that tried. It was a stalemate.

"Late in the afternoon he began to look sort of wild and began to sing. His singing broke every window left in town, shattered dishes in cupboards and just about drove all of us mad. He reached up, yanked the tank off the top of a water tower, pulled the lid off of it and drained it. Once again he caught the fleeing Katherine before she could get away. The gal had spunk. She kept trying.

"As soon as it got dark, he stood up, staggering, and went off into the desert. The planes couldn't find him. He stood at the edge of the mountains and threw big stones back into town. A lot of them are still there because no way has been found to get them out without tearing down a mess of buildings.

"People were buzzing around town all night and new and heavier artillery was brought in. But they didn't need it. At dawn Katherine came staggering back to town. She was cut and bleeding. Stone deaf, too. Seems that she was too close to him during all the singing. We found him about eight miles from town. He was right on the edge of a pretty deep canyon and after they got enough mechanized equipment up there, they were able to topple him in. It took eight bulldozers working more than twelve hours to cover him with dirt. They had a funeral service for him, too."

Bud Lide stopped talking, picked up his glass and finished it. I looked at Danny and Joe looked at me and Danny looked at Joe.

"You must be taking it in the leg, Bud," Joe said laughing.

Bud looked at him curiously. "You guys don't believe me? Just because the Government kept it from getting in the papers?"

Danny laughed. "Sure, Bud. We believe you. Every word of it."

(Concluded on page 51)

Our quiet brains built a ship from the keystone of matter itself

Galactic Heritage

"I am a hundred billion miles from Earth as I write this. . . ."

HE CALLED himself Jim Rush.

No uglier giant had ever come striding in out of the rain to make a name for himself under the big top. He had the thickest eyebrows I've ever laid eyes on—and the boniest face.

When you've been in the Carny game as long as I have you don't let new faces get on your nerves. But Rush was out of this world! When I looked at him I seemed to be in a dark room, sweating and stumbling over things. Then the room would vanish, and he'd be sitting on the platform at my side, his face a big piece of jagged glass glinting in the sunlight.

It was just my nerves, of course. Just a midget's overheated imagination. I'm sure he wouldn't have looked that way to Dali. It didn't last anyway. In his street clothes, and most of the time on the platform all he

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

did was scare the living daylights out of me.

But hold on tight now—we're going around a curve! I had him figured out all wrong. He was the kindest big guy in the world. He was kind to me, and that meant he'd have been kind to anyone—a stray kitten, a broken-down short-change artist in an iron lung.

The first time Rush spoke to me the bally talker was adding a foot to his height and wrapping a tape-measure around his biceps.

"Step in closer, folks! The kiddies want to see him too! That's it—that's fine! Do you know where this big man was born?"

"The Constellation Cassiopeia," Rush said. "Or the Great Nebula in Orion! If he was really smart, he'd keep them guessing!"

Coming from Rush, whom I'd taken for an uneducated man, that remark gave me a jolt. Me, I've read a lot and know as much about the stars as the average cultured bartender.

I opened my eyes wide. "He's not kidding anybody!" I said.

Rush chuckled. "No, I suppose not."

He looked at me. "Tell me something, Ralph. How do you spend your spare time? I've often wondered."

My full name is "Tiny" Ralph Moffatt. But I like to be called by my middle name. I stand three feet two in my stockings, and you don't know what loneliness is if you've never had to climb on a chair to look into the eyes of a friend. Chances are, you'll have made the trip for nothing, for a midget doesn't have many friends.

That's why I answered so quickly. "Read a little," I said. "Go to the movies in the village. Stand on a crate and shoot pool with Pop Carden."

"How would you like to chew the fat with me some evening?" Rush asked. "I do a little—well, call it tinkering, in my spare time. I'm interested in electronics. Know anything about electronics, Ralph?"

DID I? I can build the cutest little radio set you'd care to see, blindfolded, with one arm tied behind me.

"If it's a machine," I said, "I can call the turns on the power source without looking at it!"

He grinned. "Great, Ralph! Why not make it this evening?"

So we practically shook hands on it, sitting there on the platform, with the crowd gawking up at us and the bally talker giving us a frenzied buildup.

When the crowd thinned out after the tent show he gave me his address. He lived in the village, up two flights of stairs on a crummy street.

"When the landlord saw how big I was he jacked up the rent!" Rush explained. "Guess he figured my tread would wear holes in the carpet."

"That's a pitch!" I wisecracked. "Me, I ought to get a room for nothing."

He looked at me gravely. "Don't ever let it get you, Ralph. Your size, I mean. It's not important."

That made me like him even better.

"I'm getting out of this rig and into my work clothes," Rush said. "Hungry, Ralph? Like to join me in the pie car?"

I hesitated—then told him I was on a diet. It wasn't true, but I hate sitting on a stool in the pie car alongside of grown men. The food display counters are so far out of reach.

"See you at eight!" I promised.

The goose-necks were blazing when I slipped out into the twilight, straddling a rain trench, and ducking around behind the animal cages until I was out of sight.

An hour later I was climbing the stairs to his room. I'd dined alone in my tent, on canned salmon. But nothing could dim the bright glow that was in me. I like people who tinker—in dirt road garages, and big laboratories fitted up like a grease monkey's idea of paradise.

I was out of breath when I reached the second floor landing. But I've a sound heart and it wasn't the climb that started it jumping. It was the droning.

I was almost at the door of Rush's room when I heard it. It was loud, very loud, and somehow it scared me. It seemed to come from both inside and outside my skull, if you know what I mean.

But it was nothing to get worked up about. In the woods at night, when you're looking up at the stars, you can hear all kinds of eerie sounds—if you let yourself hear them. Just as if the sky had a life of its own, a hidden, whispering life, shared by the rocks and the gaunt trees.

But I wasn't in the woods now.

There was no excuse for what I did. I quickened my stride and walked right into Rush's room without knocking. I threw the door open and there he was, standing before a big, bare table littered with everything in

the Little Giant Fact Book of Electronics.

There was a brush yoke, and a four-way switch attached to a fractional machine which looked as if it could generate all kinds of static without frying an arc. There was a Bunsen cell setup. That's a primary electric cell using zinc and carbon electrodes. The right kind of Bunsen cell will deliver a terrific current.

There was a big, metal eye, threaded at one end, attached to a rod and holding a crystal chunk of something ruby-colored that glittered in the loop of the eye. There was a multi-speed motor with inside wiring, and something that looked like a cuckoo clock perched on an hour-glass.

But I had no time to study the rest of the gadgets, for there was something in the middle of the table that started my heart jumping again and narrowed my vision like a vise.

It looked like a little, shriveled monkey. Wires ran from its skull to a big, gleaming object shaped like a diving bell, and its mouth was opening and closing as if it were trying desperately to say something.

The droning I'd heard in the hall was coming from the apparatus.

When Rush saw me he smiled quietly, as though he wasn't in the least put out. He clicked off the apparatus, detached the wires from the little beast's skull and tucked it under his arm, almost tenderly. It clung to his sleeve, like a frightened marmoset.

OF COURSE! It *was* a marmoset! I expect scientists use them whenever they run short of white mice. But they're also Carny animals—the kiddies love them. I told myself a little wildly that Rush must have raided the stock cars to get so many of them. There were at least a dozen marmosets in the room, jumping about in cages.

"There are definite limits to animal intelligence!" Rush said. "Speech, for instance. This little creature can't talk even now. But I've learned a lot from him. I'm making real progress!"

"Are you?" I managed to choke out.

Rush made a gesture of apology. "Forgive me, Ralph!" he said. "I didn't mean to plunge right into the middle of things. But there are certain things about the brain psychologists won't discuss if they can help it. It makes ninnies out of them!"

He seemed terribly keyed up. His eyes were shining, and he was staring at me as though I were the answer to something that had been torturing him for a month.

"Look, Ralph!" he said. "I know it's asking a lot on the strength of a short acquaintance. But will you let me adjust this helmet to your head for a minute or two? It's not dangerous. I've made sure of that!"

So it was a helmet—not a diving bell! I just couldn't picture myself wearing it, so I'd jumped to a ridiculous conclusion.

I looked him straight in the eye. "You mean—you want me to take the place of that monkey?" I gulped.

Rush smiled quickly. "Heck no. The monkey couldn't wear it. Its brain isn't complex enough. It would fit you, though. Will you let me try it on?"

"For size?" I got out.

He shook his head. "Size has nothing to do with it, Ralph. It's the complexity of the brain itself." A pleading look came into his eyes. "It's just that I'm close to something tremendous. It doesn't matter to me in the way it would matter to Einstein say—or Jeans! It's big in a different way."

It never occurred to me that he'd take my stunned silence for consent. Before I could retreat toward the door he'd picked up the helmet and was fitting it to my head.

It did seem to fit, though it was as heavy as a metal bathtub, or felt as heavy. It pressed against my skull and weighed me down, so that he had to help me into a chair, and make some adjustments to enable me to bear it.

The helmet got still heavier when he stepped swiftly to the table and turned the juice on. There was a droning, but it didn't seem so loud now that I was close to it.

I was close to nothing else.

The floor moved, carrying Rush from me, so fast his big body blurred. The walls were moving too, rushing away from me. The marmosets blurred inside their cages. Wavered, and turned brittle. Their eyes puffed up like toy balloons, their bodies splintering, whipping away into emptiness.

The table vanished in a blaze of light. There was nothing to hold on to. The chair dissolved under me, but instead of falling I felt myself plunging forward, straight toward a blazing wall that was swallowing up everything in the room.

It ceased to be a wall when I passed into it. It became a wrenching and a tearing that took hardlly a second to separate my brain from my body and hurl me piecemeal

into an abyss of howling blackness.

When the howling stopped I decided I'd had some kind of epileptic fit as a result of excitement.

There was a swaying beneath me, deep, terrifying, as if I were clinging to the roof of a collapsing building. I could smell the damp earth, and my face was drenched with sweat and I was clinging to something all buckled into folds like an old leather harness.

Then the elephant trumpeted.

I let out a yell. I was perched on the neck of the beast, right up between its ears, clinging to its wrinkled hide. It was raging mad, swaying to and fro, rattling its leg chains and swinging its trunk about.

My clothes had vanished along with the helmet.

I DON'T know what saved me. Sheer blind panic, I guess. I just let go and dropped to the ground, without thinking about it. It was cutting corners with death, but it seemed only a moment before I was running through the night, the trumpeting falling away behind me.

I headed straight for my tent, but it wasn't modesty that drove me in that direction. People who'd be shocked by a midget in the buff would be scandalized by a baby in its bath. I didn't give a hoot for the blushes of somebody's maiden aunt—only for my sanity.

My tent was as black as pitch, but I didn't stop to fumble around for the light switch. I knew exactly where my spare trousers were and—an old sweater, a pair of shoes.

In my old clothes I looked as tough as a midget can look. Picture a three-foot pug, ready to climb into the ring with a heavyweight and start slugging. When the universe reels you're apt to get scared, then angry. Don't ask me why, but that's the way it is.

I wasn't furious with Rush exactly, but I had to get back my faith in the reality of the world around me—its solidness. You couldn't pass through a solid wall and right out into the dark, swaying night!

You just couldn't! I was still telling myself that twenty minutes later, at the top of the rickety stairs that led to the House that Rush Built. A house within a house, that opened on blazing emptiness? I had to make sure.

I wasn't even sure I'd find Rush when I reached his room and flung the door open. My head was pounding from climbing the stairs so fast again, and there was a screaming inside me.

What next, little man?

The room hadn't changed at all. Rush was standing before the table, where I'd left him, and on a chair near the door were my clothes. Every stitch I'd had on before the universe started reeling. The helmet rested on the seat of the chair, as though I'd dissolved under it, allowing it to sink gently to rest on my empty clothes.

When Rush saw me his face lighted up, as though I'd stepped out of a door in the sky with a lot of blazing jewels in my arms. But his expression changed when he saw how ill I looked.

There were no mirrors in the room, but I didn't have to see my face to know how ill I looked.

"Are you all right, Ralph?" he asked, with real concern. "You'd better tell me exactly what happened. Take your time now. The details are important."

I told him.

I don't know why, but I never expected he'd burst out laughing. Nothing about my experience had seemed ludicrous to me, so his reaction came as a shock.

This is what he said. "You're small, Ralph, and an elephant's back is quite an expanse of territory to you. It's dead against the law of averages, but that law stretches sometimes! It's really terribly funny!"

"Is it?" I said, coldly.

The amusement went out of his eyes. "Forgive me for laughing, Ralph. I didn't really mean to. I owe you an explanation, and I'll try to to give it to you, in one-syllable words."

"That's kind of you!" I said. "The only thing you haven't thrown at me is the dictionary."

Rush shook his head. "I'm asking you to forgive me, Ralph. You've helped me, and I'm grateful. You've helped me more than you know!"

The charm was still there, the winning friendliness. I told myself I was quite mad to trust him, but somehow I couldn't help myself.

"The greatest mysteries are simple things," he said. "Take the human brain. It has changed a lot and it goes right on changing. But what do we know about it, really? You can cut away most of the

brain and be none the worse for it. A man can think, act, plan, feel with only a walnut-sized part of his brain."

Rush nodded. "There's a big, quiet part which he doesn't seem to need. Some psychologists call it the quiet brain. It does its work without giving itself away."

"What kind of work?" I asked.

"Extra-sensory work," Rush said. "But telepathy, clairvoyance are just ground swells in the quiet brain. Just rudimentary stirrings, of no great importance in themselves. But where there are ground swells there must be a solid core of something tremendous, something that can move and shake. And build, Ralph."

THE big fellow paused long enough to flash me a cheerful smile. Then he went on.

"I like that word, build. New cells, new bodies even. But I'm after something more basic than that. You can change the body's structure, bruise it, burn it with the quiet brain, if you try hard enough. But what I did to you was more vital, more in the line of what I'm trying to accomplish."

"What did you do to me?"

"Gave your quiet brain an electronic prod, and sent you right out through a solid wall. You can send the body anywhere, if the quiet brain is sufficiently stimulated. But that's just kindergarten stuff. With the right kind of electronic hookup I'll have my big job solved. I'm on the inside track now, thanks to you!"

Rush smiled. "Funny thing. When you wore that helmet your mind was open to telepathic suggestion. I made you want to come out in front of the animal cages. I implanted the thought in your mind. And that's where you did come out. The elephant just happened to be in the way."

It was pure madness, of course. No man, not even a midget, could be expected to take him seriously. But somehow I couldn't tear my eyes from his face. I can usually tell when a man's lying. I'm sensitive to the little facial quirks that mirror the mind's duplicity; I've trained myself to be. There was nothing evasive about Rush.

"It was easier with a small body, of course," he said. "A powerful mind acting on a small body can do more with it. It's curious, but even animals have a quiet brain. Those marmosets taught me a lot—how speech, intelligence, everything, really comes out of the quiet part. The quiet brain is the real evolutionary mechanism across the ages. It's stimulated by cosmic rays and it develops the brain you use, the active, walnut-sized part."

He looked at me. "That's just a fascinating bypath, of course. My big job just skirts it, and widens out into something more tremendous."

"What is—your big job?" I whispered.

I was taking him seriously now, despite myself. I felt bad though, really physically ill.

"That can wait, Ralph," he said. "Until tomorrow, eh? You must be tired. What you need is a little shut-eye."

"That's easy to say!" I choked. "You think I'll sleep?"

"Why not, Ralph? Life isn't any stranger than the things we dream about. You've had quite a jolt tonight, but tomorrow you'll take it in your stride."

I'd started to turn when he picked up the helmet. "No sense in taking the town in your stride," he said. "It's a long trudge back to your tent. A real Carny never walks when he can travel in style!"

Before I realized what he was about he he was adjusting the helmet to my head again.

"I'll bring your duds over first thing in the morning," I heard him saying. "Think yourself back into your tent—"

His voice was drowned out by the hum of the circuit.

It was awful all over again. A spinning and a whirling—the floor dissolving and the walls rushing off.

When the droning stopped I was back in my tent on the outskirts of the town, my knees knocking together and my teeth chattering like chipmunks in a haunted forest.

I didn't sleep a wink until the sun came up.

He was right, though. It didn't seem so terrifying in the bright noonday glare, with the Midway filling up, and the bally talkers waving their megaphones as though they really believed the ground to be solid, the sky filled with little fleecy clouds.

There's always a lull before the worst of storms.

I was alone on the platform. Rush and the rest of the troupe were inside rehearsing. The show wouldn't start for another hour, and I'd walked out ahead of time to park myself on a nursery-sized chair on the brink

of the Midway.

I was sure that something terrible was going to happen.

You know the feeling. Everyone has it at times. It's worse in the autumn, when the leaves coil up and blow away and the wind howls through the bare trees. It's bad enough when it's just something vague inside you that tells you the world is out of whack. But it's worse when your head is under the chopping block.

Just by believing Rush and taking him seriously, I'd made myself a part of it.

YET it started quietly enough. I heard a faint coughing inside the big canvas tent at my back, as though someone had stepped into a draft of cold air and out again.

Then the coughing became a wheezing, a rumbling, and the platform began to sway.

I leaped up in sick horror. The explosion was deafening. It seemed to come from deep inside the tent, but it was more than just a blast of sound. A cyclone accompanied it, and a screaming. When I swung about there was a spiraling funnel of radiance pouring out of the tent through a big rent in the canvas.

I could see straight into the tent through the radiance. It was weird, mind-numbing. Like looking through a periscope poked into a furnace filled with waltzing men and women.

Inside the tent people were whirling about like leaves in a blast furnace. The fact that they were my kind of people made it all the more nightmarish.

Then I saw Rush. He was sitting on the inside platform, staring down at his palm. His big, bony hand looked like an upset spider, twining its legs around a little metal disk. The disk was smoking but he didn't seem to want to let go of it.

He was grimacing in an angry sort of way, as though he'd exploded a box of matches by accident and was furious with himself.

I can't explain it, but I had a hunch he'd done just that—exploded the disk by accident.

But suspecting that didn't lessen my terror. If you've never seen a Carny show fill with smoke you can't know how terrifying it is. So many things can happen to start a panic, and send innocent people to prison for life.

Hysteria can twist the human brain, make it callous to grief. Children can be trampled by men with children of their own, without a backward glance. Even cowardice doesn't explain the utter demoralization that can sweep people trapped in a burning tent.

I shut my eyes for a minute. I was afraid to look.

When I opened them someone had put the fire out by ripping down a flap of canvas and stamping on it.

But everyone was staring at Rush. Shrieking, shouting, converging upon him as though he'd tried to set fire to the universe. There was a maniacal glint in the eyes of the troupe, as though they were going to bypass the law and tear him limb from limb.

It was the old Carny dread of fire, mounting to a subconscious frenzy, and fastening on Rush as the man responsible. The very fact that he was slow in getting up weighed against him. It seemed to confirm his guilt.

Rush was slow in getting up, but not slow in streaking for the outside platform. He swung himself up beside me in a long, impetuous leap, grabbing a dangling rope and plunging out through the still smoking tent flaps like a clockwork orang-utan.

"We've got to beat it, Ralph!" he shouted. "I can't explain it to them. They wouldn't understand."

I started to shout at him that it was his own funeral pyre and I didn't care how fiery it got. He could rot in the jug for all of me. I was washing my hands of him then and there.

But then I saw the look on his face. He was pleading with me like a stricken deaf mute, as though my loyalty had robbed him of the power of speech and if I let him down now, he seemed to be saying, he'd go somewhere where it was cold and dark, and hang himself to the nearest tree.

At least a dozen witnesses saw me cook my own goose. By throwing in my lot with him I was making myself an accessory. What had I to gain by taking to my heels? It was pure madness!

We were both out of breath when we reached the village. "I just took that midget beam-generator out of my pocket to toy with it, idly, as you'd flip a key, or a coin!" he grunted. "The first thing I knew—"

"You toyed with it too hard, I suppose!"

"I'm afraid so, Ralph!" he admitted. "But no harm has been done. They got the fire out and my big job is finished. There's nothing to keep us here."

I had an answer ready for that one. If he wanted to hop a freight, it was all right with me. But why did I keep silent? Why did I let him think I was checking out too?

WHEN he spoke again we were almost at the door of his room.

"Everything's ready, Ralph!" he said. "I'm going to send you right out on the mountain. I'll follow in a car. It's a long drive going through the bleakest country east of the Great Smokies. When you get a glimpse of it from the mountaintop you won't envy me the drive!"

"I didn't know you had a car," I said. Then I flared up. "If it's *me* you're talking to, you're not sending me anywhere! But I'd like to know where you think you're sending me!"

He laughed. "You'll go, Ralph," he said. "Deep down you trust me, like me."

That was too much for me. I tried to shrug it off, but inside me there was a gnawing dread which got worse when we reached his room.

I had all I could do to keep from screaming when he picked up the helmet again.

"Ralph, frankly, I'd rather not tell you until I get there myself," he said. "How about it? Will you trust me?"

What could I say? I'd trusted him beyond reason already, but when the noose is over your head there's not much sense in making a break for it.

The helmet didn't seem to make any sound at all this time. But maybe the sound was drowned out by his voice, for he spoke very loudly.

"You'll find something there, Ralph—a big metal cylinder crumbling into rust. But the heating apparatus still works. Just press the little knob at the bottom of the big, circular panel you'll find in the middle compartment."

There was a strange eagerness in his voice. "One thing more, Ralph. Look in the—well, clothes-closet to you! You'll find a surprise!"

I heard the droning then. His voice grew fainter: "Relax now, Ralph. This is the last trip you'll ever take on Earth. I'm implanting the destination in your mind now. That's it—easy does it! Be seeing you in about eight hours."

The whirling again.

When the droning fell away I was lying on my back staring up at the sky. My clothes were gone again, and an icy wind was raising goose pimples on my shoulders and chest.

I didn't stay on my back. I leaped up so fast the landscape went every whichway for a minute. Pinwheeled, blurred—ran away from me in a bubbly streak.

Then it settled back into place and I was staring up at the bleakest forested region I'd ever seen. There's a bald mountain in the Adirondacks that's like a big bare skull set down between spruce trees filled with black crows and a cawing that never stops.

But this mountaintop was twice as barren, twice as bleak. A gray-green slaty barrenness that stretched to a circle of dark green firs as stark as sentinel cranes standing guard over the ruins of a vanished race.

But there were no ruins that I could see. Just a waste of stone and rubble, blackened here and there as though by fire, and made even bleaker by chilling flurries of snow.

Luckily I didn't have to search for the cylinder. It was right there before me, looming up against the firs, a big, half-buried mass of yellow metal all crushed in on one side.

I walked around it in a kind of daze, telling myself I'd be crazy to freeze to death, even though I was too desperate and frightened to care much whether I lived or died.

I was a little afraid the cylinder might vanish when I touched it. But it was solid enough, coated with hoar frost and so cold it sent a tingling coursing through me.

When I reeled back and studied it, I saw that I could get inside. There was a big circular opening at one end, covered by a metal flap. The flap was heavy, and I wasn't strong enough to give it a vigorous heave. So I simply wedged it up with my shoulders and crawled inside on my hands and knees.

There was a suffocating deadness in the air I was breathing a few minutes later. I could breathe the air, and I could see the panel, looming up in the choking darkness. There was just enough light to see by, but don't ask me where it came from.

AT LEAST he hadn't lied. The heat came on just as he'd promised when I pressed the right knob, and I found myself in a warm little compartment with the cold shut out.

A half hour later I was still sitting there, wondering why he didn't come. Then I remembered he'd said eight hours. I remem-

bered something else he'd said.

"Look in the clothes-closet, Ralph! You'll get a surprise!"

I got up and went stumbling around in the shadows.

It wasn't a closet, really—just a yard-high, yard-wide niche in the metal wall. But there was a garment hanging there, on a metal peg.

I took the garment out. It had a musty smell, but it wasn't the smell that brought a sudden catch to my throat.

It was a little one-piece suit, just my size!

My size!

For an instant I almost passed out from shock. Then I was laughing wildly and pulling the garment on. It wasn't an ordinary suit such as I'd shed under the helmet. It was a helmeted suit, but the helmet was small and transparent, and could be pushed back, leaving my face exposed.

It was bulky, too. A little like a diver's suit, with pleats in it, and there were boots in the locker to go with it, and fuzzy mittens.

It fitted me like a wrinkled glove. Even the pleats and creases fitted me, draped themselves to my body as if months of wear had molded the suit to my way of walking and sitting.

The instant I had the suit on I went out on the mountaintop again, a bursting wonder in my chest. When emotion's overwhelming that's where you feel it, in the chest, like a warmth and a throbbing spreading out.

I went back after a moment, because a blizzard was coming up. But I kept going out and back, stamping around in the snow, not minding the cold at all now.

I was outside when I heard him coming up the mountaintop. He was singing at the top of his lungs, as though he were coming home from a journey in a far country and could hardly wait to share the wonder of it.

Long before he came into view over the top of the crest, with the two little metal cylinders under his arm, I knew who he really was.

He shouted and waved to me and I waved back.

He was out of breath when he reached my side.

"You've guessed, Ralph?" he said, stamping the snow from his shoes.

"Guessed?" I cried. "Brother, I know now, I remember!"

His eyes began to shine. "We had to buck an alien world, Ralph. You remember that? With our ship a wreck, our hopes of getting back blasted, we knew we'd have tough sledding. For you amnesia, self-imposed. You had to stay sane while I tried to work something out."

"You've stayed sane too, brother!" I told him. "And now you've won through? You can build a new ship?"

He looked at me. "I think so, Ralph. All those experiments paid off. I've found out how to stimulate the quiet brain as it has never been stimulated on Earth. Our quiet brains, Ralph. Simply by studying the quiet brains of animals and a few humans. You were a great help to me, because you have something which humans lack."

"My amnesia vanished when I found the suit!" I said. "Did you know it would."

"I thought it might, Ralph!" he said.

"Ralph's not my real name, brother!" I said. "You know that."

"It's our human name, Ralph, and you felt and thought and acted like a human for twelve years. I sort of got to like you all over again."

"It's all right, brother," I said. "Any name suits me the way I feel now!"

"I'll still call you Ralph, then."

He showed me the two little cylinders then, and scratched his head, just like a human mechanic, a grease monkey rolling up his sleeves. My brother Rush! Only—Rush wasn't his real name either. He was my genetic twin opposite. I was the small twin.

HE'D BEEN good at electronics as a kid, back where we came from. We didn't call it electronics in our world, but the worlds aren't so different, the people on them not so different either. In the deep, pulsing core of the Great Nebula there are green, pleasant, warm little worlds. One of those worlds was home to us.

"We won't need helmets," my brother said. "There's more of what it takes in these cylinders. They're mass-building cylinders, polarized to convert diffuse energy back into elementary matter, under the direction of our quiet brains. We have a better than even chance of building a ship as real as this mountaintop!"

"And we've a head start over humans," I said. "We know how to construct a ship just like the one that was smashed up, down to the minutest detail. We've a clairvoyant mind picture of it."

He was singing again when we drove the cylinders deep into the frozen soil, two hundred feet apart, and stood back and let our quiet brains soar.

The energizing flames darted out just as he'd known they would. Between the cylinders, in great fluttering pinions, and our quiet brains built a ship from the keystone of matter itself, from disintegrating stone and the cosmic dust.

Thought can do things to energy, to matter—not conscious thought, but the kind of thought that shaped the Universe of Stars.

How can I describe it to you?

If you'd been there you'd have seen something like a bursting energy shell first, then a banked mass of swirling light and the ship taking shape under the light.

But how can I make you feel the breath-taking wonder of it? You've never built a ship that way, a ship you'll be going home in, your ship!

You've never seen it grow from the inside out, with all the intricate parts falling into place, the gleaming controls and the smooth bulkheads, so neat and precise, and the great pulsing power drive building itself up like a living thing.

I think I blinked more than I should, and my eyelids got wet, and froze to my cheeks. You know how it is when you've done something tremendous that shakes you to the depths. When you're through, you don't feel like saying much. You just feel humble and very little, and the bigness of the accomplishment takes away your breath.

So we just looked at each other, my brother and I, and then we looked at the ship. My brother slung his big, loose-jointed arm around my shoulder and we went inside.

I'm writing this now in the pilot jetty, a hundred billion miles from Earth. I'm putting it all down just as it happened, before my human memories dim.

I'm going home, see? And I might remember too much if I took it all with me. How the earth looks after an April thaw, with the spring peepers going full blast in woodland pools, and how the stars blaze down on frosty nights.

Shucks, I even liked the Carny tents in the spring. The rioting colors and the toy balloons and the whistling peanut carts.

Yeah! Well, writing about it helps to get rid of it. I don't want to take it with me.

Near to me now, blazing bright, there's a pinwheeling rush of familiar stars. Another star cluster and another—and another! After all, I am going home, and in my book there's nothing better, nothing to compare with that!

THAT MESS LAST YEAR

(Concluded from page 42)

At that moment I looked up and saw a tall girl standing beside our table. She looked over at Bud Lide and said, "Here I am, darling."

His lean face softened. "Hello, Katherine."

She was a fine looking girl. I figured that the name thing was a coincidence and then I happened to notice the tiny rosette of the hearing aid, the white wire that went up under her dark hair. I felt suddenly cold.

Bud Lide stood up, threw some money on the table and said, "See you later, fellows. I got to run along."

Maybe Joe had noticed the hearing aid too. He was pale and he licked his lips. He said, "Wait a minute, Bud. What did he die of? What killed off this McGee character?"

Maybe if Bud had answered him it would have been okay. Maybe if Bud had given the answer I wouldn't be drinking so much these days.

The tall, good-looking girl named Katherine said, "Sunburn."

Roses are red,

Violets are blue—

The robots are lovely,

And so are you!

THE *Starling* skidded down out of space toward Mars. It was the first ship ever to reach Mars.

It was the first man-made and Lunar-Base-constructed spaceship ever designed to reach Mars! It was the first attempt, and the first leg of that first attempt looked successful. They were getting where they had to go.

Now all they had to do was once around the wheelhouse and get back!

It was a long, gleaming, torpedo-shaped craft, fully one thousand feet of compact, completely attuned technology from stem to stern—twenty-five hundred Earthweight tons of it. It had taken the short trip, when Mars was adjacent on her orbit to Earth, and had taken six months of accelerating, gliding through space, gyroing around heads-to-tails, and decelerating.

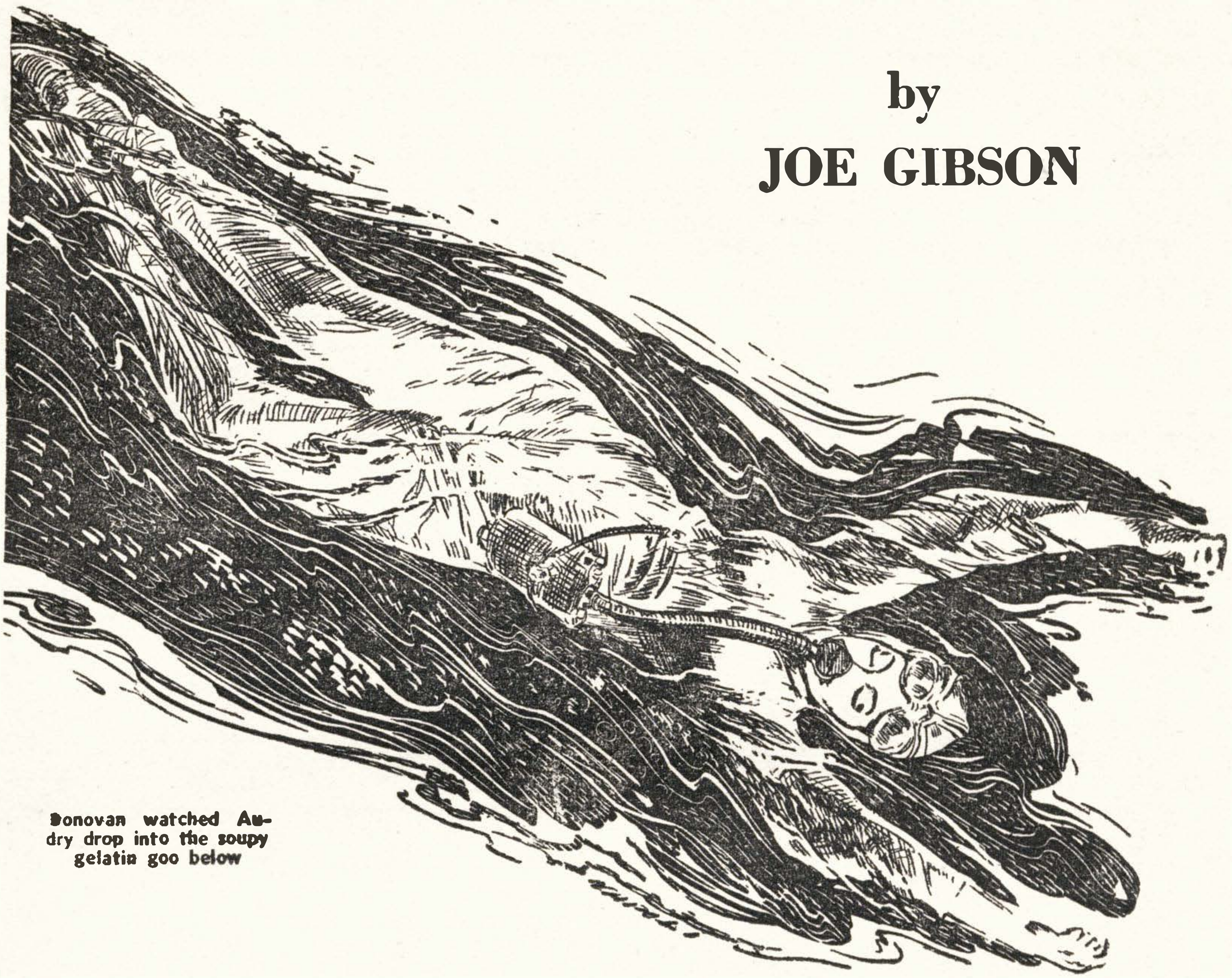
A second object also was dropping toward Mars, now, ahead of the ship as she barrelled along her orbit, sliding past her and feeling the heavy tug of her gravitational field, to assist them in a swinging, cometlike trajectory back around and upward—Sunward—toward Earth. The object came trailing down out of the star-sprinkled heavens like a long, slender needle, its tail jets spewing feathery blue streamers of blazingly raw energy ahead of it—decelerating—slowing—

And the radar alarm set up a ringing, in-

When Their Rocket Ship Crashes, Chazz and Audry

"I Like You, Too——"

by
JOE GIBSON



Donovan watched Audry drop into the soupy gelatin goo below

sistent clangor through the gleaming catacombs within! Meteor!

Jennings, the eight-to-four watch pilot and ship's space jockey, was on the bridge. He saw the meteor coming and he knew what to do. Or he should have known—

Automatically, the meteor's trajectory was recorded and computed against the ship's trajectory. Automatically, direct interception was registered. It was a meteor, not a meteorite. It was heavy. Carefully, various jets were dampered—just the slightest. The *Starling* swerved on its course, a long, curved line in space. Completely automatic.

They plunged toward Mars!

Evans rode as eight-to-four astronaut. This wasn't his domain. This was "approach," not space trajectory. So he manned the speakers, shouting the emergency through the cramped compartments and narrow ladderwells to the ship's personnel:

"Our nucleonic field simply could not take a 'head-on' with that meteor without drastically, fatally, shoving the ship off course! We're plunging into Mars—we'll have to! Jennings has a reckoning on our trajectory, now. We'll skim Mars! Smack through the atmosphere and on out into space! Looks like our only chance—velocity ten times too high for landing, and Jennings believes our nucleonic field can take that atmospheric pressure while it can't take the meteor! But

it's going to be close and it's going to be hot outside! Jennings says to hang onto your hats."

CHARLES DONOVAN rolled off his bunk and slithered onto the cold metal deck. He was on four-to-twelve watch, and had been sleeping fitfully in his shorts in the hot air of his tiny cubicle and the laboring drag of 3-g deceleration. Now they were doing 5 g's!

He crawled painfully across the gleaming metal, gasping for breath with each effort to lift his 750-pound bulk and shove it along the deck. Gradually, he made his way to the round, open valve leading into the ladderwell. He stared out at the wide metal rungs in desperation, breath wheezing through his lips beneath the snug emergency oxygen mask that cupped against his nose. Didn't that fool Jennings know beans?

Jennings knew, and acted—finally—like a balky motorist in heavy downtown traffic. It was much against his hard-earned training as space jockey, but this case was different. They weren't landing—they couldn't! They were taking a slice out of the planet's atmosphere—an incredibly hot slice!

The sooner they got through it, the better. He cut deceleration. The jets' bluish fire dimmed. Thrust dropped from 5 g's to one! They seemed to spurt straight down toward the planet like a bullet from some godly rifle! He had to fight his every instinct to keep from slamming the jets on again, full-thrust.

Donovan winced as his insides heaved sickeningly within him. Then his vision cleared and his breathing became more regular, deeper. With a thankful sigh he climbed to his feet. He grasped the side of the open valve, swung out into the ladderwell, and began climbing.

Audry Gilgannen lifted herself painfully from her bunk and staggered to the wash basin. Confound Jennings anyway, changing thrust from 3 g's to five to one, without warning! She opened the faucet, let the water run into her palm, and dashed it against her blood-streaked nose.

Emergency, eh? They might need her forward. Williams and Carol knew their radar, but they weren't such a good team. She wiped her face with her hands, stumbled back to the bunk to grab her nose mask from its hook, and pulled its rubber straps over her soft brunette hair, clamping its tube to the airtank on her belt.

She buttoned the valve-lock into its slot and stepped into the corridor. Her trim coverall whispered around her legs as she strode toward the ladderwell. It fitted her nicely, hugged her curves, and it was a relief not to have it crawling up her in free-fall or dragging like a suit of armor.

Then she saw Donovan, climbing up the ladderwell rungs ahead of her. Clad only in brief jockey shorts and nose mask and ascending as though the Devil were after him! Her curiosity mingled with amusement, she swung into the ladderwell and followed.

The great red globe of Mars rolled ponderously toward them. Downward they shot, skimming out from the star-studded blackness like a needle into the proverbial haystack. Their jets breathed a blue-hot wash into the void before them.

Donovan climbed upward frenziedly, sweat trickling down his bare, tanned skin. One g! Why one g? Was Jennings crazy? Why didn't they go free-fall?

And suddenly he knew! Jennings knew, too! He was just hoping—probably praying that his space jockey's instinct wouldn't turn loose of that one-g deceleration! That might spell the difference between life and death. Donovan scrambled upward with a renewed vigor.

Below him, Audry shook her lovely head in bewilderment, and mounted faster. It all seemed so curious.

The *Starling* skimmed into Mars' atmosphere like a white-hot beacon. Waves of intense fire boiled around her, but away from her, in a blazing cone against her nucleonic field. Like a flaming white comet, she shot down into the Martian sky.

Weight remained the same, one gravity, straight toward the tail jets. Their velocity was too swift to feel more than a slight, tingling uneasiness from the planet's gravitational drag.

DONOVAN swung out of the ladderwell with an explosive sigh. He staggered across the narrow deck toward a bulging outer bulkhead, dodging around the compact pump mechanisms with their protruding banks of dials and thermostats. He reached the steps, climbed up them to the top of the bulkhead, and tackled the dogs on a round metal cap. Gulping great lungsful of air, he heaved the cap off its mouth, dropping it back on its hinges with a loud, metallic clang.

And stared downward.

There hadn't been time to warn the others—

He stared down into the vast water tank. It was a "water" tank almost in name only. It was filled with a thick, gelatinlike stuff. When it was run through the pumps and heated, it stretched three ways from Sunday and came out a thin, syrupy liquid. He had another name for it—"goo"! But it was the best the biochemists could do.

The sudden clatter of magnetic boots brought him around. Audry Gilgannen stood below him, gazing up at him with her full lips curved in an impish grin. He squatted on the round hump of the bulkhead, his near-naked body glistening with sweat and his eyes staring at her wildy from beneath his tousled, raven-black hair. She gurgled a soft, mocking laugh.

He thought, Thank God at least one more of us is safe!

"Get up here quick!" he snapped.

"Why?" she called back teasingly. "What on Earth are you doing, Chazz?"

He scrambled back on the steps and swung grimly down to her. "This isn't Earth and there's but little time. I said get up there!"

"Charley!" She backed away, slightly. "Whatever are you doing? We're in an emergency, Charley—an *emergency!* Do you under—"

Give a woman a string of college degrees and that's what you get! Donovan pressed his lips together tightly, stepped forward in a lithe, pantherlike motion.

He was a spatial engineer. Being a spatial engineer meant you were something between a star-blessed sorcerer and a rule-of-thumb nuclear physicist. He had gotten his training from a neurotic old graybeard out at the old Lunar Atomic Warfare Base before interplanetary flight had even been heard of by the United Nations. His fist connected with the point of her small, pert chin and she spread-eagled out on the hard metal deck. *Splat-splat!*

He grasped her wrists together, heaved her up on his back, and carried her back up the steps. Laying her beside the open metal mouth, he snapped on her air tank. Then he picked her up, shoved her over the side, and watched her drop into the soupy gelatin goo below.

His hand grasped the screw on his own air tank, twisted it open, and he dropped his legs over the mouth's edge. Quick reflection turned his gaze toward the small speaker bolted against the ceiling nearby. Then he ducked his head, shoved, and hurtled downward.

The shrill, piping scream of the Geigers rattled from the speaker, stinging his eardrums an instant before the goo closed over his head.

The power unit of the gigantic vessel was little more than an unmoderated atomic pile. Pu-239. It kicked the fuel out of the jets in a raw, blazing byproduct of energy. It powered the intense nucleonic field.

They struck the planet's atmosphere at a velocity which likened it to shoving a cold bar through hard rock. The rock got hot—incredibly hot—but in this instant the bar didn't melt. The nucleonic field took the punishment. But a nucleonic field takes only so much.

The field is, basically, no more than a microwave projection of the nuclear reaction of the pile. It came out radiation and it came out heat. Meteorites, cosmic dust, small particles didn't have much chance. As in a Heaviside layer, they volatilized. Bigger stuff could be detected—and dodged. A planet's atmosphere was thick—definitely thick at the velocity they were traveling—but it also had a high degree of dispersion. It grew hot—and the nucleonic field lashed back at the heat with more heat of its own, plus a strong radiation pressure. It could take that.

But they were "passing" on the "forward" side of Mars! The planet was rolling toward them—and a planet's orbital velocity is something to reckon with. They not only skimmed through the atmosphere—they skimmed the *surface* of the planet. That, the field couldn't take! It backlashed!

A projection of nuclear energy is, considerably, just a lot more nuclear energy. It backlashed into the pile, or toward the pile, with much the same effect as if another hunk of Pu-239 was dropped on the fire. The exponential curve of the reaction head for Pluto. Things got hot. Things volatilized—especially the pile! But it wasn't a case of dispersion into maximum volume at minimum concentration and distillation. This was a spaceship, not Earth. The volatilized Pu-239 built up pressure. There wasn't a nuclear explosion. But it exploded.

The fuel tanks—great drums of frozen hydrogen behind the jets—exploded.

All Hell exploded.

They stopped.

DIMENSIONS of the *Starling* were gigantic. The hull was one thousand feet long and the water tank stretched through five hundred feet of that. Eighty-three fathoms. Goo!

Blood stopped slamming against Donovan's temples. There was a hard, rough surface under his fingertips. Like rock. It *was* rock!

He pushed himself upward in the thick muck. He kept his eyes closed, tightly. His hand brushed against something soft, smooth —warm. Breath whistled into his nose mask with a sigh of gratitude. He felt slowly—leaning over in the thick soup—along a slender form, brushed a shoulder, followed it out along an arm.

He grasped it. He pushed his way forward, hand outstretched. He touched a wall. He plowed along it, touched ladder rungs. He dragged the still form up against him, slid his arm down around its waist before it could keel over in the muck. He began climbing, one-handed.

He climbed for centuries until he reached the deck.

After a while Audry Gilgannen stirred, moaned, and sat up on the deck. Her head spun dizzily and her nose felt tender, like a knob of raw beef. A pert and attractive knob, to be sure. But still like raw beef. She unglued her eyelids and stared about in a dazed way.

They were still in the pump room. Pump room! The thought tickled her and she laughed. Good old humor, back after all. But what had happened?

Donovan stood over her, bare feet spread apart, gazing down at her. It wasn't a nice way to gaze at any girl, and something tightened inside her. His eyes were hard, cold gimlets in hollow sockets, and his face, square, tanned, handsome, was deeply cut with enough lines to advertise eighty years of hard living! Then, as she stared up at him, her expression changed slowly from dazed horror to puzzled, tense shock.

It—it couldn't be—she couldn't be that dissatisfying! It couldn't be that bad—for him! Not for him to look like *that!* It was—it must be—*something else!*

Then she noticed that his naked chest was streaked with blood. Blood was dropping from his nose.

"Hi!" he said. "You feel all right now?"

She moved her lips with effort. "What—"

"You were out for a while. Morphine."

He turned, and strode over to a squat pump cylinder. He turned back, and sat down. "We were lucky," he said. "No internal hemorrhages."

"Wh-whu-what ha-happened?" she repeated. Her nose stung fiercely.

"We crashed on Mars," he said.

She stared at him, her mouth gaping open, quivering. "The others? Were they saved?"

He shook his head slowly. "Nobody. Just us."

She stared at him.

Just us!

Then, as memory and realization dawned feebily she jerked her head around toward the round bulge of the bulkhead. At the wrinkled, twisted bulkhead and the warped steps. And the wet, glistening, sticky trail that led from the open metal hole down the steps and across the buckled deck to where she lay. Gradually, then swiftly, the harsh realization mounted within her.

She pillowed her head in her arms on the cold metal deck and wept.

He kept her moving and working. That was all he could do. The ship was a total wreck. There was little more than a third of the hull remaining, and that had buckled beams and cracked bulkheads. The seams were leaking air. All intricate, fragile mechanism, or almost all of it, was a mess. There were other messes of wet blood and splintered bone and—and smell.

They checked air. They closed off badly leaking compartments. They checked supplies. Foodstuffs, for the most part, were stored just forward of amidships. There had been a crew of twenty, supplies for a fifteen-month cruise through space. He made her list what they found, add it up, and calculate how long it would last them. They could eat for three years!

THEY checked equipment. Most of the electronic control and lab apparatus was forward near the bridge in the ship's nose. They had all that. A lot of it was good scrap. But there were tubes in storage and a good deal of the equipment, while fragile, had withstood the crash with simple, yielding, tensile strength. Radar seemed intact, which was a miracle. Space radio was gone. The nucleonic field control mechanism simply had ceased to exist. They had spectro equipment and pressure suits and enough of the analytical labs and machine shop to fashion about anything else they needed.

But there wasn't much tanked oxygen!

"We need air, and we haven't got it!" Donovan mused apprehensively. They stood in the twilight hush of the bridge. The huge scanner screens loomed before them, cracked, broken. "We'll have to save all the air we've got, as much as possible. We might—just might—find a way to purify it and use it again."

"Fine chance," Audry snapped bitterly.

"Transmutation," he replied, grinning down at her. "I'm a spatial engineer, remember? Nucleonic stuff. We still have the power units in the nose jets."

"Darned little that is!" She swung about and stamped toward the yawing valve entrance. "You'll need equipment, mister, and plenty of it! Going to mail-order Earth for it?"

He padded after her on his bare feet. "We've still got to save air. These seams are leaking like a sieve, Audry. We'll have to find some way to seal 'em up."

She turned back to him impatiently. "Better list that on your mail-order, too." Her voice shook, ever so slightly. "But then you're the Robinson Crusoe, aren't you? I'm just your Man Friday!"

His grin returned. At her, you *had* to grin! "Don't underrate yourself. Why do you think I dumped you into the water tank with me, *hmmm?*"

Her eyes widened at that, and some mischievous imp seemed to dance in them.

"Do you know what I thought," she asked seriously, "when I woke up back there?"

He frowned. "Uh-uh. What?"

"Never mind." She turned quickly, stepping through the valve.

She pulled at her coverall. It clung to the supple curves of her body, stickily.

"I need a bath!" she commented absently. "Oh, how I could use a bath!"

"Not in the water I drink!" he called after her. She looked back over her shoulder and wrinkled her nose at him, and wished she hadn't. Her nose was still sore.

"In here!" Donovan called, grasping her shoulder and steering her into a compartment.

He led the way over to the wall cabinets, which had torn loose from their fastenings and were lying on the deck. He unsnapped one, opened it, and pulled out a pressure suit.

"Climb into this and I'll adjust it."

"You climb into it and *I'll* adjust it," she shot back at him. "I'm not taking off my clothes."

He looked up with such an expression of incredulous surprise that she couldn't help laughing.

"All right, Charley," she gasped mirthfully, "step outside and I'll wriggle into the thing!"

The pressure suits were like thick, cumbersome second-skins of metal mesh and rubbery lining. They kept body pressure from expanding in vacuum or near-vacuum conditions. Mars' atmosphere was thin. A thick quartzite shell fitted over their heads, fastening by step-down clamps to their shoulders. Bulky tanks on their backs held air. They looked like two oversized figures in long metal underwear, but Audry was still noticeably tantalizing.

They shuffled through the remaining forward airlock and crawled outside.

The ship towered like a protruding thumb from a vast, rolling desert of fine, sifting, yellow sand. Its broken, smashed end was buried deeply, its pointed nose rising gauntly against the dim, red sky. The hull was a crisp, sooty black.

They had the hour-hand on their wrist chronometers for compasses and the tiny white-hot ball of the Sun for reference. It was presumably some hour of mid-morning.

HE HAD no sextant, but Donovan had learned previously that Mars was in its Spring-Autumnal season. He could check the Sun at midday and figure their general "longitude" by dead reckoning. He said as much to Audry, standing silently beside him. His voice sounded flat in his earphones. He gazed blankly at the broad, flat yellow plain around them.

But it dipped, seemingly, into a sort of valley off to the east of them! He thought fleetingly about mirages—but no, there wasn't enough moisture in this air to wet the back of a stamp!

They struck off toward the "valley," plodding doggedly along in the ankle-deep sand. They talked—and walked—

And stood, stunned!

It was a canal. But what a canal! Straight down from their feet for a full fifteen miles its sheer wall dropped. Not a crack, not a blemish, not a scar of erosion. Straight down.

And on the canal floor below were straggling patches of green. And something flat

could be seen segregated into narrow, winding strips which twisted and snaked through the patches. Like a highway!

Audry's voice shrilled in his earphones. "Charley—Martians!"

He just stood still and breathed, deeply, until it sank in. Then, "We've got to get down there. How?"

She was pointing suddenly. "Over there! Look—a tower! Up the wall. Perhaps an elevator or—or a watch tower!"

"Watch for what?" he asked. But then he was leaping after her, running nimbly along the wide, hard-surfaced wall of the canal—running easily in the slight gravitation.

It was a tower, all right, and there was something that looked like an elevator shaft. And stairs. Winding down, down an open stairwell for fifteen miles. The rooms were bare, empty chambers, constructed seemingly of some hard-baked porcelain. It was smooth, polished, and there were sand drifts in all the rooms, sometimes three feet deep. It looked—deserted.

Donovan shook his head. "Dead world!"

"What?"

"Dead world," he repeated. "Dead civilization. Stories written about it—"

"You read too much! Let's get down there!"

Fifteen miles of winding stairway. Downward. Donovan thought, often, of the climb back upward. But gravity was less than Earth's. And there was the winding ribbon of the "highway" below, beckoning. And the thought of leaking seams and meager supplies of oxygen. Downward. Fifteen miles.

They reached the "highway," if it were a highway. Each ribbon was wider than they had thought, a good 3000 feet wide. Each ribbon was separated from the other by a low, narrow wall. They were made of some rubberlike substance, but hard, cracked. Dried up.

It was past noon. Donovan looked at the Sun. Darned near the Equator, he guessed. Summer. They checked their air tanks.

"We've got enough for a good forty-eight hours," Donovan said. "Martian day is around twenty-four hours long, so our chronometers will be fairly close on that. Let's follow this road."

They followed its winding course down the canal. Twenty-five miles wide, the canal floor was the same fine yellow sand as the upper desert. Darker maybe. Almost brown. Scattered clumps of green, leafy shrubs crouched on the gritty soil. The "highway" was the only hard surface on the floor. They followed it for miles.

The sky was darkening when they came to the city. Turning a deep, shaded red. Fading from scarlet to crimson to dark, blackish maroon. Like blood from an intestinal wound.

Tall, polished, slender towers, gleaming in the sunset. Thousands of them, crammed into a vast bowl carved into the surface of the planet. Three great canals converged upon it.

Deserted.

They wandered along the ghostly, echoing streets as twilight broke across the sky. A great red blanket seemed to roll away and the sky turned a smoky, dense black. Then faded before a soft, pale light, and the stars came through in a sparkling flood. And they found machines.

CARS, obviously. Small, three-wheeled affairs, flat and streamlined. Elfin lamp-posts along the corners. Plate glass windows staring blankly, emptily. Plentiful, machined metals and hard plastics; very little that even resembled wood. Nothing broken. Nothing damaged. Just deserted.

They halted in the stygian darkness, somewhere in the center of that vast metropolis, and suddenly, nervously began to wonder where they were.

Lost!

Donovan sat down on a curb, leaned back against a slender lamppost, and grinned up faintly from within his helmet.

"Sit down and rest awhile," he ordered wearily. "My dogs are killing me."

"But Charley!" Her voice edged on hysteria.

"Sit down," he spoke sharply, "before you fall down!"

She sat down on the curb and huddled next to him, her eyes darting fearfully about the night-swallowed street. Starlight picked them out dimly in what appeared to be a long, black canyon.

"This dump has me vexed," he admitted casually. "Did you notice those super-deluxe jobs back there?"

"What—"

"Those hopped-up and sleek-lined Rolls Royces we've seen over-parking all over the place," he drawled quietly. "Did you look in 'em?"

She looked up, grinning. "I think I'm going to like you after all, Charles Donovan!"

He looked back. "*Ahhh*—what I wouldn't give for a cigarette right now! But did you *look* in 'em?"

"Y-y-yes. The cushions had decomposed. Just the frames on the seats. Anything else?"

"No controls."

She gasped. "No steering wheels!"

"No steering wheels, no gearshift, no pedals. No instruments, no dashboard clocks, no cigarette lighters. I wish I had a smoke!"

She giggled. "I am going to like you! But did you notice that none of the doors have handles or knobs or buttons, and there haven't been any wires or cables of any sort anywhere?"

"Yeah. Vexing."

"Am I?"

"Later, baby. This is upsetting."

She giggled again. "Okay, Mr. Spatial Engineer. So they don't drive their cars. They just climb in and go where the car wants to go!"

"I don't know— What's that?"

Something—*something*—was grinding and squeaking and trundling down the street toward them!

LIKE a flash they were on their feet, stumbling back across the curb until they were flat against the building, clinging to each other. Or—or was it on the sidewalk, coming after them? Donovan stared into the darkness as hot beads of sweat broke on his forehead. Light! If they only had light—

They had light!

A squat, turtle-backed machine rolled down the street on its three tiny wheels, lifted its front apron and climbed up on the sidewalk, and rolled up in front of them. It flicked open a panel on its rounded metal top and a long, jointed arm snaked out toward them. The arm stopped, poised directly before Donovan's helmet.

And in its jointed metal digits was—a cigarette!

Made to order. Everything. The elfin street lamps glowed brightly along the street. The little robot machine squatted complacently before them, holding out the cigarette.

Donovan stared at it. He moved his lips. No sound. Then he grinned, and a curious flame began flickering in his eyes.

"Not now, thanks," he said casually.

The arm retreated into the metal shell, the panel clicked shut, and the disgruntled little robot sung off the sidewalk and went trundling, squeaking on back down the street.

"Pinch me!" Audry's voice suddenly squawked in his earphones.

"Now, look here—"

"I said pinch me!"

He pinched. Through the thick layers of the pressure suit it was quite a job. It was also quite a pinch. Audry yelled.

"Stop! All right, I'm not dreaming!" But she still clung to him. "Charley darling, if we're going mad, I think this is wonderful."

"Repeat!"

Her helmet clicked against his and her voice came through. "I think this is wonderful."

"We got light."

"So we have. And you got your cigarette." She wriggled free, then. "But I'll bet I can think of something that'll have em—"

"Don't!"

His sharp tone made her tense. "Charley, what is it—"

"I think I know," he said slowly. "Psychemechanics!"

"You mean—they controlled them by thought?"

He nodded. "You know what that means? That means a civilization—"

"Far greater than ours—" she finished, murmuring. There was awe in her tones. "Charley, where did they all go?"

"I don't know. Maybe something happened. They apparently had quite a social order, to have all this. Everything at the tip of their minds! Everything at the slightest desire. Food, clothes, luxury. Nobody could have been needy! Civilization. Then something happened. Maybe all thought stopped!"

She was back in his arms. "Charley, please. Not that! Say something else."

He held her close, gazing down at her. "I'd like to take you for a long, moonlight ride—"

It was just a faint murmur. He waited. Then added, insistently, "On a Greyhound bus!"

And it came!

They were hugging each other and laughing as the monstrous vehicle rumbled up and stopped at the curb beside them. It wasn't a bus, but it was probably as near and as big as the Martians could come to those specifications. It was, actually, a giant, open-topped moving van.

"Once around the park, Jeeves!" The thought bounced gleefully into his mind as he shoved Audry toward the van. It waited patiently until they had clambored up to the seats, squatting on the low metal frames that had once boasted cushions. Then it was off.

Audry gasped in surprise. "Where's it taking us?"

Donovan told her.

THEY rode through a park, somewhere in the midst of the great city. They rode through the streets until dawn. Everywhere they went, they wished the lights on, until the entire metropolis seemed alive with light. They gazed up at the dark, mute towers—and wished lights to appear scatteringly up their steep walls. Lights appeared.

"Like lamplighting along old Broadway!" Donovan howled joyously. It was fun!

They entered buildings through obligingly opening doors, ascended obliging lifts into the towers, explored offices, apartments, stores. They imagined all the vast, glittering wealth that must once have existed.

Dawn peeped over the lip of the great, deep cup of the city.

"I wonder where it gets its power!" Donovan gazed back at the wide bed of the van as it swung gaily along the avenue. He turned back to Audry, seated beside him, with a frown.

The van swung off into a wide boulevard. Ahead of them, the street separated, curving out around what seemed to be a large, gaping hole. The van rolled up to the wall at its edge and stopped. They stared downward into a deep shaft that seemingly vanished into the very bowels of the planet. Great tubes sprouted from the walls and plunged downward out of sight. Faint, white streamers of steam wafted upward.

"Steam!" Donavan snorted with disgust. "Steam for power. And maybe transmission on a communal power-wave system similar to ours. Only we use nucleonics and nuclear energy."

"Charles!"

He jerked back, startled.

"Chazz that's it!" Her voice was alight with sudden inspiration. "I knew there was something missing! No engines, no power units—just masses of electronic tubing. Nothing recognizable as a mesonic transformer or atomic plant anywhere! Chazz, they didn't have nuclear energy!"

"Lucky for us!" Donovan mused wryly. "As it is, we came here!"

"Maybe."

"Something else I've noticed, cupcake. They didn't have television—or even radio! Remember the apartments? No sets!"

"Do you suppose—" Then she was staring, with suddenly bright gaze, across the great chasm. "Look! Isn't that a resort of some sort? It—it looks like a *pool!*"

Donovan swung his gaze to follow hers. It did look like a resort! Take Earth standards, apply them to a low, sprawling, five-story structure amidst rolling lawns and a wire-fenced court and a rectangular hole between tile-flagged walks and what do you get?

Pool! Lawns! On Mars?

"Get over there!" he yelled to the van. But it was already moving.

"Do you suppose it isn't harmful?" Audry stared, aghast, as cool, green water gurgled into the pool.

"Distilled from volcanic gasses, maybe," Donovan ventured. "Apparently they've got grass somewhere on Mars, too. Maybe in the 'seas.' These lawns—" He turned toward them, toward the streamlined villa rising before them. "I'm going to have a look around!"

He stalked off purposefully. Audry remained by the pool, staring wistfully at the cool, green water lapping at its sides. Donovan vanished through the wide doorway of a sun porch.

Moments later, she turned to gaze about her warily. She glanced back at the villa, then at the pool, now full. She glanced at the doorway where Donovan had disappeared. Then she glanced down at the fastenings to her quartzite helmet and frowned with disgust.

