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edited by
FREDRIC BROWN
and
MACK REYNOLDS

SCIENCE FICTION CARNIVAL

A SHARPLY SARDONIC VIEW OF
OUR FUTURE IN STORIES BY THESE
OUTSTANDING WRITERS:
HENRY KUTTNER, FREDRIC BROWN
ERIC FRANK RUSSELL, NELSON BOND
MURRAY LEINSTER, H. B. FYFE
GEORGE O. SMITH, CLIVE JACKSON
LARRY SHAW, ROBERT ARTHUR
MACK REYNOLDS

"GO AND CATCH A FALLING STAR"

said John Donne. "Why stop there?" say Brown and Reynolds. Hop a comet and tour the galaxy. Get the down-to-universe truth about how the other half is going to live. See what it would be like to be


a perfectly competent promotion-publicity robot with a telephone voice that scares the customers away—


or a poor sick robot with such a complicated mechanism that there's no other robot complicated enough to cure you—


or a traveler in a time machine that gets stuck repeating the present over and over again—

THE WEIRDLY IMAGINATIVE WORLD of science-fiction at its best in this collection of exceptional stories brilliantly assembled by Fred Brown and Mack Reynolds, two all-time masters of science-fiction.

FUN IN SCIENCE-FICTION

SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL

Edited, and with Introductions by
FREDRIC BROWN and MACK REYNOLDS

Bantam Books • New York

With deep gratitude for his invaluable aid in compiling this book, each of us respectfully dedicates it to the other.—FREDRIC BROWN and MACK REYNOLDS

SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL

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Introduction

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MAN AND AN ANT?

Think a minute before you answer; it's a fundamental and terribly important difference, but not as immediately obvious as their similarities. Think about the latter a moment first. Man and ant are both social creatures, able to live together in large groups and to cooperate within those groups. Both store food, fight wars, build cities. Yes, there are plenty of similarities. Why bother to enumerate them? It's the *difference* that's important.

What's the difference between a man and an ant?

A man can laugh. He has a sense of humor, an appreciation of the incongruous, an ability to enjoy a situation (whether he encounters it in real life or in a story or a picture) because of some not always tangible factor therein that gives him a type of pleasure that is above and apart from any form of physical gratification.

The ant does not laugh, and therefore the civilization of the ant is static; it will never change.

A civilization that knows laughter can never become static. As long as man can recognize absurdities he can change them. If and when he ever forgets how to laugh, he's through. Oh, he may *survive,* but he's *through.* He won't be man any longer; he'll be a new type of ant with four limbs instead of six. His individual and collective life will be a never-changing treadmill that leads him nowhere.

George Orwell paints such a picture of the end of man's progress in his horrifying *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* He describes a civilization that is without laughter and is therefore without change and without hope of change. Laughter would have toppled it, as laughter has toppled empires before. Laughter would have led to change—and although all change is not progress there can be no progress without change.

True, man must think seriously at times. But he must also laugh—or he will no longer be able to think at all. Have you ever thought of the semantic implications of the common phrase *dead earnest?*

Science-fiction deals—largely, at any rate—with the future of man, with what he's going to do when he breaks free of the bonds of Earth and finds himself headed toward the stars. It looks forward to the day when he'll learn to ride a comet, gallivant about the galaxy, nibble a nebula. Oh, he'll do those things, and more, if he never forgets how to laugh—and how to be free.

Many science-fiction writers have known or felt this, have realized that laughter is more essential to man's future than rocket fuels, atomic energy or telekinesis.

It's even, in the long run, more important than ideologies—except as ideologies can affect man's ability to laugh. An ideology that suppresses laughter can and would force man into the ant-pattern that is without change and without future.

Without future there'd be no dreams and without dreams there'd be no science-fiction.

So it's not surprising that science-fiction has not neglected humor. These stories are proof. Hundred proof, some of them.

They're out of space and out of time; some are so wacky it might almost be said they're out of context, too. They range from here to infinity in setting and from here to eternity in time but they all have one thing in common: They prove that man hasn't lost his sense of humor *yet,* and give hope that he never will.

FREDRIC BROWN

Taos, New Mexico

Preface

FRED AND I HAVE ENJOYED COLLECTING THESE STORIES. WE'RE both omnivorous readers of science-fiction and these are the stories which, in recent years, have pleased us most. Yes, we've stuck to recent or fairly recent stories. There are some older classics of science-fiction humor that we'd have liked to use but they have been anthologized elsewhere, some of them time and again, and we wanted to give you fresh material, to use only stories that have never before appeared in an anthology.

In particular we nobly resisted one of the two temptations to which it is so easy for an anthologist to succumb—the temp-

tation to slide in a few stories so old that he can get them for free because the copyright has expired. We didn't resist the other temptation. It was too strong for us. We hope you'll forgive us. We hope you'll forgive our including, each of us, a story of his own.

This is the first anthology exclusively of humorous science-fiction stories. The idea was conceived over a jug of wine in Taos, New Mexico, and we immediately began culling through the stacks—and I *mean* stacks—of magazines we had on hand and writing letters to editors, literary agents and other writers for further suggestions. Everyone we wrote to or talked to was enthusiastic about the project, although many were doubtful of our ability to find enough really *good* humorous science-fiction to fill a book. But even the doubters hoped we could prove them wrong.

We were pleasantly surprised to discover how wrong they were. Our chief difficulty was not in locating sufficient material; it was in choosing a limited number of stories out of at least three times as many wacky and hilarious yarns as we could possibly use. It broke our hearts to leave out some of them. We were even tempted to leave out our own stories to make room for two others—but that would have broken our hearts even more.

We want to give our thanks to the editors and agents who helped us, to Ted Dikty, Harry Altshuler, Larry Shaw, Forrest J. Ackerman, Scott Meredith, Mel Korshak, and in particular to Anthony Boucher, whose assistance went far beyond the call of duty.

We want to thank the authors of these stories for the privilege of using them and also, and even more, we want to thank them for the pleasure we had in reading the stories. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

MACK REYNOLDS

Taos, New Mexico

Robert Arthur

No anthology of science-fiction humor should be published without one good "mad scientist" story. A good percentage of the humor in this field deals with professors who may be shy a few marbles but whose zany genius lets them accomplish things no sane rival would even think of trying to do. The house of Jeremiah Jupiter obviously is surmounted by a belfry full of bats, but if you're not already a Robert Arthur fan it's because this is your first introduction to Jeremiah Jupiter.

—F. B.

The Wheel of Time

IT WAS A LOVELY SUNDAY MORNING IN JULY when Jeremiah Jupiter called to suggest a picnic. I must have been feeling suicidal that day, because I accepted.

Jeremiah Jupiter has a mint of money and a yen for scientific experimenting—on me, if he can. His mind and lightning work the same way—fast, in zig-zag streaks. He's either the greatest scientist who ever lived, or the worst screwball who ever trod this mundane sphere.

But I had an excuse this time for not realizing he was up to something. I thought he meant a real picnic—the kind with lots of cold chicken and lobster salad. If there's anything Jupiter loves besides science, it's eating, especially on picnics. The lunch basket his Javanese boy packs up would lure Oscar of the Waldorf away from his skillet.

I stipulated, however, that I absolutely must be back in New York by evening, for I had an important dinner engagement with an out-of-town editor. He was returning to Chicago Monday morning, so at dinner we were going to settle on terms for a serial of mine he wanted to buy, provided he could take it with him and rush it to the press the minute he got back to Chicago. Since I figured on getting at least two thousand for the story, I was anticipating that dinner with considerable zest.

Jupiter promised we would be back in time, said he'd call for me in an hour, and rang off. I dressed, in some lightweight flannels, one of the new Pandanus grass hats decorated with a bright-colored band, and an appetite. Promptly in an hour I heard Jupiter's honk, and went out.

When I got outside, though, I stopped in amazement. Jupiter wasn't driving his usual V-16 touring car. Instead, he was at the wheel of a Jeremiah Jupiter lab truck, with an enclosed body. My suspicions were instantly aroused.

"Lucius!" Jupiter caroled. His bright blue eyes in his chubby pink face sparkled behind their powerful horn-rimmed spectacles. "I'm so glad you can make it. What a day for a picnic, eh? We'll have the time of our lives!"

He put a queer emphasis on the word time, and chuckled. I looked at him darkly as I clambered in beside him.

"Jupiter," I demanded, "since when have you been a truck driver?"

"Er—" Jupiter coughed—"I have some guests. I thought it best to bring them in a truck. Avoid the stares of the Sunday crowds."

"Guests?" I whirled around, and peered into the body of the truck through a panel opening. The inside was quite light. I could see perfectly. I realized that after I had rubbed my eyes twice, and what I saw still stayed the same.

And what I saw were three large chimpanzees, wearing clothes and horn-rimmed spectacles, hanging from support rods in the top of the truck while they read volumes of *The Encyclopædia Britannica!*

"Jupiter!" I said. Jeremiah Jupiter flinched.

"Don't scream, Lucius," he reproved. "If you make a habit of it, you'll get cancer of the vocal cords. Anyway, they aren't really reading the encyclopedia. It's part of the act. There are thin candy wafers between the pages, and they turn the pages looking for them. When they pop the wafers into their mouths, they seem to be licking their thumbs. That gives them the appearance of studying. Really, they never actually read anything but the comic sheets."

"Jupiter!" This time the word came out in a strangled voice, as I kept control of myself by an effort. "I won't ask you why you're bringing three trained chimpanzees along on a picnic. I won't ask you what that very sinister-looking apparatus under the tarpaulin is. I won't ask you what madness your sly, serpentine, Machiavellian mind is bent upon. But one thing I do want to know.

"What are those three motorcycles in the back of the truck for?"

"Lucius," Jeremiah complained, dashing at a space between

a bridge abutment and a ten-ton truck that would not have accommodated a stout bicyclist, "you will really get cancer of the vocal cords. I detected a distinct crack in your voice then."

"Hah!" I breathed. "Hah! What a chance for a *mot juste* on my part. But I'll restrain myself—if you'll explain why we are going on a picnic with three chimpanzees who read encyclopedias while hanging by their heels, and three undersized motorcycles painted vermillion, gold, and silver!"

"They're part of the act, too," Jeremiah chirped, finding the bridge clear and roaring the truck down it at breakneck speed. "The chimpanzees ride the motorcycles around and around while they study the encyclopedia."

"Jupiter—" now I was just whispering—"I do not say that makes sense, but I'll accept it. On looking closer, however, I see that beside the motorcycles are three bass drums. *What the devil are the drums for?*"

"You will have to let me X-ray your throat when we return, Lucius," Jupiter said, with a worried expression. "You sounded so strange then . . . Why, the drums are—"

"Part of the act!"

"Yes, indeed," he agreed brightly. "The drums fasten to the handlebars of the motorcycles. Then the chimps ride the motorcycles around on the stage—I bought them from a vaudeville animal act—beating the drums, reading the encyclopedia, and throwing out oranges to the audience."

I was reduced to speechlessness for a good half hour as we drove up the Jersey shore of the Hudson. At last I made an effort and blinked the glassy feeling from my eyes.

"You," I said, "brought along three chimpanzees who ride motorcycles, beat bass drums, study the encyclopedia, and throw oranges at people, all at one and the same time—you brought along these intelligent, educated, amiable, sociable, versatile creatures to keep us entertained while we picnic? You did all this just to while away the time and amuse us as we eat? Is that it, Jeremiah?"

My chubby companion shook his head.

"Not at all, Lucius," he piped. "They will play an important part in the epochal scientific achievement you are going to witness. Although I have food with me, this is really going to be a picnic of science, Lucius, a feast of knowledge rather than a mere gorging of the corporeal body. Aren't you excited at the thought?"

I gurgled slowly and collapsed.

"No," I murmured hollowly. "No, I won't help you."

"Help me do what, Lucius?"

"Whatever it is you're planning. I won't help you."

"I was afraid of that," my small friend sighed sadly. "That's why I brought the chimpanzees. They're highly-trained, very intelligent, and they shall be my only assistants in the precedent-shattering feat I am about to perform. You need do nothing but look on. And applaud, of course."

"What—" I hardly dared ask it—"what is the experiment, Jeremiah?"

Jeremiah Jupiter's face took on the rapt, dreamy look I knew too well.

"I am going," he said, "I am going, Lucius, to upset the time-rhythm of the universe!"

There is nothing small about Jupiter. When he takes a notion to investigate space and distance, he short-circuits infinity. Now that it had occurred to him that time would make a fascinating scientific plaything, he was preparing to upset the universe's time-rhythm, whatever that was.

"Jupiter," I said in the merest whisper, "Jupiter, let me out right here. I'm going to walk back."

"I really am worried about you, Lucius," Jupiter told me, swinging the truck off the road into a muddy lane leading through a wood. "I'm positive there's something wrong with . . . But anyway, here we are. Here's where we're going to have our picnic."

He pulled the truck to a stop in the middle of a grassy meadow, dominated by a large oak tree. A hundred yards away was a section of the Palisades, dropping sheer to the blue of the Hudson River. In the other direction, the field sloped gently.

There were, however, several large grassy mounds in the middle of the meadow, and one of these showed signs of having been dug into recently. The spot where Jupiter chose to stop was between the tree and the mounds, and he immediately jumped down and ran around to open up the back of the truck.

"Come, Lucius!" he called. "I need your help. That's a boy, King. Good girl, Queenie. Come on now, Joker. Give me the books. Get down and romp in the grass. This is going to be a picnic."

The three chimpanzees hopped lightly down and began doing somersaults in the grass at the word picnic, which they seemed to recognize. Little did they know!

The largest of the chimps had a broad, apish face, fringed by graying hair. He was tastefully costumed in an Indian suit, with plenty of bright beadwork around the cuffs and pockets. From time to time he paused to pick a bead off and eat it, chewing reflectively. Then he went back to turning somersaults.

