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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

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He was falling directly into the storm.

It was a glory-mad kid who jumped that ship, to be the first Earthman ever to set foot on a planet of another star. It was a hardened man who found the ship again . . .

LAST STAND

COMPLETE NOVEL

by Algis Budrys

illustrated by KELLY FREAS

IT WAS DIM and somehow lonely in the auxiliary lock. For one moment, Cort Tompkins felt his nerve begin to go, but he clamped a quick hold on the edgy feeling. He tightened his chute straps with decisive finality; he was going to jump.

He waited for the first sound of atmosphere frictioning on the

ship's hull, and through the silence that had not yet been broken by that all-important high moan, he listened for steps in the companionway behind the lock's inner hatch. If the ship's officers found him now . . .

He wondered what his superior, the Chief Engineer, was doing about locating him, and grinned

derisively. The Chief Engineer could go ream his wastepipes; and the Captain too, for that matter. He'd told them so, more than once.

Cort Tompkins chuckled; they'd had to stand there and take it, and like it.

He checked the survival kit strapped to his chest. He had food and water for three days, a compass, a battery torch, a knife, a light tent, a first-aid kit, and a Kesley sidearm. The planet's air was breathable, as they'd found out long ago by spectroscopic analysis, and the world had an extensive agrarian population—which meant that most natural menaces had been wiped out. He'd be taking a chance, of course, on such things as bacteria and insect poisons, but it was worth it.

He heard the air begin to thicken around the ship as it edged down into atmosphere, and chuckled again.

Cort Tompkins was going to be the first Earthman ever to set foot on a planet of another star, and the Captain could damn well lump it—the Captain, the Chief Engineer, and the expedition's directors, too. They'd taken a green kid aboard the first interstellar ship, after filling his head with glamorous ideas, and then expected him to stick to a routine job for ten years without once putting up a squawk. They expected him to re-

act to the same sentimental slush at the end of that ten years as he had at the beginning, and they turned purple if he so much as said he didn't.

Well, they hadn't gotten away with it. Tompkins could make an engine sing duets with him, and that gave him the right to spit in anybody's eye. And if the Captain thought he could finally slap on the discipline when the ship was safely down on Alpha Centauri II...

Tompkins lifted a corner of his lip in a wolfish grin, and pushed the stud that opened the outer hatch. He'd be coming down pretty far from the ship, but he'd be coming down *first*, and afterwards the Captain could go up a stump. Cortney Tompkins would have his name in the history books, and the expedition's director—who'd been grooming himself for that spot—would have a very red face for his pains.

He knew the opened hatch was activating alarms on the master control board. If he didn't move soon, the lock controls would be over-ridden from the master board, and the hatch would slap shut. This was no time to be standing around with his thumb in his mouth.

He got as far back in the lock as he could, fighting the suck of air rushing past the hatch. Then he jumped forward, diving, and the kick of his legs, combined with the suction, carried him far away

from the ship's descending flank, clear of the fountaining jet throats. He dropped like a stone, gaining on the ship with every second of free fall, while she lowered herself slowly.

He thumbed his nose at her. Then he looked down and saw the storm waiting for both of them below, and turned pale.

AS A WHOLE, the mass of the storm turned furiously clockwise, but clouds boiled up in all directions within its structure, all a greasy gray color. Even at his altitude, Tompkins could make out rippled flashes of lightning clashing downward through the clouds. There was no question of the ship's pilots not seeing it by now, but the planet was small enough so that the entire deadly thing had been able to hide below the horizon and then rumble into the ship's downward track when it was far too late to re-set course. The ship was committed—she couldn't climb back out of the atmosphere without burning more fuel than she could afford. She had to keep going down, into the wild turbulence that spun just a little below Tompkins, now, as he fell toward it.

There was nothing *he* could do but pray that the ship could somehow be set down, the pilots holding her vertical despite the smashing horizontal gusts. If she landed on her side, there was no telling

how badly she might be damaged.

Almost sick, he fell into the storm, and before it thickened around him too deeply for vision to penetrate, he saw the ship lurch as she struck the top layer of hurtling air. Then he was blind and deaf, soaked in icy rain, battered by thunder, his clothes flapping violently where they were not plastered to him by the wind and the velocity of his fall. He tried desperately to see down to the ground, hoping he could get his chute out in time, praying the wind wouldn't cartwheel him once it opened.

He landed, finally, in a tangle of shrubbery that slashed him painfully but superficially, while it broke the impact of his fall. He hit the release catch and watched the chute billow away like all the frightened ghosts of Earth, and wondered how the ship was making out. While the storm bludgeoned him, he forgot, for the time, that he was the first Earthman to stand under an alien sun.

II

HE CLUNG to the ground while the storm rose in force, his numbed senses functioning just well enough for him to know he was lying with his fingers sunk into a soft but tough variety of moss. Then the combination of hyper-excitement and muscular battering overcame everything else, and Cort Tompkins

either fell asleep or lost consciousness.

He awoke feeling miserably cold, soaked to the skin, the moss as uncomfortable as a wet sponge to lie on. It was daylight, with the sun above the horizon by what would have been an hour's distance on Earth. He sat up, wiping his face and shivering.

The storm was gone, with nothing left to mark it but the moisture that sparkled from every shrub and weed, and scattered bits of torn shrubbery. Before he even began to think things out, he pulled off his clammy clothing, got off the moss onto a patch of dry ground, and hung the clothes on bushes to dry. His survival kit had come through its battering without a scratch, as it had been designed to do, and he dug into it for food while he trotted in place, trying to get some warmth into his body. Once Cort had time to think systematically, he piled up some branches, dried them with the Kesley's wide-aperture beam, and then needled them into flame. With the aid of fire, his clothes were dry in a short while; he got into them hastily, his skin loosening to the touch of warm fabric. Between the fire and the food, and the added warmth of the rising sun, he began to feel human.

And feeling human—and thinking of it in those terms—removed Tompkins' concentration from the problem of immediate comfort

to the much larger one which now faced him.

He had expected, of course, to be able to tell where the ship had landed; he had no other way of finding it.

He was in trouble, and at the moment he felt neither as though he'd made history or been particularly bright.

Cort looked around him, and cursed.

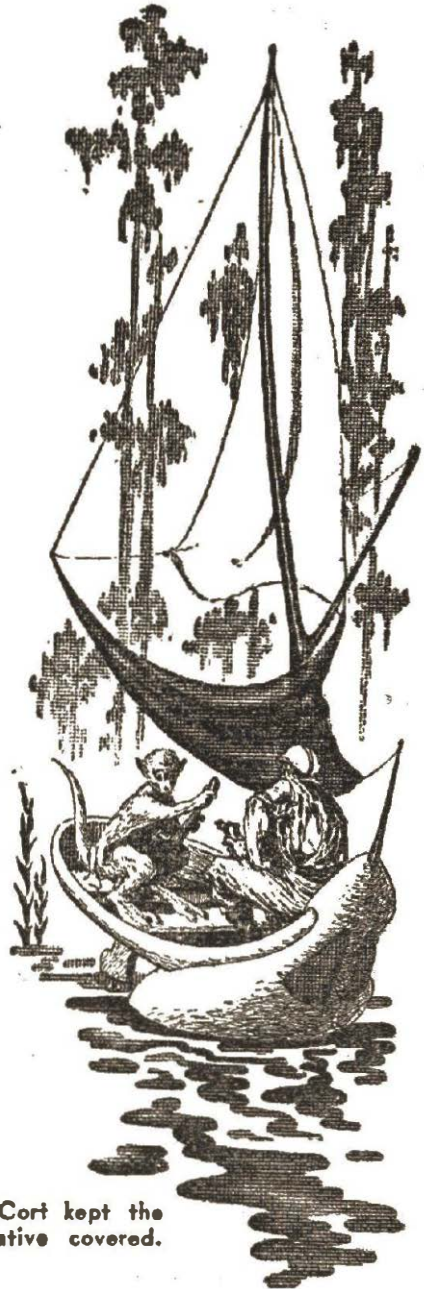
He'd landed in hilly country, though his particular location seemed to be the upper flank of a shallow vale. The countryside, of course, looked alien, though not by virtue of any purple vegetation or six-legged cattle, either. The moss and bushes were as much a green color as any he'd seen on Earth, and he was the only living thing within his range of vision. But the hills were too rounded, and the vegetation too twisted by foreign wind-velocities. Nothing had quite grown in this shape on Earth, nor had storms ever scoured a countryside so smooth. The valley and the hills around it looked as though they fought tooth-and-nail for every shoot of green, and every outcropping of stone.

There was no peace with Nature in this valley, nor had there ever been. And this was not the high mountains, where Tompkins might have expected something of the sort. The mountains hulked on the horizon to his right, gray and squat, with no needle-spires of

stone or sharp declivities. He noted with a twitch of his thinning mouth that even though it had seemed to be the Summer season in this part of the world, those mountains were heavy with snow.

The sun had advanced a considerable distance—twice as fast as Earth's sun would have—and now all the moisture of the rain burst into dank mist. It rose in sheets, piling up into banks as Cort watched it, and in another moment the clammy tide surrounded him, filling his clothes and making his breathing uncomfortable. He cursed himself again and piled more wood on the fire, which smoked heavily because he'd neglected to dry it first. He became lost—with almost disquieting speed—in a highly restricted world of barely-penetrable mist, and ground-hugging wood smoke which not only irritated him but kept him from getting as close to the fire as he would have liked.

AFTER about a half-hour of sitting glumly on a rock, Tompkins thought he noticed a lightening in the mist, and shortly thereafter the sun completed the burn-off, but not without first making him feel as though he'd been through a steam bath. It was now positively hot, and he peeled off his jacket, cursing himself once more—this time for having worn coveralls instead of a two-piece outfit, which would have let him



Cort kept the native covered.

strip to the waist. He gave the valley another short inspection, found that nothing had changed materially, and returned to the problem of locating the ship.

To begin with, he had no idea of where it was—or, rather, of how far away it ought to be, and in which direction. He suspected that its relative position to him would still be the same as it had been when he jumped—that is, behind him. The storm, blowing him before it in his parachute, would have magnified the separation considerably, but the wind had not carried him off at an angle. At least, it had not during the brief while he had still been able to see the ship—but it was impossible to determine whether that had continued to be true. Cort decided quickly that his best course would be to assume that he had not veered off; there would be time enough for further speculation if he arrived where he finally decided the ship ought to be, and found it was not there.

His biggest problem, at the moment, was deciding where "behind him" was. The storm had both blinded and spun him out of all reference to any direction, relative or absolute, and his first concern now was to re-establish his relative line of direction with the ship.

Well, since he'd already decided to assume that the wind had blown him directly away from the ship,

then the direction of the wind ought to lie along the same line as an imaginary line drawn between him and the ship. Or rather, the thought struck him, between him and the ship's imagined position.

It made for far too much imagination for comfort. Tompkins grimaced and looked around him sourly.

All right, assume all that. There was still the problem of determining what the wind's direction had been, and that was a pretty one in itself. He'd landed in a heap, rolled over Lord knew how many times, been dragged some more, and finally, had already moved about so much since awakening that he was hopelessly disoriented.

For a moment, Cort considered simply striking out at random, proceeding in a straight line until he found some help or dropped. There must be some habitation within walking distance, and though he did not enjoy the thought of contact with whatever it was that peopled this planet, it was better than becoming hopelessly lost and dying miserably.

He remembered the parachute with more gratitude than any collection of fabric had a right to expect. He'd released it as soon as he could find the breath to, and the wind had carried it away. There was now the problem of locating it, establishing a line between it and his original moss

patch, and then following that line back the way the wind had blown him. He'd either locate the ship eventually, or else run into terrain which precluded its having landed anywhere farther along the line. At that point, of course, Tompkins would have something else to think about—quite a bit, as a matter of fact. But, for the present, he at least had a course of action, and a fair chance of success.

He stood up and began looking for the parachute. Already, he could notice himself feeling better—almost like the old Cort Tompkins.

III

IT TOOK him the rest of the short day to locate the parachute. It was invisible from the moss patch—and he'd had a bad moment at finding that out—but he'd hit on the idea of marking the patch with a rag tied around the tip of a sapling driven into the ground. After that, Cort was free to make quartering casts in all directions, stopping at each point of high ground for a complete circular inspection. He finally caught a glimpse of glimmering white, and got to it as fast as he could.

The chute had snagged on some thorny bushes, and was in very bad condition. A number of the cloth ribbons which composed it

were torn, and the rain had pounded most of it into the soil. He'd been hopeful of salvaging it as a whole, with an eye to using it as a sail if he had to cross water—but that had been a dubious scheme in the first place. He contented himself with cutting as many of the tough shroud lines as he could bundle compactly. He worked one length of ribbon out of the webbing—for use as bandages, or for anything else that might come along—and then took a compass bearing on the moss patch. The bearing, of course, depended on a completely arbitrary "North," but at least the needle held steady on *some* sort of magnetic pole, which was all he required.

He did not, at the moment, give a damn whether the native population would have described his now established line of march as "glop by-ugh-ugh," rather than the west-by-northwest which he called it. That was none of Cort Tompkins' affair, and, if he were smart enough, would continue not to be. Once he got back to the ship, and had a crew to back him up, he was ready for all possible fraternization with any beings this world might bear. For the present, the fewer alien contacts, the better. He got back to the moss patch just as night settled down completely, set up his tent on the collapsible rods in his survival kit, and tried to go to sleep.

He was not successful, at first.

For one thing, though he hadn't looked at his watch when he woke, he doubted if he'd been awake more than eight or nine hours. He'd only eaten twice, and wasn't hungry now.

This was going to be a problem, he realized. The planet apparently had something like a fifteen-hour day, while Cort's metabolism was geared to the twenty-four hour cycle of the ship. This meant that sometime about two hours after sunrise, when he ought to be well on his way, he'd start getting sleepy. Then, sixteen hours after next sunset—he'd be sleepy again. That would be four or five hours past the *following* sunset, and he'd be sleepy again just as the sun came up for the "day" after the day-after-tomorrow.

Thoroughly mired in this semantic morass, Cort tossed fitfully for several hours, and then woke up to the blaze of sunlight through the tent, somewhat surprised to discover that he'd forgotten five hours' sleep. Apparently, he'd been more tired than he thought.

WORKING quickly, he packed his tent, settled the survival kit between his shoulders, strapped his compass top his wrist above watch, where he could read it easily, and began his walk.

He kept to it single-mindedly, treating his problem as a simple case of getting from here to there,

without bringing in any extraneous considerations. He left the valley at about mid-day, topped a knoll of higher ground, and worked his way down the slope of the next vale. The scraggled shrubbery had lost something of its unfamiliarity, and Cort treated it simply as a series of obstacles which he got through or around without serious difficulty.

He was usually able to keep his entire horizon in sight, and maintained a good walking pace. His leg muscles were holding up well, considering the softness that ship's gravity had given them. He had no idea of the actual strength of the planet's gravity, but he suspected it was significantly lighter than Earth's. There was some strain which might simply be the product of more extensive walking than the ship's decks had allowed. In any case, he was fairly comfortable.

At nightfall, Tompkins camped beside the brook which distinguished this valley from the one he'd left. He used the water without hesitation, since the storm's rain had already proven itself harmless. It had a faintly metallic taste, but so had the water in the ship's tanks, until he'd gotten used to it.

He fell asleep shortly, woke up well after dawn, and was on his way again.

He seemed to be gradually working his way down to lower ground, instead of more or less maintaining his altitude above sea-level,

as he'd thought at first he would. Apparently, he hadn't been able to estimate the lay of the land correctly.

Well, that wasn't exactly his technical specialty in the first place. Actually, in the back of his mind he'd expected to have more trouble than this. It had been ten years since he'd walked a planetary surface, and a seventeen-year-old boy's memories of a settled and civilized Earth were not likely to produce the experience required by a man lost on a completely uncharted world ten years later.

What was bothering him was his food supply. He'd begun with supplies for three days, Terrestrial. Water was no longer a problem, thank God, but he'd been down here for three planetary days—which meant that he had full rations for a little over one more Terrestrial day. He could fall back on half-rations, particularly since he had ample water, but that meant that in three more planetary days he'd be in serious trouble.

There was absolutely no game in this country. Trying to set up some sort of an analogy with Earth, Cort had expected at least to come across small game—birds at any rate. But he couldn't recall seeing any kind of bird, even in flight, and the moss and shrubs didn't seem to shelter so much as a mouse.

He had to admit to himself that he'd expected, at the outset, to

find the ship before his food ran out. He might have planned on the basis of having as much time as he needed, but subconsciously he'd believed—as he'd had to—that his calculations were good enough to get him to the ship in time.

He still believed it, by God, but he was finding it harder to do so with every bite he took.

And supposing he did run across game, and managed to knock it down with his Kesley? How did he know it was edible? There were more inedible animals on Earth than there were edible ones—at least, without elaborate preparation. What was this planet going to offer him?

He set his tent up for the night and lay awake for quite a while, trying to resolve that problem. Then, in the morning, when he finally noticed that the sun was rising from a highly unexpected angle, he discovered that his compass needle was pointing, not at his arbitrary north but at his wrist-watch.

IV

TOMPKINS sat quite a long while in front of his tent, his brain functioning with paralyzed slowness. He found himself having to fight his eyes free of his boot-toes, or of some shrub, or off his piled-up kit, knowing that if he did not he would fall into long periods of simply staring at the things, dully. Finally he poured

some coffee powder into a canteen cup full of water, boiled it with his Kesley, and gulped the scalding mess as fast as he could. The pain, streaking down his throat and alimentary canal, jabbed some life into his reflexes, and he found that, more than the caffeine stimulation he'd expected, the warmth in his stomach was relaxing his solar plexus, which had knotted convulsively at the shock. By the time the sun was at its noon position, Cort was functioning fairly well again.

The compass seemed to be all right, once he'd gotten it off his wrist. He was cheered by that; it was enough to make up for the discovery that he was well east of his landing. But he did not know how far east, nor how much forward progress he had made. There was no way for him to intersect his previously-established line—at least, none of which he knew—and, short of back-tracking to that first valley, re-establishing the line, and starting all over again, Tompkins could think of no way, now, to navigate himself to the ship unaided. And he had far from enough food for that.

He felt well enough, he noted wryly, to be able to stand up under the cursing he gave himself, but that was about as much as he could say for his state of mind. Cort was in far more serious trouble now than he had been, and knew he was likely to see the situation worsen

before it even began to get better.

He climbed up on a fairly high rock and stared down the fall of the hills at the plains country beyond. It seemed to be less aridly hostile, at least, than these hills. He was unable to make out very many details, but most of the landscape seemed to be overgrown, with occasional clearings. There were straggling humps in the greenery that indicated taller trees lining waterways. The hills on which Tompkins stood, and the mountains they rose toward, seemed to curve forward on either side of him. He tried to remember his Terrestrial geography well enough to decide if there was any possible information for him there, but the best Cort could do was tentatively to decide that these mountains might be part of a chain roughly paralleling a seacoast. What he saw below him, then, would be a coastal plain, though he saw no glint of broad water even at the very top of the horizon.

A coastal plain almost certainly meant settlements of some kind, but they, of course, would be invisible from here.

He thought of the glib announcement, throughout the ship, that this world was obviously under extensive agricultural cultivation. Probably, it was on the average, but not in this particular pocket, and Cort Tompkins was most definitely in this particular pocket.

He checked his Kesley thorough-

ly. He was going to have to go down into that green foliage, and there'd be game—possibly, far too much game. He wished that life on the ship had permitted extensive practice. He could probably hit a sitting target without much trouble—particularly since the Kesley's lethal beam had a two-foot diameter at a hundred yards—but a snap shot at something that came hurtling out from behind a tree might be quite another matter.

Well, at least he had the satisfaction of knowing that he'd be dead of old age before the charge that solidly filled the gun's butt was exhausted.

He re-packed his kit and strapped it on. Taking a compass bearing that would get him to the nearest river—and this time strapping the compass to his right wrist—he began his descent to the plain. There was nothing for it. He'd have to find game, and he'd have to find a native of some sort. The ship certainly hadn't just set down and gone into hibernation; the expedition would be moving, and if this world had any kind of communications network at all, he'd be able to find out where the big-fella sky-devils—or whatever they'd be called, were.

V

AS A MATTER of fact, Cort decided as he lowered himself down the steep face of

the last of the hills, he was probably better off on this track than he had been before. Knocking the shroud line loose from its snubbing up the slope with a flick of the Kesley, he gathered in the coils of line, looped them over his shoulder, and began to walk into the thick growth of the plain. The smallest error in his original calculations, even if he'd kept to them, would have been so magnified after four or five days of travel that the ship's actual position might have been well over the horizon from where she ought to be.

Moreover—and now he was free to consider something he'd consciously avoided—there was no telling what kind of maneuvering on the pilots' parts had been required by the storm. His figuring in regard to the ship's originally-decided landing site might have been correct enough, but there was no telling where her pilots had eventually put her. Despite the fact that he'd now have to establish communications with some native, his new plan seemed to be a far more sound one than his first.

Now that he'd faced the idea squarely, he had no doubt whatsoever that he could handle any kind of inhabitant this world might have.

But, for the moment, there were no natives, and Tompkins walked along steadily, at a measureably

slower pace than in the high, open country, but nevertheless making good progress. He stopped to check his compass frequently, and held firmly to his previously set line of march.

The plains growth consisted almost entirely of stumpy trees, short, but tall enough to interlace the air overhead, so that he was walking in a watery-green tunnel with decaying foliage for a floor. There was considerable undergrowth, most of it apparently consisting of short saplings seeded by the bigger trees, and the usual subsidiary growth of any thick forest—fungus, lichens, and the like. He was unable to see more than fifty feet to any side of him, but then, there was nothing to see, and the ship had certainly not been landed anywhere near here.

He heard a sudden chatter of bird cries and stopped to look about curiously. He saw a thick flock of birds—about the size of pigeons, but with far narrower wings—clustering around a dark mass of foliage. They were hopping in and out along the branches of a large tree, slipping out of sight momentarily between masses of leaves, then re-appearing.

Well, now was as good a time to find out as any. He pulled out his Kesley, set it at wide aperture, pointed it at the greatest concentration of birds, and fired.

Pandemonium broke loose overhead. Stunned birds fluttered out

of the sky like feathered rain, but then there was a wild thrashing in the dark foliage, and something big and shadowy launched itself at the ground, mooring with pain.

Tompkins flung himself backward, fumbling at the Kesley's aperture setting. The thing landed on the ground with a flurry, then sprang into the air again, away from him. He had time to see that it was some kind of big kangaroo, with enormous hind feet, a thick tail, and a pear-shaped body with extremely loose skin. Then, as it reached the apex of its long spring away from him, its forelimbs stretched out from its shoulders like spars, and he saw that the loose skin had been a collapsed flap of membrane that gave the beast a very respectable ability to glide. Now he noticed that its underside was a mottling of light and dark green, and that one of the birds, possibly stunned into that position, was still clinging to its back, its beak buried in the short fur.

Before Cort could take aim at it, it had hit the ground again, sprung, and glided farther. He fired and missed, and then it was out of range and practically out of sight, gliding farther and farther after each spring as it gathered speed, its under-fur blending with the foliage which it was barely skimming under, the sound of its crashing landings and takeoffs

diminishing along the green and brown colonnade of the trees.

SHAKEN, Tompkins re-holstered his sidearm and walked over to one of the fallen birds. It still had some sort of insect in its beak. Cort would have been hard put to it to recognize "symbiosis" as a term, but he knew the phenomenon when he saw it. He grunted thoughtfully and took a closer look at the insect. It was a parasite, without much doubt. He wondered if one of them would find a human being a suitable host.

Cort flicked the bug away finally, and examined the narrow-winged pigeon, which was heavier than he'd expected. But his standards of mass relationships were geared to ship-gravity foremost, and, dimly, to Earth. He doubted very much if this bird could have flown on Earth—and he was positive that nothing as big as that terrified animal could have behaved so spectacularly.

But, in any case, the bird's present intended function had nothing to do with flying. He looked at it doubtfully for a while longer, but there was only one possible test of its edibility. He killed, plucked, and cleaned it, and then roasted it over a small fire on a spit he'd rigged out of his collapsed tentpoles. Finally, he could no longer deny that the bird was as ready as it was ever going to be. Then he smelled the roasted flesh,

and could find nothing wrong. At last, he touched it with his tongue. Aside from a decided layer of soot, it tasted as well as unbasted fowl could be expected to.

He ate it cautiously, but he ate all of it. There was an unfamiliar taste, which he'd expected, but a not-unpleasant one. Moreover, the food in the survival kit had a tendency to taste like cotton after a month or two of aging, and the kits had been stocked a full six-months ago, when the ship first definitely learned it would be possible for men to survive on the planet. Cort was grateful, too, at not having to swallow wholesale lots of water after the meal in order to fill his stomach.

It was growing dark, and his metabolism, which had been rapidly adjusting itself to a fifteen-hour cycle, was making him sleepy. He pitched his tent—cursing at the lack of foresight which had made the tentpoles almost too hot to touch—and was soon asleep, his stomach rumbling a little, but not alarmingly.

VI

HE AWOKE in the morning without feeling extraordinary distress; however, "extraordinary" is a word with shades of meaning. Ship-board fare had been mainly synthetic, and the bird was the first natural food Tompkins' digestive processes had en-

countered in something like ten years. His progress during the day was slow, punctuated by numerous delays; but, by nightfall, he was feeling almost normal, and the following day he knocked down another covey—this time without startling one of the flying kangaroos. They seemed to be fairly rare—he'd seen none since the first, and he decided that the kangaroo-bird relationship was not a sort of casual accomodation. The quasi-pigeons swarmed through the woods, interspersed with other species, and seemed to thrive on all kinds of insect life.

He picked out the plumpest birds in the stunned lot, cooked them wholesale, and ate two while tucking the others into his rapidly emptying kit. His survival rations were almost totally gone, and, providing he could get himself used to them, the birds were a far from unwelcome replenishment.

By the following day—with his digestion much improved over its previous effort—he reached the bank of a river, and felt a certain pride in the fact that he hadn't fouled up his navigation a second time. He pitched his tent in a clearing near the water, ate some of his cold birds, and tried to decide whether to walk downstream or to build a raft. Cort Tompkins knew nothing about rafts, or about rivers. He might run into rapids with a craft that would break apart under him, or do something equally dan-

gerous in his ignorance. On the other hand, it looked as if it was going to be a long walk to the nearest native.

He considered the question for some time. The raft was a gamble—but almost any kind of adventuring was a gamble, with no possibility of help if he got into trouble. Still—it was bound to be not only easier but faster than walking, and he was becoming increasingly worried about being separated from the ship so long.

That train of thought led to a more thorough examination of his general situation.

In the first place, he'd either been seen dropping away from the ship or he hadn't. One way, he'd simply have been marked off as dead—either a suicide or the victim of some complicated accident. The other was, depending on whether they'd seen his parachute open or not, he was known to have jumped of his own free will, either, again, with the intention of killing himself—but this was highly unlikely—or else with exactly the intentions that he'd had. And no matter how you looked at it, the Captain either considered him dead, or, if alive, certainly not worth detaching even one of the Expedition's valuable helicopters in what could very well be a wild-goose-chase of a search for him.

SOMETHING went skimming through the foliage at the clear-

ing's edge just as he came to that decision, and he jumped before he realized it was probably only one of the flying kangaroos, off on some flying kangaroo errand.

He realized with an abrupt sting of complicated emotion that he desperately wanted to get back to the ship. He laughed at himself in another moment, scornfully telling himself that he was no longer a small boy out on his first overnight camping trip and desperately homesick.

Nevertheless, it was true. For the first time since he'd landed, he was thinking of the ship as something more than a place where Cort Tompkins would be more comfortable. It had become, in his mind, a lost, lonely Earthman's refuge.

He'd build that raft first thing in the morning, he told himself as he fell asleep.

VII

THE TWITTERING of mock-pigeons woke him in the first light of morning. He crawled out of his tent to discover that the woods all around his clearing were full of them, and he raised his eyebrows at the dark clumps of what looked like foliage, thickly concentrated in the trees on each side of the river. Apparently, a whole herd of the kangaroos had browsed into his territory during the night. Cort shrugged up at them

as he ate breakfast, and even made sure he did it quietly enough with as few sudden motions as possible, so as not to startle them into mass flight.

It would be a brief respite for them, he knew, for he'd soon have trees crashing down, but there was no point to stampeding them before he had to. He dismissed the notion of trying to bring one of them down and seeing if they were a possible source of food. He'd been lucky enough with the birds, but experimenting with large animals was something else again.

Finally, he finished breakfast. The kangaroo herd had not moved, and he stood looking at them and scratching his ear thoughtfully, but there was no help for it. He had to start work on the raft. Setting the Kesley for needle beam, he aimed it at the base of the highest superfluous branch on one of the trees he'd selected at the edge of the river, and hoped none of the animals would smash his tent—or him—in their wild flight. With one eye cocked against that eventuality, he lopped off the first branch, which crashed down through its lower fellows and landed in a thrash of leaves.

Oddly enough, the kangaroo herd did not break. The birds cut off their twittering abruptly, and the undertone of chewing as the kangaroos fed on the leaves around them was also stilled; but after a moment both sounds were resumed,

and Tompkins shrugged. So much the better.

Working rapidly, and with the animals showing less reaction every time, he stripped the bole of its branches. Once that was done, he lashed the base of the trunk to another tree with shroud line, cut under the lashings, and yelled a ridiculous "Ti-im-berrr!" as the trunk smashed into the river and subsided gradually after bobbing and rolling in the water, firmly anchored to shore by its line.

He looked around him, and saw, without great surprise, that the kangaroos had not moved at all. Nor, he now decided, were they likely to as long as he didn't make the mistake of cutting down an occupied tree. With that thought, he forgot them, and pitched into his work.