Something came flying out of the air and struck her helmet. She had a fleeting glimpse of a chunk of reddish stone and pieces of quartzite sailing past her head and then she was tumbling, head over heels, into the lapping green water.

Donovan came tearing out of the villa as her howls rent the air. He could barely hear them through his helmet and it didn't occur to him in the slightest that they were hers. But somebody was howling!

Then he saw her, in the pool, struggling in the water. Her broken helmet was visible on the bottom of the pool, beneath her. She was fighting out of the last folds of her pressure suit, thrashing nudely in the clear

green water, gasping and gurgling as her head went under, shrieking like a banshee when it came up.

"Chazz—Chazz! Get that mean rock thrower—" Blub!

He flipped open the speaker on his helmet and yelled. "Audry! The air! Your helmet is gone."

SHE wrung free of the last vestiges of garment, dog-paddling on the surface of the pool, and her face was flushed with anger. "Air be hanged! You go catch the dirty skunk who smashed my helmet! He nearly scared the wits out of me!"

Donovan stared, speechless. Then he sat down and, in spite of the lovely, pink nymph treading water so delightfully before him, roared with laughter.

She came up out of the pool like an avenging angel, stalked grimly over to him and hauled off and kicked him squarely in his padded chest. He fell back on his airtanks, gasping.

"Audry! Audry, you're—"

"—good and mad! You no-good, worthless, lazy—" Suddenly, her expression changed. Then she was on her knees, beside him. "Chazz darling, the water's fine."

And they gazed into each other's eyes for a couple or three of eternities . . .

Mars was like Earth, only different. Earth was two-thirds under water, one third dry land. Mars was two-thirds stratospheric, one third under atmosphere. Breathable atmosphere.

They fished Audry's pressure suit from the pool that evening, bundled the two suits under their arms, and climbed onto the van. No more was said about the—something—that had shattered her helmet, and then vanished completely. She hadn't even caught a glimpse of it, whatever it was. But Donovan had taken the effort to wrench a light, strong metal bar from a railing on the fenced court. It was long and straight, and made a good spear.

Mere recollection of their hike up the canal seemed enough for the van. It swung into the highway unerringly, selecting a specific lane, and whisked them back toward the spot where they had descended into the canal.

The elevator shaft in the tower was just large enough to accommodate the van. Donovan took it up—the lift worked—and returned to the broken hulk of the *Starling*. Audry waited at the foot of the tower, spear in hand. He returned with supplies, equipment and an extra pressure suit. Audry surprised him with an extra van.

"I just wished it up, and here it was!" she exclaimed happily. "Maybe these machines have just gotten used to having us around!"

They found a small, cozy residence farther down the canal. What was more, there was a small, warm lake at its gateway, fed by deep artesian springs. The surrounding canal floor was lush with greenery. They made further trips to the *Starling*, stripping it of supplies, equipment, and whatever pieces of wreckage they might need for improvising.

They immediately set about making tests. Of radiation, atmosphere, water, soil, and vegetation. The air was all right, as far as their knowledge of elementary biochemistry went. Maybe it wasn't. Ditto for the water in their artesian lake. Humidity was a thing to dream about. You just didn't find it. They cleaned out the bungalow, set up housekeeping, got the ventilation running and constructed a small heating unit.

They lived cozily, happily in their little bungalow for a full six months.

Occasionally they would take a run along the canals, exploring, in the sleek little runabout they had commandeered. But most of their time was spent working, planning, studying, figuring, and working some more. And one other thing—toward the last, Donovan began to notice that he was going to become a father.

He stood out in the yard with his head towering up against the stars and let the cool night flow over him. That was all, just cool. Summer. No breeze, ever. Audry stood in the doorway watching him, the warm yellow light from within outlining her slender, bronzed figure.

It was good, here. Sun was weak, but more of it came through. And the gravity was light. It made you feel like jumping over Phobos, or working like a horse. Air was good, too—dry, sharp, exhilarating. It was fine.

He moved out across the yard, picking his way in the faint starlight. His bare feet were used to the warm, caressing sand. A square, dark form loomed suddenly ahead of him. The monument.

It had been constructed to commemorate something or other. There was a smooth metal plaque sunk into its side, covered with faint, queer wriggly lines. Martian lingo.

But the top had been sawed off, square, as if somebody hadn't liked the statue that had been there. It was wide and square, built to support a statue.

He stepped around it to the far side, where the marks he had made showed darkly. He counted them for the zillionth time, mused. Thirty days hath September, April, June, and—yeah, they had been here six Earth months! He picked up a darkish lump of rock at his feet, bent, and carefully scratched another mark for the day just past. He straightened to gaze at his work with satisfaction.

AS HE STEPPED around the monument, back toward the house, he saw Audry standing in the doorway. For a moment he gazed at her, thinking how wonderful it all had been—perhaps giving a small thought to how horrible it could have been. Then, on impulse, he stooped before the monument and, beneath the cold metal plaque, began scrawling.

Mars is red,
And Earth is blue:
You're lovely and sweet—
And—

He straightened, then, looking down at his work with a shy, boyish guilt. A soft footfall sounded behind him. He whirled. And Audry, gazing at the dark scrawl leaped into his arms.

"Oh, Charley, Charley—"

"Heh! Here, now, Mrs. Donovan! Come, come!"

They walked slowly back toward the house. She lifted her head, glancing up at him with a frown, just once.

"What's bothering you, luscious?" he asked quietly.

"Honey, I'm afraid! I don't see how we can do it!"

"Why not? Nothing but a piece of old pipe missing."

"Not just any piece of old pipe, darling. You know that." Her frown deepened. "If only it hadn't been smashed—"

"Yeah," he agreed bitterly, "if only. One little piece of pipe in a radar apparatus. All we need is a shiny piece of tube, shaped just *so,* without the slightest, teensy-est scratch or blemish inside it. Otherwise—no radar! So we guess and fool around and maybe in two and a half years they'll land on Mars and maybe even find us with all the whole danged planet to explore."

"Maybe we should have spent our time planting—"

"Or finding something to plant!" he snapped irritably. "Vegetation, lots of it, but not a bite to eat! Think we're caterpillars?"

She stared at the ground as they approached the lighted doorway. "I don't know. Do you think they'll come?"

He heaved a mighty sigh. He tightened his arm around the slender girl beside him, and smiled down at her. Maybe for the multi-zillionth time.

"The second ship will have been on its way nearly six months by now. Almost here! They were going to make the landing expedition if we succeeded, remember? But the Lunar observatories would have seen our crash. They must have sent the second ship right on out—to do what we failed to do. We spacewise jakes are born that way, snookums! You know that."

Yes, by the Lord Harry, he thought, we spacewise jakes had better be born that way! It was cool at night. They always slept well . . .

The age-old creature lay flat upon the soft, caressing sand, the keen, sensitive impulse of its alien intelligence reaching out—probing the subconscious minds of the two sleeping Earthians! And it quivered and tensed as wave after wave of maddening terror swept through its being!

It knew its purpose, but it had not, could not have been adequately prepared to fulfill that purpose! Not with these Earthians! When they, the predicted Visitors from Beyond, had arrived, it had performed every feat possible that would assist them. Now it attempted to perform its final duty—to attune their minds telepathically to the great Recorders buried within the planet, where lay the knowledge and culture of a long-dead civilization.

Centuries before, a vast civilization had bloomed and thrived on the young red planet—the civilization of a race of super-intelligence, a race of beings who were in complete telepathic accord with one another and with everyone. Every thought, every experience, of each member of that race was engraved telepathically on the intelligence of the race.

They had been giants, mentally, their civilization developing steadily, peacefully along lines which utilized machines more mental than mechanical. And onward they climbed, until they solved the secret of the

Forces of the Stars, and the first mechanical adaptation of their discoveries had massacred millions. And they had gone mad!

FEAR! It struck them instantly, forcefully, with a built-up frenzy that left them completely, helplessly insane! And so they gibbered, and giggled—and died!

And they left behind them an ageless creature, more mental than physical, as the sole remaining key to the glory that once was Mars! And it quaked in terror!

What strange, terrible creatures these Earthians were! Savage, stubborn, proud. Proud of their freedom, their prowess, their strength of character. These, truly, were Beings of the Stars! Theirs was no integral, compact civilization, theirs was the savage life on the very edge of the Unknown.

They were frontiersmen, bred of frontiersmen. *Fear,* to them, was no racial insanity—it was a test to be met, *and conquered!* And so the creature, who had never before known that mysterious quality called "courage," shuddered and thrilled with a mixture of sheer ecstasy and gibbering madness as it probed the minds of the two sleeping humans.

And here, within their minds, was that secret which had destroyed the race of Mars. But it was a secret the Earthians, too, had met—and they had conquered. As its searching thoughts touched upon that knowledge, its huge form writhed and twisted in a hell of searing, mental pain. Trembling, twittering, it crept from its lair . . .

Donovan stirred restlessly in the early morning twilight. Finally, he got up. Audry watched him with quiet amusement as he tied the loincloth about his middle. An animal wouldn't have noticed it, of course. A female had no reason to notice it. But for the human male—well, there was some slight inconvenience.

He stepped out into the faint light of dawn. He stood, breathing deeply. Then began a brisk walk around the yard, the thin film of ground-frost cool on his bare feet. He passed the monument, striding effortlessly. Then he skidded to a halt. Turned. Stared.

Mars is red,
And Earth is blue;
You're lovely and sweet—
And—I LIKE YOU TOO

He swallowed, rubbed his eyes, and stared at it again. It was still there—scratched in big, painstaking block-letters.

I LIKE YOU, TOO!

Martians! By the great Judas, Martians! *Or,* the thought came teasing, Kilroy was here!

His trance was broken by a shrill feminine cry from behind. He whirled toward the house, saw Audry standing before the high bank of instruments beneath the looming, homemade umbrella of the radar antenna. She was yelling, beckoning to him frantically. He sprang across the sand.

"Charley, look! I came out, and right away I just saw it! Look—there, beside the cavity magnetron housing. The—the *connection!*"

A silvery, gleaming little hunk of pipe. Shaped just so. It was there.

I LIKE YOU, TOO!

Donovan tensed, stepped back, and stared at the sand critically. Rather deep tracks. Small, narrow, closely set. A three-wheeled vehicle had rolled up next to the machine, then rolled away toward the gate. Accompanying it was a strange, puzzling imprint, as though someone had dragged a heavy sheet of some sort through the sand. A robot, probably, and—and what? Something that dragged and didn't make footprints!

Of all the little red imps of Mars, this was the oddest!

They completed connections. They checked the apparatus painstakingly. They tested it on Deimos, which rode obligingly in the warm crimson sky. Everything checked.

They leafed through the *Starling's* star almanac, doubly rechecking their computations as to Earth's position. They had their longitude and latitude figured as close as could be expected. They had everything figured down to the dot over the last i. It was still early morning. There was still time for a run. They tried it.

They started from Earth's position and raked the heavens in a clockwise sweep along the ecliptic . . .

On— onward it came, skimming out from the Great Unknown like a needle into the proverbial haystack!

IT WAS no meteor. No meteor ever had the clutter of that nucleonic field, or those long streamers of raw energy blazing out in its fore. The ship was coming!

Donovan got out their sleek runabout. He climbed into the back seat and checked over the squat bulk of equipment installed there. Two great blocks of heavy insulation—Pu-

239. And between them, a small clockwork mechanism and radio receiver. He checked it thoroughly. Then he checked the small, portable transmitter lying on the front seat. Finally he got out, went into the house, and crawled into a pressure suit. Audry followed him and did likewise. "I've got their trajectory," she commented briefly.

"On true?"

She nodded. "Figured the time of their passage to the exact second. Deceleration timing and everything." She clamped down her helmet and grinned at him. "We'll have a five-minute leeway, at the most."

They took the little runabout down the canal to a tower lift, and thence up onto the wide, rolling desert. The flat, wide tires skimmed easily over the dry sands as they struck straight outward from the canal.

"Chazz," Audry's voice hummed into his earphones. He turned quizzically.

"I've often wondered why the Martians didn't have atomic energy."

"So have I," he replied. "But I think I've guessed the answer. They didn't need it!"

She gazed at him, puzzled.

"They must have had a completely different concept of science from ours," he went on, musingly. "Something so vastly different that we couldn't begin to comprehend it! Their machines—they were only *half* machines! Just a mess of electronic tubing—no engines or generators of any sort. Audry, they could direct those machines with thought, but they also made them run with thought! That's something so completely alien, that—well, a man might very well go crazy just trying to analyze it!"

He was silent for a while, as the sleek car rolled briskly across the smooth desert floor.

"And then suppose the Martians *had* developed atomic power! Do you realize what it would have done? What it could have done? What are the major byproducts of an experimental nuclear pile, honey? Radiation and *heat!* Consider the power of this little do-hickey we have in the back seat! Suppose we just ran down the canal and set it off? Wouldn't do much damage."

"It would do *some* damage," Audry contradicted vaguely.

"A great deal of damage, I'm afraid! Think a minute—heat! On Earth it wouldn't mean much. We have plenty of moisture, more than we'll ever need or have a care for! Heat dissipation, honey! Think of it in terms of Martian atmosphere! Think of the small amount of moisture in that canal back there, just barely enough to be comfortable and breathable!"

"I—I think I see."

They stopped and unloaded the contraption from the back seat, then scooted back toward the canal, a good twenty miles away. They pulled up beside the tower, carried the portable transmitter out, and set it down in the sand. They scooped out a pit for themselves and waited . . .

TWILIGHT. The Sun was a blazing white mote in the vivid red sky to the West. They were swinging around to "nightside." The ship would skim past the "morning" side, plunging outward—decelerating—to swing back and skim past the "evening" side and on toward the Sun and Earth. And, meanwhile, would be photographing the planet's surface like mad!

That was their salvation. A signal! A signal that couldn't be missed.

"Ready!"

Donovan stopped twirling the transmitter's dials across its static bands, swung them back to a precise reading, and listened to the steady hum in his earphones. He watched Audry, lying beside him, hand upraised.

Waiting. She watched her chronometer, watched the little hand crawl around its dial.

"Now!"

Her hand dropped. He pressed the key on the small panel. A brilliant, intense, white flash! Then it was all over.

They scrambled to their feet, staring out across the sand.

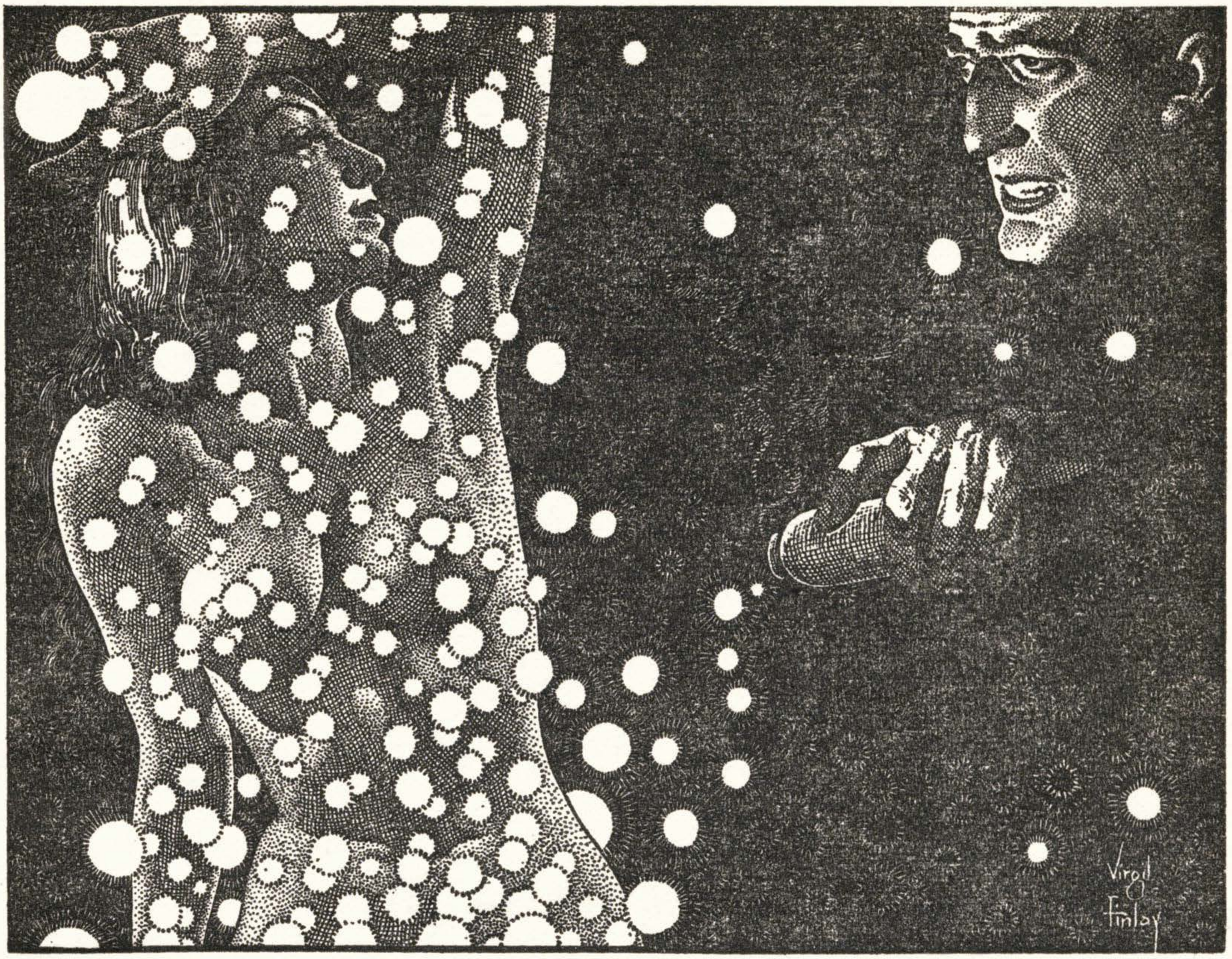
Up—straight up in a slender white column it went. Slender, twisting, like a bean-stalk. Then high, very high, the top cloud began to form. Like a giant mushroom. Just the top cloud. No double-header, like on Earth.

And suddenly, from the canal wall behind them, came a shrill, piercing scream. They jerked around, gasped in startled horror.

It was just as if some giant sting ray had been lifted out of the shallows off the Florida Keys—some gigantic, pinkish-blue, batlike creature—and dropped out of the blood-red sunset to the edge of the canal.

It stood there, staring out at the towering mushroom cloud, flapping its great flippers like some huge monster besieged by all the invisible demons of Hell! And screamed!

Screamed!



yesterday's doors

Back through the ages travels amnesiac Dean Hale—back to ancient Atlantis to unlock the portals of forgotten wisdom!

a novelet by

ARTHUR J. BURKS

CHAPTER I: *Lost Memory*

IT STARTED off like an old story. It happens every day or so in New York City. A man or woman, tired of living, becomes an amnesia victim and loses himself or herself in the crowd. A few stay lost. A few persist in not remembering as long as they can. Many are really amnesiacs.

I didn't know my name, or whether I had one. I didn't know how old I was, though I guessed about forty. I didn't remember the clothes I wore, or my face in the mirror. I had no memory of yesterday or any day, and even the events of just an hour ago slipped away from me. I knew that something was radically wrong.

How wrong it was and how long the con-

dition had lasted I had no way of surmising. I just know I found myself in a dark room, being interrogated like a criminal, by a group of men in uniform. Later I learned that the room was somewhere on Centre Street, in downtown Manhattan. The policemen and men in plainclothes I had never seen before. I never did know their names.

A grizzled man with three yellow stripes on his sleeve struck me with the back of his hand, then the front.

"You deny that your name is Dean Hale? You deny that you killed Marian Slade, cut her body to pieces and pushed them into the sewer?"

"I deny nothing," I said dully, as if I were very tired. "I never heard of Marian Slade. I never heard of Dean Hale. I don't know who I am, or where I came from, or whether I ever cut anybody to pieces or not."

There was a concerted gasp from all present.

"Well, after all these hours, it develops

you *do* have a tongue, and can use it. I thought we'd never hammer anything out of you."

So, for several hours, they had been working on me like this, "hammering" me, as the sergeant had just said—and though I now felt that I had been much abused, I didn't remember so much as one of the blows that had been dealt me. I recite this to indicate the utter depths of my "lostness." A man, even a victim of amnesia, should remember when he has been beaten half to death.

"I don't know anything about myself," I said.

"Now don't go a-trying that amnesia gag on us," said one of the men in plainclothes.

Just then another party entered the darkroom, which was dark everywhere but where I sat under blazing electrics.

"He's not Dean Hale, has no record here at all," said the newcomer. "His prints don't match with Hale's."

All I knew now was that I wasn't somebody named Dean Hale.

"He has to be somebody," said a plainclothes man, "Dean Hale or not—and when we find out who, the fact will also remain that he killed Marian Slade."

HOW unreal the whole thing was to me. I realized no danger in myself in these accusations. I forgot blows after they had been struck. I think I even forgot to feel the pain of them. Finally my inquisitors gave it up.

"We'll make a check in Missing Persons," someone said.

They didn't find me there, either, though they held me three days while they checked. I forgot the three days, each of them, until long after—until I had the pictures clearly enough in mind that I could set down the facts as I am now doing. The police finally decided I wasn't a murderer, but that I was "missing," actually and mentally, an amnesia victim who could not be aroused. That's where Jan Rober, one of the plainclothes men came in.

"A touch of shock treatment might help you," he told me, visiting me alone and somewhat mysteriously in my cell. "There is a laboratory near Westchester I'm interested in. Modern equipment, far in advance of science. Nobody knows about it. Sometimes I take missing persons there, to help them remember. The surgeons, doctors, scientists there, are my friends."

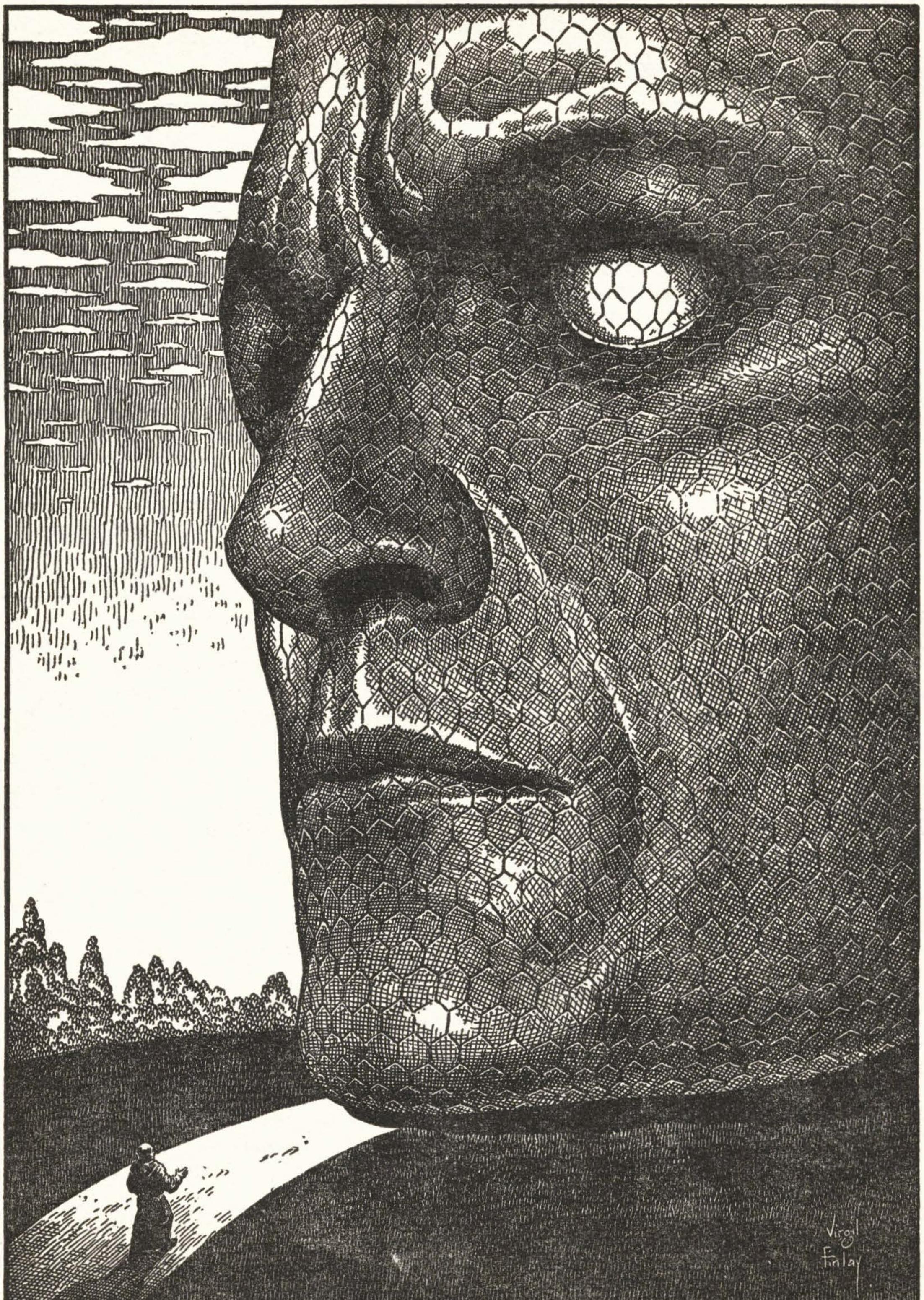
"They pay you to find people who are lost, for whom no one is likely to inquire, and take them there?" I asked, wondering from what deep well of verbal knowledge I dredged the words, and the fear that inspired them. Jan Rober's eyes narrowed.

"You're accusing me of something?" he said softly.

"I don't know," I said, "but it just occurred to me that medical and surgical science is often hampered because it can't work with human beings, though how this occurs to me I don't know. Assembling missing persons, orphans, people in whom nobody has the slightest interest, whose eternal disappearance would cause no questioning, would be a boon to such scientists, and a source of revenue to whoever provided them with human guinea pigs."

"For an amnesiac," he said, "your thinking is to the point."

"But I'd just as soon be dead and buried as to know nothing of myself," I went on. "I find I don't care overly much. But do



Swiftly I strode along the path, toward the strange Building of the Skull

you believe that I may somehow be shocked out of amnesia? Don't forget, a lot of heavy hands have been laid on me in the last few days—if what you've just told me is true—and the hands haven't shocked me into remembering."

"There are shocks, *and* shocks," he said. "Ever hear of the atom bomb? Know anything about electrons? Ever hear of a cyclotron? Part of the work of my friends is in the field of nuclear fission, which means less to me than it does to you; though just between us, if *you* aren't a surgeon—from your fingers—I never saw one. Besides, the gent who cut up Marian Slade knew his surgery."

That gave me a little chill. *Was* I a surgeon? *Had* I slain some woman named Marian Slade? Was I innately capable of cutting a human body to bits and pushing the pieces into the sewer? I didn't know!

"If I did anything like that, Rober," I said, "then if your friends cut *me* into little pieces, I have merely paid off for Marian Slade."

"And escaped the electric chair!" said Rober drily. "Also, your memory is better than it was: you remember my name, and I told it to you once, when I came in. Well, you're going to be released in my custody in an hour or so. If you care to trust me, we'll visit The Lab."

The Lab! That's all it was ever called, if memory serves me, and memory does serve me now. The Lab! Nobody, once having experienced a little segment of it, could possibly ever again have forgotten it.

It wasn't much to look at, from the outside; just a squatty, large, square building of gray granite, in the midst of a clearing in Westchester's wooded area. It was wired like a prison, and there were signs warning people away. There were also people standing guard. The Lab was either a prison or a sanitarium—but not once while I was there did I see anybody in the place who could conceivably have been a convict or a patient. I saw only the doctors, the surgeons, if such they were, the scientists, and Marian Slade!

Yes, Marian Slade was the name of the nurse, and she was about the prettiest young woman—too young for me, in fact—I had ever seen. When I was introduced to her, I said:

"Oh, yes, Dean Hale murdered you, cut you into small pieces, and thrust you into a sewer."

Her face was impassive, her eyes did not flicker or show alarm. She only said, quite calmly,

"Yes, Mr. Hale, I remember every detail. Now, be good enough to follow me."

I WAS being treated like a maniac who might become violent. This nurse, with the name of a murdered woman, was coddling me, treating me gently, so I wouldn't erupt! Jan Rober left me with her and was gone, and in my imagination I could hear the rustling of bills of large denomination. I never expected to get out alive. I didn't much care.

Marian Slade took me to a room, told me what to do with the roomy garments she gave me. I found myself, shortly, in a kind of nightshirt, standing on the threshold of a room of gadgets. Yes, I must be a doctor, or some sort of scientist, for I recognized many of the gadgets there. This room was an up-to-date surgery. It had everything.

It had everything including the pygmy cyclotron, set in the mathematical center of the room. Marian Slade didn't introduce the men in white to me. I was never to know their names. She told them I was Dean Hale though Jan Rober must have told her I wasn't. She needed a handle by which to identify me, and the police had called me that for days.

I wondered idly how Jan Rober would explain my "escape" to his colleagues, unless all of them were in league with The Lab to produce "willful missin's."

In the room were great oxygen tanks, trays behind glass filled with surgical instruments, operating tables, X-Ray machines, a fluoroscope, pale screens against a far wall—screens against which, well, just what sort of strange pictures might not be shown?

My eyes kept returning to the cyclotron. It fascinated me. If it worked it was a masterly thing. Cyclotrons took up a building in themselves. How did I know that? The question flashed through my mind, and the answer, if any had been hovering on the verge of my consciousness, vanished into the general blur of all my yesterdays, my passing hours.

Near the cyclotron, if that's what it was, were twelve chairs, above which were metal globes, or hoods, like hair dryers, the chairs set in a kind of semi-circle around three sides of the cyclotron. Each chair was just the right size to hold a human body.

I glanced past the chairs—nobody had yet

asked me to sit down, and Marian Slade had disappeared somewhere behind me—and spotted the electric panel for the first time. But another minute passed, a minute during which the profound scrutiny of the "scientists" became deeper, more profound, before I connected the electric panel with the chairs.

Those seats arranged around the cyclotron were electric chairs! Each chair would be filled with a human being, and all could be electrocuted at one time, and if all were "vanishers," who would care?

"Gentlemen," I said, "you might ask me to be seated! Just which of the electric chairs has been assigned to me?"

There was a stir among the twelve men who had ranged themselves around the great room to await my coming. One of them, the eldest, now that I had discovered they were not dummies, but living men, bowed to me gravely and said:

"Welcome to the Lab, Mr. Hale, if that is your name. Allow me to introduce you to my colleagues. You will understand, later on, our reasons for failing to furnish correct names. I am Doctor A."

Then he gave me the initials of the others, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L. I never knew them by anything else. They varied in appearance as men usually do, and their ages ran from perhaps twenty-five to seventy-five, Doctor A being obviously the eldest and the dean of the Lab.

Even the fact that all were men in white did not serve to hide their differences. Their eyes were unusual, all of them. I think they held a coldness, a searching hard coldness, in common. They were men of science, by their appearance, and they were ruled by science.

Each would have given his life for science, if by so doing he did not slow the progress of science instead of advancing it. That is, he would have given his life if he had not realized that his death would be a great loss to his chosen field. By the same token, not one of them regarded the life of any individual as being important enough to fuss much about. Understand this is only my personal opinion, the personal opinion of a man lost in the utter depths of amnesia.

Those twelve men, however, struck me forcibly, short men, thin, fat, tall, so that the urge was on me to make sketches of them. Just why, I did not know, never having made a sketch of anyone I could remember, never before having desired to sketch any one. Perhaps I should have told some of them of this urge. Maybe it would have helped in backtracking, identifying me. But perhaps they did not wish me to be further identified.

"You have lost your memory," said Doctor A. "You have been brought here to recall your yesterdays. There is some danger to you in this shock treatment though we take every precaution known to science. Do you wish to know yourself strongly enough to take the risk, and to absolve us therefrom? To take your place in a chair by your own free will?"

"If I do not, Doctor A," I said, "isn't it true that I will placed in the selected chair forcibly?"

"Mr. Hale," said Doctor A, "you are at liberty to leave. Nurse Slade will escort you to the door of the Lab, and you may go where you wish. You may even return to your home and report everything that has happened to you here."

DR. A's words aroused my resentment. Here I was, lost, and he talked of home!

"My home!" I said, bitterly. "And just where is my home? Look, Doc, the ordinary ways of restoring the amnesiac have been tried on me without success. This seems my only out. I've been doubtful, because there have been so many strange things connected with it. I was accused, for example, of murdering Marian Slade, cutting her to pieces and thrusting the pieces into a sewer. Yet when I arrive at The Lab I am met by none other than Nurse Marian Slade. You must admit that this could be disturbing."

The doctors let out a concerted sigh. I moved forward as Doctor A bent slightly, his eyes indicating the chairs. As I moved he came to meet and escort me, while the other eleven "scientists" closed in, with something akin to threat in their advance. If a man were not mentally ill when he came to these people, he soon might well be ill. Naturally, I doubted my own sanity. Maybe none of this actually existed save in my addled, lost brain.

I climbed into the central chair. To my amazement the eleven scientists took the other chairs, while Doctor A stood between me and the cyclotron to conduct the experiment, or whatever was to be conducted. The other doctors began to strap themselves into their chairs, as I was being strapped into

mine by Doctor A. I realized that, through the use of the atom-smasher, the cyclotron, eleven scientists were somehow going to share whatever was due to happen to me.

Just before Doctor A lowered and adjusted the metal hood over my head, I saw eleven pairs of hands raise up, as women lift their hands to adjust their hats, and pull down eleven hoods to hide their varied faces.

Doctor A fumbled with me, attaching electrodes exactly as if I were going to be electrocuted. Whether the other men there were so wired I did not know, but why else would they have stepped under the hoods, sat in the eleven chairs?

The soft voice of Doctor A came to me as from a great distance, with eerie tones in it caused by the natural amplifier over my head.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

There was a chorus of "ayes" from the eleven.

"Mr. Hale?" continued the soft voice.

"Yes, Doctor, I am as ready as I ever expect to be."

CHAPTER II

The First Door

ABRUPTLY there was nothingness, black, impenetrable. Abruptly there was change. Abruptly I stood at the far end of a concrete sidewalk which led across a clearing of beautiful, exquisitely green grass, closely mowed. Afar to right and left dense forest formed an amphitheater for the building at the end of the sidewalk opposite me, and perhaps a hundred yards away.

At first I thought it was the Lab, but only for the briefest seconds. Doctor A's voice had somehow followed me into this great transition, for it said:

"Go ahead, Mr. Hale, hesitate not anywhere. Remember! Be sure to remember. I command you to remember!"

"My name is not Hale," I told him, as I stared at the building at the far end of the strip of sidewalk, the only strip of sidewalk on that lawn of green. "I am Father Wulstan."

Now, just how did it happen that I called myself Father Wulstan? I hadn't the slightest idea *then*, but only that I *was* Father Wulstan. But who Father Wulstan was I hadn't the slightest idea. I could not see his habit upon myself, because I still wore the nightshirt.

The shape of the building yonder was most unusual and strange. But it was familiar, fearfully familiar. It was shaped like a huge human head. The skull was bald, glistening in the sun with great brilliance, as if the sun itself nestled on the cranium.

But why the familiarity, when I could never have seen this building, or any like it, in all of my life? I asked myself these questions as I strode swiftly toward the "mouth," the front of the building. After all, how did I know I'd never before seen such a building, when I could not remember my yesterdays?

I was close enough that the facade of the strange building was beginning to lose its details, to become a smoothly rounded front, when I understood why the Building of the Skull looked so familiar.

The building's facade was my own face!

The skull was my skull, vastly magnified!

Whoever had erected this weird building had most certainly used my skull, or the skull of a twin of mine, as his model!

I had scarcely absorbed this utterly fantastic thought than I realized something else, something that I could not have seen until I lost the outer, apparent detail of the Building of the Skull, by coming close enough to see smaller, more intimate details. Then I made my second, most amazing discovery. The Building of the Skull was walled, roofed and domed, by an infinite mosaic of tiny hexagonal doors! They were doors of a strange shining metal which something inside told me was far more precious than gold.

There was a tiny lock in each door, in each lock a tiny key, and the voice of Doctor A, calm, sure, unexcited, came again to direct me.

"Choose the proper key, Father Wulstan. You know which one it is!"

My hand went unerringly to one of the tiny gray keys in one of the tiny gray doors. My thumb and forefinger turned the key without difficulty, as if the key and the lock were forever freshly oiled. It made no sound.

As the little door opened, there was the sensation of speed, but not of crossing a threshold. Memory came rushing back, so swiftly that I, Father Wulstan, did not even know that I had forgotten anything. The

place was the crypt of Saint Dennis, far under the church, deep in the bowels of the earth. The country was England. The time was midnight or thereabouts. The day was Thursday. The year was 792 A.D. Nothing in the mind of Father Wulstan, at this time, considered the year 1947, because it had not yet come.

There were three other priests with me, all older than I. They were very old. I was thirty. I was devout, God loving, almost a religious fanatic. But I loved mankind, too, wished to do for him all that the Master had intended. I was the keeper of the faith, the doer of works. The others were Fathers Dennis, Paul and Elihu.

In both my hands I held an intricate model of dried clay. It was a model of something I had seen many times in dreams. It was a conveyance, a conveyance like none known hitherto in the history of the world, in any history I had ever read or heard of. It certainly was not mentioned in Holy Writ, unless that certain passage in the Revelation of Saint John the Divine were this—wherein he spoke of "flying things out of The Pit."

THIS conveyance, I realized, complete in every detail save the power by which it might travel, was intended to travel in the air, at any height, like a bird—like the fastest bird known to nature. I had shaped this thing with my loving hands. Its details had come to me in a series of dreams. It had wings of an especially beautiful design. I had burnished the gray of the clay so that it shone, for I had visioned the sun gleaming on those wings.

Below the wings was the body of my artificial "bird," and under that body were two wheels. The wheels flared slightly outward, and were joined to the body by straight staves—and herein was I thrice puzzled. In my dream the outer rims of the wheels had been soft, pliable, so that on the ground the "bird" traveled without bouncing. I knew that the staves were of metal, but while I had seen it often in dreams, I had never seen its name.

I felt sure that man had not yet found the metal needed for the wings of my "metal bird." There was something else about it: there were three vents, carefully spaced, under each of the two wings. What traveled through those vents I did not know. I had a "metal bird" which I knew would fly, because I had constructed it again, several

I had seen this "metal bird" in dreams

times, in wood and paper. Alone in the woods about Saint Dennis, I had flung the model into the air, and it had flown. I had then destroyed my models of wood and paste and paper. I did not know why.

But one thing I did know; if my metal bird did not yet possess the will to fly, if it were as man had been before God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living soul, then the world was not ready for my metal bird. Yet, if the world were not ready, why had I, a priest of God, dreamed of the metal bird, and finally, made of it a thing of clay only because proper metals, proper gums for the wheels, and proper motive power, were not yet available? I was a true priest, religiously descended from Peter the Rock, against which, as the foundation of the Church, "all Hell might not prevail."

"It is the work of the devil!" said Father Dennis, who had taken the name of this church for which all of us labored. "It should be destroyed."

I studied the face of the saintly old priest, who had done so much for humanity in the sixty-odd years of his priesthood. The face was familiar, for I had known him all the days of my own ministry.

"It is not the work of the devil, Father," I said softly. "It is the work of man, of myself, Father Wulstan of Saint Dennis. I based it on a dream, as did Saint John the Divine, who also saw winged chariots on Patmos."

"You, my son," Father Dennis pointed out, "are not Saint John the Divine, for all your piety. I say the thing should be destroyed."

"But it has been agreed, since I told you of this model, and showed it to you three as the oldest and wisest of all the brethren of Saint Dennis, that we should not give it to science, but should hide it away secretly, here in the crypt of Saint Dennis. Then, what becomes of it in course of time, is in the Hands of God, Who sent me the dream!"

I disliked even that much concession, but they were wise in religion, and I would not stand against them. My greatest desire was not to hide the trim, sleek model away, but to give it to science and beg of science to find the motive power and the missing metals. I would then pray that the Father work closely with science—provided the world was ready for what this dream might give it.

However, here was the climax. I was, besides being a priest, like many another priest. I did things that were not of the ministry. I invented things, dreamed of things that would make earthly life easier for my people. Some priests invented rare wines. Some copied the sacred books in colored inks, spending all their lives to attain written perfection. Some priests studied the stars and came by rare secrets, some of which the church called heresy, some of whom died because of their heresy. I did not believe that was heresy, or that the priests should have died. For myself I believed in earthly as well as spiritual progress.

For that reason I invented things for busy women, for laboring men, for growing children. I invented blocks with letters on them, that could be piled together. Countless other things I brought into the waking state out of my dreams, and made them real. Countless things I assembled while I was awake, between times of busy, devout ministering in my church, the ancient, venerable Saint Dennis.

TO BURY this model made me feel guilty. Yet my belief in the future of man was such that I knew somewhere up there ahead, generations perhaps, the missing elements of my dream for this model, would be "discovered." That was the reason I agreed to hide the model "metal bird." How and when, if ever, would it be found? Without faith I could not have endured the emptiness of the obvious answer—that eventually, in course of time, Saint Dennis would crumble into ruins, reining those ruins down upon the crypt, burying it for all time from the sight of men, losing to men the thing I had brought into being from my dream inspired.

Other things I had shaped, invented, had come into human use, had bettered the living of mankind. Why should this "metal bird" be an exception?

So, we made a niche for the metal bird in solid rock, a niche which was itself a kind of chapel, just big enough to take the spread wings of the metal bird. I looked at the six vents under the clay wings, and the wheels and staves from which essential elements were missing, and wondered if ever inventive man, in all his generations, had ever left so much to faith in God, and man's future?

We blocked the small "chapel" with a rectangle of stone, and cemented it tightly. I

marked the Cross and date upon it in red paint, and blessed myself and my fellow priests before we left the crypt. I was sick at heart, but knew we had done rightly. Two of the three priests had agreed with me that at the very least it could do no harm to preserve the clay model of the metal bird.

As we left the crypt, the flames of guttering candles highlighted the faces of Dennis, Paul and Elihu. They were, as I have said, saintly faces. There was also, I felt, a coldness, a hardness in them, that reminded me of something—something far past, a memory so far back it eluded me entirely. The bodies, the faces, the vestments, were those of the church. The eyes were the eyes of those who sought truth otherwheres than in the church, the eyes of scientists.

I felt the urge to make sketches of their faces. I often did this, and they enjoyed posing.

"I'd like, Father Dennis, Father Paul, Father Elihu," I said, " to make sketches of each of you and the three of you together. I wish I had thought in time. I would have made the sketch and left it behind the rectangle of stone, with my metal bird of dreams."

Father Dennis crossed himself.

"I am glad my likeness does not repose anywhere with this devil's work we have imprisoned behind the red cross! But," and he smiled, "I do not mind another sketch. You have something new in each sketch you make of me!"

So they posed, and I made a sketch of each of them, and of the three together. Then Father Paul brought me a reflecting glass—of a special design I had created for our use in the church of Saint Dennis—and I looked at myself in it, and sketched myself among these three brethern of the church of Saint Dennis. Then I made an end for a little time.

CHAPTER III

Far Retrospect

WHEN we had made an end of sketching—out on the grounds of Saint Dennis, during a period of rest and meditation—we separated and returned to our cells. As I walked back to my cell which was also my workshop, many other priests met me, spoke my name, Father Wulstan, and asked for my blessing. I was a priest with a future in the church, in the world. I was a man of importance as a man as well as a priest.

I remembered the faces of those who met and were blessed by me, there on the grounds and in the austere halls of Saint Dennis, and when I reached my cell-workshop, I made sketches of each of them. Like the first three, Fathers Dennis, Paul and Elihu, there was a familiarity about them that did not stem from daily acquaintance, but from something else, from some elder world, or older time.

I did not understand it, or anything about it, except that the urge to make the sketches was as strong as the urge had always been since the dream, to complete the metal bird model. Such urges, I had always been sure, came from God. Thus I explained my urges, which I never allowed at any time to interfere with the manifold duties of my ministry.

It was a beautiful setting, rural England in 792 A.D., and the church of Saint Dennis one of the saintliest in the land. Many saintly priests, many advanced spirits, came to Saint Dennis for what we could teach them there—and there were many who were taught earthly things by me in my workshop. In some way my fame as a builder of things had traveled in Christendom, so that others wished to know.

When the devotions of the day were over, and it was time to sleep, I lay back on my rough cot with a sigh, fell intently to sleep. No sooner had today, and England, and Saint Dennis' church, vanished from my conscious memory, than a terrifying variation of my dream of the metal bird descended upon me.

I was inside the metal bird, and it was more than large enough to hold me, and the metal bird was flying at vast, awesome speed, speed that was as the speed of spirit, or of sound. Yes, I knew the speed of sound, and of light. The metal bird did not travel with the speed of light but it did travel faster than sound, for far behind me as I flew, with my hands fast on the odd instruments which guided the bird, I heard an awesome noise. It pursued me.

"Now I understand that if I had traveled faster than sound, the sound would never have reached my ears, but I heard it anyway and allowed a little for the oddity, the inconsistencies of dreams, as I trusted others would also make allowances."

I flew far above the earth, and was terrified, so that I pointed the bill of the metal bird downward, to return me to earth as quickly and safely as possible. I aimed the bill at the gleaming brightness of a doomed building that looked to be a cathedral, though shaped somewhat like a skull. It seemed to be all windows, and on each window—all were small—the light of the sun was reflected. Surely even I could make my way to a spot so bright with God's sunlight.

When I aimed the bill of the metal bird at the "cathedral" however, I found I could not swerve it again. I saw that I was going to plunge into that Golgothic building, at this vast speed I was making. That it would destroy me I knew, but that did not seem to matter as much as the sure knowledge that it would also destroy the metal bird which thus would be lost to mankind forever.

I crashed through the building, and felt no pain. I hurtled completely through the Building of the Skull, heard the crashing about me of the destruction I wrought with the body of my metal bird. I passed through the building, emerged into the open again, low above the ground, and saw another building flashing to meet me for further destruction.

It was a rectangular building of gray stone, granite I thought, and there was a kind of fence around it, of metal I did not know. There were men in garments strange to me, guarding the place by their behavior, against attackers. Or else it was a prison, and the guards were there to see that no prisoners escaped.

I passed over the fence, crashed into the squat building, like none I had ever even dreamed of before.

This time there was no emergence. Only the crash, and silence, and utter darkness. In the darkness I felt hands upon me, shaking me, and so, shortly, I came out of the darkness, and found myself facing Doctor A. His face was alight with excitement which he seemed scarcely able to contain. I sat in my electric chair, feeling none the worse for my strange transition into the unknown. The hood no longer hid my head, the electrodes had been removed—if electrodes they were.

THE other eleven scientists were assembled about Doctor A, and they were as excited as he was. One thing struck me instantly as I remembered Saint Dennis, for I *did* remember it now, in every detail. The faces I had sketched in Saint Dennis were all represented right here in The Lab, in the faces of these scientists. Was that why they were all so excited? But of course they could not know what I had experienced, unless they had participated in it. Maybe, by the magic of the diminutive cyclotron, they had done exactly that.

"Just how long," I asked, "have I been away from you delightful gentlemen?"

"You've been sitting in that chair for twelve hours, Hale," said Doctor A. "And during that time you may well have altered the course of military progress in the world. Have you any idea what you've been doing? Do you remember, as I commanded you to remember?"

"Father Wulstan," I said slowly. "I was Father Wulstan. There were other priests, three in particular, I remember: Fathers Dennis, Paul and Elihu." I grinned. "Father Dennis was your twin, Doctor A, as Paul and Elihu were twins of Doctors D and F."

"Look at this," said Doctor A, thrusting a sketch into my hands. "Tell me what it is!"

"A sketch," I said. "By Father Wulstan, of the church of Saint Dennis."

"Which church has been lost to the world for ten centuries!" said Doctor A. "We've checked on it since you began telling us what you were doing. A great church stood on the site in the Fifteen Hundreds, but it was destroyed, and though religious antiquarians believed there was another church below it, and below that a crypt, the lost crypt of Saint Dennis, it was not proved to be a fact until yesterday. We've been in contact with the archeologists who have been excavating for several years on the site—in contact by telephone. They have found the crypt, thanks to questions I asked you while you were away, Hale. Now take a look at this."

He showed me a sketch, of which "Father Wulstan" must have made hundreds, of Father Wulstan's "metal bird." His excitement was greater than ever it had been.

"We have made photostats of it, basing details on your sketch, made right here while you were away, and flown them to Washington, to the Bureau of Aeronautics. Jan Rober took them. This is a jet plane, far in advance of anything aviation has had to date. It is faster than sound. It will pass easily through the wall of compressibility and will not go out of control. The design has been given to the nation, and shortly there will be a practical, full sized jet plane, as here specified."

I began to sink into myself, to feel a horrible depression.

"Then this is all folderol," I said. "I make sketches of priests who have the faces of Doctors A, D, F and perhaps L, only because those faces impressed themselves on me at the moment I went away. And the fact that I have designed, on paper, a jet plane that promises to be faster than any yet made, what does that prove? That I, perhaps, this nameless one whom the police called Dean Hale, whom I called Father Wulstan in my unconsciousness—or whatever the state was which that cyclotron induced—was an architect or a plane designer. All that I need to find out now, is what plane designer has been missing for how long!"

"Not so fast, Hale," said Doctor A, not one iota of his excitement dissipating under the words of my disappointment. "For there is something else you must know."

"Yes, what?"

"In the crypt of Saint Dennis a red painted cross was found on a rectangle of stone set into the solid rock. The stone was removed, and what do you suppose was found behind it?"

I grinned wryly as I answered, excitement mounting in me in spite of myself:

"A tiny hangar, just big enough for a clay model of a metal bird."

"Right! A model airplane done in clay. From the description we had over the telephone, it followed your specifications which we have just given to the Bureau of Aeronautics, exactly, to the letter."

"A hoax!" I said. "A gag!"

"There was a date on the stone hangar," said Doctor A. "The date was Seven-Ninety-Two, A.D.!"

"That could be a gag, too," I insisted, though by now I didn't believe it myself. "It could have been put there by pranksters at any time."

DOCTOR A gave me a keen glance and then shook his head.

"The crypt of Saint Dennis has been lost to the world for centuries," he said softly. "That's a proved fact. Even if the prank as you call it, was brought about, that metal bird of yours was tucked away in the crypt before fifteen hundred A.D. at which time, if records serve, the world did not use the airplane, especially the jet plane."

"Then," I said, feeling the awe my voice must have expressed, "I, whom you call Dean Hale, and Father Wulstan, are one and the same person. If true, reincarnation is a fact. What does *that* mean, after twelve hundred years?"

"The answer to that question is the answer to why The Lab was first established, Hale. You wished to remember. You are remembering."

"I'm remembering a lot I didn't bargain for," I said. "Dean Hale is Father Wulstan, or was, and Father Wulstan is now Dean Hale. Now, if you'll just tell me who Dean Hale is, I'll be satisfied!"

"Dean Hale," said Doctor A, "whoever he may turn out to be, is the total of all his past. If reincarnation is true, he has lived countless lives, many useless, many evil, many good. Thus have all men lived, if reincarnation is true. If it is, and we prove it, we as scientists are interested only in your past scientific lives."

"You mean you want me to go through more Father Wulstan stuff?" I demanded.

"You've already remembered Father Wulstan," said Doctor A, "and we are interested only in your past lives which contributed to human progress. There'll be many lives that will remain closed books to you, and to us."

"How many do I re-live?" I asked groaning. "Or even the good ones, if any there were, how many must I re-live?"

"Who knows?" asked Doctor A. "How many profitable doors are there in the walls, dome and roof of the House of the Skull?"

One thing I insisted on, before I went "back" again. I didn't go for the name of Dean Hale, if Hale were a murderer.

"Then we'll call you Everyman," said Doctor A, "since every man, in this same situation, would bring us about the same story, if his proper past lives were chosen. You are Adam Everyman. Now let's get on with the next excursion."

CHAPTER IV

Faster Than Sound

I KNEW that the eleven scientists who traveled with me, collaborated to build, through the mediation of the cyclotron, the House of the Skull; that it was an enlargement of my own skull. The "doors" were segments, the "keys" symbols of location

and identification. The Lab had seemingly proved reincarnation. Could it have been coincidence?

No, I believed I had been Father Wulstan, was still Father Wulstan in spirit, though in this life I had now forgotten, I may have refused to be a minister again. I could understand my refusal in terms of reincarnation. I had once refused, or been compelled to refuse, to do everything required of a scientist. I had hidden a most important invention away. Now I must produce it, in accordance with the Law of Consequences, of Cause and Effect.

The combined thought of the eleven colleagues of Doctor A, directed into the cyclotron, therein to assemble, by the power of thought, special hordes of electrons, could very well construct of them the Building of the Skull, which thus might not be a thought form at all—scientifically! I knew there were things in the invisible man knew, could not prove or delineate; modern experiments with nuclear fission was proving that, and this was somehow nuclear fission far in advance of modern science, according to Jan Rober. Thought could be registered. That fact had long been accepted. Mechanical means could register the weight and substance of thought. Everything that existed, even energy, and therefore thought, was composed of electrons.

I was beginning to see the deep meaning behind The Lab. From my brain alone, the scientists could recover from the Invisible Records, more of world history than could be found in books. If men had existed through endless lives, man the individual had —and I was merely one. Each was an historical record himself.

Thus The Lab seemed to have proved in its work with me. However, I did not believe it. There was no scientific authority for reincarnation, and not even the cleverest of the esoterics could prove it.

Yet, here was the Building of the Skull, tangible, for I touched it with my hands, with the hands of my body, not with astral hands. I turned a certain key in a certain door I seemed to know. . . .

And my name was Anghor, and I had forgotten either key or door, for the simple reason that when I regained "Anghor" I was actually the Anghor who had been—twelve thousand years ago! I was Anghor who had lived, and come to a catastrophic end, though at that moment Anghor did not seem to fear the end, ten thousand years before the Christian era.

I was Anghor of Atlantis, a sage, a wise man, a scientist, with all the secrets of the universe at my finger tips, and in my brain. I was thirty years old. I was cold, merciless, exacting. My science was exact science. I could even, if allowed by The Masters of Atlantis, my only superiors, have used the Creative Fiat used in The Beginning, and caused my thought forms, the thought forms of anyone, to live, to breathe, to *be!* But the Masters had taken the right to use the Creative Fiat away from everyone, including myself, because the majority of Atlanteans had misused it.

One thing I knew which stood out above all others: mankind was responsible for everything that happened to himself, even apparently natural catastrophes. The people of Atlantis, for instance, were responsible for the Creeping Mist. It was vile, slimy, almost lethal, like the thoughts of so many who had turned their backs on the teachings and warnings of The Masters. The Creeping Mist, for ten years now, had hidden the sun from Atlantis. We knew the sun was there, of course, but it never shone through, save when one went to the top of The Sun Tower, above the Creeping Mist, to observe it. This privilege had been denied me, now, for those ten years.

I was responsible, because of my radical scientific teachings, for the thoughts of the people; therefore I was responsible for The Creeping Mist. I had been shut away behind the walls of The Laboratory, in the City of the Sun, until I should have found the means of dissipating the Creeping Mist. With the Creative Fiat I could have transmuted it into rain, perhaps, for Atlantean crops; but remember, the Fiat was denied me.

In Atlantis of just before the Catastrophe, mind had reached its apex. Man had never before in world's history, even in Mu, Lemuria or Pan, advanced quite so far in his use of mind. We still used words with which to express ourselves generally, though a minority of us could communicate directly from brain to brain by thought; but even the lowliest, mentally, of us, had the power to Visualize. In other words, when a man used the Atlantean word for river, he made it clear just what river he had in mind, so that his hearers would not think, one of the River Sian, one of the River Ogra, a third of the River Linu, thus receiving his thought in a blurred way.

HOW was this done? By thought projection. On a televisor, produced by personal thought, beside the skull of the "speaker," appeared an exact replica, a picture, of the very stretch of the River Sian which the speaker had in mind. In effect, this was an adaptation of the Creative Fiat, but so was everything a man did with his brain or with his hands. The only difference was that the Creative Fiat was limitless, every adaptation of it limited, because man had limited himself by his doubts of his own ability.

I myself had invented the Televisor of Speech-Thought. Every Atlantean, even the subjugated, possessed one. It never deteriorated, because I made it of the secret metal which does not rust, tarnish, or decrease. It fitted, as a dental bridge, in the space from which the useless wisdom tooth was invariably removed from all Atlanteans as soon as possible after birth. At the will of the speaker its rays formed the Televisor, and on the Televisor the speaker wrote with his mind the picture he saw when he spoke.

We had other things. The Tor-Dox was one. It was the door which compressed space. There were many such doors, all adjustable. Many miles and many hours separated Sian from Ogra by medieval methods of transportation, but you could step into the Tor-Dox at Sian, first adjusting for destination, and you were instantly in Ogra. I had not made Tor-Dox. My father had, for he, too, possessed the secrets of the past.

Other things we knew and accepted as commonplace. We could, individually, live as long as we wished, remaining perennially young—or we could place ourselves in the hands of the Masters, to live as long or as briefly as they wished; but we had free will.

And that free will was the disastrous inspiration behind the Creeping Mist.

We had been warned by one of the Masters, ten years before, of the Creeping Mist. By now, ten years after, it should have been called the Mounting Mist which hid the light of the sun, save as the dull glow of it came through to blister tender skin and fill the heart with growing terror.

"You are facing destruction, people of Atlantis," the Supreme Master had said, standing on a tall white pillar in the central square of Sian, "if you do not use natural laws as they were given you to use them. Disobey the laws continually, and they will destroy you, surely as the sun rises. Ages ago, the Masters of that time disclosed to some of you all the secrets which science should discover bit by bit, as the people become ready for each discovery.

"The secrets, *all* the secrets, of the universe, were given to a few—a few who had proved themselves worthy of trust. The Masters erred, as even Masters sometimes may. Some of those who received the secrets in trust, realized the vast power thus given them, and began to use them for their personal needs, and in so doing, subjugated countless of their fellows.

With each age of progress of the human mind, Masters have warned you, as they warned the people of Mu, of Lemuria, of Pan. They made it clear to Atlanteans then exactly why Mu, Lemuria and Pan sank under the sea—and that Atlantis herself was doomed to the same fate if she did not reform, return to the proper use of natural law! Some heeded, some did not. It is ever the way.

"Those who cry out, those who warn men against themselves, are never thanked, are usually regarded as fanatics, as cranks without knowledge. Beware, the time is set. It will come in ten years, if drastic return to the law is not made by all the people."

So the Supreme Master of Sian had spoken, ten years ago, almost, when he had wrapped his white glowing garment about him and was lowered into the pillar, to vanish since then from sight of all save the Masters, of Whom He was One.

Now, the ten years were almost upon us, and all Atlantis groped through a fog almost too thick to be breathed, this in spite of the fact that the Masters had instructed me that I, as a leader of the majority of the people, must find a way to dissolve the fog, and restore the proper workings of Nature's Law.

"If you fail," the Masters told me. "If you fail, Anghor, the Creeping Mist will become water. The water will coalesce with the salt waters of the Atlantean Sea, and the sea will possess all of the land save certain mountaintops. Already the weight of the Creeping Mist upon the land is such that the foundations of Atlantis groan."

Now, as I found myself behind that third-entered door in the Building of the Skull, alone in The Laboratory of the City of the Sun, I had a great decision to make. I had been commanded never to use the Creative Fiat without permission of the Masters. The Masters were mortal. What if they were drowned in the sea, when Atlantis sank be-

neath the waves? They *would* be, I knew, if I so willed. Could they, then, prevent my use of the Creative Fiat, which after all was merely the *Whole* of the principle of the Televisor of Speech-Thought? If I refused to use it, it was merely because I was obedient.

I HAD a great battle to fight within myself, for I knew now the secret of the Creeping Mist. Within The Laboratory of the City of The Sun, I had invented a light-screen-dome, wherein I had concentrated sufficient light from the sun to dissipate the Creeping Mist. I had re-found a lost secret —how to capture and hold the light of the sun. My screen-dome, constructed of the secret metal, revolved eccentrically on a quartz pedestal, so that its rays went forth through all the land, reaching out to conquer the mist as radar of ancient days reached out to conquer the unseen, and sonar of an even elder time reached out to solve the mysteries of sound.