The chimp Jupiter had called Queenie had on a skirt and blouse, also Indian, but the smallest and youngest of the three —my companion informed me that King and Queenie were his parents, which was why he was called Joker, or in full, Jack Joker—was gaily decked out in an acrobat's silk shorts and jersey, with an American eagle across his chest.

He did flipflops around his parents, while Jupiter and I sweated to unload the truck.

We ran the motorcycles, one crimson, one gold, one silver, and smaller than standard models, down an extensible ramp onto the grass. Each had a small sidecar attached, and in these I saw some glittering objects like gargantuan liver pills, but I had no chance to investigate them.

Jupiter handed me down the three small bass drums, each with a portrait of its owner painted on the head, and I placed these beside the motorcycles. King, Queenie, and Joker recognized their property and made sounds of anticipation, but Jupiter shooed them away.

"Go on, play," he told them. "First we're going to eat. The drums come later."

Either recognizing the voice of a master before whom Nature herself quailed, or because he was now unloading the large vacuum lunch hamper, the chimps scampered around in circles, playing tag and chattering. Jupiter handed me the hamper and jumped down. I tottered with it to the shade of the oak, and he trotted at my side, rubbing his hands and exuding enthusiasm.

"Hmm," he said, peering into the hamper. "No reason why we shouldn't eat now. Put you in a better mood perhaps, Lucius. Now let's see, what have we here? Breast of Hungarian pheasant? Ah!"

Munching, he flung himself down on the grass. He tossed a bag of peanuts to each of the chimps, and they swung happily up into the lower branches of the oak, where they squatted, eating peanuts and tossing the shells at me. Moodily I chewed on squab in jelly, and blasphemed the base appetites that had lured me into this expedition.

"Now, Lucius," Jeremiah said brightly, licking his fingers, "I dare say I'll have to outline for you what it is I'm going to do. In the first place, time is nothing but rhythmic forces—"

"How do you know?" I asked rudely.

"I deduced it logically," he informed me, sinking his teeth into a turkey leg. "It came to me in a flash one night when I was setting my alarm clock. Everything else in Nature, I realized, is rhythmic. The seasons, the progressions of the stars, birth, life, light waves, radio waves, electrical impulses, the motions of molecules—everything. All move according to

fixed and definite rhythms. Obviously, I deduced, since the Universe is constructed upon a pattern of rhythm, time must be rhythmic too. It's just that nobody ever thought of it before."

"And now that you've thought of it," I asked, opening a bottle of Moselle from the cooling compartment, "what has it gotten you?"

"Just this, Lucius!" Jupiter bubbled with excitement. *"Any rhythm can be interrupted by a properly applied counter-rhythm!"*

I opened my mouth and forgot to put anything in it. "Now surely," Jeremiah said patiently, "even though you do spend all your time swinging golf clubs, waving tennis racquets, or whirling polo mallets, when you're not writing the puny little pieces of fiction you compose as an excuse for not working, you must know some elementary physics.

"I am positive you must have read of experiments in which two light waves of the proper lengths, being made to interfere with each other, produce darkness? And the fact that two sounds, properly chosen for pitch, can get in each other's way, with complete silence as the result?"

I nodded.

"Yes," I admitted. "I know about that. What's that got to do with time?"

"The time-rhythm," he corrected me. "Or, the Jeremiah Jupiter Time-Rhythm Effect, as succeeding generations will call it. Why, it's quite obvious. If you can interfere with light and produce darkness, if you can interfere with sound and produce silence, then obviously you can interfere with present time and produce past time."

It was not obvious to me, and I said so.

My companion sighed.

"Very well, Lucius," he remarked. "I've made it as plain as I can, and if you don't understand I'm sorry. Your attitude is no surprise to me. In fact it accurately reflects what my professional colleagues would say, and that is the reason we are here today. To provide irrefutable proof which, upon being presented to certain contemporaries calling themselves scientists, will force them to respect the monograph on the subject I'm now writing."

His eyes glittered. Jeremiah Jupiter has had notable encounters with his fellow scientists in the past, but he has never yet emerged the loser.

"A demonstration, Lucius," he explained, "they would claim was faked. Consequently I am going to prove I can interrupt the time-rhythm of the present and produce the past so that even the most skeptical dolt cannot doubt."

He poured himself a tall glass of Moselle and drank it with great appreciation. Perceiving that the chimps in the tree overhead had finished their peanuts, he tossed each of them a bottle of soda pop, which they drank with avid gurglings.

"That is where King, Queenie and Joker come in," he informed me. "I knew that you, Lucius, would balk. They, however, are equally competent to do what is necessary, and much less skeptical. You see, I have prepared a number of time capsules—"

"Time capsules!"

"To use a layman's terminology. I have one here."

He produced from one of his bulging pockets an article shaped like a gelatine capsule, about as big as his fist, and made apparently of platinum, for it was very heavy.

It seemed solid; at least there was no way of opening it. On the polished surface was deeply engraved, in bold script, *Jeremiah Jupiter Time Capsule. A. D. 1965. Melt at left-hand tip to open.*

"In it," Jupiter told me, "there is a microfilm of the *New York Times*, another microfilm containing my autobiography and listing some of my more noteworthy discoveries, a third microfilm announcing that I shall presently publish my findings concerning the Jupiter Time-Rhythm Effect, and a small compartment containing the merest pinch of radium."

"But—"

"Those mounds—" he gestured—"are recently discovered barrows containing ruins of an ancient barbaric civilization on this spot. In digging, the archeologists have also discovered that beneath this meadow is a clay stratum, once part of a swampy coastline, containing tremendous numbers of fossils. The digging has only begun. In a short time it will be undertaken more extensively, and this whole area sifted for fossils and other finds.

"And among the objects found, Lucius, will be one or more Jeremiah Jupiter Time Capsules! Clever, eh?"

He gazed at me brightly, but I could only scowl.

"You mean," I demanded, "you're going to dig down in this meadow and plant your time capsules for the archeologists to find next week, or next month? But I don't see—"

The pink, cherubic face clouded over.

"Lucius, sometimes I despair of you," he sighed. "Of course not. I am going to set up an interference in the time rhythm at this particular spot. Then the chimpanzees will enter it with my time capsules—since I know *you* won't—and *they will deposit the capsules here a million years ago!*"

He gazed at me anxiously.

"Are you sure you're well, Lucius? Your throat isn't bother-

ing you again? You seem to be choking. Now you understand, of course. My time capsules, deposited here a million years ago, will have been resting beneath this meadow all that time. The archeologists, digging down into strata they know were laid down before the dawn of history, will find at least one time capsule.

"There will be only one possible explanation—that it was actually placed there in the past. By measuring the disintegration of the radium inside, they will know the exact number of years it has been lying there, waiting to be found by—

"Here, Lucius, drink this wine, please!"

I drank it. I felt stronger then, but not strong enough to argue with him.

"I do not understand, Jupiter," I told him. "But let that pass. I will take your word for it. You are going to set up an interference in the time-rhythm, making today yesterday, a million years removed. But why yesterday? Why not tomorrow too? Why not have a peep into the future as well?"

He placed his plump fingers together and pursed his lips.

"I can excuse you for asking that question," he chirped, "because I asked it myself when first the idea came to me. But it is impossible. I logically established its impossibility and dismissed the thought from my mind.

"I think I can make it plain why, though I can reduce the present to the past. I cannot resolve it into the future. Let us assume that you have a grandchild someday."

"But I'm not even married," I protested.

"Please don't be irrelevant. In the course of events your grandchild grows up and develops an inflamed appendix that must be operated upon."

"More likely peptic ulcers from traveling around too much via the Jupiter Spatial By-pass," I suggested wickedly.

He remained unruffled. "Let us say I am a doctor. In the course of time, your grandchild comes to me and I cut into him, remove his appendix. I do it *then*. But obviously I could never do it now, because neither grandchild nor appendix has yet occurred. So it is with the future. As it hasn't occurred, I can't penetrate into it. Now to the business at hand."

He rose and strode briskly over to the truck. I followed. Together we slid the heavy apparatus under the tarpaulin down the ramp and set it up on the grass.

While we were doing this I noticed that the three chimps had dropped out of the tree and were chattering excitedly about something, but I was too busy to see what.

The object that my companion was now handling with such loving care was large and square, something like one of the old cabinet television sets of my boyhood. It had similar dials

on the front, and when he lifted the top, I saw bank after bank of tubes inside, as well as a large drum that apparently revolved.

The middle of the front was given over to a speaker-like opening, and a long insulated wire depended from the rear. This wire was attached to a steel prong, which Jupiter drove into the earth several feet behind the unwholesome apparatus.

"That forms a ground connection," he remarked. "Now we're ready to make a preliminary test of my Time-Rhythm Resonator. Where are the chimps?"

I looked up.

"They're drinking the Moselle!" I yelled. "They're getting tight!"

Jupiter, in the midst of adjusting something, jerked upright. The chimps certainly were getting intoxicated, and in a hurry. Having finished off their soda pop, they'd dropped down out of the oak as soon as we'd left and picked up the Moselle. Now they were guzzling it as fast as they could get it down, giving guttural calls and cries of enjoyment.

"They can't get drunk!" Jupiter cried. "That might spoil the experiment! Lucius, we must take the wine away from them!"

We rushed across the grass. As soon as they saw us coming, King, Queenie and Joker took to their heels, scampering away with knuckles touching the ground to give them extra speed. They dashed for their motorcycles, leaped into the seats, and got under way.

The motorcycles were electric, and could be started, stopped, or steered with one hand—or foot. King took off first. He grabbed the handlebar control with his foot, the machine hummed, and then shot toward us. With a tipsy whoop Queenie followed. Joker paused long enough to grab up his drum. Then, steering with one foot, holding on with the other, grasping the drum with one paw and banging it with the other fist, he charged after his parents.

"Jump, Lucius!" Jupiter shrilled. He leaped one way and I the other. King and Queenie whizzed between us, and Joker, banging lustily on the drum and emitting a kind of simian war-whoop, zipped past behind them.

Jeremiah Jupiter fell on his face. I banged against the tree trunk. The three chimpanzee Barney Oldfields went whooping around the tree, turned and started back.

"Look out!" I yelled. Jupiter got dazedly to his feet just as the chimps came around the second lap. Then I leaped, and King and Queenie and Joker, all abreast, rocking and swaying, roared by underneath me and were gone again.

I was in the lower branches of the oak by then. Turning, I discovered Jupiter on the next limb.

"You and your discoveries!" I grated.

But he wasn't listening. He was staring at his apparatus, and he looked worried.

"Er—Lucius," he remarked. "I think my Time-Rhythm Resonator is working."

I looked. I could see the tubes glowing, right enough.

"Well?" I asked. "Nothing's happening."

"Um—I think I'd better go turn it off anyway. The revolving drum was not working properly and I was about to adjust it—"

He dropped to the ground and started toward the thing. I dropped behind him and started that way too, just as the three tipsy chimps on their gaudy motorcycles came past a third time, still rocking and swaying, whooping, Joker beating the drum.

"Look out!" I yelled, and leaped. They went past underneath, dust spurting, and back in the tree again I turned, to discover Jupiter on the next branch.

"You and your discoveries!" I grated between my teeth.

But he wasn't listening. He was staring at his apparatus, and he looked worried.

"Er—Lucius," he said. "I think my Time-Rhythm Resonator is working."

I could see the tubes glowing, right enough.

"Well?" I asked. "Nothing's happening."

"Um—I think I'd better go turn it off anyway. The revolving drum was not working properly and I was about to adjust it—"

He dropped to the ground, and I after him. Just as we did so, I saw the three chimpanzees on their vaudeville-act cycles roaring around the oak at us again, and it flashed through my mind that all this was very familiar. That we had, in fact, just done it all a moment before—

Then, leaping, I was in the tree again, the chimps were zooming by underneath, and Jupiter was clinging to the next branch.

And I knew! Jupiter's machine was stuck, like a phonograph with a cracked record! It wasn't changing the present to the past, but *repeating the present over and over again!*

Bitter horror overwhelmed me. We were doomed to keep leaping up into that oak while three drunken chimpanzees tried to run us down until—until—My brain reeled.

"You and your discoveries!" I screamed.

Jupiter did not answer. He was staring at his machine—

It was after the little act had been repeated for the tenth time—I think it was the tenth, though it seemed as if we spent days hopping up and down out of that tree—that King and

Queenie and Joker, instead of trying to run us down, swerved and brought their motorcycles to a stop. They leaped off and began turning somersaults, as if waiting for the applause. Jupiter rushed across to his machine and clicked a switch. Then he mopped his brow.

"Goodness," he said mildly. "I'm certainly glad I put in that automatic cut-off switch. The drum was caught in one position, and—"

"—and time kept repeating itself around here!" I yelled hoarsely. "We were stuck in time! Talk about being in a rut! If that machine hadn't stopped we'd have spent eternity dodging intoxicated chimpanzees on motorcycles!"

"Any apparatus may have a bug or two in it at first," Jeremiah Jupiter said, but I could see he was slightly shaken. It had been hot work, jumping up and down out of that oak, and Jeremiah does not like exercise. His pink face was bedewed with perspiration.

"However," he went on briskly, "I have that fixed now. Now to turn the resonator around, so its field of operation will be directed toward the mounds, and we're all ready."

He moved the square box about, did a few things to it, and turned toward the chimps. Sobered and abashed now, they crouched beside their cycles as if expecting to be punished. Jupiter patted them on the shoulders reassuringly, and got them back onto their motorcycles. Then he fastened King and Queenie's drums to the handlebars, retrieved Joker's drum and fastened that in place too, and lined them up facing toward the mounds.

From the truck he brought out three volumes of the encyclopedia, and gave one to each. The chimps immediately brightened up.

"Now they feel at home," Jupiter informed me. "They have all the trappings of their act. Nothing is missing, so they're reassured. Like children. Everything's all right now. They won't lose control of themselves this time. You'll see."