By noon, he had all the logs he needed, each swinging at the end of its line, all close enough together so all he'd have to do would be to push them at each other and lash them. He sat down and ate the last of his birds, planning on knocking down a fresh supply just before nightfall. He could roast them before he went to bed, and be ready to shove off in the morning. The kangaroos would have had a day's grace, and even whatever Super-Kangaroo it was that guarded their destinies from On High could not be too offended if Cort gave His children some exercise before bedtime. Chuckling at

the thought, and at the prospect of watching a whole herd of the creatures fleeing and mooing, Cort smoothed a sapling pole with his knife. He'd cut four of them, to make sure he'd have spares in case he broke some while fending off from the rocks or narrow banks that might be waiting for him downstream.

He almost wished that he had time to make a pet out of one of the kangaroos. It would be company—and it might even take a turn at the poling.

Still chuckling, he finished the job and waded into the water, which was clear enough for him to see that it did not conceal anything equivalent either to alligators or piranhas. Moreover, in all the time he'd been camped here, he'd seen nothing to indicate that there was anything dangerous in the river. It was an oddly sparse world, compared to Earth.

IT WAS close to twilight when the completed raft finally swung at the river's edge. He'd lashed the logs together carefully, once more thankful he'd had sense enough to bring the parachute shrouds along, and added transverse braces to give the structure rigidity. Cort had no real idea of whether the raft would serve its intended purpose, but it was a stout-enough looking thing, and was the best he could do. Wading ashore, he walked back to his tent, noticing that the kangaroos

had worked closer to the clearing's edge with the approaching dusk.

Well, it was time for supper.

He set the Kesley and walked toward the nearest clump of birds attendant upon their personal symbiote.

And abruptly realized there was something very wrong. The birds were still as stones, and though it was difficult to tell in the uneasy light, it looked as though the entire kangaroo herd had turned its heads and was looking at him. He wondered, in a flash of incongruous thought, whether the other half of the herd, across the river, had done the same. But for some reason he could not define—and suddenly did not wish to—Cort did not want to turn his head away to see.

He stopped uncertainly as one of the kangaroos moed. Then the whole herd was lowing, but the birds remained as still as death. Only some other bird—whose sudden cry he recognized as being different from that of the mock-pigeons—abruptly burst away from a treetop and went chittering down the river, skimming over the water and calling.

On the other side of the river, one kangaroo went crashing away downstream, as though in pursuit.

For no reason, Tompkins raised his arm to re-set the Kesley to Lethal. Then the kangaroos were bounding down out of the trees, before he could complete the mo-

tion; he turned and ran, fumbling with the sidearm.

A kangaroo crashed down beside him, knocking him sprawling. He tried to get a shot at it, but it sprang away in the same motion, without trying to do anything more. Stumbling to his feet, Tompkins ran on toward his tent, while the beasts clumped to earth all around him. He heard one behind him, and then he was knocked on his face again. A looming dark body hurtled away over his head. He got up again, nearer the tent and the all-important survival kit. Before he reached it, he was knocked down twice more, and once a tail caught him on the side of the head, almost making him lose consciousness. Gasping and stumbling, he reached the tent just as a kangaroo smashed into one corner of it. Two of them landed on either side of him, almost crushing him between them before they sprang away again, and as he scooped up the kit and ran for the raft, he saw the rest of the herd come swooping over the river, black against the dusk, rolling like a wave.

THEY BEGAN slashing at him with their foreclaws as he neared the raft, gashing his coveralls and drawing blood in shallow gouges. He began to yell as he fought through them, and now, at last, he began to shoot—not actually able to pick targets, but in a screaming need for some sort of

action. They flickered and fainted around him, too fast to be hit, and some sort of sanity finally stopped his useless firing. He hugged the gun and survival kit to his chest, ducking his head between his shoulders and taking their claws as he bulled through them. Dimly, he realized that no escape was worth it if either gun or kit were knocked out of his hands.

Bloody and almost blind, Tompkins reached the raft's line and saw that, by some miracle, the raft itself was clear. He thrashed through the shallow water and flung himself on the raft, scything through the line with a sweep of the Kesley. Cursing and sobbing, he poled frantically away from the bank.

And thereby lived. A bellow of rage trumpeted out of their throats as they realized that the structure was not part of the shore and could be used to carry him away. Some of them even risked the water and leapt after him, but were unable to gauge the spinning target. They fell into the water, struggling wildly at the air, and now he saw that whatever had refrained from Man was all too eager for beast. The river boiled with something below the surface, and the fallen kangaroos died in bloody explosions of piecemeal flesh.

The current caught the raft and whipped it away into the dark downstream while he sprawled

across the logs, choking, his skin etched with pain.

* * *

It took Cort a long time to recover. He drifted for hours, completely at the casual mercy of anything whose path the raft happened to cross. He regained complete consciousness only after the sun had risen, and, crawling to the edge of the raft, he dragged his head in the water. When he could finally think with some clarity, he got his first-aid supplies out of his kit and swabbed antiseptic into every accessible rip in his skin. Slowly, as the raft slipped by the monotonous shore, he lost the tremor on his fingertips.

Well, he managed to think, it had actually been no worse than if some interstellar visitor had dropped down into lion country in Africa. That was almost precisely what had happened to him—and, from one point of view, was no more than he might have expected. He was bound, eventually, to stumble into something deadly on this world. The flying kangaroos were no more to be blamed for the acting like flying kangaroos than lions could have been blamed for being lions. And, probably, lions would have been just as temporarily mystified into caution by the sight of an Ungleef matoodling a skord, as the kangaroos had been by a man building a raft. As he looked back on it

with some return of logic, it all seemed reasonable.

But when he saw a stray kangaroo feeding alongside the far bank, a little later, he came out of his red haze of hatred only after he'd reduced it to tatters with the Kesley. He crouched on the bobbing raft with his teeth bared in a snarl, and re-holstered with his hand trembling violently once more. Bleakly, he told himself that if the natives hadn't cleared this part of their world, then it was up to him to regard it and its animals as something to be subjugated. If the natives exercised no authority here, by God, he would! From now until he reached the ship, it was Cort Tompkins against this world.

VIII

HE MADE IT down the river somehow. His coveralls were rags by the time he did, and the raft had broken to pieces under him a half-dozen times, and partially re-lashed each time. He had struck rapids and cataracts, and once another storm had almost drowned him on land while he huddled at base of a tree. He was half-starved, and he'd been sick countless times from what he'd thought might be edible, but had turned out not to be. One arm was wrapped in mummy-like lengths of parachute ribbon, and the only thing left of the survival kit was the Kesley in his hand and the

compass on his wrist. The knife was buried between the ribs of something that had gone down into the water before he could even see all of it, and the first-aid kit had been expended long ago. The canteen, wrenched from his belt, had probably bobbed out to sea weeks past. The flashlight possibly still glimmered somewhere in the forest, beside the rotting hulk of a beast that had pursued him for thirty minutes after the Kesley's beam had pierced its brain.

He left a swath of death in the country to either side of the river behind him.

Now Cort slumped over the bole of the single log that had carried him down from the last cataract, staring dully at the stretch of sand on which he'd grounded. With a grunt, he finally realized he was at the end of the line, and heaved himself off the log. He stumbled forward, out of the shallows and onto the sand, pitched forward, and slept.

When he awoke—there was no way for him to tell whether it was the next day or the one after—he gave the country around him a quick but thorough visual inspection. Nothing moved near him—either in the water or in the short delta grass—that could possibly be harmful. He cut down a familiar species of water bird with an almost automatic reflex of his gun hand, gutted it with his hands, singed the feathers off, and roasted

it. While he ate it, he stood up to take a better look.

He was at the apex of the river's triangular delta, with the edge of the jungle just behind him and several miles of swamp grass between him and the coast. Even in this broader range of territory, there was nothing big or dangerous that he could see. And his ability to spot the danger revealed by a barely-weaving clump of grass or a flicker of shadow had sharpened considerably since he'd escaped from the clearing far upriver.

But if there was no danger, neither was there any help. There were no traces of intelligent life—neither a hut on shore, nor a boat on the broad gray-green sea.

TOMPKINS skinned his lips back in a snarling grin. If this world wanted to increase the odds against him, it was still all right. He'd taken on all comers in the drift downstream, and now he stood at the river's mouth, while the jungle bled behind him.

As he thought about it now, it was almost incredible that the boy—twenty-seven years old, but nevertheless an immature boy dependent on ship's hulls and ship's comforts to bolster his very rebellion against ship's authority—had been able to live through his harried maturation into the man he now was.

The further thought struck him

that he was a better man, now, than most of the ship's company could possibly be, still sheltered by the steel egg. He grinned again as he thought of what it would be like after he got back to the ship. They'd walk softly around Cort Tompkins, all right!

Slogging through the swampy ground at the jungle's edge, skirting the delta, he began to make his way toward the shore. When he reached it, he found it to be much like any other. The yellowish sand was covered with weeds and driftwood thrown up by the storms, and the sand sloped off into a drift of broken seashells. Looking at them, Tompkins could see no particular difference between them and those he remembered from Earth. The sea water was saltier, and now he had a new problem: there was no longer any way for him to carry a supply of drinking water with him. His canteen was lost, and while some of the larger shells might have held a day's worth, he had no desire to skate down the beach like a waiter balancing a loaded tray.

Finally he shrugged. He'd taken a long drink after eating the bird. It would have to do until he got to the next fresh-water outlet into the sea. Trudging over the sand, his bad arm swinging loosely at his side, and holding the Kesley in his other hand, Cort set out along the coast.

IX

THE LEAF-ROOFED jungle had sapped the last ounce of fat out of his body, but it had left his skin a bleached white. Within an hour he was burning badly, sweat trickling off his forehead and into his inflamed eyes. His lips rapidly acquired a glaze of vapor-borne salt, and there was sand in his boots, which had soaked and dried so many times that they were stiff as cardboard. He tried to ignore his various annoyances for a time, and clung grimly to the shore, leaving a trail of humped footprints along the water for as far back as he could see; but after a time, Tompkins realized that he was wasting his strength to no purpose. The ship and anything else he might be destined to come to would still be there, whether he arrived a day later or not. Turning off the beach, he found a clump of thick bushes and crawled into their shade. He was thirsty, but not specially so; his sunburn was far more difficult to ignore. And even so, he was able to fall asleep after a while.

* * *

He awoke, and there were three of the flying kangaroos standing over him. He jumped to his feet, clawing for his Kesley, and they sprang away from him in obvious panic, shouting loud guttural exclamations. They sprang neither as

far nor as lithely as they had in the jungle, and did not fly at all. It was then that Cort saw their breechclouts, and stopped himself from skewering them with his beam. Holding the weapon over his head—but holding it so that he could fire easily, if he had to—he waited for their panic to die down.

It had been primitive country he'd wandered into, among the flying kangaroos; but that hadn't been the equivalent of lion country. No, not lion country—ape country.

Now that he was able to examine them more closely, as they stood uncertainly some distance away, Tompkins saw that there were a number of differences. Their tails were not the powerful levers that the flying kangaroos had possessed, and their "wings" were almost completely atrophied. Their foreclaws had developed into hands, and their skulls were fuller. Their ears were shorter, and their noses did not twitch, testing every breeze as their ancestors had. They were talking among themselves in an uneasy mutter that—guttural though it might be—was also several tens of thousands of years removed from the jungle beasts' mooring.

Thinking rapidly, forcing himself to push his speculations off to some other time, Cort decided that the best thing for him to do as of the moment was to simply wait for their next move.

Keeping the three natives in

his field of vision, he slowly turned his head as far in either direction as that limitation would permit, tried to see if there were any more of them, and how they'd come to be here in the first place.

They'd found him easily enough, simply by following his tracks in the sand. He could see widely-spaced gashes in the beach where they'd hopped along beside his trail, but there was no sign of any other tracks leading off behind or to some other side of him. Something that just might have been the prow of a boat drawn up on the shore tantalized the very edge of his vision, but he did not dare turn his head the necessary further quarter-inch. He was unable to guess, from that small fragment, how large the boat was—if it was a boat.

He realized that his heart was hammering wildly at the walls of his chest, and that he was breathing hoarsely. He stood in a tense, crouched position, his knees bent.

His lips twitched at the thought of the picture he must be presenting to the natives — the outlandish monster, poised to spring, trapped at the end of the thread of incredible foot-marks that must have struck against their eyes like a terrifying hammer-blow when they first chanced across them.

Mysterious Beast Strays Out Of Mato Grosso Jungle Country!
Cort thought wryly, translating the situation into the equivalent ter-

restrial headline, seeing in huge blocks of screaming black type.

Well, this monster had dangerous teeth. And Cort Tompkins had every intention of demonstrating that the best course of native action was to give the monster what he demanded.

THE NATIVES had apparently reached a decision. They moved forward in a huddled group, obviously aching to turn and flee, but nevertheless tantalized.

Tompkins let them approach until they were just too far to cover the distance in one more desperate spring; then he fired a sweeping cut of his lethal beam into the ground six feet in front of them. A line of fire and smoke sprang up; when it died, it left a clear mark of ravaged grass and fused soil.

The natives stopped as though he'd shot them. One of them was staring goggle-eyed at the dead-line; the other two kept their eyes on Tompkins, but it was obvious that they were only paralyzed with fear, and might break at any second.

Tompkins smiled and lowered the Kesley. "Keep your distance, doggies," he said in a firm but hostile voice. "Good doggies. Nice doggies."

The natives, in their first unmistakable alarm at his awakening had chattered in clearly-understood panic. Tompkins hoped that other

emotions were also expressed in vocal tones similar to Earth's. More than likely, the basic ones would be. High voice for excitement, low for confidence.

It seemed to be working. The two who'd kept their attention focussed on Tompkins were talking to each other again, obviously reaching some kind of decision. The third was apparently the coward of the group. He clutched at the arm of one of his companions and tried to drag him back, the gutturals of his rushing exclamations tumbling over each other in panic. The other native shrugged him away impatiently, and barked out some kind of command or admonition. The coward shut up, but moved behind his companions and peered at Tompkins over their shoulders.

The one who'd issued the command now looked at Tompkins again and tentatively pushed one foot toward the deadline. Tompkins who'd been expecting it, immediately fired, and the section of the line nearest the native broke into renewed flame.

The native appeared unruffled. He nodded calmly, in a surprising mannerism, as though checking off a confirmed theory in his mind, and Tompkins said "Good doggie."

The third native grimaced. "Gud Tuhgi" rumbled up out of his chest and past the thick tongue. He

seemed to be awaiting confirmation of his effort.

That was considerably quicker than Tompkins had expected. He certainly could not conceive of an Earthman, chanced across an incomprehensible beast, instantly able to assume that its growls were actually an attempt at vocal communication.

But, on the other hand, the analogy had to break down somewhere; these were not Earthmen.

"Good doggie," Tompkins repeated, pointing at the linguist. Then, with a sudden grin, he pointed at the coward, whose head was extended up behind the leader's shoulder. "Yella doggie."

The linguist soberly pointed at himself. "Gud tuhgi," he repeated. Then he pointed at the coward. "Huluh tuhgi."

For no good reason, Tompkins decided that the linguist understood that "huluh" was a term of scorn. Certainly, there seemed to be an edge to his voice as he spoke it. But he was confused, nevertheless. He pointed at the leader, to whom the first "good doggie" had been addressed, and then back at himself. "Gruh gud Tuhgi?" he asked, an obvious question in his voice.

TOMPKINS was on the point of shrugging, suddenly realizing that languages were far more complex than their first success would have indicated, when he

thought of putting himself in the native's place. In that case, "gruh" translated to a fairly obvious "both?"

He pointed to the leader and said "Good *boss* doggie." Then he pointed back to the linguist and said "Good *talk* doggie."

The linguist tried it out, then. Then he pointed at Tompkins. "Tuhgi?" he asked.

Tompkins shook his head. He slapped his chest. "Man!" he said assertively. "Man, come from big-fella sky-devil ship." This was the point he'd been working for—that, and something else. He'd edged over far enough so he could keep an eye on the natives and see the boat, as well. It seemed to be something no bigger than a cat-boat, and under no circumstances could have held more than the three natives. They must have put in at the delta for fresh water and seen his tracks.

Reassured, and with the beginning of a plan forming in his mind, he resumed his communicative efforts.

"Ship!" he repeated. With a slash of the Kesley's beam, he traced the ship's egg-shaped silhouette in the soil. "Ship! Voom, Voom, rumble!" He pointed up to the sky, still imitating the ship's noise, and slowly lowered his hand, until he had tracked the imaginary ship's downward course.

The leader was looking at his seared depiction of the ship. The

linguist essayed a tentative "Mun? Guip?" but could not seem to make the connection between the crude sketch and something in the sky with Tompkins in it. Only the coward gave the impression—obviously false—that some of it had gotten through, for he had cringed visibly both at Tompkins' raised hand and the "ship noises," and was now chattering again.

Tompkins disregarded him, and tried to think of some channel of communication. He caught the linguist's eyes, finally, and pointed at the sea. "Water."

The linguist followed the direction of his point, and uncertainly repeated "wutuh."

Tompkins swept his arm along the horizon arc, carefully stopping the motion before it included any any of the shore. "Water."

This time, the linguist caught his meaning. He, too, pointed at the sea, and recognized its name in the monster's tongue. "Wutuh," he said firmly.

From that point, they progressed to "boat," or "but," in native accents. Then Tompkins established the link between "water," "boat," and "doggie." He sketched a rudimentary boat beside the outlined ship, and finally, after much effort, established the fact that the boat and the sketch were linked. Apparently, graphic symbolism wasn't the natives' strong point—a fact that would have intrigued a xenologist, but which served only

to drive Tompkins to the brink of exasperation.

But once that hurdle was conquered, he was able to link "sky" with "ship" and both with "man," and then to establish that the other sketch had been a depiction of the boat. Since he had no object "ship" to correspond with the natives' "boat," it then followed logically that he was looking for the ship.

It followed, but slowly. It took the better part of the afternoon, and it was the coward, it finally developed, who knew where the ship was. He chattered in even more obvious fear until the leader finally paid him some attention. Then he made passable, but exaggerated, imitations of ship noises ending with the final "Va-room!" of the ship, intimating that it had landed practically on top of him and scared him out of a year's growth.

Tompkins sighed, feeling the long-pent tension ooze out of his body. He'd made it; he'd finally made it. He'd found a guide back to the ship.

X

THE PROBLEM of getting three natives and himself into the tiny boat did not arise. He let the linguist make it adequately plain to the coward that he wanted to go where the big *va-room* had come down, then,

having casually re-set the aperture on his Kesley, stunned the linguist and the leader down in their tracks. The coward stared at him, teetering, his nervous organization almost completely over-triggered by a new gushet of whatever passed for adrenalin in his system. Tompkins knew that if he decided to run, his jerky, uneven pace would be ludicrous.

But Tompkins had re-set the aperture on the Kesley to its roasting intensity. He flicked the coward lightly, driving him toward the boat, and the coward stumbled awkwardly in the desired direction.

"Good yella doggie," Tompkins said, and followed him at a prudent distance. He hoped there was food and water in the boat, and some sort of cloth to spread for a shelter, as well. The sun beat down brutally as he stepped out of the shade, singeing his already tender skin.

Still and all, even with the first flush of relief past, he felt like a new man. He'd beaten the planet conclusively, bending both animals and inhabitants to the authority of himself and his Kesley. Now he was not in the least worried about what the Captain might do.

And it was a different attitude, he realized, than the callow defiance of authority he'd felt before he jumped. Now it was simply a quiet confidence in his ability to take care of himself. The Captain might still hold the authority of

rank, but he had the compensating weight of the inner authority which comes with competence.

"Ship," he told the coward as they reached the boat. "We go ship."

"Ghip," the coward mumbled unhappily, n o d d i n g in fright. Tompkins motioned him toward the stern, and, together, they got the boat launched. As they climbed in, and Tompkins took a seat that permitted him to lean back and still keep his Kesley pointed at the native, he wondered, briefly, what would happen to the two natives he'd left behind.

Well, he reflected, when they came to, the leader could probably lead them out, somehow. And with the linguist for company, he'd even have somebody to talk to.

* * *

The boat was not comfortable. It had never been designed for human occupancy, and its proportions were all wrong. Moreover, there was no cloth for a shelter. There was a small sail, but he had to let the native set that, if they expected to arrive within the year. He'd gathered the big *va-room* had come down a considerable distance away, and that only pure luck had put a man who knew of that location among the three fishermen, or traders, or whatever they'd been.

There was water—muddy, from the delta flow, but no worse than

he'd been drinking. The grit irritated his cavities.

There was no food. He'd have to go hunting the next time they landed. The native had food, but Tompkins was not attracted by what looked like moldy leaves. He might have delayed pushing off, long enough to shoot down a bird or two, but he hadn't like the prospect of both hunting and keeping the coward in check, while worrying about the possible revival of the other two natives. It was best to put as much distance as he could between himself and those two before nightfall.

He checked the coward's course against his compass. He'd be at least able to tell if he began deviating more than the run of the coastline made necessary. But the coward seemed to be entertaining no rebellious notions. He slumped against his tiller, casting occasional frightened glances at the rock-steady Kesley, and apparently had accepted Tompkins' superior authority without further cavil.

Monster Captures Fisherman! Tompkins thought briefly. Well, yes, from the natives' point of view, the Thing from Outer Space had doubtlessly just performed a heinous kidnapping. It all depended on your point of view.

"Murderous Beast Ruthlessly Tortures Captive!"

"Fiend From The Stars At Large!"

Those and similar whimsies en-

tertained him in his cramped relaxation until nightfall, when he motioned the coward to put in to shore. The native obeyed apathetically, and, after tying up his captive with a length of boat's line while he went hunting, Tompkins released him long enough for them to have a wary supper together, then re-tied him and tethered him to a tree, and went calmly to sleep in the boat.

XI

IT WAS A week before there was the slightest change in this routine. There was another storm, which forced them to shelter in a craggy cleft of the coast, which had now become a rock cliff, but after that interruption they resumed course, Cort Tompkins in the bow and the coward in the stern, and it was as though nothing at all had happened, once the storm was past. The coward did not protest being tied each night, and seemed to have lost none of his awed fear of Tompkins. There might have been an increasing nervousness in his manner as they that was all.

drew nearer to the big *va-room*, but

At dusk of the day which ended that week, they rounded a sharp headland and Tompkins, twisting his head to see what lay beyond it, suddenly cursed and motioned frantically for the coward to go about. A fair-sized town was set between

harbor and cliffs, and though it was far too dark for anyone to see the boat from shore, it had been a near thing. The coward obediently cacked, and got them back on the safe side of the point, where they put in to shore.

Tompkins tied up the native almost automatically—in fact, the native had picked up the habit of handing him the rope—and sat down to consider this new problem.

By now, it had become obvious that the native's spine was so gelid that there was no question of his plotting any nasty surprises. He had lapsed into a dull apathy that precluded all independent thinking. He did what the monster told him, thereby hoping to stay alive for yet one more day.

Which was interesting, but, more important, meant that the way to the ship led through the town; there was no other conceivable reason for the coward to have brought them here. Tompkins scowled up at the cliffs which backed the narrow beach. He could not conceive of himself climbing them to go around the town, much less dragging the native with him. He walked to the end of the point and stood looking at the town, which he immediately named Rooburgh.

It consisted of a fair number of one-story buildings, huddled dunly by occasional torchlight in the cliff's shadow. There was a darker patch, midway along the

seafront, which must be the mouth of a river. Apparently, that river was the only convenient break through the cliffs into the country beyond, where the ship must have landed. If the coast above the town was anything like the coast that stretched for a good seventy miles below, it was the only break, period.

Well, then, they'd have to go through the town. He wondered how the population of, say, Atlantic City, would react to having the Thing march a human being up the main street.

They'd certainly call the cops, that was sure.

All right, they'd go through at night. Within the next hour or so, when all good kangaroos were in bed—or Tompkins hoped they were. He went back to the coward, untied him so he could eat, and then sat ignoring the native's obvious surprise and uncertainty at not being tied up again in accordance with established custom.

He wondered what the expedition was doing. Probing cautiously, no doubt. Well, he'd have an interesting report to give them. He wondered, too, exactly how long it had been since he'd jumped. Probably, no more than a Terrestrial month, but it was hard to be sure. The trip downriver had not only smashed his watch but made him lose track of days, as well. Now that he was so close, he even permitted himself the lux-

ury of worrying just a little bit. Suppose the expedition had already left? There wouldn't be another ship within his lifetime, probably.

But that was no more than a mildly masochistic nervous quirk. The expedition was scheduled to spend several years here, and only the most remote emergency could change that schedule. The ship was completely self-contained, an island Earth capable of sustaining and protecting human life with complete independence of any planet.

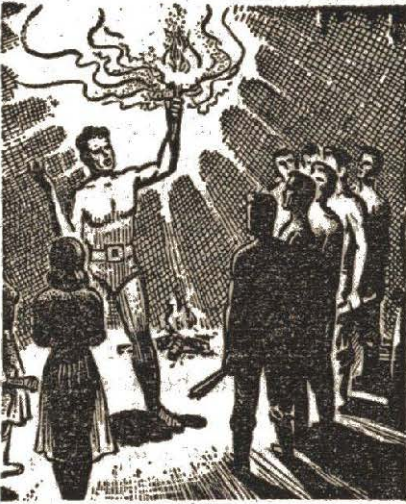
It would be good to get back. He looked at the completely dark sky, decided it was late enough, and gestured the surprised native back into the boat. "Let's go, doggie, time's a-wastin'. We go ship."

"Gu ghip," the coward muttered in affirmation. "Gu va-room." It was obvious that he did not regard the trip in a happy light.

XII

AT TOMPKINS' direction the native made an attempt to sail up-river; but, as had been no more than he'd really expected, the force of the current, compressed in the narrow slot between the cliffs, was too great. They put in at a shadowed dock, moving with absolute stillness, and Tompkins looked about cautiously.

The town was dark and soundless. The low buildings pressed



against the shore and trapped shadows in the narrow alleys between them. There was nothing moving, and, except for an occasional untended torch, guttering in a solitary corona of luminescence from its wall bracket, there were no lights.

This was going to be the hard part. There was an outside chance that the coward, heartened by the promise of so many hiding places and the near presence of his fellows, might try to make a break. Tompkins carefully set the Kesley back to stunning intensity; he could not afford to lose the native.

He took a deep breath, and waved the native up to the dock.

* * *

He could not help feeling like

a lost ghost, haunting the wrong world, as they slipped between the buildings full of sleeping natives. The coward was whimpering softly to himself, casting beseeching glances at the shadows, hoping for succor; but he kept moving, which was the important thing. Tompkins herded him forward, occasionally letting him feel the gun in his back. There had never been any doubt that the natives understood whence the lightnings came.

And the chained destruction in the Kesley triumphed over the call of the shadows. The coward could not summon up the courage to run. They got through the town and to the narrow path beside the river. Tompkins gave the huddle of buildings one last look, sighing in relief as some kangaroo insomniac hopped unaware down the same alley they'd just passed. Then he prodded the coward up the path.

DAY BROKE and found them still walking. The native was stumbling frequently, as much from obvious fear as from fatigue. Tompkins showed him no more mercy than he gave himself. His own steps were uneven, but the coward's very nervousness was as good as a series of milestones marked in ever decreasing distances to the ship. Obviously, the ship had terrorized the entire countryside with its landing. Even in daylight, he could see no other movement. The coming of the

ship had stamped every living thing away, as timber fires sweep the forest animals before them.

They were past the cliffs now, and on a hilly plateau after a night of climbing. Tompkins chewed on the last cold joint of bird in his kit, and threw the battered, empty pack away when he finished it. He had no further use for it; they'd reach the ship soon, he knew.

There were fields to either side of him, with the river far below, at the bottom of a valley. This was the agricultural country the ship had been aiming for, all right.

He wondered if he'd run into field parties from the ship. He rather fancied the idea of walking into the main lock without previous warning.

And now that his mind was increasingly free to relax its almost exclusive concentration on pure survival, the thought came to him that he'd completed an epic that would stand in the history books even longer than the simple fact of his being first on this world. One man against a completely unknown world, beset by uncalculable dangers, subject to alien fates. And the man had won!

They were still climbing upward, aiming for the ridge of a high rise about a mile ahead of them. The coward was throwing terrorized glances at the ridge, as though the ship were in the valley beyond. Tompkins grinned and prodded him forward.

He turned to look back, and saw the long line of natives laboring slowly up the path behind him. He looked at them thoughtfully. With their bodies built for hopping, they'd have to shuffle painfully up the narrow path, as the coward had. They'd never reach him in time, even if they could accelerate their pace once they got to open ground. Probably, they'd found the boat and tracked him out of curiosity. Or else he *had* been spotted in the town.

But it didn't much matter. By now, the natives in this district must have a healthy awe of the sky-devils in the big *va-room*.

He pushed the coward onward, climbing for the ridge. "Let's go, doggie," he said. "Go ship. Go *va-room*."

"Gu *va-room*," the native gibbered.

The trees growing above him, at the top of the ridge, had been ravaged by flame. Tompkins chuckled. Apparently, the storm had forced the pilots to make a sloppy landing, blasting continuously to correct the ship's oscillations. No wonder the natives were terrorized!

The natives were hopping rapidly across the plain toward them, but they could never catch him now. He pushed past the coward, running the last few yards up the ridge. The native instantly turned and pelted back to his fellows, but Tompkins didn't care. It made no

difference now.

Nothing did, now. He balanced precipitously at the top of the ridge, staring numbly at the crater where the big *va-room* had been—where the ship had crashed and exploded.

Numbly, he felt the natives crowding just behind him. Numbly, he turned his head to look at the crater, littered with smashed trees and stripped fields, a blackened splash on the face of the countryside, with the glassy patch of fused soil at its center.

Numbly, he faced around and looked at the natives, who were looking back at him quietly.

"Skighip *va-room*," one of them said, and Tompkins recognized

the coward, trembling in their foreground.

Well, at least he saw no weapons in the crowd; and they were not menacing him. They simply stood and looked at him, quietly, as though wondering what he'd do now.

It was their world. He was no longer in a position to make decisions. He faced back toward the crater for one last time—except for the time, years later, when he and the linguist put up the marker in Terrestrial and Murkon. Then he threw the Kesley as far as he could turned back to the natives, and walked slowly toward them, surrendering to their authority.