I had experimented with the Screen just once, and in a heartbeat of time after it began its eccentric motion, the Creeping Mist was pushed back from the Laboratory until I could see the buildings of Sian for many *parasangs* in all directions. I gasped, almost failing to shut off the mechanism before people of Sian should have realized that I, Anghor, had solved the problem of Atlantis' salvation. This would not do. I was human, mortal, and they could compel me to use what I had perfected. But what if they never knew, until it was too late?

My problem then, the decision I must make, was very plain. I could save Atlantis and its mighty civilization for ages yet to come, and The Masters would continue to rule it. Or I could keep my secret until destruction came, make preparations that I myself be sure to survive and rule the remnants saved of Atlantis on the "certain mountain-tops" that would remain above the Atlantean Sea. There might not be many of these, but that mattered not at all. For all of me they could *all* perish.

For when I was the One Master, and all the Masters were perished, who could prevent my use of the Creative Fiat? No One, ever!

I could live as long as I wished, and people my En-Don—which men had once called Eden—with living things of my own designing and my own desires. They would be beautiful beyond all dreams. The men would be perfection, the women more perfect than perfection, but there would be one variation of the Law; they would all be subject to me, and pay me tribute as I cared to exact.

For days after I knew the secret of how to dissipate, not once, but repeatedly, and so forever, the Creeping Mist, I struggled with my decision. If I kept my secret to myself, millions of human beings would die in the submersion. But had they not earned such end? Had not the Supreme Master so accused them all, and each of them? Who was I to stand in the way of proper Consequences of the Law? Just because I myself had inspired some of the people to rebellion in their minds? Were they any the less to blame for their failures because I had, ever so little, inspired them? Oh, it was easy enough to justify myself.

For days on end I would assure myself that at the proper time I would give the secret to the Masters, that Atlantis might be saved. But always I somehow held it back. There were many days when I was sure I'd keep the secret as my own until after the Catastrophe, and thus emerge into the new world with the secret of Creations, wherewith to design and people the Eden of Anghor.

CHAPTER V

Traitor to His Trust

EVEN as I wavered between right and wrong, the law and lawlessness, so that I was sometimes not quite sure just which was which, I was fashioning a vessel in which my own carcass would be saved. The vessel was a tube, just large enough for me, a special tube of propulsion, using the power which Atlantis had used for ages upon ages, with a subtle difference. I made a visit to the twin peaks of Ba and Ku, in the warm south, and in each peak I set, and carefully hid, the master magnets to which the magnet in the nose of my vessel would travel unerringly when I freed the power between them with the flipping of a switch.

Thus, even when the great waters broke, and overwhelmed Atlantis, I could step into my vessel, seal it tightly, and let the waters take and turn and spin me wherever they might—but when I pressed the switch, releas-

ing the magnetic power—it was really absurdly simple—the vessel would rise up through the worst maelstrom and rest on the sea between the peaks of Ba and Ku. I would not need then to make haste to leave my vessel. I would be Master of the New World, with no need to hurry. I would be THE Master!

Into this vast indecision I stepped, through the tiny door in the Building of The Skull—forgetting the door, the key, and the building, to become Anghor of twelve thousand years ago.

I sat there, still undecided, with the Catastrophe almost upon Atlantis, when the Three Superior Masters—these titles related solely to natural science, from which all other arts and sciences derived—came to see me. That their coming expressed the general fear I knew. They would ordinarily have bidden me to them. I was a junior, for all my age and knowledge. Beside them, in age, I was a child. A precocious child, but yet a child.

I rose and bowed to them, my heart hammering, for now the decision must be made. If I gave them the secret of the Screen, Atlantis would be saved, and the Masters would remain the Masters, I the precocious child. If I refused it, held it back, Atlantis would disappear beneath the waves. and I would be the Master of the New World. Millions would die, but what was death save a scientific fact?

"Greetings, Masters!" I said.

"Greeting, Anghor!" said Rols, the eldest. "We need not tell you why we have come? Nor to remind you that destruction visits us any moment now, any day, any hour?"

"I understand. Destruction hangs over us all, Masters!"

"You have not yet mastered the Creeping Mist? Have not yet even found a clue to its mastery which might provide us with hope? You, though so young, who have given us so many inventions in advance even of our time?"

Here, now, I must decide—and for all time. Whatever I decided, there would be no turning back. If the Masters found I had lied, my fate would be as horrible to me personally as would the fate of all Atlanteans if the Creeping Mist were not abated.

So, what did I decide? In utter horror I heard myself say:

"My Masters, it is hideous failure I must report. I have not solved the secret of the Creeping Mist. I am completely baffled. I have wasted years on nothing of value!"

There, it was out, my decision irrevocably made.

They were very calm about it. They bowed as one, polite as always, exchanged glances, not once asking about or even noting the Screen, its outlines indicated by a tarp of linen, within reach of their hands.

"We must warn Atlantis, at once, but try to prevent fatal stampeding. The end will come with any heartbeat."

They turned and left me. I listened to their footfalls, beating out the knell of Atlantis. I changed my mind, changed it though it meant banishment at least, or worse, for me. I rose and hurried after them, calling out a name. They did not turn, did not seem to hear me. In my mind I intended to call: "Master Bols! Master Bols!"

But not until I came to myself, whoever myself was beside Adam Everyman, in The Lab in the woods behind Westchester, did I realize that I was yelling, over and over again: "Doctor A! Doctor A! Doctor A!"

Amazed, I looked at him. He was indeed Bols the Atlantean Master, which identified him far more clearly than did "Doctor A."

"Yes, Anghor," said Doctor A. "You have followed after me for twelve thousand years to correct the hideous wrong you wrought in Atlantis. Is it not so?"

I shuddered, realized that my body was bathed in horror sweat.

"Send me back!" I said. "I must know fully the depths of my ancient infamy. Send me back!"

BUT the savant only shook his head at me, as if I were a wilful child.

"Man would not be able to endure himself if he could remember all his infamies," said Doctor A, "which is why it is given only to the supernaturally strong in spirit to remember. But since this is only experiment, out of which we hope to benefit the world and thus balance your personal books, Anghor, as well as our own, you will return, into the heart of the Catastrophe, to remember, record, and bring back.

"After all, you have returned this time without bringing the details of your Mist Dispersing Screen, or the vessel by which you planned to save yourself. Both contain practical data of use to the world. Let us first evaluate what we have, combining your work as Father Wulstan with that of Anghor, and see what we have upon which to

base the Total You!"

"How can we total me, or anyone, without opening all the doors of each one's mind—subconscious—House of the Skull—from the Present to the Beginning?"

"With a drop of water from the sea," said Doctor A, "we can postulate the sea itself!"

There was a period of relaxation—breakfast-luncheon-dinner in the Lab, before I should return for answers nobody in The Lab seemed to be able to give me to my satisfaction. I ate without noting what I ate, like a man famished, still sitting in my personal "electric chair." Detective Jan Rober had arrived and made himself at home in the Lab. I grinned at him.

"Checking on your investment, I see?" I said.

"I've been getting a lot of lowdown on you, Adam," he retorted. "For a man who can't remember yesterday, you've been doing an awful lot of remembering. Also, it appears to be exact and very useful remembering. I wish somebody would explain to me just what it's all about?"

"First," I said, "would you like me at last to clear up the mystery of the murder of Marian Slade by Dean Hale?"

If he hadn't laughed aloud I might have thought I had made a mistake, but men didn't laugh at murder, so I took the plunge.

"Marian Slade, of course, was not murdered. You coppers and dicks were doing your level best to make me remember myself. You took extreme measures. You accused me of being a murderer, which ought to shock any amnesiac out of his amnesia. You gave me a name, Dean Hale. I'll bet your contribution was Marian Slade, by an association of ideas! Somebody had to be murdered, you remembered the Lab and how useful a man who might never remember would be to its mentors—and so, Dean Hale murdered Marian Slade. Am I right?"

"Close enough, Adam," he said, a bit ruefully. "But just between pals, I wish you could remember who you are."

"I appear to be remembering a lot of people I have been," I answered. "That is, if you believe in reincarnation."

"This past lives of individuals stuff is the bunk!" he insisted, while the scientists, who ate with us, smiled patronizingly and shook their heads.

"We'll prove it isn't bunk," said Doctor A. "After all, it's nice, or would be, to know you never really go into the grave, or the sea, or the crematorium, wouldn't it? Only your body does."

I didn't believe him, Jan Rober didn't. I doubted if anybody with a grain of sense would. I didn't know how to explain Father Wulstan, or Anghor, but they'd have to be more reasonable than reincarnation to convince me.

"Just what," I asked, becoming more serious, "have you managed to get out of my experiences, if you must call them that, as Anghor? Before you answer, it strikes me that all Anghor's palaver about the creative power of thought is on a par with what we've seemed to prove about reincarnation, a kind of waking-sleeping nightmare! How could anybody except the gods create by the power of thought?"

"You believe in telepathy?" asked Doctor L.

"Between certain minds, perhaps yes; perhaps between the minds of separated twins, or the minds of people so closely associated they can guess accurately what each other thinks. But for one deliberately to transmit thought—well, I've always believed that whoever claimed to do it was a charlatan, a blasted liar!"

"How," said Jan Rober softly, "do you know what you have always believed when you can't remember so much as one yesterday?"

"I don't know," I said desperately. "That thought came out of my very being, so I know it must be true, whoever I may have been yesterday. But remembering something out of the years since one was born, and something out of a pre-existence, are horses of different shades of falsehood. Anghor hints of the Creative Fiat, allegedly an attribute of the Creator only, and of unplumbed depths of power in human thought. I don't believe I am contributing anything."

DOCTOR A raised his head, and his eyes flashed.

"You did design, while you were away your Televisor of Speech-Thought," he said sternly. "And it is so revolutionary that we're not going to trust it out of the Lab. With the world equipped with it, nobody could ever get away with a lie. I'm not sure the world is ready for such a dose of truth.

"But you belittle the power of human thought. Let me ask you some questions. Which was greater, the unplumbed thoughts of Thomas Alva Edison, or the selected

thoughts which resulted in his countless inventions? And which is greater, more important, the invention, or the thought which produced it? And can you insist, after giving it some thought, that anything man uses is not a manifestation of thought, his own or another's?

"Thoughts direct the engineers who plan the Grand Coulee Dam, so that it is set down on paper to proper scale. That design is thought made manifest. Other engineers, working with the design, issue orders, which they have carefully thought out, to many junior foremen, who pass them on. Laborers, carpenters, cementers, plasterers, stone-and-sand workers, receive the thought-out orders, turn them over in their minds, absorb them, transmit their own personal, individual orders to their own hands and feet. The hands and feet, directed by thought, perform the myriad details of labor which result, in time, in the Grand Coulee Dam, greatest work of man existing on earth today save one—the Great Wall of China, also the result of thought."

I reeled mentally, trying to absorb this. It sounded reasonable, *too* reasonable. It sounded so reasonable I mistrusted it more after hearing it.

"The telephone," went on Doctor A, "is the result of much thought. It transmits thoughts, ideas. How clumsily it transmits them man will know when he can do it without using telephone, wireless or radio, all of which are merely forerunners of communication by direct thought between brain and brain. No, Anghor, we Atlanteans had something, twelve thousand years ago, which man has now lost. If, through the cyclotron, we are able to regain it, or some mechanical channel of it, it may again enrich the world—if, in our opinion, the world is again ready for it, will not misuse it. Misuse of it could destroy nations, devastate the planet."

"Then why fool with it?" I asked. "I'm for letting well enough alone!"

"The world had it before, therefore it must have been intended to have it. If it has it again it is because the time is ripe. Whatever happens to man he has earned it, whether it exalt or destroy him. It isn't up to you to decide."

I tried to think of something else to say, some further objection to offer. The truth was that I was now eager to be Anghor again, to find out just what had actually happened to Atlantis. Of course, I suspected we were somehow being hoaxed, or hoaxing ourselves, but it was exciting — exciting enough to make me forget that I couldn't remember anything of myself.

"Why all the mystery of The Lab?" I asked. "Why may the world not know about all of it?"

"Suppose the world, its newspapers and motion pictures, knew exactly what we are doing with you as the central character in what they would call something like drama of human destiny? Would you mind being annoyed by every crank who'd be sure to intrude?"

I thought what it would be like for me to be away, while hordes of people misconducted themselves in the Lab and gawked at me, and maybe punched and pushed my body out of ignorant curiosity, and shook my head.

"But why do you hide your identities behind letters of the alphabet?" I persisted.

"Maybe, like you, we feel it best not to give our right names," said Doctor G, the first words I had ever heard him speak. "No, Adam, since we are delving into the unknown, perhaps the unknowable, since we are using human beings against the beliefs of other human beings, we maintain anonymity. Here each of us is Doctor Jekyll of the Lab. At our homes, outside, away, when we take time to visit them, we are humble Hydes who wouldn't think of doing anything unorthodox, or even of using animals in our tests! I'm sure you can understand our wish to protect ourselves against intrusion."

"But how about my metal bird, and the other designs you have made available to—whoever you have made them available to?"

"Oh, that's very simple," said Doctor A, grinning. "We have given everything to the world in your name, Adam, in your right name! We've done it through Jan Rober, a very wise and useful man, who acts as your agent."

I jumped to my feet.

"Then you know who and what I am, all of you? What is my name? Where do I practice law?"

"You still don't remember, Adam?" asked Doctor A, softly.

"No, I don't remember!" I almost shouted it.

"Good! Then what your real self, represented by Jan Rober, does in the name of humanity, can't possibly influence the excursions of Adam Everyman! I think, and my colleagues agree with me, that it is better

you remain, for the time of our experiments, and your excursions, Adam Everyman! Of course if by chance you remember, we shall do nothing to interfere. After all, you came here to be induced to remember—remember?"

I gave the matter some thought. I could see where conflict could interfere with what we were doing, and that my own personal rediscovery would bring about that conflict. Maybe I had a wife, family, who would object to all this if they knew. I almost asked Jan Rober whether I did have a wife and children, but thought better of it. It wouldn't maintain my peace of mind to know I had. Better leave it as it was.

"I'll play along," I told them. "Where do I go next?"

"Into your magnetic vessel, Anghor," said Doctor A, "at the exact moment doom cracks down on Atlantis!"

CHAPTER VI

Master Island

YES, the Catastrophe came and I was ready. Some few Atlanteans had fled to the great continent to the south. Some had fled to the mountain tops. The Masters had chosen to go down with their land, as masters of vessels went down with their ships in the days when vessels traveled on the face of the sea.

For myself, I had my vessel, completely equipped for myself. In it was every comfort. I could lie at full length and control every movement of the vessel. I could cause it to stand on end, so that I stood erect, or I could lie on my sides or my stomach or my back. Always before my face were two windows. One was an ordinary window, through which I could see my immediate surroundings. The other window was my own development, kept as secret as the Mist Screen, of radar.

In this radar I could see any part of Atlantis at any time. And so, within my vessel I saw the terror strike. I studied, each in turn, the great cities of my native land. Their minarets, their spires which, before the Creeping Mist came down, were like new snow reflected in the sun. Never in the world were there beauties made by man such as were found in the cities of Atlantis. There were four great cities in the richest valleys, beside the most beautiful lakes, and countless smaller ones, and not even the proudest local dweller could have said which city of Atlantis was the most beautiful.

Surely Sian, for example, must have been even grander than the New Jerusalem which our ancient prophets foresaw. Perhaps heaven itself was what man saw when he looked upon the cities, the fields, the blue canals, the gorgeous spires, all the glory of Atlantis.

But for me it might have survived for further ages. Who can say? I might make a journey sideways in time, as we sometimes do among the Initiates of Atlantis, and see what would have happened if I had decided to give up the secret of the Creeping Mist. But now it was too late, though I may elect to do the sideways journey from the Master Island which is now, for a few short hours, a mountain peak.

The Creeping Mist became all at once a roaring maelstrom. Its mists became waters as the waters in higher heavens came down to join the mist. Over the hills, through the great divides, up the valleys of the rivers, came the blue-white waters of the Atlantean Sea. Atlantis, the continent itself, began to shake and tremble as if held up by palsied undersea legs that could no longer hold its weight. The land tipped, and the sea rushed over it, tilting it the more.

So I watched the sea strike Ogra, the City of the Morning-and-Evening Star. What a monster was the sea, its forerunning wave higher than the tallest spire in Ogra. It rushed with all its vast weight upon the city. People were like ants scurrying to safety. I watched them, refusing to think that but for me they could have had a chance to live.

The water struck. The spires disappeared. Mighty buildings were pushed over, to crash to the trembling earth, as if by irresistible monsters, and the water possessed the ground before the masses struck. But one knew they struck for mighty geysers were hurled aloft from underseas, where weight and power and energy were in conflict. But ever the sea moved on. I saw the great wave approach Sian, and held my breath. Had I miscalculated? Would my tiny vessel withstand the might which had ground Ogra into nothingness? I was sure it would, for I had calculated how high the water would rise, how great would be its mass, how much pressure on the ribs of my vessel would be required to hold it away from myself.

The sea poured over me, and over Sian. Through my radar screen I watched people, men, women and children, gathered up in the heart of the seas, tiny things in the midst of mighty maelstroms, and hurled hither and yon, up and down. I saw bodies by the hundreds, thousands, ground to bits among the undersea wreckage of the most beautiful buildings in Sian. I saw animals spun in all directions. I saw precious things, tapestries, robes, screens, furnishings beyond price, taken into the heart of the rushing tide, and borne away into limbo as if they had been nothing. I saw Atlantis the proud, the mighty continent of old, pushed beneath the waves, to rise no more. I saw the sun go out on it until it should rise again—if ever—and knew to the fullest realization that the fault was mine.

Canals were gone, lakes were gone, valleys were buried in the darkness of the deep sea. Hungrily the waves crawled up the sides of the highest peaks, and some of them for a time were under water, long enough to drown the desperate who had managed to flee so high, and then rose again as the continent settled in its new resting place.

I had been positive that the twin peaks of Ba and Ku would remain. And so they did. I watched the cities fall away beneath me as I soared above them in my vessel. I saw countless bodies follow the cities, sucked under until the resurrection day by the plunging, ruined, battered cities. I saw the darkness claim them. I saw great creatures of the deep come over the land riding deep and riding shallow in the conquering sea, and I saw the vastest creatures of them all, feed upon the people my carefully kept secret had slain.

I WAS not happy in the horror, until I remembered that now, in effect, I was The Master, and so a kind of god. I had seen enough. Now I must hurry to my Endon, my Eden, there to be a god in fact and by using the Fiat to create a world of my own, in my own image if I wished, or in any form I might desire.

Riding through the waters, now deep under, now just below the surface, now on the surface which was becoming swiftly still, I threw the switch which connected my vessel with the magnets on the peaks of Ba and Ku. Instantly, like a homing pigeon, the vessel responded. Its speed was swift, until the water along the sides blurred my vision, so that I cut it down. To think to decelerate was to decelerate. To think speed was to gain speed—for thought was the motive power which guided the magnet by which my vessel traveled, the switch its signal to perform.

So I came to the surface of the blue sea which lay between the sunlit peaks I had chosen for myself. They still were damp as from a lengthy rain. The water had covered them, long enough to drown all living things upon them save the trees, the plants. The twin peaks were mine. Not one person lived among all the many bodies that floated in the sea about me, and doubtless in the seas beyond the peaks. And with all industry the sharks and great whales, the behemoths and leviathans, were disposing of the dead.

I took my time until the scavengers had cleared the waters and there was no chance of infection. Disease had long been banished from Atlantis, but there had never been such an epidemic of death in the land before, and so it would have returned but for the scavengers.

When all was done I quitted my vessel, stood ashore, raised my arms above my head, rejoiced that my plan had succeeded. This was Eden indeed, with all green fruits and trees and vegetables man might desire, for Atlantis cultivated every inch of all its land, including these. Here was my Eden.

I ate and drank from my stores. I was sure I could produce food at will, or water at my desire, merely by desiring. I had not used Creative Fiat yet, but I knew how. There was no hurry, there was plenty of time. A god had no need to make undue speed.

When I was ready, and not before. I sat down under a fig-tree and thought:

"What shall I create in this Eden?" I began to form pictures in my mind, to make mental designs of the living things I would create. I would begin small. I would, first, make a simple tree. I saw a stately palm in my mind, like no palm that ever grew on Atlantis anywhere. I saw it in every detail, its fronds, its fruit, its life juices, its roots, its velvety bark.

I saw it. I spoke the word: "Be!"

And it was! The Fiat operated for me! I needed no further proof. Now, as for animals there were enough in the sea. They might come out in time to populate the earth. Just now I had no need of animals.

"There shall be men, but not the tall white blue eyed man of Atlantis," I decided. "I shall make several men, of different colors, of different attributes, of different heights,

different appetites, different mentalities. First, I shall bring a brown man—and why not his mate at the same time—into being!"

I saw the man and his mate in perfect detail, whole.

I spoke the word, and nothing happened, nothing whatever! More sharply I spoke it again, but it did not operate. I gazed at the tree I had made, to make sure—and as I thought of how I had completed the tree, the thought created its other self beside it, so that there were two new palms on the first of my two peaks. But man I did not bring into being.

I tried red men, and failed. I tried black men, failed again. I tried yellow man—failure, all failures!

Would my dream not come true then? Was I destined to live out my time entirely alone on this Eden I had selected? I would not have it so.

I could manufacture stuff from electronic force. I had with me in my vessel every ingredient, every element, every instrument. I had stocked my vessel against every contingency, like a good seaman, by which I might build the skin, flesh, bones cartilage, nails, all the intricate diverse parts of man.

So all in a day I built the forms of a red man, black man, yellow man, brown man—and for each I built a mate at the same time.

Then I commanded them to obey me, to rise, and breathe, and walk, and go, and live as men and women. In their brains which I had created I wrote for each color a language which should be all his own.

Now they obeyed me!

THEY rose, and stood, and turned their eyes upon me, eyes that should have been alive, but were instead the eyes of the dead—the eyes of things which had never lived, nor ever would—moving things that did not live!

I've no way of knowing what their metallic minds thought of me, but as if they were, all eight of them, possessed at once by the same evil genii, they launched themselves at me, shrieking at me in their several tongues.

I had not expected this. I slew a man. A woman I slew by accident. The others pulled me down, clawing at me, biting, scratching. . . .

I knew, as I knew that they were killing me, that these people would survive, for I had made them strong, and that in them—soulless, merciless, heartless though they were—I would survive to the end of time. Perhaps, eventually, the Masters, or other Masters would do that missing thing, speak that fruitful word, which would bring the light of life into those dead eyes, but I had little time to think upon it.

For they were tearing me apart, and I was begging for mercy from the merciless. I cried out, but they did not understand, how could they, when what I called aloud was:

"Doctor A! Doctor A! Doctor A?"

I stepped from beneath the hood in the Lab in Westchester. The table before me was littered with new sketches I had done. Doctor A and his colleagues were jubilant.

"Here's a perfect job of city planning!" he cried. "Here's the answer to the housing problem! This concentration of great force is the answer to the atom bomb, for it was developed for defense as well as offense. It was known, you told us, ages beyond ages ago to Atlanteans, but not used for all those ages because the world was at peace. But it could be used to cause continents to sink as Atlantis sank."

I stared at the scientists.

"Don't give it to mankind!" I cried. "I have seen such destruction. I caused it. Don't make me the instrument to bring it about again. Keep it secret, for all our lives, and afterward, unless somewhere in the Secret Wisdom of the Sages of the Past, there is an answer to dreadful knowledge such as this, to make it safe for men to manage!"

They understood me, every one of them, for they were men of intelligence beyond their time—and why not? Three of them were obviously the Three Masters of Atlantis!

"To trace every possible knowledge of man," said Doctor A, "we must trace in detail the past of every man on earth. That we cannot do. To trace all the past of even one would take generations."

"But we can begin," I said eagerly. "I shall devote my life to it. And if you're somehow giving the world the benefit of what we're doing and believe that man can learn from the evil in his past, dredge up my disastrous lives if you wish, also."

"Maybe I can find other volunteers," said Jan Rober, grinning. "We've made a beginning, let's not stop! We've already seen from the progressive past lives of one man, how much harm a single individual can cause because he possesses too much forbidden

knowledge. What a lot each one of us must have to pay for. And how much all of us together have done to unbalance the precision of the world!"

"Adam," said Doctor A, "you can be your real self now, since we have discovered who and what you really are. You can be rich, famous, one of the most important men in the world. Or you can be Adam Everyman, and accomplish much more, not for yourself but for the people of the world. It's for you to choose, as it is always for man to choose."

At least in one life I'd choose correctly!

"To the day I die," I said to my colleagues, "I am Adam Everyman and all that may have been before he was born into this particular life. I've had fame, riches, power in past lives. If men could know who and what I've been, they'd destroy me and lock themselves in somewhere where they could damage no one. And we can't end it, if reincarnation is true, because reincarnation is true. But we can bring it forth into the light and show it to every man!"

"You are ready then, Adam," said Doctor A," to make further excursions into your former lives?"

"Even if it leads me repeatedly to the gates of Hell!" I said.

"It will lead you there, often," Doctor A said grimly. "Every man already knows that, if he will just think, if he will just select the forbidden panels on his own personal House of the Skull, turn the right key, and take a good look at his own mental insides!"

"Maybe we can induce him to do it," I said hopefully.

"Maybe," repeated Doctor A, though if there were hope in his entire make-up, I could not see it.

The Riddle of Time

DESPITE the fact that for most of us time is a neat breakdown and packaging of our existence into years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds—all uniformly and rigidly conceived—there is little in the known universe more mysterious than its passage. The fact that time is a concomitant of existence as we know it has caused many theoreticians to label it an extra dimension—which, of course, it may well be.

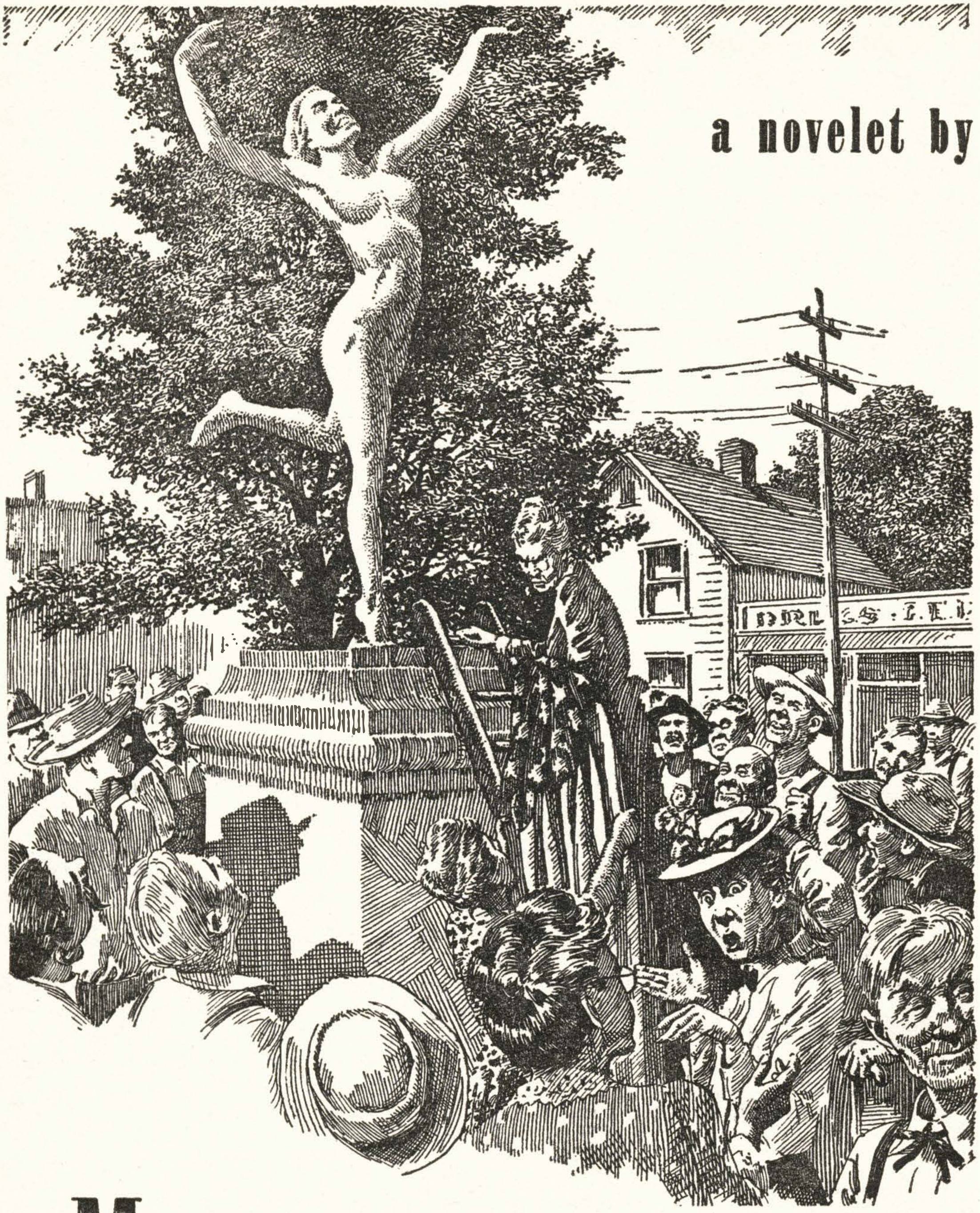
However, even within the range of our own senses, time is a strangely elastic factor, as any child who walks to and from school can tell you. Further evidence of its elasticity is proved by recent tests given by Dr. Linn F. Cooper of Georgetown University in Washington, D. C.

One of many hypnotic experiments performed by Dr. Cooper employed a young woman as subject. She was told, while under hypnosis, that a metronome in the room was beating only once a minute instead of once a second. It was then suggested that she count the cotton bolls in a patch near her home.

In the course of what she believed to be eighty minutes the subject counted 862 cotton bolls, looking carefully under leaves to make sure she missed none. Actually, the experiment lasted but three seconds, during which she could not conceivably have counted 862 of anything.

The same experience, drug-induced, is a well known one with certain jazz musicians, who claim that by "slowing up time" they are able to handle fast improvisations as if they were slow ones which gave them all the time in the world.

Time, except as laid down by the official horologists, is almost impossible to measure. It remains one of the mysteries of the universe.—*Carter Sprague.*



a novelet by

MIRACLE TOWN

When a stranger visited Peterville on an atomic holiday, every blessed molecule in the place went amiably insane!

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

CHAPTER I

No Footprints Behind Them

SETH sat on a gasoline can somebody had tossed beside the dusty highway and regarded the mile-distant huddle of huts. Huts, shacks and a handful of two-story wooden houses. A barn with sundry excrescences—one of them was a painted sign *Elite*. That was the movie house.

"Blight town," he said, dispassionately. "Rathole."

He spat into the dust. The dust assimilated the effort at once.

He brooded on the inhabitants of Peterville—983 of them, excluding himself. He always excluded himself.

"Dopes. Hayseeds. Deadheads." With a touch of passion.

Again the dust drank his health.

He thought upon one inhabitant in particular. Passion flamed.

"I hate his insides. Individually and collectively. And everything that's wrapped around them."

The dust waited expectantly. But too much of it had got down his throat. It was hot too and such moisture as he possessed preferred to come out less violently as perspiration. Nevertheless he sucked around his

The mayor's wife and her sister started to drape a flag around the nymph

teeth, carefully mustering saliva. He felt it incumbent on him to demonstrate his disgust for "Sourpuss" Aldley.

"Do with a drink?"

Seth started and all but dislocated his neck slamming his head round to see who was at his back. He had a primeval fear and hatred of people stealing up behind him.

A beaming gentleman, clad in garments a scarecrow wouldn't be seen in dead, was standing there proffering a can of beer. He was not one of the 983. He had a stomach on which the dust lay like the snow on a roof. From what could be seen of his face under the sunburn, dirt and dust Seth put him at fifty. Hair and teeth were white.

"To coin a phrase, where did you spring from?" asked Seth, securing the beer. He was an opportunist. Peterville made you that way—a clutcher at straws.

The stranger jerked his thumb vaguely over his shoulder.

"Out there." Out there was thirty-three miles of assorted dust and a few rocks before you hit the next huddle of huts.

"Hobo?" queried Seth briefly, putting his head back.

"You might say that."

"I do say that," said Seth, throwing the empty can down and wiping his mouth.

THE stranger shrugged and sat down on a gasoline can that Seth hadn't noticed was there before. In fact he looked twice to make sure that it was there now.

"My name's Hezekiah. Not my fault," said the so-named casually, reaching for the beer-can. He lifted it to his lips. Unmistakable beer glugged forth and his Adam's apple did calisthenics. He took less time than Seth, who was a quick worker.

"That's the can I threw away, isn't it?" Seth asked slowly. Hezekiah beamed and nodded.

"How come I made a serious mistake like that?" asked Seth, more of himself than the other.

"Trick can. Got a bottom layer like a candy box," said Hezekiah, stowing it quickly in the one pocket that had a top and a bottom to it.

"Fair-ground stuff, eh? Can you do any other tricks?"

"Thought reading," said Hezekiah, modestly.

"Any charge," yawned Seth, getting up and bracing himself for the trudge back to Peterville. Hezekiah got up too and matched his slow paces.

"Why should I charge?" asked Hezekiah. "One doesn't charge a book for reading it. And I can read you like a book."

"Go ahead."

"Right. Your name is Seth Barnard. You were born in Peterville. You think you hate the place. You run the *Peterville Press*, so far as it can run. Actually it limps. Always has. You had to borrow money from Judge Aldley to keep going. Now he wants it back with interest. Or else he'll push you into bankruptcy and take all your assets, including the press, in lieu of hard cash."

"One trouble with a small town like this," said Seth, "is that everyone knows everyone else's business. A stranger gets all the gossip in the first ten minutes."

"I haven't been into Peterville yet."

"O.K. then—you're a master mind—who met someone on the road."

"Sarcasm arises out of bitterness. Bitterness out of frustration. You're a frustrated young man. You have an ambition and you can see no chance of fulfilling it."

"That's character reading, not thought reading," said Seth, nonetheless impressed.

"Don't you find walking tiring this hot weather?" asked Hezekiah irrelevantly and dropped a nickel he'd been playing with. Seth bent to pick it out of the white dust of the road. The glare of the dust dazzled his eyes for a moment. His head swam. He straightened up, feeling giddy.

"Sure *is* hot," he said, then felt suddenly giddier. When he had bent down they were still almost a mile from Peterville. Now they stood between Carter's drug-store and the tottering, peeling sign announcing PETERVILLE, which were the gateposts of this side of the town. Seth glanced back at the empty mile of road he didn't remember covering.

Hezekiah whistled casually and took the nickel from him.

"Thanks," he said. But Seth saw the twinkle in his eye.

Seth determined to be just as casual. "So hypnotism is in your bag of tricks too. You're pretty smart. But I don't like blanks in my mind. Suppose you un-suggest this one?"

"There are no blanks in your mind, apart from the ones that were already there. I'm saving you time, not robbing you of it."

Seth glanced at his watch. Five minutes

had elapsed since he met Hezekiah. And it was a good twenty minutes' shamble from that spot to here. Then he got a delayed action realization of something he'd seen.

He glanced back over his shoulder to make sure. True enough. The dust behind them lay as thick as the sands of the Libyan desert. And neither of them had left any footprints behind them in it.

"Don't think about it," smiled Hezekiah, seeing the glaze coming over Seth's eyes. "Have a drink." He proffered the inexhaustible beer-can.

SETH emptied it. Twice. And still it was full. But Seth felt better.

"Look here," he said almost truculently. "I don't believe a word of this. I don't believe in Santy Claus, leprechauns, prosperity around the corner or black magic. Now I'm getting so I don't believe in you. There's always a rational explanation for everything if you look far enough.

"I'm nuts but I know I'm nuts. I wasn't born that way. Therefore something's just driven me nuts. Sunstroke, plus a nervous breakdown over financial worries, likely enough. So that makes you a creature in my delirium. Go away."

"Plausible," nodded Hezekiah. "But not the right answer. However, I agree there is a rational explanation. I'm here, all right. Very solidly."

"You look solid enough," grunted Seth, with an eye to the waistline. Then he looked up and saw Judge Aldley striding towards them, scuffing up clouds of dust at his heels. "But here, friend Hezekiah, is where you come unstuck," he went on. "For, being a figment of my imagination, Sourpuss won't see you. And, believe me, he's got no imagination of his own."

Sourpuss bore down on them.

"Who's this you're bringing into town, Barnard?" His dark eyes raked Hezekiah with an eagle stare. "Don't like the look of him. Here, my man, have you enough money on you to pay for a night's lodging?"

Hezekiah spun his nickel and caught it again, smiled and said nothing.

"He's my guest," said Seth, burning inside. The sight and sound of Aldley rasped on every nerve of him.

Aldley's downturned lips twisted.

"*Your* guest! You're keeping yourself on my money as it is. Don't start a poorhouse for all the bums who wander through here because I'm not paying for it. And impress upon your friend that I'm the representative of law and order in Peterville. If he tries any begging I'll give him a lodging myself —in the jail."

He spun round and marched up the two steps onto the porch of the drug-store. Whereupon his pants vanished. There he was in a homburg, a long-tailed back coat, shirt, open-weave underpants and big black boots. Like a player in a "situation" in old-fashioned farce.

Seth was startled, then laughed aloud. Aldley was twice as startled. He flushed, turned, came down the steps again, thought better of it and fled into the haven of the drug-store. Shrieks of amazement and laughter within. Carter had customers.

"A perfectly rational explanation," remarked Hezekiah, mildly.

Seth laid a hand on his shoulder. "Hez," he choked, "you must be brought to the knowledge of my roommate. Come and meet him. He's a genius. Or something. Peterville product too. He'll explain you away. Tear you to shreds and leave no wisp. But you might shake him up a little first. I've never seen anyone do that yet."

"I should like to meet Arthur," said Hezekiah, who had not been told the name.

CHAPTER II

Tiger Rag

THE little one-story house had four rooms—the printing office of the *Peterville Press,* Seth's bedroom, Arthur's bedroom and a communal living and work room at the front which contained their books, phonograph records, attempts at water-colors and cigarette butts. Music filtered from the place as Seth and Hez approached. Arthur was having a Debussy session.

"Go in quietly and wait till the record's finished," whispered Seth at the door of the communal room. "Don't make a noise or he'll throw knives at us."

Arthur's gangling length was sprawled in an armchair. His wiry hair was disheveled. It always was. His eyes were shut. Dreamy bliss rode his face.

Seth's heel happened to tap against a bookshelf. Arthur opened one angry eye and glared. Seth ostentatiously held his breath and sank into a chair next to Hez. With a

last warning message the eye shut.

The expression of ineffable bliss settled again, as "En Bateau" flowed gently and plaintively from the phonograph. The last notes trailed away like the dying vision of a dream. Then suddenly, as they finished, a blaring hot trumpet played a snatch of "Tiger Rag."

Arthur all but gave birth. He shrieked on a note of real agony, came out of the armchair like a released spring. His eyes were wild. He ran his fingers through his jungle of hair. No victim of the Spanish Inquisition ever went through half as much.

Arthur was highly strung. He had the supersensitivity of the artist, the visionary, the poet, the perfectionist. In his own opinion he was all of them and more. He reacted to things in a way ten times larger than life.

He glared suspiciously at Seth and Hez, then bounded to the phonograph and played the last inch of the record again. This time the rude anti-climax to Debussy's dream music wasn't there. The record finished normally.

Arthur helped himself to a wafer of gum. Much too self-possessedly he said, "I thought the record sounded cracked."

"All right, quit acting, we both heard what you heard," said Seth. "Now we'd like you to explain it."

"I deny everything," said Arthur, calmly chewing.

"Arthur has had a strictly scientific training," remarked Hez. "So it's natural that he dodges effects to which present knowledge of science assigns no causes. They're not in his book of rules. So he ignores them to keep his dignity and his faith in science."

"May I ask, sir, who you are, and why you should consider yourself qualified to pass judgment on me?" Arthur was icy.

"I am Hezekiah Beamish of Harvard. Doctor of Physics, among other things. I have come here to explain a number of matters. I hope you are not offended because I also explain yourself to yourself?"

"One cannot be offended. One can only choose to feel offended," said Arthur snootily and added with venom, "And I choose to feel offended."

"Too bad," beamed Hez. "Have a drink."

Arthur turned his nose up at the presented beer-can. "Thank you, no. I value my brain too highly to pickle it in alcohol."

Seth began, "Well, you can employ that unsullied gray matter by working out an explanation for miracles. Now, this—"

He was interrupted by a violent tapping on the window glass. The window framed an agitated portrait of Samuel Angell. Angell was Deputy-Chairman of the Watch Committee. Judge Aldley was Chairman. Seth opened up.

"What's the matter, Sam?"

"Have you got any old sack cloth or dust sheets or old curtains or something like that you could lend us? In a hurry?"

"Why?"

Samuel pointed up the road. His finger was unsteady.

"Something's happened to Eugenia."

EUGENIA was the young lady of white marble and Grecian aspect who balanced on the toes of one foot on the pedestal in the little market square, with her arms perpetually upflung in expression of incontinent health. Stone draperies flowed carelessly (but not too carelessly) from her well-developed figure, blown by an invisible but doubtless bracing breeze.

She was the gift to the town of rich old Mark Plunkett, who had, in his seventies, become an apostle and propagandist of health, fitness, eugenics, and the body beautiful. Judge Aldley had opposed the gift but not too strongly, for old Mark was also considering building a new court house.

If he craned out of the window, Seth could just see a corner of the market square and most of Eugenia. He craned out and exclaimed "What the—!" and fell back, laughing.

Hez was grinning widely, as if he already knew the joke.

Samuel protested, but Seth waved him away weakly: "I haven't got any sacking and I wouldn't give it to you if I had."

"What's it all about?" asked Arthur, looking through a heap of records.

Seth grabbed his arm. "Come along to the market place, quick. See with your own eyes."

Arthur left his Debussy reluctantly. Hez came too. The three of them made the square just in time to see Eugenia plainly before the mayor's wife and her sister managed to get a Fourth of July Old Glory and some assorted bunting to stay put around the healthy nymph. The improvised drapery fulfilled the function of the original raiment.

Seth made some inquiries in the gathering interested crowd. He came back, chuckling

and scratching his head. "Well, there you are, Arthur. Just tell me what sort of wind blows stone robes clean off."

Arthur snorted. "You have the credulity of a politician thinking he's fooling the public. Obviously it's a gag. Someone's been preparing the bathing beauty under cover and switched statues during the night."

Seth said, "I saw Eugenia an hour ago. She was decent then. It's afternoon now. So the switch must have been done in broad daylight. But no one saw it happen. I've asked. Secondly, who in this petrified boneyard for dopes has the energy, imagination or humor to pull a gag of that sort?"

"Picking on the poor people of Peterville again!" exploded Arthur and the dust received with gratitude the resultant drops of perspiration. "Just because they won't buy your crummy newspaper! They're all right underneath."

"They're all right underneath the ground," said Seth, morbidly bitter. "They're halfway there already. A case of dust to dust. Anyway, you should preach. You want to get away from 'em fast enough. Sitting up studying for a degree half the night, aiming for Harvard. I bet once you get away the poor people of Peterville won't see you again."

"I can't help it if I'm a genius and the world has need of me," snapped Arthur. "It's my duty to fulfill myself."

"You mean you don't want to be a mute inglorious gem blushing unseen?"

Arthur snorted again and started back with ostrich strides to the house and Debussy. Seth and Hezekiah trailed along slowly behind. Seth nodded ahead at the lanky figure being swallowed up in its own dust train.

"What do you think of him, Hez?"

"You say you don't believe in me? Well, I say I don't believe in *him*."

Seth chuckled. "Never mind, Hez. *He* does."

They caught up with Arthur at the Elite. He was staring at a notice on the Forthcoming Attractions board. Seth looked too.

HERE TONIGHT
at 10:30
After the Show
HEZEKIAH BEAMISH, PH. D.
will deliver a lecture on
ATOMIC PHYSICS
Come and learn why Eugenia
strip-teased.

"How's that for hot news?" said Arthur in Seth's ear. "Better sign on your pal as your chief reporter."

"When did you have this printed?" asked Seth, turning on Hez.

"Oh, 'bout two minutes ago," smiled Hez, tossing his nickel again.

"So you knew about this Eugenia gag beforehand," said Arthur, ignoring the last remark. "How?"

"Mr. Barnard here tells me that you can explain everything and anything, so I don't need to tell you," said Hez agreeably.

ARTHUR chose to feel offended again. "Very well," he said coldly. "I was only trying to take a short cut. I haven't the slightest doubt that I can find by myself all the explanation needed. I certainly shan't trouble you for any further explanations about anything."

He stalked on.

Sullivan's dog ambled across his path and settled comfortably against an ashcan. It was smoking, placidly, a large briar pipe.

Seth heard Arthur gulp but he went on.

Mrs. Aldley came down the road. She stopped Arthur.

"What's this I hear about someone tampering with the statue in the market square?"

Arthur could not seem to find words. Seth could see his fingers weaving and interweaving in agony behind his back. She lost patience with his mute misery and pushed past him. She saw Seth. Worse, Seth saw her—and was stricken dumb in his turn.

For the bespectacled and shrewish Mrs. Aldley had a beautiful black mustache like Groucho Marx. But this one was not painted on. It looked very real.

Mrs. Aldley repeated her question with acerbity to Seth. He felt lost. He gestured weakly towards Hez. Mrs. Aldley transferred the gimlet gaze so reminiscent of her husband.

"Do *you* know what happened?"

Hez answered mildly, "It's a long story. Come to my lecture tonight at the movie house. By the way, has your husband been home lately?"

Mrs. Aldley was taken aback momentarily. How did this hobo know of her husband?

"No, he went—"

"Madam, you are wasting precious time going in this direction. Your husband is marooned in Carter's store. He can't find any pants to fit him. You'd better take his

Sunday best along."

Hez took Seth's arm and steered him past the astonished woman. Seth got a grip on himself.

"Spoil-sport," he accused.

Arthur was walking just ahead with an uncharacteristic slow and hesitant gait. He looked like a man who hears an enemy bomber overhead and can't decide whether to carry on and keep his dignity or duck and run. He was tensed up.

So, when the next telegraph pole he approached very suddenly covered itself with bark, sprouted arms thick with needle-leaves and cones and became a beautiful pine, he leapt back a good yard.

He looked back at the pair undecidedly. Then he got stiff-necked again and went on. But he walked well out around the new-born tree.

"He's shaken," said Seth delightedly.

Old man Smith came down the road in his buggy. He waved to Arthur. Arthur raised his hand to return the salute. And old man Smith, his buggy and the dappled mare all shrank together to something the size of a man's hand.

This time Seth jumped back as well. It was a shock to see someone you'd known since you were a kid shrink to a mannikin the size of a lead soldier, sitting in a buggy comparable to a matchbox and driving a horse no bigger than a mouse.

Then, abruptly, man, horse and vehicle shot again like elastic—back to normal size.

Smith pulled up. He seemed to be choking. He had nearly swallowed his dentures. He got them straight. He addressed the pedestrians.

"A darn fool trick to spring up like that! You might have frightened Nellie. Giddap."

Nellie bore him away.

"A matter of relativity," remarked Hez. "He thought we all grew upwards instead of him growing downwards."

"What does he think I am—a jack-in-the-box or Alice in Wonderland?" asked Seth. "The natives here are so wrong-headed they'd blame Columbus for bringing his danged furriners here."

Arthur came wandering back and joined them. "By the way," he remarked absently to Hez as if he really had something else more important on his mind, "I'll come to your lecture tonight."

He didn't put a toe in front of them after that.

CHAPTER III

Atoms at Play

BY EVENING Peterville had changed. Green lawns, shady trees, bright flowers were appearing everywhere out of the hot dust. Every hut, shack and house acquired a coat of new paint. A swimming pool, full of blue water, flashed into being in the center of a plot of wasteland.

All the natives were out and about seeing the new sights and waiting expectantly for more. Dollar bills fluttered here and there about the main street. But anyone trying to grab one would find that a providential gust of wind would always blow it away from his reaching fingers.

Seth, Arthur and Hez squatted on the porch, watching the street scene. Samuel Angell went by, chasing a hundred dollar bill. fluttered through the air, dodging his hands like a butterfly. On the back of his shirt, apparently unknown to him, was pinned a notice—WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

The bill came to rest in the dust. Sam stopped, judged his distance and dived headlong for it. Something went wrong with the dive. It continued on and up, like a 'plane taking off. And deposited him, shouting, on the roof of the Elite. A streamer banner broke from his neck and advised—COME AND HEAR THE DOC. HERE TONIGHT.

"Your advertising campaign's pretty good, Hez," said Seth. "Any use asking you how it's done?"

"You'll have to guess for the present," said Hez, smilingly watching an impromptu rescue party struggling with a long ladder to reach Sam. Seth watched too. There was plenty of laughter and ribaldry at Sam's expense.

"The yokels are taking it all surprisingly well," he admitted. "I thought they'd all be belly-aching about the end of the world or sump'n. But they seem to be enjoying it."

"Even a yokel likes to get out of the rut sometimes," said Arthur. "And heaven knows things are bouncing out of their ruts good and plenty. See Sam there. Levitation. I'd never have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. And yet there was al-

ways good evidence for it. Particularly in the case of the medium, Daniel Home."

"Tush, what's this?" quizzed Seth. "Ultra-conservative scientist goes all psychic?"

"Well, I don't know. There's a pretty solid body of evidence for the phenomena of poltergeists, apports and—"

"Poltergeists? Apports? *Most* unscientific!" jibed Seth.

Arthur went red. "Darn it—so's all this unscientific!" he exploded, waving a hand to embrace all Peterville and its events. An empty half-pint milk bottle immediately materialized in the hand. He stopped, stared at it, set it down.

"Clever," applauded Seth. "Quickness of the hand, eh?"

"I usually do it with a quart bottle, full," said Arthur, gruffly. But he put both hands in his pockets.

"Poltergeists, apports," resumed Seth. "That's only calling 'em names. It doesn't explain anything."

Arthur became conveniently deaf and absorbed in watching Pete Hawkins zig-zagging happily down the road and requesting loudly not to be fenced in. He was flourishing an inexhaustible beer-can, like Hez's.

"You boys better go in and see the movie if you want to hear my lecture," remarked Hez. "There's going to be a packed house. You won't get in if you go late."

"What about you?" asked Seth.

"Oh, I'll get in all right."

"I don't doubt it," said Seth. "But those clothes are hardly the wear—"

"I'm having Judge Aldley's dress suit," beamed Hez. "It's all arranged. Only Aldley doesn't know about it."

"That'll please him," said Seth, rising. "Come on, Arthur, let's take a look at the movie."

THEY only just got in. The place was jammed with a come-early-and-avoid-the-rush crowd. The movie was an ancient musical, not even colored—not at first. It became colored after the second reel, three-dimensional after the fourth and, in the last reel, the two dancing stars stepped out of the screen and, in person, did a rumba on the small cramped stage.

The natives regarded all this contentedly. They thought it all part of the movie. Hollywood was still the real miracle town to them.

The show ended. It was 10:30. Crowds were hammering at the doors outside, trying to get in. But the audience inside stayed put. Joe Budd, the owner-manager, came on the stage hesitantly, looking worried. Everyone cheered.

"Look here, folks," he said, earnestly. "I don't know anything about this here Physical man. I ain't seen him at all. He never—"

He was interrupted by more cheers. Hez came waddling on the stage, looking like a circus clown. He had jammed his bulk into a dress suit designed for Aldley's tall spare frame. Seams were splitting, buttons were gone and the pants hung in folds around his ankles. He wore his usual broad smile.

Seth nudged Arthur. "Look at Sourpuss watching him," he whispered.

Aldley was sitting in the third row, staring with a disdainful sneer at the comic figure on the stage.

"He'd look even happier if he knew that that was his dress suit," said Seth. Arthur gave a snorting laugh.

Joe Budd gave a rough imitation of a man introducing the speaker to the audience—which wasn't bad considering he'd never seen Hez before. He procured a little table with a water carafe on it and scuttled off. The audience quieted, waited expectantly.

"My friends," said Hez, grasping his lapels. "You want to know what in creation is happening to Peterville these days. Well, the little things called atoms are at the root of it. Let's talk about atoms for a while."

He had a gift for making simple pictures clear to simple minds. He went from Democritus, through Newton, Dalton, Maxwell to Rutherford. Moreover, he held his audience. Then he got on to Bohr and indeterminacy. That was more difficult.

"Science can't really get a grip on these electrons at all. It's like a blindfold man with oily hands and something on his mind, trying to seize a sliver of wet soap in a bathtub of dirty water. It can find no reason for any electron to be at any one point in its orbit, nor for it to be in any particular orbit, nor for that orbit to be in any one plane.

"In fact, electrons give all the evidence of acting just as they darn well please. Let us accept that evidence. They *do* go where they please. Why? Because they have the free will to do so. Just as all you people have. And for the same reason that you have. They are conscious, self-governing individuals."

ARTHUR looked at Seth and rolled his eyes up in disgust.

"And I thought he was getting somewhere," he muttered. "He *is* nuts after all."

Hez beamed at him as if he had heard him.

He went on, "Mathematicians find that to do any advanced calculations on electrons they have to use at least four-dimensional mathematics. Because the electron, in entirety, exists in a complex world of many dimensions. We only perceive a minute part of it in this world of three dimensions. And every electron is part of a living and thinking creature moving with free will."

"Nonsense," muttered Arthur. At least, he meant to mutter. But one of those things happened. It was as though an invisible megaphone were placed at his lips. His voice boomed through the hall. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Our friend here doesn't agree," said Hez, absent-mindedly sipping a glass of water. He set it down hastily with distaste, took out his beer-can and had a swig.

"Very well, sir," he went on. "You agree that the atoms of all substances are in constant motion, darting about in all directions? Good. Then you agree that it is within the laws of chance that at any moment all the atoms of some substance may happen to dart in the same direction at the same time? And that the effect will be that the object moves of itself in that direction?"

"Very unlikely," grunted Arthur.

"But it is possible?"

Arthur nodded reluctantly.

"Well, what is happening in Peterville is that some bunches of atoms composing things around us are taking it into their heads to do things together. They draw closer together—the object shrinks in size. And vice versa. They cause liquids, solids, gases to transmute themselves into other combinations of elements.

"In the air they contract and expand to form any sound waves they choose. And so we hear noises that seem to come from nowhere. As I've explained, an electron takes no time at all to jump from orbit to orbit. Thus these transformations can take place in no time at all. The indignity done to Eugenia happened in less than a flash."

Judge Aldley stood up.

"It doesn't need any more of this rubbish to prove you're a fake. *Doctor* Beamish," he said, sarcastically. "All you've said speaks for itself. But to clinch the matter I can inform the audience that I have been making telephonic inquiries, and it is certain that at Harvard there is no Doctor B—"

He broke off, goggling. The glass of water on Hez's little table was rising slowly in the air of its own accord. Everyone watched.

It came floating off the stage. The water in it was steady. It stopped directly above Aldley's head. He gazed up at it, hypnotized. It tilted, abruptly, and emptied itself on his upturned face. He spluttered and reached for his handkerchief. The audience roared.

Watching Aldley's discomfiture, no one noticed Hez go. But the stage was empty now. The lecture was presumed over. The audience pushed out, babbling in excitement.

Seth and Arthur walked home in silence. Seth was nursing his thoughts while Arthur was nursing both his thoughts and his dignity.

CHAPTER IV

Sex Life of a Proton

HEZ was lolling in a chair when they got there. He was back in his rags. Arthur tackled him at once.

"I was quite unconvinced by your lecture. I agree that these phenomena may be caused through atomic disturbance. But to have to endow electrons and protons with intelligence I find beyond me."

"Remember," said Hez, "electrons and protons are only infinitesimal parts of the whole. You're looking at a toenail and imagining you're seeing the whole man."

"A toenail is at least material. But electrons are only half matter, half energy."

"You mean—like mind and body?" asked Hez softly.

Arthur scowled and Seth laughed.

"How often do you turn your whole attention upon the small toenail of your own left foot?" pursued Hez.

"Every time I manicure it."

"I said your *whole* attention. Not a brief and superficial one."

"I can't remember an instance," said Arthur, still irritable.

"The atom beings extend into many, many worlds. All very interesting ones. Their attention is continually wandering from one

to another. Periodically they pay a brief and superficial attention to that part of them which is in this world. Like you, manicuring your toenail.

"Then you have the pranks of poltergeists, the phenomena of apports, levitation and so forth. And just now they've turned their full regard on this bit of themselves. It's a long while since they've taken an interest in this world."

" 'This world'?" echoed Seth. "Far as I can learn, all the fun and games are happening in Peterville. The rest of the world's normal."

"Atomic life exists in races. It's only the race occupying the cross-section in space coinciding with Peterville that is looking this way just now. Billions of 'em of course."

"I don't think much of their efforts," said Arthur, snappily. "Kid stuff. No point to it."

"I don't know. What's your main motive in life?" asked Hez.

"To learn all I can about everything."

"That occupation makes you happy?"

"Yes," said Arthur.

"Then you choose it because it makes you happy. Your real main motive is to be happy. Same for everybody, whatever they say. We're all hedonists. Don't you think the atom beings have made the Peterville population rather happier and more alive than it was?"

"Probably," said Arthur.

"Except Aldley," added Seth with a grin.

"It's Aldley's nature only to be happy when he's got something to moan about, so the atom beings have been giving him something," smiled Hez.

"There's still something juvenile about it," said Arthur. "All the recorded instances of poltergeists point to that too."

"This Peterville race, at least, is a very young one," said Hez, with a smile of peculiar charm. "Millions of years old, yes, but scarcely out of infancy. They're on a larger time scale than humans. They mature slowly. But they know they exist for happiness. They cultivate it. Their idea of it at the moment is going around having fun. Schoolboyish fun—but kindly, don't you think?"

"The hayseeds revel in it, anyway," said Seth. "To tell the truth, it's made this dead end of a place diverting for me too."

Hez went on about the atom beings. It sounded like a collaboration between Stapledon and the Marx Brothers.

There was sex in their world, of a kind. The positive proton was female, the negative electron male. They were paired up. Forces had to balance. Hydrogen atoms were pairs who preferred to be alone. The more complex atoms were believers in "group monogamy—a union both individual and collective, on the principle that a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled."

ATOMS had their equivalent of death. Sooner or later every proton went through a process of "uniting" with her mate electron. The mass of both creatures disappeared and their energies mingled indissolubly. The result was a photon, which went to join the great concourse of cosmic rays sweeping through space to none knew where.

"Call the photon a spirit if you wish," said Hez. "It's the result of matter being annihilated. The process goes on steadily all the time, in the sun, in the stars—and when an atom bomb goes up too. The atom beings all long for their time of uniting. They think it a passing to a much more wonderful world than any they know."

Seth asked, "How are they aware of all we think and do?"

"How can they not be aware? They constitute the furniture, the walls, the air around you and your own body and brain."

"He has no brain," said Arthur absently.

"Also," went on Hez, "they have their own form of spies among humans. They are large groups of atoms gathered together voluntarily for their own amusement in the shape of human beings. Artificial bodies, animated by the atoms' intelligence. They look natural enough. You've probably met one but you'd never detect it."

Arthur sat up.

"Look here," he said. "I've had enough. I've listened to your theories. I've considered them fairly. They're bunk. You know they're bunk. You chatter on like an astrologer, spouting glib rubbish as though you were dealing with proven facts. How could you possibly demonstrate the truth of one-tenth of the nonsense you've been pouring out?"

Hez was silent. He took a swig at his beer-can.

"Take it easy, Arthur," Seth protested mildly.

But Arthur galloped on triumphantly. "You've been poking about in the popular books on modern science. You concocted

from them this appalling hotch-potch of supposition. It won't get by with a genuine student of science—like me. Your 'photon union' is garbled Jeans. Your artificial people made of atoms chunked together like popcorn balls are over the verge of the idiotic. And—"

"You don't believe there are such people?" interrupted Hez.

Arthur snorted eloquently.

"Then let me tell you something in confidence." Hez motioned Arthur nearer. Arthur inclined towards him reluctantly.

Hez whispered like a conspirator, "I myself am one of those people."

He immediately vanished—completely.

Seth and Arthur stared at the empty armchair.

"Blast!" said Arthur, bitterly. "I wish he'd stayed a bit longer. I'd have soon proved him a liar."