He pointed into the small sidecars attached to the machines. I saw now that the glittery objects in the sidecars were platinum time capsules.

"Oranges," Jeremiah Jupiter said, drawing the chimps' attention to them. "Oranges," and he made a throwing motion.

"As they ride around throwing out oranges in their act," he told me, "they will throw out my time capsules. Perhaps you understand at last, Lucius.

"In a moment I am going to create a temporal rhythm interference which will reduce the present over these mounds to the past of a million years ago.

"The chimps will ride into that area of the past on their

cycles—if only you were more cooperative, Lucius, none of this rather elaborate scheme would be necessary—and as they ride around they will throw the time capsules broadcast over the whole area. One or more is bound to sink into the ground, be covered over, and remain there until the present, to be dug up by the archeologists.

"When I whistle, the chimps will ride back to us, in the present. I will turn off the resonator. In due time one of my capsules will be found. Then I will explain how it came to be there, and no one will be able to doubt my time-rhythm effect thereafter. It is a little complicated, but remember, that is your fault."

"You could run in there and plant a capsule for yourself, Jupiter," I suggested, but he only shook his head.

"It wouldn't be feasible," he retorted. "Now—"

He clicked a switch on his apparatus.

This time nothing went wrong. In an instant a large area of haze formed over the old mounds. This haze thickened at first, but Jupiter fiddled with a dial, and gradually it thinned down until it was just a shimmery area.

Within that space, a great change in the meadow had taken place.

Now great broad fronds grew up from the ground, long tentacles of unhealthy-looking moss drooping from them. In the background were tall spiky trees distantly resembling palms. In the foreground, a hard, sandy beach, covered with curious shells. It was rather like a stage setting seen through a gauze curtain.

Jeremiah Jupiter took a deep breath.

"Lucius," he said, "this is a solemn moment. We are standing here today, and there is yesterday . . . All right, King, Queenie, Joker. Start!"

Unhesitatingly the three chimps started their motorcycles bouncing across the meadow toward the shimmery area of the past that Jupiter's resonator was producing. Steering with one foot, banging their drums with one hand, holding out their encyclopedias as if reading in the other, they charged bravely back into the remote past of their distant forefathers.

Jupiter watched them go, entranced. But I tapped his shoulder and pointed to a spot behind us.

"And there," I said, "is tomorrow!"

Jeremiah Jupiter turned, and his eyes bugged in disbelief.

Behind us was a second hazy area, as large as the first and the same distance away. But within this one there was a glitter of glass and crystal. We saw a wide street, along which low-roofed buildings stretched into the distance. Jewel-like façades shone in the sunshine, and over the roofs of the

buildings airships were swooping so rapidly we could not make out what they looked like.

"G-good heavens!" Jupiter stuttered. "My resonator is giving out a harmonic!"

Calling what we were looking at a harmonic seemed to me an understatement.

"Now," I asked, with malicious amusement, "how do you explain that?"

"I—" Jupiter muttered, struggling to collect himself. "I—"

But before he could get his thoughts in order, a shriek of terror sounded behind us. We wheeled.

The three chimps had plunged into the past area, banging bravely on their drums, and for an instant their motorcycles spurned the primordial sands. Then, beyond the trees, a great, toothed head arose, and red eyes stared at them. Above them a shadow swooped down, and King, Queenie, and Joker, pausing not, turned and came right back.

They threw away their books. They threw away their drums. They threw away everything but the time capsules, and crouching low, yelling in horror, they swept straight back at us.

The head of the brontosaurus that had reared up disappeared, and the pterodactyl that had swooped down on them flapped its bat-like wings and zoomed back up into the sky, out of our sight. Jupiter yelled, but the chimps had only one thought now. They wanted to get back to nice, peaceful today.

They came bounding at us, eyes rolling, teeth chattering, and I made one wild leap.

"Duck, Jupiter!" I shouted. "They're going to run us down! They're scared silly!"

Jupiter tumbled after me, just in time. The chimps bounded over the spot where we had been standing and kept on going . . . straight for that future which had appeared where it shouldn't!

"Oh, goodness!" Jupiter squeaked in dismay. "No, they mustn't!"

He scrambled up and dashed for his apparatus. By now King and Queenie and Joker, still howling, were at the very edge of the second hazy space, and still accelerating. Directly before them, broad and smooth, lay the street we could see running into the heart of that crystal and silver city of the future.

As they reached it, Joker, in an automatic response to his training, I dare say, reached down into the sidecar, seized one of the time capsules, and tossed it high into the air.

Then Jupiter, rushing for his resonator, tripped over the

ground wire, plunged into the apparatus, and sent it crashing to the earth beneath him.

The silver city, into whose street King and Queenie and Joker had just ridden in their headlong flight, vanished.

So did the chimps.

We were surrounded by nothing but peaceful Jersey meadow.

I picked up Jupiter and then the resonator. The resonator was just a tangle of broken tubes and loose wires; but I opened the bottle of Moselle that remained and restored Jupiter to normalcy.

He drank the wine, but his look remained thoughtful. After he had wiped his lips, he said, "Naturally, my resonator gave off a harmonic. Almost any resonating apparatus, from a flute to a radio, will. What happened, Lucius, is that the harmonic, instead of interfering with the time rhythm, *amplified* it."

He got up, straightened his clothes, and carried the hamper to the truck.

"You understand, Lucius," he said then, his voice reflective, "that two vibrations don't *have* to interfere with each other. Two light waves may combine to make one stronger light. Two sound waves may combine to produce one louder sound. Obviously what the overtone from my resonator did was to strengthen the time rhythm, thereby driving the present into the future.

"Thus the main vibratory wave was working in one direction, and the harmonic directly opposite, producing equal but opposite reactions. So the future we saw was just as far ahead of us as the past I created was behind us. A million years, I'd say, offhand, though as unfortunately none of the time capsules were deposited, we'll never know."

He started to climb into the driver's seat of his truck. At that moment something glittered down out of nowhere and fell on his toe. Yelling, he hopped around holding his foot, while I picked the object up.

It was a Jeremiah Jupiter time capsule: It was, in fact, the one Jack Joker had tossed out at the instant he started into the future.

We had just caught up to the moment in which the chimp had thrown it away.

Preserving a stony silence after that, Jupiter drove us back to New York through the pleasant summer twilight. The time capsule he tossed into the Hudson as we crossed the bridge. From time to time he glanced at me in irritation.

"I can't for the life of me imagine what you're chuckling about," he muttered, as he drew up before my apartment building.

"I was just thinking of King and Queenie and Joker charging down the streets of New York a million years from now on motorcycles, throwing time capsules at the startled inhabitants," I told him. "It will give a very queer impression of what their ancestors in the twentieth century were like. And you know something, Jupiter?"

"What?" he grumbled.

"They all wore silver discs around their neck with their initials on them," I said. "Of course Joker's initials are J.J., the same as yours. They're bound to think they stand for Jeremiah Jupiter, and that he's you, and King and Queenie are your parents. They'll put your name under his picture in their history books, I expect . . . Are you going to build another resonator?"

Jupiter shifted gears with a clash.

"No," he snapped. "I have too many other things to do."

And he hurried off. It was the first time I'd ever had the laugh on him, and I made the most of it. I went inside laughing, and was still laughing after I'd bathed and dressed for my dinner engagement with the editor who was so anxious to have my serial to take back with him to Chicago on the Monday morning plane.

I didn't really stop laughing, in fact, until I got downtown and discovered that it was Tuesday night . . .

Murray Leinster

Now on this one we stretched a point. We promised, in our introduction, to give you stories never anthologized before. Well, although this one hasn't been anthologized *before it has appeared in a* collection *of Mr. Leinster's more outstanding science-fiction stories. Frankly, it was just too funny to be left out of a book of science-fiction humor. We're sure we'll hear no complaints.*

—F. B.

A Logic Named Joe

IT WAS ON THE THIRD DAY OF AUGUST THAT JOE come off the assembly-line and on the fifth Laurine come into town, an' that afternoon I save civilization. That's what I figure, anyhow. Laurine is a blonde that I was crazy about once—and crazy is the word—and Joe is a Logic that I have stored away down in the cellar right now. I had to pay for him because I said I busted him, and sometimes I think about turning him on and sometimes I think about taking an axe to him. Sooner or later I'm gonna do one or the other. I kinda hope it's the axe. I could use a coupla million dollars—sure!—an' Joe'd tell me how to get or make 'em. He can do plenty! But so far I been scared to take a chance. After all, I figure I really saved civilization by turnin' him off.

The way Laurine fits in is that she makes cold shivers run up an' down my spine when I think about her. You see, I've got a wife which I acquired after I had parted from Laurine with much romantic despair. She is a reasonable good wife, and I have some kids which are hellcats but I value 'em. If I have sense enough to leave well enough alone, sooner or later I will retire on a pension an' Social Security an' spend the rest of my life fishin' contented an' lyin' about what a great guy I used to be. But there's Joe. I'm worried about Joe.

I'm a maintenance man for the Logics Company. My job is servicing Logics, and I admit modestly that I am pretty good.

I was servicing televisions before that guy Carson invented his trick circuit that will select any of 'steenteen million other circuits—in theory there ain't no limit—and before the Logics Company hooked it into the Tank-and-Integrator set-up they were usin' as business-machine service. They added a vision-screen for speed—an' they found out they'd made Logics. They were surprised an' pleased. They're still findin' out what Logics will do, but everybody's got 'em.

I got Joe, after Laurine nearly got me. You know the Logics set-up. You got a Logic in your house. It looks like a vision-receiver used to, only it's got keys instead of dials and you punch the keys for what you wanna get. It's hooked in to the tank, which has the Carson Circuit all fixed up with relays. Say you punch *"Station SNAFU"* on your Logic. Relays in the tank take over an' whatever vision-program SNAFU is telecastin' comes on your Logic's screen. Or you punch *"Sally Hancock's Phone"* an' the screen blinks an' sputters an' you're hooked up with the Logic in her house an' if somebody answers you got a vision-phone connection. But besides that, if you punch for the weather forecast or who won today's race at Hialeah or who was mistress of the White House durin' Garfield's administration or what is PDQ and R sellin' for today, that comes on the screen too. The relays in the tank do it. The tank is a big buildin' full of all the facts in creation an' all the recorded telecasts that ever was made—an' it's hooked in with all the other tanks all over the country—an' everything you wanna know or see or hear, you punch for it an' you get it. Very convenient. Also it does math for you, an' keeps books, an' acts as consultin' chemist, physicist, astronomer an' tea-leaf reader, with a "Advice to the Lovelorn" thrown in. The only thing it won't do is tell you exactly what your wife meant when she said, "Oh, you think so, do you?" in that peculiar kinda voice. Logics don't work good on women. Only on things that make sense.

Logics are all right, though. They changed civilization, the high-brows tell us. All on accounta the Carson Circuit. And Joe shoulda been a perfectly normal Logic, keeping some family or other from wearin' out its brains doin' the kids' home-work for 'em. But something went wrong in the assembly-line. It was somethin' so small that precision-gauges didn't measure it, but it made Joe a individual. Maybe he didn't know it at first. Or maybe, bein' logical, he figured out that if he was to show he was different from other Logics they'd scrap him. Which woulda been a brilliant idea. But anyhow, he come off the assembly-line, an' he went through

the regular tests without anybody screamin' shrilly on findin' out what he was. And he went right on out an' was duly installed in the home of Mr. Thaddeus Korlanovitch at 119 East 7th Street, second floor front. So far, everything was serene.

The installation happened late Saturday night. Sunday mornin' the Korlanovitch kids turned him on an' seen the Kiddie Shows. Around noon their parents peeled 'em away from him an' piled 'em in the car. Then they come back in the house for the lunch they'd forgot an' one of the kids sneaked back an' they found him punchin' keys for the Kiddie Shows of the week before. They dragged him out an' went off. But they left Joe turned on.

That was noon. Nothin' happened until two in the afternoon. It was the calm before the storm. Laurine wasn't in town yet, but she was comin'. I picture Joe sittin' there all by himself, buzzing meditative. Maybe he run Kiddie Shows in the empty apartment for a while. But I think he went kinda remote-control exploring in the tank. There ain't any fact that can be said to be a fact that ain't on a data-plate in some tank somewhere,—unless it's one the technicians are diggin' out an' puttin' on a data-plate now. Joe had plenty of material to work on. An' he musta started workin' right off the bat.

Joe ain't vicious, you understand. He ain't like one of these ambitious robots you read about that make up their minds the human race is inefficient and has got to be wiped out an' replaced by thinkin' machines. Joe's just got ambition. If you were a machine, you'd wanna work right, wouldn't you? That's Joe. He wants to work right. An' he's a Logic. An' Logics can do a lotta things that ain't been found out yet. So Joe, discoverin' the fact, begun to feel restless. He selects some things us dumb humans ain't thought of yet, an' begins to arrange so Logics will be called on to do 'em.

That's all. That's everything. But, brother, it's enough!

Things are kinda quiet in the Maintenance Department about two in the afternoon. We are playing pinochle. Then one of the guys remembers he has to call up his wife. He goes to one of the bank of Logics in Maintenance and punches the keys for his house. The screen sputters. Then a flash comes on the screen.

"Announcing new and improved Logics service! Your Logic is now equipped to give you not only consultive but directive service. If you want to do something and don't know how to do it—Ask your Logic!"

There's a pause. A kinda expectant pause. Then as if re-

luctantly, his connection comes through. His wife answers an' gives him hell for somethin' or other. He takes it an' snaps off.

"Whadda you know?" he says when he comes back. He tells us about the flash. "We shoulda been warned about that. There's gonna be a lotta complaints. Suppose a fella asks how to get ridda his wife an' the censor circuits block the question?"

Somebody melds a hundred aces an' says:

"Whyn't punch for it an' see what happens?"