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by
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A man who denies himself anything—even though it is his own choice—ultimately comes to see that denial as a cruelty inflicted on him!

LIVE IN AMITY

NOVELET

by D. A. Jourdan

illustrated by FREAS

GORSE helped Leah into his copter, glad the darkness hid his expression when she deliberately disarranged her full skirt and exposed a generous portion of white thigh.

Entering from his own side he replaced the skirt without comment. "The ancients," he said serenely, "believed that civilization

required people to live under whatever were the most painful, most difficult conditions..." He hoped she didn't know how badly he wanted her; the ancients might have enjoyed that sort of thing, but he did not.

Their duel had been going on for months. They both wanted the same thing, but they had differ-

ent ideas about how they intended to accomplish it. To get his mind off it Gorse tried absorbing himself in his subject. It really was interesting. "They called all natural desires 'sin'; and they actually forbade them..." He paused, wondering if he should go on. His research into old custom was only incumbent on him as a priest in Amity.

It was not good manners for him to force his knowledge on others. Social grace ruled that the cruellest, most destructive thing one person could do to another was to burden his neighbor with unnecessary information.

On the other hand, Leah, too, was a member of the Serving class; as such she had to be inured to the discomfort of education. Too, she was certainly going to be one of his mates. From the way she was holding him off, it was beginning to look as though she would be chief.

He gave in to his desire to share the odd bit of lore with her. "Just imagine, Leah; imagine calling the most instinctive, most essential desires of mankind 'sinful'!"

"What's so important about the name you call a thing?" she said sulkily. She was piqued by his self-control; apparently she didn't realize how close she was to winning what she was after. "Natural desires are natural desires—whatever you call 'em..."

"But these people didn't just



Gorse pictured masses of people killing and maiming each other.

call 'em 'sin' and let it go at that," Gorse emphasized. Airborne at that moment and busy with the plane, he didn't consider how much he was saying. "These people actually abstained from their natural-desires-called-sin..."

"How could they?" Leah was almost more puzzled than shocked. "They'd have nothing to declare! They'd be denied their clearance!"

Feeling her slight shudder, Gorse frowned at himself for saying more than he should have. History was not specifically secret—but all responsible people knew that world Amity rested most securely on the people's conviction that the System was not merely the best way of life, but the only way. Even the intellectuals of the Serving class were rarely aware that there had ever been anything but Amity.

Only the Priesthood at the very top knew of the chaos that had preceded the System; they had to know to be capable of formulating policy. (For three hundred years, though, there had been no need for any further policy, since in Amity mankind had found peace and stability.)

So Gorse could understand Leah's shock at the thought of non-declaration. Homicide, of course, had to be proved justifiable to a board of priests; but aside from that, the one crime in Amity was failure to make monthly declaration.

Gorse set the automatic pilot

and tried to change the subject by putting his hand on Leah's now chastely-covered thigh. "That was a nice party last night," he said reminiscently. "Except that I didn't see as much of you as I'd have enjoyed..."

Leah refused to have the subject changed. As an educated girl with some experience in assimilating new ideas, she strove now to understand this one. "Tell me," she insisted. "How could people abstain from—call it natural desire or sin—I don't care... But how could they? They'd be quarantined as socially undesirable..."

Gorse considered explaining to Leah that there had been a time in history when people were not required to appear and declare monthly that they had properly fulfilled their natural desires to the best of their ability.

He decided against it; the idea would seem too incongruous to her. He thought of pointing out to her mournfully that by her stubbornness she had been making his own declarations so petty as to be dull for months; but he knew better than to expect any sympathy from her about that.

Still stroking the silken fabric over her soft thigh Gorse lapsed in a pleasant state of semi-hypnosis. Leah would make a delightful mate. He knew that if it took him much longer to persuade her, he was going to give in, name her his chief and permanent mate. He said

absently, "What puzzles me is not *how* they could abstain, but *why* ... Why would any sane person want to abstain from something he badly wanted?"

AS A PRIEST, except for the High Priests who were a secret group and known only to each other, Gorse was at the top of the Serving class. Naturally Leah wanted him.

And he was dangerously close to giving in to her. Only his social obligation to mate with her without naming her his chief, if he possibly could, was holding him back now.

Conquest was the usual solution to a problem such as his, but such success with a girl of Leah's intelligence and foresight was not child's play. She had both imagination and spirit, and he had learned painfully that she was willing to use both. Also, though the system approved both force and trickery in such a campaign, the female was not permitted to be seriously harmed.

She, however, was permitted to use unlimited force to defend herself. Slaying of the male by the female in these circumstances was considered justifiable. And he wouldn't put it past Leah.

Sighing, he gave her leg a final pat and stopped. A girl like Leah was not to be had by force, and priest though he was he had been unable to seduce her. But under

his stroking she had snuggled closer to him. She whispered softly in his ear, "Gorse, love. I'm hungry..."

He asked despondently, "Where would you like to go?"

"Butterfly Inn isn't far. And let's take a private room; I don't care to eat chicken in front of people..."

Gorse headed for the place she mentioned, gloomily aware that this was just the sort of thing that broke a man down.

Shortly later, following her rippling blue skirt into the pleasant room he was stabbed, exactly as she had intended. There was the usual invitingly arranged, candle-lit table on one side of the room. And on the other there was the usual, capacious, chintz-flowered chaise lounge. If the couch had not been too large Gorse would have shoved it out the window.

He gave the order. Across the table from him Leah's shoulders were camelia-white, and so rounded he could feel the touch of them in the palms of his hands. The candles transformed the mischief in her eyes into mystery. And as he watched her long, dark hair bob and undulate entrancingly around those lovely bare shoulders, Gorse knew that he was very nearly finished.

The platter full of chicken arrived. Leah examined it judiciously and selected a wing. Gorse, too, had been on the verge of taking

a wing but at that moment he veered to a leg.

MUNCHING on the chicken, Gorse tried puzzledly to understand why he had done so. As a priest, he knew something of human nature—and unless he was mistaken he had just done a strange and perverted thing. He had automatically, and without thinking, refrained from fulfilling an unobstructed natural desire.

He had always preferred the wing, and apparently Leah liked the wing, too. Though there were two of them on the platter, at the moment he had seen her take the wing he had without thinking reserved the other for her—despite his own preference for them.

Gorse put down the leg, wiped his fingers and stared at Leah, badly shaken. He had just depravedly and abnormally resisted a healthy, natural impulse. He, a priest in Amity!

Under his gaze Leah stopped eating. "Is something wrong with the food?"

Gorse shook his head without speaking and reached for another piece of chicken but his mind was made up. It must be frustration that was causing him to behave so insanely; he would resist no longer. Leah had beaten him fairly and deserved to be named his chief.

He waited until they finished eating to tell her. He pretended to

be looking out the balcony at the view. "What would you say if I told you I've just decided to give in to you . . ."

She was on him and in his arms immediately, warm and enthusiastic. He knew that even a lifetime of Leah was not going to seem long. He enjoyed her mouth for as long as he could stand it and then put her from him. She twirled across the room and flung herself down on the enormous chaise lounge. "Come here!"

"Why?" he asked wryly.

"Even kissing," she said, smiling innocently, "Is more comfortable in a reclining position . . ."

He smiled, too, but he doubted if his smile was innocent. "Unless you want to risk losing what you've just won, better not invite me. Not until after you're actually named . . ."

"I invite you!"

He came over to her slowly, trying to understand. She was too intelligent, too sensible not to know what she was doing. "You've been holding me off until I'm almost crazy . . ." He frowned down at her. "Now that you've almost achieved what you want—suddenly your desire becomes so strong you can't wait . . . Even though this way you risk my changing my mind afterward . . ."

Her laughter was indulgent. "My desire is neither stronger nor weaker than it was before. But if

you want to give in to me, I want to give in to you; that's all..."

Gorse stared down at her, beginning to understand, but wishing now that he didn't. Something serious—even dangerous—was taking place. Leah really preferred to wait until after she was named to give in to him.

Yet she was denying her own wish, in order to please him. It was, like his giving her the other chicken wing, a deliberate self-denial of an unobstructed natural desire.

Amity called it decadence.

AMITY was based on not merely the right, but the duty of every person to fulfill their natural desires. All citizens were required to appear monthly before their board of priests and make declaration—secret and private, of course, but verifiable—that they had done so. Their monthly clearance testified that they were fit for society.

The monthly declaration was requisite rather than voluntary, lest sick or confused individuals shirk their duty to fulfill natural desires and so create a reservoir of the evil Amity knew to follow self-denial.

Leah's refusal to allow Gorse to make love to her except on her own terms was, of course, her right. Amity ruled that whenever two person's desires were mutually exclusive, whoever felt the most strongly should prevail. The rules,

as on conquest, were simple and reasonable and rarely violated.

Gorse could not, however, escape the fact that both he and Leah had been guilty of decadence—self-denial of an unobstructed natural desire—in the same evening. And it had seemed so reasonable and right. He wondered troubledly if he were becoming contaminated by his research into the past. Perhaps he was not sufficiently balanced to be exposed to the temptations of the decadent past.

Yet at the same time, he felt, sinfully, that perhaps the behavior of the ancients was after all not so evil. And that thought, even though it was contrary to Amity, persisted.

II

TWO MONTHS later, when Gorse was summoned for the first time in his life to appear before his regional director in the eastern capitol, he was still not at ease with his own conscience. Though he had recently turned in what he thought was an exceptionally good analysis on the trends in modern amusement, he was not at all sure that he was being summoned to the capitol for commendation.

Even after he had publicly named Leah his chief, he still found places where he was refusing to fulfill his natural desire. He

knew it was wrong and he tried to fight against it; but no amount of self-disapproval could convince him that the ancients had been really evil in their passion for abstinence. Sometimes, when he failed to be strict with himself, he would almost believe that the ancients' way was more civilized than Amity's.

Nervously thumbing through various priests' trade journals in the director's anteroom, Gorse knew that he expected as much to be called up for untruthful declaration as for congratulation on his work.

The director, Utz, was a sturdy, cheerful looking man with just a suggestion of grimness around the mouth. Rumor said he was a member of the all-powerful, secret body of High Priests, final administrators in Amity for the entire world.

Utz, returning from ushering him in, touched the comfortable armchair nearest him and gave the built-in lazy Susan on his desk a slight turn. "Will you try my tobacco? Or a drink? Or—" his smile deepened and the grimness around his mouth disappeared. "Perhaps a small dose of biothe to help you relax?"

Gorse demanded defensively, "Should I find it difficult to relax?" regretting it before he had even finished speaking.

Utz closed the lid of the humidor compartment of the wheel and sat down. "Some priests are a

trifle tense at meeting their director for the first time," he said mildly.

"And so am I," Gorse admitted apologetically, but he still didn't help himself from any of the compartments of the lazy Susan. Biothe, which lulled conscious control of one's mind could be introduced into almost anything. Until he had cured himself of his perverse passion for abstaining, it was best he maintain his intellectual integrity.

But it was shameful that he, a priest, should have to close his mind to his superior. He felt himself flushing and tried to believe that with his knowledge and training he should soon be able to cure himself. It wasn't easy to convince himself, since after months of trying he still had no idea why he wanted to deviate.

Utz was studying him, must have seen him redden. He glanced down at the sheaf of papers in his hand. "Gorse Cheyne, age twenty-five. And your work is in entertainment analysis . . ."

Gorse relaxed a little. He still wasn't at ease about his mania for abstaining, but from Utz's attitude he was beginning to dare to hope that he had been brought here for commendation rather than disgrace. He tried not to feel too hopeful.

Utz flicked the papers lightly and laid them on his desk. "Gorse, your work has been excellent ever since you took your vow. But this report here." he pointed toward the

papers on his desk, "entitles you to a rare honor."

Gorse looked at him doubtfully. Though he had been born into the Serving class, the Priesthood was competitive; he had already won his way into this highest of all Services. He frowned slightly, wondering what Utz could mean. He had already achieved the ultimate in promotion. All he hoped to do now was to continue to merit the privilege he had already attained. Even that, he thought nervously, in view of his trend toward decadence, was not going to be easy.

Utz had been watching him. "You've been selected," he said impressively, "for preparation for High Priest."

For one incredulous moment of delight Gorse stared at Utz. Then reality blasted him; the coveted honor was not, could not be for him. As downcast as he had been exultant, Gorse said, "I'm sorry. I can't—"

Utz waited blandly. "Yes?"

GORSE fell suddenly silent in horror of what he had been saying. His balance hadn't been too secure to begin with, and this shock had upset it further. This was something that no priest would ever refuse.

As Utz said, this was the greatest honor—and duty—that Amity offered. The High Priests governed the final policies of the entire world. It was because of the wis-

dom of that secret body of men that for three hundred years, war—mass murder of mankind by mankind—had disappeared from earth.

Only a student of ancient history could appreciate what that meant.

Gorse leaned back in the comfortable armchair, his eyes closed. He had a mental picture of great masses of people turning on themselves, maiming, killing each other. He shuddered, made up his mind. Locked up inside himself, his decadence could do no harm; but a sick mind like his among the body of High Priests might single-handedly destroy civilization. He must refuse, even if it destroyed him.

Gorse looked at Utz dully. "It's a great honor, but I don't feel qualified..."

Utz's tone was kindly. "The board decides that."

"You mean I can't decline?"

"Why worry?" Utz smiled. "Would it be so terrible to be selected as High Priest?"

Gorse flushed. "It's not that..." He couldn't explain that he was not fit to govern, that his mind might prove dangerous to the security of the world.

If Utz suspected that he was abstaining from his natural desires Gorse knew he would be immediately segregated. If he then proved unresponsive to cure, he

would be sent into quarantine for the rest of his life.

He tried to choose his words carefully; Utz was probably suspicious already. "It's just," he said miserably, "That I'm so happy with my present life as I am, that I hesitate to change it in any way..."

Utz tapped the file of papers on his desk. "Strange your last few monthly declarations don't bear out that statement of bliss."

Gorse's heart began to vibrate his whole body. So his untrue declarations had been brought to Utz's attention! He knew that it was impossible to escape the detector, but he had hoped for a little more time before the reports caught up with him. He said stiffly, to hide his fear, "Am I forced to accept this honor, or can I refuse?"

Utz moved the sheaf of papers into exact alignment with the edge of his walnut desk. "In Amity," he said slowly, "we're only forced to do what we desire. However, to be permitted to live with our fellows we must keep ourselves free of the tensions that make vicious animals of men; and Amity knows how men must behave to remain free of such tensions."

Gorse said insistently, "Then I'm not forced to accept?"

Utz shook his head. "You're not forced. But if you refuse, you imply that the good of the System is not your first interest..."

"So I'm allowed to refuse,"

Gorse said bitterly; "only, if I do it marks me as a socially undesirable citizen..." He looked at Utz. "Quarantine?"

Utz's mouth was firm. "I'm afraid so..."

GORSE looked suddenly confused. It occurred to him that he was trying to escape being made a High Priest lest he harm the world—when all the time the fact of his untruthful declaration was known, and he was slated for disgrace—not honor. "I've been stupid," he said. "You certainly don't want me for High Priest, knowing my declarations have been untrue—"

"But we do!"

Gorse looked at him distrustfully. "Socially undesirable as I am? You want to prepare me for High Priest?" He was finally suspicious of the way the interview had been conducted. He scowled at Utz. "Naturally I'd give anything—do anything—to be High Priest. Any man would. But did you summon me here to prepare me for High Priest, or to quarantine me as undesirable?"

Utz paused, then said carefully, "Both, perhaps..." He asked, "Are you sincere about wanting to be High Priest? If you can be cured of your decadence, of course..."

Gorse stared at him. There was nothing he wanted more in life at that moment than to be safe again

in Amity. Secure in a position of honor. "I'm sincere," he muttered without much hope.

"The cure will be strenuous and shocking," Utz warned; "the reward, you know. I'll do everything I can to help you..."

Gorse eyed him warily but with resignation. Utz seemed pleased that he was willing to try to cure himself. Actually he had little choice. Unless he wanted to go into life quarantine.

Utz had been consulting the file on Gorse. Finally he looked at him. "Ordinarily we first try to rehabilitate deviates by stimulating their sexual desires. But I don't see much hope in exposing you to any charms, however celebrated. Since you recently named your chief mate..."

Gorse nodded despondently. "No other female could possibly stimulate me more than Leah..."

"Yet as much as you desired her, you deliberately abstained from taking her when she made herself available to you..."

Gorse gestured, dropped his hands. How could he explain something he didn't understand himself. "She wanted to be my chief. First."

"But she *did* offer herself to you?"

Heavily, Gorse nodded.

"And you *did* refrain from taking her? Though you wanted her?"

Gorse said, "But she wanted—" Utz raised one forefinger. "It

is *your* desires, or rather the denial of your desires in which I'm *now* interested. Not hers."

Gorse looked at him hopelessly. "Yes. I wanted her but I waited. I waited until after I could name her..." Gorse explained desperately, "But it was only for her sake I waited. I wanted her to be happy, because she was only offering herself to me to make me happy!" He looked for some sign that Utz understood the complex phenomenon.

Utz was adamant. "However you *did* desire her and you *did* abstain from taking her. It does come to that, doesn't it?" Gorse looked down at his hands. Utz said thoughtfully, "So I certainly cannot hope to win you back by any lesser temptation..." His tone was abstracted. "Since your satisfaction with her is so complete..." He frowned. "Yet even with her—"

Utz broke off, took a deep breath. "How then shall we go about tempting you?" he asked soberly. "In order to persuade you to redeem yourself by following your natural desire, we must first give you something to desire. Something important..."

"There's nothing," Gorse said hopelessly. "Nothing I can't abstain from..." He stared at Utz. "When you spoke of the High Priesthood, badly as I wanted the honor, here, too. I found myself abstaining..." He said slowly, "But in another way I was follow-

in my desire—by abstaining... Since I wanted to..." Gorse's voice faded out as he saw Utz's face.

Utz spoke with amusement. "As a priest, you should recognize when a man is rationalizing to defend his perversity..."

"Then is it rationalizing," Gorse demanded, "to say that in each case I abstained for the benefit of others. So it was really harmless..."

"No, Gorse!" The hard look was back around Utz's mouth. "You may think your behavior was to the benefit of others. But in principle and in fact, self-denial is the basis of all evil..."

Utz continued flatly, "A man who believes that his right and his duty is to do exactly what he desires is a peaceful and contented individual. He lacks that breeding ground of all intolerance, cruelty and vice—a sense of his own virtue; he has nothing to feel virtuous about—he's only done what he wanted. And he has no pain of self-denial to retaliate for..."

"But a man who denies himself—even though he may originally do it because he chooses—ultimately winds up confusing self-denial with virtue, and wanting to make every body else, also—" Utz's mouth twisted into a grimace of disgust—"virtuous..."

Utz was speaking with powerful conviction. Gorse wondered resist-

antly how he could be so sure. It had been hundreds of years since the ancients had lived under their strange custom of self-denial rather than fulfillment.

Perhaps history maligned them when it said that their society was founded on a bloody intolerance of all men for their fellows. Gorse said sturdily, "When I abstained, it was for good."

"It seemed so to you. But there's good reason for Amity to abhor the principle of self-denial," Utz said urgently. "I repeat: A man who denies himself anything—even though it is his own choice—ultimately comes to see that denial as a cruelty inflicted upon him. So in anger he calls his self-denial 'virtue', and seeks to extend it forcibly to other men. And there is no limit to men's cruelty in forcing their 'virtue' on their fellows..."

GORSE knew that he had no intention of denying others the right of carrying out their desires just because he had. Although, as he thought of it, there had been something kindly and generous about his self-denial in Leah's favor. Or the world's.

He frowned at Utz. All the training of his entire life said it was evil and wrong; yet he was not sure.

Utz stared back at him, his serene face suddenly eager. "Listen, Gorse, I'm going to help you; I

can help you. Since all self-denial ultimately aims toward the abnegation of life, there is something I can do..." He presses a button on his desk. "This will not be easy on you, but we must find out if you are completely beyond redemption—if you are really willing to give your life for your chief mate."

Alarmed, Gorse stood up. "You're not going to hurt Leah?"

Two guards had entered the office and stood, one on either side of him. "I'm not going to touch her," Utz assured him, "nor will I harm you. However I must confine you in order to test your attitude. Only this way can we discover if you'll really carry your self-denial to its logical extreme—and die for this female..."

"How?" Utz was too reasonable a man for Gorse to feel much fear of him.

Utz made a slight gesture. "You will be confined indefinitely. And though you will be served food regularly, if you eat, your chief mate will die—because you will have falsely implied that you're willing to sacrifice yourself for her." He said grimly, "In order to justify your passion for self-denial in her favor, I expect you to be willing to starve yourself to death."

Incredulous first, then enraged, Gorse yanked free of the guards' restraining hands. He leaned over Utz's desk and stared at him.

Slowly, his recent ideas had been

eroding away the cherished convictions of a lifetime; now he knew complete disillusionment. He had never hated as he hated Utz, never loathed evil as he now loathed the creed he lived under. "So Amity, too, like the savage concepts of the ancients, requires the death of those who do not believe in it..."

Utz said sternly, "You know that Amity's only punishment is the quarantine."

"And," Gorse added in despise, "starving a man to death. Under threat of killing someone he loves..."

Utz stood up. "You are mistaken." There was neither anger nor pity on his face. "I am not punishing you; I am giving you my maximum assistance in purging yourself. So that you may—as you yourself said you desired—one day be High Priest. The greatest of all natural desires is the desire to live. I am calling on the most powerful incentive I know to persuade you to cease this perverse restraint and return. To life and to Amity..."

Utz paused for a moment. "You chose to deny yourself in favor of another: this gave you a sense of virtue. I am now offering you an opportunity to carry that virtue to its pinnacle. To give your life for another..."

"If," he continued coolly, "you should decide that self-denial is not synonymous with virtue—if

you decide to live—you will be welcomed back into your rightful place. The price of redemption, the life of your mate, is high, but you set it yourself when you questioned Amity."

III

FROM THE beginning, Gorse had known that Utz was sentencing him to death. What he had not known was what a vicious and lengthy torture it would be achieving that death.

At first Gorse had started out to do it the hard way, like a hero. He would leave the tray where the guard placed it, and try to ignore it. After two days of this he grew so hungry he no longer dared to trust to his own control.

After that he didn't pose any more. The moment the guard brought the tray of food he would flush it down the toilet. The first time was the hardest; it had seemed as though he was flushing away his life.

Utz had been very subtle. Since for Gorse to eat meant for Leah to die, symbolically, if he ate he would be engaging in the most animal of all human drives: Cannibalism. The appetizing trays of food the guards brought in no longer looked like food to Gorse. They represented Leah's white flesh.

In a way Gorse was thankful that Utz had arranged it that way.

That horror was the only thing that might have made it possible for him to abstain from the food. He grew weaker as the days passed, and spent most of his time asleep or in a stupor. Always, conscious, or unconscious, in back of his fear of death was Utz's cold, hard face.

Sleep brought another fear. He would dream that while he slept the guard brought in a tray of roast pork and candied yams and that while he still slept, he ate the food.

Even after he would wake up and see the tray, empty as he had left it after disposing of the food down the toilet—or freshly replaced by the guard and still untouched—he never felt quite sure it was only a dream. That he had actually not tasted the food, while still asleep.

That dream always terrified him so he would struggle to remain awake. But of course he always failed.

It seemed to him that he had spent weeks in confinement. He knew it shouldn't take that long to die of starvation and he suspected Utz of force feeding him somehow when he was not conscious.

Often when he would wake up a doctor would be there. By that time Gorse was no longer afraid he might take some of the food while he slept. He knew he knew he was no longer strong enough to

cross the cell without stumbling or falling.

Then one day Utz was there as he woke. The doctor standing beside him was looking down at him with admiration and pity. Utz's face was calm as usual. He said, "Can you hear me, Gorse?"

Gorse closed his eyes again and turned his head to the wall. He couldn't stop the false and vicious creed of Amity from destroying him, but he need no longer listen to Utz—its false priest.

"Then you can," Utz said coolly. "Good. I have news for you. The doctor informs me you are close to death, so I've decided to terminate your cure. Your chief mate, of course, won't be harmed. But you understand this failure means quarantine for you..."

After that came weeks in a hospital while his stomach was re-educated to accept food. Then the flight under guard to prison, the last flight he would ever make.

UNDESIRABLE CITIZENS of the North American region were quarantined on a small, inaccessible island in the San Francisco bay. Built around the twentieth century as a prison, hundreds of years later it was still being used for that purpose. Amity, of course, had little need for prisons, since competition was for honors only—and honors could be neither stolen, embezzled nor forged.

From time to time a rare indivi-

dual was unable to justify a slaying to the satisfaction of his board of priests, but the main group of undesirables—and they were not many—were deviate priests like himself. Gorse soon learned that, like himself, they too had been attracted by the strange customs of the ancients. They too had found them superior to Amity.

He sought his friends among these men and the one of them who fascinated him most was Verl.

Verl was a slender, ascetic-looking man with intense gray eyes and a fierce eloquence. Gorse and he and a dozen ex-priests like themselves gathered in the dismal courtyard of the prison evenings and by talking tried to lance the bitterness in their hearts.

After a long siege of the damp and gloomy days common to the area, Verl was angry. "Here we rot," he exploded one night. "The handful of men in the country who have the self-restraint and dedication to behave higher than the animals..."

Often as Gorse heard them actually praise self-denial, the strangeness of it still alarmed and delighted him. He could not get over having what he believed was his perversity approved. "Explain again," he begged, "why restraint is more civilized than fulfillment."

In the darkness of the Pacific evening Gorse couldn't see Verl's face, but he knew the expression of disgust that would be on it. Verl

said, "Any animal can follow its desires..." His voice rang out majestically. "But only man can deny himself..."

Scornfully, Gorse recalled Utz saying that self-denial made vicious animals of men. It was just the opposite. Gorse wondered hopefully if the secret of civilization itself did not lie somewhere within this strange and painful ability—the ability Amity called decadence.

Eager to share Verl's pride and wisdom, Gorse reasoned slowly, "and we deny ourselves for the benefit of others. Others we love..."

"Not necessarily," Verl disagreed sharply. "Not that it's important. The important thing is that we *do* deny ourselves; we're not animals to follow our every wish..."

Gorse frowned, wished he could see Verl's face in the darkness. Surely Verl must be joking; he couldn't mean that—and yet he was not given to humor. Gorse said doubtfully, "I should think that our reason for denying ourselves is of prime importance. More important than the denial itself."

"Not at all." Verl was absolutely positive. "The denial is the important thing. If you believe that the reason for the denial is of any importance, then when there's no reason, you simply won't deny yourself. And there you'll be— one with the animals again..."

Confused, Gorse remained silent. He had a sudden, terrible convic-

tion that something was wrong. There must be something he didn't understand, something he had missed. For a man to deny himself without any reason made even less sense than for himself under Amity to be compelled to fulfill his desires. He would have liked to have asked Verl more, but Verl usually acted as though anyone who questioned him disagreed with him.

Still unable to understand Verl's meaning, a few days later, cautiously, he questioned him again. "Verl, I know self-denial is better than fulfillment, but I don't know just why. Explain why..."

Verl was working at the counter beside him in the machine shop. He turned to look at Gorse with exasperation. "There isn't any reason; but it's more difficult, so it *must* be right."

With sickening shock Gorse knew then that he had made a terrible mistake. He had hated Utz and Amity so much he had welcomed the opportunity to be imprisoned with others who believed as he did.

But now that he was with them he wished that Utz had not relented and allowed him to live. Dead he would never have learned that these men—his co-believers—made less sense than Amity.

Gorse tried to tell himself that at least these men could not be as cruel as Utz, who preached that it was self-denial that spawned

all cruelty. He knew how cruel Utz could be.

IV

THAT NIGHT, when they gathered in the courtyard, Gorse braced himself to ask the question.

Verl, like most of the men, hoarded his weekly ration of biothe for a period of weeks and then took it all at once. He had just swallowed five weeks ration of biothe when Gorse put the question to him.

"What would we do with them if we were out and they were in?" Gorse could see the glitter in Verl's eyes in the darkness.

Gorse said anxiously. "Yes. Assuming we're right, and knowing that if we are, some day—even though it may take centuries—we'll have the problem of an opposition to deal with as they do now...."

"What do you mean 'assuming we're right.'" Verl's voice was insulted. "If you're not sure—"

"I'm sure," Gorse corrected quickly. "I mean assuming we're in control...."

The biothe began to take effect and Verl forgot his anger and grew exaggeratedly self-assured. "You don't need to assume that, either; because we *will* be in control, and it isn't going to take centuries."

Arrogant as Verl was, Gorse felt pity for him. Like all prisoners

he dreamed of escape. Biothe made it seem possible. Actually the bay was a death trap of treacherous currents for the strongest swimmer.

Verl sensed Gorse's doubt. "I've made a connection," he boasted; "the opposition is about to get rolling. Amity, watch out!"

It brought Gorse back to his test question. The one that would tell him positively if he had been wrong to forsake Amity. "What would you do with them, Verl? If you were on top?"

"When I'm on top," Verl said with assurance, "all the people need is a leader. They're ready for this idea...."

"Probably you'd put them right here," Gorse tried to lure him back to his subject. "Turn about." For just one moment he enjoyed the thought of Utz locked up, himself free.

Verl sounded supercilious. "So they can figure out how to escape? And turn the tables right back on us?"

"But they let *us* live...." No one knew better than Gorse how cruel Utz could be; but Utz *had* let them live. He said somberly, "We would be behaving even more viciously than they did...."

"Vicious!" Verl, relaxed with biothe, was amused. "It isn't vicious to destroy wickedness...."

Hearing him Gorse felt sick. Utz had tortured him to try to force him back into Amity; but

Verl felt that his own virtue entitled him to destroy any who were not virtuous—exactly as Utz had warned.

Gorse had known his error, really, when Verl said that self-denial was desirable for its own sake. Fulfillment was desirable for its own sake—but there should be some reason for denial.