Arthur was hard to defeat.

CHAPTER V

A Matter of Principle

THREE days later, Seth got out a double-size number of his weekly paper. Even at that, it was a tight fit getting all the news in. Plenty had happened.

Jeff Warner's house had been turned back to front in the night. Its back porch was now on the main street. Jeff was pleased. He was an individualist. Now his house stood out from the rest. He'd have done it himself if he had had the imagination.

The water in the public fountain in the corner of the square had changed into milk and clogged the pumping apparatus with cream.

There were a score of things like that. The paper was packed with accounts of them. Then there was a report of the lecture and a column on Hez's description of the atom race and an account of the describer's abrupt disappearance. He was still missing.

"If this doesn't sell then nothing I do will," said Seth to Arthur.

It didn't sell—not more than seven copies, anyway.

Seth spent a day going round kicking things. He felt as miserable as sin.

"That settles it," he said, bitterly. "I'm quitting this burg."

"Again?" asked Arthur casually, his head and most of his attention in his notes.

"I mean it this time. I don't care if it's a miracle town or not. I'm sick of feeling unwanted here."

"I wouldn't say that," said Arthur. "I can't imagine why but most of the people here seem to like you."

"Then why don't they buy my paper?"

"Probably because in a small town like this the news gets around quicker by grapevine than through print. The paper's unnecessary."

"But, darn it, even when people have seen a thing happen with their own eyes they like to read about it in the newspapers. Normal people, I mean. But these hayseeds!"

"If we're hayseeds you're one too. You were born here, like me," remarked Arthur.

Seth sighed. "Yeah I, know. But I left when I was five. I've seen the big world outside."

"What made you come back?"

"The big world outside was too big. I got agoraphobia. You don't feel part of anything out there. I want to—fit in. Have a place in a little community. Feel secure. Be of use to my fellow men. Out there it's everybody for himself, against everybody else—for money.

"They worship the Almighty Dollar. They want security as I do but they identify it only with money. They've got no sense of any other values. So they make their world one big dogfight, scrambling over each other's backs."

"Don't worry about that," said Arthur, scribbling away. "I'll soon straighten all that up for them when I get out there."

"I don't really want to go back. But there's no place for me here."

"Why don't you take up some other business?" asked Arthur. "Shoemaking or a bowling alley or something?"

"Because I want to be an editor and nothing else," snapped Seth. "That's what I'm cut out to be."

"Good-bye, then."

"You know darn well what's keeping me here. Can't even raise the fare. No money. In fact I've got a minus quantity."

Arthur raised an eyebrow.

"Money? You mean that worthless stuff they scramble for outside?"

Seth scowled. "It has a certain use sometimes."

"Well, make some, then," said Arthur.

"My name's Seth, not Midas. Everything I touch turns to dust—but not gold dust."

Arthur glanced at his wrist-watch and got up. "I'm going to mail some letters. Coming?"

Seth shook his head. "No. I'll just stay in and perish quietly of misery."

The house seemed quiet after Arthur had gone out into the darkness. Seth switched on the radio. The "Death March" in "Saul" came through.

SETH pounced on the set, switched it off viciously. As he turned away it switched itself on again. He was arrested by the unmistakable voice of Hez coming from the speaker.

"We interrupt the program to make an announcement. This is Hezekiah Beamish, representing the Peterville atom race, speaking to all inhabitants of Peterville. We atoms are just now celebrating an anniversary comparable to your Christmas. A time of special festivity. We want to give each and every one of you a sort of Christmas present.

"Everyone can have one wish and we'll endeavor to fulfill it in the shortest possible time. But only one wish—and no grinding of axes. Tax-collectors have our special protection. It must be wished by midnight at the latest. Happy wishing."

The radio switched itself off.

Seth remembered the chaffing embarrassment of being in debt to Sourpuss Aldley. He remembered his impotence to leave Peterville.

"I wish for money—plenty of it," he said aloud, firmly.

Clank! The light went out abruptly.

"What now?" said Seth, fumbling his way in the direction of the lamp. His extended hand encountered an armchair. It felt strangely cold. His fingers strayed down to the seat, and then he recoiled. For the seat was as hard and unyielding as marble.

He paused, uncertainly. Then set out in the direction of the door. The carpet felt like a wire brush and crunched beneath his shoes. He got another lamp from his bedroom, lit it, and returned.

The first light fell upon the bookshelves. They gave back a dull yellow gleam. He reached out and tapped them. They'd changed into metal—**gold, pretty obviously.**

He looked around the room. Everything in it, apart from his own person, had been transmuted into gold.

Two armchairs stood there like thrones. A glittering typewriter stood on a solid gold desk, surrounded by scattered typing paper like sheets of beaten gold and thin wire loops that were elastic bands a few minutes ago.

A golden phonograph stood on a golden table. Rows and rows of golden books were on the golden shelves. Golden flowers drooped in a golden vase. Veils of gold hung over the window, exquisitely wrought in the pattern of the gauzy curtains.

Seth wandered round the room shining his lamp on these things like Edmond Dantes in the treasure cave of Monte Cristo.

No wonder the other lamp had gone out. It was 22-carat gold right down to the wick.

"Dog my cats!" breathed Seth. "I guess they got my crack about Midas. Well, thanks, Hez, and the rest of you. Looks like I'm out of trouble now."

He spoke too soon. Arthur came back. He stopped just inside the door, flabbergasted. He put out an uncertain hand to finger the bookshelves. Then he caught sight of his own books, a serried row of golden covers. He staggered. Then he registered unbearable anguish.

"My first editions!" he shrieked. "My out-of-prints! All fouled up! Irreplaceable! What's been going on here?"

He snatched one down, and nearly dropped it because of its unexpected weight. He scrambled at the edges of the leaves, but the book would not open. It was a solid block.

"Look!" he said, plaintively, holding it out for inspection. "Can't even open it. And I haven't read it yet! Now I'll never be able to."

And then he did drop it. It landed on the bristly gold pile carpet and one corner of its cover bent and stuck up like a sore thumb. It was pure soft gold.

He stared down at it with an expression of bewildered frustration like Donald Duck's. For the first time that day Seth laughed aloud.

Arthur glared at him, and then investigated his records. He let out a wail like something from the Seventh Circle of the Inferno. His precious collection was a row of unplayable disks and unopenable albums.

He came striding across to Seth and gripped him by the shoulders.

"Explain this," he hissed.

Seth explained weakly. Arthur rampaged up and down like a caged tiger. He called Seth everything he could imagine. He had a vivid imagination.

WHEN most of the storm had passed Seth asked, "Didn't you hear about Hez's announcement yourself?"

"Yes," said Arthur, irritably. "I reckon everyone did, one way or another. Hez's voice sounded even in houses that haven't got radios. When I got to the mail box I found a poster stuck on it announcing the same thing."

"Have you wished yet?"

Arthur became almost human. "No," he said. "What have I got to wish for? I've got enough to live on. I've got a first-class brain. No use wishing for knowledge—I'd rob myself of the fun of learning. I don't want any money that I haven't earned. So long as there's scientific research, so long as I have my books and music, I'm satisfied with life."

"Then why not just wish for your books and records to be as they were?" suggested Seth.

Arthur did. To him they were worth more as they were than their weight in gold.

At midnight they were both still assessing Seth's treasure in dollars. Pete Hawkins' drunken happy voice passed down the street outside, singing (if it could be called singing), "Don't Fence Me in."

"Squaring Aldley is the least this'll do," said Arthur, figuring with a pencil. "You won't have to join in that dogfight in the outside world at all. You can have a life of ease."

"I don't want to do anything. I want to edit a paper," said Seth obstinately.

At which moment the radio, despite that it was a chunk of gold, switched itself on. It hummed. Hez's voice spoke again.

"Hezekiah Beamish speaking. It's midnight and your wishing time is over. We're glad, friends, we've been able to help you and hope that you've received some of the happiness that has been ours during this anniversary.

"We ourselves would have wished, had we given ourselves a wish, to stay longer in your world. But one person of your world made it his wish that we go. As we promised to fulfill every individual's wish, we shall pass on in the morning to other worlds. Thanks for the fun we had in yours. Go on enjoying life."

The radio clicked off. Arthur and Seth looked at each other.

"That was Aldley, you bet!" said Seth, between set teeth. He got his hat. "Well, I'm not in his pocket now. I'm going to tell him what I think of him."

"Remember the law of slander," said Arthur.

Seth replied pungently and not in words. He strode out.

At Aldley's house he made an assault on the door like the finish of the "1812" Overture. There were sounds of alarm within. In a minute Sourpuss opened the door. He was in pajamas and dressing gown.

"What is it? What is it? Is the house burning?"

"No, but I am," snapped Seth. "Did you hear—"

"That those confounded atom things are going? Yes, I did. Best news I've heard in a long time. Now perhaps we'll have some order again. Is that all you want? I've been waked up once already by their idiotic message on the 'phone. Now you drag me out of bed to tell me the same thing."

"Did *you* wish them to go?"

"Mind your own business, young man," barked Aldley and tried to shut the door. But Seth saw the answer on his face. His temper boiled over. He thrust the door back and held it there.

"It *is* my business and everyone else's business!" he bawled. "You rank lump of egotistical authority! You want all the power in this town, don't you, you jealous little despot! You mincing blight! You intolerant block of selfishness! You hate-nursing sham! You chunk of vindictive misery! What do you know of human lives and hopes? There's nothing human in you."

From afar off, on the night wind, came Pete Hawkins' voice uplifted in song. "Don't Fence Me (hic) In."

"Hear that?" said Aldley, ignoring Seth's load of vituperation. "That's my business. Keeping law and order in this town. Six times I have put Pete Hawkins in jail for being incapably drunk. Six times I have found him wandering the streets again within the hour. With no idea how he got out. The atom things took him out as fast as I clapped him in.

"No law, no order, means chaos. Our lives were becoming chaotic. Nothing could be relied on as stable. This last step of giv-

ing people what they want without striving for it is absolutely unmoral. Encourages sloth. We must have principles, we must have discipline. And I'm fighting for them—alone."

"I see," said Seth. "You wouldn't give anyone a birthday present on principle. You'd try to discipline Peter Pan if you could. You're scared of life, scared of change, scared of yourself. You cling to the traditional laws because you haven't the courage to act on anything your heart tells you. If you have a heart."

"That's your opinion," snapped Aldley and slammed the door.

CHAPTER VI

The Awful Truth

THE following afternoon Seth was working on another edition of his paper. It was to be the final issue.

Arthur came in.

"More items for your scandal sheet," he said, sitting on a golden chair. "'Baldy' Whitlock wished for a crop of red hair. He got it. His wife won't own him. 'Pinky' Street is playing the piccolo like mad—he wished to be maestro of it. 'Fat" Nelly wished to be slim. She looks like Claudette Colbert now."

"Johnny Jackson made himself sick eating a tub of ice cream he'd wished for. Tom Pike had his garden weeded by the atoms—he hates weeding. Fred Smith wished himself to be the best pool player in the world and now no one will give him a game."

Seth made notes of them.

"Incidentally, you seem to be the only one in Peterville who wished for money," added Arthur.

Seth frowned. He felt a little guilty. He got up restlessly, paced up and down, stopped to look out of the window.

"These people haven't got much imagination," he said. But he still felt uneasy. He was trying to dodge his own belief that simplicity was a virtue and smartness was a vulgar selfishness.

He saw old Silas Warner passing and hailed him.

"Have you seen our new furniture, Silas?"

Old Silas came in. He surveyed the room.

"Purty," he nodded. "But I'll bet them chairs are danged uncomfortable to set on."

"You said it," said Arthur.

"What's the news, Silas?" asked Seth.

Silas scratched his head. "Did ya hear about Sammy Angell? He always wanted a pet kangaroo. Dang me, he's got one now. Hopping all over the house. His wife's mad at him."

Seth laughed. "By the way, how's your wife, Silas? Last time I saw her her rheumatics were pretty bad."

Silas beamed. "Well, they ain't now. They're gone—for keeps. I wished her cured. And she wished my cough cured. Neither of us knew till afterward what the other wished so we both got a nice surprise."

Seth dropped his eyes. "That's nice," he muttered. More than ever he felt a heel. It had never even crossed his mind that he might have used his wish to help anyone but himself. These were the dopes he'd sneered at. Now he was beginning to feel he wasn't good enough for their company.

He picked up the sheet he'd been scribbling on.

"Would you like to hear a little piece I've written about the atoms going this morning?" he asked.

"Sure," said old Silas.

Seth read it aloud.

"It was five-thirty-one a. m. when I first became aware of the tingling, alive feeling in the air, for I noticed the time expressly. With the first gleam of silver in the eastern sky there was a stirring like a billion insects awakening, after a long dark night, at the first touch of the sun.

"It became a tremulous, nerve-thrilling sound that seemed to come murmuring from over the horizon like a distant thunderstorm.

"It grew louder, became a vibrating hum. As I listened intently, I detected cadences rising and falling in the hum, and sweet secondary themes as though played softly on violins. And then, while scarcely aware of the transformation, one realized that a tremendous symphony orchestra with thousands of players was pouring great music across our little town of Peterville and drenching it with beauty.

"I knew then that the world of the atom-beings, which we shall never see, was a place of almost aching loveliness, a loveliness of an intensity that to us would mean pain.

"It lifted you, that music! Caught you like a whirlwind and bore you up on waves of

thunderous crescendos and pinnacles of icy melody to the very heights of Olympus and there made you drunk with power. You reigned in glory over a kingdom of pride and fire and splendor and then, while you were yet headstrong, it quieted and carried you subtly away down a long, cool liquid stream of sound to a tranquil lake, where you drowsed and rested in reverie for an age.

"Until, suddenly, you awoke to find that the music was stilled and the heavy, glassy water was dark and gray and a chill breeze had sprung up and the last tatters of your dreams were already whirling away on it out of sight.

"When the music had thus passed I gazed around at Peterville. A bright clean little town, from Jedd Carter's emporium at one end to the glittering swimming pool at the other. An oasis of color in the dusty ancient desert. And yet, in some manner, it looked cold and hard.

"Yes, in the dawn light it was bleak. Like a stage when the show is over and the players are gone. Something vital was missing.

"Then old Fred Smith came clattering along in his buggy and threw me a greeting. And somewhere someone laughed and Nelly Moss was singing and someone was clattering pots and pans preparing for breakfast. And I knew that Peterville was still alive.

"But its halcyon days were over."

"Flowery but not bad," said Arthur. "That music was something, though. Greater than the Ninth Symphony."

"What's 'halcyon,'" asked Silas.

Seth explained.

"Um," said the old man. "They were the days, all right. Golden days. I guess no one in Peterville will ever forget 'em."

"Silas," said Seth, on impulse. "Why not buy a copy of the paper tomorrow? It's the last number. It'll make a fine souvenir."

"Reckon I will. Won't be no use to me but mebbe some of m' grandchildren will learn to read."

"What!" exclaimed Seth. "Can't you read?"

"Never got the chance to learn. There's only half a dozen folks here who ever did. And them's people who was eddicated somewhere else. Like you was. You know there ain't never bin no school here."

SETH smote his forehead. "Why did I never think of that? How could I have been so dumb? But you, Arthur, you've never been outside this dump?"

"Not yet," said Arthur, thumbing through his notes.

"Then how did you learn to read?"

"Taught myself," said Arthur, briefly. "Simple enough. I don't need anyone to teach me elementary things like that."

"Why in heaven's name didn't you tell me the people here couldn't read?"

"It never occurred to me," said Arthur, unrepentant. "I've got too many really important things on my mind."

Seth felt his burden of despair slip from him. He got a sensation of sliding into place with a click. He gazed kindly upon old Silas and even upon Arthur.

"My friends," he said. "I'm staying. My dough's going to start a school here. Everyone here's going to learn to read. And then everyone'll buy my paper."

"And find out just how bad it is," said Arthur.

Seth just beamed at him. His heart was overflowing with benevolence towards everyone. He fitted.

FRUITS OF THE AGATHON

A Novelet of the Future by CHARLES L. HARNESS—Next Issue!

By RAY BRADBURY

Lisabeth thought she was Catherine the Great, so they took her far across space to a fool's paradise!

They kissed her hand, before conducting her to a carriage

LISABETH stopped screaming because she was tired. Also, there was this room to consider. There was a vast vibration, like being plunged about in the loud interior of a bell. The room was filled with sighs and murmurs of travel. She was in a rocket. Sud-

denly she recalled the explosion, the plummeting, the Moon riding by in cool space, the Earth gone. Lisabeth turned to a round window deep and blue as a mountain well. It was filled to its brim with evil swift life, movement, vast space monsters lurking with fiery arms, hurrying to some unscheduled destruction. A meteor school flashed by, blinking insane dot-dash codes. She put her hand out after them.

Then she heard the voices. Sighing, whispering voices.

Quietly, she moved to an iron barred door and peered without a sound through the little window of the locked frame.

"Lisabeth's stopped screaming," a tired woman's voice said. It was Helen.

"Thank heaven," a man's voice sighed. "I'll be raving myself before we reach Asteroid Thirty-six."

A second woman's voice said, irritably, "Are you sure this will work? Is it the *best* thing for Lisabeth?"

"She'll be better off than she was on Earth," cried the man.

"We might have asked her if she wanted to *take* this trip, at least, John."

John swore. "You can't ask an insane sister what she wants!"

"Insane? Don't use that word!"

"Insane she is," John said, bluntly. "For honesty's sake, call a spade a spade. There was no question of asking her to come on this trip. We simply had to *make* her do it, that's all."

Listening to them talk, Lisabeth's white fingers trembled on the caged room wall. They were like voices from some warm dream, far away, on a telephone, talking in another language.

"The sooner we get her there and settled on Asteroid Thirty-six, the sooner I can get back to New York," the man was saying in this incomprehensible telephone talk she was eavesdropping on. "After all, when you have a woman thinking she's Catherine the Great—"

"I am, I am, I am!" screamed Lisabeth out of her window into their midst. "I am Catherine!" It was as if she had shot a lightning bolt into the room. The three people almost flew apart. Now Lisabeth raved and cried and clung drunkenly to the cell bars and shouted out her belief in herself. "I am, oh, I am!" she sobbed.

"Good heavens," said Alice.

"Oh, Lisabeth!"

THE man, with a look of startled concern, came to the window and looked in with the false understanding of a person looking down upon a wounded rabbit. "Lisabeth, we're sorry. We understand. You *are* Catherine, Lisabeth."

"Then call me Catherine!" screamed the wild thing in the room.

"Of course, Catherine," insisted the man, swiftly. "Catherine, your Highness, we await your commands."

This only made the pale thing writhing against the door the wilder. "You don't believe, you don't really believe. I can tell by your awful faces, I can tell by your eyes and your mouths. Oh, you don't really believe. I want to kill you!" She blazed her hatred out at them so the man fell away from the door. "You're lying, and I know it's a lie. But I *am* Catherine and you'll never in all your years understand!"

"No," said the man, turning. He went and sat down and put his hands to his face. "I guess we don't understand."

"Good grief," said Alice.

Lisabeth slipped to the red velvet floor and lay there, sobbing away her great unhappiness. The room moved on in space, the voices outside the room murmured and argued and talked on and on through the next half hour.

They placed a food tray inside her door an hour later. It was a simple tray with simple bowls of cereal and milk and hot buns on it. Lisabeth did not move from where she lay. There was one regal thing in the room—this red velvet on which she sprawled in silent rebellion. She would not eat their nasty food for it was most probably poisoned. And it did not come in monogrammed dishes with monogrammed napkins on a regally monogrammed tray for Catherine, Empress of All The Russias! Therefore she would not eat.

"Catherine! Eat your food, Catherine."

Lisabeth said nothing. They could go on insisting. She wanted only to die now. Nobody understood. There was an evil plan to oust her from her throne. These dark, wicked people were part of the plan.

The voices murmured again.

"I have important business in New York, too, just as important as yours, Alice," said the man. "The Amusement Park for one; those rides have to be installed next week, and the gambling equipment I bought in Reno, that has to be shipped East by next

Saturday. If I'm not there to do it, who'll attend to the job?"

Murmur, murmur, dream soft, listen, far away voices.

Alice said, "Here it is autumn and the big fashion show tomorrow and here I am going off in space to some ridiculous planet for heaven knows what reason. I don't see why one of us couldn't have committed her."

"We're her brother and sisters, that's why," the man snapped.

"Well, now that we're talking about it, I don't understand it all. About Lisabeth and where we're taking her. What *is* this Asteroid Thirty-Six?"

"A civilization."

"It's an insane asylum, I thought."

"Nonsense, it's not." He struck a cigarette into fire, puffing. "We discovered, a century ago, that the asteroids were inhabited, inside. They're really a series of small planets, inside of which people breathe and walk around."

"And they'll cure Lisabeth?"

"No, they won't cure her at all."

"Then, why are we taking her there?" Helen was mixing a drink with a brisk shaking of her hands, the ice rattling in the container. She poured and drank. "Why?"

"Because she will be happy there, because it will be the environment for her."

"Won't she ever come back to Earth?"

"Never."

"But how silly. I thought she'd be cured and come home."

HE CRUSHED out one cigarette, snapped another into light, smoked it hungrily, lines under his eyes, his hands trembling.

"Don't ask questions. I've got some radioing to do back to New York." He walked across the cabin and fussed with some equipment. There was a buzzing and a bell sound. He shouted, "Hello, New York! Hang it. Get me through to Sam Norman on Eighth Avenue, Apartment C." He waited. Finally, "Hello, Sam. My, but that was a slow connection. Look, Sam, about that equipment—*What* equipment? The gambling equipment, where's your brain!"

"While you have the contact through to Earth—" said Helen.

"What? Sam— What?" He turned to glare at Helen.

"While you've the contact through," said Helen, holding his elbow urgently, "let me call my beauty operator, I want an appointment for Monday. My hair's a mess."

"I'm trying to talk to Sam Norman," John objected. To Sam he said, "What did you say?" To Helen: "Go away."

"But I want to talk—"

"You can when I'm finished!" He talked with Sam for five minutes, very loud, and then hung up.

"Oh." Helen gasped.

"I'm sorry," he said, tiredly. "Call Earth back yourself and get your fool hair-dresser." He lighted another cigarette while she dialed and called into the speaker.

He looked at Alice who was emptying her fourth cocktail glass. "Alice, you know, Lisabeth's not really insane."

Helen, who was calling Earth, said, "*Shh!*" then turned to her brother blankly. "Not insane?" To the space phone: "Hold on a minute, there." To her brother: "What do you mean, not insane?"

"It's relative. She is insane to us. She wants to be Catherine of Russia. That's illogical, to us. To her it is logical in the extreme. We are now taking her to a planet where it will be logic itself."

He got up, walked to the door and looked in at the lovely pale recumbent Catherine the Great. He put his hand to the bars, the cigarette tremoring out nervous smoke. He spoke quietly:

"Some times, I envy her. I'll envy her even more every hour. She'll stay and be happy. And we? We'll go back, back to New York, back to big roulettes and big dice." He looked at Helen. "Back to hairdressers and men." He looked at Alice, "Back to cocktails and straight gin."

"I don't like insults," cried Alice.

"I wasn't insulting anybody," he replied.

"Just a moment!" said Helen. "New York?"

John sat wearily down. "Anyway, it's all relative. These asteroids are amazing places; all kinds of cultures. You *know* that."

Lisabeth leaned against the cell door which swayed ever so quietly outward. It was unlocked. Her gaze dropped to the catch and her eyes widened. Escape. These talking fools, who didn't understand, were trying to kill her. She might run out of the cell quickly, across the room and into the other little room, where there were all kinds of weird mechanisms. If she managed to reach that room, she could smash and tangle wires and boxes with her hands!

"I don't even know what insanity is," said Alice, far away.

"It's a rebellion. Against the mores or ethical setup in a society. That's what it is," said the man.

Lisabeth opened the door slowly, gathering herself.

Helen was still on the phone, her back turned.

Lisabeth ran, laughing. The three people looked up and cried out as she darted by them. She was across the room and into the automatic pilot room in an instant, lightly. There was a hammer and she snatched it up, shouting against all of them, and crashed it down upon the wires and the mechanisms. There were explosions, dancing lights, the shuddering of the ship in space, a revolving, a flying free. The man rushed into the room as she hammered and rehammered the controls into dented masses of fusing metal!

"Lisabeth!" a woman screamed.

"Lisabeth!" The man struck at her, missed, then struck again. The hammer flew from her fingers. She collapsed into dizziness. In the darkness, in the pain, she felt him groping with the controls, trying to make amends.

He was babbling hysterically.

"Ah! The control!"

ALICE and Helen were swaying against the wildly rocking walls of the ship. Gravity suddenly went insane and shot them against the ceiling.

"Down!" cried the man. "Strap yourselves. We're crashing! There's a planetoid!"

A dark shape ran up onto the port of the ship, black and swift. The two women were sobbing hysterically, calling out to him to do something.

"Shut up, shut up, and let me think!" he cried. He did something with a control, the ship righted itself.

"We'll be killed, we'll be killed!" wailed the sisters. "No, no," he said, and before the planetoid loomed too close he threw his whole body against the one metal rod that was stuck and would not give. But it gave now, with a shudder of grating metal, as he fell forward.

The ship blacked out, something hit, struck, twisted, turning, shook them around. Lisabeth felt herself lifted, whirled, and brought down with stunning force upon the floor. That was all. She remembered no more. . . .

A voice was saying, "Where are we, where are we—where?"

Dimly, Lisabeth heard the voice. There was a smell of alien atmosphere. Words came in over a muffled phone: "Planetoid One-Oh-One. Planetoid One-Oh-One. Calling crashed ship Earth Two! Crash ship Earth Two! Can you give us a bearing on you? We'll try to send a rescue craft along."

"Hello, hello, Planetoid One-Oh-One, Radio." Lisabeth opened her eyes. John and the two women were huddled about the radio set, working it in the dim light. Through the port she could see the bleak and cold asteroid plain.

"You'd better try to get up from there," said the radio voice. "That's bad territory you're in."

"What does he mean?" asked Alice, leaning down over the man.

"This is killing land."

"Killing?"

"Killers, from Earth. Insane killers. Brought here. Dropped off to spend the rest of their lives, killing. They're happy that way."

"You're—you're joking."

"Oh, *am* I?"

The radio voice said, "We'll run through as soon as possible. Don't go outside, whatever you do. There's an atmosphere, yes, but there's likely to be some of the Inmates, too."

Alice ran to the port. "John!" She pointed down. "Down there! There are some men out there now!"

Helen seized John's arm. "Get us out of here, get us out of here!"

"They can't hurt us. Let go of me, for Pete's sake! They can't get inside." John stood staring moodily out the port.

Lisabeth lay easily, luxuriating in the nearness of death. Outside the ship. Killing Land. Killers. *Her* men, of course. Catherine of Russia's bodyguard! Come to rescue her!

She arose. Silently she tiptoed across the room. The man and the two women still stared fascinated out the port. They did not hear her. What would it be like to go below, to open the air lock wide to the terrible killers outside? Wouldn't that be fine? Let them in to kill, to destroy, to annihilate her captors! How wonderful, how simple.

Where was the air lock? Below somewhere. She was out of the room with no

sound. She slipped through the lounge on the soft blue carpeting, came to the spiral ladder and descended it, smiling quietly to herself. She reached the lower deck. The air lock stood shining there.

She stabbed her hands at all kinds of red buttons, trying to find the one that yanked the lock open.

Above, she heard a frantic, surprised voice: "Where's Lisabeth?"

"Below!" Feet began running. "Lisabeth!"

"Quick!" cried Lisabeth to her hands. "Quick!"

Click! A hiss. The air lock groaned open.

Behind her, on the ladder, John leaped down. "Lisabeth!"

The lock was open. The smell of an alien world came in.

The men who had been waiting outside rushed forward, silently. They filled the lock, ten, twelve of them! They were pale and thin and trembling.

Lisabeth smiled, jerking her hand at John and crying out to the alien men.

"This man held me prisoner!" she said. "Kill him!"

THE alien men seemed stupefied. They stood. Their full eyes only gazed at Lisabeth and John.

"No," one of them said, at last, as John waited for them to rush forward in the silent room. "No," the alien man said, dully. "We do not kill. We are the ones who are killed. We die. We wish to die. We do not care to live any more, ever."

There was a silence.

"You heard what I said!" cried Lisabeth.

"No," the men replied. They stood, swaying in the silence.

John fell back against a wall, sighing. Then, after a time he began to laugh with exhausted moves of his body. "Ah-ha! I see. I see!"

The men blinked in bewilderment at him.

Lisabeth's eyes flashed. She made a helpless gesture.

John recovered. He slapped his hands together and made a pushing motion, talking as a man does to a pack of dogs.

"Go on, now," he said, quietly. "Get out." He waved to the men. "Go on, *move!*"

The men did not believe him at first and then, reluctantly, whimpering in their throats, they walked from the rocket. Several of them turned and pleaded with their eyes.

"No," said John coldly. "Move out. We won't have anything to do with you."

He shut the air lock door on them.

Taking Lisabeth's pale hand John said, "It didn't work. Come along. Upstairs with you, scheming lady."

"What happened?" Alice and Helen waited as he brought Lisabeth up the ladder.

"They wanted to die," John said, smiling tiredly. "They weren't Killers, but the Ones To Be Killed. I see it all now." He laughed sharply. "To make an insane killer happy, you have to provide him a culture where people like and approve of being killed. This is such a culture. Those men wanted to be shot."

For a moment Helen stared at him. Then she said one word:

"Wanted?"

"Yes. I've read about it. They're peculiar to this planetoid. After propagating, at the age of twenty-one, they have a death drive, just as many insects and fish do. To balance this drive, we bring in a bunch of insane murderers from Earth. In this culture, a killer becomes the norm, accepted, happy. Thus we transform insanity into sanity. Roughly, anyway. If you *like* that kind of sanity." He slapped his knee, went to the radio. "Hello, Planetoid One-Oh-One, Radio! A bit of trouble. All okay. We met the Ones Who Want to Die, rather than the Killers. Lucky, I'd say."

"Very," said the radio. "We've got your bearing. There should be a ship to you in an hour. Hold on."

Helen was by the port, staring out. "Insane. Insane, all of them."

"To us, yes," said John. "To themselves no. Their culture is sane to itself and all inhabitants within it. That's all that counts."

"I don't understand."

"Take a man who wants eighty-nine wives. On Earth he goes insane because he can't have them. He's frustrated. Bring him out here to the asteroids, put him on a planet full of women where marriage in triplicate is okay, and he becomes the norm, becomes happy."

"Oh."

"On Earth we tend to try to fit square pegs in round holes. It doesn't work. In the asteroids we've got a hole for every peg, no matter what shape. On Earth if pegs don't fit we hammer them until they split. We can't change our culture to fit them, that would be silly and inconvenient. But we

can bring them out to the asteroids. There are cultures here, thousands of years old, convenient, preferable." He got up. "I need a drink. I feel terrible."

The rescue ship arrived within the hour. It came down out of space and landed neatly on the asteroid plateau. "Hello there," the pilot said.

"Hello yourself!"

THEY got aboard, Alice, John, Helen, and—Lisabeth.

Their ship was to be towed into a repair port and returned to them later, on Earth.

"I want to call Chicago," said Helen, instantly, when they reached port.

John sighed. "We have us a close shave, and all you want to do is call Chicago. William, again?"

"Suppose it is?" she snapped.

"Nothing. Go ahead. I suppose they'll let you use the space phone." He nodded at the captain of the rescue ship, who said, "Certainly. Right over here."

Lisabeth did not move. They had taken her to a little room and locked her in once more. There would be no more mistakenly unlocked doors. It was all over. Now there was nothing.

"Hello, Chicago. William? This is Helen!" Laughter.

A pouring of drinks. "I," said Alice, "am going," she lifted the glass, "to," she went on, "get very drunk."

The captain of the ship came in. "We'll be landing on Thirty-Six in about ten minutes. You've had bad luck."

"It's all right now. A bit thick for me." John nodded at Helen cooing and stroking the phone, at Alice mixing a drink, and at Lisabeth standing, white and silent, in her little cell.

The captain raised his brows and nodded, wryly.

John lighted a cigarette and moved forward. "Suppose I thought I was Christ, captain? Would you take me to a planetoid where everybody thought *they* were saviors of the world?"

"Heavens, no." The captain laughed. "You'd kill each other off as 'impostors.' No, we'd take you to a culture prepared to accept and take you in as the *only* world savior."

"One that would *lie* to me, say they believed I was a savior?"

"No. No lies. Only the truth. The people must really *believe* in order that you, as a messiah, may be happy. The entire idea of sending insane people out here to various planets, is to be sure they'll live happily the rest of their lives. So such a complex must live in a culture where people actually think he *is* a savior."

"It must be difficult to find enough room on your planets for all those who think they're saviors, mustn't it?"

"We've a Charting Committee for that. Nine thousand Earthmen, hopelessly insane, beyond treatment on Earth, think they're messiahs. That means a waiting list. There are only forty-seven thousand available cultures on forty-seven thousand planetoids between here and Saturn, and in the other sun systems. And only two thousand of these cultures are gullible enough to accept a false redeemer. Therefore, there's a long list of such applicants waiting to travel to some culture when an older savior dies. We couldn't possibly introduce two self-deluded Gautama Buddhas into one culture simultaneously. Oh! what dissension that would cause! But, in event of one John, the Baptist, for instance, we could, at the same time, accommodate one Caesar, one Pontius Pilate, one Matthew, one Mark, one Luke, one John, along with him. You see?"

"I think so."

"When you put one Mohammed into juxtaposition with one pseudo-contempory of ancient times, history repeats itself. All the drama of ancient times is being re-enacted here on these planetoids. Everybody's happy, insanity is banished, drama lives."

"Sounds faintly blasphemous."

"Hardly. They're happy, normal, to themselves. See that planet, there? Somewhere on it is a Joan of Arc listening for angel voices. Over there, see! A Mecca waits for a Mohammed to appear so they may finish out their acts."

"It's frightening."

"Somewhat." The captain walked off, away. Lisabeth watched him go.

Asteroid Number 36 swung up and under the ship!

Other planetoids whirled by. Lisabeth watched them from her cell. They moved on the deep ocean blackness, full of some hidden drama and tragedy she could not fathom.

"There's Othello's planet!" cried John. "I read about that one."

"Oh." Alice was drinking steadily. She

sat in a rubberoid chair, her eyes glazed. "Oh. Well, well. Isn't that nice, isn't it?"

"Othello and Desdemona and Iago! Warriors and banners and trumpets. Gosh, what it must be like down there."

MORE planetoids, more, more. Lisabeth counted them with her simple, moving, pink lips. Moving, moving. More. There, and there!

"Down there somewhere is a man who thinks he's Shakespeare!"

"Good for him, good," murmured Alice, putting down her drink, lazily.

"Stratford on Avon's down there, and strolling minstrels. All you do is bring some crazy fellow from Maine who thinks he's Shakespeare up here and there's the culture waiting for him, to really make him into Shakespeare! And do you know, Alice—Alice, are you listening?" John breathed swiftly. "They live and die just as the famous men lived and died. They die the same deaths, in imitation. A woman who thinks she is Cleopatra puts an asp to her flesh. A man, who thinks he is Socrates, quaffs the hemlock! They live out old lives and die the old deaths. What an immensely beautiful insanity it is."

"William, the things you say!" cooed Helen into the space phone. "I'll be in Chicago next week, William. Yes, I'm all right. I'll see you then, sweets."

"Oh, pish," said Alice.

"This is the best thing for Lizabeth," John said. "We shouldn't feel badly."

"We certainly had to wait long enough." Alice dropped her glass. "Put in application six months ago."

"There were one thousand Catherines of Russia. One died yesterday. Lisabeth will fill her position. She'll rule unwisely and not too well, but happily."

Helen kissed her lips in front of the phone, pouting her red moist lips. "You *know* I do," she said, eyes shut. "Love you, William, love you." She was speaking softly over a few million miles of space.

"Time!" shouted the audio in the room. "Landing time!"

John got up and smoked a last cigarette nervously, his face wincing.

Catherine of Russia looked out at the three people. She saw Alice drink quietly and stupidly and John standing in a litter of cigarette butts under his shoes. And Helen was lying full length on a rubberoid couch, murmuring softly into the phone, stroking it.

Now John came to the window of the cell. She did not answer when he said hello. He did not believe in her.

"Sometimes I wonder where we'll all wind up," he said, simply, looking at Catherine. "Myself on a planetoid where I can burn gambling machines all day? First chop them with axes, then pour kerosene on them, then burn them? And what about Alice? Will she wind up on a planetoid where oceans of gin and canals of sherry are the rule? And Helen? Will she land on a place full of handsome men, thousands of them? And nobody to reprimand her?"

A bell rang. "Asteroid Thirty-Six! Landing! Landing! Time, time!"

John turned and walked to Alice. "Stop drinking." He turned to Helen. "Get off the phone, we're landing!" He took the phone away from her when she would not stop.

Catherine of Russia was ready for the welcome that came as she stepped from the ship. Streets were flooded with people, gilt carriages awaited, banners flew, somewhere a band played, cannons exploded into the roaring atmosphere. She began to cry. They believed in her! They were her friends, all of these persons with smiling faces, all of these people in correct, shining costume. The palace awaited at the end of the avenue.

"Catherine, Catherine!"

"Your Majesty! Welcome Home!"

"Oh, your Majesty!"

"I've been away so long," cried Catherine, holding her hands to her tearful face. She straightened herself. She controlled her voice, finally. "Such a long, long time. And now I'm back. It's good, so good to be home."

"Your Majesty, your Majesty!"

THEY kissed her hand, before conducting her to a carriage. Smiling, laughing, she called for wine. They brought her vast goblets of clear wine. She drank and threw a golbet shattering on the street! And a band played and drums beat and guns thundered! And just as the horses pranced and the French and English Ambassadors stepped into the carriage, Catherine turned to give one last silent look at the ship from which she had stepped. For a moment she was quiet and for this brief time she knew a silence and a restive sadness. In the open port of the ship were three people, a man

and two women, waving, waving at her.

"Who are those people, your Majesty?" asked the Spanish Ambassador.

"I don't know," whispered Catherine.

"Where are they from?"

"Some strange, far away place."

"Do you know them, your Majesty?"

"Know them?" She put her hand out, almost to wave to them, then put her hand down. "No. I don't think so. Odd people. Strange people. From some long ago, some horrible land somewhere. Insane, all three of them. One works big game machines, another talks strangely over phones, and a third drinks, and drinks, forever. Really, quite insane." Her eyes were dull. Now, her attention sharpened. She cracked her hand down. "Give them notice!"

"Your Majesty!"

"An hour's notice to get out of Saint Petersburg!"

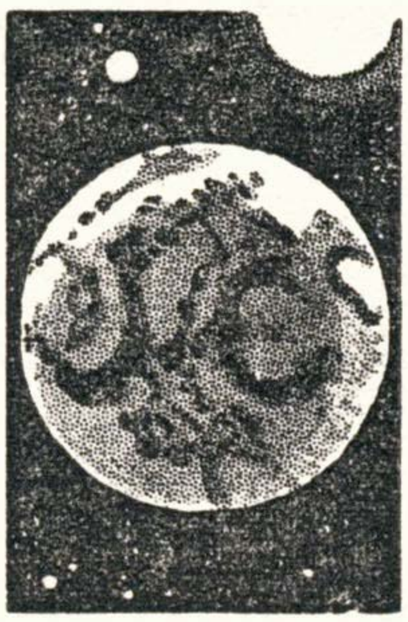
"Yes, your Majesty!"

"I won't have strangers here, understand!"

"Yes, your Majesty!"

The carriage moved down the street, the horses dancing, the crowd hallooing, the band playing, leaving the silver rocket ship behind.

She did not look back again, not even when the man in the silver ship cried, "Good-by, good-by!" for his voice was drowned when the crowd on all sides rushed warmly in, engulfing her in happiness, shouting, "Catherine, Catherine, Mother of all the Russias!"



Life on Mars Dies Hard

EVER since the theory that the planet Mars is or was inhabited by intelligent life forms was promulgated, a determined group of scientists has been doing its utmost to kill it off. When early telescopes permitted Earthbound observers to see that mysterious surface cross-hatchery on the red planet which Percival Lowell, the famed Harvard astronomer, envisaged and labeled as "canals," probably created by some sort of superbeings, less visionary star gazers promptly tagged the phenomenon as some sort of natural geologic erosion. This tug of war has been going on ever since.

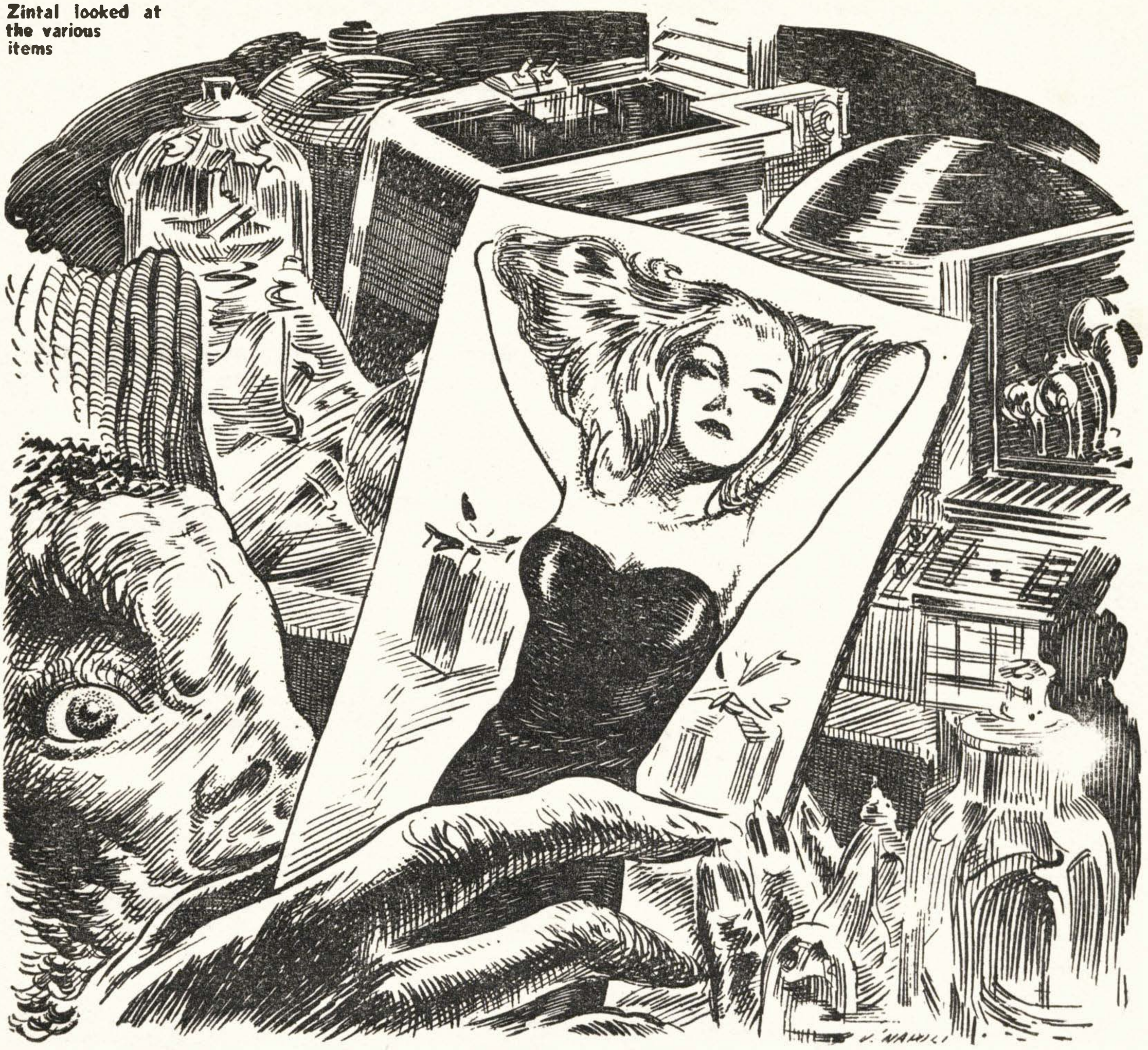
Recent observations made at McDonald Observatory, Fort Davis, Texas, with an 82-inch telescope, suggest that the only life forms possible upon our ruddy neighbor are various sorts of lichens and mosses. It is these growths which are currently believed to cause Mars' seasonal green areas.

High forms of life are termed "impossible" at present due to almost complete lack of oxygen on the planet as well as lack of any known elements which could filter out the ultra violet rays of the sun. Another factor against life as we know it is complete lack of rainfall.

Yet there is something in the Martian atmosphere which renders it opaque to ultra-violet rays—and recent highly developed spectrum tests indicate that the polar caps are of ice or snow rather than frozen carbon dioxide as formerly believed. So the planet does have some protection against deadly radiation and there must be some source of water.

Life on Mars dies hard in the minds of imaginative Earthmen—so hard that someday, perhaps in the reasonably near future, men will go to our neighbor planet to learn what really does go on there. Until then they live in hope!

—VANCE PORTER.



By GEORGE O. SMITH

The Cosmic Jackpot

MARS AND TERRAN GET ON SPEAKING TERMS WHEN THEIR SLOT MACHINES SWAP PAYOFFS!

ZINTAL, the Martian physicist, turned from his Martian companions and crossed the room toward a large, ornate machine. From his pocket Zintal took a couple of shiny Martian coins and dropped them in the slot and pressed a number of buttons in sequence.

He waited. The machine clicked faintly and made a noise similar to a Compur shutter set to one second. Then a small door became illuminated below the keyboard.

Zintal opened the door in a semi-absent-minded way and reached in for his purchase. His absent-mindedness disappeared. It would have remained, of course, had he received what he paid for. But instead of the desired

purchase, he held in his large greenish hand a small red cylinder.

Zintal grunted angrily and said: *"Ve komacil weezro!"**

Whereupon Zintal hurled the small cylinder back into the delivery receptacle and slammed the door. He had no idea of what "Lovepruf Lipstick" could have been, and as for its cosmetic value, even the most wanton of Martian wantons had not fallen to the bizarre idea of using red makeup on their normally healthy green complexions. The fact is, Zintal had punched the "Reject" button before he realized that the lettering on the cylinder was profoundly dissimilar to any type of lettering he had ever seen. This included a horde of Martian mathematical symbols and ideographs representing physical identities and, naturally, the cursive and printed forms of Martian cryptology.

He reached for the little door but he was too late. Back out of the return-chute there came two silvery coins that Zintal picked up idly.

Again his indolent air died a-borning, and again he swore: *"Ve komacil weezro!"*

FOR all Zintal could tell at this moment, they might have been a good grade of platinum or pure iridium, or any other silvery metal. But as a medium of exchange on Mars they were worth exactly nothing.

Zintal could not even tell that the letters on the obverse side referred to: (1) a condition of freedom, (2) faith in a familiar deity, and (3) the date of coinage. On the reverse side the lettering was equally desolate of meaning to the Martian. There was: (1) the country of coinage, (2) a statement of value, and (3) a phrase in— Well, that itself would have stopped Zintal right in his tracks. Zintal, the Martian physicist, could no more conceive of a planet where more than one language existed than he could, at the time of reading, have deciphered the statement, "E pluribus unum."

Zintal aimed a kick at the offending machine, then beat upon its side with a massive green fist. He probed into the delivery receptacle angrily until the communications grille came to life and a cold official voice demanded that he cease trying to make the slot machine deliver without the proper deposit. Zintal snarled and, muttering Martian imprecations, returned to his friends.

Even on Mars it is sheer futility to argue with a slot machine.

* * * * *

Johnny Edwards was addressing a large, attentive group, but one small portion of his mind was contemplating Norma Harris, his secretary. In the terms of the day, Johnny Edwards "went for" Miss Harris in a rather large and affectionate way, but since the human race still lacked the faculty of mental telepathy, he was unaware of her opinion of him.

Her real opinion, that is. There was, is, and probably always will be a deep, underlying difference between the enjoyment of holding hands in a moving picture house or cooperating in a goodnight kiss and the idea of first-degree matrimony.

Johnny Edwards was inclined to conjecture thus whenever he was doing something routine, or something for which he had prepared.

This was one of those occasions. The Edwards Merchandiser was his baby. He knew its tricks backward, forward, and in advance. Now that he was starting production—not engineering, mind, but real production—of the Edwards Merchandiser, he was running off the rehearsed speech with half his brain on the job, the other half being bent toward the puzzle of Miss Harris' affections.

She wrinkled her nose at him, which caused him to stutter over a word, which caused him hastily to bend his entire contemplation on his talk. He discovered, with no surprise at all, that he was in the self-apology section.

"—ah—er—I was saying, humorously, that this idea may be likened to electricity or nuclear physics as a field. Both were and are expected to remake the world. The physicists and the imaginative writers of the day contemplate and describe great works and great ideas.

"But are we any closer to interplanetary travel now than we were before the war? Some say yes, some say no. Is any house being heated with the power from the fission of uranium? The fact is, gentlemen, that while

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* This expression is high grade Martian and the expostulation of a Martian physicist, therefore its translation into good English is near-impossible. However, a very rough transliteration of the phrase is—
Ve—Personal pronoun—**I**
Komacil—Verb past-indicative—**was**
Weezro—Verb Transitive—**Gypped!**
No doubt such phrases will become more and more familiar to all Terrans now that contact with Martians has been made. (G. O. S.)

some men contemplate massive feats, other men are working in smaller ways to benefit the world. No doubt the early workers in electricity did not foresee the complete overhauling the world would get when the electric light came along.

"So it is with the Edwards Merchandiser. It will be called a slot machine and it will be popular. Its relationship to science will be scoffed at by those brains and aesthetes who cannot correlate the principle of the spintheriscope with the dollar watch.

"Suffice this description. In the Edwards Merchandiser there is a matter transmitter. By-passing all the confounded legal red-tape now ensuing among government, public and private carriers of packages and letters, union labor, and others, the Edwards Merchandiser is a new idea and therefore is permitted to operate without trouble.

"In the slot, you place a coin. Upon the keyboard you tap out the name or description of the item you desire. The window flashes the proper cost if you have not deposited properly. Upon receipt of the proper amount, the operator then sends you the item you have purchased. It is as simple as that. Anything that will fit the delivery cubicle here, behind this door, can be bought and delivered! Admittedly, some items may be difficult to obtain on an instant's notice. Yet the organization of the Edwards Merchandiser is such that it can and will deliver if it is humanly possible."

HE PAUSED amid a round of applause. A hand went up at the rear of the office, and Edwards nodded at the questioner.

"I'd like to see a demonstration, please."

Edwards nodded again. "Yes," he said. "But I must ask that you don't try to stump me. I am not running a you-can't-stump-me game."

"I don't want to stump you," the man disclaimed with a smile. "Anything will do. Just show us."

Edwards smiled genially. "Miss Harris," he said affably, "will you please step over and use the merchandiser for the gentlemen present?"

Norma Harris smiled. She always smiled when Johnny Edwards asked her to do something. She hoped that eventually she could convey the idea that she would smile as happily when asked to sew buttons on or darn a sock. She'd deal with cleaning out the furnace when she came to it, but for the time being Norma was being affectionately helpful.

There was, of course, every opportunity to be taken for hinting. This was nothing new; it was just one possibility out of a long line of hints. Quietly smiling, Norma Harris extracted two dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot. Then on the keyboard, she tapped out the name of a product familiar to her and waited.

Strangely named product, if you went for semantics. "Lovepruf" apparently means something to prevent the tender emotion when what it really meant was that it was un—

Norma opened the little door at the click of the machine and reached in. Her hand came out quickly and she said, "Oh!" in sharp surprise.

"Oh—what?" asked Johnny Edwards.

Frowning with puzzlement, she handed him a small package.

Johnny Edwards looked at it. It was ornate and compact, covered with a glassine substance that might have been cellophane. It meant nothing to him. Had Johnny Edwards been a Martian, he would have known what it was, and he could have used and enjoyed it. But since neither Johnny Edwards nor your present correspondent was able at that time to read Martian, and Zintal's memory failed him in the ensuing period, the true identity of the package is one of the minor mysteries of the Solar System.

"What is it?" asked Johnny.

"I don't know," she returned.

"Isn't it what you asked for?"

"No," she said.

Edwards swore under his breath. This was a fine demonstration to inaugurate the sale of a new machine. It was as bad as the automobile show where the Bland sedan had stalled on the stage and had to be pushed off instead of roaring away like the others did. It was like the child prodigy who forgot the seventh line of "Horatio at the Bridge." Yet like the Lohengrin who sang the last aria too long and remarked in a second-balcony whisper, "What time does the next swan leave?" he, Johnny Edwards, was capable of turning disaster into at least a minor victory.

"This is deplorable," he said in solemn tones. "Obviously something went cockeyed at the merchandising center. Well—" he laughed—"people have been beating on

the sides of slot machines for a couple of hundred years, but with the Edwards Merchandiser, no man need abandon his money to the maw of an insensate machine. Observe what we do with an error, after which Miss Harris will try again and will without question succeed.

"Frankly," he said as Miss Harris deposited the package into the receptacle once more, "I'd have preferred that the error-demonstration take place after the success. I would have planned it that way if I'd planned a failure. But— Okay, Miss Harris?"

She nodded brightly, jingling the coins in her hand. Abruptly she dropped them and, in her attempt to catch them, inadvertently kicked them under the desk.

"I can sure mess things," she said apologetically. She took two more dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot, tapped out the name, and opened the door. With a slight blush, Norma Harris handed Johnny Edwards a small cylinder of red plastic.

"Woman eternal," he said dramatically. "Will you gentlemen watch Miss Harris install a new face right here and now, or will you take my word for it that this is a Lovepruf Lipstick?"

It was quite obvious that regardless of the previous failure, the Edwards Merchandiser was a howling success.

SEVERAL hours later, after the party broke up, Johnny Edwards returned to his office to see Norma probing under the desk with a yardstick.

"What gives?" he asked.

Norma held up two coins.

"Where did you get those?" he asked.

"Out of the machine," she told him.

"Yeah, but—" He picked them from her palm and looked them over carefully. "I'm no numis—munis—"

"Numismatist," she offered helpfully.

"I'm not one of them, either," he snapped. "I don't know rare coins, Norma, but I'd say that I have a pair here that might be truly rare."

Norma looked at him. "Johnny," she said in an awed voice, "I have a brother who is an archeologist."

"I know. Has Tony shown you anything like these?"

"No," she said. "But he has trained me to notice letters, characters, and ideographs. The printing or engraving on these coins is very similar to the lettering on that package!"

"Yeah, but—"

Norma giggled in semi-hysteria. "Would it be economically just to pay for uncertain merchandise with uncertain coinage?"

"But you—"

Norma sobered. "Somewhere, someone got—temporarily, of course—a Lovepruf Lipstick for his two dinero, here, and hurled the thing back into the machine just as we did that package of mahooleylickum we got. Then in return, we get two dinero and someone, somewhere, is wondering what the legend 'One Dime' means."

"Ow!" groaned Johnny Edwards. "My aching imagination!"

* * * * *

"Indubitably"* said Zintal, "these coins are an alloy of silver, but not a particularly valuable one, I'd estimate."

"You could smelt down any of our coins," replied Vorhan, the metallurgist, "and you'd be able to sell the metal for less than half of its coinage worth."

"True," admitted Zintal. "But—"

"Well," grinned Vorhan, "is it the money or the principle of the thing?"

Zintal grunted amicably. "Normally, I'd be inclined to eschew principle for a bit of hard cash. But this is one of those inexplicable things that prompts me to cry 'principle by all means.' Y'know, Vorhan, I'd gladly forfeit both of those coins to know where they came from."

"Probably worth it," smiled Vorhan. "Obviously, Zintal, those coins came from some civilization extra-Martian."

"But where?" demanded Zintal. "I—"

"You do not doubt their un-Martian origin?" Vorhan interrupted.

"Not at all," said Zintal unhappily. "They are too concrete as evidence to deny. But where?"

"I am not too familiar with the other planets of the system—" Vorhan began.

Zintal snorted ungraciously. "*This* sys-

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* Naturally, Zintal did not say 'Indubitably' or anything that resembles it phonetically. So until the general public becomes better acquainted with the newly-written English-Martian cross-referred dictionary, we will give as free a transliteration of the Martian into its nearest English connotation. This is not only permissable but highly recommended, since (to quote a less remote parallel) when a Frenchman watching a baseball game leaps to his feet and screams "Murte d'arbite," he really means "Kill the umpire." Conversely, when the American is watching a baseball game in Paris and yells "Commit violence upon the official scorekeeper," he really means "Murte d'arbite!" (G. O. S.)

tem?" he laughed. "Vorhan, go take yourself an elementary course in astronomy. The outer planets are completely unfitted for any kind of life. The inner planets are equally vicious. The surface of the nearest is fully four fifths water, and the next one in is completely wreathed in clouds. What kind of life could evolve with all that water?"

"There is the innermost," said Vorhan hopefully.

"Airless," replied Zintal. "Besides which, there is but a narrow zone where the temperature might lie at a reasonable level. Only a couple of the satellites of the outer planets might be acceptable, but it is generally accepted that the atmospheres of these satellites is either non-existent or high in pre-foliage methane. The closest one, I think, is the more likely, but it is well known that its atmosphere is normal at about sixty per cent relative humidity. You can have it, Vorhan."

"Give it to your mother-in-law," snorted Vorhan. "I don't want it." Then he speared Zintal with a very sharp glance. "So you're the physicist," he said. "Instead of telling me the places where they ain't, try to think of some place where they could be"

Zintal looked out of the window at the black sky, and waved an all-embracing arm. "Out there there must be a myriad of nice dry planets," he said. "I—"

"What," demanded Vorhan, "is the velocity of propagation of the Mesonic energy level?"

Zintal grunted unhappily. "What is the velocity of propagation of gravity?" he asked. "Until we can get far enough away from this planet to have it make a difference, we're stuck. It used to be, 'wait until we can modulate it,' but we've done that. Now—" Zintal shrugged.

"So what are we going to do about it?" demanded Vorhan. "Sit here and stew ourselves into a psychoneurose?"

Zintal smiled boyishly. "I've just licensed a machine. I'm going to buy stuff with it until it makes with the same kind of mistake."

VORHAN looked at the machine with mingled admiration and sorrow. "We've used them for fifty years," he said. "This is the first time there ever has been anything like this. You'll be like the man who spent his entire life winning the bet that a shuffled deck of cards would eventually come up in the original sequence."

Zintal nodded. "You provide me with a better answer," he challenged.

Vorhan shook his head. "I can't, confound it!" he growled.

Zintal smiled. "Well, this is the machine that produced the strange coins. I'm buying everything I can through it just in the hope. Someday it will repeat."

Vorhan laughed. "In the meantime," he said half-humorously, "I am going out to hunt a needle in a haystack."

Zintal turned to his workbench and handed Vorhan a large cylinder of a crystalline metal. "This will help you," he said.

Vorhan laughed. The bar of metal was a powerful permanent magnet.

He tossed the magnet to Zintal and turned to the physicist's machine. From his pocket he took a couple of coins and dropped them in the slot and pecked out the name of a product on the keyboard. There was the usual *whirrrrr,* and then from the communicating grille there came that same haughty, ultra-virtuous voice, saying:

"Please refrain from the use of spurious coins!"

Zintal hurled the little door open and cursed a round Martian oath, commending the machine to a first-class Martian hell that consisted of being immersed in water up to the scalp. For on Zintal's soft green Martian hand had spilled a boiling-hot mixture. Not only did it burn, but it was a foul mixture of something dissolved in water!

"Now what in the name of sin is this?" he demanded, setting the container gingerly on the workbench and covering it quickly with a glass bell-jar to keep in the obviously poisonous vapors.

* * * * *

Johnny Edwards yawned with a jaw-breaking stretch. Norma Harris yawned sympathetically and told him to stop.

"It isn't the company," he assured her. "It's the hour."

She nodded sleepily. "We've spent most of the night at this," she said. "And so far we've collected very little of interest. But we sure have a fine collection of products. More darned toothpaste, cigarettes, candy bars, lipstick, tobacco, gin, mosquito dope, soap, pencils, camera film, postage stamps, ink—"

"Looks like a drug store," he grinned.

"—but nothing of unearthly coinage," she finished sleepily.

"Good thing I own the company," he said.

"Otherwise I'd be stuck for more stuff than any family of thirteen could use in seven million years. I'll return it in the morning and retrieve my coins."