It's a gag, o'course. But the guy goes over. He punches keys. In theory, a censor block is gonna come on an' the screen will say severely, "Public Policy Forbids This Service." You hafta have censor blocks or the kiddies will be askin' detailed questions about things they're too young to know. And there are other reasons. As you will see.

This fella punches, "How can I get rid of my wife?" Just for the hell of it. The screen is blank for a half a second. Then comes a flash. "Service question; is she blonde or brunette?" He hollers to us an' we come look. He punches, "Blonde." There's another brief pause. Then the screen says, "Hexymetacryloamioacetine is a constituent of green shoe-polish. Take home a frozen meal including dried-pea soup. Color the soup with green shoe-polish. It will appear to be green-pea soup. Hexymetacryloaminoacetine is a selective poison which is fatal to blonde females but not to brunettes or males of any coloring. This fact has not been brought out by human experiment but is a product of Logics service. You cannot be convicted of murder. It is improbable that you will be suspected."

The screen goes blank, and we stare at each other. It's bound to be right. A Logic workin' the Carson Circuit can no more make a mistake than any other kinda computin' machine. I call the tank in a hurry.

"Hey, you guys!" I yell. "Somethin's happened! Logics are givin' detailed instructions for wife-murder! Check your censor-circuits—but quick!"

That was close, I think. But little do I know. At that precise instant, over on Monroe Avenue, a drunk starts mournful to punch for somethin' on a Logic. The screen says "Announcing new and improved Logics service! . . . If you want to do something and don't know how to do it—Ask your Logic!" And the drunk says owlish, " 'll do it!" So he cancels his first punching and fumbles around and says, "How can I keep my wife from finding out I've been drinking?" And the screen says, prompt, "Buy a bottle of Franine hair shampoo. It is harmless but contains a detergent which will neutralize ethyl

alcohol immediately. Take one teaspoonful for each jigger of hundred-proof you have consumed."

This guy was plenty plastered—just plastered enough to stagger next-door and obey instructions. An' five minutes later he was cold sober and writing down the information so he couldn't forget it. It was new, and it was big! He got rich offa that memo. He patented *"SOBUH, The Drink that Makes Happy Homes!"* You can top off any souse with a slug or two of it an' go home sober as a judge. The guy's cussin' income-taxes right now!

You can't kick on stuff like that. But a ambitious young fourteen-year-old wanted to buy some kid stuff and his pop wouldn't fork over for. He called up a friend to tell his troubles. And his Logic says, "If you want to do something and don't know how to do it—Ask your Logic!" So this kid punches, "How can I make a lotta money, fast?"

His Logic comes through with the simplest, neatest, and the most efficient counterfeitin' device yet known to science. You see, all the data was in the tank. The Logic—since Joe had closed some relays here an' there in the tank—simply integrated the facts. That's all. The kid got caught up with three days later, havin' already spent two thousand credits an' havin' plenty more on hand. They hadda heluva time tellin' his counterfeits from the real stuff, an' the only way they done it was that he changed his printer, kid fashion, not bein' able to let somethin' that was workin' right alone.

Those are what you might call samples. Nobody knows all that Joe done. But there was the bank-president who got humorous when his Logic flashed that "Ask your Logic" spiel on him, and jestingly asked how to rob his own bank. An' the Logic told him, brief and explicit but good! The bank-president hit the ceiling, hollering for cops. There musta been plenty of that sorta thing. There was fifty-four more robberies than usual in the next twenty-four hours, all of them planned astute an' perfect. Some of 'em they never did figure out how they'd been done. Joe, he'd gone exploring in the tank and closed some relays like a Logic is supposed to do—but only when required—and blocked all censor-circuits an' fixed up this Logics Service which planned perfect crimes, nourishing an' attractive meals, counterfeitin' machines, an' new industries with a fine impartiality. He musta been plenty happy, Joe must. He was functionin' swell, buzzin' along to himself while the Korlanovitch kids were off ridin' with their ma an' pa.

They come back at seven o'clock, the kids all happily wore out with their afternoon of fightin' each other in the car. Their folks put 'em to bed an' sat down to rest. They saw

Joe's screen flickerin' meditative from one subject to another an' old man Korlanovitch had had enough excitement for one day. He turned Joe off.

An' at that instant the pattern of relays that Joe had turned on snapped off, all the offers of directive service stopped flashin' on Logic screens everywhere, an' peace descended on the earth.

For everybody else. But for me—Laurine come to town. I have often thanked Gawd fervent that she didn't marry me when I thought I wanted her to. In the intervenin' years she had progressed. She was blonde an' fatal to begin with. She had got blonder and fataler an' had had four husbands and one acquittal for homicide an' had acquired a air of enthusiasm and self-confidence. That's just a sketch of the background. Laurine was not the kinda former girl-friend you like to have turning up in the same town with your wife. But she come to town, an' on Monday morning she tuned right into the middle of Joe's second spasm of activity.

The Korlanovitch kids had turned him on again—I got these details later and kinda pieced 'em together—an' every Logic in town was dutifully flashin', "If you want to do something . . . Ask your Logic!" every time they was turned on for use. More'n that, when people punched for the morning news, they got a full account of the previous afternoon's doin's. Which put 'em in a frame of mind to share in the party. One bright fella demands, "How can I make a perpetual motion machine?" And his Logic sputters a while an' then comes up with a set-up usin' the Brownian movement to turn little wheels. If the wheels ain't bigger'n a eighth of an inch, they'll turn, all right, an' practically it's perpetual motion. Another one asks for the secret of transmuting metals. The Logic rakes back in the data-plates an' integrates a strictly practical answer. It does take so much power that you can't make no profit except on radium. But that pays off good. An' from the fact that for a coupla years to come the police were turnin' up new and improved jimmies, knob-claws for gettin' at safe-innards, and all-purpose keys that'd open any known lock—why—there must have been other inquirers with a strictly practical viewpoint. Joe done a lot for technical progress!

But he done more in other lines. Educational, say. None of my kids are old enough to be int'rested, but Joe by-passed all censor-circuits because they hampered the service he figured Logics should ought to give humanity. So the kids an' teenagers who wanted to know what comes after the bees an' flowers found out. And there is certain facts which men hope their wives won't do more'n suspect, an' these facts are just

what their wives are really curious about. So when a woman dials: "How can I tell if Oswald is true to me?" and her Logic tells her—you can figure out how many rows got started that night when the men came home!

All this while Joe goes on buzzin' happy to himself, showin' the Korlanovitch kids the animated funnies with one circuit while with the others he remote-controls the tank so that all the other Logics can give people what they ask for and thereby raise merry hell.

An' then Laurine gets onto the news service. She turns on the Logic in her hotel room, prob'ly to see the week's style-forecast. But the Logic says, dutiful: "If you want to do something—ask your logic!" So Laurine prob'ly looks enthusiastic—she would!—and tries to figure out something to ask. She already knows all about everything she cares about—ain't she had four husbands and shot one?—so I occur to her. She knows this is the town I live in. So she punches, "How can I find Ducky?"

O.K., guy! But that is what she used to call me. She gets a service question: "Is Ducky known by any other name?" So she gives my regular name. And the Logic can't find me. Because my Logic ain't listed under my name on account of I'm in Maintenance and don't want to be pestered when I'm home, and there ain't any data plates on code-listed Logics, because the codes get changed so often—like a guy gets plastered an' tells a redhead to call him up, an' on gettin' sober hurriedly has the code changed before she reaches his wife on the screen.

Well! Joe is stumped. That's prob'ly the first question Logics service hasn't been able to answer. "How can I locate Ducky?" Quite a problem. So Joe broods over it while showin' the Korlanovitch kids the animated comic about the cute little boy who carries sticks of dynamite in his hip pocket an' plays practical jokes on everybody. Then he gets the trick. Laurine's screen suddenly flashes:

"Logics special service will work upon your question. Please punch your Logic designation and leave it turned on. You will be called back."

Laurine is merely mildly interested, but she punches her hotel-room number and has a drink and takes a nap. Joe sets to work. He has been given an idea.

My wife calls me at Maintenance and hollers. She is fit to be tied. She says I got to do something. She was gonna make a call to the butcher shop. Instead of the butcher or even the "If you want to do something" flash, she got a new one. The screen says, "Service question: What is your name?" She is kinda puzzled, but she punches it. The screen sputters an'

then says: "Secretarial Service Demonstration! You—" It reels off her name, address, age, sex, coloring, the amounts of all her charge accounts in all the stores, my name as her husband, how much I get a week, the fact that I've been pinched three times—twice was traffic stuff, and once for a argument I got in with a guy—and the interestin' item that once when she was mad with me she left me for three weeks an' had her address changed to her folks' home. Then it says, brisk: "Logics Service will hereafter keep your personal accounts, take messages, and locate persons you may wish to get in touch with. This demonstration is to introduce the service." Then it connects her with the butcher.

But she didn't want meat, then. She wants blood. She calls me.

"If it'll tell me all about myself," she says, fairly boilin', "it'll tell anybody else who punches my name! You've got to stop it!"

"Now, now, honey!" I says. "I didn't know about all this! It's new! But they musta fixed the tank so it won't give out information except to the Logic where a person lives!"

"Nothing of the kind!" she tells me, furious. "I tried! And you know that Blossom woman who lives next door! She's been married three times and she's forty-two years old and she says she's only thirty! And Mrs. Hudson's had her husband arrested four times for non-support and once for beating her up. And—"

"Hey!" I says. "You mean the Logic told you all this?"

"Yes!" she wails. "It will tell anybody anything! You've got to stop it! How long will it take?"

"I'll call up the tank," I says. "It can't take long."

"Hurry!" she says desperate, "before somebody punches my name! I'm going to see what it says about that hussy across the street."

She snaps off to gather what she can before it's stopped. So I punch for the tank and I get this new "What is your name?" flash. I got a morbid curiosity and I punch my name, and the screen says: "Were you ever called Ducky?" I blink. I ain't got no suspicions. I say, "Sure!" And the screen says, "There is a call for you."

Bingo! There's the inside of a hotel room and Laurine is reclinin' asleep on the bed. She'd been told to leave her Logic turned on an' she done it. It is a hot day and she is trying to be cool. I would say that she oughta not suffer from the heat. Me, being human, I do not stay as cool as she looks. But there ain't no need to go into that. After I get my breath I say, "For Heaven's sake!" and she opens her eyes.

At first she looks puzzled, like she was thinking is she

getting absent-minded and is this guy somebody she married lately. Then she grabs a sheet and drapes it around herself and beams at me.

"Ducky!" she says. "How marvelous!"

I say something like "Ugmph!" I am sweating.

She says: "I put in a call for you, Ducky, and here you are! Isn't it romantic? Where are you really, Ducky? And when can you come up? You've no idea how often I've thought of you!"

I am probably the only guy she ever knew real well that she has not been married to at some time or another.

I say "Ugmph!" again, and swallow.

"Can you come up instantly?" asks Laurine brightly.

"I'm . . . workin'," I say. "I'll . . . uh . . . call you back."

"I'm terribly lonesome," says Laurine. "Please make it quick, Ducky! I'll have a drink waiting for you. Have you ever thought of me?"

"Yeah," I say, feeble. "Plenty!"

"You darling!" says Laurine. "Here's a kiss to go on with until you get here! Hurry, Ducky!"

Then I sweat! I still don't know nothing about Joe, understand. I cuss out the guys at the tank because I blame them for this. If Laurine was just another blonde—well—when it comes to ordinary blondes I can leave 'em alone or leave 'em alone, either one. A married man gets that way or else. But Laurine has a look of unquenched enthusiasm that gives a man very strange weak sensations at the back of his knees. And she's had four husbands and shot one and got acquitted.

So I punch the keys for the tank technical room, fumbling. And the screen says: "What is your name?" but I don't want any more. I punch the name of the old guy who's stock clerk in Maintenance. And the screen gives me some pretty interestin' dope—I never woulda thought the old fella had ever had that much pep—and winds up by mentionin' a unclaimed deposit now amountin' to two hundred eighty credits in the First National Bank, which he should look into. Then it spiels about the new secretarial service and gives me the tank at last.

I start to swear at the guy who looks at me. But he says, tired:

"Snap it off, fella. We got troubles an' you're just another. What are the Logics doin' now?"

I tell him, and he laughs a hollow laugh.

"A light matter, fella," he says. "A very light matter! We just managed to clamp off all the data plates that give information on high explosives. The demand for instructions in counterfeiting is increasing minute by minute. We are also

trying to shut off, by main force, the relays that hook in to data plates that just barely might give advice on the fine points of murder. So if people will only keep busy getting the goods on each other for a while, maybe we'll get a chance to stop the circuits that are shifting credit-balances from bank to bank before everybody's bankrupt except the guys who thought of askin' how to get big bank-accounts in a hurry."

"Then," I says hoarse, "Shut down the tank! Do somethin'!"

"Shut down the tank?" he says mirthless. "Does it occur to you, fella, that the tank has been doin' all the computin' for every business office for years? It's been handlin' the distribution of ninety-four per cent of all telecast programs, has given out all information on weather, plane schedules, special sales, employment opportunities and news; has handled all person-to-person contacts over wires and recorded every damned business conversation and agreement. . . . Listen, fella! Logics changed civilization. Logics *are* civilization! If we shut off Logics, we go back to a kind of civilization we have forgotten how to run! I'm getting hysterical myself and that's why I'm talkin' like this! If my wife finds out my paycheck is thirty credits a week more than I told her and starts hunting for that red-head—"

He smiles a haggard smile at me and snaps off. And I sit down and put my head in my hands. It's true. If something had happened back in cave days and they'd hadda stop usin' fire—If they'd hadda stop usin' steam in the nineteenth century or electricity in the twentieth—It's like that. We got a very simple civilization. Where in the nineteen hundreds a man would have to make use of a typewriter, radio, telephone, teletypewriter, newspaper, reference library, encyclopædias, office-files, directories, plus messenger service and consulting lawyers, chemists, doctors, dieticians, filing-clerks, secretaries, an' Gawd knows what all—all to put down what he wanted to remember an' tell him what other people had put down that he wanted to know; to report what he said to somebody else and to report to him what they said back. All we have to have is Logics. Anything we want to know or see or hear, or anybody we want to talk to, we punch keys on a Logic. Shut off Logics and everything goes to hell in a hand-basket. But Laurine . . .