As he listened to Verl boasting of how many people were ready for his message of virtue through denial and pain, Gorse felt fear. He had already ruined his own life. How tragically wasteful if many other fools like himself actually came to believe in Verl's glorification of self-torture. He knew now why wars had flourished during the ancients' regime; men in pain struck out at their fellows.

He shuddered. He had been willing to sacrifice himself to save the world from his sick mind, but it was another sick mind who really threatened the continued peace and security of Amity. Verl, intense, fanatic, was just the man to lead a movement. If he escaped, he would live to destroy Amity; and he intended to escape.

After that Gorse was with him constantly.

LESS THAN a week later the men were taking their evening rest in the yard when Verl quietly started to walk away. Gorse tried to follow but one of the men

seized his arm. "Don't spoil it; afterward, he'll get us all out..."

Gorse twisted away, drove his fists at the man. Two others grabbed his arms and they all started to sing. A guard glanced toward them from one of the towers and then looked away. Occasionally a whole group would save their biotche for a party.

As soon as the spotlight had passed on, Gorse pivoted suddenly and kneed the man on his left. He doubled over, releasing Gorse's arm. Gorse struck at the man on his right with his free left. His captor cried out and let go.

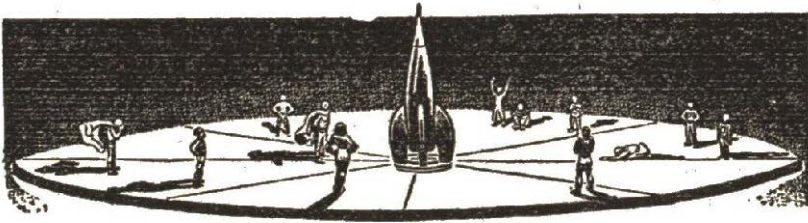
Gorse ran across the yard to directly under one of the guard's towers. Verl was already halfway up a rope ladder suspended from the wall. Gorse followed him.

Verl tried to go faster when he felt Gorse on the ladder, then tried to kick at him. He was too afraid of falling off or attracting attention to be very troublesome. By the time they were at the top Gorse had a firm grip on Verl's pants leg. If he shoved him off, Verl was going with him.

Furious, Verl turned. "Why did you come? The boat only holds one! Later, I'll get you all free!"

Gorse clambered over the edge of the wall still clutching Verl's trouser leg. That Verl would release them all was exactly what he feared; and intended to prevent, whatever the cost.

Crouching, he stared over the



side edge of the wall down to the turbulent, oily swells of the bay below. He tried to sound nonchalant. "Always room for one more..."

Verl reversed the ladder and Gorse made him go down first. The boat was a small, neatly-folded package on the rocks below. Provided, no doubt, by someone a board the mail-and-supplies launch.

Real evidence of the strength behind the enemies of Amity made Gorse more sure of what had to be done— To the other fools, who, like himself, were jeopardizing the finest civilization man had ever attained.

Verl did something and the canvas became a small boat. Verl almost upset it trying to keep Gorse out. "You'll sink it!" He said finally, "Listen Gorse. If you must come, hang on to the edge and I'll tow you in."

AS GORSE dropped into the cold, stinking water Verl slipped one of the extensible aluminum oars out of its pocket, poised to strike him as he rose.

Gorse anticipated that and came

up beside the boat, too close in for Verl to strike him without overturning. "Hold it," he warned.

Enraged, Verl struck anyhow. The boat turned and dumped him and bobbed away from both of them. Frantically, Gorse thrust toward it. Getting on was not easy, because of the swells, but he managed; the other oar was still in its compartment.

Verl was gasping and crying out and going under, but the waves and the singing inside the courtyard covered the noise.

It took Gorse hours to maneuver the boat to a landing with one oar, but he never doubted that he would do it; he had to see Utz once more.

Ashore he was spotted and recognized for an escapee immediately—but the guards *did* relay his message to Utz. And Utz was willing to see him.

Hours later, again he was being escorted into his office. One of the guards had managed to get him a change of clothes and the plane that had brought him from the coast had facilities for him to wash away the stench of the bay. He felt

completely exhausted, but thankful that he was going to be able to do something to correct the wrong he had done.

Utz was calm as usual. He seated Gorse in the same chair he had occupied once before, helped himself to a cigaret.

Gorse had been planning his speech ever since he first heard Verl's ideas, but it was still not easy to make. Not after what had passed between himself and Utz.

He said finally, flatly, "I was wrong; I was completely wrong."

Utz raised his eyebrows, didn't speak. "I just killed a man—left him to drown." Gorse felt his mouth tightening. "That doesn't bother me. What bothers me is that another will take his place. Another who'll be dangerous to Amity..."

"Do you care?" Utz looked at him.

"I told you I was wrong," Gorse said with helpless anger. "I'm trying to make up for it."

"What do you suggest?"

Gorse said urgently. "You'll have to kill them: they're too dangerous. The threat they represent is too savage—"

Utz interrupted quietly. "You sound considerably less tolerant than when—"

"Don't you think I know and regret it? How wrong I was!" Tension stiffened Gorse's mouth, made it hard to speak. "But they

must be killed. I, too, if you like. They're dangerous to Amity."

Utz looked at him with something like satisfaction. "Occasionally, Gorse, we run across a man who'll die for someone or something. That's good. More rarely, still we find someone who'll kill for his beliefs. That's even better..." He smiled, got up, gesturing to Gorse.

"But those men in quarantine! They can destroy everything we've accomplished so far!"

Utz smiled more broadly. "What if a few do escape us, spread their gospel of rage?" He shrugged. "Why should we kill them? They are our training ground; we need them..." Again he beckoned for Gorse to accompany him.

Gorse got up, frowning. "Training ground?"

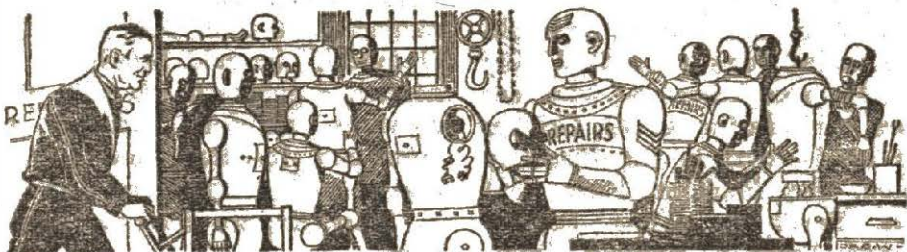
"For High Priest..." Utz moved serenely across his office to another door. "No man is ready for our supreme council until he has weathered their test..."

A little dizzily, Gorse followed him. "Where," he began, and then stopped.

"To join your fellows." Utz opened the door and a large group of men seated around a conference table grew quiet and arose. "From all parts of the world..." Utz said simply. "You can see we've been expecting you..."



Solar Timesavers spared no one, and, no thing, in their tireless efforts to serve....



IN WORKING ORDER

by Ward Moore

illustrated by ORBAN

MR. JEREMY GRINKER, in charge of ashly residues for Asteroid Foods ("Prepared In Outer Space For The Inner Man"), landed his copter on the roofport of the Solar Timesavers Building. His personal Timesaver, Jerry, was out of order, a grave inconvenience for Mr. Grinker, who was bringing him in for repairs.

The soul-billboards on the roof chuckled, *If It Isn't a Solar It Isn't a Timesaver; From Mercury*

To Pluto Solar Timesavers Save Time; Wasting Time Pressing Buttons? Let a Timesaver Press Them For You; What Did You Do Today That a Timesaver Could Have Done For You? Then they switched to the company's anthem, in rousing tempo, "The top of every world is polar; The tops in servitors is Solar."

Mr. Grinker, struggling to load Jerry's duraluminum bulk on a trundler, nodded. He would no more have bought a competing

Universal Vassal, Sunsystem Serf, or Planetary Do-4-U than he would have traded Jerry (a 2152 Utility Model) in on a new '54 with tentacles, instead of arms. Mr. Grinker was loyal—loyal to the Planetary Union, the Fedlican Party ("It Will Never Be Time For A Change Again"), Asteroid Foods, and Jerry. He agreed with the ad-cast, now trumpeting, "*What's Good For Solar Timesavers Is Good For The Planetary Union!*"

He'd been a child when the glorious revolution overthrew Toddling Socialism, but he remembered some of its horrors: no banks, no credit, no finance companies, no vice-presidents, no advertising. Dull, drab, lethargic plenty instead of stimulating competition for limited goods. Penthouse Planners and Cerebral Socialists, yearning for the past, were misfits and cranks who never had it so good.

He pressed the elevator button; Jerry himself would be doing this menial service in a few minutes. It could not take longer to replace the missing spindle nut and remove the danger of Jerry shaking his electronic brain loose every time he used his neck.

The doors shut, the annunciator murmured, "See the 2154; a demonstrator on every floor." "... Twenty-fifth floor, thank you."

Mr. Grinker wheeled Jerry into a hum of activity. Timesavers in all states of assembly were being

worked on by others. "Spindle nut, number M20 dash 960, for a '52 U model," he said briefly to the nearest, a gunmetal job with gold chevrons tastefully welded on arms and forehead, and *Repairs* also in gold, on chest and back.

"Sorry, sir; we don't have parts here."

"All right; who does?"

"Stores and Spares; thirty-third floor. Thank you, sir."

Mr. Grinkler nodded. All servitors were respectful and polite under the new system. A far cry from the glum old days when a robot handed you whatever you asked for without a courteous word.

"Newest Timesavers are the housewife's dream; In all styles and ores they shine and gleam. Thirty-third floor, thank you."

Shelves and bins stretched to the ceiling. The only Timesaver visible was stainless steel with informally arranged copper dots.

"Spindle nut, number M20 dash 960, for a '52 model."

"Fourth aisle to your right. Thank you sir."

Four aisles over Mr. Grinker repeated his need to a Timesaver who, like the other, had *Stores & Spares* in copper, but with a pattern of circles instead of dots.

"Yes sir. I have no shop order on such a number, sir."

"Never mind. Just sell me the spindle nut; I'll put it on."

"I can't do that, sir. Repairs to

Solar Timesavers must be made by factory-adjusted mechanics."

"Look," said Mr. Grinker; "This doesn't call for special skill. I'll just start the thread and activate Jerry; he'll tighten it on."

"Sorry, sir; tinkering or tampering invalidates your guarantee."

"I'll waive guarantees on the spindle nut. And on the spindle itself," he added generously. "In fact, if anything at all goes wrong with Jerry's neck because of this I'll make no complaint."

"You can't do that, sir."

"Why not?"

"Company policy, sir. If exceptions were made on one repair, exceptions would have to apply to all."

Mr. Grinker respected company policy. "Where do I get an order?"

"Fifty-first floor, sir. They'll telephote a requisition."

"Why can't I phone an order from here?"

"I have only an outgoing check-viser and an incoming telephote."

MR. GRINKER and Jerry rode to the fifty-first floor, hearing that "Executives need them, assemblylines speed them, The one you must favor is the bright new Timesaver."

A burnished brass model had *Repair-Routing* in black venerium.

"Spindle nut, number M29 dash 960, for a '52 model."

"Have you a clearance, sir?"

"Clearance?"

"Yes sir. Please consult Mr. Zergut, our vice-president in charge of routing obsolete models."

"Obsolete? *Obsolete?* I said '52, not '42."

"I understood you, sir. Solar Timesavers' optional aurafier catches sounds inaudible to human ears. My recommemory—standard on all late models—retains both audio and visual images."

"But how can you call a two year old model obsolete?"

"I have nothing to do with it, sir; company policy deter—"

"All right. Where's this what-his-name's screen?"

"Mr. Zergut's tivydesk is the third beyond the receptionist, sir."

Mr. Grinker's arms, unused to exercise, began to ache. He halted the trundler beside the bronze and aluminum Timesaver whose neatly lettered *Receptionist* seemed faintly feminine.

"Good afternoon," the receptionist trilled. "Solar Timesavers Incorporated is here to serve you."

"Fine. I want an order from your Mr. Zergut for a spindle nut."

"A clearance, sir," the receptionist corrected. "Shop orders come from Supervisory. You name, address, telephone, please?"

"Look, I just want a spindle nut. Like those on your neck."

"Not *my* neck, sir. "I'm a '54 Special Deluxe. *My* spindle nuts have left-hand threads."

"I still only want a nut. You don't need a file on me for that."

"The information is for our records. To serve you efficiently."

Mr. Grinker glanced at his watch. How was he going to explain this prolonged absence from his tivy desk to Harley Gayne, Asteroid Foods' vice-president in charge of vice-presidents? He gave his name, address, telephone. He even threw in his copter license number.

"Thank you. Are you employed, Mr. Grinker?"

"What difference does that make?"

If Timesavers had emotions, the receptionist would have looked reproachful. "We cannot function efficiently without data, sir."

"You have it. I gave pages of it when I bought Jerry."

"But not up to date, sir; not correlated to repairs."

"Look, I'm in a hurry; can't we cut this red tape?"

"Since the Return to Free Enterprise red tape has been done away with, sir. Bureaucracy and government interference have been abolished. Private business exists to expedite, not obstruct."

Mr. Grinker, abashed, reproved, instructed by a metal servitor in thinking a thing through and fundamental Fedlicanism, muttered, "Asteroid Foods. Five hundred forty-first vice-president."

"Married, single, or divorced?" The receptionist blocked his protest. "Statistics to discover what conditions cause breakdowns."

"But— Married."

"Wife's full name, please?"

"Don't tell me my wife's name has any connection with spindle nuts."

"No, sir."

There was a long pause. "Well? What are we waiting for now?"

"Your wife's full name, sir."

"But you admitted that had nothing to do with it."

"No, sir. You told me not to tell you your wife's name had any connection with spindle nuts. I am adjusted to maximum agreeableness to customers, so I can't tell you something you've told me not to."

"O. K. I take it back. Doralee Punzeigle Grinker. Why?"

"If you should pass away, we'd want to serve the new owner—"

"Efficiently. All right. What else? Blood type? Age? Politics? IQ? Medical history? Fingerprints?"

The receptionist selected several items, inquired about others he hadn't mentioned. "Thank you Mr. Zergut will see you now."

"About time. Two hours wasted on a ten minute matter."

A SCREEN threedeed. Mr. Zergut might almost have been Mr. Grinker's twin, except he was heavier. More like Harley Gayne. The same iovlon smock, depilated face, expressionless eyes. In the old, regimented days the robots had been alike; humans tried to escape the monotony by eccentric

dress, habits, thoughts. In that planned, unnatural drabness they prized, instead of suppressing difference.

"Zergut here." He stared unblinkingly at Mr. Grinker.

"Spindle nut," began Mr. Grinker eagerly, describing it.

Mr. Zergut reflected thoughtfully. "Left spindle or right?"

"What's the difference? The spindles and nuts are identical."

Mr. Zergut clasped his hands behind his neck and looked stern. "Are you trying to tell us our business, Mr...Um...Drinker?"

"Grinker," corrected Mr. Grinker angrily. "Jeremy Grinker. I'm not trying to tell you anything except that I want a spindle—"

"—nut M20 dash 960. I can't requisition one without specifying right or left spindle. Our mechanic must be told where it goes."

"If he can't see which one is off, I'll show him."

Mr. Zergut shook his head tolerantly. "Not the way we do things. Repair orders are exact; slipshod methods went out with Planning."

"Oh... Left spindle," said Mr. Grinker sullenly.

"Left spindle." Mr. Zergut grunted. "How did the nut come off?"

"How the devil do I know? Suddenly Jerry's head was wacking back and forth like a metronome. Garbled his speech, too. I deacti-

vated him and saw the nut was gone. I tried to find it, but our sweebaire autoclean—very sensitive; a grain of sand starts it—must have detected it, sucked it in and pulverized it."

Mr. Zergut shook his head. Not tolerantly this time. "We can't repair Timesavers without knowing the cause of failure. Solar Timesavers offers maximum service; each model is better than the one before. To improve them we must know how and why they break down."

"But anyone can lose a nut," argued Mr. Grinker.

"Not a Solar Timesaver. 'Work to build because built to work' as we say among ourselves. Even an obsolete model couldn't lose a spindle nut accidentally. Mistreatment, carelessness, tampering—"

"I've taken perfect care of Jerry. Followed the handbook exactly. 'Light, utilitarian work; no factory labor or steady use as computer.' I don't know how he lost the spindle nut; maybe the lockwasher wasn't—"

Mr. Zergut pounced. "You've lost the lockwasher, too?"

"I haven't lost anything," cried Mr. Grinker, losing his temper. "I have the washer; you can add the information to your files. I don't care how the spindle nut came off; I want another. You can't tell me a six thousand credit Timesaver is junk unless a clairvoyant or psy-

choanalyst discovers how a lousy spindle nut got loose!"

"Are you trying to tell us how to run our business?"

"Yes!" shouted Mr. Grinker, pushed into sedition, rebellion, and subversion; "yes, damn it, if you don't know how yourselves!"

There was shocked silence. Even Mr. Grinker felt he had gone too far. Injustice rankled, but he had weakened his case.

"Now, now—let's be reasonable," urged Mr. Zergut, obviously humoring someone quite unreasonable. "There's a space on our form headed '*Cause of Failure*'. I can't leave it blank."

"Why not?"

"Why not? That space was put there by qualified time study engineers. Experts. *Business* experts. Do you or I know better than they? It's not a whim of mine to fill out the form; it's to keep our service up to standard for *you*."

"Oh," said Mr. Grinker exhaustedly, "put down that Jerry lost the spindle nut from looking over his shoulder apprehensively."

Mr. Zergut frowned. "Sounds neurotic. Solar Timesavers—"

"Perfectly normal. Jerry adjusts the private Asteroid Foods' tele-screen; naturally he's anxious for it never to get out of focus."

"Seems to me you ought to install a self-rectifying—"

"Are you trying to tell us how to run *our* business?" asked Mr. Grinker triumphantly.

ZEST VISIBLY left Mr. Zergut. Without real enthusiasm he listed the actions Jerry (or as he put it coldly, "Our '52 U model") normally performed, the times he'd been exposed to corrosive acids, radioactivity, floods, temperatures of 200 degrees (fahrenheit) and other hazards. He seemed almost relieved to say, "Well, that's it. You can pick up the spindle nut on—"

"I know. Mr. Grinker was already wheeling Jerry to the elevator.

The stainless steel *Stores & Spares* shook a polite head. "You forgot to pick up your invoice, sir."

"I'll get it after; just let me have the spindle nut now."

"Sorry, sir. Receipted bills are necessary for expediting."

"Nonsense! Do you think I'm going to abscond with a spindle nut?"

"I'm a limited duty model, sir; not built to speculate."

"All right; all right. Where do I pay?"

"You can't pay till you get an invoice, sir. From Accounting."

On the way to Accounting Mr. Grinker barely heard the cheery, "One third down and a judgement waiver Brightens your home with a new Timesaver." The worst was over. In a few minutes Jerry would be repaired. It would be he, not Mr. Grinker, who would drudge at pressing *Down* buttons, running

elevators, driving the copter home. Mr. Grinker's heart warmed at the thought of good old Jerry, and by extension softened toward his manufacturers, Solar Timesavers.

"Third sub-basement. Thank you."

Each glass-fronted cubicle was occupied by a Timesaver of different metal with contrasting welded *Accounts*. As the towel-sized bill came through the proper slot his impatience dwindled. "Once they get started their system really works," he conceded.

"Please pay any of the cashiers on the sixtieth floor," instructed *Accounts* sweetly. "The receipted duplicate will clear your work order with Parts and alert Repairs."

"O.K.," he answered cheerily. "It won't be long now."

In the elevator he glanced at the bill. Absently he let his eye rove down the detailed columns, then halted petrified at the total.

"No!" cried Mr. Grinker. "Never!"

The doors slid smoothly open. "Sixtieth floor. Thank you."

"Damnation!" roared Mr. Grinker. "Impossible!"

"Sixtieth floor. Thank you. Sixtieth—"

"Insane! Unbelievable! It's robbery! Outrage! Banditry!"

"Sixti—"

"I won't pay it! I'll never pay it!" Boiling with rage, Mr. Grinker rolled Jerry out of the elevator. "Here," he shouted, "I want

to complain! I want an adjustment! I want this bill fixed!"

Except for the faint strains of *The Top of Every World is Polar*, *The Tops in Servitors is Solar*, perfect quiet answered. He strode to the nearest window, thrusting out the invoice. "I won't pay it!"

"Yes sir. What seems to be wrong?" *Cashier* was gold and silver.

"Seems to be wrong? *Seems?* Forty-six credits for a nut!"

"Oh no, sir. The spindle nut is only 52 mils."

"Yes. 52 mils for a spindle nut, 30 mils for a lockwasher, six credits for labor and 40 credits for information. Information!"

"That's correct, sir. Your total bill is 46 credits, 82 mils."

"That's what I said; forty-six credits for a— Oh, there's no use arguing with you—you gadgets. Let me talk to your vice-president in charge of complaints. Here and now," he bellowed. "Without any more run-around or palaver."

He braced himself for evasion. Instead a tivydesk threedeed on a nearby screen. "Quigley here." Mr. Quigley had a depilated face, expressionless eyes, jovlon smock. "Seems to be the trouble?"

Mr. Grinker told him. Painedly and emphatically.

"Quite so. Everything in order."

"I won't pay it."

"An unreasonable attitude. Quite unreasonable. Let's see; who expe-

dited this? Ah, Zergut. Good man, Zergut. On his toes. Figuratively. Zergut? Will you cut in please? Quigley, *Complaints & Adjustments*. Customer seems upset over a little item—"

"Little?" shrieked Mr. Grinker. "Forty credits for information and you call it little? What information? When did I ever—"

MR. ZERGUT'S voice was harsh. "Grinker, you're a troublemaker. Controversial. Spotted it right away. One of those fellows who are against free enterprise and want to go back to planning."

"What—"

"There you go again with a question. Let me tell you, Grinker, Solar Timesavers doesn't like to make trouble for anyone, not even a Planner, but there's a limit to our patience. You come here, wasting our time, trying to tell us how to run our business, asking silly questions that show you don't really understand free enterprise. Naturally we charge for the informa-

tion we've given you—and let me tell you, forty credits is cheap for the briefing you've had."

"But I didn't ask—"

"We don't want to be tough about it, but maybe it's our duty to let Asteroid Foods know they have a Planner on their staff."

"I'm not a..." began Mr. Grinker.

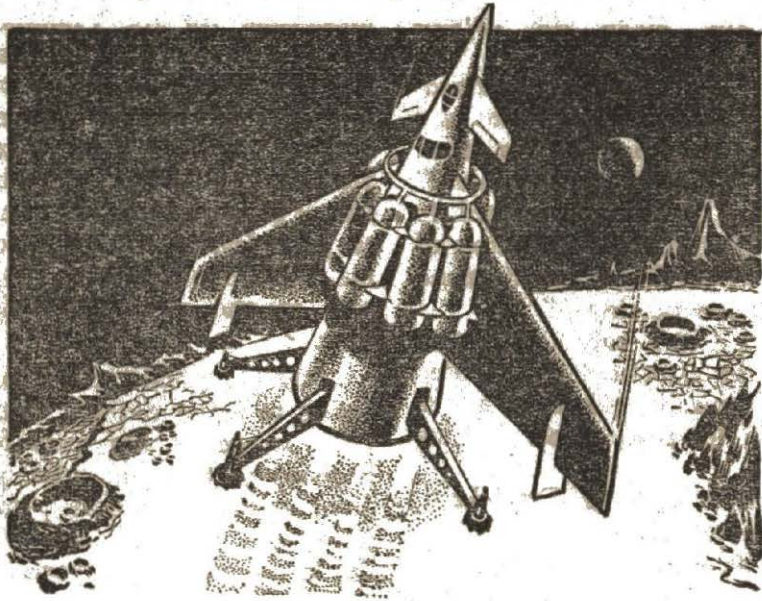
His voice trailed off. He saw the whole horrible vista before him. Harley Gayne would never believe the slander, but a vice-president, any vice-president, against whom the slightest suspicion, no matter how absurd, had been breathed, lost his usefulness. It was bad public relations. He could hear Gayne's mournful dismissal.

"All right," Mr. Grinker muttered brokenly; "I'll pay."

"Right," said Mr. Zergut cheerfully. "And as I started to say when you rushed off, you can pick up the spindle nut on Tuesday. Next Tuesday. We don't stock that type; have to order it."



Was it a probable future they saw—or an immutable one?



DESIGN IN STATISTICS

by Irving Cox, Jr.

illustrated by Laton

"MY NAME is Paul Lark. I helped Dr. Roberts build the Historizer. On June 16th I was operating the machine when—"

"One moment." Senator

McHagle interrupted my testimony in that somber tone of his. "Are you related in any way to Hiram Lark?"

"I never heard the name," I

said. "Now, about the experiment—"

"Hiram Lark is your second-cousin." Senator McHagle waved a legal-looking paper in my face. "Do you still deny knowing him?"

"Senator, I was subpoenaed to testify concerning the operation of the Historizer. I don't understand what possible bearing—"

"Hiram Lark's wife's sister was at one time associated with a Red Front organization; I have sworn affidavits to that effect in my files."

"I've never met this Hiram Lark. The name means nothing—"

"Careful, Mr. Lark; remember, you're under oath." The Senator smiled with saintly pity and waved another paper at me. "On the fifteenth of August, 1948, you spent a night in St. Louis, at which time you visited Hiram Lark and—"

"That was twenty years ago, when I was a kid of eight!"

"I resent being interrupted," Senator McHagle interrupted me indignantly.

"Perhaps I did meet Lark then," I admitted. "I don't remember. At the time, we were driving west, and when we stopped overnight, dad sometimes looked up relatives who lived nearby."

I felt no real resentment, but instead a kind of clinical curiosity. I knew how the hearing would turn out; I had already seen the results—but it was interesting to watch how they pulled it off. Since it was

impossible for the Committee to question the Historizer data, they had to discredit our work without giving us an opportunity to explain it. Not that they knew what they were doing—far from it—but the future is as immutably unchangeable as yesterday. The Senate Committee was simply playing its blind role in the statistical design of time.

McHagle pursed his lips. "I'm trying to bring out the facts, Mr. Lark, to get at the truth for the benefit of the American people. Your testimony proves your willingness to perjure yourself in order to promote Dr. Roberts' vicious attack on our priceless American institutions."

"It is not perjury when I don't—"

"I said a *willingness* to commit perjury," McHagle reminded me smoothly.

"And Dr. Roberts hasn't made an attack on anything. He simply wrote a book describing the data which he—"

"Alleged data presented by a scientist, Mr. Lark, is something we take with reservation. Scientists seem to have a different definition of loyalty from the rest of us."

This generalization provoked a reaction from two other Senators on the Committee. They wrangled with McHagle for an hour or more as to whether or not the remark

should be stricken from the record. It was time to recess the hearing before they had that issue settled. The afternoon session went off just as inanely. All told, throughout my testimony, I didn't complete more than half a dozen statements. Senator McHagle dragged me from one absurd triviality to another; I never did get around to describing Dr. Roberts' machine, or my operation of it on June 16th.

I MET Chuck Roberts four years ago. We were both working for United Electronics. I was a technician; Roberts worked in the experimental lab, designing new applications of the basic computer patents held by the company. Roberts was responsible for the development of the gadget which United Electronics marketed as the Predictolizer.

The machine is a specialized computer, simplified so that an untrained clerk can use it; it is mass-produced at a price every business can afford. That description I've lifted word-for-word from our ads; it's literally true. Fed sales and market data on a given product, the Predictolizer will analyze future trends with an overall error of less than one percent.

I worked closely with Roberts in building the pilot model of the machine. He dreamed up the design; I built the machine from his plans. Roberts has the brain and the imagination; I'm just a

good mechanic who knows how to follow another man's directions.

When the Predictolizer was on the market, Chuck Roberts began tinkering with the idea of using the same principle to analyze social trends. The big problem there was how to reduce the unpredictable human factor to data which could be handled by the computer.

After two years of experiment, Roberts came up with the idea of combining the encephalograph with the computer; I built the machine from his plans. The encephalographic pattern of three different individuals, of three different generations, is tabbed into the computer. The computer combines the separate brain readings to produce a remarkably accurate analysis of the past. The results are thrown like a film on a scanning screen.

United Electronics marketed the new computer as the Historizer. It never sold as well as the Predictolizer, although it had a greater impact on the popular imagination. Individuals who could afford it bought the gadget because it was an amusing toy. Universities and research scholars used it to check the accuracy of the written record of history.

All that is background for the experiment Chuck Roberts conducted on the 16th of June, when we used the Historizer—with a slight variation in the relay setup—to make man's first statistical exploration of the future. For the

test run Roberts used encephalographs of himself, his son and his father. I ran the machine for him, because the subjects supplying the analytical data are always on a comatose condition.

The three of them—two men and a boy—lay on couches with the probe wires taped to their skulls. I turned the dials and slowly the pictograph representation of the data came into focus on the reading screen.

I had no way of knowing how far into the future the machine had projected the analysis. It could have been twenty years or twenty thousand. In dealing with the past that factor had never presented a problem. Costume and event gave clues to the historical period, usually enough to identify the exact year; but we have no clue to the chronology of tomorrow.

As it did in reconstructing the past, the Historizer concentrated upon the point of view of a single individual. From time to time the calculator verbalized his emotional state; the words reeled across the bottom of the reading screen, like the interpretive titles in a foreign language film.

I FIRST SAW the subject as he walked down a suburban street, on both sides of which geometrically identical eight-family dwellings made a patterned wall of cement and steel. At intervals there were small, scrawny patches of

brownish grass. The flat buildings were characterless and ugly; young children were playing in fenced areas crowded between the apartments. Occasionally a sleek vehicle shot down the street, moving so fast I could not see it clearly.

The man was of an indeterminate age, somewhere in his forties. He was wearing an open-necked, bright colored jacket, knee-length shorts, and shoes which seemed to be made of plastic. Other men on the street were dressed in the same way. Across the screen came the first interpretation of the subject's mood. "He feels depressed and frightened. The emotion is related to a job change he has been ordered to make."