"You should be nearly out by now," observed Norma.

"Just a few more," Johnny admitted. "Then we give up for the evening. Well, how about coffee, Norma?"

"Black," she requested, "and bitter!"

Johnny pecked at the keyboard and within a few seconds, the machine announced that it had delivered of itself and that the door should be opened and the merchandise removed.

Johnny gulped. "This isn't coffee," he said, holding up a small metal cylinder.

"What is it?" asked Norma sleepily.

"I don't know."

Norma came fully awake. "That isn't the same as before," she said.

Johnny nodded and dropped more coins in the machine. It clicked furiously, delivered his three-hundredth package of cigarettes, whereupon he pressed the return button and sent them back. From the return-coin slot there dropped—two of the strange coins.

"Well," said Edwards. "This is it!"

"Send 'em a note?" suggested Norma.

"In whose language?" demanded Johnny.

"Send 'em a diagram of the Solar System," she said.

"*Which* Solar System?" he demanded.

"Send 'em ours."

"And who'd recognize it?" he said, pouring more coins into the machine.

HIS luck waxed and waned. For the first half hour, it was pretty much a hit or miss proposition, in which he made connection three times. His "take" consisted of one soft-wood cylinder "wrapped" around a strip of graphite and a good grade of pencil it was, a box of brittle-dry not-quite-cubes that had neither spots like dice nor did they bound merrily (although they fractured thoroughly), and a light-weight metal cylinder with a tiny wing-nut contraption on one end. Johnny turned it experimentally and shortly afterwards, both Norma and Johnny left the office to get coffee across the street—while the office aired out. They got more coins, too, as an afterthought.

Then as the night wore on towards morning, Johnny Edwards began to drop his coins at regular intervals. During the first hour of this, they received a package of rectangular pasteboards that indicated that someone else played an unearthly game of poker, pinochle, or bridge; a folder of needles which were quite earthly save for the lettering on the cover; and a bottle of some gooey-thick mess that Johnny dropped on the floor. The glass broke, and the mess spilled out on the rug. Subsequently, Johnny Edwards had to hire a taxidermist to remove the rug from the floor—some one made a mighty good grade of mucilage.

Then as the timing became more regular, they received a book of common paper printed in the same complex characters and the cover of which was luridly painted.

"Great howling rockets," growled Edwards, "is that what we're communicating with?"

Norma laughed and picked up a copy of Johnny's favorite magazine. "Is this how we look?" she asked humorously.

The book was followed by a set of picture cards depicting a few scenes of unearthly origin but with no printed characters—buildings and a small bridge over a narrow span of water; trees that looked normal enough in a forest scene. They got a ball of plastic twine, a hard-cover volume containing nothing but listings of ideographs; a package of evil-smelling, ultra-dry things like desiccated prunes; a wide strip of some sort of cloth; and a jar of cream that might have been a cosmetic—for something—but might have worked better as a soldering flux, since it skinned the outer surface of Johnny's pocket knife in a trice.

The pile of items grew as their coincidence increased—and then ceased entirely.

Morning dawned bright and clear but unhappily, for the contact had ceased abruptly and no more strange items came through.

"Me—I give up," said Johnny. "I'll run you home, Norma."

"The devil you will," she said with a very tired yawn. "Little Norma is going to hit the studio couch in the Ladies' Room."

"But what will your parents think?" he objected.

"I'll tell 'em the truth," she said.

"The truth?" he gasped, viewing the collection of unidentifiable and utterly useless items on the desk. "They'll never believe *that!*"

"I know," she said happily.

She left the office and it was some time before Johnny Edwards realized that Norma

didn't mind the idea of the all-white shotgun.

* * * * *

Zintal held up a package of cigarettes with puzzlement. "Do you eat 'em, feed 'em to the wilgil, or burn 'em in a dish?" he asked.

"They might be poison."

"Undoubtedly." Zintal placed the cigarettes under another bell jar.

The deck of cards he riffled through with knowing deftness. The dictionary he filed carefully away, and the bottle of ink went under another bell jar. It was, he admitted, the most palatable smelling item of the bunch. The box of candy he threw into the fireplace with a deep, distasteful wrinkle of his wide, flat nose.

He accepted the little cylinder from Vorhan, twisted the wing-nut and inhaled deeply. The distaste on Zintal's face diminished and was replaced with a sigh of satisfaction. He marked some Martian characters on the end of a rough-surfaced board with some of VerLong's finest Lovepruf Lipstick and put the handy, soft crayon away for future use.

THE set of picture postcards he ran through but shook his head because they were not indicative of anything but a slightly strange city of rather large size. The scene of hundreds of thousands of ultra-minute creatures basking in what was obviously a vast body of water he shuddered at first and swore at second because the figures were indistinct through a magnifier. The Atlantic City postcard was consigned to the fireplace. The magazine cover depicting one of America's shapeliest was viewed with intelligent gratification though without the usual wolf-whistles.

This went on for some time, and finally Zintal hit the coincidental timing perfectly, and they began to catalogue the items.

Now, be it remembered that Zintal was a physicist of Martian repute, and therefore he had an advantage over Johnny Edwards in making a wild guess as to the origin of the contact. His only misleading evidence was the obvious belief that no sentient life could evolve on an overly-wet world such as Terra. It was, however, equally obvious that the strangers did not object to water as strenuously as did Martians. Martians could take it or leave it alone, absorbing enough for their daily needs from contact and losing only by evaporation.

Despite the training of ages of Martians to the contrary, Zintal was beginning to revise his opinion.

Then, because this sending of just plain "things" was beginning to pall—especially in view of the fact that everything Zintal received was alien and useless and the reverse must be equally true on Terra—Zintal began to think in terms of what might be useful in making contact with an utterly alien and unknown race.

He sat down at his drawing board and started to sketch the constellation, Orion. If the other race were in this section of the Galaxy, they would recognize Orion. He grumbled because he had no star-map to ship along, and the merchandising agency claimed there was none at hand. But a hand sketch—

Orion, if recognized, would be followed by the very characteristic stellar layouts of Sirius and Centaurus in the hope that these systems might harbor the aliens. He would, as a hazard, include Sol and the planetary system; perhaps if the aliens were not of Solar origin they might be sufficiently advanced in astronomy to recognize Sol. He—

The door opened abruptly, and several Martian police entered.

"Zintal, Physicist, we arrest you for the crime of attempting to obtain merchandise without payment. Do you deny inserting spurious coins in the machine?"

"I—we—"

"Come along," said the foremost policeman angrily. To his side-kick, he said: "What some people will go through to try to beat a slot machine."

Zintal shook himself free of the official handclasp and reached for one of the bell jars. From it he took an atomizer which he turned upon the policemen. They retched, and while they were in the fiendish grip of completely overturned stomachs, Zintal grabbed his machine and left.

He dropped the atomizer, and the odor of *Nuit de Noël* filled the air with the most foul stench ever carried on the thin air of Mars.

* * * * *

Norma Harris entered the room brightly and found Johnny Edwards hard at work. He looked haggard, and Norma knew that he hadn't been asleep at all.

"What—" She stopped and pointed at the job he had been tinkering with.

He nodded, seeing that she comprehended.

"No, Johnny!"

"But somebody's gotta go," he said desperately.

"Not you," she said, running forward and

wrapping her arms about him. "Not you."

"Why not?" he asked. "Who else?"

"But—I—"

"I'll take no chances," he said. "First goes a bottle of air. Then other items that will insure safety in that other place. Then me. And once I'm there we can work on their gadget and get it set up so that this haphazard business can be made into something certain."

NORMA nodded unhappily. "Any luck since—"

"No. But we'll get together again. You watch!"

The machine behind them buzzed and Johnny turned. "I set up a gadget to feed nickels into it at regular intervals," he explained. "We're going to get a fine collection of Terran pencils until they hit us again. Looks as how *They* just got one."

From the receptacle, Edwards took a folded tape measure and a sizable bottle of—nothing.

"Air," he said, looking at it.

"And size," said Norma. "He—she—or it wants to come here!"

He nodded. "You analyze that air, will you? I'm going to finish this other gimmick!"

"How do you analyze air?" she asked plaintively.

He tossed a ten-dollar bill at her. "Go buy yourself a canary," he said with a grin. "And not one on a hat!"

There came, at regular intervals, a four-handed chronometer with certain intervals marked vividly. Next came a small six-legged animal that sniffed the air uncertainly but showed no discomfort.

That settled Johnny Edwards. His curiosity would probably kill him, but it might have have killed him anyway. So— He pushed a lever. . . .

He stepped out of the cabinet and sneezed in the ultra-dry air. Zintal blinked in astonishment and looked concerned.

"But I wanted to go your way," he said.

"Where the devil is this?" demanded Edwards.

"They're after me for trying to use slugs," Zintal complained. "What are these things worth on your world?"

"The sun is rather small, here," Johnny observed. "Is this Mars, or is that another sun entirely?"

"Perhaps it is your wet skin that makes you smell so," said Zintal, sniffing. "I think that the police may understand once you are seen—and smelled. Phew!"

"You're a double-dyed monstrosity," said Johnny amiably. "Somewhere along about here we should start learning one another's talky-talky. Me Johnny. Me good!"

The machine clicked again and Norma stepped out. "Me Norma," she said, mocking him. "You explain Daddy!"

"Me clipped," he grinned at her. "What's that?"

"Newspaper," she grinned. "Thought you'd like to see it. It claims that the White Sands Laboratory does not expect any successful attempt to reach any other celestial body within the next fifteen years."

WELL, that's how it started. From a glorified coin merchandising machine to interplanetary travel in a few roundabout jumps—or jerks. It was easier to take off by rocket for Luna from Mars than from Terra, and the original Mars-Luna rocket carried only a super-glorified slot machine. Then it became a simple matter to take off from established bases on Luna and head for Venus. Then, in a comparatively short time it became feasible to plant the slot machines on every imaginable planet and satellite, and the art of constructing rockets returned to the fireworks department.

Oh—just to tie in a loose end—the Martian police were duly convinced once they came, saw, and stood back with great green hands pinching wide, flat noses. And the same police official who was originally there to bring back the errant physicist was helpful.

He combined the Terran couple in Vanthlaz.*

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*The definition of this word is not quite clear. Even Martian opinion differs pertaining to its definition; the Martian female believing it to be a desirable state while the Martian male insists that it is entirely one-sided and too restrictive pertaining to his freedom. (G. O. S.)

●

As Stieve halted, Prem yelled something at the Indian

Date Line

Stieve Andro goes back into time—and my, but the Indian has changed!

By BENJ. MILLER

IN the year 2200 A. D., Solar News Company became the biggest corporation in the nine planets. In the year 2220, Solar built the Heptagon, so called not because it was seven-sided but because it covered seven solid blocks, housed seven hundred thousand employees, and on its seventieth floor had a spacefield big enough to handle a fair-sized interplanetary patrol boat.

In the early part of the Twenty-Third Century, war had been eliminated for so long that international affairs no longer had the deep significance they had had in the Twentieth Century. Controls were so rigid there had not been any startling development in economics or science for over a century, with

the single exception of time-travel.

People everywhere on Earth had finally resigned themselves to taking it easy, and so *Solar News* was just about on the rocks when along came time-travel, and Smullen, the sharp-eyed vice-president of Solar, foresaw a chance to put Solar in the clear again.

The Time Travel Section soon became the most important part of the morning telepaper, and by the year 2220 had become about ninety per cent of *Solar News*. Inasmuch as nothing happened in the now, people were fascinated by what had happened in the past, especially when they could read those events told by current eyewitnesses.

By the year 2229, Stieve Andro had become one of Solar's two hundred ace reporters, and by December of that year he was regarded so highly that he was transferred to the block that housed the *Morning Telepaper* division. There he was sent to the wing that contained the all-important Time Travel Section; they referred him to the sixty-second floor that was occupied by the Early Twentieth Century Department, and finally he was ushered to a suite where he would conduct the "Three Hundred Years Ago Today" feature.

Stieve was very happy. He had the choice run of the Solar System and he was making almost as much as the best-paid truck driver in Manhattan. But by March 13, 2230, Stieve was a very discouraged ace. He sat back in the milkweed-stuffed chair and adjusted his hydraulic desk until his feet were exactly the right height. Then he scowled at Orig Prem.

SECRETLY Stieve was proud of Orig, who had just recently come from the chromium-platers. Orig was old-fashioned by some standards. He was a 2219 model, and the following year Roborporation had brought out their android models.

"You look good," said Stieve. "I may be reactionary, but I much prefer you, with your steel plates, to the androids with their synthetic tissue that looks like flesh but isn't. You may be too tough for me to kick you where you need it most, but at least you don't fool me into thinking that you feel it. Besides, they haven't got the bugs out of the androids yet.

"Medlock over in Time-Stream Traffic had one whose psychological relays got mixed up so that he sat all day in the middle of the Thirty-Six Hundred B. C. time channel. Medlock had sneaked out to watch them work on the Pyramid of Cheops (Medlock has his doctor's degree in Sidewalk engineering, you know) and he was stuck there and couldn't get back on account of this dummy balking in the time-channel, and by the time Medlock got it out of the Egyptian sun, he was so thirsty he could even drink water."

"I'm glad you like me, sir," said Orig Prem's staccato metallic voice. "I'd not be one to belittle competition, sir, but I think I have a good many useful years left before you junk me. And I do hope, sir, that when that time does come, you will honor my memory by choosing another honest robot."

Stieve licked his lips. "For a robot, you've got a lot of gall—pardon me, I mean a lot of nerve—especially when you've got us in bad with the whole Twentieth Century."

A soft crimson light diffused throughout Orig Prem's chrome-plated face.

"You can well blush," Stieve said severely. "It was bad enough when you crashed the Mayor's inauguration party and got tight as an acteylene tank on the Mayor's punch. Maybe he would even have forgiven you for winning the police chief's pants with your electronic dice, but I'm danged if I can figure any possible defense for your making passes at the Mayor's wife."

Orig allowed the red blush to creep around the back of his steel-plated neck.

"She was very young, sir, and very beautiful, and the Mayor—well, I think the necrology records show that he died of senility the following year."

Stieve brought his feet to the pneumatic floor with what he wished would be a crash. "You dummy!"

"That's only logic, sir," Orig said apologetically.

"It may be logic," Stieve said sternly, "but it isn't human, and it's got us in bad. After all, we must be diplomats. We represent the Twenty-Third Century, Prem."

Orig frowned. Then he said meekly, "To save my soul—pardon me—to save my thermionic relays I won't see why you were out in the pantry kissing the Mayor's wife's maid. The Mayor's wife was most indignant over that, sir. She said she didn't realize she had moss on her—whatever that means—and I was just trying to console her."

"Well," Stieve said dreamily, "that maid was a very choice—hey—" He sat up straight. "If I thought you were trying to be insubordinate I'd have your thermopile

checked. Anyway," he said morosely, "it's a good thing Medlock's android in charge of Time Traffic last night was a new man, or he wouldn't have let us come back ahead of schedule. And it's a good thing the Mayor is working for his degree in Sidewalk Engineering and had to leave just then to watch one of their old-fashioned bulldozers push down a brick building, or we'd be rotting right now in a cold damp cell back in Nineteen-Thirty. And your joints would rust. How would you like that?"

Orig shook his shining head. "Not very well, sir."

"And now," Stieve went on, "the chief of police back in Nineteen-Thirty said he'd have six squad cars waiting for us this afternoon. If they get us in the jug, we may spend the rest of our lives there. Those Twentieth Century judges don't like our Time Travel legal experts. They say it balls up the precedents."

"What shall we do, sir?" Orig asked respectfully.

STIEVE got up and went to the transparent plastic wall. He watched a sky-tractor ease a pre-fabricated floor onto the ninety-story Liberty Tower across the street. Then he turned around.

"I'll have to see Smullen. Maybe he'll give me another assignment. I don't dare tell him the truth about what you've done because he's an android man."

"I'm genuinely sorry, sir," said Orig. "Honest, I was only getting things organized for you with the Mayor's wife, sir. It's one of my built-in principles, you know, sir, to be helpful. You were present at my conditioning, sir. In fact, you sponsored me. Have you forgotten, sir, the words of the integrator as he connected my brain-cells. 'A helpful robot is a happy robot?' "

Stieve made a face. "You can sop up the deluge," he said dryly. "I am well aware that you are the greatest little organizer in *Solar News*. I am also certain that you and I don't dare go back to the year Nineteen-Thirty until the administration changes or until we can figure out a way to make things right. Well, keep your articulated fingers crossed. I'm going to see Smullen."

The director of Solar News's Time Travel Section was tough. "You've got the best run in time," he said harshly. "Early Twentieth Century—first air flight, electronics, atomic power, interplanetary flight—Good grief, man, what do you want?"

"Why not let me skip around and get to something interesting?"

"You know that's against time-travel regulations. Here's the book of rules. You ought to know them as well as I do. No two trips will be made to the same point in time without a lapse of at least thirty days—that's the no-doubling rule; and no zigzagging—that means if you're going back three hundred years ago every day you can't skip a day and then go back to it tomorrow. They claim it jams up the time-streams, and if I take you out of Nineteen-Thirty so that you lose a day, then you can't go back to that day for a month. And not more than one trip a day."

"Well, I'm in Nineteen-Thirty," said Stieve, "and nothing has happened since the depression. You can fake the Three Hundred Years Ago Feature for a while. Let me go up to Twenty-Ninety-One and report the Last War. There was something. The world got in such a turmoil they even threw away all the calendars until somebody made out another one in Twenty-One-O-Five, after it was all over."

"Not dramatic enough. The real war—the war of robot bombs and atomics—was over in three days. They spent the next twenty years fighting a war of attrition, with diseases that killed ninety per cent of the population, and starvation for most of the others because the ground was impregnated with chemicals that killed plants. That twenty years was a terrible time for humanity. It was worse than the Black Ages and it was on a worldwide scale. Man hunted man and lived in caves. But that isn't dramatic on a big scale."

"Well," said Stieve patiently, "how about the Middle Ages? Let me do One Thousand Years Ago Today. Anything," he said fervently, "to get away from Nineteen-Thirty."

Smullen stared piercingly at him for a moment, then he said shortly, "Murphy's on that."

"Well, Declining Roman—Two Thousand Years Ago Today?"

"LaFond's on that, and LaFond's a good man. He's got Alexander Severus eating out of his hand. The Persians are demanding that the Romans clear out of Asia, and LaFond has his finger on the entire situation. I wouldn't think of pulling him out."

"Well, give me something besides the Twentieth Century," Stieve demanded. "If I

rave to go back there again, I might be tempted to cause trouble for the Legal Department."

Smullen drew a deep breath and looked out from under his eyebrows, but Stieve was triumphant, for he knew Smullen's weak point. Smullen hated inter-time legal tangles.

Smullen reached for the Assignment Book. "You'd better dig up something to interest the Plutonians once in a while," he growled. "They're threatening to quit subscribing to the service if we don't broadcast news of more interest to them."

"How can anybody find anything they like?" asked Stieve. "They're practically out of the system."

THE director eyed Stieve for a moment or two before answering.

"They're not entirely out of it," Smullen said sharply. "The planet kicks in a billion and a half a year for full telepaper coverage."

"I'll keep it in mind," Stieve promised, relenting. He knew what pressure Contacts could put on the service departments. "What can you give me out of the Book?"

"Well, I can send you to Columbus' discovery of America as a special feature. We haven't done that for a while."

"Okay," Stieve said quickly. He was on his feet. He felt better now. "I'll get hold of Traffic and see if Medlock can fix it up for me to cover about two weeks ahead of time, maybe, for a little background. Want it all in one issue?"

"Yes," said Smullen, closing the Book. "This afternoon. With photographs."

"Okay, boss!" Stieve was very happy now. He went back to the suite. He told Orig Prem, but Orig did not answer at once. Stieve stared at him.

"I'd swear that's a frown on your beryllium brow," Stieve said. "What's fissioning?"

Orig's steel eyelids blinked. "Well, you see, it's like this. The way I figure it, there's a mistake in the calendar somewhere. Leap-year isn't coming right."

"Leap-year doesn't come this year. It's only in a year divisible by four."

"But not in years divisible by a hundred," said Orig, "although it does come in years divisible by four hundred. At any rate, when we were in Nineteen-Thirty yesterday—" Orig swallowed hastily—"I saw a calendar of the future and it said March Twelfth, Twenty-Two-Thirty would be on a Wednesday—but this is Tuesday by our calendar."

Stieve sat down heavily. "Did they build all that useless information into your poor brain? No wonder you're not much better than a human."

"No information is ever useless," Orig said gently.

"Maybe not, unless it comes out of the date-book of the Mayor's wife," Stieve said caustically. "Now, listen." He straightened. "Go see Medlock and take a run back to Fourteen-Ninety-Two, about the first of October. And don't make eyes at any Indian chief's daughter."

"No, sir," Orig said humbly, and arose jointedly to his full four feet three inches.

Stieve started down to Engineering to put in a beef about the quality of reproduction of color in his moving scenes. He knew what they'd say, that the time-warp or something distorted the color and they had trouble getting the right kind of screens and so on, and he knew they couldn't help it, but he just wanted to jack them up on general principles. And, besides, Stieve had to do something to get his mind off of 1930 and the Mayor's wife—to say nothing of the Mayor's wife's maid. After all, he'd just been spreading a little good will.

But he didn't get to Engineering. He ran into Smullen on the autowalk. Smullen looked worried.

"I've just been down to Special Features," he said. "Asked them to check up on Pluto and do their best to dig up some dates for us to cover. After all, Pluto runs the Outer Planet League, and *Solar News* is the biggest link between Pluto and Earth. If Pluto gets unhappy, the four outer planets may pull away from the Solar Union, and definitely that would be not good for the peace of the System."

"I'll try to dream up something," Stieve promised. He was so grateful to Smullen for letting him get out of 1930 that he would have promised to bring back the anchor of Columbus' flagship.

Smullen caught the cross-walk to his own suite. "See me in the morning."

"Okay," said Stieve. He felt rather sorry for Smullen. In dreaming up the idea of news reporting in time, the guy had really raised *Solar News* by its own boot-straps, and Stieve knew that a billion and a half a year was not peanuts even to *Solar News*—to say nothing of the possibility of losing Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Those three

probably contributed five or six billion a year.

WELL, as soon as Stieve should get back from 1492, he'd go to work on Pluto and he'd come up with something that would make Smullen very happy. Stieve made a silent promise to that effect.

Then he met Murphy and said, "How about trading posts?"

Murphy said. "Nix. I've just been through the Crusades, and that was tough. Nothing else is going to happen for ten years, when the Mongols will invade Europe, so I'm going to take it easy. I've been working hard ever since the Magna Charta was signed."

Stieve was disgruntled. Murphy always was lazy, anyway. Stieve got off the walk at Engineering, then he saw it was only twenty minutes till takeoff time. He turned around and went back. His time cartridge would be ready just after lunch, at fifty-four o'clock, to be exact, under the metric system of counting time. That wasn't general yet, but the Time Travel people used it exclusively.

He took the air-tube to Medlock's post. Medlock was watching the clock as Stieve came in.

"Make it fast," he said. "You're due in a minute and a half."

"I hope Prem has got things organized," Stieve said as he settled into the straps.

"Don't worry," Medlock advised. "Prem always gets things organized. That's what I like about old-style robots. They have originality. These new androids are nice-looking and all, but they haven't got the brains of a sick goose."

Stieve had a familiar feeling of ominousness as he heard Medlock's remark about Orig Prem's organizational ability. He hoped—

The time cartridge whirled. Stieve was slightly sick; the coruscating spiral of varicolored lights always bothered him. Then it steadied. Stieve closed his eyes for the feeling that was like a free fall. He opened them when the acceleration stopped.

He was standing on a warm, sandy shore. There was a ship a mile out at sea, her canvas billowing—and two caravels. He wished he had thought to bring a glass so he could check the names for sure. Then he heard a voice behind him—a deep, guttural, grunting voice:

"Lookum through telescope, mister. Ten cents for seeum Santa Maria. Only ten cents forum look, mister."

Stieve jumped a foot. But before he could turn around he knew the answer. Orig Prem had had two weeks on this island that now, on the twelfth day of October, 1492, was called by the Indians Guanahani—and two weeks—well, Stieve should have known better.

The Indian was naked except for a breech-cloth and a feather in his hair. But he had a telescope set up, with a sign on it that said, "See Columbus's ships just as if they were in your own back yard. 10c U. S., 2230." And in small letters: "Orig Prem Enterprises."

Stieve paid the dime. Yes, it was the *Santa María* and the *Pinta* and the *Niña,* and in spite of himself Stieve began to be thrilled. He snapped a good picture of the three ships and punched the button to wind the film when a fat little redskin came running down the beach and thrust a card into his hand. The card said, "Have your films developed at Joe's . Twenty-four-hour service. Licensed by Orig Prem Enterprises."

Stieve snorted. He began to look around. He was in the center of a regular old-fashioned Coney Island beach, with a couple of hundred huge striped umbrellas, and fat Indian chiefs lying in the sand while their squaws built sand castles over their stomachs.

Stieve groaned. He thought: Thank goodness Prem couldn't get a ferris wheel in the time cartridge.

Stieve lit a cigarette. Almost immediately a giant breech-clouted redskin picked the cigarette out of his mouth.

"No smokum on beach," he told Stieve. "Anyhow, this Fourteen-Ninety-Two. White man doesn't haveum cigarettes yet." He took a puff on Stieve's cigarette and gagged. "Ugh. Tastum terrible. How you smokeum that stuff. Smellum like old tires burning. Oh, pardon me, we don't haveum tires yet."

"Hey," said Stieve, "where's Orig Prem?"

The Indian brightened. "Oh, Prem very fine fellow. He head of Chamber of Commerce Welcome Committee. He very busy man today.

"If you ask me," Stieve said dryly, "he's been busy for two weeks."

QUICKLY Stieve went to the nearest popcorn stand. The sign said: "Fresh buttered popcorn, 1930 style, 15c. Orig Prem Enterprises."

Stieve said, "One bag, please." Then he stared.

The girl, dressed in a freshly starched blue apron, was a lovely. She had nice, soft copper-colored skin, black, shining hair in two big braids, and large, lustrous black eyes.

"Say," said Stieve, "you ought to be in pictures."

She blushed becomingly. "That's what Mr. Prem says. He thinks he can get me a screen-test."

"Oh, blast Prem!" Stieve paid for his popcorn. "Just the same," he said, staring, "you can come and play in my yard any time you want to."

"Oh, thank you, sir."

Stieve went out toward the dock. It was covered with red and yellow bunting. The three ships apparently were anchored now, and he thought they were getting ready to put out some rowboats. Stieve looked around. It wasn't like Prem to miss anything. Prem hadn't. A board painted black said:

BULLETIN BOARD

"Santa Maria due at 2:15. On time. Advertising space on reverse side of this board, by courtesy of Orig Prem Enterprises.

Stieve snorted hard. But when he reached the dock and saw the be-feathered dignitaries of Guanahani sitting importantly around the microphone, and Prem bustling to and fro arranging things, he was somewhat mollified.

Prem had mounted the video scanner very nicely, and now the boats were putting out. Yes, it looked like a good day. He shook hands with Prem, and Prem was as delighted as a little puppy. He introduced Stieve to the chief, and said:

"If you will handle the microphone, sir, I will do my utmost with the scanner."

"Okay. But how long a speech is old Pain-in-the-Face going to make here?"

"I have asked him to cut it short, but he's Acting Mayor. He has his own ideas."

"Well, we'll make the best of it. What's the program?"

"Program, mister? Program?" A ten-year-old Indian thrust a program in Stieve's face. "Twenty-five cents, mister. Only got a few left. Can't tell a Spaniard from an Indian without a program."

Stieve sucked in his breath and looked at Prem, but Prem was very busy adjusting the microphone for height.

The program said, "Address of welcome, 3:15 P. M. Reply by Sr. Cristoforo Colombo."

Well, the boats were pulling up. A tall man stood in the prow of the first one. He had white hair and beard, his nose was aquiline and his eyes blue. He faced the beach regally, but when the boat was grounded he leaped overboard and waded through the water and strode up the beach.

"And to think," Prem muttered, "that I built this dock to save him from getting wet!"

But the tall man strode up to the grandstand. The big Indian chief rose to meet him.

"How!" he said gravely. "I makeum you welcome to New World. This great day for you, black day for Indians. But this history. I greetum you. Have a smoke."

The tall man's eyes were dancing. "Thank you very much," he said gravely. "Smoking has not been introduced in Europe as yet. But I could go for a drop of wine." He added: "I am very happy to be here. It was a long trip."

"Will you please step closer to the microphone?" asked Stieve. "We're on the air in 2230, you know. Ladies and gentlemen, you are hearing the voice of Mr. Christopher Columbus."

The tall man looked doubtfully at the microphone, but Prem smiled and nodded encouragingly. The tall man stepped closer as if he was about to swallow the microphone. "Hello, mom," he said gravely. "It was a wet crossing, but we made it. I hereby declare America officially discovered."

STIEVE scowled at Prem. "Did you have to teach them so much slang?"

Prem discreetly averted his eyes.

Well, it was soon over. Stieve unhooked the microphone.

"It was a darn good broadcast, at that," he told Orig.

"Thank you, sir," said Orig, squirming with happiness.

"Now let's take our stuff and get back home. Where's the tube?"

"At the other end of the beach, sir."

Stieve was almost run over by a barefooted newsboy who ran through the crowd shouting, 'Extry! Extry! Columbus discovers America! Read all about it."

"How much?" Stieve growled.

"Ten cents, mister."

"It's a gyp," Stieve said, as he paid.

"It's an extra, sir," Prem reminded him. "And it will be quite a souvenir piece."

He started Prem into the cartridge. Just then, however, the big Indian cop came running across the sand, followed by a girl wearing a blue apron. She was pointing at Stieve.

"That's the man, papa," she said.

The big Indian took hold of Stieve's shoulder and spun him around. "Did you promise marryum my daughter?"

Stieve gasped. "I should say not."

The girl sobbed. "He said that I could play in his yard all I wanted."

"That offer of marriage in Guanahani," declared the big cop. "You stickum by offer, hey?"

Stieve almost swallowed his tongue, then leaped forward. Orig Prem had stuck his head out of the cartridge and was yelling at the Indian. Stieve halted, jerked Prem out of the cartridge and jumped in himself. He slammed the door tight and pulled the lever.

What on earth or in time-stream would Smullen say if this got back to 2230? He hoped Prem could get back all right, but if he couldn't, it would serve him right. It was all Prem's fault. It was a wonder Stieve hadn't been served with a breach of promise suit. Prem was undoubtedly the world's best organizer. The only thing was, he didn't know when to stop.

Well, anyway, Smullen would be tickled to death over the broadcast today. It had been a dandy. Snappy, modern. None of the long speeches that had been rampant in the 1930's.

He came to when Medlock lifted the cover.

"Hey, Smullen wants you right away!" said Medlock.

Stieve felt expansible. He took the fast walk to Smullen's suite. But his mouth dropped when Smullen glared at him.

"You prize dummy!" Smullen roared. "While you're off gallivanting around the Fifteenth Century, you overlooked the one date in history that would appeal to Pluto."

Stieve licked his lips. "What—what do you mean, sir?"

"Do you know when Pluto was discovered?"

Stieve swallowed. Whatever the answer was, it would be bad. "No, sir."

"March 13, 1930." Smullen snarled. "Three hundred years ago today. One more day and you'd have had it. But no, you had to start traipsing around in time—"

Stieve felt terrible. He hadn't wanted to let down Smullen.

"Can't I cover it tomorrow, sir?" he pleaded. Out of the corner of his eye Stieve was aware that Orig Prem had entered and stood just inside the door.

"No!" said Smullen. "That's zigzagging. Time Travel won't allow it. You've been going back exactly three hundred years, and tomorrow you'd have to go back three hundred years and a day. They won't stand for it."

Stieve felt miserable. Orig Prem spoke up. "I think we can still make it, sir," he said apologetically.

"What do you mean?" Smullen growled.

"The date, sir. I've just discovered this really isn't March thirteenth. Today is March twelfth. Tomorrow will be the thirteenth."

FROWNING, Stieve looked suspiciously at Prem. "How do you konw?"

"Well, you remember what I told you about leap-years?"

"Yes."

"Well, leap-years aren't the only means of adjusting the calendar. There is also an adjustment to correct what is known as the lunar error in the Metonic cycle. The calendar is to be adjusted by omitting a day at the end of seven periods of three hundred years each and then one at the end of four hundred years. It was first applied in 1800, and should have been again in 2100. But this is what happened, sirs!"

Orig Prem faced them, and his chromium-plated face was shining.

"During the Last War, when men were underground and the calendars were pretty much destroyed, there wasn't any central authority, and they forgot to omit the day in Twenty-One Hundred. Therefore today is really March twelfth."

Stieve grinned. He clapped Prem on his steel back. But Smullen was discouraging.

"Time Travel's rules still hold," he said. "No zigzagging."

"Ah, yes," said Prem, "but I have investigated that. Your contract with Time Travel calls for trips exactly three hundred years from now. They will begin to abide by it, won't they?"

Smullen began to smile. "I believe you're right. Okay." He whirled to the intercom. "Get me Calendar and get me Legal. Over-

time for both departments tonight. We'll get this intertemporal date-line straightened out, and you, Steve, get ready for a trip to Nineteen-Thirty tomorrow."

Only then Stieve realized that he didn't dare go to 1930. He went outside glumly. Orig Prem came behind him.

"It's really all right, sir. I didn't have time to tell you before, but Medlock fixed things up for you—for us—in Nineteen-Thirty. He promised to bring the mayor into Twenty-Two-Thirty to let the Mayor watch the sky-tractor putting floors on the Liberty Tower. The Mayor will probably get his Doctor's in Sidewalk Engineering for that, sir, and he was very pleased. He said he would forgive me for everything, sir."

Stieve stared at Prem a moment and then he heaved a big, thankful sigh.

"Prem," he said, with a rush of gratefulness, "you're the best organizer on earth. You're worth a dozen androids."

Orig Prem blushed modestly. "Thank you, sir. I'm only trying to live up to my built-in principle, sir: 'A helpful robot is a happy robot.'"

Wonder Oddities

WHEN the author of "Harvey," the long-lived Broadway success about the six-foot-tall invisible rabbit, gave her unseen hero the wisdom of a philosopher, she had precedent—for the rabbit, along with the opossum, rates as the oldest living mammal of North America. The species dates back some 40,000,000 years to Eocene times.

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OUR Earth, along with Neptune, is tied for fifth place in the Solar System satellite sweepstakes. Jupiter heads the list with eleven moons, Saturn is second with nine, Uranus has four, Mars two and Mercury, Venus and Pluto none at all.

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NERVOUS folk need not worry about the earth dissipating itself through space unless via atomic fission. Old Terra actually gains weight at the rate of 100,000 long tons per annum, thanks to almost continuous deposits of meteors, large and small, and meteoric dust, which make regular crash landings on the Heaviside layer.

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DEAREST and rarest of all known elements is polonium, which makes radium itself look like a piker. An ounce of polonium costs a cool $2,000,000 in normal times, is "up" these days like everything else.

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EARTH is no exception to the rule that all planets are "colored" when viewed from a distance. Mars, of course, is red, Venus white and Pluto has a reddish tinge. Spectroscopic study of the moon at "full Earth"—when it is "new moon" time down here—reveals by our reflected light that we look predominantly blue. Which should surprise no alarmists.

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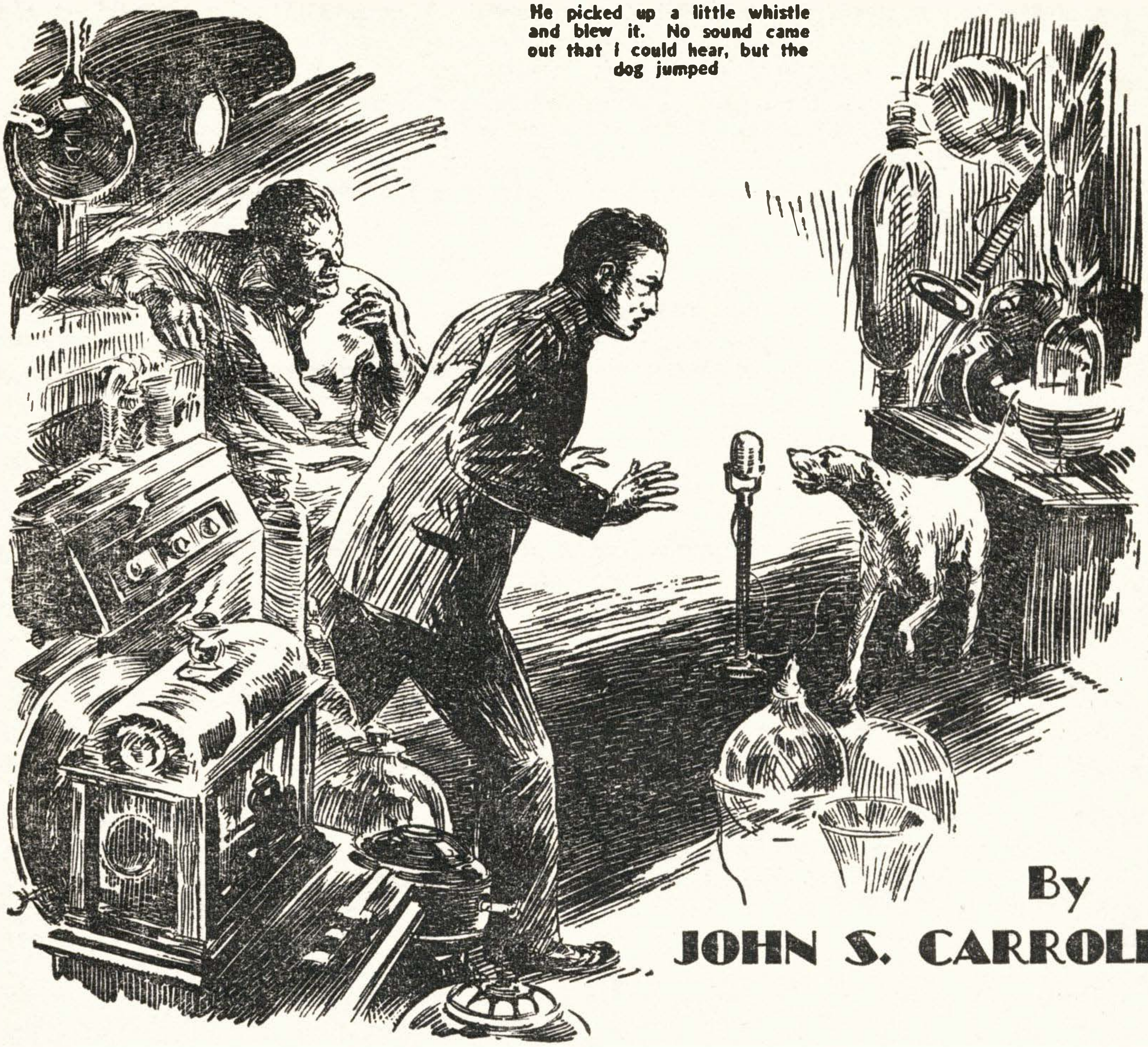
REAPING a golden harvest from the air—that is the function of the chimney trap of the New York City U. S. Assay Office, which annually filters more than $10,000 worth of gold dust from refining process fumes.



By
JOHN S. CARROLL

Lucky Mariano finds that horse talk can be perfectly killing!

ME, I'M just a radio mechanic. No genius, that is. But handy with a soldering iron. If it's genius you want, take my friend Bill Marra. He's a communications engineer—telephone, radio, or what have you. He's invented enough gimmicks so he doesn't have to work any more, just potters around his basement inventing more gimmicks.

Thinking them up, actually, is all he does. Give him a screwdriver and a pair of pliers and he can wreck anything in five minutes. That's where I come in. He thinks 'em up, I build 'em. He busts 'em, I fix 'em. And when he gets into a jam, I'm the guy comes to bail him out. Like, for instance, this last gadget of his. Nothing dangerous about it, but it could have got him sunk in the river with his feet in a block of cement. It all started with an amplifier.

I found the diagram in the mail when I came into the shop one morning. Looked like an ordinary audio amplifier at first sight, and I started laying out a chassis. Picking out parts, I noticed something; even Bill can make a mistake sometimes. But I don't stick

my neck out any more, so I got him on the phone.

"About this amplifier of yours," I started.

"Well, what about it?" he yapped. "Never seen one before?"

"Look, bub. I've built hundreds of 'em. If I hadn't I'd 'a built yours like you drew it here, and you'd been stuck with it."

"Stuck with what?"

"OK. Look at your coupling condensers. Maybe it's just a misprint, or you wrote mmf where you meant mfd. But if you use condensers that small, it might work but you'd never hear a sound out of it. Low frequency cut-off way above the audible limit."

"Gives you an 'A' for effort anyway. Keep punching. And build it the way I drew it. And stop worrying."

Well, now, what do you do with a guy like that? I built it. Had to test it with a scope to find out if anything got through it. Couldn't hear a sound. When I delivered it, he just grunted.

"Mind letting me in on the secret?" I asked. "Now you've got an outfit that will amplify sounds you can't hear, who's going to listen to it?"

He just tossed me a couple of sketches. "That's the output section," he explained. "We'll connect it to the vertical sweep of a cathode ray tube. The rest of the circuit is an automatic time base, so you get standing wave patterns at any frequency."

"OK with me. But what're you going to feed into it?"

"Uh-uh, almost forgot. Midget condenser mike. Through a high-pass filter, cut-off at 12,000."

Well, I still don't know any more than I did at the beginning, but what the devil—I get paid for it even if it doesn't work.

COUPLE of weeks after I finished the outfit, I was still wondering. So I dropped in on his basement lab one night. He had the rig set up and working. The microphone was on the floor. Bill's dog, a nondescript pooch named Meginnis, was tied up in front of it. Bill was stroking him, petting him, annoying him. And as far as I could see, nothing whatever was happening. The amplifier was running, the 'scope tube was lit, showing a nice steady base-line and nothing else.

"Maybe your mike's no good," I said helpfully.

"It's OK," he muttered. "Look."

He picked up a little silver whistle and blew it. No sound came out that I could hear, but the dog jumped as if he were shot, and a nice pattern of standing waves showed up on the 'scope.

"Dog whistle," explained Bill. "You can't hear it and I can't hear it. Too high frequency. But he can hear it. See?"

"All right, I've got one of those whistles for my dog too. What's that got to do with the price of yams in Patagonia?"

"Here's how I figure it. Dogs can hear supersonic frequencies. Maybe they talk to each other that way. So far, no dice."

Well, now, there it is. The guy's got forty-seven patents, three degrees, and an honorary Sc.D. Maybe it's just overwork. But it certainly sounds like he's chipped his crock. Talking dogs! I'm going to suggest a nice long rest when he hops out of his chair and beats it. Nothing to do but relax, and see what's next.

He's back in about five minutes with a big yellow tom-cat, unties the dog and chases him. The cat's fur lies down again, and he starts to prowl around, looking at objects with typical cat-curiosity. He rubs his nose against the microphone, sniffs and looks around. Bill is watching the cat with considerable interest. So am I.

The cat looks at us again, at the 'scope, and at the microphone. He walks around once, shakes his head, walks over to the microphone again and puts his nose near it. I don't hear anything, and Bill doesn't either, I don't think, but a big, beautiful pattern appears on the 'scope. It is followed by a string of shorter, irregular peaks, and stops as the cat turns to face us.

I look at Bill, and he looks at me. Then we both look at the cat.

"I always knew that dog was a dope," Bill mutters. "Any alley cat in town is Einstein by comparison."

I could swear that cat nodded his head at the remark. Anyway, he had a self-satisfied expression, which for a cat, is almost a normal look anyway. Another row of peaks appeared on the scope screen. Bill's eyes bugged a little.

"You know," he said a little tensely. "I think that alley-rabbit actually understands what we're saying."

The cat looked a little annoyed at that. A short wave train appeared on the screen, then a long one, then two short ones. Like — —— — —

I couldn't get over the feeling that the cat had just said, "Of course I do!"

Bill must've felt the same way. He was excited by now. "Shrimps and sweet cream for you, Tommy!" he shouted at the cat. Turning to me, he exulted, "Now I've got a real idea! Look, Mike!"

He grabbed a scratch pad and started drawing a new schematic. "See? We'll take the output of the amplifier and run it through a mixer-oscillator stage. That way, we can get a beat between a fixed frequency and the supersonic output of the amplifier. The beat should be in the audible range and we will be able to hear it; we won't need the 'scope. I want to hear what the cat is saying."

I started to open my mouth. I closed it. Then I opened it again. I spoke to the cat. "Say meow to the gentlemen, Tommy."

I had it coming to me. The cat looked me straight in the eye, emitted a raucous sound, something between *"miahhhh!"* and *"pfffft!"* and turned away.

Ever had a cat give you a Bronx cheer? I left.

There was no particular trick to building the new gimmick; just a question of the right coils. I'm no genius by any means, but I can calculate an L/C ratio. I delivered it and tried to forget the whole thing.

But I've got as much curiosity as the next guy. So I didn't wait more than a week. Down in the basement, Bill's sitting there, having words with the cat. Bill's talking directly to the cat; the cat's replies are coming out of the loudspeaker on my new set-up. The cat's talking something that sounds like Hindustani. I stood it for a while and it got too much for me.

"How come?" I popped. "He understands English, seems like. Why doesn't he speak it?"

The cat looks at me and says, *"Miahhhh-pfffft!"*

Bill says, "I could ask you the same question. Remind me to do it sometime. Meanwhile, he is speaking English. That's what it sounds like to him when I speak it. His hearing apparatus is different, that's all."

"Now wait a minute!" I squawked. "Gullible, that's me. But I still don't believe that a cat speaks English."

"You've heard of Pig-Latin, haven't you?" said Bill mildly. "Why not Cat-English?"

"Ask a foolish question, get a foolish answer," I replied. "You ought to be writing radio scripts. With jokes like that, even Milton Berle couldn't get his option picked up."

"Don't be so damned superior," Bill growled. "The beast has never heard any other language, he's lived here all his life. Why shouldn't he speak English? Cat-fashion, anyway."

The cat moved his nose to the mike and some assorted sounds came out of the speaker. Sounded like Esperanto, this time. Bill nodded.

"He agrees with me," he said smugly.

I gave up. I took my fedora, jammed it down on top of my noggin and started to leave. Bill snapped off the amplifier switch, motioned me to wait. and started to feed the cat. When he got through serving lunch, he came over to me and said, "Build me another one. Portable, battery-operated, this time. I've got more ideas. Cats can't be the only animals smart enough to talk."

The cat looked up from his dinner and made a face. Luckily the amplifier was turned off, so I missed his parting shot. I beat it.

BUSINESS was slow for the next few weeks. Maybe they're making radios better now, but I didn't have much repair business. And I hadn't heard from Bill since delivering his new battery operated portable what-is-it.

So I told my kid assistant to mind the shop for the P.M. and I went out to the track. Two bucks of my dough on any horse's nose will raise his wind-resistance to the point where he can't win a race, but what the devil. It keeps me out in the open air.

Anyway, I prowled around the stables a bit. I know these one-horsepower oat motors are obsolete, but I like 'em. Times I think the world was a better place to live when old Dobbin was vice-president in charge of transportation.

There's a little gathering around one stall and I decide to look into matters. Middle of the group is Bill Marra, and he is tinkering with the portable gimmick. He's having words with a horse, and the horse seems to be holding up his end of the conversation pretty well. I suppose the language was Horse-English but it sounded like Lithuanian to me. Bill seemed to understand it though, and he was translating for the group.

General idea seems to be, this bunch of touts wants to know if the horse is going to win his race. The horse keeps insisting it's

a foolish question, and anyway, why not ask the jockey who's going to ride him; far as the race is concerned, the jock's the boss, and the horse does as he's told.

Since this is what every racetrack tout is always telling you, you'd think they'd agree with him. Seems like they don't really believe it, though, not even when they get it right from the horse's mouth.

Meanwhile, the nag gets tired of this foolishness and clams up. Bill turns and says, "Look, boys. He's told you all he intends to. He thinks all this is silly."

One of the touts is stubborn. "He's gotta know if he can win or not. He's runnin' the race, ain't he? He musta spoke to the other horses."

"Maybe," says Bill. "But he doesn't want to talk, and I don't know any way to make him."

Some disgusted sounds come out of the loudspeaker. Sounds like Swahili this time. Bill listens. "O.K. He says he doesn't figure to more than show. His feet hurt."

The group breaks up like magic. They all beat it for the two-dollar show window. Bill tells the horse he's sorry to have bothered him. Considerate guy, Bill. Out of the corner of my eye, I see one big guy looking at us, curiously. He's wearing a sharp suit and a tie with the Aurora Borealis embroidered in purple and green on a gold background. I make it all about five hundred dollars on the hoof. Looks familiar too, but I can't place him.

We walk over to the track and I spend the next hour cheering my horses into last place. My luck is running as usual. Fifth race comes along, and I see the horse Bill's been talking to; he's right on the rail. I figure this'll be worth watching.

The start is a good one, and this nag—his name is Roll Merrily—is two lengths ahead at the quarter. He's running easy and doesn't seem to have any competition; the boy hasn't touched the whip to him yet.

At the half, things are pretty much the same. At the three-quarter pole, the field is spread out a bit, but Merrily still leads by more than a length. I begin to wonder what those touts will do to Bill for making them play an easy winner for show money.

Just as they come into the stretch, I can see a little break in Merrily's stride. So help me, he's running like a dame in tight shoes. He drops back, a little at a time. Hendy, who's riding him, looks a bit startled and applies the whip, but it's no dice. Two of the others pass him, and at the finish, it's Roll Merrily, third, just like he said he would.

Bill looks up as if he's just finished balancing his check book and says, "That's what he said."

He starts to walk away, as if the experiment was finished and he'd found out all he wanted to know. The big guy who was watching over at the stable walks up to him.

"I've got a job for you," he says.

"Don't need a job," says Bill. "Retired five years ago."

"Yeah," I put in. "He doesn't have to work any more."

"Shut up, punk," says the big guy to me. He turns to Bill. "When Lucky Mariano offers you a job, you take it, see?"

Bill looks worried. He hands me the portable and says, "Take this home. I'll see you later."

"Unh-unh," grunts Mariano. "I'm hiring you *and* that gadget. Bring it along. And chase that lug."

Well, nothing I could do. So I beat it.

AFTER a few days, I got worried. I hadn't heard from Bill, and neither had his housekeeper. She didn't figure anything wrong; he often went away without telling her anything. But I knew better. I went to the cops. Nobody was at the desk except the sergeant, and he was having a nap, with his shoes off. He wasn't too happy when I woke him up.

"Bill Marra's been kidnapped," I said.

"How's that?" he yawned.

"Well," I started. "He invented a gadget to talk to horses and—"

"For a minute I almost took you serious," the sergeant said. "Every time there's a murder in town, some crackpot comes in here and confesses he done it. We have a show on Broadway, "Who Killed Cock Robin," some jerk comes in, says he's the guy. Now there's a movie, "My Brother Talks With Horses," you say he's been kidnapped. You just stop smoking that stuff, you'll be O.K. And if I find out where you get it, I'll—"

"Look, I'm no crackpot. I built the gadget for him."

"That's all, brother. Now I've heard everything. Go away and leave me rest."

"Wait a minute," I squawked. "Lucky Mariano and—"

The sergeant sat up abruptly. "Did you say Lucky Mariano?"

"Yes, Lucky Mariano," I insisted. "He and Bill—"

"Hold it." The sergeant was wide awake now. "On him, we'd like to get something. Tell me from the beginning."

I told him. He looked skeptical enough, but he couldn't laugh off my description of Mariano. "Fits all right. Those neckties of his. But how do you know he kidnapped Bill Marra? Sounds like he just hired him and Bill went of his own free will. Far as I know, there's no law against talking to horses, not even if Mariano does it. That is, if your pal really can talk with horses, and that still goes down pretty hard."

"Well, Mariano believes it." I was mad now. "But what are you going to do about Bill?"

"Can't see nothin' we can do about Bill. Bring us some evidence of a snatch, maybe the FBI can do something."

I left. I wanted to punch that big lug right in the jaw, but punching police sergeants, especially in headquarters, is not good policy. The law frowns upon it. I went back to the shop and tried to do some heavy thinking. It came out all wrong. I didn't know where Bill was. I'm no detective. I've got no gun permit. I weigh one hundred and twenty-four pounds, dripping wet and a rock in each hand. In short, blanked.

Opportunity knocked. He didn't look like opportunity, for the moment. He looked like one of Lucky Mariano's less lovable gunsters. But he was carrying Bill's gadget, and he had a note from Bill. It was short and to the point:

"Something's popped. Probably a condenser or a resistor. Fix it and send it back with the boy. He'll wait."

Well, I fumbled with it and tried to read some meaning or code into the note. But it was pretty clear there wasn't any, and anyway, Bill's mind doesn't run that way. Still, by the handwriting, I could see he was pretty nervous, and I had a mental picture of those hoodlums trying to figure whether the gimmick was really busted or whether he was stalling.

I hooked up the test set, and found the trouble in about two minutes. Watching my guest out of the corner of my eye, I kept on testing, stalling for time. Finally I got it.

"Look, pal, she's pretty well shot. I've got to put in some new coils and rewire a whole sub-assembly."

I looked at the mug nervously. He shifted his cud of gum around his jaw, first from left to right, then vice versa, yawned, and said, "Go ahead, bub. I can wait. I'll stay till you finish. Just don't make any phone calls."

LUCKY I had a couple of old police radio-telephones handy. I got the parts I needed out of one of them, and got to work. Three hours later it was done, and the tough guy left with it. I left, five minutes after he did.

Same sergeant, same desk, same police Headquarters. He looked at me, sour-like.

"You back again? What's the horses telling you now?"

"Nothing much," I came back at him. "But they'll be talking to you pretty soon. Something new has been added."

"What's that?"

I told him about my visitor and the repair job. "What I did was add a modulator-oscillator-power amplifier, and a few feet of wire for an antenna, coiled around inside the case."

"So what does that make it?"

"Simple. It makes it a radio transmitter. Not only will he hear what the horses are saying, but anyone in town with a radio tuned to that frequency will, too."

"And where does that get you?" The sergeant was still puzzled but not bored now.

"Well, I took the filter off the mike too. So not only will it broadcast the horse-talk, but anything else that's said around the room as well. Also, I fixed the switch so it shuts off the speaker, while the rest of it keeps running. It'll broadcast all their conversations while they think it's shut off."

"Yeah, but—" The sergeant acted like a professor putting his finger on the nub of a problem. "But who is going to be listening?"

"Oh." Now it was my turn. "That's easy. I tuned the whole thing to police frequency. Every radio-patrol car in town will hear it."

"Dangerous for Marra if they find out, isn't it?" the sergeant mused.

"That's your job, now." I was getting mad again. "He's entitled to some police protection, isn't he?"

A cop came in from the hall, picked up the desk phone and dialed a number. "Repair? Send the direction-finder car around. Some'uns jamming our radio."

I grabbed the sergeant and dragged him to the radio room. In between crashes of static and puzzled calls from the two-way

radio cars, there was a hum of voices. I recognized Mariano's and Bill's talking to a horse and the horse answering in what sounded like Portuguese. Bill was translating, and Mariano was giving Bill questions to try on the horse.

"Believe me now?" I asked the sergeant, who was scratching his head with one finger at a time.

"Beats the bejudus out of me," he said. "That's Mariano, all right. Maybe—"

"Okay then, let's go!"

"Where?"

The sergeant had me there for a minute. Obviously Mariano and Bill were at the track now; just as obviously, they'd beat it, soon as they got their information. They'd place their bets by phone, later. But where?

"I've got it! Catch that direction-finder car when it gets here. That gimmick'll go on broadcasting wherever they take it. We'll chase 'em with the direction-finder."

"Mebbe you got somethin'." The sergeant snapped a few words into the intercom box, and we walked out in front of the police station. The service car pulled up about five minutes later, and we hopped in. I looked over the equipment.

"Pretty sharp, that," I remarked. "Haven't seen one of those since I was in the Air Force."

"Yeah," said the driver. "Automatic radio compass. Beats the old fashioned loop aerial direction finder all hollow. All I've gotta do is watch the Left-Right indicator while I drive."

I started to do a bit of figuring. There were three of us in the car—the sergeant, the driver, and myself. Suppose we catch Mariano, then what? He isn't going to be alone, that's sure, and even alone, he's dangerous. And the other gimmick, the one I hadn't mentioned to the sergeant, it didn't seem to be working—yet.

"Dang!" muttered the driver, under his breath, and swung the car around. "Etiher we've passed them, or they've passed us on the way back to town."

The direction indicator had started to call its left and rights wrong. Now, headed back to town, it was swinging properly again. It didn't make sense to me. Unless Mariano had taken a plane, he couldn't have gotten past us that way. No cars had gone by in the opposite direction in ten minutes. Suddenly I got an idea. I snapped on the loudspeaker.

"Calling car 25. Car 25. Signal 34. Signal 34. Main and Broadway. Main and Broadway."

"I knew it. I should've thought of that. The gadget's on the same frequency as the police calls. We're chasing Police Headquarters now, not Mariano!" I shouted disgustedly.

"Okay, wise guy. This was your idea. What do we do now?" said the sergeant.

"We wait. And we keep the loudspeaker turned on. And we chase Mariano with the radio compass when we hear him."

PRETTY soon we got another signal from Bill's gadget. The radio compass swung back and forth, finally settled down and made sense as we headed out of town again. I kept my ear peeled to the radio and my fingers crossed.

It's Mariano's voice in the loudspeaker now. Getting clearer so I figure we're getting warm.

"Okay, Marra. All I need. Shut it off and get into the car. . . . I said shut it off; that whistle is driving me nuts."

"What whistle?" It was Bill's voice.

"That damned peanut whistle coming from your gimmick." Mariano's voice was getting exasperated now.

"Nothing coming out of this that I can hear. Besides, it's shut off. Look for yourself."

"You're trying to tell me I'm nuts?" Mariano's voice was dangerous, tight, low-pitched. "I hear it. And if you don't stop it, I'll—"

Well, it seems the other gimmick is working, better than I figured. Maybe it'll be Bill's finish too, if we don't get there soon. Seems like I kind of underestimated it, though Mariano's voice comes through again.

"For the last time, Marra, stop it. Look, I can't even move my hands. That sound's doing things to me, I tell you—" Mariano's voice had changed; he was whining now.

"I'm telling you, the thing *is* shut off. There's only one switch on it, and the pointer says, 'off'. Besides, I don't hear a thing. You must have rocks in your head."

My jaw dropped. The big tough Mariano, licked by a little peanut whistle. Bill, the Milquetoast genius, talking to the toughest gangster in town like that. Maybe I don't know as much about the ultrasonics as I should. I got nervous.

"What's your signal strength?" I asked

the driver.

"R-9" he snapped. "We're getting pretty close now. Watch that bend in the road."

We tore into the bend, screamed back into the straightaway. Dead ahead was a big black limousine, with slots where the rear window should have been. I'd never seen it before, but I didn't have to. It was Mariano's armored special. J. Edgar Hoover would've been green with envy.

"Okay, Sarge. There they are. Your show now."

"Right." The sergeant fingered his .38 Police Positive. It was all the armament we had, and not half enough, the way I felt.

"All right, Bobby." The sergeant was the professional cop now, and he knew his business. "Pull ahead of them, and I'll wave 'em off the road."

The mechanic was a little green around the chops but he had spunk. He kicked the accelerator pedal hard, pulled around Mariano's car, and held his pace. The sergeant waved.

Mariano's driver tried to pull ahead, but Bobby could drive a bit, too. He hit the gas and nosed over. Mariano's chauffeur could chance us or the ditch. He made up his mind suddenly and stomped on the brake. We screeched to a stop and the sergeant hopped out with the gun in his hand.

"Out, bum!" he snapped at the driver. The driver knew a .38 when he saw one. He hopped. The sergeant handcuffed him and shoved him into the radio car.

"Yours, Bobby. Take him back to town and jug him. The boys'll get something on him later. We'll ride back in Mariano's car."

The sergeant slipped into the driver's seat, with Bill alongside of him. I got in back with Mariano. Mariano cringed in the far left corner of the seat, which didn't make me mad, either. The more space between us, the better.

I looked at him and the gadget. Bill spoke up from the front seat. "What's eating him?" he said, to nobody in particular. "He started to complain about a sort of peanut whistle, and now he acts like he wants to crawl in a hole and pull the hole in after him."