Somethin' had happened. I still didn't know what it was. Nobody else knows, even yet. What had happened was Joe. What was the matter with him was that he wanted to work good. All this hell he was raisin' was, actual, nothin' but stuff we shoulda thought of ourselves. Directive advice, tellin' us what we wanted to know to solve a problem, wasn't but

a slight extension of logical-integrator service. Figurin' out a good way to poison a fella's wife was only different in degree from figurin' out a cube root or a guy's bank balance. It was gettin' the answer to a question. But things was goin' to pot because there was too many answers being given to too many questions.

One of the Logics in Maintenance lights up. I go over, weary, to answer it. I punch the answer key. Laurine says:

"Ducky!"

It's the same hotel-room. There's two glasses on the table with drinks in them. One is for me. Laurine's got on some kinda frothy hangin'-around-the-house-with-the-boy-friend outfit on that automatic makes you strain your eyes to see if you actual see what you think. Laurine looks at me enthusiastic.

"Ducky!" said Laurine. "I'm lonesome! Why haven't you come up?"

"I—been busy," I say, strangling slightly.

"Pooh!" says Laurine—"Listen, Ducky! Do you remember how much in love we used to be?"

I gulp.

"Are you doin' anything this evening?" says Laurine.

I gulp again, because she is smiling at me in a way that a single man would maybe get dizzy, but it gives a old married man like me cold chills. When a dame looks at you possessive—

"Ducky!" says Laurine, impulsive. "I was so mean to you! Let's get married!"

Desperation gives me a voice.

"I—got married," I tell her, hoarse.

Laurine blinks. Then she says, courageous:

"Poor boy! But we'll get you outa that! Only it would be nice if we could be married today. Now we can only be engaged!"

"I—can't—"

"I'll call up your wife," says Laurine, happy, "and have a talk with her. You must have a code signal for your Logic, darling. I tried to ring your house and noth—"

Click! That's my Logic turned off. I turned it off. And I feel faint all over. I got nervous prostration. I got combat fatigue. I got anything you like. I got cold feet.

I beat it outa Maintenance, yellin' to somebody I got a emergency call. I'm gonna get out in a Maintenance car an' cruise around until it's plausible to go home. Then I'm gonna take the wife an' kids an' beat it for somewheres that Laurine won't never find me. I don't wanna be fifth in Laurine's series of husbands and maybe the second one she shoots in a moment

of boredom. I got experience of blondes. I got experience of Laurine! And I'm scared to death!

I beat it out into traffic in the Maintenance car. There was a disconnected Logic in the back, ready to substitute for one that hadda burned-out coil or something that it was easier to switch and fix back in the Maintenance shop. I drove crazy but automatic. It was kinda ironic, if you think of it. I was goin' hoopla over a strictly personal problem, while civilization was crackin' up all around me because other people were havin' their personal problems solved as fast as they could state 'em. It is a matter of record that part of the Mid-Western Electric research guys had been workin' on cold electron-emission for thirty years, to make vacuum-tubes that wouldn't need a power-source to heat the filament. And one of those fellas was intrigued by the "Ask your Logic" flash. He asked how to get cold emission of electrons. And the Logic integrates a few squintillion facts on the physics data plates and tells him. Just as casual as it told somebody over in the Fourth Ward how to serve left-over soup in a new attractive way, and somebody else on Mason Street how to dispose of a torso that somebody had left careless in his cellar after ceasing to use same.

Laurine wouldn't never have found me if it hadn't been for this new hell-raisin' Logics Service. But now that it was started —Zowie! She'd shot one husband and got acquitted. Suppose she got impatient because I was still married an' asked Logics Service how to get me free an' in a spot where I'd have to marry her by eight-thirty P.M.? It woulda told her! Just like it told that woman out in the suburbs how to make sure her husband wouldn't run around no more. Br-r-r-r! An' like it told that kid how to find some buried treasure. Remember? He was happy totin' home the gold reserve of the Hanoverian Bank and Trust Company when they caught onto it. The Logic had told him how to make some kinda machine that nobody has been able to figure how it works even yet, only they guess it dodges around a coupla extra dimensions. If Laurine was to start askin' questions with a technical aspect to them, that would be Logics' Service meat! And fella, I was scared! If you think a he-man oughtn't to be scared of just one blonde —you ain't met Laurine!

I'm drivin' blind when a social-conscious guy asks how to bring about his own particular system of social organization at once. He don't ask if it's best or if it'll work. He just wants to get it started. And the Logic—or Joe—tells him! Simultaneous, there's a retired preacher asks how can the human race be cured of concupiscience. Bein' seventy, he's pretty safe himself, but he wants to remove the peril to the spiritual

welfare of the rest of us. He finds out. It involves constructin' a sort of broadcastin' station to emit a certain wave-pattern an' turnin' it on. Just that. Nothing more. It's found out afterward, when he is solicitin' funds to construct it. Fortunate, he didn't think to ask Logics how to finance it, or it woulda told him that, too, an' we woulda all been cured of the impulses we maybe regret afterward but never at the time. And there's another group of serious thinkers who are sure the human race would be a lot better off if everybody went back to nature an' lived in the woods with the ants an' poison ivy. They start askin' questions about how to cause humanity to abandon cities and artificial conditions of living. They practically got the answer in Logics Service!

Maybe it didn't strike you serious at the time, but while I was drivin' aimless, sweatin' blood over Laurine bein' after me, the fate of civilization hung in the balance. I ain't kiddin'. For instance, the Superior Man gang that sneers at the rest of us was quietly asking questions on what kinda weapons could be made by which Superior Men could take over and run things . . .

But I drove here an' there, sweatin' an' talkin' to myself.

"My Gawd!" I says. "What I oughta do is ask this whacky Logics Service how to get outa this mess. But it'd just tell me a intricate an' fool-proof way to bump Laurine off. I wanna have peace! I wanna grow comfortably old and brag to other old guys about what a hellion I used to be, without havin' to go through it an' lose my chance of livin' to be a elderly liar."

I turn a corner at random, there in the Maintenance car.

"It was a nice kinda world once," I says, bitter. "I could go home peaceful and not have belly-cramps wonderin' if a blonde has called up my wife to announce my engagement to her. I could punch keys on a Logic without gazing into somebody's bedroom while she is giving her epidermis a air-bath and being led to think things I gotta take out in thinkin'. I could—"

Then I groan, rememberin' that my wife, naturally, is gonna blame me for the fact that our private life ain't private any more if anybody has tried to peek into it.

"It was a swell world," I says, homesick for the dear dead days-before-yesterday. "We was playin' happy with our toys like little innocent children until somethin' happened. Like a guy named Joe come in and squashed all our mud pies."

Then it hit me. I got the whole thing in one flash. There ain't nothing in the Tank set-up to start relays closin'. Relays are closed exclusive by Logics, to get the information the keys are punched for. Nothin' but a Logic coulda cooked up

the relay-patterns that constituted Logics Service. Humans wouldn't ha' been able to figure it out! Only a Logic could integrate all the stuff that woulda made all the other Logics work like this . . .

There was one answer. I drove into a restaurant and went over to a pay-Logic an' dropped in a coin.

"Can a Logic be modified," I spell out, "to cooperate in long-term planning which human brains are too limited in scope to do?"

The screen sputters. Then it says:

"Definitely yes."

"How great will the modifications be?" I punch.

"Microscopically slight. Changes in dimensions," says the screen. "Even modern precision gauges are not exact enough to check them, however. They can only come about under present manufacturing methods by an extremely improbable accident, which has only happened once."

"How can one get hold of that one accident which can do this highly necessary work?" I punch.

The screen sputters. Sweat broke out on me. I ain't got it figured out close, yet, but what I'm scared of is that whatever is Joe will be suspicious. But what I'm askin' is strictly logical. And Logics can't lie. They gotta be accurate. They can't help it.

"A complete Logic capable of the work required," says the screen, "is now in ordinary family use in—"

And it gives me the Korlanovitch address and do I go over there! Do I go over there fast! I pull up the Maintenance car in front of the place, and I take the extra Logic outa the back, and I stagger up to the Korlanovitch flat and I ring the bell. A kid answers the door.

"I'm from Logics Maintenance," I tell the kid. "A inspection record has shown that your Logic is apt to break down any minute. I come to put in a new one before it does."

The kid says, "Okay!" real bright and runs back to the livin' room where Joe—I got the habit of callin' him Joe later, through just meditatin' about him—is runnin' somethin' the kids wanna look at. I hook in the other Logic an' turn it on, conscientious makin' sure it works. Then I say:

"Now kiddies, you punch this one for what you want. I'm gonna take the old one away before it breaks down."

And I glance at the screen. The kiddies have apparently said they wanna look at some real cannibals. So the screen is presenting a anthropological-expedition scientific record film of the fertility dance of the Huba-Jouba tribe of West Africa. It is supposed to be restricted to anthropological professors an' post-graduate medical students. But there ain't

any censor-blocks workin' any more and it's on. The kids are much interested. Me, bein' a old married man, I blush.

I disconnect Joe. Careful. I turn to the other Logic and punch keys for Maintenance. I do not get a Service flash. I get Maintenance. I feel very good. I report that I am goin' home because I fell down a flight of steps an' hurt my leg. I add, inspired:

"An' say, I was carryin' the Logic I replaced an' it busted all to hell. I left it for the dustman to pick up."

"If you don't turn 'em in," says Stock, "you gotta pay for 'em."

"Cheap at the price," I say.

I go home. Laurine ain't called. I put Joe down in the cellar, careful. If I turned him in, he'd be inspected an' his parts salvaged even if I busted somethin' on him. Whatever part was off-normal might be used again and everything start all over. I can't risk it. I pay for him and leave him be.

That's what happened. You might say I saved civilization an' not be far wrong. I know I ain't goin' to take a chance on havin' Joe in action again. Not while Laurine is livin'. An' there are other reasons. With all the nuts who wanna change the world to their own line o' thinkin', an' the ones that wanna bump people off, an' generally solve their problems . . . Yeah! Problems are bad, but I figure I better let sleepin' problems lie.

But on the other hand, if Joe could be tamed, somehow, and got to work just reasonable . . . He could make me a coupla million dollars, easy. But even if I got sense enough not to get rich, an' if I get retired and just loaf around fishin' an' lyin' to other old duffers about what a great guy I used to be . . . Maybe I'll like it, but maybe I won't. And after all, if I get fed up with bein' old and confined strictly to thinking—why—I could hook Joe in long enough to ask, "How can a old guy not stay old?"

Joe'll be able to find out. An' he'll tell me.

That couldn't be allowed out general, of course. You gotta make room for kids to grow up. But it's a pretty good world, now Joe's turned off. Maybe I'll turn him on long enough to learn how to stay in it. But on the other hand, maybe—

Larry Shaw

Here's one about a circus—and you'll be surprised to learn what kind of a circus it is. No, we won't tell you here. You'll have to ride with Simworthy in his space ship if you want to find out. But the trip will be well worth it, even if you have trouble stomaching Simworthy's pet, Simworthy's occupation and Simworthy himself for a while. Eventually you'll love *him.*

—M. R.

Simworthy's Circus

EVERYBODY HAS HEARD OF SIMWORTHY'S CIRcus, yet comparatively few have actually seen it, since, oddly enough, Simworthy has refused fabulous offers to present it on vaudeo or in the reelies. But the population of the galaxy being huge as it is, those "comparatively few" are several million in number. And every single being, human and otherwise, among them has come away busting to tell his friends and relations what a wonderful show it is.

The funny part is, when described, Simworthy's Circus merely sounds like an anachronism, and one that wouldn't logically be very entertaining to the enlightened citizenry of a world whose horizons are the edges of the galaxy. Bluntly, it sounds dull. But all those customers, and Simworthy's bank account, testify to the contrary.

Almost nobody knows the explanation of the paradox, and the strange story behind Simworthy's Circus. This is it.

To begin with, Jared Simworthy was—and is—about the ugliest human ever to blast off from Earth. Wormy Ed, they called him behind his back—and he looked the part. Real nightmare type, sub-class child-scaring. He looked as if his component parts came from a surrealistic junkyard and had been assembled in the dark by a bunch of idiot bricklayers. Mirrors turned green and curled up at the edges when he stepped into the room. In brief, a mess.

His appearance, naturally, conditioned his entire life and

outlook. He acquired a monstrous hatred for the universe at an age when most kids are playing with isotope-blocks in kindergarten. Only contempt kept him from going around putting Venusian stinkworms in little old ladies' teacups.

As he grew—a process which appeared for a dismayingly long time to be endless—he conceived, however, a limited number of affections. Not for people, of course. But things and creatures which were abysmally unsightly, by terrestrial standards, became the objects of his love. In his early teens, for instance, he resurrected and rebuilt an ancient ground vehicle. It was called a carriageless horse, or some such term, and it was not only an eyesore but a sin against logic besides. The first time Simworthy tried it out, the sight, noise and smell of it caused three women to faint, and scared the wits out of nobody knows how many flitter-drivers. After that, the police wouldn't let him run the contraption on the gravways, so he hated people more than ever.

Then there was the Satcat, one of the vicious little beasts the first Saturnian expedition brought back. It was so hideous that the horror-reelies wouldn't touch it after the zoos had turned it down cold. Even so, it cost Simworthy a month's salary. It also cost him his job, when he tried to take it to work with him. He never went back to crossing a clockbeam again.