The man came to a street corner. He paused, looking carefully in both directions; then, suddenly, he sprinted across the intersection. He had nearly reached the opposite walk when a vehicle shot past, missing him narrowly. I heard an echo of mocking laughter from the driver, as the man jumped desperately for the curb.

I prodded the interpretive dial on the Historizer. The machine clattered out, "Present episode unrelated to emotive mind-set. This situation is entirely normal, a risk every pedestrian must take at an unbridged intersection."

In the next block the man turned down a walk and entered one of the eight-family dwelling units. As he opened his apartment door, I

felt a shock of surprise and horror, for he seemed to have plunged into a domestic crisis. A beautiful woman lay writhing on a couch, and a handsome, nearly naked man was ripping off her clothing and kissing her flaming lips. From the shadows a second man was watching. He had a gun in his hand, and he was aiming it carefully at the pair on the couch.

Ignoring the crisis, the subject of the analysis moved to an inner wall and snapped a switch. The scene faded, and I realized that it had been only a story played out on an enormous, three-dimensional television screen. A woman had been sitting in a foam-leather chair watching the drama. She sprang up angrily.

"You've no right to turn it off, John!" she screamed. "It was *Nellie's Secret Lover*, and you know I always—"

"I want to talk to you, Sandy."

THE WOMAN turned toward him. She was wearing a short, blue skirt and above the waist a tight, skimpy blouse which left her bosom almost completely exposed. Rhinestones were fixed decoratively to her skin.

"My story!" she wailed. "I'll never know how it came out!"

"I've been transferred to the school service," he told her as if he were repeating a death sentence.

"What's that to me?"

"I'll have to teach the culture

core; I don't rate high enough to do one of the sciences."

"Well, the pay's the same, isn't it?"

"I can't take any more of this, Sandy." He reached for her hand, but she jerked away. "Will you go away with me? We can sign up for Mars; they accept older people sometimes."

Sandy swept her hand toward the gigantic television screen. "And leave all this?"

"Things, Sandy; that's all they are—machines. If we started over again in the Mars bubble—"

"Don't be a fool, John."

Across the foot of the screen the Historizer spelled out John's emotional pattern, "He feels a strong affection for his wife, and he is unable to make the decision without her."

The woman went to a wall console and turned a series of dials. A vent snapped open and a tray of food shot out. She handed it to her husband. "There's your dinner," she told him. "Now do you mind if I watch *Uncle Jolly's Jesters*? Tonight they're giving away—"

John wrung his hands. "Sandy, don't you understand? They're putting me in the schools!"

She shrugged. "Social Service is the highest classification you ever qualified for; if you wanted something better, you should have arranged to be born with more brains." She snapped on the tele-

vision and dropped into her padded chair again.

In a kaleidoscopic flash of color the scene on the reading screen shifted. The Historizer was built to do that automatically, to sort out significant episodes and telescope the passage of time. When I saw the man named John again, it was apparently the following morning and he was on his way to work, walking down the same, drab street where the pictograph had first picked him up.

John walked for six blocks past the identical, eight-family apartment buildings and joined the line of men moving up the steps of a passenger station. As the camera-eye gained altitude, I could see the square, flat dwelling units stretching endlessly to the horizon, like a geometric pattern of blocks laid out on the earth. There were no trees anywhere, simply the postage-stamp patches of grass in front of each building and the symmetrical grid of streets. Far away, in a haze of smoke that grayed the morning sky, were the towers of a large city.

Although vehicles of some sort moved on the streets—rocketing along at a breakneck clip—the majority of people seemed to use another form of transportation. The passenger station opened upon a series of sliding walks which moved on an elevated track toward the city. The outer walk was very slow; the inner belt traveled at

better than sixty miles an hour. The intervening walks made an easy transition to the high speed lane.

JOHN FOUND an empty seat on the fast slide-way. As he approached closer to the city, he came to the first of a series of rectangular boxes erected along the sides of the walk. They proved to be a spectacular evolution of the advertising media. Vivid, life-size images—usually lush, nude women—were projected from the boxes. They seemed to travel with each passenger while they cooed their sales spiel.

A blonde talked throatily about a liver compound "to make you feel that old zest for life again." A brunette whispered the virtues of a laxative—"peppy, zippy, snappy, and oh so safe." And a fleshy redhead did a series of bumps and grinds while she sang the sanitary wholesomeness of a cigarette from which everything had been removed. The number of advertisements increased until the projections were tumbling over each other and the clatter of their voices became a screaming Babel.

The slide-walk plunged into the city: canyons of gray stone and a choking fog of industrial smoke. John moved across the intervening belts to the slow-moving outer walk. Over the guard rail I could see into the buildings as they slid past. All were designed for com-

mercial use. I saw no apartments, no hotels, no slums. The city was only a work center; the people lived outside in the ugly, suburban subdivisions. Inside the factories giant machines were hammering out a variety of products—nearly half produced chemically synthetic foods—but the machines were largely automatic. I saw very few laborers; the handful of men at work in the factories seemed to be only repair crews, tinkering at machines which had broken down.

John left the slide-walk at a central terminal. On the thronged city street he walked past display windows which exhibited an infinite assortment of clothing, games, patent medicines, tonics and labor-saving gadgets. Advertising slogans and price scales were flashed at him from all sides. Apparently his was a culture where technology had found a machine to do even the smallest individual chore—and where competitive advertising had run riot.

Here and there, sandwiched on display boards between the big, exhibit windows, were posters recruiting colonists for Mars. The central point was a picture of a stern, gray-haired man—vaguely reminiscent of the cartoonist's Uncle Sam—pointing out accusingly at the mob. Beneath the face red letters proclaimed, "*We need YOU on Mars. OPPORTUNITY UNLIMITED. For details apply to your local tax bureau.*"

At intervals along the walk were racks of popular literature. Neon letters over the stands read, "Current Library Selections." I saw nothing remotely resembling a genuine book. There were one or two serious picture magazines, but the majority were brightly colored comics. The covers were the most lurid illustrations of sex and violence I had ever seen; literally nothing left to the viewer's imagination. A steady stream of men from the crowd put coins in the purchase boxes and selected literature from the racks, reading avidly as they walked along the murky street.

AT A SECOND terminal John took another slide-walk to the outskirts of the city. He got off in front of a high, granite building where the words "City School" were chiseled in stone above the door. Mobs of teen-agers thronged a fenced courtyard. Beyond the building I saw a vast parking lot filled with sleek, low-slung, two-seated vehicles which resembled daringly designed sport cars of my own day. Other cars shot into the lot from the grid of suburban roads. These, then, were the high-speed vehicles I had noticed before—the sort of car which had nearly run John down the previous afternoon. Evidently the sports cars were driven only by teen-agers.

John worked his way through the courtyard crowd and entered the school. In the reception hall

I saw another display rack of current literary selections. These comics, if possible, were even more lurid than the material offered to the adults. The school day had not yet started, and only a few young people were in the corridor. It was impossible for me not to notice the young boy—perhaps sixteen—leaning against a central pillar. He wore brief shorts and a tiny jacket, which left his well-muscled chest exposed. He held a girl in his arms, in a long, passionate kiss; slowly his hands kneaded her back as he crushed her closer.

John went past the couple, ignoring the exhibition as if it were a common occurrence. He pushed a bell-button beside a metal door. A eephole slid open; John gave his name; he was admitted to the administrative office of the city school. A chubby, pink-faced man sat behind a large desk.

"So you're our replacement for the culture core," he said, with disappointment. "This time I hoped they would send a younger man."

"I've had no school service," John volunteered hopefully. "Perhaps if you contact the assignment bureau, you can persuade them to send another—"

"We make do with what we have. The culture core isn't important enough to warrant an official protest."

"I'm not a teacher, sir. Since I took the qualification exams, I've worked in the national archives.

I don't know exactly what I'm supposed to do here."

"That's no problem." The administrator spread his pudgy hands in an expansive gesture. "The culture core is divided into thirty minute periods. You teach history, literature, philosophy, government, the spiritual and moral values of—"

"In only thirty minutes?"

"My dear sir, that is the maximum time we can spare from the important scientific and technical subjects. The modern school is integrated with society; we prepare the child for his life experience." The administrator took a number of paperbound books from a drawer and piled them on his desk—a stack nearly three feet high. "This is the outline of your course," he explained negligently.

"I cover all that," John gasped, "in half an hour a day?"

ACROSS THE screen the Historizer sent the explanation, "John feels an unspecified hatred for his whole civilization. There is a strong image in his mind of the recruiting posters for the Martian colony. He is thinking about his wife's refusal and what he might do to persuade her to change her mind."

The administrator said unctuously, "The culture core in an overview of our social evolution. Don't bog down in details. Hit the high points—the signposts, you might

say, on the long road of human progress. Let the pupil understand how we have achieved our present wholesome perfection by correcting the errors of the past."

"Every day in every way we get better and better."

"Precisely," the administrator beamed. "That's the idea."

"I was quoting a phrase I once read in a book I found in the archives," John answered stiffly. His irony was self-evident, without the explanation of the Historizer, but it was quite lost on the administrator.

"In teaching the culture core," the administrator continued, "the key to success is pupil interest. Make it exciting; make it entertaining. You have a certain degree of opposition to overcome. The boys and girls hate the culture core because it's the one course they're required to take. And most of them have a natural feeling that if they take the subject matter too seriously they may qualify only for the social services when they take their final classification exams." He shook his head depreciatingly. "But you'll work out good teaching techniques, I'm sure. Just remember, sir, we are completely democratic here; the children run the schools. Find a method to satisfy the majority, and you'll have no trouble."

The pink-faced administrator arose and shook John's hand.

"Your assigned classroom is the

bungalow south of the campus. We have no space for the non-technical courses in the school building proper. You understand the reason for that: the noise and confusion of the culture core would disturb the more important lectures." He glanced at his watch. "You have nearly ten minutes before your first class. That gives you plenty of time to look through your outline and work out some material for today."

John took his three foot bundle of printed brochures and retreated through the metal door into the hall. There were more teen-agers crowding the corridor by that time. Most of them stood in knots talking shrilly in the jargon of youth. A few were reading comics from the library rack. Some younger boys were wrestling with each other or playing tag. Here and there couples were embracing with frank, sensuous pleasure.

Because of the outlines he carried, the teen-agers recognized John as their new culture core teacher. They hooted derisive remarks at him or jostled against him maliciously. John seemed to expect the general attitude of disrespect; he ignored it, or muttered a vague apology. As he walked toward the campus, he passed the open doors of the science lecture halls, where the gleaming array of experimental equipment stood on the lab tables — motors in one room, chemicals in another, partly dismantled TV

transmitters in a third: all the host of mechanical things so vital to his world.

THE CALCULATOR tabbed out a continuous patter of words.

"He feels resentment at the mechanistic preoccupation of his society, where technology has relegated social values to a status of utter insignificance. He thinks of it as a permanently adolescent culture, with the amoral philosophy of a twelve-year-old. The only solution he can see for himself is escape to the Martian colony. He knows there is no legal reason why he cannot go alone, but faithfulness to his wife is a significant part of the value pattern he has made for himself. He must persuade her to go with him."

John crossed the courtyard and entered a dismal, ramshackle bungalow. Rows of rickety, old-fashioned schooldesks lined the splintered floor. At the front of the room was a small, cracked blackboard; a half-dozen dusty, faded pictures of ancient buildings were thumb-tacked to the bulletin board.

John dropped his outlines on the teacher's desk. Dust swirled up, dancing thickly in the slanting shaft of anaemic sunlight that came through the narrow windows. Slowly clenching his fists, John turned toward an apparatus standing in a corner of the room. It was a derivative of the telephone, integrated with a viewing screen.

He dialed a number. I saw his wife's pretty face focused on the glowing view panel. "What do you want?" she demanded.

"Sandy, look at this room. It's where they expect me to teach culture. I can't go through with it. Don't you see—"

"John, do you mean to say you dragged me away from watching *Dr. Kimmer's Problem* just to tell me that?"

"I want to sign up for the Martian colony."

"That nonsense again?" She laughed. "I've more important things to do, John, than argue with you about anything so absurd. Go to Mars, if that's what you want, but leave me out of your plans."

"I didn't mind the social service as long as they kept me in the archives. I was able to pretend that ideas important to me mattered to other people, too. But now I have to rub my nose in the truth. I have to see young people who don't care, and don't have even an idiot's inkling of moral values—"

"That's nothing to me, John."

She broke the connection. He stood looking dumbly at the blank screen. Far away a bell sounded. A mob of scantily dressed teenagers poured into the bungalow, talking and laughing among themselves. Four or five dropped into the creaking desk chairs and opened their notebooks; they were completing written assignments for a class in motor mechanics.

John stood behind his desk. The class ignored him. He asked for their attention and the din of conversation increased. John rapped his knuckles on the wood. A girl of fifteen looked at him brightly. "What's on your mind, Egghead?" she asked.

THE OTHERS gradually fell silent, waiting for his response so they would have something concrete to jeer at. John twisted his hands together; abruptly the muscles of his face hardened.

"No, I won't run away to Mars," he said, more to himself than to his shiny-faced audience of adolescents. "I have a responsibility here; I never thought of it that way before. Perhaps I can't teach any of you a system of values, but I can make you distrust what you have now."

Somewhere in the room a boy laughed; the others took it up in chorus. John waited for the laughter to subside. "You expect to hear a thirty minute lecture from me," he said. "That's what a culture core teacher is supposed to do—dish up some entertaining tidbits that you can forget five minutes after you hear them. By all means, I must be amusing; it's a cardinal sin if I don't hold your interest. Everything I believe in has to be sacrificed to that."

He took his ponderous course outline and symbolically crammed it in the wastebasket. "But I'm

going to do it differently. I won't tell you about the past. If you feel any curiosity, dig the information out of the archives for yourselves. Starting today there's going to be a new subject covered by the culture core. And that will be you—yourselves."

"I don't get it, Egghead," one of the teen-agers said uncertainly.

"What could be more entertaining?" John demanded savagely. "A generation totally without frustrations—for only rules can frustrate, and you have no rules. Only a standard of values can instill a sense of guilt, and you live without standards. The well-adjusted people. We've cleansed your minds of neuroticism and madness, but we've washed away the soul in the bargain. Now I'm going to dissect your minds and—"

At that point the projection screen on the Historizer went blank. I saw the words, "Hypothesis derived from the data is—"

Frantically I twisted the dial to demand more information, but in a figurative sense the calculator shook its head by stating, "Additional specifics unnecessary."

The Historizer is, after all, only a machine designed to present a scientific generalization relative to social trends. When the machine has all the data necessary for a valid conclusion, it makes no superfluous exploration. The human drama, in which an observer might have taken an emotional interest,

had no meaning to the machine. I could not return to John's situation in order to discover what solution he attempted to his own problem. Since the Historizer had not seen fit to explore it at greater length, I could only assume that whatever John tried had not appreciably altered the statistical pattern I had seen.

Helpless, I watched the orderly formation of the generalization on the reading screen, "The culture is technologically very complex, predominately materialistic. Artistic creativeness as well as moral philosophy are subordinated, and will finally disappear. The individual misfit is rare; the majority are attracted to the frontier colony on Mars. Although material invention is multiplying, social invention is at a standstill. The prognosis for such a society is conformity at its present level of adjustment, followed by a steady degeneration. Without a value system a human culture has no goal; without a goal, that culture moves inevitably into aimless chaos and dissolution."

BY THAT TIME Dr. Roberts, and his father and son, had recovered from the encephalographic coma. I removed the electrodes from their skulls. The Historizer works in such a way that they were aware of the data I had observed on the screen; the calculator transmits the details directly into their conscious minds.

"What a miserable way for civilization to end," Chuck Roberts said grimly.

"Can't we do something?" his father inquired.

"To change the culture?" I asked. "The Historizer has been accurate in every analysis of the past, down to the smallest detail. This data about tomorrow must be right, too."

"It's only a statistical accuracy," Roberts answered firmly, "the evolution of civilization as it exists now. We weren't observing a real future, but only a probability."

"I wonder," I said. "When we apply the Historizer to the past, the reconstruction has concentrated on real people."

"Because the past already exists. Tomorrow is different. It could be what we observed, but man by the exercise of his will can always remake his own destiny. We know while elements in our present culture were overemphasized to create the situation we saw. All we need do, then, is make the public aware of the danger, and we can change the pattern."

On that basis, Dr. Roberts wrote his book. The rest is current history: the spectacular newspaper controversy, the storm of critical articles in the big, national magazines, and finally the Senate hearing. Unlike many scientists, Dr. Roberts had a knack for making himself entirely clear. Perhaps people reacted because they understood

him; or perhaps because he attacked our most popular shibboleths.

On the surface it would seem that a defense of morals was one thing that even Senator McHagle could never consider subversive. He analyzed the false sentiment and the suggestive sexual immorality underlying the comic books, the TV soap operas, the happy-ending fairy tales in the slick-paper magazines; he demonstrated how the mild opiate of today could become tomorrow's social paralysis. He condemned the educator's philosophy of education, which had substituted technological skill for the moral values derived from academic scholarship. By all odds Roberts' most vitriolic criticism was aimed at the advertising profession, where sex had become the touchstone for selling everything from toothpaste to vacuum cleaners.

Various groups agreed wholeheartedly with parts of his book; no one accepted it all. Goodhearted church folk quoted Roberts on comic books and the sins of the silver screen. But they screamed "Un-Americanism" because of his attack upon the advertisers—which the hucksters' fraternity managed to interpret as an underhand attack upon the fundamentals of free enterprise. It was inevitable that Roberts would sooner or later tangle with the McHagle Committee.

NAIVELY, Dr. Roberts welcomed the investigation. He knew it would be televised. He thought it would give him an opportunity to make his point to millions of viewers.

I was more realistic; I knew the McHagle technique.

From the beginning I had never been entirely able to accept Roberts' conclusion that the Historizer had shown us only a statistical probability; John had been an entirely real individual to me. I was certain that I had seen the future, and that nothing we did could change it. Yet it puzzled me when Roberts' book sold so rapidly—half a million copies in two months' time. If he aroused so much popular interest, his point of view was bound to have some effect.

And that created a paradox. If we had seen the future, then it existed just as surely as the past did. Tomorrow is "tomorrow," standing always on the shoulders of "yesterday". If Dr. Roberts actually succeeded in erasing the degenerate trends from our present culture, what happened to John and his world? How could we condemn a reality to non-existence?

The McHagle investigation cancelled out the paradox. In theory, McHagle subpoenaed us to testify to the accuracy of the Historizer data Roberts had published; in actual fact, we were put on the stand to be ridiculed with irrelevant side issues. I knew the meth-

od; I knew how it had to end. Roberts fought hard for his point, and he fought with the cold, precise logic of the scientist; but it was no match for McHagle's emotional paranoia.

At the end of the hearing, the Committee made no indictment, but Roberts had been thoroughly discredited and his research was condemned as Un-American; both Roberts and I were dismissed by United Electronics as security risks. Our job prospects were nil. Roberts might have been a broken man—McHagle's victims usually were—but he had an amazing resilience.

HE WALKED out of the hearing room jauntily, with an air of undefeated pride. As soon as we escaped the mob of photographers, he took my arm and we went to a nearby park. We found an empty bench. For some minutes neither of us spoke. Roberts breathed deeply of the fresh, clean air, as if it would drive the stench of the hearing from his mind.

"When the Historizer broke off the data projection," he said suddenly, "John was faced with a problem very much like ours. I had the impression that he thought he had found a solution."

"I did too," I answered, "but we don't know what it was, and I can't see how it would apply to our situation, in any case."

"Not his specific course of action, Paul. But the method—that's what counts."

"He told the kids in the classroom he wasn't going to teach; he threw his course outline away; then he said—"

"Exactly, Paul. He junked tradition because he knew it had failed before. I've tried the scientist's traditional method of presenting a conclusion, and the McHagle investigation has destroyed the results; therefore, I have to use another technique."

"You still believe you can change what's going to happen?"

"Paul, the only reason we make the statistical analysis of trends is to avoid the predictable pitfalls. The future is always in our hands."

But if people reject the truth, what else can you do?"

"Make a lie, then, that people *are* willing to believe in." Roberts smiled slyly. "I have money, Paul, and I have friends. That combination works miracles. Let's admit that the future we saw was something we manufactured—something ghastly and subversive. We'll do it dramatically, with a lot of public contrition; that automatically transforms us into McHagle heroes. It's a quirk of our time that the confessed subversive somehow becomes a more loyal American than the rest of us. Then, I'll persuade a friend to publish a sham

version of tomorrow—a goal so alluring and so attractive that we'll all jump at the chance to work it out." He looked into my face and I saw the gleam of hope in his eyes. "All we have to do is disturb the present configuration of data slightly, and the whole probability trend becomes invalid."

Dr. Roberts may have had the answer. But I never knew exactly what he had in mind, for, as we left the park, he was struck by an automobile. He died thirty minutes later, without recovering consciousness.

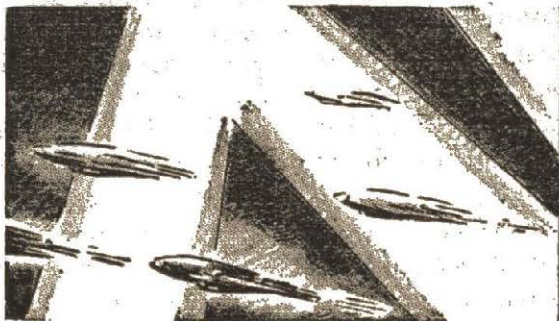
In a general way, I knew what he wanted to do, but not how he planned to do it. As I explained earlier, Roberts had the imagination; I'm just a mechanic who can follow directions. I've had the complete co-operation of Roberts' friends, but we haven't come up with a sham future attractive enough to take the mass mind by storm. When we finally published

our fabricated data, the book sold less than a thousand copies.

The public has lost interest in the analysis of the future because of the popular excitement over our first successful rocket ship landing on Mars. The newspapers are already talking about building a Martian colony. The planet is unbelievably rich in uranium ores.

Only last month a new gadget was introduced: a machine by which advertisers project realistic, three-dimensional images directly in a prospective buyer's vision. Already signboards along the highways are being replaced by the rectangular, projection boxes.

I wonder: could Roberts really have made it any different, if he had lived? Or is the evolution of tomorrow as inevitable and as unalterable as the data of yesterday? Was all history predetermined at the moment when the first living cell emerged from primoidal slime?





They watched in horror, knowing what had happened...

Bit by bit, humanity was being drawn into this vortex . . .

TELESTASSIS

by M. C. Pease

illustrated by ORBAN

STAN WYCOFF sat at the foot of the long table as the President, flanked by his personal secretary, took the seat at the head. In a moment almost of panic Stan wondered why he was here. What rank did he have to sit here among these great? Kritchevsky, the famed professor of comparative sociology at the University of Moscow. Yamagata, one of the foremost philosophers of the world, here from the University of Japan. Renoit, leading anthropologist of France, if not the world. And these others, assembled from all the lands to meet this catastrophe. What right had he to be here, even if he was the resident psychiatrist on the President's staff?

From her chair at the President's

right, Selma flicked him a glance. Her face was impassive and her hands did not hesitate as they arranged her notebook and pen before her, but Stan drew comfort from this sign of her awareness of him. She had wrangled his invitation, he knew, and he was grateful and afraid. Afraid that he would not measure up to her opinion of him, but grateful for the fact of that opinion.

Cautiously he reached out his mind to her. Tentatively, with a question mark. Finding her, he gently fitted his mind to hers. He felt her realize he was there, and sensed her turning to him with a mental smile. But then she stopped. "*No, not here and now,*" her mind said. "*The others might*

become aware." She closed her mind to his, but she did it gently, and he was comforted.

The President cleared his throat. "Gentlemen," he said. "I have called you here as a committee to study the present crisis, and to determine what course of action will help to solve the problem. You probably already know the magnitude of the crisis. If you don't, Mr. Ryan, my assistant here, will inform you. Its scope, its threat to civilization and to humanity itself, is such that a solution *must* be found." He looked old as he stared around the table—old and tired and desperate.

"You are each an authority in your field," he went on. "Between you, you represent all the main fields of knowledge which seem to have a bearing on the situation. If there are any we have left out, you as a committee may, in my name as President of the World, command whomever you will. But I suggest that you will not wish to call many others; even this present committee is beyond the danger point. I suggest you think well before you add to it.

"You each possess one other qualification," he continued. "Each of you talks English fluently. Obviously you will wish to conduct your meetings on the verbal level. I will go further and suggest that you all forego any telepathy until some solution has been found. As members of this committee, you

will be too valuable to take any chances." He smiled, but there was no humor in it as he looked around. Only fear. "And now, gentlemen, I will turn the meeting over to Mr. Ryan, who will act as Chairman in my place. Please do not hesitate to ask for anything you wish." They all got up as the President walked out, and there was silence until Mr. Ryan took the head chair and sat down.

A LEAN, dark man with deep set eyes, Ryan displayed a nervous intensity of focus. He was known as an excellent organizer, Stan knew, and as the President's assistant, had considerable authority. Stan knew him as Selma's father and he worried somewhat about him. He wondered how stable Ryan actually was, and feared that the man's drive might be obsessive.

Calling the meeting to order, Ryan quickly sketched in the background. The world was falling into a coma. Telepathy, first hailed as the tool to save humanity, had proved a terrible curse. Opening the way to more perfect communication, it had solved the age-old problems of humanity. Wars had become impossible with all people knowing each other; crime and evil had nearly been banished. The psychiatrists had had the perfect tool to help the sick of mind. The millennium had arrived.

But then, on the very dawn of

the millennium, had come the dark spectre. Telestassis! Somewhere, some time, some place, there had been a group of people who were alone and afraid. Men, and women, bearing such heavy scars of childhood fears that they could not find peace even in the communion of a telepathic friendship. And somehow their neuroses had meshed, reaching some crisis at the same time and with the same need. Their needs had cried out to each other, and they had locked together in a wild obsessive cycle. Submerging their separate identities in the group, they had found release and satisfaction in the final unity. A union where each thought was locked into the pattern, frozen into a timeless and impervious stassis.

Like a whirlpool, each part had existence only as part of the whole. As individuals, they were gone; freezing into the foetal position, their bodies continued, cared for by their puzzled friends and doctors. But their minds were locked together—locked into the maelstrom of a group obsession so strong that even the trained psychiatrists with all their tools of telepathic probing were powerless.

And like a whirlpool, too, the group drew others into itself, feeding itself on their own worries and fears. It grew to a strength that could attract the mildly neurotic. And finally it grew until a man's fear of the telestassis itself was enough to make it dangerous.

Even as he sat there listening to Ryan's words, Stan could feel in his mind the throb of the telestassis. He could hear its siren song and could sense the pulsing power of it. By habit, he kept his mind locked against it, the door in that direction firmly closed; but, like flooding waters, it was too strong to be completely denied. It seeped around the door, and the vibration of its voice permeated his awareness. There was a temptation to open that door—to open it and see for once and all the idiot titan that was there. There was a fascination to it that could hardly be denied.

STAN SUDDENLY heard Ryan say, "...and there, gentlemen, is the problem. Where shall we start?" What had Ryan been saying, he wondered. In its essential details, he knew, of course. As a member of the President's staff, he had heard the confidential figures. He knew that one adult out of thirty over the whole world was curled up in the foetal position, eyes blank and staring, breathing barely visibly, unreacting to any stimulus. Three percent already engulfed in the telestassis, and the number still climbing without sign of saturation. There was a problem and it was a terrible one. How long, in the face of this mounting tension could any single individual hope to hold on?

"Please." It was Yamagata, the Japanese, his round head bobbing

and his lips spread in a smile. "Forgive the question but what is the problem?" His voice was pleasant and decisive.

"The problem?" Ryan's voice cracked sharply. "I thought I made it clear. I told you how big it is. I said that this...this thing is growing fast. What more do you need—to know we've got a problem?"

"No, please, you do not understand," Yamagata said. "There are many problems here. Which should we tackle, please?"

"What do you mean?" Ryan frowned.

"I am so sorry I do not make myself clear," the Japanese said. "Should we only consider how to stop its growth? Will it be enough if we could make it happen that there will be no new victims? By a pill, perhaps, or a screen about the head? I do not know that this can be done, I am just asking for direction, please. Or should we seek to break the telestasis somehow, and return these poor people to the living world? Or, in the other way, would it be enough if we could learn to raise the new generation to be free of it? Find some way to stop the Cayley-Stimpson reaction? How should we turn, please?"

"Stop the Cayley-Stimpson reaction?" Ryan seemed shocked; this was the phenomenon that was the very basis of the telepathic world—the fact that children raised in

an environment that included telepathic adults would develop telepathic powers of their own in adolescence or in early adulthood. Telepathy had come upon the world suddenly and quite by accident. Two people had, by chance, awakened in themselves the latent power; their use of these new powers had acted on the children near them. By the Cayley-Stimpson reaction, the more sensitive of these children had in their adulthood found their latent powers. It had taken only fifty years to breed a generation that was wholly telepathic, for the Cayley-Stimpson reaction was easily established.

"Yes," Ryan went on. "I guess even that is a possibility. At least it would be better than having everybody in...in that."

KRITCHEVSHY hunched himself forward. A huge man with a bristling black beard and a perpetual scowl on his face, he took the cigar out of his mouth and cleared his throat. "The problem is simple," he said, the words coming forth in a guttural torrent. "You cannot stop the Cayley-Stimpson reaction, unless maybe you park some children on the Moon or Mars, and even that I doubt. But we have tried experiments. There is the work of Tchebyscheff and others. Children raised in caves, and in metal cages with all sorts of fields around them, are still subject to it. And

for the telepathy itself, Drusoff has tried all sorts of ways to try to screen it out.

"All have failed. We do not know what kind of transference telepathy is—radiation or whatever—and we cannot screen it. We cannot stop the Cayley-Stimpson reaction.

"And by the same thing, we cannot protect ourselves from telestassis. There is *no* screen for telepathy." His fist came down hard scattering ashes from the cigar clamped in it. "We cannot stop the cancer that is telestassis and there is only one thing we can do." He glared around the table.