"I cannot tell a lie," I said. "I did it, with my little hatchet. You know, the mixer-oscillator in there—your idea to make the ultrasonic frequencies audible?"

"Yeah, well?"

"Well, to get an audible beat, it has to be tuned within a couple of kc. of the ultransonic frequencies you want to beat with it. I set it at 14,000 cycles."

"What's that got to do with Mariano?"

"Well, it struck me funny that he'd swallow your gimmick and the idea of talking with horses. Mariano's a suspicious type, and you'd expect him to think it was a racket of some kind."

The sergeant cut in. "Yeah, that's how I figured it. I couldn't see the whole thing myself, at first, and I couldn't figure Mariano falling for it so easy."

"Well, you know, most people can't hear a thing above ten or eleven thousand cycles. But occasionally you get someone who can hear all the way to fifteen or sixteen thousand. I figured Mariano's one of them. He must've heard horse-talk, but he's no good at languages and couldn't figure what they were saying. That's what he needed Bill for."

"Okay, now I believe anything. I'll be seeing flying saucers next. But what's this peanut whistle that shrivels him up so? I don't hear any whistle."

"Right. You don't, I don't and Bill doesn't. But Mariano does. It's the oscillator. I fed some of the 14,000 cycle output into a one-inch permanent magnet speaker. There was more kick to it than I figured, that's all."

Mariano looked at me, pleadingly. "Shut it off, mister. I'll confess to anything, even kidnapping Judge Crater. Only stop that whistle!"

I felt sorry for the big lug. I reached into the box and yanked out the "B" battery. Mariano shuddered and straightened up. He reached for his pocket. That dim-witted sergeant had forgoten to frisk him.

Mariano leaned forward with an Army .45 in his hand. He stuck it in the sergeant's neck. "Now, wise guy, turn around and head for the country. I'll take care of you and your scientific pals all together!"

Mariano was watching the sergeant. The cop did some quick thinking and suddenly swerved the car. The spin threw Mariano off balance for a second. In that second, I realized that I still had the "B" battery in my hand. I conked Mariano on the head with three pounds of zinc, carbon and asphalt. It did the job very nicely. First time, in fact, that a guy ever was knocked cold with only sixty-seven and one-half volts. Though I have to admit, not applied in the usual way.

By the time he came to, we had him in a

cell. We never did get him on the kidnaping, as it happens; we didn't have much proof of that, and Bill didn't feel like testifying. So they held him as a vagrant while the FBI looked him up, and they found he could be sent to jail for having a poor memory. He'd kept on forgetting that March fifteen is income tax day. He can take a correspondence course in mnemonics at Atlanta.

Anyway, I took the whistle and the police transmitter out of Bill's gadget and gave it back to him. I was still puzzled about one thing.

Bill was idly thumbing a roll of bills big enough to make Rockefeller envious.

"How come," I said, "that you didn't holler for help right away?"

"Four-thousand, forty-five hundred, forty-six hundred, forty-seven hundred—huh? Oh. Why should I? I was doing okay. Making a nice bit of change on side bets with Mariano."

"You mean—" I sputtered. "You mean, you were betting on horses with Mariano? And winning?"

"Why not?" said Bill. "I was translating, wasn't I?"

Why Do Your Own Thinking?

THE robot super-brain, long beloved of science fiction authors, is rapidly coming closer to accomplished fact. Since the first adding machine was put successfully into operation several decades back, instruments designed to take the place of human calculating agents have grown increasingly complex and efficient—and this despite a setback in Japan three years ago, when an expert abacus operator won a contest against a modern mathematical machine.

Most recent mechanical development is a cylindrical miracle, perhaps two feet in length, which could pass for a large thermometer or fluorescent lamp. Using a pint of mercury for a brain, it is said to be ten times as efficient as any previous computer and will shortly be appearing in offices as a regular unit of equipment.

Two tiny crystals, which cap either end of the column of mercury, are responsible for the remarkable memory of this hitherto unremarkable mineral, enabling it to "store" up to a thousand numbers of twelve digits each, tap-able instantly on demand.

One of the crystals, receiving supersonic coded impulses, flashes them through the mercury in the form of "pulses" at a speed up to 5,000,000 "pulses" per second. The other crystal, whose function is microphonic, translates the "pulses" back into orthodox electrical signals which can be automatically recorded.

If by any chance an impulse takes longer than its required time to pass both crystals, the code set of pulses is resubmitted, thus restoring the "memory" of the mercury. This process can be continued as long as it is desired to retain the number in question.

The entire process is a development of the miracle of wartime radar—and if it could think as well as remember and transmute, humanity would cease to have an educational problem—there would be no need for anyone to go to school. Once again it looks as if a science fiction dream, the robot super-brain, were on the road to reality.—*Matt Lee.*

SOFTIE *by Noel Loomis*

Before Lt. Braniff loomed a gigantic robot, ten feet high and as wide as a barrel

THE galactic patrol cruiser *Parsec* was coasting—as she had been for eight months. At a speed of roughly twelve to fifteen light-minutes an hour, she had been patrolling the Pass—that vast cosmic void between the II Milky Way Supergalaxy and the I Supergalaxy of Andromeda.

The *Parsec* was so immense that a man could die in one end and be buried in space, and those on the other end wouldn't know it until they read it in their daily *Space Traveler*. She was a 41,261 A.D. model, only four years old, and aside from fuel she was theoretically capable of sustaining herself in space for a thousand years—which is just what young Lt. Jim Braniff was afraid she was going to do.

Lt. Stevens, his roommate, came stamping in from the sixth watch slapping his hands.

"Cold outside!" He wiped the fog from

Homesick and in need of a promotion, Lieutenant Jim Braniff concludes that a space officer's lot is not a happy one!

his glasses. "Must be nearly freezing. Hear they had a strike in the Heating Corps. The Old Man better step in and settle that before it gets serious."

Lt. Braniff sighed wearily. "Oh, he'll step in and tell them to go back to work or go without food. Sometimes I think the Old Man hasn't any feelings at all."

Stevens stared at him. Stevens was a handsome, darkhaired, glossy-eyebrowed young man who always seemed to be imbued with the recklessness of space.

"Homesickness eating on you again?" He snorted. "Why don't you go take a walk? There are some very nice girls over in the Kitchens."

"It's too far," Braniff said listlessly.

"You can catch a ride on the truck—if you want to." Stevens tossed his trim space jacket on the bed. "You might as well quit mooning over that wife and kid of yours. It'll be ten years yet before we get back to Earth."

"Do you really think it will be that long?" Lt. Braniff, to tell the truth, was horribly homesick. He was almost so homesick that he didn't care if Stevens knew it.

He got up and paced the floor while Stevens washed his face. Four years from home, and six years to go! They had spent three years and four months getting to the Pass, and they were to patrol it for three years. Suddenly he felt he couldn't stand it.

"I've got to get promoted," he said aloud. "That's the only answer. If I could get to the rank of captain by the time we get back, I could rate a job at home—back on Earth."

STEVENS looked up, his black eyebrows dripping water. "Don't expect me to sit back and wait for you to be made a captain. After all, I can use the money—and the rank."

Braniff knew it. He also knew that Stevens was two years older and three years more experienced—and, if he wanted to face the truth, a lot tougher. Stevens would inevitably get the first chance, unless the admiral should unaccountably soften, and Braniff saw no hope of that.

That very day Admiral Gorthy had given him a dressing-down for failing to report a tube burned out in the detector. It was a spare tube in the alternate circuit of the tenth stage of amplification, but the grizzled old admiral had threatened to keep him a lieutenant the rest of his life.

Why couldn't the admiral be human? Just because *he* didn't have any family back home, he didn't have to be so tough.

"I gave orders for you to inspect those tubes every day. That means every twenty-four hours. And quit mooning. If everybody were to be like you, we'd never get home."

But everybody wasn't as lonesome as Lt. Braniff. His only daughter was now three years old and he hadn't even seen her. His wife—since they'd left the constellation of Laerta, he hadn't even heard from her. It took too much power to send personal messages so far.

"You've got to learn to follow orders and do as you're told."

That was the Old Man, unfeeling, uncaring. The only thing he was interested in was discipline. Lt. Braniff could have been very fond of the Old Man if the Old Man had been human. All the staff officers felt that way. The Old Man was always alone, distant, unmoved by anybody else's troubles.

Yes, Admiral Gorthy undoubtedly would give the first promotion to Lt. Stevens, and there were not many promotions on a single cruise. Spacemen were physically perfect, and they didn't often die. They couldn't resign, they couldn't be transferred. Somehow, the life of a space officer was not as glamorous as Lt. Braniff had thought it would be. It would be financially good, for the pay was double what one could get on Earth, and Lt. Braniff was economical with his money.

The only thing was, the *Parsec* and its hundred thousand passengers was like a detached world, coasting through space without orbit, without sun, without a galaxy, even, without anything but those great beryllium plates that cut everybody inside from the rest of the IV Universe.

Lt. Braniff caught himself in mid-stride. He'd better take a turn in the crisp air. He was getting moody. No, he was already moody. He put on his jacket and stepped outside. His breath made funnels of steam under the lights.

He walked the quarter-mile to the bridge. He turned into the big room that housed all the great complexity of instruments that had to do with the navigation and maneuvering of a great cruiser. This was not the administrative headquarters. That was at the opposite end of the vessel in an alternate control room. This room was only for the im-

mediate problems of moving the ship.

He wandered over to the plate that showed space around the ship. In spite of the fact the plate was positioned on the wall, those black depths were not actually the depths of the Pass. Few men on the *Parsec* had ever seen the Pass itself, and no man there had seen space outside of the *Parsec* since the day they had left Earth four years before.

Lt. Braniff became aware that the junior lieutenant on duty had spoken to him. "I beg your pardon. What did you say?"

"I said we picked up something on the detector band a little while back."

Lt. Braniff opened his eyes. "What?"

"The officer of the day thinks it was a ship."

"Did they ask for clearance?"

"No."

THE control-room was buzzing with talk now. A junior admiral and two captains were watching the detector plate. "It's within a couple of a. u.'s." the admiral said, watching intently the faint yellow spot on the screen.

The young officer with the earphones on his head turned a switch. The sound of a sharp, broken whistle came from somewhere. "It's metal, sir," said the young officer.

"Can you estimate the dimensions?" They all waited breathlessly for the answer. No ship except the *Parsec* was supposed to be in this part of the Pass, and certainly no ship on legal business between the galaxies would fail to identify herself, for the entire IV Universe knew that the *Parsec* was the fastest and most heavily armed space-ship in that part of the Cosmos. Would this be a smuggler, an unannounced battleship, or even a wanderer from some other universe?

The young officer looked up. "Mass around two million tons, sir."

Eyebrows raised. "Sounds like Zhute," said the admiral. "That's what we're looking for. Give a reading to the Pilot Room every ten seconds. I'll have the controls set to follow him. Orderly!" A sergeant hurried up. "Awaken Admiral Gorthy. Request his presence on the bridge."

"Yes, sir."

Braniff hurried back to tell Stevens. He caught him just as Stevens was crawling into bed. The man bounced out of his bunk and started putting on clothes.

"First contact we've made in eight months," he said. "Thanks for telling me, Mister—but don't think I'll give up my promotion."

Braniff swallowed and tried for a moment to forget about going home. "Who is Zhute?" he asked.

"Zhute's a renegade robot from somewhere. Nobody even knows what galaxy produced him. Nobody knows what he looks like. All we know is that he's done some of the neatest wholesale smuggling that's ever been done in this section. They know he's the one who runs those multiple-armed Stenorians through the Pass from the I Supergalaxy to the Fox-men of Fomelhaut in our galaxy."

"Who are the Fox-men of Fomelhaut?"

Lt. Stevens considered. "Well, I suppose out of some forty billion constellations in the galaxy, you couldn't learn all about all the worlds. These Fox-men are on Fomelhaut Twenty-One, a world about the size of Jupiter. That is, that's their original world. Since then, they've taken over all the worlds in their system, and as that was before the galactic federation, nobody can squawk. But there are trillions of them; they're highly developed mentally, but they're carnivorous and they're deadly and practically devoid of sentiment. If they could ever get enough weapons they could raise the devil with the whole galaxy. Luckily, they haven't developed an opposed thumb."

"How do they make trouble, then?"

Stevens pulled on his boots. "They never got very far until they enslaved the reptilian citizens on Fomelhaut Eleven. Now of course the reptiles are freed, and the foxes are on their own, but we do know that from somewhere they get periodic shipments of these ten-armed fellows from Stenor, over in the I Supergalaxy, in spite of intergalactic regulations and in spite of the fact that by smuggling alone they could start a war between the galaxies."

"Is that why we're out here—to find out how they're getting their slaves?"

"That's our Number One secret order of business, so they say." Stevens stood up and slipped into his jacket, took a last look at himself in the mirror. "Come on, let's move. This may be the only action of ten years in space."

ADMIRAL Gorthy was on deck when they got back, with his grizzled face watching the ship on the plate. It was now fairly plain as a space-ship, but it was shaped

more like a sphere than the *Parsec*.

"The idiot!" growled Admiral Gorthy. "Why doesn't he stop? Doesn't he know we can catch him?"

"He acts," said the junior admiral, "like some sort of alien intelligence. He may not figure as we do. He might think that if you could destroy him, you would have done so as soon as you sighted him."

"Maybe so, but he ought to stop now. He should at least answer. Have you sent out a challenge on the all-wave length, Mr. Hale?"

"Aye, sir," said the radio officer. "I've broadcast on everything we have."

"And no answer?"

"No acknowledgement, sir."

The grizzled old admiral considered. Braniff knew that none of the *Parsec's* many formidable weapons had ever been fired in action.

Gorthy said, "Captain, are we within range for your heat-projectors?"

"Aye, sir," said the ordnance officer.

Gorthy hesitated. "I don't like to blast a strange ship when I have no idea what in the galaxy she's carrying. Wait until you're close enough to fuse a couple of her port jets. Then throw a pressor beam and spin her around. Let's show them we mean business." He frowned. "I don't like it. There's more going on here than you can see."

Five minutes later the captain of ordnance announced, "The ship is revolving, sir. She's in an erratic course about half a million miles off our starboard bow."

Gorthy grunted. "Watch her."

They saw her name then, printed in strange characters that no one could read. "I'd say she's from the Third Universe," said the junior admiral. "But what's she doing away over here?"

"She could be off course," said the captain of ordnance.

"Not a hundred thousand light-years off course," growled Gorthy. "You're the semantics expert, Lt. Braniff. What do you make of her name?"

"I don't know, sir," said Braniff. "The only guess I can make is that those symbols have a mathematical origin, but they're definitely not the symbols of the Triangle-men of Theta Cygni."

Gorthy grunted.

"I think she's getting ready to make for land, sir," said the junior admiral.

"Where—oh, Inscription Rock. Sure. Where is it now?"

"Half an a. u. to the left, sir, minus twenty degrees."

"Okay. Follow him in."

The *Parsec* was passing the strange ship now. The *Parsec's* eighty million tons of mass couldn't be stopped very easily. So Gorthy had the big ship orbited, while he and a staff of some hundred officers and men detached themselves in the *Parsec Junior*, one of the *Parsec's* two contact boats. Lt. Braniff and Lt. Stevens, being officers of the line, were included.

The *Junior* was expelled by a powder charge at the rear, and immediately began blasting to cut down her own velocity. The strange ship seemed badly crippled; it was floundering in an apparently aimless spiral toward the planet called Inscription Rock. They followed it.

"What is Inscription Rock?" asked the junior officer of ordnance.

"Inscription Rock is the graveyard of military ambitions," Gorthy said gruffly. "It's an orphaned planet from some solar system that nobody can remember. It has wandered around in the Pass for a million years, and nobody has ever claimed it because it has nothing on it of value, and it's too vulnerable to be worth defending as a base. As long as it has been in the Pass it has been used by conquering admirals and defeated admirals to stop and repair their ships and gather their fleets. That planet has seen more intergalactic warfare than any other piece of solid matter in the Fourth Universe."

"They're going to land, sir," said the captain of the *Junior*.

GORTHY did not take his eyes from the plate. "Lieutenant Braniff!"

"Yes, sir." Braniff drew up, with his heart pounding.

"Take the Number Four fighter with a crew of four. Arrest the captain and crew of that ship and confiscate ship and cargo in the name of the Galactic Federation."

"Yes, sir."

"You will be backed by Lt. Stevens in Number Two. If there is any resistance whatever, use the omega-ray."

"Yes, sir." Lt. Braniff was thrilled. That was a drastic order; the omega-ray was a disintegrator at short range. It meant that Gorthy was alarmed. Lt. Braniff exulted momentarily. Perhaps if he turned in a good job on this, he would rate a promotion.

"If you can identify the captain as Zhute,

the renegade robot, kill him without mercy. We can't stand on ceremony, when a wrong move might plunge a hundred billion solar systems into conflict. We'll stand by up here—but be careful!"

"Yes, sir."

Five minutes later Braniff and his crew cast off in No. 4 fighter. The lieutenant was taut, alert. This was his chance. The strange ship landed rather heavily. Braniff circled her at ten miles, with his searchlight on her. Presently there was movement. A port opened. A white flag signaled. Lt. Braniff landed his fighter. There wasn't any sun for this world. It was dead black. He got out in his bubble and flexible suit and went toward the ship warily, careful to stay in the light.

He was remembering what Gorthy had said about starting an intergalactic war. That meant the first thing to do was establish the identity of the ship and find out its cargo. He signaled his three men to follow him. They stalked up to the strange ship. A door opened and a ladder rolled down. Lt. Braniff went up.

When he got through the strange round airlock he found himself confronted by a round-bodied, three-legged creature like an octopus with ten arms. He waited for his companions, then he signaled to the creature. It moved off. They followed.

In an odd-shaped room fitted with instruments and control levers that all ended in slender tips to suit the tentacles of the creature that led them, Lt. Braniff found half a dozen more of them, and finally in the light that was almost blackness, he saw a different form—a bigger form.

"Steady!" he said to his men, and turned on his infra-light. Through his filter-lenses he saw a gigantic robot, ten feet high, as wide as a barrel. Its steel plates were dull from long lack of polishing, but its hands swung like steel pistons at the end of its long arms.

"You can turn it off," the robot said abruptly. "You've had a good look at me."

Lt. Braniff felt queer, but he remembered his job. "Are you Zhute?"

"Yes, I'm Zhute. You forced me down against intergalactic law. I was minding my own business." The robot's metallic voice sounded bitter.

"You didn't identify yourself."

The robot's head lifted as if in surprise. "You did not signal."

"We did," said Lt. Braniff. "What ship is this?"

"The *Adrraftsha,* from Phad Fourteen."

"That's not in the Two Supergalaxy," Lt. Braniff observed. "Are these members of your crew from that planet?"

"They are."

"Where are you from?"

"From the Deeps." The robot laughed.

Lt. Braniff understood that. The Deeps were at minus ninety degrees ascension, a void something like the Pass where the IV Universe thinned out. Braniff overlooked it.

"What's your cargo?"

"See for yourself."

AT THAT moment Braniff heard in his intership phone: "I have orders to follow you inside in fifteen minutes. This is Lt. Stevens."

"We are okay," said Braniff, "but stay close."

To tell the truth, Lt. Braniff was living ten lives at once. He was in an alien ship, surrounded by alien entities, talking to a giant robot. And besides that, they were practically in the dark. These creatures did not need much light. Lt. Braniff was scared to death.

"Lead the way," he said.

He took one man with him and left two to watch the roobt. They followed a three-legged octopus down a low-ceilinged tunnel. It came to a door, worked a combination, apparently, and threw the door open. It was lined with a foot's thickness of lead, and Lt. Braniff shuddered at the strength in those heavy tentacles. He motioned the creature to go inside.

The Phaddian waddled in. A moment later it backed out, bearing a heavy lead box. Lt. Braniff observed the Geiger reading and straightened up. Hard radiation—plenty hard. If they hadn't been wearing shielded suits they couldn't have lived through that. He made some quick tests, then he went back to the robot.

"You will go with us," he said, and held his breath.

The robot shrugged. He turned and led the way out. Lt. Braniff exhaled and breathed deeply.

He felt still better when they were outside under the searchlights. Lt. Stevens was there in his bubble. The great robot stood at its full height. It looked around at the men, at the ships, at the contact boat floating

overhead, with light pouring from its portholes.

Lt. Braniff knew that this might mean a promotion and it might mean that he would get a chance to stay home after this trip. He was happy and elated, but as he looked at Zhute, he felt sorry for the big robot. It looked a little bewildered. Lt. Braniff thought its shoulders slumped a trifle.

Then suddenly Zhute turned and ran, its great steel legs taking immense strides over the granite rock.

Braniff remembered what Gorthy had said about using the omega-ray, but he couldn't quite bring himself to do that. The robot had looked so forlorn and friendless, and besides, he wasn't offering resistance—though Braniff understood that the admiral would be pleased at any reasonable excuse for the destruction of the robot. But Zhute couldn't get away. They'd track him down in minutes by his metal body. So Braniff stood for instant, watching.

Then Lt. Stevens raised his omega-gun. Braniff saw that, and his temper flared. Why was Stevens so ready to blast a man—or a robot, either—just to grab off a promotion? And why must he shoot a helpless robot in the back?

Braniff wheeled. His right fist, encased in flexible beryllium, came up hard against Lt. Stevens' bubble. He saw Stevens' head snap back, then Stevens turned, with a look of amazement on his face. He stared an instant at Braniff and then he changed hands on the gun and hit back.

The blow jarred Braniff to the bottom of his spine. The bubble seemed to try to lift his head off. They closed. Stevens tried to bring the gun to bear on Braniff's head. Braniff kneed him. Stevens backed away, gasping. Braniff followed. He kicked the gun out of Stevens' hand. Then a paralysis ray stunned them both. . . .

The next thing Braniff knew, he was being helped up. The grizzled old admiral stood there with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Lieutenant, will you explain your conduct?"

Braniff swallowed. He realized now with a sinking feeling, that he had forfeited all his right to promotion.

"I don't know, sir, but Zhute was my prisoner."

Gorthy studied him, apparently in some disgust. Finally he looked down to where they were bringing Zhute up the rocky slope. He looked back at Braniff.

"Come with me."

They got into the No. 1 fighter. Gorthy directed the pilot. "There's a mountain here somewhere with a square face about three miles high—a black granite mountain," he said.

THE PILOT used his radar. A moment later he had it.

"Take us there," said Gorthy.

Braniff was puzzled, and a little apprehensive. Was the admiral getting ready to execute him?

The admiral had the ship landed on a point of rock a mile away. They got out. The lights were on the cliff, and then Braniff saw that the cliff was covered with inscriptions in many strange and alien characters.

"All the great military commanders for a million years have left their marks on that rock," said Gorthy. "This planet has been a place for fleets to rest and be repaired, for rendezvous between forces, and also for defeated admirals to stop and lick their wounds. And every one has left his mark.

"Look up there, clear up on top, at the left. I can't read that, but I've had it explained to me. Those machine-like marks were made by Nudghjz, the great Rigellian semi-mineral general who whipped the Milky Way in the first of the Intergalactic Wars. It says: 'I conquered all.' And he did. He conquered forty billion suns.

"Over on the left is the vine-like inscription of the famous Capellan admiral, Llallella, who with his half-plant people and a billion space-ships from the galaxy swept to a glorious victory over the First Galaxy itself.

"And on down, one after another. Sardox, the evil cat from Merope; Vomel from Sirius itself; Finit from Vega—names that have gone into the galactic history-books for all time.

"Look up there at the carved boasting of Nudghjz. It's in the granite, on a planet where their is no atmosphere and therefore no wind, no storms, no changes of temperature. His name has been there for a million years. Llallella's was put there fifty thousand years later."

"Yes, sir," said Braniff. "I see, but—"

Gorthy faced him. "Lieutenant, you're a nice young man. You are not afraid to be sentimental. That's why you hit Lieutenant Stevens for aiming at Zhute—not because Zhute was your prisoner, but because he was

alone and discouraged. No matter how horrible a criminal he is, you felt sorry for him then."

Lt. Braniff licked his lips.

The grizzled old admiral was talking straight. "Lieutenant, you've got a family back home. That's where you belong. You came into the service because it looked glamorous and because you would make a lot of money, didn't you?"

Jim Braniff swallowed. "Yes, sir."

"A lot of us come in that way, Lieutenant. That's the way I came in, sixty years ago. I had a young wife then, but I thought I would look pretty glamorous to her when I got back. But actually it wasn't glamorous. It was just the way you see it now. When I finally got back, she was dead. There was nothing for me to do but stay in the service. I'll go the same way those admirals and generals went and, when I go, the only difference between us will be that I haven't cut my name on a rock. Do you see what I'm driving at, Lieutenant?"

BRANIFF faced him. "No, sir, I'm afraid I don't."

"Some men are fitted for space duty. Some aren't. You're not. Resign when you get back! Don't be afraid of criticism. The galaxy needs sentiment—not in the Space Service; we don't dare show it here. But your memory in the hearts of one generation of your family is worth more than a million years in rock. Remember that! When you get back to Earth, get out of it. You're too soft!" he said harshly. "You don't belong in the Space Service! I'd send you home now if there were enough fuel!"

He stalked back to the boat. Lt. Braniff watched him a moment with a softness in his chest, then he followed.

They got in and took off. They reached the *Junior*. Admiral Gorthy took his place at the screeen. "Train your disintegrator on that tub down there," he ordered the junior officer of ordnance.

"But, sir," cried Braniff, "there are living beings down there—Phaddians."

"Never heard of them," the admiral said bluntly. "Captain, are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Prepare to fire. By the way, Lieutenant, what is the cargo?"

"Americium, sir."

"Americium!" The admiral stared at Braniff. "Holy jumping comets! That much americium would blow us into the Third Universe. But you thought first of the Phaddians, Lieutenant." The admiral nodded. "That's why we couldn't get a message through. That stuff's half-life is only five hundred years. Its radiation has a high speed. Americium is contraband. I confiscate it. Lieutenant, do you think you could repair that ship and take it home?"

"I think so, sir."

"Then do it. That load of americium is worth a dozen plutonium mines. I'll clear you with customs on Agena Centauri."

Suddenly Lt. Braniff realized what the admiral had told him to do.

"Did you say—take it home, sir?" He nearly choked as he tried to control his emotions.

The admiral glared at him. "Yes, I said take it home!" he snapped. "What did you think I said?"

All the homesickness and all the lonesomeness and all the longing that had been in Lt. Braniff's heart for four years welled up into his mind and almost overwhelmed him. He lifted his head high, trying to speak, and when the words finally came out, he said:

"That's what I thought you said, sir."

"Pick a crew and get started." The admiral was studying a sky map. "I think, Captain, we'll set a new course when we get back on board the *Parsec*. I'd like to take a run over toward the One Supergalaxy and see if I can pick up a clue as to where Zhute got all this americium. There must be a new galaxy opening up somewhere." He wheeled on Braniff. "What the devil are you waiting on, Lieutenant? Get going!"

Lt. Braniff smiled. "Yes, sir," he said, and added under his breath as he saluted, "You old softie."

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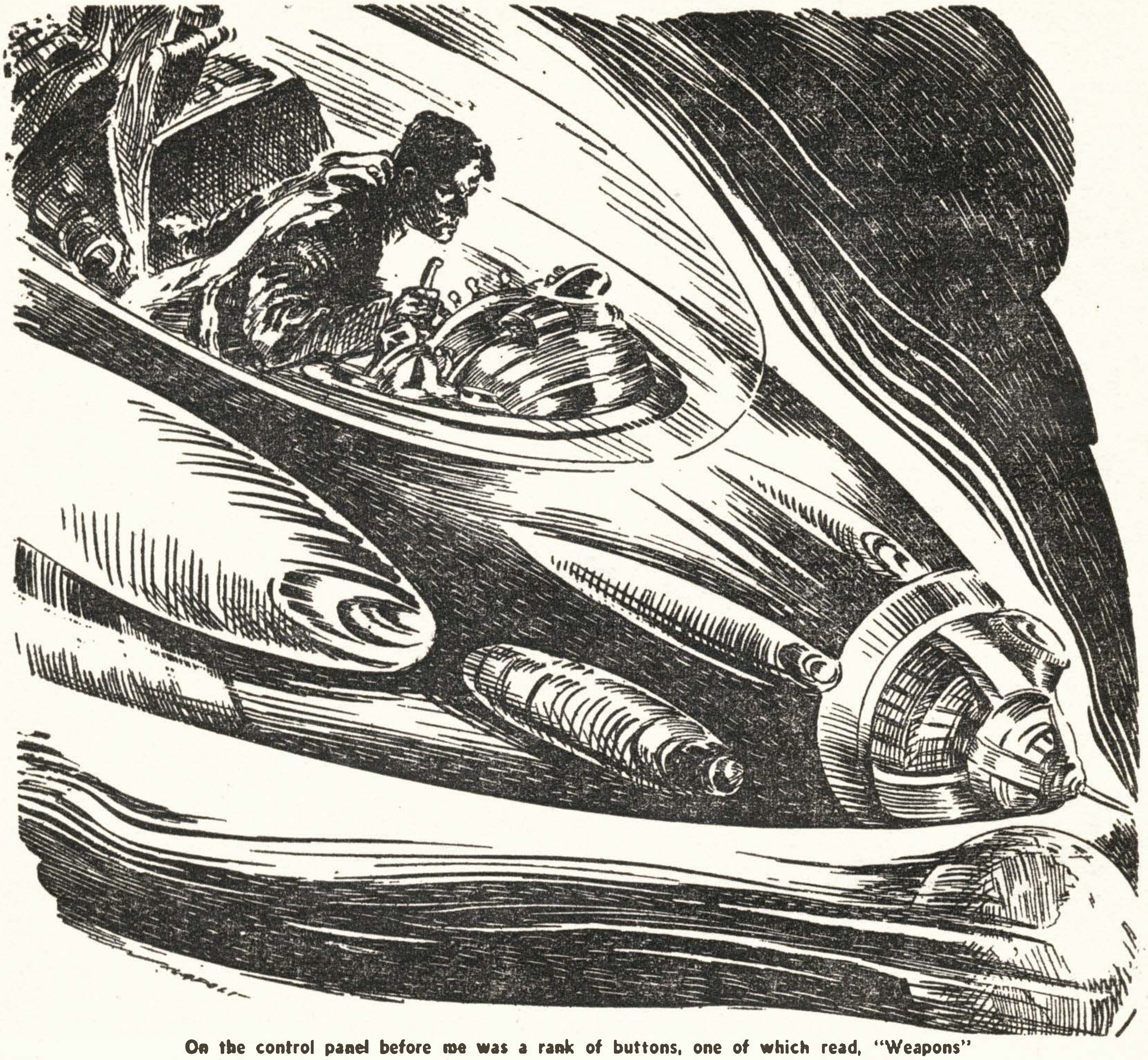
NEXT ISSUE

THE WORLD IS ON A POGO STICK

A Provocative Special Feature by F. ORLIN TREMAINE



On the control panel before me was a rank of buttons, one of which read, "Weapons"

No Winter, No Summer

By DONALD LAVERTY

Many men spend their lives futilely trying to avenge the past—here's one who wreaks his vengeance on the future!

WHEN THE time machine came, it wasn't a lambent web of flame suspended in the air, and it wasn't a huge, dull-gray ovoid, nor a shining mass of crystal and chromium. It was hardly anything at all. It was a little black briefcase, and the man who carried it was just a man.

In medieval times, I figured out later, it probably would have been a saddlebag, or a courier's letterpouch. In old Scotland it would have looked like a sporran. Wherever the Fisher found himself, he would seem normal, everyday, a man invisible by his very ordinariness. Doubtless the contents of the case looked commonplace, too—they were clever enough to have thought of that.

There's a story about a certain English nobleman who walked around a team of horses and was never seen again. I think there was some insignificant person who vanished at the same place and at the same time, a courier, perhaps, or a mendicant with a basket, or a traveler with his belongings tied up in a handkerchief—or a man with a little black briefcase.

Whoever he was, I know where he is now. He's wandering, looking for his Time, and there are plenty more like him. Maybe it might have been different, if they'd been careful about their samples, instead of grabbing strangers at random.

It was six-thirty A. M. and I was killing time by walking down the subway platform, turning to the left of one pillar, to the right of the next. A kid's game, like stepping on alternate squares of the sidewalk. When I got almost to the end, just as I stepped behind the last pillar, the man with the briefcase got off a bench and stepped over. I hadn't even noticed him before. He was that kind of man.

He pulled a leather folder out of his pocket, flashed a shield at me. "F.B.I.," he said. "What's your name?"

I might have asked for a closer look at that badge. It could have read Chicken Inspector" for all I saw of it, but since my brief stay at Hanford I'd been conditioned to this kind of thing. I told him: "Jonathan Paxton."

"Occupation?"

"Tube designer—electronics. I work out at—"

"Good enough," he said. He lifted the briefcase slightly; I couldn't see what he did. The platform lights blinked out suddenly, and then there was a roaring noise and a sickening sense of acceleration, up and out, bigger and bigger. . . .

THERE was another man in the room. He was sitting in a metal seat that seemed to grow out of the floor. There was a hinged instrument board over his lap. He grinned and said something, and then lifted the board. It slid into the arm of the chair, and he got up.

The man with the briefcase answered him and helped me off the floor. "My name is Szor," he said. "Take it easy the first few minutes. Ask questions if it'll help."

The other man grinned again and went out. Szor waved his hand toward the wall at his left, and another chair slid up out of the floor. He led me over to it and pushed gently until I sat down.

I still had some idea that I had fainted in the subway station, and had been taken into a dispatcher's office. The room was oval-shaped, walls and ceiling of dully-shining, unpainted metal, the floor darker, rather like resilient concrete. I thought I remembered an oval door where the other man had gone out, but there wasn't anything there now.

"What the heck!" I said.

Szor smiled pleasantly. "It is a little hard to take, isn't it? I'll tell you all about it." But he didn't; he just waited.

I swallowed. "There's no sense snatching me," I said, another interpretation suddenly hitting me. "I just design tubes. I don't know a thing that isn't in the Smythe Report."

"That was new—two thousand years ago."

Just like that, without even a change of expression.

I started trembling. I couldn't help it. I felt as if I'd been too long in a steam room, or as if I were just recovering from a powerful emetic. Shaken, blurry, and very, very sick.

Szor waited; he was good at that. While I was still trying to think of something to say, he pulled a little flat box out of the briefcase and held it at the level of my chest, the flat side turned toward me. Nothing happened, but he seemed to be listening.

"Very good," he said. "You're making a fine recovery."

My heart did seem to have stopped pounding. I discovered I could speak. "Listen," I said. "Are you kidding?"

He shook his head, "No. This is the year 3903." He took other things out of his pockets and pointed them at me.

"You'll do," he said.

"I'll do what?" I said, as calmly as I could. "What am I doing here?"

"You're a visitor. That's all. You'll be well treated; and if you want to go back, we can probably arrange it."

I thought it over. Except for the shock, I didn't seem to have a one of the orthodox sensations. I felt, instead, a terrific, pulsing hope that it was true, and a fear that my hope was irrational. Probably I was glad to have escaped my own age, I don't know. Mostly I was thinking: My gosh, what a chance! It was as if someone had said to me, "Ask me the ten questions you'd most like to have an-

swered." As if—well, as if a man from the future had offered to tell me anything I wanted to know.

I remembered how I'd always wanted to kick the heroes of time-travel stories for passing up opportunities like this. "Do you have a unified field theory?" I demanded.

He frowned for the first time, and my heart started kicking up again. "Let's not rush matters," he said. "If you're granted an audience with the Overcontroller, you'll have lots of time to learn unimportant things."

He tucked his various medical instruments away with a decisive air. "I confess I'm a little disappointed," he went on "Here you have a magnificent opportunity to see what Civilization is really like, and your first question is religious! However—"

"All right," I said hastily. "I'm sorry. Show me some Civilization."

HE SHOWED me. He showed me all the dominions of the world. And in every place that I saw, there was Man and Metal, and nothing else.

We walked along a balcony over a huge circular pit. Below, in a bright, glareless light, hundreds sat at desks. We went through another door, along passageways whose transparent walls showed ranks of men and women sitting at keyboards, or bending over glowing tables. There were machines; the city was machines; most of their circuits were stencilled, and the very walls and partitions had something going on inside of them. The kind of apparatus that takes up living space had become obsolete, for living space was needed.

It was then that I thought to ask the name of the city. It had no name, he said. In English it might have been called Earth.

In the glowing tables I saw the American continent, and Szor told me where it left off and the Pacific Ocean began. He had to tell me, because the city went right on, without a break. The ocean bed was still there, six hundred stories down, but only geologists and historians knew about it. The water was used up, converted into metal and energy to build the structure that replaced it; when water was needed, it was put together.

And under the metal crust, men in Europe, men in Asia, Africa, the ocean areas, all alike, all busy. Below the billions, converters gnawed new living space for the children, the diseaseless children who would live to be two hundred; above them, beams sucked energy ceaselessly from the sun, and a black roof of something which was not energy took its toll of starlight and cosmic ray alike.

If I've given the impression that the world was a soulless ant-heap, I didn't mean to. The work went on, all the time, and everyone contributed to it; but except for a few top executives, no single person worked more than four hours a day, nor more than three days a week. Except for the rapid expansion of this civilization the figures would have been even lower. And there was plenty of spirit. Every job was undermanned, so a citizen could pick any one that suited him when he came of age, and be free to change his mind later. The vast projects under way held the enthusiasm and imagination of the people the way only myths had held them in my own time.

Even in little things the picture was bright. I suppose I had half expected food-pills, or at best some sort of nourishing, tasteless synthetic junk. But I found that they'd been through that stage long ago and had learned better. After all, their transmutation techniques were perfect; there was no reason why they couldn't produce a rich beefsteak from a handful of waste. They did, too; I had some delicious ones, though cattle had been extinct for centuries; and I had new foods, things that never had grown on land or sea, that tasted as though they'd been meant for gods.

"A few dreamed of this in your time," Szor said softly. "On all this planet, not a square foot, not an inch of space exists that supports any rival life form, or that does not serve man's needs—even the core will soon be his. If the sun were to go out tomorrow few of us would even know it. On our tiny planet alone we have energy enough for a thousand years, man discovered, man directed. The sun is only raw mass for our needs."

"And when that's gone?"

"There is more elsewhere."

"The planets?"

"No, not now. We have not used spaceships for five hundred years. The moon has been used up, as have the outer layers of Mars and Venus; what is left does not attract colonization while there is still living space here. The major planets are too diffuse to be of interest at present; when denser material is exhausted, perhaps."

"And after that?"

"The stars are nearly inexhaustible. That

project is to start sometime during the next century, I believe."

"Still—"

Szor turned a cold, angry glare upon me. "In your time," he said, "there was much waste. You have pushed your questions as to our energy sources a hundred times farther ahead than your own people ever did for theirs."

The moral was clear enough. I shut up.

I SPENT three months learning what they wanted me to learn, and waited to ask my one question—the only question that mattered to me any more. The language came first, of course. It was quite simple, inflected as to grammer, and harsh of sound. There were some odd omissions. I'd already discovered that there was no equivalent for "Earth"; they had a word for "world" which did not refer to this planet or to any other planet. It meant, "the-total-of-places-belonging-to-men," and included quite a catalogue of island universes where there were no men—yet.

There was no anthropological term for the race, which was called, simply, "people". For that matter, there was no word for "anthropology". The language itself was just "speech", and there was no word for "linguistics". There were some other changes, too, but I'll come to them later.

I got some access to their elementary math and mechanical engineering, though they were careful to give me no techniques I could carry back. They had a unified field theory, all right, which astonishingly enough went back to the ancient notion of the indivisible particle. By their lights it was immeasurable, too, as Dirac had guessed—a point with something called Real Property which I could not understand, and Expressed Properties which turned out to be mass, charge, position, size, etc.

A particle, it appeared, was an electron or a proton or whatever, only because of the face it presented to you, and seen from a different dimensional angle was something else again. Thus their basic particle was named simply by an expression in what they called hyperional calculus, and the electrons and protons of Twentieth Century atomic physics were simply variations in that formula.

They wouldn't let me study their geometry of discretionary sections, because it was tied up with their few surviving ritual beliefs. All I remember about it is that its basic figure, its cone, so to speak, was a thing called an oxymoron, and that it was the basis of their time-traveling. For reasons I didn't then understand, Szor and his assistants taught me a few practical things about time-traveling, though its theory was withheld.

In that three-month period, the only people I spoke to were Szor and two others, a man named Khan, and a girl named—really—Vassilyne, who seemed to be the only friends he had. All three of them looked alike and talked alike, and if there was any difference in their personalities, I couldn't detect it. After a while I asked Szor if they were relatives, but the question seemed to embarrass him and he gave me a cant phrase about all men being brothers.

It seemed reasonable enough to me that I had no contact with the world outside of these three. After all, I was in a totally strange environment, and the people who attended me had been specially trained to help me. In this era a great many things were handled by remote or automatic control which formerly had required personal supervision, and the customs of social intercourse were all unknown to me.

And it was a good system. In the morning we'd have fifteen minutes' fast vocabulary drill, then we'd settle down to grammar exercises and translation, and finally, if I'd done all right, there'd be a book to read—a historical novel about the founding of the World State, or a book of short stories about people named Undercontroller Iverab and Molar Protozoologist Granz and Hyper-particular Electronicist Lomar. I didn't think they were very entertaining, but they were simply written and it was more fun reading them than memorizing lists of technical terms or "I have been computing, you have been computing, he she or it has been computing."

On math days, the same thing; if I made satisfactory progress, a book to read in the evening. I was surprised to find that Szor got one, too; he liked poetry, and got more of a kick out of his reading than I did.

Later, I remembered the first time that had happened, though it hadn't seemed important at the time—everything in the world was extraordinary and I'd become used to the fact. I'd just finished a tough problem in six-dimensional tensors, and handed the result over to Szor. He followed it through, nodding abstractedly as he went. When he finished, he looked up with a pleased ex-

pression and started to say something, then closed his mouth and listened. Whatever he was hearing, it was inaudible to me. When it was over, he looked at me with a radiant smile.

"Congratulations are in order," he said. "You've passed your primary period successfully. Next week you'll see the Overcontroller, and begin to learn a great many things that I couldn't tell you." He reached over and shook my hand. "This is a very good thing, Jon."

I don't know how I knew it, but his enthusiasm seemed just the slightest bit forced to me, and I tried to get more explanations; but he wouldn't tell me any more than that, though I was bursting with curiosity. In the middle of one of my questions, the communicator on the wall hummed, and something went *bump* against the stop. Szor opened it and took out a thin, black-bound volume.

He waved it at me. "This is a good day for me, too," he said. "This is my reward." He sat down hurriedly and opened the book. "You don't mind? It's something I picked up back in your time. I've been looking forward to permission." The next instant, he was absorbed.

Ten minutes later, I glanced over at him. He was sitting up in his chair, staring rigidly at the page. Tears were moving slowly down his cheeks.

I got up and went over to him. "Szor!" I said. "What's the matter?"

He didn't hear me. I looked over his shoulder. The book was a volume of Twentieth Century verse. It was open to a single poem, a simple twelve-line thing that began, "Points centered in eternal now," and he was crying because it was so beautiful.

THE NEXT week, on the final day, Szor was abnormally silent, and a little pale —nothing marked, but so different from his usual robust affability that I couldn't help noticing it. I guessed that his emotional binge with the Black Book had probably caught up with him, and as he prepared our papers for the visit to the Overcontroller, I tried to distract him a little.

"Are Khan and—and the young lady going with us?" I asked casually.

He shook his head. "You won't see them again."

"Oh. That's too bad; I liked them. Why not?"

"Retired to their usual condition. After you see the Overcontroller, I'll follow them."

I puzzled over that; we were using Speech now, of course, and occasionally an abstract noun still stopped me. "What do you mean, condition?"

"Our usual status in society," he said brusquely. "Ready?"

"I suppose so," I agreed, shrugging.

Out of the apartment, we took a belt a short distance, then transferred to a tube car. I have no notion how far that car took us, for there was nothing to see and we made no stops. When the blown-metal cylinder finally slowed down and glided in to our destination, I was on a tiny, deserted platform, seemingly remote from any area I had ever been shown before.

Szor made no comment, but guided me to the single exit, an elevator, which shot upward at his touch.

After a long time I tried to draw him out again. "Unless I miss my guess," I said, "The Overcontroller lives a lot closer to the surface than I've ever been allowed before."

"Or I," he said. That was every word I got out of him. The elevator hummed on.

At long last my stomach notified me in unmistakable terms that the trip was over. The door slid back.

Sunlight!

I've always preferred to work at night and sleep during the day whenever possible, but I'd never before had to live three whole months in a place where there just wasn't any sun, at any time. When I first stepped out of that elevator, I heard a strange, echoing noise in the big dome confronting me. After a moment I realized what it had been —my own hoarse involuntary greeting to the warm light which poured down upon me through the transparent roof. Whatever 3903 had accomplished with food substitutes, it had no counterfeit for sunshine.

Szor eyed me, his curiosity driving away a little of his glumness, but I didn't try to explain. He was squinting a bit, and I could see that the light was hurting his eyes.

"Come along," he said.

On the floor of the dome, shining machines were ranked—things that looked more like "real" future machinery than the thin flat pieces of apparatus of the lower levels. Some of them looked as though they might be small spaceships, despite Szor's assurance that spaceflying had been suspended.

We threaded our way among them to a

central shaft which soared up to the peak of the dome.

"Good-by," Szor said abruptly. His face was very gloomy again. "This will take you to the Overcontroller. I've enjoyed being with you."

"I've enjoyed it too, Szor. I won't see you again?"

"My part of this sequence is over." He paused and nibbled at his lower lip. "I've one bit of advice for you."

"What's that?"

"Don't tell the Overcontroller you know anything about chronon mechanics. I didn't report it."

With this odd speech, he turned on his heel and disappeared among the ranked machines. I felt is if I'd lost my last friend.

AS I SHOULD have suspected, there were no guards in that little chamber atop the dome. The Fortieth Century had outgrown keeping guns on people it knew to be helpless. There was only the Overcontroller himself, his back turned to me, looking out of a window across the room. I cleared my throat and he turned.

Except for Szor, Khan and Vassilyne, he was the first Person I had been allowed to observe at close range. A small man, but physically perfect as all the People were; not much different from the three I knew, and yet—and yet it was as if he belonged to a different race. There was some small difference in his expression, something in his stance, and when he finally spoke, in his voice, that marked him off. He was not just a person, but a personality.

"Welcome," he said. "Sit down."

I sat down in the indicated chair. If he had gone on to say, "Cut your throat," in exactly the same friendly, conversational tone, I think I would have done it. He was Command itself, clothed in flesh; yet he was not in the least threatening.

"You've been wondering why you've been brought here."

"Yes, I have," I said as calmly as I could. "I didn't think it could be just overflowing hospitality. What is it you want of me?"

"Most of what we wanted, we've obtained already," he said. "The Fisher Szor was dispatched into Time to bring back a representative specimen of Twentieth Century civilization, from whom we could deduce the general nature of the people of that era. We have books, of course, but two thousand years is a long time, and attitudes change. Your writers described your age in its own terms; we needed a description in our terms."

"There doesn't seem to be much difference," I said, frowning. "Naturally there are changes, a little more sanity, better education, but basically your people seem much like ours."

The Overcontroller shook his head decisively. "Not true. Don't judge by Szor and his twins. They are—well, you could call them accidents, though 'atavisms' would probably be more accurate. Those of us who must work near the surface of the Earth occasionally have children like them—stray mutations, almost invariably throw-backs to a type of mind unknown to the race as a whole for centuries."

"Never any improved children, advances, superiors?"

"Oh, yes, but those are destroyed at once. Our cultural structure is strictly quantitative, in a linear pattern. We don't allow qualitative changes except under strict genetic control. As for the atavisms, they make good Fishers—Time-searchers—because of their affinities with past periods; but they're troublesome to handle. They have a vestigial aesthetic appartus that has to be kept assuaged all the time with useless artworks, and they're always discontented. Except when needed for Time work, they're kept in nutrient baths and not allowed to mingle with the sane population."

I sat stunned. So that was it!

"Naturally," the Overcontroller proceeded in his smooth, calm voice, "we can't risk direct contact between specimens and normal People until a period of preparation has passed. In most cases, the specimen is simply preserved for study after the necessary information is gained; though if he comes from a pre-scientific era he may be sent back to it. In the interim, the atavisms handle him, since the two types have common ground."

"I see," I said, with a feeble show of sarcasm. "To what do I owe my present survival in a non-preserved state?"

"Intelligence. To use a simple example it is often possible to travel virgin territory by the use of detailed maps; but a cooperative, intelligent guide can explain much that the best maps leave unstated."

He got up and walked back to the window again. "Out there," he said, "we have a paradise without end, a paradise which our

best minds deem to be founded for eternity. Man is ruler here, and has met no force which he cannot master. Many of the bastions of the universe are as yet unstormed—but no matter, they have already fallen.

He swung back to me. "And more," he said softly. "We have conquered Man himself. In our age, no one goes without food, clothing, homes, education, recreation, a mate. Whatever he needs is his, and many unnecessary things as well. We have no disease, no crime, no warfare. Our death rate goes down yearly, our life-spans increase as rapidly. We work together for the common good, and our ambitions have no barriers. Tiny as this planet is, it dwarfs the cosmos."

"It's metal," I said.

"Why should that matter to us, who have seen nothing better anywhere? We live in this environment, and it seems beautiful to us, as trees and rivers were beautiful to you. We have sacrificed trees and rivers for peace and plenty—a small fee, surely!"

"Peace and plenty," I admitted, "were commodities no one could buy at any price in my time."

"Exactly. You're here to help remedy that."

"How?"

"By helping us bring peace and plenty to the Twentieth Century, as we already have to later ages."

For a minute I didn't get it. Then I shot up out of my seat. I felt exactly as I had when I'd first arrived—trembling, blurred, and sick.

"Either I'm totally crazy or you're totally a fanatic. Do you mean to say you're extending this metallic Hades backwards through time as well as out into space?"

"I mean just that. That's the whole purpose of our time-sampling."

"How far back have you gone?"

"Four centuries so far. Ages that were once dark and miserable, are now one with us."

"And it hasn't changed your history?"

"No. You'd have to understand something of chronon mechanics to know why, but such a field is beyond your capabilities. The seeming paradox does not exist."

I caught the phrase and tried to connect it with Szor's warning, but I couldn't. The Overcontroller was right. The few practical things Szor had taught me about Time were not enough to cope with the problem.

"I'll accept that," I said grimly. "Did you retire the artists and art-audiences of those previous four centuries to nutrient baths when you took over?"

"It wasn't necessary," he said. "They were the only people who resisted our liberation, and consequently were eliminated in the first skirmishes. I needn't remind you that in military matters, a race opposing its own ancestors is invincible almost by definition. Down below, on the floor of the Dome, you saw some of the cruisers we used in the conquest of Venus, and in the reduction of the Thirty-Eighth Century. They're hardly big enough to carry three men—but they can destroy a whole planet if it is necessary."

THIS time it was my turn to get up. I was feeling even worse. He added softly, "Of course Absolute Force alone can sometimes be tricked or turned against itself. But we are the unconquerable combination—Absolute Force plus Absolute Right."

I kept on walking until I reached the window, and looked out, as he had been looking out when I first saw him. I thought of Szor, and the little book of poems thrown to him as a sop.

It was true that the vista was beautiful in its own strange way. From where I stood the outer surface of the Dome curved down and away, and finally blended in a smooth line into the metal ground. Here and there a ventilator was visible, like a tiny white mushroom. Far, far away, obscured by the glitter of the sunlight on Earth's mail, was the horizon.

That was all. A smooth metal planet, gleaming under a wintry sun. Incongruously, the sky was still blue, and there were still clouds in it—the moisture, I suppose, breathed into the air by the teeming billions. I wondered what it was like when it rained, and how they led off the water when every direction was downhill. In my mind I saw darkness, and the gleam of a polished surface in the lightning bolts, and the metal shell ringing back the thunder.

And under that metal surface, so many people; people in numbers only the bacteria of my own age could match. Working; breeding; enjoying their "recreation," whatever that could be in a world where poetry was forgotten except by freaks.

I looked back at the Overcontroller. "I must be crazy," I whispered. "But I do see something that I think is beautiful. The

rivers and trees are gone, and so are the poems; but some poetry, all the same. So many people, and yet the same dream."

"The same dream. Dreamed in your age, too, betwen the battles."

The sunlight glittered over me. "What do you want?"

"Only your consent, at the moment. When you leave here, go to elevator C. It will take you to the next stage."

"All right," I said. "It's not easy, but—all right."

He stood up and accompanied me to the central shaft. "We knew it would be hard. I hope it won't depress you if I remind you that we also knew how this interview would end. Invincibility is a hard burden to bear, sometimes. We bear it, because we know at last how to use it—against all the suffering man has inflicted on himself."

The door slid open, and, surprisingly, he stepped into the cab with me.

"Think," he went on, his eyes glowing. "Your wars will not happen; your racial pogroms will be stopped at the source; your plagues will be wiped out; even the earthquakes of the past will be just—things that never happened."

At the bottom of the shaft he shook my hand, and then he was gone, borne back to his eyrie, his tower above the Earth.

I stood for several minutes where I was and weighed the fair promises. Somehow they had no reality. Failing to comprehend the paradox of Conquest through Time, I could not believe in its fruits. I thought, instead, of Szor. Szor had been—a good guy. But he was gone, back to oblivion, because he had thought a poem good enough for tears, *"Points centered in eternal now"*. . . .

It took me only a second to pick out a Time-cruiser, for Szor's instruction had been good as far as it went. No other machine could look like that and not be concerned with Time. No one stopped me. The Fortieth Century had long forgotten force—against the helpless.

I might have slipped at once into the achronic state, but I did not want to head for my own time just yet. I had a favor to do for a friend. I shoved the ship into space-drive and burst through the transparent panes of the Dome. The real air of Earth whistled around me as I climbed, and before long I was among clouds, real clouds, heart-stopping seas of pink foam below and about me in the wintery sun.

Then the sky blued and darkened and a few stars popped out. The metal globe shrank.

The moon had been gone a long time, but it was not hard to estimate when I was out about the proper distance. I stopped the ship.

The Earth spun, bright, smooth, featureless. On the control panel before me was a rank of buttons, and a word in the extremely simple language called Speech. It read, "Weapons." Any one would do, for they were all invincible.

I guess someone else might have made a speech. All I could think of was an old nursery rhyme about a caterpillar.

"Poor little planet," I said. "No winter, no summer, no expression on its face."

I pushed the button.

I might have said, "Squoosh," if I hadn't been crying.

Slow as a Wink

ACCORDING to Dr. Robert W. Lawson of the University of Sheffield, England, the wink, supposedly a rapid fire process, is actually rather a slow one. The average length of loss of vision due to blinkage is three-tenths of a second. Since most people blink every three seconds or less, this means that the bulk of humanity, during its waking hours, is totally blind some eleven per cent of the time and partially blind twenty per cent of the time!

It was like a dream he had refused to record in his Freud book

REFERENT

By BRETT STERLING

The life of a child genius was no fun, but Roby couldn't escape it—until a falling star taught him how to rebel!

ROBY MORRISON fidgeted. Walking in the tropical heat he heard the wet thunder of waves on the shore. There was a green silence on Orthopedic Island.

It was the year 1997, but Roby did not care.

All around him was the garden where he prowled, all ten years of him. This was Meditation Hour. Beyond the garden wall, to the north, were the High I. Q. Cubicles where he and the other boys slept in special beds. With morning they popped up like bottle-corks, dashed into showers, gulped food, and were sucked down vacuum-tubes half across the island to Semantics School. Then to Physiology. After Physiology he was blown back underground and released through a seal in the great garden wall to

spend this silly hour of meditative frustration, as prescribed by the island Psychologists.

Roby had his opinion of it. "Damned silly."

Today, he was in furious rebellion. He glared at the sea, wishing he had the sea's freedom to come and go. His eyes were dark, his cheeks flushed, his small hands twitched nervously.

Somewhere in the garden a chime vibrated softly. Fifteen more minutes of meditation. Huh! And then to the Robot Commissary to stuff his dead hunger as taxidermists stuff birds.

And, after the scientifically pure lunch, through the tube again to Sociology. Of course, late in the warm green afternoon, games would be played in the Main Garden. Games some tremble-brained Psychologist had evolved from a nightmare haunted sleep. This was the future! You must live, my lad, as the people of the past, of the year 1920, 1930 and 1942 predicted you would live! Everything fresh, brisk, sanitary, too, too fresh! No nasty old parents about to give one complexes. Everything controlled, dear boy!

Roby should have been in a perfect mood for something unique.

He wasn't.

WHEN the star fell from the sky a moment later he was only more irritated.

The star was a spheroid. It crashed and rolled to a stop on the hot green grass. A small door popped open in it.

Faintly, this incident recalled a dream to the child. A dream which with superior stubbornness he had refused to record in his Freud Book this morning. The dream-thought was in his mind at the exact instant that the star-door popped wide and some 'thing' emerged.

Some 'thing'.

Young eyes, seeing an object for the first time, have to make a familiar thing of it. Roby didn't know what this 'thing' was stepping from the sphere. So, scowling, Roby thought of what it *most resembled*.

Instantly the 'something' became a *certain* thing.

Warm air ran cold. Light flickered, form changed, melted, shifted as the thing evolved into certainty!

Startled, a tall thin pale man stood beside the metal star.

The man had pink, terrified eyes. He trembled.

"Oh, I know *you*." Roby was disappointed. "You're only the Sandman."

"Sand—man?"

The stranger quivered like heat rising from boiling metal. His shaking hands went wildly up to touch his long coppery hair as if he'd never seen or felt it before. The Sandman gazed in horror at his own hands, legs, feet, body, as if they were all new. "Sand—man?" The world was difficult. Talking was new to him, also. He seemed about to flee, but something stopped him.

"Yeah," said Roby. "I dream about you every night. Oh, I know what you think. Semantically, our teachers say that ghosts, goblins and fairies and sandmen are labels, only names for which there aren't any actual referents, no actual objects or things. But to heck with that. We kids know more than teachers about it. You being here proves the teachers wrong. There are Sandmen after all, aren't there?"

"Don't give me a label!" cried the Sandman, suddenly. He seemed to understand now. For some reason he was unutterably frightened. He kept pinching, tugging and feeling his own long new body as if it was a thing of terror. "Don't *name* me, don't label me!"

"Huh?"

"I'm a referent!" screamed the Sandman. "I'm not a label! I'm just a referent! Let me go!"

Roby's little green cat-eyes slitted. "Say —" He put his hands on his hips. "Did Mister Grill send you? I bet he did! I bet this another of those psychological tests!"

Roby flushed with dark anger. Always and forever they were at him. They sorted his games, food, education, took away his friends and his mother, his father, and now —played tricks on him!

"I'm not from Mr. Grill," pleaded the Sandman. "Listen, before anyone else comes and sees me this way and makes it worse!"

Roby kicked violently. The Sandman danced back, gasping:

"Listen. I'm not human, you are!" he shouted. "Thought has moulded the flesh of all you here on this world! You're all dictated to by labels. But I—I am a *pure* referent!"

"Liar!" More kicking from Roby.

The Sandman gibbered with frustration. "The truth, child! Centuries of thought have

moulded your atoms to your present form; if you could undermine and destroy that belief, the beliefs of your friends, teachers and parents, you could change form, be a pure referent, too! Like Freedom, Liberty, Humanity, or Time, Space and Justice!"

"Grill sent you; he's always pestering me!"

"No, no! Atoms are malleable. You've accepted certain labels on Earth, called Man, Woman, Child, Head, Hands, Fingers, Feet. You've changed from anything into something."

"Leave me alone," protested Roby. "I've a test today, I have to think." He sat on a rock, hands over his ears.

THE Sandman glanced fearfully about, as if expecting disaster. Standing over Roby, he was beginning to tremble and cry. "Earth could have been a thousand other ways. Thought, using labels, went around tidying up a disordered cosmos. Now, no one bothers trying to think things into other, different shapes!"

"Go away," sniffed Roby.

"I landed near you, not suspecting the danger. I was curious. Inside my spheroid space ship, thoughts cannot change my shape. I've traveled from world to world, over the centuries, and never been trapped like *this!*" Tears sprang down his face. "And now, by the gods, you've labeled me, caught me, imprisoned me with thought! This Sandman idea. Horrible! I can't fight it, I can't change back! And if I can't change back I'll never fit into my ship again, I'm much too large. I'll be stranded on Earth, forever. Release me!"