The Satcat didn't last long; Earth climate didn't agree with it. But Simworthy got plenty of publicity out of the incident, and people who had formerly ducked around corners when they saw him coming began to leave the neighborhood altogether. He didn't mind that, but it did make it rather hard for him to earn a living. So, predictably, he followed the "misfit trail" into space.

It surprises some people that he became a trader, since his hatred of all the beings he'd have to deal with was so monumental. It calcs, though, when you know his real intentions. During moments of over-lubrication, he was heard to brag that he would swindle at least one member of every race in the galaxy before he quit. Then too, his ugliness simply didn't exist, in extra-terrestrial eyes. That is, to most e-t's, he was no uglier than any *other* Earthman.

Simworthy worked damned hard, if it's any credit to him. No transaction was too petty, and no alien too truculent; he'd wheedle or browbeat for hours on end, if necessary, to put over a deal. He was one of the few Earthmen who ever had a strong enough stomach to sit in on the moulting ceremonies of the Vipherians. It was worth it; he gained their confidence, and left behind a shipload of coil springs—which of course rusted solid after a week on Viphesta. The profit was tidy.

Gradually, Simworthy prospered. It made no difference in

his way of life. He stuck to the ship he'd started out in, a horribly functional monstrosity, one of the first models to use the warp principle that made interstellar travel possible. In Simworthy's hands the *Barnum* became battered, pocked, and rusty. He loved it. The name he had given his ship, incidentally, turned out to be prophetic; Barnum was a big circus owner a few centuries ago. Reason Simworthy chose it, though, was a proverb the guy was supposed to have originated: "A sucker in every pot," or was it "port"?

Somewhere along the line, he acquired a successor to the Satcat. It was a Nimoon, a biological insult considered unspeakable even on its home world of Mreyob—a downright stomach-twister anywhere else. Simworthy lavished a share of his misguided affection on it, and called it Walter.

Somewhere else along the line, he got the Space Police on his tail. The charges, individually, were minor, but there were several of them, mostly misrepresentation and the lack of various licenses. Together, they could have iced Simworthy for quite a few years.

He was not many jumps ahead of the cops when, one day, he flipped out of hyperdrive in a lonely sector of space, with a single-planet system dead ahead. The sun wasn't important enough to rate a name on the charts, and the planet was classified as uninhabited. But once Simworthy got a look at the planet—overgrown moon would describe it better—he smiled a lopsided smile.

Black rocks and raging grey oceans, plus a lot of snow and ice, were all that could be seen at first. Closer in, some stunted and poisonous-looking vegetation became apparent. There was no practical reason for anyone to visit the forbidding place. Simworthy keyed his stern-jets and prepared for a landing.

He considered it as a hideout, but mostly he just wanted a look at that beautiful ugliness. The *Barnum* slid into an atmosphere which tested breathable, if you didn't mind the fishy smell, and was full of odd gusts and currents. The delicate jetwork was making Simworthy sweat when—blooey!

There was a flash from below. The *Barnum* gave a lurch that scrambled Simworthy's breakfast, and then started to imitate a pinwheel. The jets developed an ominous foreign accent. Simworthy thought about the Space Police and swore.

He also acted—fast. He'd developed skill and deftness, coaxing the cranky crate along in its normal state, and he used it all now. The *Barnum* plummeted, bounced, slid into a steep glide, spun some more on its vertical axis, and finally dropped to a belly-landing going backwards—an incredible feat of piloting, even under favorable conditions.

As it was, about the best that could be said for Simworthy was: no bones were broken.

Needle-rayed! Simworthy rose from the pilot's armchair, still cursing with an energy that, tight-beamed, would have burned a hole into the planet's Heaviside layer. He spat, and stainless steel sizzled.

Calmly, Walter peered at him from the top of a refrigerator and scratched a flea. The peering was done with four unblinking, bloodshot eyes; suction cups on the Nimoon's bloated belly held it firmly to the porcelain; the scratching was accomplished not with the eerily weaving tentacles, as might have been expected, but with a bony tail that tapered to a wicked claw.

The flea was snugly ensconced in Walter's mane of greasy, greenish hair; the scratching continued monotonously, mechanically.

Simworthy's first concern was to estimate the damage to the *Barnum*. He stomped through the airlock and jumped down, stirring up puffs of pumice. Ignoring dust in his hair and stink in his nostrils, he gazed angrily at the fused jets. The inspection finished, he ground his teeth and shook a fist at nothing in particular.

"Ugh," said a wheezy voice behind him. "Cool off. Lend ya my robot to fix it. Complete machine-shop. Easy."

The last word was ambiguous, and Simworthy was in no mood to be told to take it easy. He whirled.

The other Earthman looked like a rag, a bone, and several hanks of hair. Most of the latter was an undisciplined beard, but there was also a wavering halo around the chalky face, and tufts of fuzz growing out of the ears. At best, the stranger looked antique and brittle. He teetered. But he was definitely not a cop, which was something.

Simworthy expanded his chest, raised his arms, thrust out his already protruding jaw and fixed the stranger with a baleful eye.

He said: "It's kind of you to offer. I hope it won't be too much trouble."

He said it softly and politely, and seconds later tried to swallow the words and his tongue with them. There was no sensible reason not to break this specimen's jaw, if any. By rights . . . But something wasn't right.

The feeling was totally inexplicable. Simworthy *liked* this creature. He respected him, and desired to treat him with the utmost deference, as long as he could remain in his infinitely pleasant presence. At the same time, he wondered if he were going nuts.

The stranger drew a gasping breath and spoke again. "Shot

yuh down! Beats all! Heh. Marksmanship. Just tryin' to warn yuh off. Tried to hit yuh, I'd of missed a mile. Gah."

It was anything but an apology. Disregard for Simworthy was plain as the stranger's beard. But he said: "Don't mention it. Could have happened to anybody. I wanted to land anyway."

The beard semaphored. "Yah. You wanted. I didn't. I want yuh outa here. Pronto. So I'll help. Hermit. Mrmph."

Inhospitable as he was, he did not leave Simworthy out in the cold and the icy rain that was starting. He invited the puzzled trader to his dome for coffee and over the coffee he continued his grumpy monolog.

As Simworthy pieced his story together, the Hermit—who ignored all hints designed to ferret out his proper name—had once been a biologist with the Galactic Exploratory Service, a member of one of the highly specialized crews that went about the endless job of charting suns and planets and collecting data on their inhabitants. His methods had always been a trifle unorthodox, but he had done his work well, making his more off-trail experiments on his own time, keeping their results to himself. Which was fortunate, in the case in point.

"I found a love potion," growled the Hermit.

Simworthy gawked.

The Hermit poured more coffee, a brew as black as outer space. He raised his lumoplast cup with a sardonic grin. "Like me, huh?" he asked.

By this time, Simworthy had regained partial control of himself. But he had to admit it. "Yeah. I like you. Like, hell! I feel almost like kissing your feet. At the same time, I can imagine how long it is since you've washed them. I'm damned if I can calc it."

The Hermit opened a closet. Containers of assorted sizes and shapes clattered on the floor. The Hermit found a tiny vial, which he placed on the table. "That!" He waved a scrawny arm and cackled violently. The cackle broke off, to be followed by a cough and an infinitely bitter "Damn it!"

Simworthy gawked some more.

The vial was made of ordinary glass, and contained a brownish liquid. "Love potion," the Hermit sputtered. "Universal. Glandular. Little animals. Planet I prob'ly couldn't find again—glad of it. Brpph. Cave. Alone. Tiny beasts. Must of lived on rock. Albino. Fell for 'em. Hypnotism or something, thought at first. Loved 'em. Didn't want to leave. Wanted to take 'em all with me. Urf!"

Gradually, Simworthy learned, the Hermit had subdued his strange infatuation somewhat. He'd smuggled one of the creatures back to his ship and taken it apart to see what

made it tick. The ship had blasted off before he'd discovered a gland unlike anything he'd seen before. From it, he'd taken a minute quantity of fluid. He'd fed a drop of it to a guinea pig. The guinea pig, superficially like dozen of others, had become the ship's mascot. Hardened spacemen went crazy over it.

Back on Earth, the Hermit had drunk a few drops of the stuff himself.

There was more after that, and it got harder to follow. The Hermit mumbled about brain waves and glands and personally indices and hypnogogics and telepathy and grumble gurgle foompf. He kept repeating something about ego-feedback, which Simworthy didn't get at all. What he did dredge out of the mess was what had happened to the Hermit—but a little imagination would have told him that.

In brief, people had loved him to distraction. He found it impossible to live in the close quarters of a spaceship with other men. Women—of various races and biological traits—fought over him. On Earth, dogs followed him around the streets. On Mars, yeesties did the same. And so on. Until, in desperation, the Hermit had become the Hermit.

"And—" he pounded the table with renewed vigor—"the infernal stuff doesn't wear off! Ever!"

Yes, Simworthy believed him. He found himself wanting to believe everything the old man said, anyway—but that in itself was a form of proof, wasn't it? Simworthy started to envision possibilities. *Love!* Not for love's sake, naturally, but for the things people would be willing to do for him. Power . . .

Anyway, when Simworthy blasted off again, the Hermit was richer by a portable windmill (government surplus, reconditioned), two dozen bottles of cheap perfume, six quarts of Rigellian Bhuillyordz (92 proof), and a pair of hair clippers. Simworthy, on the other hand, had the vial of—for want of a better name—universal love potion. The Hermit was happy; he wondered why he'd kept the stuff so long in the first place. Simworthy had wanted to drink it before leaving, but the Hermit had been adamant. "Uh," he'd grunted. "Work on me. Might try to keep you here. Oog!"

So, with the stuff safely cradled in his first-aid locker, Simworthy pointed the *Barnum's* nose towards Agrab-Grob, and yanked into hyperspace again.

That left him, of course, with nothing much to do for the 17.4 minutes it takes any ship, in hyperspace, to reach any destination. He gazed at the gray nothingness outside the forward port, bit off a chaw of cardroot, and dreamed hazy dreams of future success. They began with his conquest of

Agrab-Grob, the salesman's nightmare. The inhabitants should have been good customers, since their own economy was so primitive. However, they were also warlike and excessively suspicious of outsiders. With monotonous regularity, they chased all visitors off the planet as soon as they landed. For Simworthy, though, things were going to be different.

Imagination proved unsatisfactory. Simworthy got up and shuffled towards the medical locker. He was about to open it when a noise like a staticky wristphone speaking Mercurian drew his attention. He looked around, startled.

Walter hung from the ceiling and squealed at him again. Hungry, Simworthy reflected. The beast usually was. Simworthy took a container of sour cream from the refrigerator, flipped off the top, and placed it on the deck. Then he reached up and plucked the Nimoon from the ceiling.

Let us not dwell on the picture of Simworthy cradling Walter in his arms, fondling his mane, and crooning to him in a rust-clogged voice. It is by no stretch of the imagination a pretty picture, and is in its way a bit sad. Dial, then, the next scene: the Nimoon happily lapping cream and his master standing, bowed legs spread, running his fingers through his mop of red hair, rubbing his half-inch forehead, and wondering what it was that he had been about to do when interrupted.

Dawn broke; Simworthy remembered the Hermit's vial. Stepping over the Nimoon, he opened the first-aid locker and removed the thing. It looked even more insignificant now than when he had first seen it, and—the Hermit's influence was fading somewhat—Simworthy began to wonder if he had been had. There was only one way to find out.

He removed the cork.

Then he realized that there would be no way to test the stuff's powers until he made port. Walter loved him already, so on him it wouldn't show. Simworthy gazed moodily at the vial and tortured his scalp with his stubby fingers again.

Oh, well. He had nothing to lose, and might as well drink it anyway. The aura the stuff created, as he had made the Hermit repeat several times, apparently remained until death. Simworthy raised the vial.

The control panel burped. The *Barnum* was re-entering normal space, and being an old crate with many manual controls, was calling for the pilot's guiding hand. Simworthy stuck the vial back in the locker, slammed the door, and scrambled into his armchair.

It was lucky he was a good pilot. Just as things solidified outside the viewports, a flashy Buick sportsjet, with "tourist" written all over it, flashed across his nose. The *Barnum's* detector-circuit must have blown a fuse—but Simworthy

didn't have time to wonder about that. He yanked, and the *Barnum* zoomed wildly. It cleared the Buick with scant feet to spare, and the tourists had their britches warmed by the blast from the older rig's tail.

Pale, Simworthy flicked the *Barnum* into the simplest orbital course available, punched the autopilot, and stomped away from the panel. If only he'd gotten their license number! The knowledge that it was undoubtedly his own fault, that he couldn't haul anyone into court with the cops hot after him, and that the *Barnum's* insurance had lapsed several months before to cap it all, was submerged beneath his anger. Damn people anyway!

Simworthy reached the first-aid locker, clutched a bottle of his best alchololic medicine, took several healthy swigs, choked, and came up gasping for air. His horrible suspicion was confirmed immediately. The perspiration on his neck turned into drops of ice that snowballed down his spine. The door of the locker was swinging open—*had been* swinging open throughout the action—and the vial was no longer in its place. Simworthy tore his long-suffering hair and groaned a mighty groan.

It didn't take him long to find the vial. He almost stepped on it. It was lying on its side on the floor.

Under stress, Simworthy's brain clicked with unusual clarity. He became deductive. The vial, he saw, was empty. There was a brownish spot on the deck beneath it. But it was a very small spot indeed. Not nearly big enough to account for the entire contents. The stuff couldn't have soaked in, and it obviously hadn't run off, or spashed elsewhere.

"Walter!" bellowed Simworthy.

The Nimoon raised its snoot, uncoiled itself from an air vent, and shrieked at Simworthy chummily. When Simworthy dove, Walter made a belated effort to climb up the bulkhead. Simworthy's huge hands closed on the frightened beasty, and in Simworthy's eyes gleamed a lust for blood.