"Please, what is that?" Yamagata asked.

"Telestassis is like a cancer," Kritchevsky said, staring at the Japanese. "It is an uncontrolled—and therefore malignant—growth of destructive cells in the sociologic body. We must treat it as a cancer."

"Please, you speak in riddles," Yamagata said; "there is no rhiamine for the sociologic cells."

"No, there isn't," Kritchevsky nodded vigorously. "And there did not used to be for the cells of the body. But there was still cancer and it still killed people. And rhiamine, is a recent discovery. Even sixty years ago there was still no chemical known that worked on cancer, but there was quite a respectable science of medicine. And, not knowing any drug to help, the

doctors were still not fully helpless to fight cancer."

"Please, how did they treat cancer?"

Kritchevsky glowered a moment at the table. Then he answered: "They cut it out." He glared around the table. "They removed the cancerous cells. To be a surgeon, one must be willing to sacrifice the part for the whole. One must be able to be brutal to the individual cell so that the whole body may live. We must be surgeons; for otherwise the whole body of mankind will die."

As the meaning of Kritchevsky's suggestion became clear, as Stan realized that the Russian was saying that they must kill—or at least some way remove—all the people in the telestassis, he was horrified. These were still human beings. It was true that their minds were dead for the rest of humanity, that individually they had given up their very selves. But to kill them, to say that they must be destroyed to save the rest, that was the ultimate denial of their humanity, and Stanley was appalled.

HE LOOKED around at the others, wondering what their reactions were. No one was saying anything. Some of their faces expressed shock; some were impassive and indrawn, betokening perhaps a greater shock. Others were nervous and their eyes evasive.

Cautiously, Wycoff stretched out

his mind, wanting to get a better feel of the reaction. But there was no contact; every one of them was closed up tight, sealed against the intrusion. By this fact as much as by anything else, he suddenly realized that this plan of Kritchevsky's was not entirely alien to them. If it had been, their instinct would have been to scream out against it, even as his had been. And if they had suppressed the screams as he had done, they still would be reaching out to find some other denial of this horror.

But they were not screaming. Each hid behind a poker mask that extended even down into their minds. They had already faced the shock, even before Kritchevsky had spoken. And they were waiting.

"Please," Yamagata finally broke the silence. "I have considered this possibility. It is a real one. If there is no other way, then we must use it. But first we must consider if there is another way. Is it not so? Is that not why we are here, please, Mr. Ryan?"

Stanley looked at the man at the head of the table. Ryan's face was grey and his hand trembled as he lit a cigarette. His breathing was fast and his eyes jerked as they looked up at the Japanese. "We're not murderers," he burst out. "There must be some other way; there's got to be!" And he stamped out the cigaret he had just lit.

Renoit, the French anthropolo-

gist, leaned forward. "Yes, Messieurs," he said, "we must seek some other way." His face was pinched, his mouth almost puckered, and he gestured tightly with his hands. "Perhaps drugs. Perhaps we can anesthetize them all at the same time. And when they come out of it, who knows, maybe they will be free."

"Bah," Kritchevsky grunted. "That has already been tried, at least twice that I know of—in the early days when it was small. It did no good at all. There's no purpose in trying to fool yourself."

Renoit shrugged. "I did not know." He spread his hands. "If that is known not to work, then maybe there is another way. If you will speak of the history of psychology. We know now how to treat the aberrations of the mind. With the tool of telepathy, we can... how do you say?... straighten out any individual who is twisted around. It is only the combined power of the telestasis that prevents us from curing that.

"But this did not used to be the case. And as you say, before we had this tool, there were still doctors, and they were not entirely without the power to cure. In the case of psychiatry, the ultimate was similar to surgery. It was shock—electrical, chemical, through drugs, and other kinds. And in its ultimate form, mechanical through direct surgery on the brain. Perhaps these techniques will work here."

Kritchevsky sneered. "You can try them if you like. If it makes your conscience easier to kill only the mind and not the body, go ahead. To me it all seems the same; to leave them mindless, without will or sense of ego, to remove the feeling and the pride that makes a man a human being, I do not see that this is any different from the outright killing of the man. But if you think it is, why go ahead; it might work."

"Please," Yamagata said, "I think you are right. But there are other factors that are perhaps important. We cannot do this thing ourselves. We must persuade the proper people. And maybe it will be easier to persuade them to kill the mind than to kill the body. But I agree that, from a purely ethical standpoint, there is little to choose between them. Therefore I do not think we can make this decision easily. If I may make a suggestion, Mr. Chairman, I think it would be well if we thought about this for a while. Perhaps we should adjourn and discuss this more tomorrow."

Ryan looked at him with stupid eyes. He shook himself slightly as if to wake himself from a trance and said in a weak voice: "Yes, I think we should. If this is the only answer we can find, then we must be very sure that it is right. Do we have the right to do such a thing? Can we live with ourselves if we must make this recommendation to the President? I wonder if

I can. Let us meet tomorrow at ten."

Ryan hurried out, looking almost sick. Some of the others left, too. The rest gathered into smaller groups, each group containing one or two men who argued vociferously, while the rest watched with troubled eyes.

Stanley went to where Selma was finishing up her notes. He felt shocked and sickened. To kill—either outright or in their minds—some three percent of the human race seemed a horrible thing to contemplate. And yet he had an awful feeling in the pit of his stomach that this might be the only answer, the only way to keep the whirlpool of the telestassis from swallowing up the whole human race. For the power of the telestassis was growing, and how long could any man, however sane, hold out against it? And if this was so, if the telestassis did in fact threaten the whole of humanity, did they have the right to shrink from any measure of therapy, no matter how brutal, that might afford an answer? There was the cold, bleak thought in him that they would probably reach this decision.

THAT NIGHT, Stanley took Selma into a small park on the second level. Around them, the city was quiet but busy. Along the street ways personal cars glided silently through the glowing light.

Overhead, the belts moved with swift silence broken only by the hum of conversation of the people riding them. Around them the buildings towered high, their windows having automatically adjusted to the night so that only faintly glowing squares showed the life within. There was an air of cleanliness about it all, for it was clean. And so, too, were the stars that glittered overhead, undimmed by smoke or dust or glaring light.

In the park there was silence except for the occasional sleepy cheep of a bird and the low voices of the other people there. It was dark except for the dimly glowing signs to show the paths, for there ~~was~~ no one here who was afraid of the dark, and there was no need for fear.

They walked through the park until they found a bench. They sat down, Stanley leaning back against the cushions, and Selma leaning on his shoulder and pulling his arms about her. They sat without talking, listening to the soft breeze in the leaves, smelling the flowers that bloomed about them, being aware of each other with a sense that was only partly telepathic and partly as old as man. It was peaceful, and for the moment at least, they were not even aware of the beating pressure of the telestassis.

AFTER AWHILE, Selma stirred and, sitting up straight, turned

toward him. "Tell me, Stan," she said, "I don't understand; why is the telestassis like it is?"

"Must we talk shop?" Stan asked, his voice slightly irritated. And then he shrugged in the darkness. "Oh, well. What do you want to know?"

"Well, why do they go into this trance?" she asked. "Why can't they think in it? I mean, I should think that people linked up that way would be able to think so much more effectively. It's as if their brains were multiplied by a millionfold; why does it so paralyze them?"

"Well, how can they think?" Stan asked.

"You make a computer better by making it larger," she answered. "Why doesn't it work with the brain?"

"Even in a computer," he said, "it depends what you mean by 'better'. Actually you can build a computer that will fit in a suitcase, and which will perform all the logical functions, and do them as fast as any other. The only difference between a computer you can carry in your hand and the one at Central Information that fills up ten million cubic feet, is in the amount of data it can handle.

"How fast can it absorb data, and at what rate can it deliver it? And how fast can a stored piece of data be made available? These are the key questions. The telestassis can absorb data fast with

all its separate eyes and ears and sense nerves—but not in useful way. It all comes pouring in in one vast jumble, the separate pieces completely indistinguishable. And, for the same reason, it cannot transmit data, for all the mouths and all the ordering nerves are linked together.

"But the third question is the even more important one, for thinking is done by the association of stored data. And consider, how can the single governing body that is the telestassis get at any single memory? In the mind, the data stored in the memory is coded for its access. We are only just beginning to understand this coding, but we do know some things about it. We know that no two individuals use quite the same method of coding. It may be—and usually is—similar, but never identical. And so, the telestassis wants to think about—let us say—ah—primary power generators. It sends out what it hopes is the proper code, and for one person, it *is* the right code, and his memory does send up the wanted data.

"But some other memory sends up the data that it has on the source of solar power. And a third one sends up what it knows about the basic metabolism of plants. And so on and on, to utter and complete confusion. How can it put together so much as one single coherent thought?"

"Hmm," Selma said. "I suppose.

But why doesn't it set up its own coding? I should think at least it could control what it itself has experienced."

"I've wondered about that," Stan admitted. "Maybe the answer is that some day it will; but right now it's growing too fast. Maybe it's like a baby before birth, growing so fast, with new connections being added to its brain in such profusion that it cannot yet learn to use that brain. The unborn baby cannot remember anything—not in a form that will be useful to the conscious mind. It's changing too fast. Maybe the telestassis is like that."

"A baby in the womb of all mankind," Selma mused.

"Perhaps," Stan said. His voice was sad. "If so, a foredoomed baby. It is going to kill its mother; and it will do this before it can take care of itself, and so it too will die."

They both dropped into silence. After a moment, without saying anything, they both got up and took the path back homeward. Their hands were linked together but there was a deep sadness on them.

WHEN THE meeting convened the next day, they were all there. Ryan, as he took the chair at the head, looked haggard, as if he had little sleep over the night. He called the meeting to order, and the discussion continued as different people talked round and round

what had been said the day before.

It was finally after lunch that Kritchevsky exploded. "I would like to know why we are sitting here, talking and talking, with nothing new to say," he suddenly roared, his eyes glittering over his bristling beard. "It has been obvious for years what has to be done. It was obvious yesterday and it is obvious today. I am a busy man; I have important things to do—things more important than to say over and over again what is obvious. Let us agree that what must be, will be; let us write our report and get home."

"Please, are you not being a little hasty?" Yamagata asked. "After all, this is not an easy matter. All of us have friends and relatives who are victims of the telestassis. It is not a little thing to condemn these people to death. And whether it is a death of the mind or of the body, it is not something to be shrugged aside."

"Bah," Kritchevsky growled. "You are a sentimentalist." His mouth worked for a moment. "My wife is in the telestassis. And I love my wife. She was the joy of my life; she was my pigeon, my little bird, and now she is gone. She is dead now."

His voice trembled. "She lies there, my little Sonya, so still and quiet—so empty. She is dead, I tell you; she is dead this moment, even though she is still called alive. And I do not mind taking that last

spark of life from her. It is nothing, for there is nothing there. I am a realist, and I do not believe in sentiment."

"Monsieur," Renoit said, "you have our sympathy, and perhaps you are right. Perhaps there is no point in discussing this thing further; perhaps we do all know what must be done, and that this is the only thing that can be done. But, bear with us. This is not, I think, a new idea to any of us. It is probably not to the President himself. I suspect he knows what we will recommend. And yet it is still not an easy thing to face; it is not an easy thing to do. Let us admit that this is what we shall do. Let us agree that the telestassis must be destroyed, excised, removed. There still remains the means, and how the thing shall be organized. Let us discuss these, so we may grow used to the idea."

"You're agreeing to this?" Ryan was on his feet, shouting, his face white, his lips drawn back. "Hasn't any one of you any idea except mass murder?" He leaned on the table, his face working. His body was rigid and trembling. And suddenly his head snapped back and his legs folded under him while his arms came up alongside his head. There was panic in the room and men leaped to their feet, jumping back in horror, for this was the telestassis.

"Father!" Selma cried, leaping to catch him as he fell. And in his

mind, Stan heard the same cry, but it was louder, more desperate, more appealing. He did not stop to think. With a shuddering sense that this was what he had to do, he dove into Ryan's mind, grasping after the last shreds of the other's dissolving personality. And as he did, he heard Selma, as if from far away, cry out: "No Stanley, no! Not you, too!" But he did not try to stop.

IT WAS A winding tunnel that he went down; it was a blackness and a death. He felt his own thoughts dissolve, his very mind tatter in the wind. There was a sucking grinding dissolution and there was a sickening thought as he knew that he was lost. And then that thought, too, was wrenched away.

Selma. The thought was clear and sharp. It was the totality of all thought, and it was alone. *How? Why?* As he asked the question he knew the answer. She was here, with him; and behind her was Kritchevsky, and Yamagata, and, dimly, Renoit also. They were a life-line strung out across the whirlpool. Ryan, Stanley, Selma, Kritchevsky, Yamagata—a line that could not stand against the power of the vortex over which they hung. A line that stretched, growing thinner and weaker, until it must break.

It broke. It broke and he was many people. He saw... There

was a vast jumbled pattern of sight that had no meaning. He heard, and it was as if each sound had a multiplicity of echoes of strangely varying intensity. There was no meaning.

But... Yes... No... There was meaning. There was a table, a queer, abstract image of a table. Cubistic, a table viewed from many angles all at once. And at one end of the table there was a man that was himself. With a driving will he threw himself into that man with a blinding effort that he should be no other one.

He felt weak as he looked around. Selma was painfully climbing back into her chair; Ryan was sitting on the floor looking dazed; Kritchevsky sat heavily in his chair with his mouth open; Yamagata was staring at his hands, his habitual smile gone from his face. And Renoit was weakly fumbling at a package of cigarettes.

"Whew, old man," somebody said—Stan felt too weak to find out who—"you had us scared there for a minute. It almost looked as if it had gotten you." There was something very funny to Stanley about that, and the laughter bubbled up in his mind. His shoulders began to heave, and suddenly he could control himself no longer and he bent over and roared. He was dimly aware that the others who had been with him were laughing, too. He could hardly

hear the same voice saying: "Well, really, I don't see what's so funny."

WHEN HE finally had control of himself, he looked around at the others. He felt their minds reach out to his with wondering, and perhaps, awe. "What happened?" Kritchevsky's mind asked. "Was it an accident, or have we made a discovery, do you think?" Renoit asked voicelessly.

"I don't know," he answered in his own mind. "We seem to have stumbled onto something. I am tempted to think we should try again to make sure of what it was."

"Please, I am an old man," Yamagata said by telepathy, "and I like to think of myself as a philosopher. I would be unhappy not to know more about this thing that we have done." The others chimed in with their assents—even Ryan, although with some apparent fear.

"Okey, let's go," he told them, and he let his mind reach out towards theirs. He felt theirs, too, reaching for his and for each other. He tried to will himself into them, and suddenly it happened. The table from many simultaneous angles. The sounds so queerly distorted. The tactile senses so... confused. He felt this common mind that now was his as he was part of it, and he was aware of many things. He knew the tensions that had been in Ryan, the fear of

failure and the sense of doom. He knew the hurt of Kritchevsky, the love that he had borne his wife, and the bitterness that her absorption in the telestassis had left. And he knew of Selma's love for him as he had never known before. He knew the nature of them all, all six of them.

There was a sense of power, a tremendous exhilaration. And yet there was no thought. Deliberately, he tried to think of something and the ideas were only blurred confusions. But still, there was a sense of well-being that transcended all else. It was with almost regret that he willed himself back into his own body alone.

"Will somebody please tell me what is happening?" a chap at the center of the table asked in a rather petulant voice.

"Please," Yamagata answered, "our young friend at the bottom of the table is the one responsible for what has happened. I think he deserves the honor of explaining it."

"Well," Stanley said as all eyes turned towards him, "in a way it's simple, although in another way it isn't. You see we—Mr. Ryan, Mr. Yamagata, Mr. Kritchevsky, Mr. Renoit, Miss Ryan, and myself—set up our own telestassis."

"Yes," Ryan cut in. "I was in the telestassis, and Stanley rescued me; all of a sudden, there was the thought of Stanley before me. I tried to hang on to it, but I was

losing it. It was blurring out, twisting, distorting into nothing. And then there was a kind of a snap, and instead of the vast torrent, I was...well...it was quite a different feeling."

"I look at it this way," Stan said, "I think of the telestassis as a vast whirlpool. The chain of us was stretched out in it. And then, suddenly, it lost its grip and we snapped back into a second small whirlpool of our own. Only this second one was small enough so we could keep control. Each of us still had some measure of his own identity in it. And when we wanted to, we could break it, and come back each to ourselves. And it is a wonderful feeling."

"It is indeed," Renoit said, his face lighting up. "Never have I felt so exhilarated. Never such a sense of power, the ability to do things."

"What things?" somebody asked. The Frenchman just shrugged.

"Nothing actually," Stan said. "The power is there, but we have to learn how to use it. Right now, this micro-telestassis, if you want to call it that, is something new, and it's going to take learning. We have to pool our memories and organize our thinking; but it can be done, and when it is, we're going to have something."

A DIGNIFIED Englishman said, "This is very interesting," his voice noncommittal. "But I believe

we were discussing what to do about the telestassis. I suggest we defer these psychological adventures until after the meeting. There remains the central problem."

"You are wrong," Kritchevsky announced. "These 'adventures' as you call them, have removed the 'central problem'. I am no longer afraid of the telestassis."

With a shock, Stanley realized that the Russian had spoken the truth. He could still, as it were, hear the torrent of the telestassis; but the door in his mind that had once held his horror, was open. There before him in his mind lay the telestassis. He could, in metaphor, stand on the very bank of the whirlpool and watch it with pity and with curiosity, but with no terror.

"Yes," he cried, "that is true, we have the answer here. It's somewhat like an inoculation, where you give a weak and controllable form of disease so the body will know how to handle the real disease. Only this isn't a disease; the telestassis is, but the micro-telestassis isn't. But it acts in the same way, and somebody who has been in a micro-telestassis need not fear the telestassis."

"Yes," Ryan said, his voice wondering. For the first time in the meeting he looked relaxed and happy. "For the first time in twenty years I feel safe." His voice became more brisk. "First, we will take each of you into a micro-telestassis,

inoculate you people, one by one—and then we'll all go out, singly or in as large a group as is needed (we'll have to find out what is needed) and treat others. And so on, until all the world is safe; this is the answer to the telestassis."

"This is the answer," Kritchevsky said. His voice was almost belligerent, but then he seemed to hesitate. "There is another thought in my mind. Do you think, maybe, that this thing we have found can be used also to rescue people who have . . . disappeared . . . into the telestassis?" His eyes were almost pleading.

Stanley looked at him; he knew what was in the Russian's mind. "I don't know," he said, his voice gentle. "But there is hope; it's worth trying. After this thing is well started—when there are many people who know what micro-telestassis is—then I, and probably some of the others, will be glad to help you try to find your wife."

The others all nodded vigorously. And Kritchevsky, looking around at them, seemed almost ready to break down.

"Please," Yamagata said. They all turned eagerly to him as a relief from their embarrassment. "I have, I think, one final thought of interest. We are met here because the telestassis created a tremendous crisis. This crisis, you will note, was basically caused by the Cayley-Stimpson reaction, which changed humanity into a telepathic

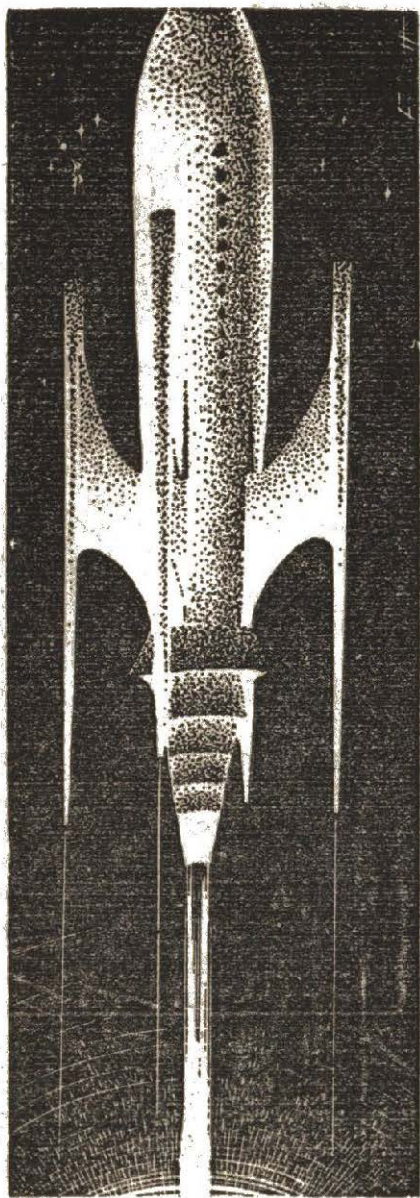
race. Now I—and I think many other people—have been wondering why this is so. How did it happen that mankind developed such a potentially lethal characteristic as the Cayley-Stimpson reaction which lead to the telestassis? It was a potentiality for race-suicide and seemed quite pointless and without benefit. This is what I have been thinking.

"Now, however, I must revise my thoughts, for the possibilities that have been opened up by this micro-telestassis are enormous. I can only dimly grasp them, but I feel that they are tremendous. There is the possibility, therefore, that the Cayley-Stimpson reaction has always been headed towards the micro-telestatic condition, and that the telestatic form has been only an aberrant form of this.

"What I am suggesting, therefore, is that, in discovering micro-telestassis, we have actually given birth out of ourselves to the coming man. It is ironical, I think, that this should be the result of that most terrible phenomenon, the telestassis."

And thinking about it a moment in silence, Stan decided he thought the Japanese was probably right—that out of disaster had, in fact, been born the salvation of mankind. It was ironical that both the disaster and the salvation should have the same basic form.





The ship would return, eventually—
but not the colonists.

UGLY DUCKLING

by Barbara Constant

*It didn't seem possible that
Judith and Mike could be
colonists...*

MARGO YAWNED. "Didn't suppose they'd really ever get any further than the moon," she remarked, letting her eyes wander idly over the headlines splashed across the front page of the newspaper. "I'm half-tempted to go down and file my own application as a colonist, just for the kicks." Her trilling little laugh was a sound of boredom, rather than amusement. She patted the yawn away ostentatiously.

Judith, dallying over her table setting, felt her heart lurch. Now was the time for the little speech she had been mentally rehearsing all day. It was silly to feel so afraid

of her own mother, but her mouth was brassy and her tongue felt thick and clumsy.

"I—I thought I would go down and apply, at least," she mumbled, half hoping that Margo would answer, half hoping that she would ignore the remark completely, as she so often did ignore her daughter.

This time Margo chose to hear. "You thought *you'd* apply!" she gasped. The surprise in her voice was anything but flattering. Judith flinched away from that amused gaze, suddenly conscious of every ounce of her 145 pounds, bitterly aware of the contrast between her own stocky body and her mother's svelte slimness.

"Don't say any more," she begged silently. "Oh, *don't* say any more!" But if Margo was aware of the mute plea, she ignored it.

"You'd better just concentrate on watching your diet, Chubby," she advised her daughter. "They'll want only perfect specimens for this trip, you can be certain. Ron and I might qualify—you'll just be wasting your time and theirs if you go to that meeting." Deliberately, she selected a chocolate cream from the temptingly-exposed box.

Miserably, Judith watched her mother lingeringly savor the sweet. Her own mouth watered, but she stuck to her resolution grimly—it had been weeks since she had suc-

cumbed to the temptation of candy and pastries, weeks of counting calories religiously, refusing second helpings, suffering pangs of hunger that kept her awake nights... weeks of watching the needle of the scales waver indecisively, then flick derisively back to the self-same accusing point.

Diet? She groaned inwardly, but said nothing. There was nothing to say. Margo felt, and made her feelings obvious, that it was entirely Judith's own lack of will-power that caused her to be chunky and unpopular, more absorbed in reading and dreaming than in the pursuits Margo considered suitable. To Judith's own self-conscious knowledge of her weight had been added the humiliation of Margo's open jibes—not even twenty-two years had inured her to them.

Silently, she touched the letter tucked in her apron pocket for reassurance, then went back to setting the table, mentally itemizing the meal in her own mind.

PORK CHOPS, french-fried potatoes, cole slaw with cream dressing, hot rolls, buttered peas, frosted layer cake for her parents. A broiled lamb chop, undressed salad, unbuttered peas, dietetic fruit for herself. Judith sighed. It *seemed* as if she should lose weight, but she didn't. Maybe Dr. Willett—but she shrank away from the thought of stepping on his scales,

noting the nurse's eyebrow, listening to his little lecture on overweight. Last time he had spoken of some kind of tests—well, as soon as she lost ten pounds, she'd go see him. Shrugging the matter away with an effort, she let her mind slip back to the newspaper story. No doubt Margo was right—there would be little use in her going down for an interview as a prospective candidate for the proposed trip. But she was going to try it, anyway.

Even as she moved competently between stove and refrigerator, Judith was picturing the bookshelves in her bedroom, sagging under their weight of tattered, bright-covered copies of the science fiction magazines she had been reading since a precociously early age, bulging with clippings from newspapers and magazines... stories of a successful robot flight to the moon, then of a manned flight... tragic tales of the explorers who failed to return, jubilant reports of those who did... the discovery of an atomic fuel, of a cosmic-ray-impervious alloy. And finally, pictures of a gleaming rocket ship that inched its way towards completion under the bright white New Mexico sun.

Today, the banner headlines in the paper...her own copy, that she could clip without jeering comments from her parent. She could see the story, recall it almost

word for word, and did so as her hands automatically set silver and napkins, salt and pepper, glasses and condiments in place on the table.

"Panel of psychologists and doctors start selection of crew for star jump," the words blared. *"Local interviewing will take place at municipal auditorium in downtown Colorado Springs tomorrow, at both afternoon and evening sessions. Candidates selected will be trained at Alamogordo rocket site."*

The footnote to the article was in her pocket—a letter, a miracle. It had sent her, wide-eyed and incredulous, to her mother's room, only to be stopped short by a casual, "Later, Judith, I'm dressing for the Branson's cocktail party now."

Safely in the kitchen, away from any eyes, Judith took the letter from her pocket and read it through again. Already, although only hours old, it was dog-eared and wrinkled. But the words were unchanged.

"Dear Miss Martin," it said, unmistakably. *"Your medical and scholastic records indicate that you may be acceptable as a candidate for the interstellar trip now being planned. If interested, please attend one of the meetings at the City Auditorium, August 10, at 3 and 9 p.m. Bring this letter, as well as a transcript of your college records."*

...Judith chose the evening session. It was over three miles from her home to the big gray auditorium, but she walked. "Walking is so good for your figure," Margo remarked frequently, usually from a reclining position on the quilted satin of her chaise lounge. "I'm *sure* you don't get enough exercise."

At any rate, Judith welcomed the silent blocks she could devote to dreaming, while the dream was still possible. Too vividly for comfort, she remembered her happy anticipation on other such walks... the basketball games from which she went home alone, while the boys and girls around her paired off in laughing couples for after-game parties... the dramatics class where she hung dresses and turned hems while other girls walked on behind the footlights. Probably it would happen again tonight—the apologetic, "Well, I'm afraid not everyone can actually make the trip—but we certainly need some help cleaning up the auditorium... typing letters... packing suitcases."

It hadn't happened *yet*. As she walked, she could still indulge in the little private revery in which a slim, glamorous Judith walked down a slanting gangplank beside a tall, broad-shouldered man in the close-fitting uniform of a space explorer under heavens that were green or purple, on to ground that was not the familiar brown earth,

but the red sands of Mars, the shifting pumice dust of the moon, the unguessed-at color and texture of whatever passed for soil on one of the far-away worlds that was not even so much as a pinpoint in the evening sky...

IT WAS A good dream. It lasted right up to the door of the auditorium, then Judith found that the dream faded; her heart sank, her feet moved slowly, and she clung to the shadows. The bright yawning door of the auditorium looked frighteningly like a trap, rather than the beginning of the path to high adventure. She quickened her pace, hurried on past the door and on around the block. "I'm early," she told herself; "I'll go in next time around."

Silhouettes were crossing that lighted rectangle as she neared it again. She slowed for a second, then, irresolutely, went on past. It was no longer early.

She walked slowly. In what seemed like seconds, however, the door yawned in front of her. And, "Third time's the charm!" a man's voice said encouragingly. It was a nice voice, warm and friendly.

Never speak to a stranger. Margo's words rang warningly in her mind. Heedlessly, she smiled up at the tall figure beside her. "How'd you know?" she asked shyly.

He grinned. His grin was as nice as his voice and constructed on the same large scale as the rest of him. He nodded down at the half-eaten candy bar in his hand. "My third," he admitted. "Been trying to get up the nerve to go in myself, so I guessed that's what you were doing when you kept going past me. Maybe it'll be easier to do it together, hmmm?"

It *was* easier. Walking in beside Mike, Judith felt small. In fact, she felt almost like the adventurous girl of her dream. And Mike looked like the man she had pictured beside her on the gangplank. Well, almost like him. Of course, Mike was a little more heavysset. But he *was* tall, and a tall man needed some extra weight. Anyway, men could be heavy, but nobody ever called them "Fatty." Her mouth felt dry again. Consciously, she concentrated on the crowd as she walked down the aisle beside Mike and settled uncomfortably into one of the uncompromising wooden seats.

"So far, so good," Mike whispered. "At least, we got inside before someone said, 'so sorry!'"

Judith stared at him. Why, that bitter remark had been like an echo of her own inner thoughts. She caught her breath—so that was why Mike had been hesitating outside the door...the same fear of exclusion that haunted her!

HER WONDERING thought was interrupted by the stir as a small gray man walked to the center of the bare stage. Judith leaned forward tensely, clutching her precious letter and her school credits as if they had suddenly been endowed with a life of their own and might somehow get away from her. She scarcely stirred during the next half hour. Beside her, Mike was just as intent.