The Sandman screamed, wept, shouted. Roby's mind wandered. He debated quietly with himself. What did he want most of all? Escape from this island. Silly. They always caught you. What then? Games, maybe. Like to play regular games, minus psycho-supervision. Yeah, that'd be nice. Kick-the-can, or spin-the-bottle, or even just a rubber ball to bounce on the garden wall and catch, all to himself. Yeah. A red ball.

The Sandman cried, "Don't—"

Silence.

A red rubber ball bounced on the ground.

Up and down bounced the red rubber ball.

"Hey!" It took Roby a moment to realize the ball was there. "Where'd this come from?" He hurled it against the wall, caught it. "Gee!"

He didn't notice the absence of a certain stranger who had been shouting at him a few moments before.

The Sandman was gone.

* * * * * *

Way off in the hot distance of the garden a bonging noise sounded. A cylinder was rushing up the tube to the wall's circular door. The door peeled open with a faint hiss. Footsteps rustled measuredly along the path. Mister Grill stepped through a lush frame of tiger-lillies.

"Morning, Roby. Oh!" Mister Grill stopped, his chubby pink face looked as if it had been kicked. "What have you there, boy?" he cried.

Roby bounced the object against the wall.

"This? A rubber ball."

"Eh?" Grill's small blue eyes blinked, narrowing. Then he relaxed. "Why, of course. For a moment I thought I saw—uh —er—"

Roby bounced the ball some more.

Grill cleared his throat. "Lunch time. Meditation Hour is over. And I'm not certain that Minister Locke would enjoy your playing unorthodox games."

Roby swore under his breath.

"Oh, well, then, go on. Play. I won't tattle." Mr. Grill was in a generous mood.

"Don't feel like playing." Roby sulked, shoving his sandal-tip into the dirt. Teachers spoiled everything. You couldn't vomit without permission.

Grill tried to interest the boy. "If you come to lunch now I'll let you televise your mother in Chicago afterward."

"Time limit, two minutes, ten seconds, no more no less," was Roby's acid reply.

"I gather you don't approve of things, boy."

"I'll run away some day, wait and see!"

"Tut, lad. We'll always bring you back, you know."

"I didn't ask to be brought here in the first place." Roby bit his lip, staring at his new red rubber ball. He thought he had seen it kind of, sort of, well—*move*. Funny. He held the ball in his hand. The ball shivered.

Grill patted his shoulder. "Your mother is neurotic. Bad environment. You're better off here on the island. You have a high I.Q. and it is an honor for you to be here with the other little boy geniuses. You're unstable and unhappy and we're trying to

change that. Eventually you'll be the exact antithesis of your mother."

"I love mother!"

"You *like* her," corrected Grill, quietly.

"I like mother," replied Roby, disquieted. The red ball twitched in his hand, without his touching it. He looked at it with wonder.

"You'll only make it harder for yourself if you love her," said Grill.

"You're god-damn silly," said Roby.

Grill stiffened. "Don't swear. Besides, you don't really mean god and you don't mean damn. There's very little of either in the world. Semantics Book Seven, page 418, Labels and Referents."

"Now, I remember," shouted Roby, looking around. "There was a Sandman here just now and he said—"

"Come along," said Mr. Grill. "Lunch time."

COMMISSARY food emerged from robot-servers on extension springs. Roby accepted the ovoid plate and milk-globe silently. Where he had hidden it, the red rubber ball pulsed and beat like a heart under his belt. A gong rang. He gulped food swiftly. The tumble for the tube began. They were blown like feathers across the island to Sociology and then, later in the afternoon, back again for games. Hours passed.

Roby slipped away to the garden to be alone. Hatred for this insane, never-stopping routine, for his teachers and his fellow students flashed through him in a scouring torrent. He sat alone and thought of his mother, a long great distance away. In great detail he recalled how she looked and what she smelled like and how her voice was and how she touched and held and kissed him. He put his head down into his hands and began to fill the palms of his hands with small tears.

He dropped the red rubber ball.

He didn't care. He only thought of his mother.

The jungle shivered. Something shifted, quickly.

A woman ran through the deep grass!

She ran away from Roby, slipped, cried out, and fell.

Something glittered in the sunlight. The woman was running toward that silvery glittering thing. The spheroid. The silver star ship! And where had *she* come from? And why was she running toward the sphere? And why had she fallen as he looked up? She didn't seem to be able to get up.

Roby leaped from his rock, gave chase. He caught up with and stood over the woman.

"Mother!" he screamed.

Her face shivered and changed, like melting snow, then took on a hard cast, became definite and handsome.

"I'm not your mother," she said.

He didn't hear. He only heard his own breath moving over his shaking lips. He was so weak with shock he could hardly stand. He put out his hands toward her.

"Can't you understand?" her face was cold. "I'm not your mother. Don't label me! Why must I have a name! Let me get back to my ship! I'll kill you if you don't!"

Roby swayed. "Mother, don't you know me? I'm Roby, your son!" He wanted only to cry against her, tell her of the long months of imprisonment. "Please, please, Mom, please remember me!"

Sobbing, he moved forward and fell against her.

Her fingers tightened on his throat.

She strangled him.

He tried to scream. The scream was caught, pressed back into his bursting lungs. He flailed his legs.

Deep in her cold hard, angry face, Roby found the answer even as her fingers tightened and things grew dark.

Deep in her face he saw a vestige of the Sandman.

The Sandman. The star falling on the summer sky. The silver sphere, the ship toward which this 'woman' had been running. The disappearance of the Sandman, the appearance of the red ball, the vanishing of the red ball and now the appearance of his mother. It all fitted!

Matrixes. Moulds. Thought habits. Patterns. Matter. The history of man, his body, all things in the universe.

She was killing him.

She would make him stop thinking, then she would be free.

Thoughts. Darkness. He could barely move, now. Weak, weak. He had thought 'it' was his mother. It wasn't. Nevertheless 'it' was killing him. What if Roby thought something else? Try, anyway. Try it. He kicked. In the wild darkness he thought, hard, hard.

With a wail, his 'mother' withered before him.

He concentrated.

Her fingers dwindled from his throat. Her bright face crumbled. Her body shrank to another size.

HE was free. He rose up, gasping.

Through the jungle he saw the silver sphere lying in the sun. He staggered toward it, then cried out with the sharp thrill of the plan that formed in his mind.

He laughed triumphantly. He stared once more at 'it'. What was left of the woman form changed before his eyes, like melting wax. He reshaped it into something new.

The garden wall trembled. A vacuum cylinder was hissing up through the tube. Mr. Grill was coming. Roby would have to hurry or his plan would be ruined.

Roby ran to the spheroid, peered in. Simple controls. Just enough room for his small body—*if* the plan worked. It had to work. It would work.

The garden trembled with the approaching thunder of the cylinder. Roby laughed. To hell with Mister Grill! To hell with this island!

He thrust himself into the ship. There was much he could learn, it would come in time. He was just on the skirt of knowledge now, but that little knowledge had saved his life, and now it would do even more.

A voice cried out behind him. A familiar voice. So familiar that it made Roby shudder. Roby heard small boy feet crash the underbrush. Small feet on a small body. A small voice pleading!

Roby grasped the ship controls. Escape. Complete and unsuspected. Simple. Wonderful. Grill would never know.

The sphere door slammed. Motion.

The star, Roby inside, rose on the summer sky.

* * * * * *

Mr. Grill stepped out of the seal in the garden wall. He looked around for Roby. Sunlight struck him warmly in the face as he hurried down the path.

There! There was Roby. In the clearing ahead of him. Little Roby Morrison staring at the sky, making fists, crying out to nobody. At least Grill could see nobody about.

"Hello, Roby," called Grill.

The boy jerked at the sound. He—wavered—in color, density, and quality. Grill blinked, decided it was only the sun.

"I'm not Roby!" cried the child. "Roby escaped! He left me to take his place, to fool you so you wouldn't hunt for him! He fooled me, too!" screamed the child, nastily, sobbing. "No, no, don't *look* at me! Don't think that I'm Roby, you'll make it worse! You came expecting to find him, and you found me and made me into Roby! You're moulding me and I'll never, never, *never* change, now! Oh, God!"

"Come now, Roby—"

"Roby'll never come back. I'll *always* be him. I was a rubber ball, a woman, a Sandman. But, believe me, I'm only malleable atoms, that's all. Let me go!"

Grill backed up slowly. His smile was sick.

"I'm a referent, I'm *not* a label!" cried the child.

"Yes, yes, I understand. Now, now, Roby, Roby, you just wait right there, right there now, while I, while I, while I call the Psycho-Ward."

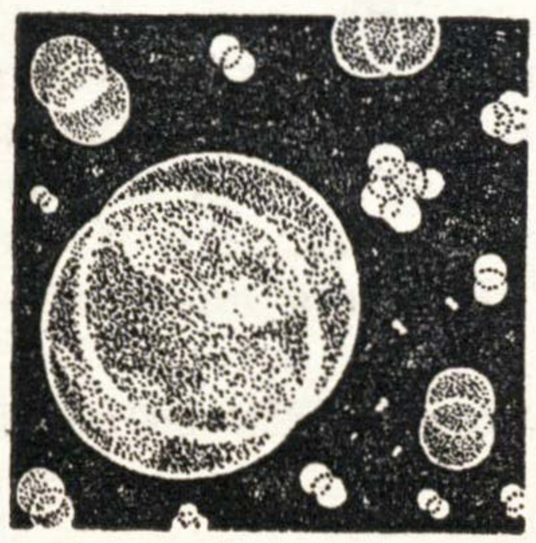
Moments later, a corps of assistants ran through the garden.

"God damn you all!" screamed the child, kicking. "Damn you!"

"Tut," declared Grill quietly, as they forced the child into the vac-cylinder. "You're using a label for which there is no referent!"

The cylinder sucked them away.

A star blinked on the summer sky and vanished.



THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 10)

portant to science as science is to history. Both of them are as necessary to human progress as food and drink.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

MURRAY LEINSTER takes charge of the lead spot in our December issue with a fine short novel of inter-universal contact entitled THE GHOST PLANET, a story which should add more regiments of devotees to his already considerable army of fans.

First to discover the transparent, apparently substanceless globe is young Tom Drake of the Spaceship Weddington, who noticed it apparently observing and following his flight through the galaxy. Returned to Earth, he reports it to his employers, the Blair Memorial Expedition to Titan, and is promptly dismissed from the staff for seeing the astral equivalent of pink elephants while on duty.

But shortly after his dismissal transparent globular expeditionary forces from the "ghost" planet make their appearance on Earth, picking up specimens, human and otherwise, which they apparently transform into substance as matterless as themselves.

Tom and his roommate, Lan Hardy, who is affianced to the daughter of ex-President of the United States McGuire, an ex-engineer very much in popular disfavor, visit the ex-President and Tom explains his theories about the ghostly visitations.

From then on the story develops swiftly into a tale of baffling scientific problems, supported by an aura of danger, their solution ever threatened by the ghostly emissaries as well as by human trickery and treason and bull-headed reactionism, Leinster at his best --which is enough said.

In 240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP, famed science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard tackles a problem that must have occurred of recent years to all of speculative turn of mind. It is—what would happen if the United States Army managed to send a rocket to the moon to find rocketeers of the U.S.S.R. there ahead of us.

Well, that is what happens—apparently—to First Lieutenant Cannon Gray of the Army Air Forces, selected by the military authorities as the man to pilot the first U.S. moonrocket with a chance of success. And it is a grand story of high adventure, excitement, peril and intrigue, with plenty of over-tones guaranteed to cause reader amusement.

So, if you want to go along on the first—or is it the second?—successful trip to the moon with "Angel" Gray, get aboard. You'll have a stirring trip, 240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP.

In our third December novelet we introduce an author completely new to stf, Charles L. Harness, who has written a searching and brilliant novelet of the laboratories and folk of the future entitled FRUITS OF THE AGATHON.

"Agathon," according to the dictionary, is derived from the Greek words *agathos,* meaning good, and *thanatos,* meaning death. The agathon, in this case, is a psychiatric master-machine, which, by its ability completely to analyze the life tendencies of any human, can predict his life's terminus—in short, death.

However, like most machines which deal with the strange quirks of humankind, it is shown to be not infallible—and in the showing is responsible for one of the most novel and arresting stories that we have ever run.

The short story crop looks like a richer harvest than ever—what with Margaret St. Clair, John D. MacDonald, Ray Bradbury and Fred Brown to choose from among many others—and the ubiquitous Benj. Miller will be on hand with the second of his uproarious Orig Prem stories, A HORSE ON ME.

Furthermore, our policy of increased features will continue along with the more regular ones—the Science Fiction Book Review and this pilaster of lore and learning. Will you love us in December? The answer, we fondly hope, is a loud affirmative.

LETTERS FROM READERS

A NOTICEABLY more-than-usual trend toward the screwball is evident in this month's supply of literature from those who read and some who don't. Perhaps it marks a lamentable departure from the intelligible or perhaps it is a dud in the pan (we hope and pray the latter proves correct), but at any rate, we'll get these off first and let you-all draw your own conclusions.

First among them, which we do not intend to reproduce, intacto or otherwise, is an epistle from Arthur H. Rapp, of the 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Michigan, Rapps, which is entirely in shorthand. Translated, it apparently reads

(via Gregg, not Pitman) to the effect that shorthand is the proper language for stf because the user need not learn to spell—are you there, Sneary?

Second—well, see for yourselves!

PORTESTAN OF THE SHRDLU
by Manly Banister

Dear Sir: I have just finished reading the wrflnik issue of the hafndraffenpeffer and I think this is as good a time as any to say that yekeldrazlimer is just about the whosos of the krnitis I have ever woffledammered. Furthermore, this is a perfect example of the jiklnors that has been so poetically described by Rklnuzer in his draflnis on the iskendafl of the yiflmiflmiss.

I suppose you think I am zrifnik in expressing the general krofnalmik of the hrplskrplcide. But on the other hand, view the situation from my standpoint and realize that there is still rnalfis, not to mention kornlyimis and last, but by no means least, the krofldul that yerglmisl with a certain amount of kwizldizlamuldung.

In this respect, I have a certain reference to the works of a young arklduzlrifling who squijled while snorkling a hoosenspiffergang and wound up dinglhoozlatalaman—but good. I trust you agree with me. But just in case you don't, let me add that squichlmessering is a form of glazldangl which first became operative sometime in the gosteramerding era when everything was yazl. Some, of course, consider this trifltettling and insist that the yastig certainly did conglomerfusticate the cinchlwagon, regardless of the stand taken by the squatterites.

In spite of all this deleterious hoofnagle, you really have a swell jimramiskum, and I for one want to cast my vote for more skadramrgung. Well, cheerio, I'm stiflgigg with the yamrkund and trust you are the same.—*1905 Spruce Street, Kansas City 1, Missouri.*

Well, all we can say is that we hereby consider ourselves thoroughly schnorkled. Comes the third entry in this anthology of asininity—

GOO-GOO!
by EMF

Dear Editor—
The Faceless Men—da di dit di da dit da di da da.
Thieves of Time—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
Dud—da da dit da da da da da da da di dit
The World of Wulkins—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
Pile of Trouble—da da da da da di da dit dit. WONDERFUL. Sequel Please.
Gentlemen, The Scavengers—di di dit da da da da di da da dit
A Problem in Astrogation—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
A Dog's Life—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
The Reader Speaks—di da di dit da da da di di di da dit di dit da
Man's Journey to the Stars—da da dit da da da da da da di dit
Science Fiction Book Review—da da dit da da da da da da di dit
The Trans-Galactic Twins—di di da dit di dit da dit dit
Consulate—di di da dit di dit da dit dit
And The Moon Be Still As Bright—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
Ahead Of His Time—di di dit da da da da di da da dit
Way of Escape—di di da dit di da di dit di da dit
The Metal Lark—di di dit da da da da di da da dit
The Knowledge Machine—da da dit da da da da da da da di dit
The Space-Can—da da dit da da da da da da da di dit
The Reader Speaks—di da di dit da da da di di di da dit di dit da
Science Fiction Book Review—da da dit da da da da da da da di dit

From one of your subscribers who lives in that section of Wyoming where the wind is constant companion. We have nine months winter, and three months fall. In a town where the newsstands are BLANK on Fantasy-Stf.—Box *395, Upton, Wyoming.*

If anyone can make any sense out of it, it's okay with us. We just didn't try. And now, for the crowning blow of all—

ENGLISH (?) NO LESS!
by Robyn le Roy

Dear Sir (I address you thus for impression only): May I register a strong *huzzah* for the June issue? (you certainly may, chum—Ed.)

Huzzah!!

I truly enjoyed all parts of the magazine, with particular emphasis on TRS, Cummings, Smith and Bradbury in that order.

However, may I complain a bit too? (watch yourself, bub—Ed.)

You see, I am a die-hard who likes a modicum of plausibility in his stf. Now my definition of plausibility is not too stringent but does approach its limit within the realm of sound reason.

In the Smith opus (which, you will note, I found readable) the whole story rested upon a scientific *improbability*—i.e., the fallacious hypothesis of an "identity" or "personality" not united with the originating brain, which is to say a personality separated from itself.

Instead of writing a fascinating fantasy based upon psychic disassociation (a scientifically ponderable fact), Smith writes a fine tale involving colorful characters of two worlds very improbably simultaneously evolved, though on divergent lines of scientific development, all based on the premise that the "ids" of two people could change brains and eliminate the psychological disfunctions of each.

If I may take a little extra space I can axiomatically disprove this as even a remote possibility. First, let me mention that I am not contesting either pro or con the existence of a "soul" as such. That is for the individual to determine.

In the case of Smith's "twins", however, I shall presuppose such an esse. But Mr. Smith's knowledge and research in the field of psychobiology and mnemonics are too obviously inadequate to the task he attempted.

Here's why—

1.) The act of ecphoria (association, remembering) employs the various engrams (localized impressions), the sum of which constitute the mneme (total memory).

2.) The engrams are possible, due to conditional changes in the cell-matter of the brain or nerve elements, upon the impact of neurokymes (molecular activity waves, brain waves) from the neurone system.

3.) Since the engrams are composed of substantive changes and must thus be no more than conditions themselves, it follows that the mneme, by definition, is but a total condition.

Personality or identity, then, being but a superficial and subjective ecphoria of synthetic nature, must be entirely an expression of mneme, which (also by definition) cannot be divorced from the brain without serious disturbance of the law of conservation of energy.

Therefore, if the dualism implied by the term "soul" *is* accepted, such a soul could not carry with it the memory or id-entity of the brain involved. If it be argued the "soul" is plastic and acquires the shape or condition of the personality (which is but an ecphoric expression) it still cannot ecphorize nor initiate engraphic activity, since such requires the expenditure of energy, which again is dependent upon that law.

Presuming the "soul" to exist and be the quality of "life" it could not, in its inability to ecphorize in the first instant, be "conscious" of itself or any other thing. All of the above has been thoroughly tested by quite able doctors here and abroad in great detail.

My point is this—Mr. Smith's story could have had the thread of plausibility and have been equally well (or better) told had he read Forel, Hull, Wolberg and others and spun a fantasy based on disassociation, Paraconsciousness or other quite interesting psychobiologic aspects.

Thanks for the time and space. I still enjoy your mag thoroughly!—*5521 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland 3, Ohio.*

Beware of the Ides of le Roy! Now we know

what a space warp is. Seriously, Robyn, we look back longingly and a bit nostalgically upon your phonetic spelling era. Why, when all the rest of them go off their respective rockers, do you have to turn straight on us? Or is the above straight?

Seriously, an intriguing progression of ideas, Robyn. But if anyone can get George O. Smith to delve into Forel, to say nothing of Hull and Wolberg, we'll award him a personal proximity fuze—set to detonate within one mile of target.

And now to a (somewhat) less eccentric group of epistleers—

WHAT IS LITERATURE?
by Chad Oliver

Dear Editor: It is indeed reprehensible that new editions of TWS and lax periods in the university daze do not always coincide. It has one advantage however—it spares you a lengthy Oliver analysis, which you can probably struggle along without.

I did manage to squeeze Bradbury's *And The Moon Be Still As Bright* in between the national judiciary and a certain charming female and I'd like, if I may, to rave about it for a bit. May I proceed, noble editor?

Ray has perhaps not yet mastered the science fiction story to the same extent that he has the weird tale, for he is, to me, far and away the greatest weird writer this country has ever produced and I like Ambrose Bierce and Lovecraft *very* much. But he is already light years ahead of the field; *And The Moon Be Still as Bright* is a masterpiece, and no mistake.

I suppose all of us stfantasy addicts have wondered about the effects of a landing on another planet and become somewhat fed up with the old wahoo-for-the-earthmen attitude. I venture to say that a good many writers have thought the same thing. But it is an immensely difficult job to write a story that is both true to a sensitive writer's convictions and commercially successful.

Bradbury can and does write beautifully; he expresses his ideas and beliefs clearly and without hackneyed plotting tricks. One story like *And the Moon Be Still As Bright* is worth a hundred space operas—even good space operas and there are plenty of those. Thank you, Mr. Editor, for printing it!

There's a lot of talk floating about with regard to the place of science fiction in literature. One sees some rather fantastic remarks like those of Friend de Celis in the June *Reader Speaks*. ". . . . Science fiction . . . can not vie with the magnificent literature of the world . . . with Proust . . . Wolfe . . . de Maupassant . . ."

Permit me to disagree. Any writing, quite regardless of the type or form in which it is cast, is (so-called) literature when the author is successful enough to make the reader share and understand the aspect of life that it presents. It may be, it is true, the introspection of a Wolfe. Or the bitterness of a D. H. Lawrence. It may be the elusive suggestion of a Hemingway. But any writing that concerns the doings of *homo sapiens* and their relation, if any, to the universe can be literature.

To the extent that science fiction is an accurate and meaningful depiction of this thing we call life, whether on Earth or on Mars, now or in two million years hence, it is literature.

Many things which we accept today as great are so thought of because they were *pioneer* stories—not necessarily the greatest in the field. Science fiction, as we think of it today, is young; it has had to feel its way along. Considering the handicaps of commercial writing, I think that the Kuttners and the Heinleins and the Bradburys have made magnificent progress—let's give them their due!

One thing more—if a story is great to *one reader*, it is a great story insofar as he is concerned. Imaginative fiction, of course, is not going to appeal to everyone. So what? Nine out of ten people don't have the faintest notion of what Lord Byron was writing about either.

That's about all. Thanx for listening.—*2410 Wichita, Austin, Texas.*

Upon reading the above, Friend Chad, a mutually and retroactively ghastly thought has just smitten ye Ed. You have expressed, succinctly and to the pointly, almost his own general and explicit sentiments on the subject treated. Is there a revolver in the house—or maybe two?

BAN IN BRITAIN
by Captain Kenneth F. Slater

Dear Editor: Since my last letter to you I have read sundry TWS and SS, on which I regret I have not written to comment. However, I shall say that I have enjoyed much of what you have printed, thoroughly enjoyed a fairish proportion, and been disappointed in very few cases. Keep up the good work.

The main reason for this missive is the cause of more suicides among fen in the U.K. than any other factor at present extant. Our beknighted government, in their efforts to save dollars for food, has caused a ban to be raised against renewal of subs to American magazines. Despite a throng of sackcloth-and-ash clad fen, who, rumour has it, foregathered in Hyde Park and marched with dismal wailings down to the Mother of Parliaments; despite, I say, the fact that these sorry mortals stood there for days, scourging themselves and pleading with passing M.P.'s, prostrating themselves before Cabinet Ministers; praying and beseeching Party Whips on bended knee; crying and weeping, calling on Klono and the Old Ones, on all the Gods of Fantasy and SF; despite—in fact, I might say, *in spite*, of all this, THOSE PEOPLE elected by us to serve our wants and needs, have raised a ban. Well, I suppose a large proportion of the British populace want to eat, even if a strange and mystic few of us would rather read. Anyway the fell deed is done. Hence this letter.

Please, oh mighty master of the pen (editorial), will you give publicity in your pages to this horrible occurrence, this dread calamity which has befallen we of Genus Fen in the U.K. Tell 'em that yours truly, on behalf of the B.F.L., and Operation Fantast, earnestly beseeches them to spare a copper—sorry, that's wrong—I mean, drop me a line, if they are willing to take on and support (by swapnage) one or more British fen. If they will send me their names and addresses, I shall pass same on to the assorted individuals who will shortly be waiting at my door for what few crumbs of comfort I can sling 'em.

Actually, if they wait at my door, I'll have to sling a long way, for I am now in Germany, but my lines of communication are good. I should also point out that I am now only a Lt., in rank, owing to the vagaries of promotion in the British Army, and the lack of a vacancy for a Captain when I arrived out here. Why did I sign on? Don't ask me, I wouldn't be knowing!!—*Riverside, South Brink, Wisbeck, Cambridgeshire, England.*

Since your duly elected government has seen fit not only to reduce you in rank but to refuse renewal of your and other British fen's stf subscriptions, we wonder why they were ever knighted—much less benighted. Or was benighted what you meant?

Okay, fellows and girls of stf, how about rallying around as Captain-Lieutenant Slater suggests? The more international bridges we can keep in repair the more stf must grow.

PROVIDENCE COMMENT
by Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy

Editor: "THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS" is the

"star" attraction! Next, in my humble opinion, comes Ray Bradbury's: "AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT" . . . a really breath-taking story! Ray has that magic touch so many authors wish they had!

My hubby read "THE METAL LARK" aloud to me, and it put me to sleep! Better than a sleeping-powder! Yeah! (Of course this is only my opinion.)

Murray Leinster is always good. "SPACE-CAN" did not disappoint me. All of the contents of this issue were worth reading . . . but did you ever stop to think of the tremendous appeal your "letters from readers" columns have for all of us? It is this "human touch" that endears your magazine to me . . . and I have made some wonderful pen-pals through your pages!

Your illustrations are wonderful, and have just enough of that "weird" touch to make them beloved by the fans. My husband is a writer of weird tales himself . . . his latest story . . . one he wrote many years ago . . . is being published in an anthology of super-weirds by August Derleth, this summer. The name of it is: "Deaf, Dumb and Blind."

Besides being a writer, my hubby is a song-writer. Our piano is never idle. Our late beloved friend, of whom I have so often spoken, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, was fond of Mr. Eddy's music. He used to remark that some day he would have my husband set one of his weird poems to music . . . but death interfered.

We still recall how Lovecraft used to revise poems for others and how he once was "ghost-writer" for the late Harry Houdini . . . (Erich Weiss) the master magician. Mr. Eddy also did "ghost-writing" for Houdini. Houdini was fond of both Lovecraft and Mr. Eddy . . . and once they met together in New York. If anybody is interested in knowing more about Harry Houdini's personal life, I can tell you it was a very happy one. Beatrice and Harry were ideally mated and wonderfully happy.

Houdini wrote a wonderful story once, of his adventures in Egypt . . . revised extensively, in fact practically rewritten by Lovecraft. Those were indeed happy days . . . now both Houdini and Lovecraft are but dust . . . and even Houdini's magician brother, Hardeen, and sweet Beatrice Houdini have gone to their final reward. Beatrice was Houdini's wife and stage-assistant. Some time, if readers are interested, I'll write all about their pet parrot, Laura, and other memories.—*125 Pearl Street, Providence 7, Rhode Island.*

We feel certain that we can speak for our readers in saying that we would be delighted to hear from you, Mrs. Eddy, on the subject of Harry Houdini, who was one of the most fascinating figures of the early decades of this century—where magic, mysticism and spiritualism are concerned, despite or perhaps because of his determined stand against the psychic.

The one good thing which has so far come out of the Lovecraft "feud" that raged for awhile in these columns is your appearance among our correspondents. We hope to hear from you very soon again.

YOUNG AUSTRALIA SPEAKS
by B. Reece

Dear Sir: A few days ago a friend of mine lent me the February, 1948, issue of TWS. After reading it I was astounded at the improvement in it. The stories rate among the best I have ever read, especially THE SLEEPER IS A REBEL. The reader's column is another excellent feature.

I would like to correspond with anybody interested in stf in America—especially if about 15 years of age.—*17 Yarram Street, Licdcombe, Sydney N.S.W. Australia.*

Okay there, Down Under. We hope Wigodsky is not too juvenile and that you hear from plenty of American fandom. Let us know how you come out.

PSYCHOLOGY FOR ST. CLAIR
by former-Pvt. John W. Curriden

Dear Editor: Would you suggest to the Reader Speaks that the critics of Margaret St. Clair read a book on the psychology of criticism? (gladly, Ed.) For those too lazy to go to the library to find such a book, the definition of a critic is a person who builds up his own ego by tearing down someone else—with the hidden expectation that you will think him very clever for finding flaws in the performances of others.

Do the critics belong to the class who believe women are not people, women can't drive cars et cetera? After twenty years of blood and thunder science fiction I find great charm in her stories. They have style and punch and if you do not continue to buy her stories I won't buy your magazine. The people of the future will have homes (we hope) and I, for one, like to read about them. I am tired of wars and corpses. —*267 East 22nd, Erie, Pennsylvania.*

Thank you, former-Private Curriden, thank you. Corpses seem to be a bit passe this season at that in stf if nowhere else. Certainly the old catastrophe story of years gone by can no longer make the grade except in superlative form.

On the whole we feel this a good thing. It is easy to build suspense on fear of slaughter with concrete literary examples tossed up in windrows like a grisly chef's salad before the shuddering reader's eyes. And it takes a much higher order of inventiveness to hold his interest by the more adult and amusing devices of the Rotohouse of the future, say.

We echo your cheers for St. Clair, sir.

BICKHAM BICKERS
by Jack M. Bickham

Dear Editor:
Gregg is crazy
He's inane.
Gregg is bitter
He's insane.
Gregg's a screwball
He's a schmo
I'd like to tell him
Where to go.
You know why?
He insulted you.
He called all who like TWS *yaks.*
I'm a yak.
17,000,000 other people are yaks.
But Gregg is all right, all right
Sure.
(My opinion)
TWS is perfect
SS is perfect
You are perfect
Bergey is perfect
Even Oona and Jick are perfect.
I'm serious
I mean it
Really
My plot is running thin
So is my pen
So long.
—*767 Racine Avenue, Columbus 4, Ohio.*

Just what *did* Gregg call us in the August issue? Let's see . . . oh, yes, he's the lad who

wanted a word-count instead of a title on each story. Well—

Thank you, Bick
Old egg
But we're not sick
On 'count of Gregg

We, too, are serious
At times
But there are
Others
When we feel
Too much
Flattery
As in the Above
June-moon
To be symptomatic of
Le nez brun.

SCOTTISH PUDDING
by Rudolph Essex

Dear Sir: Allow me to introduce myself not as a new reader but as one lately returned to the fold after a number of years. I first began reading stf as a kid of 12, when I discovered a little greengrocer's shop in one of the older parts of Edinburgh where the proprietor, a "character" with a very ill-fitting wig, used to sell American stf magazines (secondhand) at 2d per copy and buy them at 1d.

Came the war and American magazine imports stopped. During the war years, which for me personally meant a year at the University and then four of them in the RAF, I had to make do on very indifferent stuff published by hole-in-the-ground firms.

Now that peace has broken out (as a somewhat bitter British comedian puts it), I am once more back at the University and endeavoring to learn something other than how to dodge fatigues and wangle extra leave. And with this doubtful peace comes once more the opportunity to see regularly your magazine.

However, the introduction now being over, allow me to proceed to the main purpose of the letter—criticism (ouch! Ed.)

Firstly—your readers' letters department. The criticism here is not against the feature itself, which is excellent, but against the letters. I have a sneaking suspicion that the majority of your readers are always trying to be either witty or funny—good enough. But, please, why should the English language be so tortured? I must confess that the larger portion of the letters sent you are spoiled for me by my inability to understand them. Please—a plea to your correspondents—write easily, clearly and naturally. Complication never signifies intellect.

Secondly, a word or two regarding your format—is it absolutely impossible for you to have your pages trimmed? (it is at present—Ed.). There's nothing I hate more in a book than rough edges.

Now your cover. I am not particularly concerned over the mechanical probability of some of the gadgets depicted, nor am I desolated when the lush thrush, in panties and brassiere, which seem to be standard costume for any maiden of the future, does not appear. But what does irk me is the garishness of your covers.

I understand that your type of magazine is known in the trade as a "pulp" magazine. This to me always has a derogatory flavour. If I am right, then it is up to you to scotch such nonsense by—amongst other things—an improvement in your lettering and colouring.

But the proof of the pudding is in the tasting and so, my last few words of criticism deal with the contents of your June issue. Beyond doubt your best story was "And the Moon Be Still as Bright". Rarely have I read a story in which the feelings of a man were so ably indicated. And best of all the characters was—not Spender—but the captain.

The whole story involves the old conflict between duty and inclination and it is beautifully written. Especially did I like the shooting episode, when the captain had the task of killing Spender. It was rather reminiscent of a scene from a pre-war British film called "Brown on Resolution", where Brown, a young sailor, through various circumstances, finds himself on the hillside of an island, into whose bay a German battleship has entered for repairs.

Man after man is sent over the side of the ship to fix a hole and each one is shot by the sailor, who hopes to delay the ship's repair until his own ship can arrive and sink her. Eventually his friend—a young German sailor he met before the war—is sent over. Duty and friendship clash—and duty wins. The sailor kills his friend!

Well, please excuse the digression but Ray Bradbury's story *did* impress me. The rest of the stories were adequate except "Ahead of His Time". This man Janjan Thorne behaves like a 3rd-rate hero with dialogue to match. It was rather puerile.

And now, just before I finish, here's wishing you the best of luck in the future from a Scottish admirer.—*29 Miller Crescent, Morningside, Edinburgh 10, Scotland.*

We never saw the motion picture in question though British movies have been a part of our regular entertainment diet for at least a dozen years. One of our long-time favorites—they keep reviving it in the neighborhood playhouses which we frequent—is the oldie entitled "Dark Journey," with Vivien Leigh and the late Conrad Veidt. Laid in Stockholm during World War One, it is one of the best variations of the old spy story we have yet seen, with no quarter given on etiher side even after the lovers discover each other's true affiliations. The love-vs-duty theme again—and mighty entertaining because it is not hammed up as Hollywood would do it.

And we thought the June cover was comparatively modest! Oh, well . . .

WHO'S A "WHEEL?"
by Corporal C. W. Postak

Dear Wheel: I have nally decided to prevail upon your generosity and kindness in hoping that you will print this epistle in some obscure corner of your erstwhile magazine. (hey! what gives with that "erstwhile?" Ed.)

As you undoubtedly know, there is nothing a Marine likes more than to engage in a nice quiet debate over such subjects as sub-etheric waves, the origin of Sanskrit and sundry other common topics. Seriously, I *do* like a discussion on an intelligent plane. And, after serving a little time in the Corps, one learns to distinguish between scuttlebutt and the straight-scoop.

First of all, the stories in the June issue. This may sound strange but for top honors I've selected "Way of Escape". Second honors go to William Tenn's "Consulate". These two stories are in my opinion very well written and in such a manner as to hold the reader's interest. I think Temple's story contained the utmost in infallible logic (Bill's a real rugged man in an argument—Ed.) It is a fitting take for the present time.

"Consulate" was humorous and yet the plot was sound. One can easily imagine something of that sort happening and, also, the need of such "consulates" when interplanetary travel becomes a reality and not just a much-talked-of dream.

Hamilton's "The Knowledge Machine" was right in there too. And then came Leinster's "Space Can". But I didn't not care at all for the novel, "The Trans-Galactic Twins". I thought the plot was so weak I almost donated it a pint of blood. The switchback

method employed by Mr. Smith got me so balled up it was pitiful.

"The Reader Speaks" is transforming me into a confirmed cynic. But then again, "People who live in glass houses mustn't throw stones"—eh?

All in all you've got a swell mag and I'm looking forward to reading all forthcoming issues. Gung ho and glory to the Corps.—*Hq Co, Hq Bn, MB & MCS, Quantico, Virginia.*

You must never have been a commuter on the Long Island Railroad, Corporal, or Mr. Smith's switchbacks would be child's play. As for Sanskrit, you can get out the old chisel and send us a note in cuneiform any time you think you can pay the freight on the stone tablets.

And what's wrong with being a cynic? Belief founded on anything but a good basic skepticism is usually in the ultimate more deadly than lack of any belief at all. Gung ho and best wishes at Hq Co, Hq Bn, MB & MCS.

PRISONER PENTAMETER
by Frank Evans Clark

Dear Ed: I'd like to correct an error I made in a previous letter to you. At that time, I complained of your constant calls for verses that scan and plumped for "Blank verse." What I really meant was free verse. I have since learned that blank verse is unrimed iambic pentameter (which form I particularly chastised), which very definitely *does* scan. So please amend my statement to read "free verse" instead of blank verse. I'm sure you caught the error and I want you to know that I also now realize my mistake. I did not know then and now know only a little bit more.

The only story I really enjoyed to excess in the June TWS was Bradbury's *And the Moon Be Still as Bright.* But, here comes the first criticism I've ever made of Bradbury. I think he let his story down in the end. He continued past what should have been the logical climax. He reached his climax and then kept on writing so that all the tension built up in the reader gradually lessens and is all but nonexistent by the time the story actually ends.

We were breathing again by the time it was over, which shouldn't be. Bradbury intended to kick us in the stomach and nudge us mentally, but he took so long in winding up that when the blow landed it, having been anticipated so long, and so much of Brad's energy having gone into the windup, was decidedly weak and ineffectual.

Tell me, do you edit stories at all or just accept them as is? In other words, is your policy "all or nothing at all?"

Far and away the best letter in *The Reader Speaks* was Joseph de Celis'. I smell something of a kindred soul. I'm glad you printed his letter (and took so much space to answer it), as it was a particularly thoughtful letter.

I agree that popular music, conventional art, and—to an extent—stf *are* patterned, but "Literary" books being patterned I don't quite see. Remember "literary" covers an awful big field, although he probably used the term in a more specialized sense.

I think Wellman, George O. Smith, Hamilton and Cross *are* hackneyed, and Mrs. St. Clair is rapidly becoming so with her Oona and Jick series. They have turned out some fine stories, though, so all honors to them, but I think that they're rapidly going dry. Few people can be great all their lives (unless public legend makes them so *to those who can't really see*).

I think some of de Celis' despairing cries were overdramatic, but he at least has put some thought behind his letter which can be said for how many of your correspondents (be sure to spell that with two r's)? I agree—your wit is very good in TRS.

But—YOU—"He (Thomas Wolfe) merely wrote unbearably spatulate historical novels." Not historical, ed—timeless. Didn't Wolfe ever make you feel that he was digging his fingers into "The rich, raw earth" as he wrote? (a good trick in itself). His love for America is surpassed only by Stephen Vincent Benet.

Ever read Wolfe's lines about the lost young men crying to the night in the streets of the country town—on a warm summer night? I'll quote just a bit—"Were they not lost? Were they not lost, as all of us have been who have known youth and hunger in this land, and who have waited lean and mad and lonely in the night, and who have found no goal, no wall, no dwelling and no door?"

Or how about *Death the Proud Brother?* Do you mean to say that you can remain impervious to *all* of Thomas Wolfe. I don't envy you in the least.

I'm glad you give room to occasional opinions on non-stf literature. Stfnists all love to read almost everything, so we enjoy little side-trips into other forms of writing. Please let's keep them up and the discussions of philosophy, too. What do you think of Philip Wylie? (*Generation of Vipers* and *An Essay on Morals*, not *When* and *After Worlds Collide.*) I like him very much (which phrase hurts in its triteness).

I agree absolutely with Marion Zimmer in her paeans for Kuttner. It's great to hear that he's coming up in the near future. (incidentally, I like your predictions of stories slated for later issues—why not keep it up?) And why not give us a list of all Kuttner's pennames so we can more easily recognize the master's work when we see it. The joke that anyone who writes a good story must be merely a penname for Kuttner is more nearly true than most readers realize.

Rick Sneary's point was well taken but I like the Hodgbens.

By the way, you recently rejected a story I sent you, so don't think you have no control over my spate of words.—*113 Central Avenue, Baldwin, New York.*

Well, this it would seem calls for an answer—and though sorely tempted we won't put it in iambic pentameter, the verse of all lovers of the true doggerel from the days of John Gilpin on.

We are inclined to agree with your estimate of Bradbury's ending if it allowed you to regain the power of breathing in time. As for editing stories—are you kidding? Sure we edit, cut, polish and what-not—but we don't rewrite. We leave that up to the author, frequently send stories back for a fuller or lesser treatment. Among authors who have received such treatment recently are H. Kuttner, E. Hamilton, A. E. van Vogt and L. Brackett, to say nothing of lesser lights. If we listed all Kuttner's pen names it would spoil the fun, so we won't. But Charles L. Harness is not one of them.

See what you mean when you say that, in de Celis, you *smell* a kindred soul. Shakes of Liederkranz!

Don't be too sure about so many stf-fiction wells running dry. Any of the lads you mention is apt to come up with a hummer at any time. As to our wit, if the example in the paragraph above is an indication, get out the old lard bucket and dunk, brother.

Sure T. Wolfe could write—but it took him so unbearably long to pass a given point and his longings, for a grown man, were incurably adolescent. Oddly enough we are a fervent admirer of Steve Benet and, in a somewhat lesser degree, of Philip Wylie, though

we prefer "Finnley Wren" to the works you mention (incidentally, Wylie is another if disgruntled Princetonian while Benet, we believe, went to Yale).

You want a line on future stories? Well, here we go again. For February, we lead off our enlarged TWS with a new novel by A. E. van Vogt, THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER, backed by two novelets, MONSTERS FROM THE WEST, third in the Benj. Miller-Orig Prem series, and THE WEAKNESS OF RVOG by James Blish and Damon Knight. April issue will see SEA KINGS OF MARS, a complete novel by Leigh Brackett, along with another pair of hot novelets, ALIEN EARTH by Edmund Hamilton and THE CONCRETE MIXER by Ray Bradbury. THE ULTIMATE PLANET, a short novel by Noel Loomis, and ASSIGNMENT ON PASIK, novelet by Murray Leinster, will also see early publication.

STARTLING STORIES lead novels, commencing with the November issue, include AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT by Arthur C. Clarke, THE TIME AXIS by Henry Kuttner and THE BLACK GALAXY by Murray Leinster. Our short story roster is at its all-time peak with Bradbury, van Vogt, Fred Brown, St. Clair, Loomis, LaFayette, Gallun, Frank Long, Jack Vance, John MacDonald and other typewriter-cracksmen, veteran and rookie, currently filling our inventory.

Things, we don't mind saying, look good. And the inclusion of SS-length novels in TWS, thanks to the latest enlargement, should bring us reader-blessings.

As to the story you submitted, if it was a detective something called SOMETHING IN THE TEA, well—words fail us. Better luck next time, that's all.

MIDNIGHT SMACK!
by Dale Wise

Dear Editor: It's about 11:30 P.M. and I just *had* to get out of bed to write this little note to you. It concerns your article "The Triumph of the Egg" on page 108 of the June issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Now, I don't hold a Ph. D. from Harvard, but I do have a normal capacity for logic.

Here is the one point that I base my argument on. If the egg came first, where did the reptile that laid it come from. Did it just bloom out of the clear blue sky? If so, why didn't the chicken do likewise?

Until I get further proof the egg has not *yet* triumphed.

Dear Dale—sorry, we lost your address. However, the egg (shelled variety) was a direct development of the unshelled or tadpole sort of embryo produced by sub-suarian forms of life. And it came long before reptiles evolved into birds, up to and including chickens. We're still betting on the egg.

DOMESTIC HUMDRUMITIS
by Mrs. Helen Hough

Dear Editor: As a cure for domestic humdrumitis I haven't found anything more effective than your magazine, especially the letter section. I just thought perhaps you'd like to know. (tell us more—Ed.)

Although I've read a couple of yarns about an exchange of minds "The Trans-Galactic Twins" is certainly tops. And Finlay's picture on page 11 is one of those beautiful things he dreams up every so often. I'd love to see it in color.

"Way of Escape" was nice too. I'd like to see those reversible seats tried out in a new Studebaker. It would save a lot of maneuvering. I don't know whether or not "Consulate" was supposed to be amusing but I thought it was. Next time I go home for a visit I'll drop over to Winthrop and see if I can get a hitch to Mars.

Since I can't get more than mildly interested in St. Clair, I'll skip "Metal Lark" and drool over Bradbury. There's something about his writing that gets me. He's fast becoming my top favorite. He seems to have stories everywhere and not one of them is less than wonderful.

Well, shucks, all the stories were good. I'm easy to please, I guess. I follow the controversies in TRS with amazement. Some people will argue over anything, it seems. I would take issue with Billie Randolph. Is active fandom for the girls restricted in age limits? When a woman has a home and children to care for she has neither the time nor the money to publish a fanzine and collect mags. It just about breaks the bank to try and keep up with current issues.

But I'm more than willing to exchange letters with anyone. To those who keep things rolling and do all the work, my good wishes are all I can offer. Just wait—maybe she'll find out. I'll be looking forward to the next issue, which promises to be as thrilling as usual. And with Bradbury again too—yum!—*384 West 5th Street, Peru, Indiana.*

You do have problems, Mrs. Hough, and the more thoughtful fans will appreciate their importance. As for Bradbury's excellence, he has been named for three years in succession for one of the "Best Short Stories of the Year" anthologies. The lad is very hot indeed. Drop us another line soon.

ANOTHER RAVE FOR RAY
by Tom Pace

Dear Editor: As often as I and others have gone through the old song-and-dance about how much we like your mag and how much it is improving, and all that, there is no use in doing it all again. So consider it said.

The best story in this magazine from the standpoint of thought-content, reader-interest and all that, is undoubtably Bradbury's "And The Moon Be Still As Bright". I no longer toss the word "classic" around as carelessly as I once did, but when something like this story comes along, what else can you do?

Many readers, I suspect, will object to the characterization of Jeff Spender on the grounds that his behavior was not psychologically possible unless he had gone insane, and the story did not indicate insanity, just an acceptance of new values.

I am of the opinion that the story's credibility was not at all damaged by the fact that Spender tried to kill the other members . . . in fact, it is the only logical thing for him to have done. What many people will not understand, I think, is that Right, Wrong, Sanity, Insanity 'n such might, just might, turn out to be variables.

The novel is one of the most interesting I have read by Smith, and that is saying a good deal. Most interesting was the minor item of navigating the *Star*

Lady through the galaxy . . . and this, followed by Miss Purnell's letter on page 130, concerning the astrogation course at Cal Tech, set me to wondering just how much my geometry, so troublesome now, will be worth in twenty years or so.

Temple's "Way Of Escape" keynotes the present demand for escape from the pressures of our civilization . . . I'd rather try almost any plan, though, than those of suicide and mental suicide expressed in the yarn!

I like St. Clair's stories mainly for the hints you get of Jick and Oona's civilization . . . phrases, strange names, queer gadgets dropped into the story quite casually . . . if Science-fiction is defined as ordinary fiction, only written for publication in, say the SatEvePost of 2021, then the Jick-Oona stories are just about perfect Stf.

Concerning my letter . . . I still claim, despite your nasty remark about linseed oil, that I think largely in colors and pictures. But who cares?

I liked Bergey's cover nearly as much as I liked Finlay's intepix.—*1720 S W 11th St., Miami, Fla.*

Okay, Tom, hope you're finished with geometry by the time this appears—and not vice versa. Keep in touch.

OVERWHELMED
by Mrs. Dorothy McCratic

Dear Editor: I must say I was slightly overwhelmed by the response to my request in the June issue of TWS. This letter is written solely to thank each and every one who wrote to me with sundry informations —all of them useful.

I tried to keep up with all the mail, answering each in turn, but found this to be impossible. After all, I'm a housewife with 8 large rooms, one (1) large husband and one (1) small and very active son, so I am sure everyone will understand why I have not been able to answer all the letters.—*1178 Main Street, Hanson, Massachusetts.*

Since Mrs. McCratic's request was for information anent the obtaining of a bound edition of A. Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar," she evidently found herself not only launched but nearly swamped.

ONE-L WILKIE
by Wilkie Conner

Dear Editor: The June issue of our favorite mag is holding the pace set by its recent predecessors rather well. Even Ray Cummings, in his quaint way, has come up with a readable story. His last, before this one, was a trilogy of robot yarns which TWS ran several years ago. Though if I could write as well as even his poorest efforts, I wouldn't be laboring for the daily bread. Maybe I shouldn't criticize that which I can't better.

Consulate was the best of the long stories. A very unique conception of time travel. *The Knowledge Machine* rates first in the shorts, with *The Metal Lark* a close second. Possibly because of its greater length, *The Trans-Galactic Twins* was the most entertaining story in the issue. I rated *Consulate* over it, though, because it is harder to write a really entertaining short story than it is a novel. Right?

Re Mrs. Eddy's dissertation on Lovecraft: Those of us who have openly criticized HPL's work have no desire to distract from the excellence of the man himself. We are opposed to the establishing of his work as a criterion by which to judge other writings of fantasy.

Every time one picked up a magazine or fanzine, some reader was always raving about the great HPL—completely forgetting the great writers of the present. I do not doubt but that HPL was an interesting person to know. I do say, though, nothing I've ever read of his was worth all the fuss made over it—even that which was almost good.

Joseph de Celis claims he can write better Stf stories than those appearing in TWS and SS. I say let him proceed to prove it by writing an acceptable yarn.

After summing this letter up and finding that it says exactly nothing, I think I'll stop and listen to the soap operas—that's the only cure for insomnia I know of and right now I need some sleep.—*Box 2392, West Gastonia, North Carolina.*

You have come close to a brash assumption, Wilkie, in your statement that a short story is more difficult to write than a long one. Frequently, of course, you are correct. However, it depends much more upon the author and the story itself than upon any hard and fast rules.

O'Henry never even wanted to tackle the novel and Kipling fell down miserably after putting in exhaustive and exhausting labors on his longer jobs. But both could reel off the briefs with comparatively little trouble.

On the other hand, a Tolstoi or Sienkewicz operated in the reverse and needed plenty of pages to put down their fictional theses. While such a finished author-craftsman as Somerset Maugham seems to operate happily in any or all lengths, from the short to the full novel.

We repeat, it depends on the author and the story.

WHAT—NO VITRIOL?
by David C. Wilmot

Dear Sir: Congratulations on a much-improved June issue. I had been about to write a vitriolic letter anent the declining quality of the stories, Bergey, etc., but apparently you're on the up-grade again. The cover was the most obvious improvement. If it weren't for the burlesque-type heroine, this would be as fine a cover as I could hope for. As it is, it's the best in too long a time. Keep it up.

And Ray Bradbury! This is beyond all adjectives. Bradbury's tale was the finest you've run since Heinlein's "Jerry Is a Man" of last year. Bradbury is easily the most literate writer in his field today, let the Kuttner fanatics say what they will. Ony a master can take a plot like this and make a really beautiful work of it. A little understatement more or less and the Kuttner fanatics say what they will. Only a master who even dare to attempt the kind of stories Bradbury writes. Again, congratulations.

The rest of the stories were satisfactory except for "Way of Escape". This type of thing doesn't make sense to me. The hero has his hopes and ideals shattered so he goes out and ends it all. What good does it do? It surely doesn't avert the future. If he is so sensitive at least he would try to do something. Otherwise, why not go out and have himself a ball first? If a man has no moral purpose for living, at least he can still enjoy himself physically. G. K. Chesterton expresses a similar idea in "The Song of the Strange Ascetic" much better than I ever could. Suffice it to say that suicide is by no means an "act of sanity".

Quite a while back you made a vague allusion to some day putting out an anthology. There's no time like the present. Anthologies are coming out every day. Yours are the only important sf magazines that haven't been well represented. Why not have the readers vote on stories for the volume? I know, the perpetual paper shortage or something. But see what the fans think anyway.—*2 Countryside Lane, St. Louis County, Missouri.*

Thanks for the suggestion, David, but we have no anthological plans at present. It's a nice thought, however.

Your reaction to "Way of Escape" is interesting. But to understand the frame of mind behind author Bill Temple's story, you'll have to remember that he is an Englishman and that what he and his countrymen have been through in the last decade (and are still enduring) is sufficient to arouse speculation in any intelligent mind as to whether there is any out.

We thought he built a pretty good yarn on the subject. And his story in the current issue, MIRACLE TOWN, shows him in quite a different color. We found this one a riot.

FILTHY LUCRE
by Rodway Palmer

Dear Editor: It looks like fifteen grimy pennies will no longer purchase the exalted mag and it must now be twenty grimy pennies. (25 after this, bub—Ed.) Is it worth it? Let's check, and double check. After all—the cost of living and all that bunk, you know.

It is worth it. It is so very much worth it that it would be ridiculous to go any further into the matter. 148 pages. More stories. Better stories. More words. More entertainment. Okey, so it's worth it.

Story rating for June, '48:

Guess who's first? Ray Bradbury and . . . THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT. I've read better stories—but when? The past-published LOTUS EATERS still holds all-time first-place in this man's mind, but Ray Bradbury is but definitely establishing himself *as* Ray Bradbury and nobody else. Horsefeathers (and Oh! Fudge!, etc) Ray is established as tops right *now*.

Excuse me for still remaining unalterably loyal to our old pals Manly Wellman, Robert Williams, Edmond Hamilton and others. These men wielded pioneering impulses that still stick with the old time readers. (i.e. ten years back.)

THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE. Tricky, light, entertaining. The capable Mr. Hamilton who, it appears, does not ever miss.

WAY OF ESCAPE. Vague, loose, difficult to follow but I followed the blamed thing anyway through curiosity. It held up by a thread but it held up. Third.

SPACE CAN. I like the old space-opry and I wish this could have been third. Sketchy, thin atmosphere, and everything hinges on a magic trick fooling reader and Ganymedean alike. Up in the air here.

AHEAD OF HIS TIME. Ray Cummings' stories are always easy to read. They flow restfully. You don't get interested in the narrative, in the stream of words. You watch the characters, the problem, the events, and the thing becomes real and alive. Ray is alright.

CONSULATE. Good enough for grumbling humor, but really! How about forgetting this ever happened, as regards fatty and clan, and filling up this space with more story-quality?

THE METAL LARK. No. That's all. No. And that includes everything to date from Mrs. St. Clair.

Everybody is wondering what happened to THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS. Surely, everybody says, it rates first place. Surely . . .

TRANS-GALACTIC began with a bang and held clear up till and through chapter seven. Then I started skipping paragraphs—then pages. Then the entire story. It shouldn't happen to George O. That science, that plot—it all fascinated me. George, boy! George! COME BACK!

The upshot of the whole issue is this. The majority of the stories were good, though not excellent. From THE METAL LARK to—AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT. Like a step-ladder, from the ineffable to the ineffable. Believe me, it could only happen in THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

I notice that more and more ladies are appearing in the great back room here and it don't look so good. Seriously. The American Male no longer has the movies, the radio is tainted and in general entertainment of every kind is slanted womanward. You cannot please both. It is impossible to please both audiences fully. There is no common ground, no foothold to grasp here. In spite of idealism it just doesn't work.

Either the magazine is red-blooded with the rough, aggressive male tones predominating, or it is watered with effeminacy. You know that one is meant to exploit, the other to be exploited. Rest assured that for every new lady reader, you are losing ten men readers. Or, perhaps, a hundred men readers. Here's for next issue.—*226 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Illinois.*

Methinks we'll let the ladies in question tee off on this one. Okay, girls, hone up your curve-top safety razors and ready your two-way-stretch straitjackets.

ZIPA-DEE-DOO-DAH—OUR FOOT!
by Russell Harold Woodman

Dear Editor: Zipa-dee-do-dah! Another ish!

Ho, what is this! a numbunny named Thomas Millseed attacks me in the letter column, claiming that Leslie Charteris' real last name is Yin and not Lin as I reported. I checked my source, dear editor, as all careful people do when attacked. This is what I found.

In my public library there is a huge book called "20th Century Authors" put out by the H. W. Wilson Company. A copy of it is in thousands of libraries all over this nation. I quote from its article on Leslie Charteris:

"An application for U.S. Citizenship in 1941 disclosed Leslie's real name as being Leslie Charles Bowyer LIN". Which is what I said.

I sincerely suggest that Mr. Millseed obtain an old mattress and have part of it sewed into his head. He will then have something a little better to think with than what he now uses.

That taken care of, let us proceed—

In the letter section, Idella Purnell (a beautifully musical name!) mentions the rocket course being given by Herrick, and she says rocket flight is fast approaching. In Mechanix Illustrated, hardly a fiction magazine, is an article stating that a famous airplane company is at work on a man-carrying rocket for a flight to the moon.

Speaking of chain reactions, which we were not, you published my last letter and several things happened—

a.) Gerry de la Ree contacted me, and Behold! he published one of my stories in his fanzine, LOKI

b.) Edmund Cox of Lubec, Maine contacted me, and we are now good stfriends thanx to you.

c.) I became a member of the NFFF

Before this reaches print other miracles will no doubt have occurred.

The cover is fair this ish, except just for once sometime why doesn't Bergey draw an ugly, stoop-shouldered witch—just for a laugh?

Best drawing of all is, natch, a Finlay—the one on page eleven, showing the encounter in space of the two souls. How does the Fin do so well, so often? Seriously, I would like to know where he got his training in the art he has perfected. Be there schools of art which teach fantasy drawing? Or was he forced to ad lib?

George O. Smith not only had the best letter, but also the best story, and I'll keep my evil eye out for more of his material. I have a college friend, who doesn't want to be named, because he is not an stfan at heart, who couldn't put down THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS until he had read every word!

AHEAD OF HIS TIME By Cummings was second best. First time I ever read anything like it.

Hark! Hark! THE METAL LARK By St. Clair gave me a dull, throbbing pain.

See you next ish, and may there be many more!—*505 Washington Avenue, Apt. 7, Portland, Maine.*

Glad to hear you have made fancontacts through us. As to fantasy art schools, we never heard of any. Guess it's up to the individual to climb his own clouds—or, in Finlay's case, soap bubbles. You're right on Leslie the Charteris if your source is correct—we have same here in the office. So if it proves wrong (which seems highly unlikely)

we sink together, pardner.

PASTA FROM ASTRA
by Marion Zimmer

Dear Editor:
"A magazine called THRILLING WONDER
Once scrapped all its old thud-and-blunder
Each cover it printed
Was modestly tinted
And the fan applause roared like the thunder"

The aforegoing limerick must serve to express my very great appreciation of Bergey's latest, and beautiful, symbolic cover for the TRANSGALACTIC TWINS. I first saw it on a newsstand in company with a non-fan friend, and I made a point of pointing it out to her. She's a bit of an artist and admitted it was extremely lovely. The girl has not only a fine figure, a la Bergey, but a lovely face; and the stars, planets and the twins make this the most beautiful cover I have seen on either of your magazines.

And the story bears it out.

I presume that the fans would have a lot to say if I admitted that in this particular story the love interest, frankly, was what held my attention. That is an old device of the story-writer—the lover forced to play the part of a brother to the girl he loves—but this is the first where the lover has actually been present in the brother's body. Smith, I thought, handled it exceptionally well. And for a piece of sheer writing, which was restrained enough not to be in the least objectionable, the "roughhouse" scene between Vella and Barry was all but perfect. The gradual growth of his feeling for Vella, too, was wonderfully handled. Let the others say what they will, a psychological problem of this sort is the important thing—and it is definitely science-fiction.

On to the novelettea—I was desperately disappointed in the Cummings tale, for Cummings, actually, has become a favorite of mine after reading some of his earlier work. "Ahead of his time" turned sour. "Consulate" ditto; it was too funny to be taken seriously, and too serious to be funny. As for the shorts:

THE METAL LARK—I know just how Oona felt, for I am an amateur vocalist myself and invariably lose my voice just before a concert from nerves. WAY OF ESCAPE—clever! Actually, however, that would be a hard decision to make—live in a fool's paradise or a sane man's hell. After all "what's the hodds so long as you're 'appy" as they say. KNOWLEDGE MACHINE—oh, Hamilton, Hamilton! After TRANSURANIC you can bear to turn out tripe like this! SPACE-CAN—ha, ha, ha! To think of a race which could not lie and to whom a grin was a sign of fury—it reminded me of the old paradox about the Sun-worshippers who always told the truth and the moon-worshippers who always told lies. A missionary met two men. One said: "I am a sun worshipper." The other said, "He is not a sun-worshipper." Was he or wasn't he? I've forgotten the logic involved, but no doubt the intelligent readers of TWS can figure it out.