Came a fairly exact repetition of the business gone through in Simworthy's meeting with the Hermit. All anger drained out of the big trader, and he relaxed his grip on the Nimoon. Walter chirped at him, managing to sound puzzled.

"Walter," said Simworthy, "Walter. You shouldn't have drunk that stuff. You shouldn't have, Walter. But it's all right —as long as it didn't hurt you, Walter."

He deposited his charge on the deck and retired, with the whisky bottle, to his chair. He loved Walter, but disappointment was great. Practically sobbing, he was in no mood to figure whether he actually loved Walter any more than he had before. Indeed, Simworthy's emotions did not run to fine

shadings; they were big and awkward like the man himself. All Simworthy knew was, he loved the confounded pest too much to wring its ridiculous head from its neckless shoulders. Drat it! The bottle drove rapidly towards emptiness.

The liquor may not have been entirely responsible for the idea, but it certainly helped. Simworthy suddenly saw that all of his plans were not ruined after all. He couldn't make himself lovable—hence irresistable to customers—now. But with Walter as a tool, he'd be almost as well off. In fact, with Walter perched on his shoulder as he gave his sales talk, the aura might cover them both, with the same effect. Love my Nimoon, love me! All was not lost.

Simworthy landed on Agrab-Grob.

He landed in the central square of a city that was, while puny by practically any standards, the major one on the planet. Simworthy looked out at the crowd of natives that gathered around him, and almost took off again immediately. The Agrab-Grobians were roughly humanoid, eight feet tall, pure blue, and had big teeth. They carried crude but reliable looking weapons, and they obviously didn't want company.

Simworthy made sure that Walter was nestled snugly under his arm as he opened the outer hatch. This would be the acid test. If it failed, he'd have to go on trading on his own skill and luck. That is, he shuddered, if the natives let him go at all. They weren't supposed to be cannibalistic, but how did he know just where they drew the line? And they looked . . . Brr.

The crowd pressed in. Simworthy raised this left hand in a peaceful, though shaky, gesture, and clutched Walter tighter. There was a murmuring from the crowd, which told him nothing.

Little was known of the Agrab-Grobian language, but it had been established that it was a variation of Lower Jogamish, Jogam being a more advanced, and friendlier, planet of the same system. Thus, with the aid of the Spaceman's Conversational Guide, Simworthy knew he could get his ideas across. "Peace!" he bellowed. "Friendship! Advantage to you! Gifts!" The last was a distortion of the truth, but it seemed like a good idea.

Slowly, the trembling in Simworthy's knees ended. The blue giants were making no move to chase him out. They waited, shuffling their feet. And gradually, it dawned on Simworthy that they were smiling. For the first time, he realized the true power of the love potion, and the wide radius of its effects.

An Agrab-Grobian in a fancy headdress shouldered his way through the mob. Planting himself before Simworthy, he made a perfunctory gesture in imitation of the trader's, and began a

long speech. Out of it, Simworthy got something like: "Wonderful small animal. You master wonderful small animal. You wonderful. Friend."

It was such an exact statement of what Simworthy had expected that he almost keeled over. But the businessman in him came to the fore. He handed the chief a cheap plastic necklace. "Gift," he said. "Peace. Barter, maybe?"

The chief studied the beads with a pleased expression, but only briefly. He returned his gaze to Simworthy and Walter, and made an even longer speech. Out of it, Simworthy got: "Yes."

The city's central square was also its marketplace. Simworthy saw that he could expect a fine haul of valuable metals and gems. The fact that it was all carved into small, oddly-shaped trinkets bothered him not at all. He set up shop.

Hours passed, during which business boomed. Simworthy unloaded various cheap junk from the *Barnum's* hold. The natives showered him with gimmicks, and every resident worked his way to the front of the crowd at least once to stand beaming at Simworthy with unabashed awe and amour.

He was demonstrating the advantages of a trick can-opener, hampered somewhat by the fact that the Agrab-Grobians had no cans to open, when the tragedy happened. The chief, who had not been in evidence for some time, returned and leaned against the *Barnum's* hull in a typical "holding up the building" pose. Out of his speech, Simworthy got: "Friend. Barter. Barter good. You take chief's pet. I take little animal."

Simworthy looked, thunderstruck, at the chief. He looked at another native, obviously a servant, who had followed, hauling along a reluctant something on a leash. The something appeared to be a ferocious, six-legged razorback hog. Getting more horrified by the second, Simworthy looked at the chief again.

He started to protest, but could think of nothing to say except for the one word, no. He said "No." He kept on saying it.

The chief, still beaming, reached down and plucked the Nimoon from Simworthy's shoulder.

Simworthy made a desperate grab. The chief, seeing it coming, lifted the Nimoon high over his head. Walter woke up enough to take part in the action himself. He screamed, and bit the chief on the wrist.

The chief yelled and grabbed his wrist with his other hand. Walter somersaulted to the ground, where he began to make frantic scrambling motions with all his tentacles. As if fired by the same trigger, Simworthy, the chief, the servant, and

the six-legged horror pounced upon Walter all at the same time.

Dust rose. Everybody shouted. Simworthy got an elbow in his nose, which began to spurt blood. The Nimoon caterwauled, and the bigger beast growled and snuffled fiercely. As Simworthy's vision cleared, he realized with a shock that the chief's servant was waving a long knife with utter disregard for the life and limb of anyone concerned.

Panting, the frightened trader dug in his heels and rolled out from under. The scuffle quieted down. Simworthy shook his head, but could not eliminate a roaring noise in his ears.

The chief stood, striving mightily to repair his injured dignity. The servant stood, and pulled the six-legged thing, which was yipping and snapping furiously, a few yards away.

On the ground where the battle had taken place, the mangled corpse of Walter lay in dust and blood.

The roaring in Simworthy's ears got louder. He was, he knew, a goner. Instinct took over.

He ran.

The hatchway of the *Barnum* was blocked by a knot of jabbering Agrab-Grobians. Simworthy about-faced, pumping hard. He hadn't the slightest idea of his ultimate destination, but the middle of the square was suddenly, mysteriously, empty. The battered trader started to charge across it.

The roaring noise grew louder still, but it was not until Simworthy saw the source that he identified it as the sternblast of a spaceship. Realization came swiftly as the ship itself settled into the square directly in front of Simworthy. The ship was fast, new, and bristled with weapons. The letters "S. P." loomed large and red on its gleaming nose.

The Space Police!

Simworthy was caught between two fires. It was only a matter of choosing the one that burned least merrily. He headed for the police cruiser, waving his arms wildly.

The cruiser's hatch opened, and three uniformed men—obviously tough men, ready for anything—stepped out. Hands poised near blaster holsters, they waited expectantly.

"Jared Simworthy?" snapped the one with the lieutenant's bars on his collar. "You're under arrest! We've been trailing you, and we're going to take you in. Will you come peaceably?"

Simworthy was peaceable enough, all right. His nose wouldn't stop bleeding, he had a throbbing headache, and he felt generally sick all over. This was the end, and he might as well face it. He raised his arms and walked slowly forward. . . .

Strangely, the lieutenant was rubbing his jaw, and smiling a hesitant smile, which made him look boyish. "Er, that is," he said, "you are Jared Simworthy, aren't you? But, shucks, maybe there's been a mistake. You're obviously not a crook. And as far as I know, the charges against you haven't anything behind them but the word of some screwball e-t's. Ten to one, they're phony."

He made his decision, and his smile broadened. "Aw hell, you're a good joe. Let's have a drink and talk this over. We can renew your licenses for you, while we're at it. Then we can convoy you out of here, if you're leaving."

Astounded, Simworthy realized that the other two policemen were smiling too, and holding out their hands. For the first time since he had made his break, he risked a look behind him.

None of the huge Agrab-Grobians were chasing him. They hadn't been chasing him, apparently. A few of them were looking at the chief, hiding grins behind their hairy paws. But most of them were gazing in Simworthy's direction, and their eyes were still filled with the rawest form of respect and devotion.

And that was that, just about. Later, as Simworthy jock-eyed a richly-laden *Barnum* back towards more civilized planets—planets that would pay a big price for his cargo—he figured it out. It was lucky for him that he did. It was lucky, that is, that he plucked one of the fleas out of his hair alive and looked at it, before he had scratched them all into oblivion.

The vial, he realized then, must have landed smack on Walter's neck, the fluid soaking into Walter's receptive mane. And the fleas had drunk their fill. And at some point in the proceedings, some of those fleas . . .

Simworthy scratched again, but gently now, delicately, probing carefully to capture alive as many of the insects as he could. He hadn't guessed, then, how profitable they might be. At the moment, he was simply, suddenly, completely crazy about the lovable little things!

And that's how Simworthy's Flea Circus started. So you'll know, if you ever get a chance to see it, exactly why you can't help going overboard about the antics of the normally uninteresting little pests. But even forewarned, and with full knowledge about them, you won't be able to help yourself.

You'll love 'em!

H. B. Fyfe

Robots as Frankensteinian monsters have been common in science-fiction since the earliest days. But robots as funnymen are much more entertaining—and, we think, much more likely. Here's a picture of a magazine office of the future, run by a human editor who uses robot assistants. And when you've read it you'll agree that robots are the craziest *people.*

—F. B.

The Well-Oiled Machine

HAVING TOTTERED ALONG THE HALL FROM THE elevator to his office, "Ed" Moran paused to glare at the sign on the door.

STUPENDOUS STORIES
William Moran, Editor

"Another day of it!" he groaned. "Why did Helen have to pick a fight again last night?"

He pushed open the door and entered, walking carefully.

"But even so, I didn't have to get loaded afterward, did I?"

A clacking typewriter fell silent as a level-toned voice answered his soliloquy.

"Do not know," said Sinner.

"I didn't ask *you!*" growled Ed.

Sinner was a secretarial robot, designed with four arms to facilitate simultaneous handling, correcting, and copying of manuscripts. Two of his hands had twenty-four fingers each, for typing. He was mounted on three small wheels, and gave Ed a chill on mornings after.

"How many synopses are ready?" he asked the robot.

"About a dozen, so far."

"I'll take them. Bring the rest in later!" Ed, convinced that his robots could tell when he was off beat, tried to sound brisk. "And get Doc to oil those wheels for you!"

"So you can keep telling everyone how the magazine runs like a well-oiled machine, ha-ha, because most of us are, ha-ha? You ought to hear Adder this morning!"

"Spare me that!" said Ed, retreating to his own office.

He threw the synopses of submitted manuscripts on his desk and sat down to hold his throbbing head. Just as it seemed that he would live, after all, someone tapped at his door.

Doc rolled in. He was an adaptation of the same model as Sinner and Adder, with digits specialized for repairing machinery, including other robots. His cylindrical body housed a "memory" file of repair instructions recorded on tape.

"Adder will not let me fix its voice box," he complained.

"Why won't he?" asked Ed.

"It says it does not have to, under regulations of individuality. It sounds terrible. Just lost two ads."

"Lost two ads!"

"They came in by visiphon. Sinner says that when the advertisers heard that voice over the mike, they got insulted."

Ed flipped a switch on his intercom.

"Advertising department!" a grating shriek answered.

Ed winced.

"You let Doc fix that voice box!" he ordered. "We can't go on losing money on your whims."

"Do not have to," rasped the robot. "Regulations say—"

"All right! I can't make you. But I *can* put you on another job. There's no rule against that."

He flicked the switch off.

"Go back and try again, Doc. I'm going down to see Liar."

Ed took the elevator down two floors to where the magazine was printed. He seldom penetrated deeply into this realm for fear of being run down by a big paper-carrying robot, or suffering some similar indignity. He had, however, formed a habit of chatting with the linotyping robot.

Liar—who claimed as an expert that it should be "Liner" or, at least, "Lyre"—was immobile because of his size and complexity, but he was the most educated machine Ed had ever encountered. He was equipped to proofread as he worked, and had accumulated an awe-inspiring hoard of misinformation.

Liar knew all about women—at any rate, as much as Ed's writers thought *they* knew. He knew even more about men, especially the type that was bound to win the girl and save the day. He often commiserated with Ed because the latter's chin was not more prominent, and because he was something less than six feet of bone and sinew.

"The best thing—" he began when Ed complained of headache.

"Never mind," said the man. "I keep telling you I can't get any rare, imported *xitchil* from Jupiter because there's no such thing. Human beings haven't even landed on Jupiter yet."

"Blaster Blaine did. In the June fourteenth book."

"Never mind," sighed Ed. "How are you coming here?"

"Almost finished." Liar did not pause in his work. "Be way ahead by afternoon. You got woman trouble, pardner?"

"What makes you think so?" demanded Ed, recoiling.

"You always get over-oiled when you have a fight with your girl. It is human."

"Which lousy story did you get that from?"

"You said so," answered Liar. "Now, I shall tell you how to handle her—"

"You think you will! You don't know Helen," Ed broke in.

"This worked for young Doctor Steele, in September, so listen! First, you give her the cold shoulder."

"Yeah?"

"That is right," Liar insisted. "They cannot stand it. Then, when she starts chasing *you,* knock her around a bit. Show her you are tough. They love it."

Ed shuddered.

"My dear tinker-toy," he said, "she has two brothers nearly your size. They tell me she once gave the big one a shiner."

"Well, of course . . . if you are timid—Next best thing is to shanghai her aboard a spaceship bound for Pluto."

"Who—*me?*"

"Occasionally," said Liar, "I realize how lucky I am to be well-designed for my job. I, at least, am adequate."

"I get along," retorted Ed. "Make a living, don't I?"

"We make it for you, Sinner says."

"*That* flat-tired can of stripped gears! The way he boils stories down. I'm not sure half the time what I'm buying."

"Do not worry. When the copy gets to me, I fix up anything that looks out of line."

"It's considered good for a magazine to get out of line at times," growled Ed, "but I doubt I could convince *you.*"

"I just do what they built me for, and you know I do it better than anything else could."