"You can understand, therefore," concluded the speaker, "why the candidates for this expedition *must* be volunteers. For almost a year, those accepted will be subjected to the most exhaustive psychological and physical conditioning. We have chosen and trained, during arduous years, the crews for the star ship, the scientists who will accompany the selected candidates. Those men will return with the ship and with news of the trip and the planet where it ends. We are now selecting the colonists for whom this will be a one-way journey. From the two thousand whom we select to start the training, we hope there will be a hundred who will successfully pass every test. Those who do will say goodbye to their homes, their families, their earth. For twenty years or more, they will sleep in the stasis of deep-freeze..."

For the first time, he permitted himself a smile. "At least," he admitted, "it has one merit—for

the first time, it will *really* be possible for a woman to *stay* twenty years old for twenty years, since there is no aging in stasis."

Quickly, he was serious again. "We are looking for young men and women," he went on, "who are physically able to survive the years in deepfreeze, intellectually capable of adapting to new conditions, emotionally able to stand the severance of all familiar ties. As you know, crowded conditions on earth increase day by day...although new techniques have enabled us to feed earth's new millions, the time approaches when we must have more land, or cease to reproduce, stagnate, and die.

"The stars are light years away—all earth's combined efforts have achieved only the one ship now being readied to journey outwards. We can but hope that it will reach its destination, that this group of colonists will successfully prepare the way for thousands to follow. *None of you who go can hope to return*—you will find your glory only in the knowledge of what your sacrifice will mean to mankind."

This time his pause was long and deliberate, long enough for the whispers to become thoroughly audible. The clamor died immediately as he raised his hand for silence. "Will those of you who are still interested please remain seated," he finished. "And will

those of you who find you really prefer to stay on earth, leave now? Remember, there is no stigma attached to deciding not to volunteer—you couldn't *pay* me to go!"

There was a polite spattering of applause and appreciative laughter, a curious little hush, then orderly confusion as one person after another frowned, conferred with his neighbor, then, with growing certainty of step, moved toward the outside door and the blessedly familiar routines of everyday life. Surprisingly few remained behind.

JUDITH stayed, and so did Mike. "I wonder," Judith mused aloud, "why they even threw these meetings open to the public? Seems as if they could have gotten enough volunteers just among the scientists who designed the star ship. Or else asked just those select few whom they really felt had special skill or talent to offer."

"Partly politics," Mike opined. "Remember all the stink Senator McLarky raised about 'the scientific caste system'? And it could be that scientists don't make good colonists—that's all I can think of." He glanced at the envelope he held, the twin of Judith's. "Looks as if they *did* do some pre-selecting, at any rate."

"Make yourselves comfortable," suggested the speaker as he left the stage; "this interviewing may take some time."

Judith did not feel like talking. Apparently, neither did Mike. In complete, if companionable, silence, they waited as the minutes dragged out into one hour, then two. And then Judith was the next in line.

"The front door, afterwards," Mike said, as she moved blindly forward in answer to the beckoning finger. Blessedly, Judith felt nothing except a curious numbness as she forced her leaden legs to carry her forward. . .

The numbness had vanished as she waited outside in the velvet night. The stars were diamonds, the moon a silver scimitar, the night breeze perfumed, the cool stone of the building a pleasant support at her back. She was vividly aware of every facet of the wonderful world around her. . . and when Mike charged out, preceded by his face-wide grin, the very heavens exploded into a spinning maelstrom of delight.

All he said was, "Would you like a double banana split?" And all she answered was, "Topped with hot fudge sauce and extra whipped cream?" That was all that needed to be said. And they laughed together like two wild children, and walked the streets as proudly as though the stars were already within their grasp.

Later, though, they were grave and quiet. "I don't think I'll tell Dad," Mike said. "I'll just leave

a note. Not that he could stop me from going. . . but he'd laugh. I just don't want to be laughed at."

"Neither do I," Judith admitted. "But I think we ought to tell them, Mike. After all, remember what the teachers used to say in school—'sticks and stones can. . .'"

"... 'break your bones, but words can never hurt you'" Mike finished in chorus with her. "Okay. I'll tell Dad, and you tell your mother; but I don't have to enjoy it."

Nor did she, Judith decided ruefully later. The childhood chant was not exactly true. It seemed unlikely that she could feel much more bruised and beaten by actual blows than she felt by the time the unflattering surprise, the incredulous laughter, the taunting remarks had died down.

"*You?*" Margo said. "As a star colonist? Have you gone mad? Or have they gone mad? Not that I'd consider letting you go, even if by some fluke you *did* get a chance."

And, later, finally accepting the fact that Judith was being given a chance and *was* going, "Well, they have months to train you in. If you really *want* to go, they might even be able to get *you* to stick to a diet long enough to get through the door of the ship! But I doubt it."

And later yet. "Oh, Judith, for heaven's sake stop looking so *smug*."

You'll make people think you are happy just to get away from me. Nobody knows how hard I've tried to make you pretty and popular and a credit to me. *Stop interrupting me*—I don't want to hear any wild tales about why they wanted you. I don't care, I tell you. I know. They just couldn't get any *normal* people to volunteer, that's all."

MIKE LOOKED as tired as Judith felt, when they met in the shadow of the plane that was to take them to Alamogordo. "Sticks and stones. . . ?" he queried bitterly.

"Whoever wrote that needs re-educating." Judith's tone matched Mike's. And then, because there was really very little need to say more, they simply stood there, hand in hand, waiting for someone to come and tell them where to go and what to do when they got there.

That was, in a large part, the biggest thing they did for the next year. Mornings were devoted to classes—classes in agriculture, animal husbandry, woodcraft, medicine, metalcraft, astronomy. But from noon until nightfall, they were simply "on tap" for the testing the lecturer had mentioned with such blithe brevity.

Not necessarily *doing* anything, just *waiting* to do something. Waiting in line to eat, waiting in line

for a physical examination, waiting in line for an interview with some visiting psychologist, waiting in line to try a brief turn in the deep-freeze, waiting in line, as Mike muttered, to *get* in line!

"At least," Judith remarked wryly one night, sipping a chocolate malt with very little enthusiasm, "I'll bet we're becoming the most *patient* group of people on earth."

"We'd better be," Mike said grimly; "being impatient is just about the surest way I know of getting your walking papers."

His grimness was matched by other's expressions, for time was growing short now. Week by week, day by day, the ranks were thinning. Dormitories that had once buzzed with a hundred girls' voices now echoed remotely to the thin sound of mere dozens. In the men's section, the exuberant pillow fights, high-spirited wrestling, and boisterous telling of tales had subsided into long silences.

But even as the colonists-to-be sank into a kind of weary apathy, the workers on the gigantic ship stepped up their tempo. Day and night, clanging hammers, chattering riveting machines, and throbbing engines wove a background tapestry of sound. . . .

Abruptly, like a shot of adrenal, came the news—blared from loudspeakers, posted on bulletin boards, passed from person to person. "The ship is ready. Final tests are now

being made—final elimination will soon take place. Take-off is scheduled for next week. Repeat—*Take-off is scheduled for next week.*"

And the inevitable postscript, "There will be no final leaves. Each colonist may name two people to whom he or she would like to say a personal goodbye. Those selected will be flown here to witness the take-off."

JUDITH AND Mike went to the office together to file their requests. It was evening; the lighted doorway reminded Judith of the auditorium where all of this had started. The sickening thud of her heart was also poignantly familiar.

"I think," she said slowly, "I won't request any visitors. I believe... a letter..."

"No," said Mike firmly. "We faced up to them before. We can again. For the last time." He gave Judith a little encouraging pat. "I doubt that even sticks and stones could hurt us now," he said.

The forms filled out, they strolled back down the dusty street to the almost-deserted drugstore. Mike glanced up at the star-filled heavens as they went inside. "So close," he murmured. "Neither of us must fail *now*, Judith!"

Oddly enough, this was the first time Judith had seriously considered the possibility that one of them

might go, the other be left behind. She shuddered convulsively, suddenly feeling faint and sick. Mike's big hand closed consolingly around hers. "Double or nothing," he said lightly. "If we *both* stay behind, it won't be unbearable." He smiled at her. "We can put up a solid front against the world, anyhow."

The lump in Judith's throat dissolved abruptly as she whooped with startled laughter. Mike's below joined hers, while the few other customers turned and stared curiously.

"We could always join a side-show," Judith suggested weakly, and Mike doubled up again.

"Just for that, woman," he stated severely, finally gaining control of himself, "We'll finish off the evening with two egg salad sandwiches apiece."

"Yes *sir*," said the boy behind the counter with noxious pleasure.

Judith and Mike only laughed harder, to his complete and obvious amazement. "Boy," admonished Mike, struggling for composure, "wipe that grin off your face, or we'll walk out of here without paying our check!"

"But you *never* pay..." The boy started to protest, then reddened and ignored them pointedly as he spread bread lavishly with butter, heaped on the salad mixture, and shoved the food across the counter.

They ate in silence. It took

long time. "Probably," she finally managed to say, "it is just as well we don't have much longer to go. If I had to face another month of milk shakes and egg salad sandwiches and bananas and..."

Mike shuddered. "Spare me the resume," he said. "I know just what you mean."

OUTSIDE, as always, Judith's eyes swung upwards and knew that, beside her, Mike was looking with her. So far away—those little pinpoint of light—so many miles, so many years, so many dreams away. She felt a cold shiver run down her back. And then Mike had turned her with a gentle nudge into the dark shadows between her dormitory and the one beside it.

In the dimness, she could not see his face. "Judy," he murmured huskily. The words sounded strange. "Like peppermints," Judith thought, and sought, in some bewilderment, for the link. Granny—that was it. Little, sharp-eyed Granny, the only person who had ever used the affectionate diminutive. A nickname had seemed out of place for the chunky toddler, the stocky girl, the hefty teen-ager. She supposed, ruefully, that it was even less suitable now, but, none the less, she responded to it with a warm thrill of pleasure.

"Judy," Mike said again, and then his lips were against hers and

for a breathless moment Judy was able to shut her eyes and her mind against the external stars and to concentrate on the ones that revolved giddily in her own head.

"Together?" Mike queried gently. And then, more certainly, "Together, Judy, no matter what happens."

Judith did not answer. She couldn't. But she touched one hand gently, tentatively, against his cheek, before she turned and fled into the building, to lie awake thinking, not of the tests to come the next day, not of the weeding out that would again halve the hopefuls who remained, but of the feel of Mike's body against her own, of the sound of his words, the warmth of his lips.

"Why, I'm in love!" Judy said to herself, and laughed aloud in the quiet night... Suddenly it seemed completely unimportant whether she were chosen to ride the star ship. There were other things in life besides adventure and service, other stars besides those in the skies. Wistfully, she found herself longing for her mother's presence. Surely now, with this new happiness filling her, she could break down the barriers between herself and Margo. Mentally, she pictured herself curled up at the foot of Margo's chaise lounge. In spite of herself, she saw Margo's

expression as it had been the last time, heard Margo say. . .

Judith laughed again. This time the sound was not a happy one. Clumsily, she slipped out of bed and padded over to stare out at the towering rocket. The stars were still the answer. The only answer, now.

Judith felt as somber and gray as the day itself as she joined the line of girls before the cafeteria the next morning.

Apparently others shared her mood. In morose silence, they downed their breakfast. Judith was sure, stealing a glance down the rows of somber faces, that to others besides herself the waffles were cardboard, the syrup ink, the tasty little sausages just so many twigs. But she ate, from sheer habit. So did the others. Then, still silent, they filed into the auditorium for another lecture.

AT NOON the next day the small white envelopes were delivered. One to a person—and no way to tell from the discreetly plain envelopes whether the news inside were good or bad. Beside Judith, one of the other girls toyed indecisively with hers.

"Seems as if there could have been a better way to do this," she said. "I'm afraid to open it."

"I guess there isn't *ever* any good way to break bad news," Judith agreed abstractedly, sharing the

moment of indecision. And then, determinedly, she ripped the envelope open.

Her name had been typed in across the top of a form sheet. Beneath it, the message was stark and impersonal. "*You have been selected to be one of the colonists. Report to the auditorium at 6 p.m. for a final briefing. Equipment will be issued at that time.*"

Judith drew a deep breath, realized from the surge of giddiness that it was the first for several seconds. Beside her she heard an odd sound, half-way between a gasp and sigh, and turned to see the girl who had spoken collapse on the floor, a limp rag doll. Men who had apparently been waiting for just such an occurrence were beside her in a moment.

Without thinking, Judith dropped her eyes to the paper in the girl's hand. "*We regret to inform you that you were eliminated in the final tests for the first group of colonists. It is in the best interests of the expedition, as well as in your own, that you undergo a period of rehabilitation before returning to civilian life. Busses will leave the rocket site for a nearby sanitarium at 5 p.m.*"

Judith reread the lines slowly, then smiled. For the first time since the night Mike kissed her, the tautness around her heart relaxed. The future, then, would *not* have been completely hopeless had

she been rejected.

But she was going...she and Mike...with a little moan, she hurried out of the quickly-emptying room. Mike. Mike! How could she have forgotten him, even for a moment?

THE CROWD that waited behind the ropes stirred restlessly. A wave of motion rippled through it as the parents, relatives, and close friends of the colonists were ushered into the roped-off area on the inner fringes of the crowd. Nearer the rocket. Still not very near. Lines of motionless men, bayonets at rest, but eyes alert, were a silent reminder that there still existed enemies of the projected flight. Nobody, those armed lines indicated, would get close to the star ship—nobody save the crew and the colonists.

On the dias in front of the crowd, a little man spoke into a microphone.

"The crew who will guide the *Star Corsair*," he said simply. "The scientists who will accompany them." The doors of the nearby building swung wide. Tall slim crew members, grizzled serious scientists, proud young mechanics walked across the ramp to the thunder of a thousand voices. "These are the men," the speaker said softly, "who will, God willing, direct the ship to its destination,

bring back to us word of another frontier conquered, of a new world and new hope for our children and our children's children." The crowd roared its approval.

"In a moment," said the speaker, and the noise dwindled and whispered away into nothingness. Throughout the world everything stopped for a second, a moment, a timeless interval, as eyes and ears turned to television screens, to loudspeakers, to radios. "One hundred men and women will walk across this ramp, pause to say good-bye to this life and this world. Selflessly, in full knowledge that they will never return, these hundred have trained through the long months for the longer years that lie between us and the stars. You may have wondered—you must have wondered—why none of those who failed to complete the course of training have yet returned to their homes, why we have insisted on a period of rehabilitation before permitting them to do so. In a moment, you will know the reason..."

He paused. Man turned to man, woman to woman, and a murmur of speculation swept through the crowd.

"Farewell to the Gods!" Margo murmured sardonically to her husband. "Well, they *must* have worked a miracle to make a star voyager out of Judith!"

"You all probably have mental

pictures," the speaker continued, "of the beautiful lasses and handsome lads who will carry humanity's hopes out into space. Reality, however, frequently lacks glamor."

Margo looked at her husband questioningly. "Do you know what he's talking about?" she asked.

It was a credit to the speaker's personality that she asked her question in a whisper. . . another mark in his favor that Margo's husband, for the first time in years, instead of murmuring, "Yes, dear," snapped, "Shut up!" And it was a real miracle that Margo, wide-eyed with surprise, *did* stop talking.

"It will be over two decades," said the lecturer, "before these voyagers reach their goal." The murmur of the crowd swelled and died and swelled again. He waited imperturbably. "They will not be conscious of time's passing," he said, "because they will travel in the frozen stasis we have developed, nourished by the nutrient fluid in which they sleep and, more importantly, *by the nutriment which they take with them, as part of themselves!*" He stopped dramatically. The door of the building nearby opened, and out into the hush came a white clad group. Slowly, with obvious effort, it moved sluggishly across the cleared ground towards the waiting lines of people.

"Judith!" **s c r e a m e d** Margo, shocked recognition on her face as

one of the massively fat women stopped in front of her. "Judith!"

Judith smiled at the angry little woman. Beneath her serene, knowledgeable gaze, Margo was silent.

"Remember how I couldn't ever seem to lose weight," Judith asked gently. "Dr. Willett tried to have me run metabolism tests, but I was so humiliated about the whole matter that I never listened to him. I should have. You were right, you see, when you said I wasn't normal. None of us are. Normal people can't stand prolonged deepfreeze. But a thyroid deficiency makes it possible for me—and the others—to store enough fat to keep us alive—and after landing, we can live comfortably on the same number of calories that would starve someone like you." For the first time, she looked a little uncertain of herself. "Won't you wish me luck, Mother?" she begged.

Margo only stared in stunned silence.

Then Mike moved up to where Judith waited. Quietly, she turned and trudged toward the gleaming star ship, shapeless, short of breath, far from being the slim girl of her long-ago dream, but walking proudly and carrying her stupendous bulk with dignity, as befitted one of man's first envoys to another world.



The Brotherhood was sure that Theodore Srock had been planted amongst them—but what was the purpose?

PROTECTIVE CAMOUFLAGE

NOVELET

by Charles V. De Vet

illustrated by ED ESMH

He came up out of the anaesthetic with his mind blank. His lips moved and he said, "My name is Theodore Srock," like a man reciting a learned lesson. The words were an "open sesame," that sprung loose a flood of memory. A man in a white coat moved at his side and he looked up and saw the man and thought, *That man is my enemy.*

TED SROCK had his first drink of the evening as Havilland's second sun went below the horizon.

He glanced idly at the girl who shouldered her way into the open space next to him at the bar, and noted with surprise that she was fighting to hold back panic. She stood for a moment gripping the

polished edge of the bar so hard that her fingers showed white.

She was slender, Srock observed, and vital, with a ripely curved body and delightfully ample bosom. The olive-hued flesh of her face must normally have been soft and feminine, but now the tenseness of the muscles had drawn the skin tight across her cheekbones.

quiring gaze. She surveyed him hastily, taking in his muscular frame and darkly handsome features, and the roll-collar emblem of his Brotherhood in one brief appraisal. Resolutely she banished the signs of fear from her face and smiled.

"Smile back at me," she whispered urgently, "and laugh—as



Suddenly she gave a faint gasp and Srock followed her glance into the mirror behind the bar. She was looking, he saw, at two guardsmen coming in through the door. For an instant fear rode high on her features.

She turned and met Srock's in-

though I'd just told you something amusing."

With one part of his mind wondering at his ready acquiescence Srock found himself doing as she asked.

She leaned toward him and rested her forehead against his shoul-

der. She appeared to be laughing, but her voice came up to him laden with anxiety. "Take me outside, and keep talking while we walk; pretend we're a little drunk."

Srock took her arm and led her toward the door. As they passed the guardsmen he bent close to her ear and whispered, "Steady."

She looked up at him and laughed gayly. Only the strained whiteness at the corners of her mouth showed the effort it cost her.

Once outside the girl held tight to his coat sleeve. "Stay with me awhile longer," she begged; "please."

Srock nodded. "Don't appear in too great a hurry," he cautioned as they walked.

Fifty feet from the bar entrance the girl turned and threw a glance over her shoulder. Srock felt her stiffen. "We didn't fool them," she breathed; "they're about ten paces behind. What can we do?"

"Turn left at the next corner," Srock answered. His course of action was formed as he spoke. He knew he was planning a dangerous thing: Assaulting Cartee's guardsmen was a crime punishable by death. But, as a member of the Brotherhood, faithful to its vows, Srock saw no alternative. Furthermore, he found himself oddly anxious to help this unusually-met girl.

As they turned the corner Srock pushed her ahead and flattened

himself against the building's near wall. He waited, with the personal satisfaction of knowing that he was at least as well conditioned as his pursuers for violent physical action. One of the axioms of the Brotherhood was that its members must be fit—and ready for any possible contingency.

The first unsuspecting guardsman rounded the corner and the heel of Srock's right hand landed heavily just below his left ear.

Srock caught the short, heavy body as it went limp and spun it against the second guardsman, knocking his hand from his half drawn gun. Before he could recover Srock drove forward. His shoulder caught the guardsman in the diaphragm, lifting him off his feet and battering him against the building at his back. The starch went out of the guardsman and he sagged slowly down along the wall.

In the back of his mind Srock had expected the girl to be gone when it was over, but now he found her still waiting. Neither of them said a word as they walked rapidly away. It was the girl who hailed a licensed carrier a block farther on.

ONCE IN the cab she gave the driver an address, then relaxed and looked at Srock. "You're quite a man," she said.

Srock shrugged his shoulders noncommittally.

"I see by your collar that you're a Brother," she observed. "Isn't this sort of thing a bit out of your line?"

"Not too much," Srock answered. "We try to help—in whatever way seems necessary."

"Aren't you afraid of trouble with the guardsmen?"

"As afraid as the next man, I suppose."

"I've got to have a cigaret," the girl said. She drew a partly filled package from a pocket on her sleeve. Taking out a slim, white oval she placed it between her red lips, lit it, breathed in deeply, and blew smoke at the cab ceiling. She reached toward Srock with the package. "Have one?" she asked.

Srock shook his head. "No, thanks. I prefer these." He pulled a five-sided cigar from his breast pocket and bit off the tip with square white teeth. The girl held her lighter to the cigar end until it glowed redly.

"Now," Srock said, leaning back. "What's this all about?"

The girl reflected for a moment before answering. "My name is Jessica," she said. "Jessica Manthe. Other than that all I can tell you is that I've done nothing illegal. The guardsmen want me for questioning. If they take me they'll make me talk. And if I talk, my... her pause was barely perceptible, "...brother will die."

Srock made no attempt to ques-

tion her further. He had helped from a sense of duty. It didn't give him the privilege of prying. For the second time he regarded her closely. Dark, almost black hair that caught the light and reflected it as she moved her head. Brown eyes, and fine nostrils. Excitement had brought a high color to her cheeks that Srock found fascinating.

"It seems that you Brothers are becoming more numerous every day," she said, almost as though talking to herself. "I understand there are Brothers in every occupation and class of society. You're all followers of a code of conduct like the golden rule, aren't you?"

"Something like that," Srock answered. "Originally we were a small group that fought against class restrictions and segregation. From that beginning we evolved into a society with a definite philosophy: '*No man has the right to inflict pain on another for selfish purposes.*' That may sound rather general, but it was worded thus deliberately. In time we hope to expand to other Worlds—to wherever mankind has settled."

The carrier came to a sputtering stop that precluded further questions. Srock climbed out. Flicking his cigar in a glowing end over end arc into the street, he held open the cab door.

Jessica paused and crushed out her cigaret in the cab's ashtray before alighting. Srock watched with

approval the graceful way she moved her hands, and found that he approved also of her unconscious pride of carriage as she stepped from the cab and stood beside him on the curb.

"We have a couple more blocks to go," she said, after he had paid the driver. "I thought it better not to give him the exact address—in case the guardsmen question him."

They walked the two blocks in silence. At the entrance to a copper front house-of-flats she stopped and rested her hand on his arm. "I should be safe now," she said. "Thank..." The wail of a guard-car siren came from near at hand. Her fingers dug deep into his arm.

"Quick! Inside," she urged, tugging at his sleeve.

Srock allowed himself to be pulled through the building's entrance into a short hallway. He was conscious that she was pressed tight against him as the sound of the siren grew louder, passed without pausing, and faded in the distance. She did not draw away after it was gone. Srock put his arms around her and felt a quivering from deep within as she fought to control her nerves.

Soon he grew aware of the warmth of her that came through her clothing into his hands and against his body. He was a man, and healthy, and he felt the faint stirrings of a kind of hunger. But he held it behind a close reserve.

Abruptly she seemed to feel this

new thing in him, and looked up and was afraid: But the fear was a small thing against the terror she felt of the guardsmen.

"I can't take being alone—for awhile anyway," she said. "Please come up with me."

SROCK CAME awake with all his senses alert. He concentrated, in an effort to determine what it was that had aroused him. He did not find it at first. But the feeling persisted that something was wrong. A heart beat later he had the answer. There was no sound of breathing beside him. He touched the bed where Jessica had lain—and the place was still warm. She must have risen only a moment before.

A small region of pain smarted in the upper bicep of his right arm. That, he recognized, was what had awakened him. The pain spread quickly and brought a strange, abnormal tension to every muscle in his body.

Desperately he tried to throw himself from the bed. His face strained with effort, but his body refused to move. He was helpless.

A flood of brightness burst before his eyes; for a moment he knew nothing, and the next the darkness of the room was gone and he was staring, unthinking, at a white ceiling.

The first shock of his discovery passed. Without moving, so much

as to shift the position of his staring eyes, he sent his thoughts into urgent exploration. He knew he was in danger, and that he had to understand the situation, and to decide swiftly how to react to it.

His own body first. He breathed deeply. There were no muscular protests. A good omen. He moved the tip of one little finger. Its ready response indicated that the paralysis had left him. However, in the act of tightening the muscles that controlled the finger he felt a firm snugness along his forearm. He decided quickly that he was bound to the bed on which he lay. Unobtrusively he tested the play of his nervous and muscular co-ordination on the bonds, and was tempted to apply the technique of leverage he had learned under the Brothers' training.

The risk, he decided instantly, would be too great, at least until he learned more about his immediate surroundings. One other factor disturbed him: Small islands of numbness about his temples told him that pressure had recently been applied to his forehead.

He caught a slight movement from the corner of his eye and dismissed further immediate thought of himself.

A voice said, "It looks like we did a good job."

"Do you think the mind block will hold?" a second, deeper voice asked.

"They invariably do. And I'm

not concerned too much about the superimposed memory. But if the suggestions we put in conflict too strongly with his natural inclinations he'll be able to resist them."

"Well, that's the chance he took when he came here. Shall we go ahead with the final step?"

Srock set his muscles, threw himself forward, and...

II

SUNLIGHT coming in through a crack between the window shade and the sill, fell across Srock's face and wakened him. He allowed himself the luxury of a yawn and a long stretch before bringing his attention to his surroundings. For a moment he was puzzled as to where he was. Then he remembered. Jessica! Where was she? The bed beside him was empty, and there were no woman signs anywhere in the room. Why had she left like that?

The ringing of the house caller on the wall interrupted his thoughts. Reluctantly he rose and walked to the instrument. He pressed its response button.

"Good afternoon," a robot voice said. "Your forty hours have expired. If you wish to continue occupancy please deposit another three-piece."

Forty hours? He couldn't have been here that long. They had rented the room only last night. And

it should be morning now. He shook the sleep from his mind and drew back the window shade. Semi-twilight. That meant that one sun had already set. It was evening.

"What is the correct date?" he asked into the caller mouthpiece.

"The date is the twelfth day of the third moon-month," the mechanical replied. "You have one hour in which to either deposit an additional fee or vacate."

They had entered the night of the tenth. It wasn't possible that he had slept for forty hours. Unless he had been drugged. Still puzzled, he replaced the receiver and walked to the room's small closet. His clothes hung as he remembered placing them. He took out his coin sack and found the money still intact. Next his fingers explored his belt. A crinkly stiffness within the fabric assured him that the large bill he carried there, in a concealed pocket, had not been disturbed.

Still puzzled, Srock dressed and left the room. He walked down the stairs to the ground floor and out of the building. At a street corner he bought a packet of cigars. He pressed the quarter-piece firmly into the palm of the vender as he paid for his purchase.

"General summons," the vender said in an undertone. "The nearest Cradle is three blocks straight ahead."

Srock gave no sign that he heard.

* * *

"It's coming through in scrambler code," the Brother next to Srock said. "It'll take a minute for the decoder to interpret it."

"Attention, Brothers," the decoding machine intoned. "This is your message: Three weeks ago Director Cartee published a letter in the news sheets which I will now read. Quote. *To the people of the planet Havilland: I, Cartee, your thirteenth Director, will be your last. During the next six months I will initiate steps toward setting up a democratic government, similar to that of our home World, Earth. At the end of that time your new government will be ready to function, and I will then step down and become Cartee, private citizen. May God guide and aid you.* Unquote.

"May God help us if we believe him," the voice went on, the vehemence of the words contrasting with the unemotional tone of the interpreting instrument. "Almost two hundred years ago the seventh Director issued a much similar statement; three months later all the leaders of a rapidly-growing opposition were dead.

"Cartee is the direct lineal descendant of twelve Director ancestors. All were strong men—as is Cartee; all were brilliant and shrewd—as is Cartee. All were oppressive. There is no slightest reason to expect that Cartee will be different. If we trust him now we will be assigning many of our Brothers to death, in addition to

choking off our ripening efforts to overthrow him.

"This noon we received a communication from our most reliable contact within the Palace grounds. A Brother was seen during the past ten hours leaving Cartee's personal quarters! The contact was unable to identify him. We are forced to the conclusion that there is a traitor among us. For the next twenty hours you will devote your entire effort to uncovering him. If he is not found by then you will proceed with Project Cartee."

"Project Cartee!" The Brother next to Srock let his breath out in a long sigh. "Assassination of the Director!"

SROCK WAS one of the approximately ten percent of the Brothers who devoted their full time to the work of the Society. The remaining majority worked at normal occupations, and kept their identity secret—even from most of their own Brothers. Cohesion was maintained by means of an interlocking linear organization.

For the twenty hours following the general summons Srock worked on leads furnished by the Brotherhood in their effort to run down the spy. At the end the word came through that the search had been fruitless—and that Project Cartee began immediately.

The success of Project Cartee depended largely on the undercover Brothers stationed within the

administration area. For the present there was nothing for Srock to do and he waited an impatient fourteen hours before the report came that the project had failed; Cartee had disappeared.

A heavy rain was falling as Srock left the Cradle and walked through bleak and empty streets to his quarters in the Bremner building. The rain failed to penetrate his moisture-proofed clothing, but it brought a damp and cold gloom to his spirit. For the past several hours he had been thinking of the girl, Jessica Manthe. Who was she? And what had happened during his forty hour memory lapse?

For a time he debated whether or not the girl had been an enemy agent, or whether his blanked-out period somehow tied in with some deep-seated scheme of the Director and his men. After a time he dismissed the suspicion. He, himself, while an integral part of the Society, was, after all, only a minor cog. If Cartee had decided to strike at them through one of the Brothers the chances were his attempt would have centered on a more influential member. He shrugged irritably.

Srock opened the door of his suite, stepped inside—and felt a sudden rush of alarm! He was not alone! The room was in semi-darkness, but his intuition—strong by nature, but made acute by training—sensed the presence of another person in the room.