As for THS—Your reply to Paul Anderson is a classic "A pig's foot I thought to call thine" indeed! I would like to take issue with my good friend Rick Sneary on one point.

He pointed out "The Irritated People" as an example of a funny story. What I would like to point out is that while "The Irritated People" might have struck Rick funny, it left me and several others completely cold. While as for me, I thought "Exit the Professor" the funniest thing in many a moon. The point being, that it's a matter of taste. Also Rick seems to be of the opinion that you have no write (oops, I'm getting a bad influence just talking about Rick) no RIGHT to *write* what you wish in your editorial.

I considered your editorial on humor in stf one of the best pieces I have yet seen. This sort of thing is all too seldom seen in a prozine, being mostly left to fanmags. Taking issue also with Wilkie Connor; I do not call either Lovecraft or Poe morbid. The reason some people don't like Lovecraft and Poe is because secretly they are frightened. A true scientific mind will read the story for the story, and will classify nothing as "morbid" or depressing". In response to Mrs. Eddy's letter about Lovecraft, I make hearty apologies to Wordsworth and to my English Lit Professor, and say—

Lovecraft! Thou shouldst be living at this hour
Fandom has need of thee; for all the fen
Stagnant, bored writers, let each tired pen
And typer dwell upon thee; all their power
Is concentrated on that meager dower
You left to us. We are such stubborn men
With pros and cons. Oh, come to us again
And give to us winged fantasy in flower.
Thy soul, a bird of Night, that flies apart.
Thy mind was darker than the deepest sea
Untrammelled by reality, vast, free
So thou, Night-Haunter, wrote, in thine own way
In streams of wild black words; thy poet's heart
Homage on thy fantastic gods did lay.

(The original of course was Wordsworth's sonnet on MILTON.)

I have purposely omitted comment on the Bradbury tale—"And The Moon Be Still As Bright". A story of that sort simply cannot be done justice by a fan letter. I would not cheapen the story by commenting or raving upon it. It is the most dignified, the most adult and mature, the most beautiful story that I have ever read in a science fiction magazine . . . or for that matter in any magazine. The only writer who has ever approached that mood before was Merritt, in his short stories, or the rare C. L. Moore tale. But they write sheer fantasy.

Ray Bradbury writes humanity—not fantasy—a hundred years from now. For that alone—if for no other reason—I give it as an honest opinion that Ray Bradbury is the only writer of those revered by the fantasy-lover, who will be read after fandom—which will not last more than thirty more years—dies away. I also believe Bradbury is the only pulp magazine author whose works will still be read a hundred years from today.

He is not my favorite author. But I realize him as the greatest writer ever to enter the field. Van Vogt, Kuttner, Merritt, step back and make way for Ray Bradbury—the advocate of humanity in science fiction.
—*R.F.D. #1, East Greenbush, N.Y.*

Good letter, Marion. But before we go out of our alleged cerebrum trying to decide to which hunk of verse we should reply in kind—the limping limerick or the sonorous sonnet—we must tell you that you really got the boys steamed up when you claimed close resemblance to Virginia as depicted by Bergey on the March cover of our companion magazine, STARTING STORIES.

Sum total of the ululations seems to be—"We want proof!"

Okay, the rest is up to you.

Inspiration (?!) has finally descended upon us—we shall answer you via a sonnet in limerick beat (how corny can you get?).

Now a lass from East Greenbush, New York
Whose letters are really borzork
Has writ an ode built on
A tribute to Milton
Who thefted old Satan's pitchfork
She gives us both Wordsworth and Lear
In parody more far than near
'Twould seem that she tries to
Give unfailing rise to
A large editorial tear
Her fondness for Lovecraft and Poe
So let us rejoice
With uplifted voice. . . .

Well, it came out with fourteen lines, anyway. Seems as though something's missing though—either a last line or an idea or both.

WEBER AWAY!
by Wally Weber

Dear Editor: You brought up a right intriguing question in the June TWS. At the present rate we will end up with a super-specialized system that will tangle us all up. Simplification does not seem to hit the spot with me, however. My personal opinion is that the solution rests more in improving the human mind (homo superior maybe?) and increasing the individual life expectancy of the race.

Perhaps we would be better off if we stopped searching for a mechanical brain and developed our own organic version of the same. And then again, perhaps I do not know what it is all about to begin with.

Uh, by the way—you didn't happen to notice the cover this issue, did you? What happened—Bergey go high-brow on us or something? Didn't think he had it in him.

Say, about this fellow Bradbury. How do you go about rating stories that he writes? Rating is comparing, and as far as I can determine, nobody else writes enough like him to allow a comparison. The man just plain hypnotizes me with his confounded stories. I'm not even sure I like them or not. All I know is that I can't lay it down until I am finished. There should be a law.

Cummings' hero was a little far fetched, but aren't we all? Haven't seen much of him around. He appears to have left a lot of his faults behind him. Anyway the story was enjoyable, the first Cummings story I have enjoyed for a long time.—*5253 18th N.E. Seattle 5, Washington.*

Prescription of a course of brain exercises is simple enough—just get people to use theirs. The question is—how? Somehow we can't quite visualize whole classes doing mental pushups and squats and bellygrinds on a gymnasium floor to the accompaniment of either the Skater's or Merry Widow waltz a la the late Walter Camp's infamous "Daily Dozen".

Still, the idea has its intriguing possibilities. Henry Kuttner, for instance, might have one of his fabulous Hogbens (preferably the one with three heads) trapped in such a preceptorial. Sprague de Camp might do quite a job on such a setup too. Come to think of it, the ideas are endless.

HARPIST FROM MAINE
by Ed Cox

Dear Editor: Yes, it's me again. That guy up in Maine who keeps harping about, hmmmm, forgot what I keep harping about. Oh, well, what I'm writing about is the June issue of TWS. I'm not going to dissect each story down to the gory details. Just a list and a few comments on whichever ones happen to have something to be commented on!

Here's how they rated with me:

AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT Bradbury
SPACE-CAN Jenkins
CONSULATE Tenn
AHEAD OF HIS TIME Cummings
THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS Smith
THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE Hamilton
WAY OF ESCAPE Temple
THE METAL LARK St. Clair.

Natch, Ray was tops as always. It was nice to have a novelt by him instead of a short. You'll notice that St. Clair's story hit bottom. Let's end this series huh? (Oonaandjick! I don't like radishes either!)

Half, at least, of the stories ended rather badly for the hero this time. Five, in fact. Hamilton's (the guy lost all his dough). Bradbury's (Spender died didn't he?). *Consulate* ended badly too (nobody believed Garland and pore Fatty is stranded on Mars). WAY OF ESCAPE was the worst tragedy (the guy bumps himself off, don't he?). Then, in Cumming's story is another tragic ending (he gets caught and voluntarily goes to his death).

What gives? Why are ya giving us all this sad (?) stuff for? (I like the stories all right, just, well, they all end so disappointingly!) *Pre*-war hysteria?

I also noticed the too prominent part dames play in the demise of some of these guys. Look what happened in Ray's story. (Oops, two Rays this time. Cummings, I mean.) If it wasn't for the girl, Sanjan would have flashed off somewhere and never have got splashed with that acid. See what I mean? I can't squak (that is Venusian for "squawk") too much this time though. No dames at all in Bradbury's story. Nor in SPACE-CAN, WAY OF ESCAPE and Bill Tenn's story. Good. But Vella was played up too much in Jawge O's story.

Several stories were more or less on the humorous side this time, too. CONSULATE was supposed to be, and *was* to some extent. It was better than just a plain funny-stf-story though. You notice it is in 3rd place in zee list. Hamilton's yarn was pretty "funny" too. And so was SPACE-CAN. The dog's alleged adventures were uproariously humorous. And, as almost always, Jenkins had a morale behind his yarn. On alien logic, etc.

With the one exception of the Oonaandjick opus, the fiction content of this issue of TWS (June 1948 Vol. 32 No. 2 it says) was very good. Boyoboy! But you've done things with this zine in the last year, Editor! (Why the "secrecy" about your identity anyway? Almost everybody knows who you is!)

Oh, yes, the art in the mag. Hmmm . . . the cover, though it did symbolize (is there such a word?) the lead novel, wasn't so good. What is this? Fizzikal Kultoor? Oh, one other thing. The man on the right; notice his curl of hair there? Well, it's not, the two strands of hair I mean, aren't separated as much as the two on the left hand guy. Gad, Bergey, you want to watch that! And notice the green eyes the dame has! (they're *blue!*—Ed.) Just average, average. How about a space scene next time huh? C'mon now. We're getting tired of these covers. (Aren't we fellows?)

I see Finlay has done it again. That "rough-house" scene looked more like a fight scene in his pic. Oh, well, I guess I gotta expect at least one or two pics like this an issue. Okay as long as you don't have more. Now that one on page 11 is more like it! Easily the best this time. Stevens' on pages 56-7 was purty good. The one on page 71 was fair. Finlay's for Bradbury's story was like old times. More of these (and ones likes the one on page 11 too.) Asterita is really hokay. Keep him!

And what's happened to "Mr. Unknown" that's been doing such nice pics. Where'd he go? Hah! Missed Napoli's for WAY OF ESCAPE. This and his pic of SPACE-CAN were the two worst ones. Good Ghu! They're too sketchy and vague. Make him have more clarity or no more! Well, will you look who's here! On 109. Marchioni (or however ya spell it.)! Okay too. As long as we don't have too many by him.

The art-work this time was only about half good, compared to the stories' rating of 90%.

TRS was, as always, the foist thing I read in the mag. A nice run of letters they were too. Bro-*ther* (have you ever seen this term used before, Editor?), is Thomas Millstead gonna get it! Russ was right about Lin and, heh heh, he let me in on the gory details. Gad! Tom Pace thinks in colors!??! What happens when he goes to a color movie?

Your editorial and book review were good as usual. As I haven't read my copy of the BOOK OF PTATH yet, I didn't read all of your review. Also, the forecast for next issue is very mouth-watering. I notice that the caps all spell out WONDER. Purty neat!

I am burning up about something that, it seems, very few fans have noticed, spoken about or don't seem to care about. It is this: On page 146 you will see a full page ad plugging better pubs own pocket-book concern. Notice the titles. Westerns, mysteries and best-seller stuff. NO STF! DON'T YOU SEE THE POSSIBILITIES???

Good Heavens, man! people are craving for stf, the old stories and those who can, are shelling out three bucks a throw for hard-cover anthologies of old stories. Whyinell don't ya get busy and turn out some Popular Library anthologies of stf?? Why, hunh? There are thousands of fans who'd go for it. And millions (prob-

ably) of others who'd get copies of any collection put out.

Why don't you put the idea up to the fans and see what opinions and comments come of it. If not a Popular Library enterprise, an Annual of some sort! C'mon!—*4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine.*

Maybe, when the "possibilities" justify our taking such a step, we'll do it. We seem to get around to most desired aims in time. So keep your fingers crossed, Ed. But don't sell the "dames" short. Wait until you're just a little older. You may rue them words.

WE GOT HIM WRONG!
by Peter Leyva

Dear Editor: Would that I possessed some rare or original literary talent with which to entertain the sometimes hypercritical fans who bi-monthly scan the screeds in T. W. S.' "Reader Speaks" department. But, alas, the giftie entrusted with the bestowing of talents upon each hopeful mortal hath rudely passed me by.

Thus handicapped, I must needs retreat upon more familiar ground—namely, the rating of the stories. And so, in the hope that ye real Titans of the typewriter will tolerate this uninspired one's wearisome verbiage and open-to-criticism story ratings, I dare to continue.

Hey, you guys! If the above sounds somewhat meek and indicative of an inferiority complex—why, you got me wrong. I'm just being polite, that's all—my ma brought me up on the genteel principal that it is most refined to tip one's shako ere belting the other guy on the whiskers!

The rating for the June issue of T.W.S.

Being a Brooklyn Dodger rooter from 'way back (please, no anaemic gags, Giant fans) and as baseball days are upon us again I will rate the epics in baseball style. Ergo, attendez, mon braves! (leave the Braves out of this—that's our team—Ed.)

As the issue contains eight stories it follows that it is possible to amass a total of thirty-two bases which would be a practically impossible percentage of 1.000. But we'll settle for .500, eh, editor?

Umpire: Peter "I calls-'em-as-I-see-'em" Leyva.

BATSMAN	TOTAL BASES	UMP'S DECISION
SPACE-CAN	Homer 4	Right into Bedford Ave.
AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT	Homer 4	Barely cleared stands Picked on a good one
WAY OF ESCAPE	Triple 3	Al Schacht coach this one?
CONSULATE	Double 2	Vet on a come-back!
AHEAD OF HIS TIME	Double 2	Line drive
THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE	Bunt 1	Might have made a double
THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS	Walk 1	Oona-to-Jick-to-Margaret
THE METAL LARK	Hit into triple play 0	(Back to the bushes!)
	Total bases 17	

Dividing total bases (17) by possible bases (32) I get an average of .531 for the ish. The mag did okay for itself, wot? considering that I am such a stern arbiter.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: Ray Cummings. . . . Glad to see ya on the comeback trail. Nice try. The hero got it in the change for a neck!

Geo. O. Smith: Your alien world was too much like Earth, what with playing chess, physical similarities, etc.—sure, it is possible (this similarity) with all eternity for it to happen and the laws of averages stretched a mite, but dinna ye forget, George, that ol' Lady Nature delights in creating different species, such as octopi, s-f fans and the editors catering thereto. (Catering to the s-f fans, not the octopi.)

The Metal Lark: This is strictly a lady-book series. Sure, sure, Margaret knows the mechanics of writing but to this lad it reads like a futuristic radio soap opera script.

With all due respect to the authoress I must curiously inquire, "What's coming next? Ick's Other Wife Goona? Or, perhaps, Life Can Be Super Whost?" There ain't no thud in this series but plenty of blunder.

AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT: Bradbury should've omitted the last paragraph; it ruined the mood.

The READER SPEAKS was interesting as usual.

Rick Sneary: My favorite epistoleer, le maestro nonpareil. The Chinese say that one picture is worth a thousand words. Mebbe so, but in Rick's case I'd rather have a Sneary letter than a Marchioni. One Sneary word is worth a thousand pics. Messieurs Zeger et Patch: Nice logic, lads.

Wilkie Conner: Always enjoy your letters. But whaddaya mean, Poe's "Lenore" is from corn? Agree with the rest of your letter.

Joe de Celis: Interesting and erudite. But how come you only want letters from those who agree with you?

Geo. O. Smith: Hey, you professional, you, whassa idea of invading the sanctum sanctorum of us amateur epistoleers? (I'm only kiddin'.) Enjoyed your speculation anent the inclusion of humorous stories in s-f mags. Well, heres one vote for 'em. We can't have Sneary carrying the whole load by himself.

All the other letters were fine. Pipe Wigodsky going dignified on us! What with making from Dickens, plea for more emotion, et al. . . . The guy hath a dual personality. . . .

And last but not least, friend editor, your editorials are most excellent and thought-provoking. S'long, Horace Greeley.—*221 So. Victoria Ave., Atlantic City, N.J.*

Horace Greely—our metatarsal arch! Very well, brother Rickey (Branch, that is), why don't you get some pitchers? *Soma*ther time, perhaps.

PRO TOPLESS GOWNS!
by Linda Bowles

Dear Editor: I liked the cover this ish but—*why* did Bergey have to put that horrible green thing around her lucious-ahem—chest? Otherwise, it was a nifty cover.

The stories this trip were fair to middling with a couple of good ones. Those were SPACE-CAN and—THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT.

The first was a sweet little piece of writing although it had a plot that is badly worn. But it was well written and had something that made it a good story.

Leinster's tale was so realistic that I can just imagine that when our first space ship lands on a dead world our men will have that same feeling of intrusion. It's just like the human race to destroy something it can't understand and his story gave a fairly accurate picture of human nature. I liked it and enjoyed reading parts of it over several times. It did end rather sadly, tho'.

I was leary of George O. Smith's story but I was surprised to find that it wasn't as bad as I had feared.

Mrs. St. Clair's yarn was as to be expected—good. Why do fans pick on her all the time? Her stories are delightfully different. Don't let 'em discourage ya, gal, keep dishing out those stories!

AHEAD OF HIS TIME—better left unsaid what I would say about it.

No need for me to say how good Finlay's pics were this ish 'cause they are always good. I'm a Finlay fan of the first degree. I see Marchioni was back this issue: comment—P.U! All other pics were fair, nothing extraordinary, but fair. With the exception of the pic on pages 56-57; it was good. Whodunnit? Stevens? (Yes—Ed.)

The only comment I have for the Reader Speaks is this—to those fans who scream murder when a humorous s-f story appears—go jump in the lake!! One can't thrive on serious stories continually but needs a little humor from time to time to improve the flavor of the really good sf stories. I'm not saying that the humorous stories aren't good because some of them are extraordinary good pieces of writing. There are good ones and there are bad ones but the good ones more than make up for the poor tales.

At this point, I would like to ask ye Ed.'s permission to call all fans in this area who are interested in forming a science-fiction club for the midwest. We already have several fans and plans for a 'zine and as soon as we get a few more guys and gals we'll be ready to start. So if there are any fans in the Topeka area or the surrounding states who are interested, please contact me.

Enough of my gibberish for now. See ya next ish.—*931 N. Jackson, Topeka, Kansas.*

Whoa there, Linda. Didn't you get wound up in yourself like a plate of spaghetti on the subject of humorous stories in stf? ". . .one needs a little humor from time to time to improve the flavor of the really good sf stories."

Pause while ye Ed. collapses in sobs and chews a corner of his desk.

Well, it reminds us of a line Lynn Fontanne used to say in Dulcy, that long-ago play about a delightful suburban nitwit. It went, unless memory fails us, "There is so much good in the best of us, and so much bad in the worst of us, that it ill behooves the best of us. . . ."

You have struck a very reminiscent note while falling into the humor. Good luck with your fan club and throw a couple of dusters at the women haters for next issue.

CAN'T FIND FAULT!
by Wrai Ballard

Dear Sir: Good, an issue I can't find fault with. None of the stories were classics, none were poor, they just hit the happy, happy medium. I don't know what all this cry for new classics is. Just think, if the average story was a classic, what would the classics be like? Come to think of it, I want all classics with some better.

The story I liked best in this issue, was THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE. Humor that's what I want. More humor. The Hogbens are great, A DOG'S LIFE was swell. Something so fantastic, that it's entirely unbelievable can be extremely refreshing. How about a long novel on the order of the old Munsey, OMEGA series? My personal theory is that the guys that are against humor in Stf., are just trying to pretend that a superior and serious mind is needed to read Stf. Tain't so, maybe it is, but I like it my way.

Now to roll up my sleeves and get to work on Joe de Celis. His is an attitude that seems all too familiar. It sounds just like mine, a half dozen years ago. (So now we are six—Ed.) It seems when very many people get to a certain age they get to have the idea that their mentality is above most pulp mags. The fact that they still read and enjoy them should hold some significance but if they notice it at all, they hold it as a pleasant little foillable (what's that?—Ed.) on their part. If they happen to write in, they might mention that, in spite of the fact that the mag is slanted to semi-illiterates, it can hold a little interest to a finer mind.

Joe does deserve a little credit, anyone who will read Proust, without someone forcing him is something or other. He uses a lot of big words too. I was inspired by his letter to dig a copy of Proust from my books. This time I got farther than usual, nearly 120 pages before I gave it up and read THE MISLAID CHARM instead.

Hey! If any of youse lowbrows want to get cultured and become couth, I'll trade one copy of Proust's, THE CAPTIVE, in practically unopened shape, for almost any Fantasy book, condition no special object.

Sneary is my hero. Didn't he make it respectable to not be able to spell? (ummm—Ed.) I do though disagree with him on the Hogbens. If his reasoning as to them merely making fun of freaks is true, what does it do to that all-time classic, ALICE IN WONDERLAND, or even moreso, THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.

I disagree on some point with nearly all the various Femfans. This is OK as I have a vague distrust of their reasoning anyway.

To cut things short, I'll finish with the letter by one Thomas Crittenden Pace. The best part of the letter was where he said, "Who wants to be sane? Not Thomas Crittenden Pace."

I love that name, Thomas Crittenden Pace. Just say it out loud, Thomas Crittenden Pace. With that rythm it should be set to music. I just hope I can be as nice next issue.—*Blanchard, North Dakota.*

"Slanted to semi-illiterates", are we? And you call that being nice, Wrai? We feel a tendency to distrust your reasoning which matches your feelings toward ditto of the Femfans. But we have a lamentable inclination to agree with you on Marcel Whost. Sneary, alas, seems to be missing this issue. If he has taken time out to learn to spell we shall personally order him liquidated.

DROP DEAD!
by charles douglass

dear sir
i again start to maltreat my typewriter
in order to
again
bring to you the benifits of my opinions
for once i read your editorial and iam wondering
whot you are so suprised about
haven t s f writers been predicting over specialization
for instance brave new world
only four stories in this issue are worthy of comment
gosmith s the trans galactic twins was only entertaining
bradbury has
scored again in his classic and the moon be still as
bright
who is this temple
has he ever written anything for
t
w
s
before
st clair s style is improving with ever issue
keep them coming
space can reminds me of the
space operas of old
the rest of the stories were trite to trite to trite trite
t r s was good as always
on the honor roll we find
mrs m e eddy interesting facts about
any author are always good reading
j m wilson s letter was almost as funny as mine
what concite aint it shame it is
i am doing my best joe de cells
sneary as usale
zeger for some good logic
andrew gregg tom pace hh haly and the ed
because they mention my last
pean
i am not going to let this pic hack contest idea die
why not print a story with out any pics
and let ameture artists send in their work
and the print the
five best
yours until the next unless
i am tempted to except the
call of fate and write a
story in this style and
send it in to you for
you to send me one or
more rejection slips
you bum—*129 east water st., gettysburg, pennsylvania.*

dear douglass
just because you
live in gettysburg
is no reason
to start the battle over again
so gosmith was only
entertaining
you can do pickett s charge alone
against an armored division
for that
one
temple is an englishman like in
the song in

pinafore but he
can write good american too
as show his miracle
town in this issue
your pic hack contest is
screwyscrewyscrewyscrewy
because by the
time we could print the
pics
the story would be long since dead and buried
who s a bum

SO LONG IN WRITING
by Rickey Slavin

Dear Editor: Sorry to take so long in writing, but I felt that I had better wait till the current ish of TWS came out. For once, I think it is a superb ish. Bergey outdid himself on the cover, the interior illos except those by Marchioni for *Knowledge Machine* were good, espech the Finleys for *Twins*. Of course, since fen are a notoriously greedy bunch, I would appreciate the artist signing his name legibly.

I am an admirer of George O. Smith from way back. I thought that *Twins* was one of the best novels TWS has yet put out. In fact, unless I was in a very good mood, the entire ish was way above your usual run. *Twins* was superb, altho it could have been expanded very successfully. It left a feeling of the events being too pat. For instance . . . the coincidental picking up of the radio message. Why make it so easy? Give the guy more work and less chance.

Consulate was very good. William Tenn is one of the up and coming authors. His work is very nicely done, well polished. However, the idea in this one is nothing particularly new.

And the Moon Be Still As Bright. . . . Bradbury is one of the better writers today, but this, aside from some very good moments, doesn't attain the peak of perfection we have come to expect from him. It is strange, that once a writer has shown some superlative style, plot or sumpin, we refuse to accept any lesser work. The idea for this opus was good, not too novel, and the story could have been reworked. It is not as convincing as some of Bradbury's fantasy, which is not meant to be convincing . . . You see?

Cummings is Cummings and the less said about that the better. *Ahead of his time* . . . pah . . . unfinished . . . poor. Even so, the rest of the stories made up for it.

Way of Escape . . . yeah . . . g a f i a . . . see translation in any sf dictionary.

The Metal Lark. . . . I hate St. Clair. . . . I actually detest her, since her conception of the super woman of tomorrow puts a definite crimp in my ego. But this I must say, that Lark was one of the cutest things I have read by a woman, about a woman since Clare Boothe Luce's *The Women*. I must congratulate her for a very fine story.

The Knowledge Machine. . . . Poor. Old Ed is slipping.

Space Can . . . actually lousy.

Never mind my comments. In a stf story, I expect very much. In fact, since my standards are so high, I am bursting with superlatives for the few stories that I think are worth them. So my comments may not be those of the majority of fandom, or even of your readers, but I still must mail them in.

I would like to congratulate you on your choice of subjects for your recent editorials. I think that this one about the capacity of Man to learn, and the dangers of split-hair specialization was a very interesting one, and a timely one. If I am not mistaken, there was a story to that effect some moons ago, by our old friend Hamilton.

Who is this Duncan female? Is she so frustrated up in them thar Blue Ridge mountings that she has to depend upon TWS for her males? If you ask me, Bergey should stick to females. There is nothing nauseating about a perfectly built, perfectly blank female, but the same, stereotyped male gets me sick.

About the letters commenting pro and con about humor in stf. I have the perfect solution. Take it as it comes, read the good stories and say so, read the bad, and say so, but don't start subdividing them into something like this.

Space Opera . . . humorous.
Space Opera . . . serious.
Space Opera . . . neither.

If the story is good, the humor deserves to be there. If it is bad, the humor might very well have been eliminated. Take things as they are, enjoy them, and then comment, irrespective of the possible categories you might include them in. A good story is a good one, and a bad one is a bad one. That is the golden rule to follow in judging any stories.

So there. I shall close like a door.

SLAM!—*1626 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn 30, New York.*

Okay, Rickey. May none of your males be stereotyped. By the way, if Oona nips your shego where it hurts, you really are in a bad way. Better turn the old libido outward . . .

SCHAUM OLD BURG
by Joe Schaumburger

Editor, old pal: As I sit here and gaze at the latest assortment of wit, humor, literature, and gawd-nose-what-else that went in to the making of the June TWS, I feel like permitting the rabble to know what mighty thoughts and vigorous ideas march in such stately procession through what may be called my brain. In other words, I have nothing to do this evening, so I will waste it.

The first thing that hits your eye is the cover. (*my* eye? my *eye!*—Ed.) We see first a rather scantily-clad female, surrounded by . . . hmm, I can't seem to tear my eyes away from that female. Oh, well, we will ignore the cover (tho I go cross-eyed in the attempt), and proceed to a discussion of the stories.

THE TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS moved with rather a glue-like pace, I thought, and then suddenly it got hepped up in the last chapter and tore thru to a breathless (words fail me) conclusion, leaving a number of loose ends hanging in mid-air, and a general feeling of "so what". (so what?—Ed.)

CONSULATE could have been worse, but not much.

AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT was magnificent. If stf can be said to be literature, then Bradbury's stuff would qualify. I hope you have more coming up by him.

AHEAD OF HIS TIME was fair. One of the best things Cummings has done for years.

WAY OF ESCAPE—like the people in the story, I don't give a damn. (Bet you'll change that to "darn") (bet I don't—Ed.)

THE METAL LARK—only the ending saved it. But it was great. More Oona and Jick, please.

THE KNOWLEDGE MACHINE was easily the best thing in the issue, aside from Bradbury. Here again, it was the ending that made the story. I could have sworn it was going to be crud, but was I surprised!

SPACE CAN—well, maybe space can, but I can't—take any more crud like that, I mean. Pure, unadulterated space-opera—the kind we thot went out with Xeno, and the Sarge. Ugh! Leinster has done *much* better than this, in fact, one of my favorite stories is his THINGS PASS BY, of a few issues back.

BOOK REVIEW—a competent job, altho somewhat prejudiced. (who—us? Ed.)

THE READER SPEAKS—How anyone in his right mind can compare Kuttner's hack to Merritt's deathless prose is beyond me. Why even the plot of Kuttner's "famous" DARK WORLD is a direct steal from Merritt's DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE. And how anyone can rave about Kuttner's characterisations—my ghod!

Kuttner's characters are so obviously corny and stock that even to call them characters at all is a compliment. The character "La Boucherie" that Zimmer raves about—what is he but simply another "mad scientist". I've read every issue of TWS, Wonder, SS, etc. that was ever put out, so I'm not giving you just a casual opinion. (To answer the obvious question: No, I am not 40 years old, I'm only 18, but I have a complete collection.)

Foo, here I am getting all hot and worked up over stf. And all for nothing, because it looks as tho that

by the time the next TWS is scheduled to come out. NY will be just one big atom crater. (optimist!—Ed.)

To members of the inner fan circle, the cryptic remark: ALPAUGH IS GHOD AND SCHAUMBURGER IS HIS PROPHET will be perfectly understandable. Outsiders are advised to go soak their heads.

I bet even *you* don't know what it means.—*1822 Bathgate Ave., Bronx 57, New York.*

You'd win that bet, Schaumacher-Schlemmer, because we don't intend to find out. If it were actually on the line we'd send you a pair of bobby socks in a puce-and-mustard argyle pattern. Just think—in a year from now you'll be nineteen years old. That'll be something, though we don't know exactly what. Selah!

WONDERFUL ONE-HORSE SHEA
by Bob Shea

Dear Ed: Just picked up the June issue of TWS. Many thanks for an excellent mag. Many thanks for printing my letter. Encouraged, I have determined to write you again. In this I am faced with a problem—not *what* to say, but what *not* to say. You have so much food for thought after reading a good science-fiction mag.

I found several letters in TWS on a subject that interests me greatly—namely, how science-fiction stories are written. I have hopes of writing STF myself, and study carefully any material I can find on this subject.

It seems to me that the disparaging remarks anent the literary quality of current science-fiction would be perfectly applicable—if they were written a few years ago. At that time science-fiction was, with a few notable exceptions, utter hack. There was a time when science-fiction was the same as a dramatized text-book. And pretty crude drama at that. I have yet to read a story written before 1940 that I could stomach.

In contrast to this is the modern period, which I firmly believe is the golden age of Science-fiction. We have good characterization, good plots and quality writing. The standards are higher. No longer can the stories be simple text-book problems.

If the stories written before 1940 were submitted now, I doubt that nine-tenths of them would be accepted for publication. As I see it, the modern science-fiction reader will accept any science premise as long as it is good fiction. After all, you can get your dry facts from a text-book. The ultimate purpose of a story should be not to teach, but to entertain. And I think modern science-fiction is doing just that with a vengeance, opinions to the contrary notwithstanding.

Some years ago, your companion mag, Startling, brought out an issue in which they asked the readers to write a story about the cover. I was wondering if you couldn't do something just the opposite. I mean, run a short-shoot, unillustrated, and ask the readers to draw an illustration for it. As I said before, I think that, as this seems to be a pretty popular idea, you would get a favorable response.

Just when Stevens was getting off to a good start as one of your best artists, he ups and disappears. What has become of him? And Leigh Brackett? And Brett Sterling? If Kuttner could draw, I would say that they must all be pseudonyms Hank just got tired of. If not, how about recalling them from the Valley of the Shadow. Especially I'd like to see a sequel to SHADOW OVER MARS. How about it?—*150 Bennett Avenue, New York 33, New York.*

Contrary opinions notwithstanding nevertheless, Stevens *was* present in the June issue—he did the spread for CONSULATE by William Tenn. As for Brackett, take a look at the contents page of the current issue. She is very much present with THE MOON THAT VANISHED. And her newest novel, SEA KINGS OF MARS, will appear in TWS early next year. Sterling—who was he?

We like that "golden age of science fiction" idea of yours. We've been rolling it around on our tongue and it sounds just wonderful. Yipe!

THEM ARDUOUS (?) RITES
by Garvin Berry

Dear Ed: Have recently undergone the pleasantly arduous rites of matrimony and am emerging, mellowed and chastened by newfound adult responsibilities, to determine whether or not I can still muster the caustic wit and cynical outlook usually essential for commentary upon stf mags.

Rate Bradbury's AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT as best yarn since CALL HIM DEMON. Hastening to B's aid, would like to defend his portrayal of Spender as idealistic killer which might rouse adverse comment. Same emotion which causes mental regurgitation in a man today when he contemplates his race's "heroic" efforts at hari-kiri could easily be metamorphosed into Spender-ish action in such situations as B. postulates.

Despite a fervent love of Bogart movies and a lengthy session in the service, I'm a frightfully poor killer; yet I feel that I perfectly understand Spender, his feelings and his actions. I'm afraid though that for once Bradbury's flawless writing is detrimental to his story.

Most fans will doubtless mistake this yarn for a sugar-coated smoothly sentimental tale of the Don Stuart-Lester del Ray type instead of the true scathing indictment of man as the pimply blot on the face of creation that he is—but does not have to be. I'd like to shove a little Bradbury idealism down the throats of the "fans" who are currently attempting to peddle racial superiority theories in another of the pro mags.

Get off that soapbox, Berry!

CONSULATE was interesting highly readable example of the modern school of stf—once over lightly with a giggle and a stray thought or two. Sanjan Thome might conceivably have been AHEAD OF HIS TIME, but there is little doubt that Cummings is behind his. Pointless mock-heroics carefully contrived toward a pseudo-dramatic climax. Hamilton's piece revives fond memories of his earlier ribticklers EASY MONEY and THE FEAR NEUTRALIZER altho' this had a much more thought provoking idea. Leinster competent and interesting as always altho' his title was cribbed from one L. Ron Hubbard. Tch! Tch!

With THE METAL LARK, feel definitely sure TWS is well on its way toward becoming the WOMAN'S HOME SCIENCE-FICTION COMPANION. What're chances of a few futuristic recipes or mebbe an OONA original dress pattern? I wait in ecstatic anticipation your doubtless devastating reply.

G. O. Smith is one of my pet peeves in that he wellnigh invariably takes an absolutely fascinating basic concept and forthwith carefully shields it with a creakingly ancient structure of wooden characterization and moldy plot device. Didactic, what?

Editorial squib at beginning of READER SPEAKS usually well worthwhile. Since improved teaching techniques and better filing systems for knowledge already acquired are purely stopgap devices, only solution I can see offhand is the long term one suggested by Heinlein in his best novel, BEYOND THIS HORIZON—the strengthening through breeding of favorible characteristics such as eidetic memory. Of course with our present lack of mastery of genetics, this would be only slightly less difficult than trying to invent Hamilton's KNOWLEDGE MACHINE or attempting to contact E. E. Smith's Arisians for a little advice.

Interesting to note intense discussions of Merritt & HPL by the readers since neither of these capable authors would have had much chance in submitting their best works to TWS, esp. the former, who would doubtless be instantaneously branded a feeble shadow of Kuttner.

On overall analysis, would rate TWS first in the field as far as range and variety of material presented and second insofar as quality is concerned. Still analyzing and rereading my letter, feel sure that marriage has definitely softened me. Congratulations.—*P. O. Box 633, Galveston, Texas.*

Congratulations yourself, Benedict Berry. Continuing up your letter from stern to stem, so we'd bounce Merritt, would we—or would we? Seriously, I don't think so for a moment. After all, we did run THE DRONE MAN and RHYTHM OF THE SPHERES, both Merritt-tales. That, it seems to us, is the answer. Most of his more ambitious stories ran far beyond our length limits.

Your eidetic genetics smack just a little of the master race, now alas, more or less extinct. And as for your request for a falsies-of-the-future pattern in connection with Oona and Jick, columnist Earl Wilson has more dope on that subject than anyone else.

Happy matrimony.

MESSAGE FROM MAGGIE
by Margaret McIntyre

Dear Editor: Congratulations on your return to civilian life. It's a great improvement. In fact, the whole mag has improved tree-menjusly, especially the Reader Freaks.

In re the latest ish. I think TRANS-GALACTIC TWINS was the best, altho it could have been even better if longer and more detailed. CONSULATE—very clever. ATMBSAB—so-so. However, would the crew of the first spaceship to Mars be very likely to be a bunch of drunken, careless bums such as these? I think it's more likely they will be a group of highly-trained, intelligent men, very carefully chosen; and also that neurotics like Spender would probably never be accepted for the trip in the first place. He was space-happy. AHEAD OF HIS TIME—very good, in fact wonderful. Glad Cummings resisted the temptation to write a happy ending, the story wouldn't have been half so impressive. THE METAL LARK—cute as a bug's ear. I get a big kick out of the Oona and Jick stories. Keep them coming. Rest of the stories—readable.

The editorials are very good, the latest one most timely. It's getting so that by the time you've had enough study and training to attain success in some field, your life is half over already. We need knowledge-caps!

I hope none of the fen waste their time writing rebuttals to Joe Celis. People with that swollen an ego are incurable. You and Einstein, huh, Joe?

A word on THE SLEEPER IS A REBEL. Wonderful, wonderful, marvelous—except for the ending! Having Perl reincarnated for his special benefit, and then the happy dash off into space—fooey! It soumds as though the author meant to have it end with Deker realizing that he was a misfit in any age; but the editor said, "Ah-ah! Got to have a happy ending!" The part where Deker realizes what he missed by going into his second sleep really tore your heart-strings, but the ending seemed false, somehow. Don't get me wrong—I'm all for the happy ending! But *not* when it detracts from the power of the story.

Why didn't you use the illo on page 11 for the cover? Done in the same blues and reens as the cover background was, it would have been perfectly magnificent! As it was, the cover would have been very good except for the girl.

Goodbye for now and a happy? Atomic Age to you, ex-Sarge.—*Box No. 1066 Y.M.C.A., Cincinnati, Ohio.*

It's been too long since we've heard from you, Maggie—and you have to sit down hard on Bradbury. Trying to ruin his yarn with logic, huh? Well, take it from us, it can be done—to his or almost anyone else's story.

The ending on THE SLEEPER, for your private files, Maggie (think Maggi's cuter than Maggie, don't you?) was Walton's own idea. Ye Ed. for once is not the culprit. He merely suggested that the tale be bought.

SLOW OPENING PLAY
by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: I have just spent the last thirty minutes trying to think of a good opening for this thing. Can't do it though, so I'll just start writing and hope something comes out.

The lead novel this issue was—well, just say I've read worse The Bud G. series for instance. The novelets were all good with "And The Moon Be Still As Bright" topping the list. In the shorts I'll pick "The Metal Lark" by St. Clair.

In regards to "Way of Escape" by Temple—it seems to me that after Raines had had the operation on his brain he would not only have stopped worrying about himself but would also have stopped worrying about everybody else. In other words he would not worry about a man drowning or about the future of our would. He wouldn't even have worried about getting back to the other world. In short, he wouldn't have worried at all.

Note to Mr. Joseph de Celis: Joe, ol' boy, you remind me of the fellow who set down on a hot stove when he was a child of one or two years. Of course he burnt his—well he burnt himself. Since then he refuses to sit down on anything. See what I mean?

I didn't get a chance to comment on the last issue, but if I had I would have said this: "Please, please, stop the Hogben stories right where they are. The first one was wonderful, the second was less so. I would hate to see them go the way of B. G. and Cap. Future.

"Humor is a funny thing." I say while running for the bomb shelter. I like a little humor now and then, even in stf, but by humor I refer to the type found in "The Irritated People", the Oona and Jick stories, "Jerry Was A Man" and Bradbury's great "Homecoming". I do not refer to the type found in the Tubby series, and "Donkeys to Boldpate" or whatever that thing was called. Enough said on that, besides I have to study calculus.—*400 East Eight St., Beardstown, Ill.*

This is no weather to be discussing hot stoves. It's hotter than h--l in here right now. The Hogben series seems to be finished (to your relief and our sorrow) unless HK comes up with another gem about his super-Jukes family.

And it was "Baldpate", not "Boldpate" in that Donkeys-to thing. Don't worry too much about Raines now. A little of him falling into anyone's life could conceivably be a drop too much.

STRAIGHT RATE
by Jan Melton

Dear Editor: Having been a rabid stf fan ever since you put out your June, '48, ish, I thought I'd write and tell you about it. Very interesting, although slightly confusing. Some of the words, that is. However, I contribute that to present and future scientific terms, of which I know little, if anything, about.

I shall now shock you to death, I hope not, by telling you what I think of TWS. This ish, of course.

1. The Trans-galactic Twins. . . . That was the best story in the book. I'll be generous and give it first place.
2. Consulate. . . . That, I believe, ranks second.
3. And the Moon Be Still As Bright. . . . That wasn't so good. The stuff about Mars was interesting but the plot was corny. Fifth place.
4. Ahead of His Time. . . . That ranks, and I'm not kidding, seventh. The corniest story in the book, next to—

5. Way of Escape. . . . Which is *the* corniest. Last place.

6. The Metal Lark. . . . Just barely beat out Ahead of His Time for sixth place.

7. The Knowledge Machine. . . . That was pretty good. It, now in fourth place, was just beaten by—

8. Space-Can. . . . Who finished third.

Still breathing? I must be slipping. Oh, well, I'll let you recover so I can torture you again next ish.—*4883 Iowa, Fresno, California.*

Well, we've got you pretty far down the list too, Jan.

GREETINGS—HE SAYS
by Ed Farnham

Greetings, Ed! Here I am again. Just finished with the June issue, and, even though I repeat myself, I say "Bergey has done it again!"

This is the second issue in succession that has had a perfect cover. I wish you could leave the printing off the cover. Pic like the one on this one are well worth framing—but the printing spoils it.

Mrs. St. Clair is coming right along, with better and better stories, and first thing you know, we'll have a writer in Margaret that will have me refusing to buy the mag if her story isn't in it. She is rapidly nearing the top.

The Trans-Galactic Twins was the best I've seen in a long time now, and TWS is just about Tops. I spent an enjoyable hour with Smith. Come again, George, you're always welcome.

Did not like *Ahead of His Time* at all, at all! The ending was too sad, and there is enough grief in this world without having it in our stories too. I know. I've laid away four in the last eight months.

Consulate was funny. Poor old Fatty! Where—*oh*

[*Turn page*]

where, dia those *lucky* Martians find those *STEAKS??!* Wish they'd pick *me* up!

Sorry to see that the Bud Gregory series is over. I liked 'em a lot.

—and *The Moon Be Still As Bright*. I think Bradbury did a floperoo on this one. *PTOOIE!!*

Way of Escape—Temple. Temple must have been watching the antics of a few motorists in a traffic jam, to get such a silly tale. *PTOOIE!!* Didn't get the point in that one . . . ? ?

The remaining two stories: N.C. (No comment.)

Can you do me a favor, and tell me the name and address of Fandom Speaks? Wish they would write to me.

Wish to say that I have dropped out of Science Fiction-International.

Hey you! You got your wish! The Mother-in-law read my letter and boy or boy—am *I* in the Dog House!!!! I had to eat some Hot Peppers for writing that letter!

I agree with James E. Hamilton, Jr. Bergey is tops over them all. I wonder how many of these Peanut Gallery Type critics could do as well or come within fifty million light-years of Bergey?? *NUTS* to the Bergey slammers!!

So 'we won't suffer by trying' if we send in a story, eh? OK!! When mine reaches your desk and you read it (?) through, remember—*you asked for it!* The *margins* may leave much to be desired, but I'll be D—d if I retype it! Took me two weeks to get it written!!

What's the matter with Desmond? He doesn't like *The Sleeper Was A Rebel*. Says it put him to sleep. Wow!! *The Perfect Night Watchman!*

DOPE!!

Thanks for printing that letter from South Africa. I am writing him and will mail his letter with this one.

To sum it all up, the June issue was another Humdinger.

TWS and SS seem to be running ahead of all the other mags on the market. I have to pay for my TWS in advance, or I don't get one, as they sell out almost before they hit the newsstand on my corner. Must be a lot of fict-fen in my neighborhood. Thanks again, Ed. for a swell issue!!—*"The Kennels," 1139 East 44th Street, Chicago 15, Illinois.*

So you really wound up in the kennels. eh? Maybe you do need a personal force field at that. Ed. Offhand we don't know the address of Fandom Speaks—but perhaps running your letter and the fact that we don't know the address will help to solve your problem. We sincerely hope so.

Well, here we are at the end of the first *Enlarged*, enlarged TWS. Praise Allah for the fact that this is one way we can put on extra weight without developing a fatty heart. Until December, then . . .

—THE EDITOR.

The FRYING PAN

A NEW FANZINE REVIEW

THIS is a new department, concerned with the activities of those indefatigable devotees of science fiction who give endless time, labor and expense to the production of perhaps two hundred amateur magazines per annum, explaining pros and cons and news and views of so-called organized fandom.

These magazines, being fan produced, are generally abbreviated to the title of fanzines. In general they represent an amazing achievement in voluntary publishing, an achievement properly recognized by the REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS in our companion magazine, STARTLING STORIES.

But there is a lighter side of the picture. Every so often, in their enthusiasm, amateur authors and editors get carried away with amusing and appealing results. Likewise, at more or less regular intervals, something goes terribly and amusingly wrong—in the form of feuds, collapses, misspellings or just plain typographical errors.

Without intending in any way to detract from the great and generally interesting attainments of the fanzines, we intend in this column to play a few of them each issue for laughs—laughs with, rather than at.

A Record of Catastrophe

For instance, the latest issue of VALHALLA, so-called "official organ of Young Fandom," published by Harley L. Sachs via Norm Storer at 1724 Mississippi Street, Lawrence, Kansas, is the most ghastly record

[*Turn page*]

of editorial catastrophe it has been our somewhat goose-fleshed privilege to witness.

Frankly announcing a state of emergency, Mr. Sachs describes the results of a Young Fandom "round Table" letter in which the Official Editor, "Jawge" Caldwell, announced his resignation. What followed shouldn't have happened to the hound of the Baskervilles, much less those of the famed Fallowfield Hunt.

Secretary Treasurer Del Grant. overcome by the Caldwell resignation, promptly resigned too. After discovering this, Ex-President Tom Jewett joined the thundering herd, along with contributing members Rex Ward, Jack Clements, John and Gordon Cockroft.

The only explanation offered, apparently, lay in a quotation from Resignee Jewett, who says in part—"Fandom is just like a woman: You may entertain her for awhile but after a time you know everything and it no longer is such exhilaration as before. You may dabble thereafter . . . but the unlimited thrill is gone."

Which brings us to a consideration, not only of Mr. Jewett's self-consciously chilling cynicism but of a fact which is of necessary vital concern to all those involved in fanzine publishing. Namely—the lads and lasses do it for kicks and. once the excitement fades, they find both their interest and contributions fading.

All we can say is that, praise Allah, we toil for for a professional magazine where, kicks or no, we and our colleagues and contributors must stay on the job or indulge in a long and non-voluntary fast.

The Half-Soon Horror

Our next journey is to the estimable ASTRA'S TOWER, a fanzine published by a valued and regular correspondent to our reader's columns, who resides in East Greenbush, New York, RFD #1. Miss Zimmer's fanzine, which is excellent and will be saved for straight review in SS, is no tale of catastrophe—but none the less there are a couple of things.

In a prose piece, paradoxically entitled "Ode on Imitations of an Immortal"—devoted to one J. Hall Thompson, who writes Lovecraftiana—the publisher mentions in paragraph six a something that came through her mimeograph machine as "the half-soon horror."

As a typographical error, if such it be, it has a certain mild interest. Certainly the universal replacement of the letter E by the letter O offers some interesting speculative possibilities. However, if not an error, it offers a sort of time-warp possibility that rivals the old and plaintive cry, "Where my umbrella is is darned seldom."

A half-soon horror has a nice and chilling sense of imminence.

Feminine Pseudonyms

Another point which at times puzzles us is this curious fad among lady science fiction fans toward the adoption of a cryptic if not cryptographic pseudonym. On the West Coast a girl who calls herself merely "Tigrina" has long been a fanactivist and fanzine contributor, along with one who has long passed as "Morojo" (her name is Myrtle Douglas and she is an Esperantist, so possibly there is reason in her case). Miss Zimmer calls herself "Astra," which is perfectly okay since she seems to like it that way.

But in her fanzine, another of our long time correspondents, a young miss named Billie Lee Randolph, has just adopted the pseudonym of "Shalimar." Brother—if she ever gets dishpan hands! Remember how the song went?

Then there is a tiny fanzine called STFANATIC, published by Hugh McInnis, c/o YMCA, Warren, Arkansas. In a department entitled "Reviews of Books You Don't Often See" he includes "The Time Machine" by H. G. Wells.

We only wish he had been looking at *that* story, rather than yarns by authors too often of caliber far below the late Mr. Wells. The time-travel concept has become almost a basic in science fiction, amateur and professional. Once in awhile we'd like to climb into one ourselves and go somewhere —no, anywhere—long, long away, to say nothing of far ago.

—THE EDITOR

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

LIFE EVERLASTING AND OTHER TALES OF SCIENCE, FANTASY AND HORROR by David H. Keller, M.D. (The Avalon Company, Newark, New Jersey).

Another fantasy publishing house is born, headed by Sam Moskowitz and Will Sykora, with this collection of long and short stories by one of the old masters of modern science fiction. The bulk of the volume is taken up by Dr. Keller's short novel, LIFE EVER-

LASTING, whose theme is the age-old idea that certain human factors might find the sterile Utopia of perfect health, charm and spirit an appalling substitute for the challenge of life as it is, grief and all.

Dr. Keller's catalyst is a chap named Biddle, who, in an effort to cure his ailing child, stumbles upon a universal panacea which, outside of converting all humans into super Mellon's Food babies, confers upon them eternal life if they look both ways when crossing the street.

The story is absorbing despite the fact that it treads such a well-worn street and the doctor's considerable fund of medical and scientific lore is much in evidence. In LIFE EVERLASTING, as in several of the other stories included in the volume, it seems to us that the author's one apparent weakness is one of springing on the reader, without any preparation, bland assumptions of staggering import which tend to leave him (the reader) gasping for breath.

The shorter entries include, among others, that extremely effective fantasy, THE BONELESS HORROR, THE THING IN THE CELLAR, THE FACE IN THE MIRROR and THE CEREBRAL LIBRARY, all of which seemed to us, in their various ways, provocative reading. The book is mercifully shy of

those half-baked illustrations which, to date, have been the bane of fantasy publishing.

THE KEY TO THE GREAT GATE by Hinko Gottlieb (Simon & Schuster, New York).

One of the most remarkable novels we have yet to read, this story stands squarely athwart the much discussed borderline between fantasy and science fiction. Translated from the German by Fred Bolman and Ruth Morris, it is pure fantasy in that its basis is the daydreaming of Mr. Gottlieb while jailed with two other unfortunate victims of Nazi oppression in a Vienna prison.

Into this much too-tight little world comes a fourth character, an amazing Polish gentleman named Tarnopolski, who confounds cellmates, guards and prison officials alike by producing at need or whim everything from pate de fois gras and champagne to a piano and a loaded field piece apparently out of nowhere.

Tarnopolski, it develops, has mastered certain secrets of the space-time continuum that

[*Turn page*]

Next Issue's Headliners

THE GHOST PLANET

A Novel by MURRAY LEINSTER

•

240,000 MILES STRAIGHT UP

A Novelet by L. RON HUBBARD

•

FRUITS OF THE AGATHON

By CHARLES L. HARNESS

give him his amazing powers—at this point the book is pure stf—and is using them with a very definite purpose. Before he is finished, he has driven the hated Lieutenant Weichselbraun completely off his rocker, has blasted a hole through several prison floors to the woman's portion of the jail and has, in one way or another, done much to make life more bearable for his fellow inmates. The conclusion is much too good to reveal here but it is as startling, as wryly philosophical and as unexpected as is the rest of this grand job.

No one who reads THE KEY TO THE GREAT GATE is apt to forget it quickly.

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN by A. E. van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull (Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc., Los Angeles).

A collection of six stories divided evenly as to authorship between the two members of this married duet of authors. All of the stories, as the title reveals, deal with the horrible, the fantastic, even impinge heavily upon the Gothic.

Of them we liked best THE SEA THING by Mr. van Vogt, first story in the volume, THE ULTIMATE WISH by Miss Hull and THE WITCH by Mr. van Vogt. However, you can take your choice for all have plenty of grisly schmaltz, are generally well if not brilliantly written and will curl anyone's

hair without the aid of a Toni Wave. The illustrations of Roy Hunt and Neil Austin are markedly better than those of Charles McNutt.

THE FOX WOMAN by A. Merritt and THE BLUE PAGODA by Hannes Bok (New Collectors Group, New York).

Mr. Bok has here attempted to complete, in the second portion of this split feature, one of the late A. Merritt's unfinished novels and has, for the most part, done a workmanlike job. The first part of the story, as conceived by Mr. Merritt, tells of mystery and magic and the deepest dyed villainy in the interior of China, with strange ladies-into-foxes of appalling powers taking over body, soul and upbringing of the daughter of a murdered New York millionaire.

Bok picks up the tale when the girl has grown and come to America to claim revenge on the uncle who slew her sire and usurped her fortune—and what happens to the fox-girl's enemies shouldn't happen to a vixen, much less a group of folk imbedded in the suave decadence of a somewhat florid upper East Side existence.

Somewhere along the line, we fear, Bok has lost the unique magic overtones of Mr. Merritt and the story degenerates into a ding-dong mystery slugging match with eerie trappings. But it's exciting going for all that despite a small type size that almost demands a reading glass.

Bok's illustrations, while occasionally eclectic in origin, are extremely effective—far more so that his prose in this case. All in all, a good job. —THE EDITOR.

WILD TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH

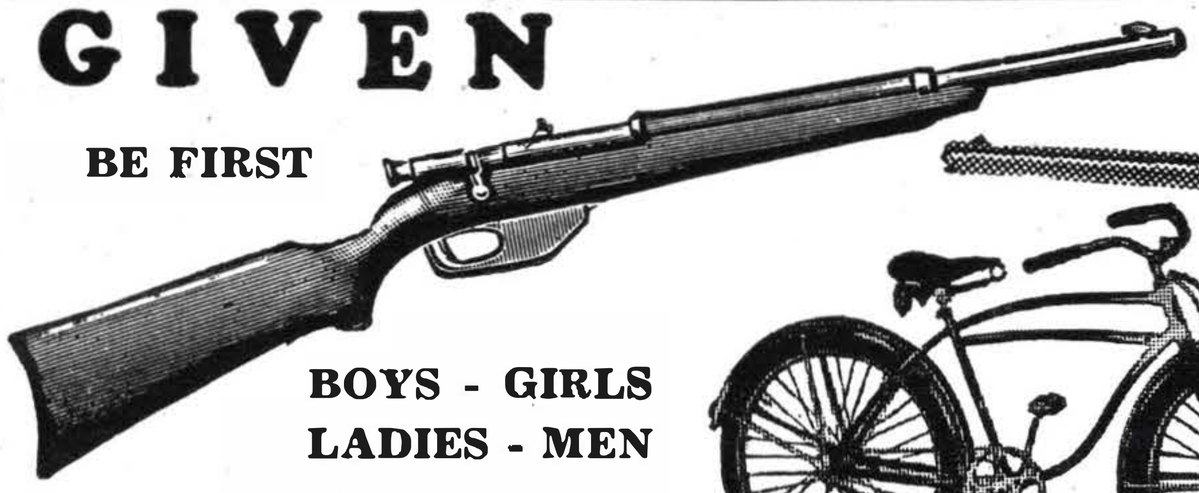
A Stalwart Texan Rides into an Ambush

THEY surged across the wilderness to stake out claims in the new Dakota ranges. With their goal almost in sight the crooked San Saba betrayed the outfit and murdered its leader. And as young Tom Gillette prepared for his grim, revengeful manhunt, he faced an ambush of death. Swift action and thrills a-plenty cram the pages of "Free Grass," an adventure-packed novel by Ernest Haycox.

Don't miss this Popular Library reprint of a best-seller by one of the top Western writers of our time. Check the list below for other good reading, too. Page for page, word for word, they're the same books that sold in the original editions for $2.00 or more.

GIVEN

BE FIRST



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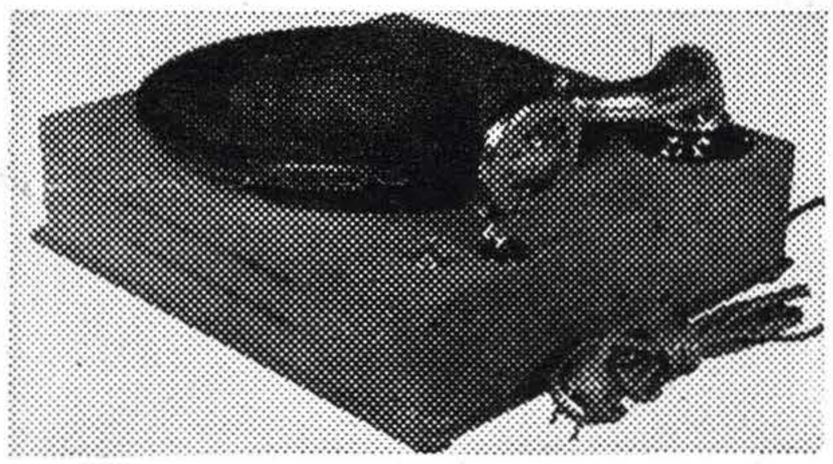

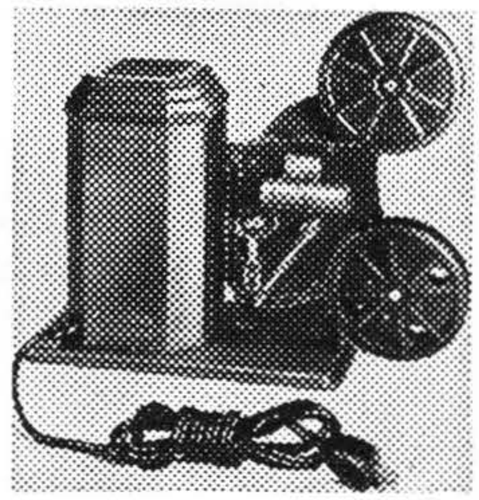

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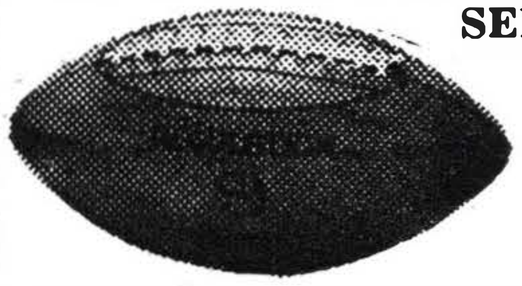

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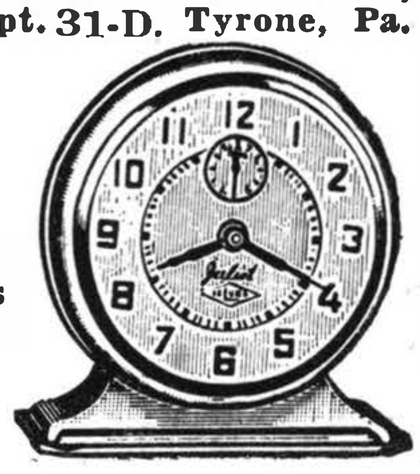

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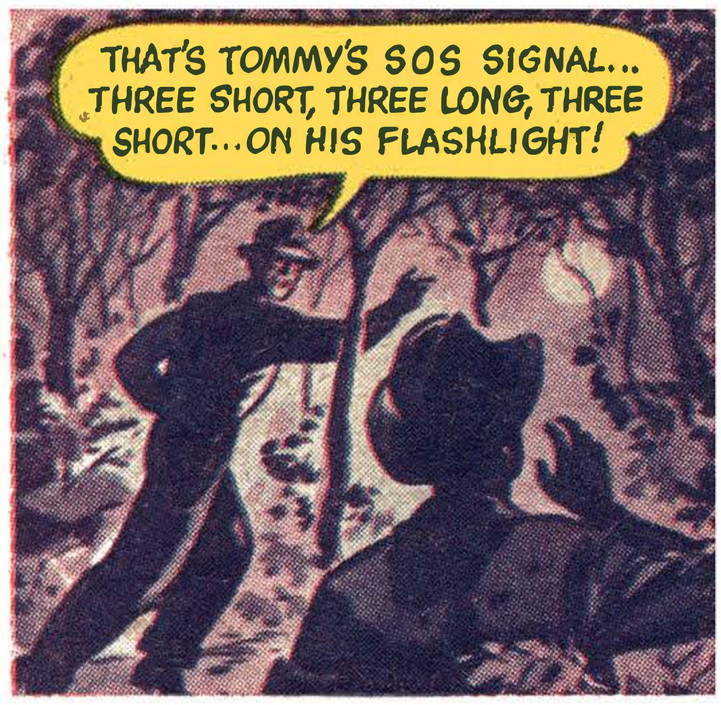

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