For an instant he knew fear. The other held the advantage, and that advantage might mean his own death. The room was faintly lighted by the rays of a street lamp coming in through a pair of side windows. His visitor had very probably adjusted his vision to the gloom by this time, and knew his exact location, while Srock's eyes registered nothing. He crouched, straining for sound, and thought swiftly. One small factor was in his favor. The other would not yet know that Srock was aware of his presence. Perhaps with immediate action he could turn that small asset into victory. He moved one hand slowly toward a side pocket.

"You won't need that," a voice said, and something in its tone awakened suppressed memories in Srock's mind: Memories of beauty, pliant feminine eagerness—and danger. They added up to one person—Jessica.

"You may turn off the lights," she said, as Srock stood with his mixed emotions.

He reached out and snapped on the light button, keeping his gaze on the spot from which her voice had come. She sat in a lounge chair, with her hands folded placidly in her lap. But all about her was the sense of leashed aliveness, and the disturbing attraction he had felt at their first meeting. She was wearing, he saw, a snow white dress, cut short, and leaving her knees bare and cool.

He walked across the room and stood in front of her. "Stand up," he said.

With a small smile on the edges of her lips she obeyed.

Unhurriedly, expertly, he went over her body for a concealed weapon.

"All right," he said, when he'd finished. "Now we can visit."

She sat down again. "Satisfied?" she asked. "I assure you that I am not here to harm you. In fact, I mean to save your life—if you'll let me."

SROCK RAISED his eyebrows questioningly. Then he smiled back at her and sat down in a chair at her right. "Say what you have to say," he told her.

"Time may already be running out on us," she said. "Do you trust me enough to leave with me—immediately? With no questions asked?"

Srock's smile widened.

Angrily she lifted the cover from a small cedar box on one edge of the end table at her side and took out a cigaret. "I didn't think you would," she said, lighting up. "You have to be real smart and demand a detailed blueprint before you'll believe me. In the meantime the noose will draw tighter around us."

Something of the urgency in her voice communicated itself to him. He sat a bit straighter. "I don't need a blueprint," he said. "Just

give me enough of an explanation to know what it's all about—and that I can trust you."

"I will." She drew on the cigaret and let the cloud of thick smoke billow around in her mouth before breathing it deep into her lungs. "I'll be as brief as possible. To begin with, you think you are Ted Srock. But you aren't."

"I'm not?"

"No," she answered. "Three days ago I tricked Srock into coming to my room with me. There I drugged him, and a couple of Cartee's men took him away to the Palace. Earlier, Cartee's doctors had remolded the features of another man into the likeness of Srock. They blocked out this man's mind and planted Srock's identity-pattern and memories in its place. You are that other man."

Quickly he considered what she had told him. The thought that he was not actually Srock he dismissed without consideration. In his own mind he was too certain of his own identity to doubt it. She was merely trying to manipulate him for some purpose of her own. His best plan would be to get all the information he could from her, before showing suspicion.

"You work for Cartee, then?" he asked.

"Not directly; I'm not that high up. I work for others, who work for him."

"If I'm not Srock, what was the

purpose behind this assumed substitution?"

"Oh, don't be stupid." The girl's impatience changed to anger. "It could have been done for any one of a dozen reasons. You can think of them yourself if you try. But the important thing right now is that you've got to get away."

"Why?"

"Why. Why." She seemed at the last frayed ends of her patience. She took a deep breath and forced herself to be calm. "Because you were seen leaving the Palace. By now the Brothers must have checked the time against the activities and whereabouts of all their members, and have narrowed the search to you."

"That sounds a bit too pat," Srock said. "Can you give me any proof that I'm not actually Srock?"

"I think I can," she answered. "But will you have the good sense to accept them? Briefly, here are a few. You should know already that a man's memory can be blocked out, and a faked memory implanted. And that it can be done cleverly enough that the man himself is unaware of the deception. But the implanting of a complete set of memories is a gigantic job that would require months of time, plus knowledge that only the original man would possess. Therefore, an imposed memory is necessarily incomplete—especially in recall of minor, relatively trivial events and experiences.

"I'll name a few that would ordinarily be missed. Do you remember the names and faces of the children you played with when you were young? Do you remember your first date; if you ever had a pet; what sports you took part in; any spankings your parents gave you; the names of your first teachers; where you..."

"That's enough!" Srock found himself stunned at the blank places she had touched. He could recall none of the past she had named. And he had tried, even as she spoke. "I don't remember," he said wearily. Does that mean..." His voice faded into silence.

"Of course it does," Jessica insisted. "They wouldn't have put in those memories I mentioned. You wouldn't even have noticed that they weren't there, unless someone pointed them out to you."

Srock recovered quickly from the momentary shock and made his decision. There was no doubt but that his mind had been tampered with, but the chance that she was telling the truth about the rest was too negligible to be considered seriously.

He'd have to take her in where she could be questioned, by men trained for that sort of thing. He hesitated, however. He knew what she would have to go through—before they finished questioning her. The few short hours of life remaining to her would not be pleasant. But he hardened himself

against the pity—and was it something else—that he felt. He had no choice. It was his duty.

He rose. "I think we'd better..." he began.

Jessica had been watching him closely. As he spoke she brushed her dark hair lightly and Srock found himself staring at a small gray pencil-gun—pointed directly at him. He cursed himself for not having examined her hair. At the same time he felt an odd relief at knowing that she would get away. And an admiration at the contrast between her woman's soft depths and her fire and spirit.

"Well, I tried," the girl said. Her shoulders seemed weary beneath the burden of her frustration. "Your only chance now rests with my staying free. Don't move for three minutes."

She walked to the door, opened it, and was gone.

III

"YOU ASKED to see someone as high up in the echelon of the Brotherhood as possible, Mr. Srock?" The man behind the desk was tall, pale of face, and with small, down-slanting lines of harshness at the corners of his mouth. He spoke with a low, steel-like courtesy, his voice revealing quick currents beneath its mildness. Srock had never seen the man before.

"Yes," Srock said, as he regarded his interviewer levelly. He was seated in a chair that had been placed directly in front of the desk. "May I know to whom I speak?"

"You may call me Mr. Taneh," the tall man answered. "And I can assure you that I hold sufficient authority to deal with any matter you may wish to discuss."

Srock was satisfied. "I'll start at the beginning," he said. He spent the next several minutes going over everything—as he remembered it—that had happened to him since he met Jessica Manthe in the bar.

"And you conclude now," Taneh said, resting his elbows on the desk and joining the tips of his fingers in front of his face, "that your mind has been tampered with. Correct?"

Srock nodded.

Taneh considered that a moment. "What do you expect us to do?" he asked.

"I didn't think it through that far," Srock answered. "My first thought was to get to someone in authority—and let him decide what was to be done."

"Quite commendable," Taneh said, clearing his throat drily. "Do you feel... That there's any possibility that the girl may have been telling the truth—about your not being Srock?"

"I don't believe so," Srock answered. "I'm too certain in my own mind that I have always been

Ted Srock. No pseudo-identity could be planted that firmly."

"Hmm. What is your theory as to Cartee's purpose in tampering with your mind?"

Srock was thoughtful for a minute. "I believe he may have gotten some information from me through hypnosis, or the use drugs," he said, "and the tampering was done to block out my remembering having given it. Or... He may have some means of maintaining a remote control. If you asked, I would advise that you lock me up, or at least see that I have no outside contact."

"Your theory may be the correct one," Taneh said. "On the other hand it would be diabolically clever of Cartee to plant you merely as a distraction. He would expect us to divert quite a bit of our energy to solving the enigma of what he did to you. We might even postpone our prearranged moves against him."

"That sounds like something he might try," Srock agreed. "Whatever else we may say about Cartee, we can't say he's stupid."

Taneh made no comment. Unhurriedly he pressed a button on the corner of his desk. "Getting back to one of my earlier questions," he said, not mentioning his action, "despite the feeling of certainty you have that you are actually Ted Srock—it's possible that the girl told you the truth. Do you grant that?"

"I suppose so," Srock answered. He glanced up uneasily as the door behind Taneh opened and three Brothers walked into the room. One of them carried an oblong, metal box. He set it on the desk in front of Taneh. Srock understood at once what was about to happen. His first thought was to resist. Then he forced himself to relax. This was something he would have to bear, for the greater good.

"As you mentioned," Taneh said evenly, "Cartee is clever, and we can't take any unnecessary chances. Our first duty must be to make certain that you are what you—knowingly or unknowingly—pretend to be. Will you pull your chair a bit closer to the desk, please?"

Srock opened his mouth to speak but let only a soft sigh escape. Any argument he offered now would sound like pleading. He'd take whatever they gave him. He was glad that he had proven to his own satisfaction that he was no coward. They might torture him; but they would never break him.

ONE OF the Brothers opened the box and Srock placed his right forearm in the groove in the lower section. He had seen these instruments of persuasion before. The Brother closed the top over Srock's arm and secured the clamps on its sides.

Taneh squeezed a bulb, con-

nected to the box by a thin wire, and Srock felt the metal close tight against his flesh. A second later concealed springs bent the box in the middle, putting pressure on both ends of the arm bone while holding the center in place.

Srock set his mind to meet the anguish which he knew would soon begin shooting through his arm. His best defense, he realized, would be an attempt at dissociation.

Taneh manipulated the control until the pain in the arm grew from sharp torment to a hot, searing agony. Without changing an expression on his face, Srock sat regarding the punished arm, his mind refusing to accept the pain as subjective. Moisture collected on his forehead, and rolled down his cheeks in great oily drops. He fastened hard to the thought that his body was a separate entity from his mind: indirectly connected with himself.

Finally he looked up. Taneh's face showed a pale and damp pleasure; there was a streak of sadism in the man, Srock decided. "One more ounce of pressure and the bone will snap," he said quietly.

Taneh brought his attention up from the arm with an obvious effort. He released his grip on the bulb and the pressure eased from Srock's arm, leaving it limp and numb. "I see that pain will never force you to speak," Taneh said

"However, it proves little. Can you suggest any other means of achieving our mutually desired clearing up of this matter?"

"We could try a lie-detector," Srock said. "That would prove that I am telling the truth—at least as I know it."

"That's right," Taneh agreed. "You know, I find myself developing a deep admiration for you, Mr. Srock. You evidently thought of the lie-detector earlier—yet you permitted yourself to be tortured, rather than suggest it. You are a brave man. You and I have much in common. I hope you can prove that you are telling the truth, so that we may become better friends." He turned to the Brother who had brought the box. "Release his arm, Miller."

Ten minutes later Srock had vindicated himself. Taneh rose and offered his hand. "I'm sorry for the trouble I've had to cause you," he said. "But we may have gained something by all this. As you know, our big problem right now is to find Cartee. Perhaps the girl will be the lead to him. I want you to contact her again, if possible, and see what you can learn. For now, good-bye and good luck."

Flexing the hand of his still weak and sore right arm Srock turned and left the room. As he walked down the outer corridor he drew a long breath of relief. It had been easier than he had expected. He stopped with the

breath half expelled. It had been too easy!

AFTER Srock had gone, Taneh spoke to the men at his side.

"Miller, stay here with me; you other two get out."

In deep abstraction Taneh rose from the desk and paced the length of the room three times before he spoke again. "I want to get a few things straight in my own mind," he said. "You listen, Miller, and if you see an angle I'm missing let me know. To begin with, that man is convinced that he is Ted Srock; I'm not. Electro-micro-surgery makes the remolding of a man's features a simple matter. And he'd be unable to judge—with a mind that had definitely been tampered with—just how effective that tampering was."

"Personally, I thought his suggestion that we lock him up was a good one," Miller said, when Taneh paused.

Taneh waved the suggestion aside disinterestedly. "I don't know what Cartee's game is," he said. "But the last thing we can afford to do is follow any suggestion coming from Srock; there's too much danger that it would be something put there by Cartee. We can forget that. Now. The girl seems to be the contact between Cartee and Srock. Our best bet is to let Srock go free, on the chance that he can find the girl, or that she comes to him. With Cartee so well hidden, we'll

probably have to get our hands on her before we can find him."

"Don't you have any other leads as to where he might be?"

"None. Despite our best efforts we haven't a clue. But right now, I'm more concerned with Cartee's purpose in setting this thing in motion. The man's clever—damnable clever—and I suspect there's more behind Srock's memory tampering, or transfer, than we've been able to guess."

"Using him for a diversion, as you suggested to Srock, sounds pretty clever to me," Miller said.

"I thought so at first too," Taneh answered. "But Cartee knows he's not dealing with children. We'd never let that really stop us."

"Do you think it possible that he might have learned anything else about what we have in mind?" Miller asked.

"You mean about our taking over the government?" Taneh asked. "He may have. Though there are only eight others—none of whom would talk—besides yourself and I, who know about it. The rest of the Brothers still believe they're fighting only to overthrow a hated dictatorship."

"You're convinced that Cartee actually intends to set up a democratic government, if he gets the chance, aren't you?"

"Certainly," Taneh exclaimed impatiently. "The information we've obtained leaves little room

for doubt. And if we let things slide, where will we be? We'd be fortunate if we landed minor jobs in the government under a setup like that. On the other hand, if we can kill Cartee now, the resulting period of unsettlement and disorganization will be an ideal time for us to take over. And once we're in control they'll never get us out."

"I wonder why Cartee hasn't tried to kill you," Miller said. "You're the heart of the resistance, the one man with a firm grasp of essential details, and the tie that binds the rest of us together. Cartee should know that by now, and that we'd be helpless without you."

"You don't suppose that he wouldn't try if he could reach me, do you?" Taneh asked. "I haven't been out of this building for over three months. And I've taken every precaution to keep the place heavily guarded. The situation right now boils down to this: Will Cartee be able to kill me before we find and kill him? Who will be the first to succeed? That's the crux of the whole situation."

"Perhaps Srock's mission is to kill you?"

"I thought of that. But my best defense is that neither Srock nor Cartee know that I am the actual head of the Brotherhood; therefore neither of them knows whom he must kill. In fact, only the eight I mentioned, and you, know that."

Miller scowled and snapped his fingers. "We've forgotten something," he said. "We should have had Srock followed."

Taneh smiled, mirthlessly. "I made arrangements in advance for a couple men to follow him when he left the building," he said.

ON THE WAY down the stairs of the Brotherhood building Srock made his own plans. Taneh had told him to find Jessica; he would.

He did not return to his room. Cartee's men might have the place watched, or its wires tapped. Neither, he decided, could he be certain that any of the places he usually visited would be safe. He stopped at a side street recreation-place that he had never been in before and made his way to a private communication booth in the rear.

Dropping a half-piece into the pay slot he adjusted the speaking tube to his height and made himself comfortable against the padded seat. This might take some time.

"Information Central," he spoke into the tube.

"Do you have a record of a Jessica Manthe?" he asked the mechanical that answered.

There was a subdued whir and a short pause. "None listed," the metallic voice responded.

He had expected as much. Now for a chore that might be hopeless, but he could think of no

better means of securing the information he needed. "I wish to learn the identity of a girl living in the city," he said. "I will describe her."

"Proceed."

"Dark brown hair and eyes," Srock began. "Olive complexion, and..." What else did she have?

"There are 753,646 females in that descriptive category," the voice said, after a slightly longer pause.

"Age somewhere between twenty and twenty-five," Srock supplied, reaching hopefully.

"That narrows the number to 200,563."

"Height between five-two and five-five."

"86,441."

"Weight one hundred fifteen—give or take ten pounds."

"21,401."

Srock slumped dejectedly. How else could he describe her? "Very beautiful," he said.

"Beauty is too subjective a term to be useful."

He was stumped. Then—a hunch. "First name, Jessica, he said.

"There are thirty-seven females named Jessica within your descriptive range."

Thirty-seven. If he were lucky he would find her now. "Please put their images on the screen."

Twelve pictures later Jessica's image smiled back at him. He had found her!

"Give me her background," Srock said.

"Name Jessica Daenis. Daughter of Commerce Minister, Lork Daenis. Unwed. Born..."

Enough. He had what he wanted. Switching off the call instrument he left the booth.

IV

SROCK changed from his Brotherhood brown to the raiment of a civilian, and spent the afternoon in the Heights, a neighborhood bordering the government grounds. He visited the drinking places and talked with barmen and loungers. By evening he had the information he wanted.

Havilland's smaller sun had followed its companion below the horizon when he drifted into a patch of deep shadow which he had carefully noted earlier. Now he drew tight a leather girdle which he wore about his middle. The action might be rough during the next quarter-hour and he needed the protection the girdle would give his vital organs. He pulled on a pair of metal-knuckled gloves, and was ready for action.

The timing had to be perfect, he reflected, as he stood quietly observing the various guardsmen patrolling the area.

At exactly eighteen-two he slipped across the street and into a clump of shrubbery near the Commerce Minister's house. A

minute later a slow-pacing guardsman approached and Srock's muscles tightened in preparation. The guardsman walked to the bushes, turned, and started back. Srock leaped, swinging his right arm in the same motion. The guardsman spun on his heel and fell stiffly backward.

Srock removed the insignia and official cap from the fallen man and put them on. He dragged the limp body into the bushes and took the guardsman's place on patrol. So far so good. With luck he'd pass in the darkness.

Ten minutes later a long official car, spitting blue smoke, drew up to the front of the Commerce Minister's residence. A girl came out and walked toward the waiting vehicle.

The driver went around the car to open the door on the far side and Srock knew the time had come to make his move. From here in caution must be an abandoned thing.

Sprinting to the car he crouched low against its rear fender.

The driver rounded the back, saw Srock, and halted. "What are you doing..."

Srock's fist stopped the words. He stepped aside to avoid the falling, sprawled body, and sprang into the car, guiding it with one hand as he stepped on the accelerator.

The girl on the seat turned wildly toward him. Srock threw a flash-

ing glance her way and had a glimpse of eyes so wide that white showed clear around the iris. "Who..." she began.

With his free hand Srock shoved his short gun against her ribs. Shoved hard enough to hurt. "Shut up," he said.

The girl subsided immediately, shrinking back into the corner of her seat. Srock drove a few blocks farther before he heard a subdued sob. For the first time he had misgivings. Until that moment he had had no doubt but that right was on his side, and he would move heaven and earth to do what he must. But for a moment now that certainty was gone. With surprise he realized that his emotions were swaying his logic. Anger acted as a defense mechanism. "What did you expect?" he growled. "When you run with a pack of yellow dogs you're bound to find yourself treated like one."

She made no answer. But a few miles later she said, "Ted? I'd like to talk. Will you give me just five minutes?"

Srock was glad of the opportunity to do her the small service. For the past couple minutes he had been seeing a picture of himself, and the picture was not a pleasant one. Swinging into a side street he switched off the mobile's motor. "Five minutes. No more," he said.

"You're an intelligent man," Jessica began urgently. "Tell me, why do you persist in blinding

yourself to the fact that your mind has been changed, merely because you don't feel that it has? Can't you see that's only proof that the job was well done?"

"For the sake of argument, let's say that you're telling the truth," Srock conceded her point. "That doesn't change the position of the opposing factions here. On the one side is a rotten dictatorship, fighting to hold on to its power. On the other is a large group of men determined to overthrow oppression. If my mind has been altered, in such a way that I want to help those men—those morally right men—then I'm thankful for the enlightenment."

"You're so certain that the Brothers are on the side of God," Jessica exclaimed. "I swear that they're not. What certainty have you that the rank and file Brothers are not being used as dupes—by their own leaders?"

THE QUESTION stopped Srock's next argument. "Do you have proof that they are?"

"Yes. I have been very close to Cartee, and I know that he is sincere in his announced intention to set up a democratic government. The fact is, the Brothers were asked to work with him, to that end, and they refused. What do you think of that?"

"I don't believe it."

"No, you wouldn't. But what do you know of the workings of your

leaders? You don't even know who they are. I tell you this, and you have my word it's the truth. Your top leaders don't want democratic government. They wish to kill Cartee, but only so they can seize the reins of power themselves."

"There's still a small thing missing in your arguments," Srock said. "You haven't given me one good reason why I should trust you."

"Here's one," she said. "You love me."

Strangely Srock could not deny it. For days now that love had tangled his reason with thoughts of her body, of the softness of her breath against his cheek, and the sweetness of her lips: It went with him wherever he went, until he wanted to shout, "To hell with reason," and take her in his arms and love her. And now he felt himself surrendering, felt his hard purpose fade into remoteness. "And you?" he asked, "do you love me?"

She moved nearer to him and sat so close that he could see his reflection in her eyes. "I've loved you for years," she said quietly.

"For years? But..." Then he realigned his identity—presumed or real—in his mind. "You mean you loved me before I knew myself as Srock?"

For answer she kissed him—long and sweetly. Oddly, Srock's arms remained rigid at his sides. This action, meant to be her proof, gave

him a new weapon with which to fight to retain a cold logic.

"You kissed me like that before—and slept with me," he said, and watched his words strike like blows. "Remember?"

She straightened and drew away from him. "You're stupid," she said, her voice coming at him hard and brittle. "Your memory of that was deliberately planted to tie you to me. Because I was to be your contact with our side. It never really happened."

Though he suspected that it was because he wanted it, Srock found himself believing her. He reached across to take her to him.

She pushed his hands down. "Don't touch me," she said. "Unless you believe me. If you don't, take me to your torturers and let them kill me."

Srock sat for a long minute, lost in his doubts. "I've never been a compromising man," he said slowly, "but now, God help me, I don't know what's right. I can't fight the Brothers—and yet I can't let them hurt you." Another long minute passed before he set himself again behind the steering wheel. "I'm going to drive out of the city," he said. "As far as our fuel will take us. When it's gone we'll walk. You and I will be out of all this. We won't even be spectators."

Simultaneously with his last words the doors on both sides of the mobile were jerked open. Srock

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swung around, and found himself facing three Brothers. All were armed.

TWO BROTHERS walked ahead, two at their sides, and four behind. They were taking no chances, Srock noted. He took Jessica's hand in his. "I'm sorry," he said. "If I had it to do over again, I'd trust you."

Her small hand was cold. She did not answer.

Their guards remained with them as they walked up two flights to the top floor of the building. Srock knew they were being taken to Taneh's office. Evidently Taneh ranked as one of the highest in the Brotherhood, or they wouldn't be taking them to him.

Once inside they found Taneh seated at his desk. "Welcome back," he said, with the same cold courtesy of manner. He placed his hands together in their familiar gesture. "Should our first step be to torture you, Mr. Srock, in the hope that she will talk? Or should I begin with her?"

Srock said nothing, but his mind worked swiftly. Either he acted now, he knew, or he faced the certainty of death for them both. The odds against him were great, but one factor was in his favor. They were dealing with a thoroughly desperate man, and desperation itself is often a powerful ally.

"I believe the latter would be

preferable," Taneh went on, disdaining to wait for Srock's answer. "Her flesh and spirit are much the softer; if she does not speak, I suspect that you will want to save her from the torture."

All the way up the stairs and into the office Srock had worked to form the hard fabric of his desperation into a plan of action. And now was the moment. "I'll talk," he said, and took a step forward.

As he had hoped, the unexpected response caught the Brothers off guard for the split second he needed. Abruptly he wheeled, caught the arm of the guard nearest him and bent it behind his back. With his free hand he drew the guard's gun and pointed it at Taneh.

All the movements were accomplished in one swift action and for that brief instant Srock dominated the situation. He spoke fast to hold that advantage. "If any of you move—even the slightest—I will shoot Taneh," he said.

Taneh was the first to recover his poise. "I would advise you to surrender." He spoke almost conversationally. "You realize, of course, that you have no slightest chance of getting out of this building alive."

"If we don't," Srock replied starkly, "you will never live to know it. Jessica," he called without turning his head, "remove their guns. And you Brothers keep in



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mind that Taneh's life depends on your remaining motionless."

Quickly Jessica went among the Brothers, removing their weapons. "Shall I take his?" she asked, indicating Taneh with a motion of her head.

"No. We don't want to arouse suspicion when we get outside."

Srock raised his voice and addressed the others. "We're taking your weapons with us. If I hear any of you leave this room I'll shoot Taneh without a second thought."

Taneh licked his dry lips. "What if I refuse to go with you?" he asked. He studied Srock. His expression made a slight change as he read his answer. He shrugged. His will to resistance was gone. "You men do as he told you," he said, and came out from behind the desk. Not a guardsman moved as they went across the room and out the door.

Srock deposited the extra guns in a waste chute in the hall.

One flight down Taneh spoke again. "You're clever enough to keep your weapon out of sight," he said. "But you weren't clever not to take mine. What if I reach for it? I may be faster than you?"

Srock knew that Taneh was trying to distract him from the job at hand, in the hope that his men would somehow be able to intercept them. He gave it back in kind. "If you think this is a good day to

die, old man, you might try it," he suggested.

Taneh's lips thinned into the semblance of a smile. "Touche," he said.

THEY WENT down until they reached the garage in the basement. Once there Taneh realized that his hope of outside help was gone. It was then he played his last card, and Srock was to remember him after as a brave man.

Taneh stopped and leaned against a pillar. "If I let you take me to Cartee, then we are whipped," he said, with the undercurrent of fatalism that was so much a part of his nature. "So it's better that I make my stand here. I refuse to go any farther."

Srock was in no mood to quibble. His nerves were operating on a thin edge. He drew his gun and started toward the stubborn man. "You'll come if I have to knock you down and drag you," he said.

"Wait!" Taneh barked the word as he held up his hand. "Whether you're the original Srock, or an imposter," he said, "I'm certain that you are imbued with the convictions and philosophy of the Brotherhood, and that you cannot willfully harm another Brother. I am going to gamble that I am right—and that you will not stand against me. I intend to draw my gun now, and put a bullet through your shoulder. You see, I want you

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alive; I command you to make no resistance."

He reached—abruptly—toward his shoulder holster and the bullet from Srock's gun painted a livid red mark on the bridge of his nose.

Taneh swayed for a moment, his face showing the shocked realization that his life had been smashed from his body. Then he fell without a sound. There was no blood.

"Get into the car behind you," Srock commanded Jessica. "Sit in the middle. I'll place his body beside you; you'll have to hold it upright."

"I can't do it," Jessica whimpered, her face white and bloodless with the shock of the past few minutes' violence. "I can't do it!"

Srock took her by the shoulders and shook her roughly. "You'll have to do it," he said. "They won't stop us if he's along. I'm going to prop him up in the seat and open his eyes; we'll drive fast and we should get by."

Jessica shuddered but did as she was told.

They were nearing the administration grounds before Jessica overcame some of her horror at having to hold the dead man erect. A faint color returned to her cheeks. She turned to Srock. "I know it was rough on you," she said. "But you did what was right. You won't be sorry."

"Damn you!" Srock cursed her and stopped the car. He had had time for reflection while they drove and at last he realized fully what he had done. He had not only betrayed the Brotherhood, but his killing of Taneh might be the direct cause of their defeat.

He made no further attempt to voice his bitter thoughts but walked around the mobile and lifted out the body of Taneh. Tenderly he laid it on the floor of the rear compartment. He resumed his seat behind the wheel.

"There's one thing I can do to make partial restitution," he said with savage determination. "That's to kill Cartee. And you're going to take me to him."

Jessica studied his face, started to speak, then thought better of it.

"Keep in mind that I have nothing to lose," Srock warned. "Your life, or even my own, is but small weight on the scales in this game. You'll take me to him—now. Refuse, or make one attempt to deceive me, and I'll kill you without a qualm."

Jessica kept her head bowed and Srock was unable to interpret the emotions that played over her face as he spoke. "I'll take you to him," she said; "you have my word."

THE GUARDSMAN standing watch at the entrance to the administration grounds recognized Jessica and waved them on. They were not stopped as they departed at the Palace, and they went in the entranceway. Down a long corridor they walked, with Jessica keeping her gaze directly ahead.

They walked up a flight of stairs, down a short hallway, and stopped in front of an embossed copper door. "This is it," Jessica said.

Once again Srock had the feeling that this had been too easy. She should have tried to bribe or deceive him. "If you're going to me you'll never get another chance," he said. He drew his gun and shoved it against her side. "Open the door."

Unhesitatingly she pressed the button and the door swung wide.

Srock pushed her ahead of him and followed, warily. Silence. The room, as far as he could see, was empty. He took two more steps, turned to ask her a question and—froze.

Fully conscious, he fought to move, but he knew it was useless. He had walked into a trap. They had been waiting for him, and had used a paralyzer to render him helpless. He could not even die fighting. In that moment the thought of the futility of everything he had tried to do sickened him.

Two men in the white frocks of doctors walked into the room from a rear entrance and stood on either side of him. "This will take only a minute," one of them said to Jessica.

They picked Srock up bodily and carried him to a long table. Still conscious, he watched them fix the antennae of a small instrument to his temples. One of the doctors made an adjustment, squeezed a control, and a wave of nausea swept over Srock.

The paralysis passed, he rose—and he had the solution. It was all there. The Srock identity was gone and he... He was Cartee!

"Probably the best hiding place a man ever had," the first doctor said.

"Perfect protective camouflage," the other agreed.



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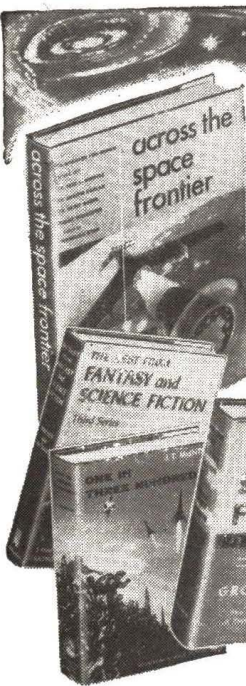
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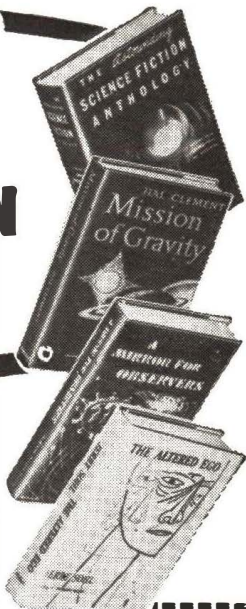
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