Ed gave up. He listened to suggestions that he should woo Helen with anonymous gifts, or show her how important he was. Best of all, Liar assured him, was to rescue the girl from terrible danger. All the heroes did it. He *should* arrange to be slightly injured in the process. Liar thought that the magazine could carry on very well during his absence.

Ed said sourly that he would really like to give it a chance, and left. At the elevator, he heard his name called.

He turned and saw the illustrating robot, Arty, apparently on his way to deliver a batch of drawings. He had been trapped by a small pool of oil spilled upon the concrete floor where some trash had been collected for later disposal.

"That one-wheel drive they give you!" grumbled Ed, but pushed him over a few feet.

"Thank you," said Arty.

He remained there, training his photoelectric eye on Ed until the elevator robot shut the door and started up. Ed fidgeted. He did not quite know what to do about this. He hated to replace Arty with a new model, but all the heroes in the sketches were beginning to look like editor William Moran.

He returned to his office and found that the pile of synopses had grown during his absence. He sat down to read them after carefully discarding the top half-dozen—Sinner always favored one plot, wherein robots conquered the world.

Ed chose a page, glanced at the code number identifying the story and author to Sinner, and read:

> *Young Jack Hansen, pilot on the dangerous asteroid run, is left unconscious on the spaceship* Hawk, *which mutineers force the captain to abandon. The* Hawk *is soon afterward boarded by space-pirates seeking her fabulously valuable secret cargo, led by a beautiful blonde girl known only as—*

Ed decided he really should be grateful for Sinner. He might have had to read it all. He took the next sheet:

> *On an expedition to the star Capella, brilliant young Dr. Martin is captured by cold-blooded, monstrous minions of Volvak, a mad Capellan who plans a ghastly experiment to destroy the Solar System. Volvak threatens the hero with torture to learn the headquarters of the humans, but the scientist escapes, aided by a beautiful blonde Earth girl who says she has forgotten her identity—*

Ed reached into the bottom drawer of his desk. After two short nips, he felt better. He read on, finding one piece he could buy. On the bottom was a really off-trail story:

> *10:23—Ed called on visiphon by beautiful blonde girl named Helen who, in his absence, conversed briefly with the synopsis robot.*

He turned the page over. That was all.

At times, mechanical communication merely frustrated Ed. He crashed open the door, flourishing the message.

"Why didn't you *tell* me?" he roared, glaring at Sinner.

"Tell you what?"

"That Helen called. What's the idea of putting this at the bottom of the pile of synopses?"

"Last item in order of arrival," said Sinner reasonably.

Ed leaned against the wall, shutting his eyes tightly. Against truth, purity, or moral right you could sometimes prevail, he thought, but not against robotical logic.

"What did she say?" he inquired, as calmly as possible.

"If I did not write it down, it must have been of no interest."

"Let me explain," grated Ed, "that what bores *you* may not necessarily fail to interest *me!*"

He slammed the door and dialed Helen's number on his desk visiphon. There was no answer. Was she waiting for him somewhere? Well, he would have to try again later.

Before he could work up a good case of self-pity at being saddled with such incompetence, the intercom buzzed.

"Ed," said Sinner's unabashed voice, "there is a Mr. Thorpe to see you. He is on his way in."

Simultaneously, a large, red-faced man charged through the door. His cinnamon mustache bristled as he glared about.

"Where's William Moran?" he demanded in a voice too small for him, while brandishing a mangled copy of *Stupendous Stories.*

Ed tapped his own chest modestly.

"You? The robot called you 'Ed' on the intercom."

"Short for 'editor,' " explained Ed for the thousandth time. "Just as he's 'Sinner' for synopsis."

"Then *you're* the jerk that ruined my story!"

"What?"

"Here it is!" shrilled Thorpe, beating upon Ed's desk with the magazine. "The best story I ever wrote. Real artistic integrity, and too good for your rotten comic book, if you want to know! And what did you do to it?"

Ed opened his mouth to ask, but got no further.

"You chopped the ending all to hell. Made the whole thing meaningless. Why? Was a fresh, new idea too much for you?"

"Let me get this straight," begged Ed. "You say someone tampered with your plot, which was . . . ah . . . original?"

"That's what I'm trying to get through your head!"

"Well, something should certainly be done. I think I know who did it. Suppose I let you talk with him?"

"Lead me to him!"

Ed called in Sinner to take Thorpe down to see Liar. Then he pressed a buzzer to summon Doc.

"Didn't I ask you to do something about Liar?" he demanded when the repair robot rolled in. "You were supposed to find a way weeks ago to stop his editing stories as he works."

Doc hesitated a moment in acute embarrassment.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I fear to tamper with as complex a mechanism as Liar. I am only a Model 255-C."

"Oh . . . get out!" growled Ed, discouraged.

After Doc had rolled out, he tried to get his mind on something pleasant. Nothing occurred to him. Except Helen. Had she called to say she was sending back his ring?

The visiphon chimed; Sinner had evidently left him a direct line while absent. A thin, dark-haired, angry man appeared.

"Now, listen here!" he bellowed. "I don't like being spoken to in that tone. You want to lose our account?"

Ed recognized the advertising agent who usually took the back cover for his client. The man must have clashed with Adder. He pulled himself together and began to talk like a ram-jet.

"Whew!" he sighed, some fifteen minutes later, turning off the visiphon after a masterly defensive engagement. "This has gone too far. *Sinner!*"

When the synopsis robot appeared, Ed ordered him to change offices and duties with Adder temporarily. He thought, then, of slipping out to lunch, but it was *too* early. First, he had to learn whether Thorpe had been disposed of. He phoned Liar.

"He just left," was the report, "a sadder but wiser man."

"That's a cliché," Ed objected automatically.

"There is no better description," Liar assured him.

Ed agreed presently, when Thorpe slumped into his office.

"I must say," the writer mumbled, "I didn't realize the depths to which I had sunk. I shouldn't blame you, of course."

"What do you mean?" asked Ed.

"I never knew how snugly I fitted the mold, until your robot downstairs explained to me just what rules he observes in doing your editing for you."

"In doing *what* for *whom!*"

"He told me exactly which plots he lets past. I could count them on one hand. I knew your tired magazine was stereotyped, but to think that I, Alexander J. Thorpe, am no better than a robot, grinding out the same pattern time after time—"

"Now, wait a minute—!"

Thorpe ignored him. The writer's features, no longer flushed

with rage, sagged fleshily. He drooped like a ten-year-old whose dog had been run over.

"It's true enough," he complained, snuffling faintly as he tossed his copy of the magazine onto the desk with a heavy, hopeless motion. "Even the illustrations, by golly! They *do* all look like you. I wouldn't believe that part at first . . ."

"Listen!" exclaimed Ed. "I have troubles of my own, and—"

Thorpe dragged out a handkerchief and blew a ringing blast.

"I knew you wouldn't understand. An artist must maintain his standard of integrity. He becomes a crass commercialist like you if he permits the prostitution of his artistic—"

"Just a second," Ed interrupted resignedly.

He reached into the bottom drawer. Having company, he groped again, further back, and came up with two glasses for supplementary equipment. Thorpe looked doleful but receptive.

The glasses were filled, emptied, refilled.

"Now," said Ed, "tell me all about artistic integrity . . ."

Some time later, Adder, now custodian of the outer office, opened the door to discover why his buzzer had not been answered.

Thorpe was criticizing Shakespeare, having already quoted at weary length from the works of John Ruskin, belligerently condemned Ingres and other French painters, and recited modern imitations of T. S. Eliot. It all sounded very erudite and impressive, provided Ed refrained from trying to make sense of it. The droning voice had a soothing, soporific effect.

"Visiphon call!" announced Adder in a raucous screech.

Ed grimaced and turned on his set. Thorpe continued to mouth phrases that seemed to have little or no semantic integrity. Helen's features appeared before Ed's startled eyes.

"Ah, so now you'll talk to me?" she greeted him.

"Wha—why, of course. Why not?"

"I wasn't going to wait, but your robot squawked out a big sales talk. Seemed to think I'd *pay* for your attentions!"

"Oh, no certainly not! The other way around, if anything . . . what am I saying? No! I mean—"

"You weren't very eager to answer my first call."

"Oh, er . . . something happened," said Ed lamely.

"Yes," Helen said suspiciously, "I think I can hear some of it happening now."

Ed hastily pushed the bottle out of the field of the scanner and requested Thorpe to shut his mouth for a few minutes.

"William Moran! Are you drunk? In the middle of the day?"

"Of course not! Tell her I'm not drunk, Adder!"

"Ed is not drunk," announced Adder stridently.

Helen flinched and backed away a few inches.

"Who *is* that?" she demanded.

"Just one of my writers, darling." (Thorpe clapped both hands to his temples and rolled his eyes resignedly toward the ceiling.) "You didn't think it was another girl, did you? You know I wouldn't look at another woman!"

"When that happens, I'll know you're dead," answered Helen acidly. "Now, listen! I may be losing my mind, but I'm going to give you one more chance to talk things over."

"No use now," mumbled Thorpe thickly. "If you sell your soul—"

"Keep quiet, will you!" hissed Ed.

"Don't whisper back while I'm talking to you!" ordered Helen. "Now, meet me for lunch and I'll listen to your excuses."

"I'm a poor excuse for a man," snuffled Thorpe. "I admit it."

"Well, admit it somewhere else!" snarled Ed. "Yes, of course, dear. Where shall I meet you?"

"I just want to tell you—" began Thorpe.

"He means *get out!*" Adder told him in horrible tones.

The writer blanched, dropped his empty glass, and departed. Adder followed him out as Ed took down the name of Helen's restaurant. He tried to make some progress then and there, but she cut off, obviously bent upon punishing him with suspense.

Finding himself alone, Ed pushed the buzzer for Adder.

"Where did our literary soul flit off to?" he inquired.

"Out to get drunk, he said. I have more synopses."

"Oh, well, give them here. I have half an hour before I can leave. Take that empty with you on the way out."

When the door had closed behind the robot and the bottle, Ed picked up the first effort of his new manuscript analyst:

> *Don't get trapped like young Dr. Jim Watkins in the depths of the ice caves of Pluto! But to solve the mystery of the beautiful blonde Earth girl caught in the ice, to learn what terrible menace threatened three planets, to give the readers of* Stupendous Stories *forty thrill-packed pages of drama and adventure, buy this manuscript! You can't afford to publish the magazine without it!*

The page slipped from Ed's limp fingers.

"What have I done?" he breathed. *"What have I done!"*

Adder had changed offices, but he was still an ad-robot. Ed fumbled for the next sheet.

This is the best piece of work to come into this office since the present analyst began to synopsize scripts. Amid the blazing heat of the desert a fugitive bearing a dreadful secret flees from the most inhuman—literally the most inhuman—gang of murderers ever conceived. Then, suddenly, a mirage, a beautiful blonde girl from nowhere, a clue in an ancient language, and other startling developments. You would be crazy to pass this one up, Ed!

"I am already!" Ed yelled. "That I don't spot-weld all you gadgets to the ceiling proves it! Am I sunk so low around here that I have to read all this stuff *myself?*"

It occurred to him that his behavior varied somewhat from normal. At least, he ought to have a robot to stand before the desk, so that he would seem not to be talking to himself.

He threw aside the synopses, snatching the bottom one to give his conscience the feeling of having reached the end.

Why had young Eddie McGinnity committed suicide? Who was the mysterious blonde in the picture on his desk? Should Dr. Kleffer believe the despairing note describing his hopeless love? What could Eddie have offered a girl accustomed to every luxury . . .?

"Beats the hell out of me!" sighed Ed. "Why did he try, then? In his place, I'd . . . well, that's different."

He stared unseeingly at the pile of papers.

"Come to think of it," he asked himself, "what *am* I doing? How long am I going to let her toy with me?"

The answer seemed simple. He had more troubles now than he could handle. He would have to give up some of them.

"I'll start by not meeting Helen," he decided firmly. "If I see her, I'll weaken, and we'll go through it all again. I can't hold my own here with a hangover every other morning."

He forced himself to set to work planning a future layout. Somehow, he felt little of the elation he had thought would accompany the decision, but he resolved to stick to it.

Thus, in mid-afternoon, he was shocked by a sense of unfairness when Helen invaded the office.

"Now, listen here!" she greeted him, stalking unannounced into his sanctum, followed by Adder. "I don't intend to be stood up by you, even if it *is* for the last time!"

"Adder!" cried Ed, his determination undermined by the sparkle and color derived from her anger. "Show the lady out!"

He snatched up an illustration by Arty and pretended to

be engrossed in the sight of himself in a spacesuit wielding a massive club against a floppy, bug-eyed monster. He managed to ignore the scuffle and the soprano tones of protest.

A genuine cry of pain, however, snapped his resolution like a soap bubble. He looked up to see Helen sitting on the floor of the outer office, wearing a very surprised expression.

"Adder!"

Ed charged out from behind his desk.

"You cast-iron idiot! I said *'show'*—not *'throw'!*"

"I regret," apologized Adder in ghastly tones. "Perhaps I *do* need rewiring as Doc says. May I help you, Miss?"

"You keep your octopus claws off me!" Helen requested rather shrilly.

She yanked down her skirt and scrambled unassisted to her feet, where she stood feeling tenderly for bruises and glaring impartially at both of them.

"I'm terribly sorry—" Ed began.

"I'm not!" snapped his lady, with a look that crackled blue sparks across the room. "Now I know you for the brute you are. I'm leaving before you have more of your monsters manhandle me!"

She whirled through the door and tapped angrily down the hall.

Ed ran to follow. He heard Adder's gears clash slightly as the robot shifted into high and rolled after him.

"Helen! Wait!" he called.

The elevator door opened. Sinner, returning from some errand, rolled out. Watching over her shoulder, Helen ran directly at him, but Sinner was adjusted by design to avoid injuring humans. He thrust out all four arms and caught her before they collided.

"Hold on, Sinner!" cried Ed.

He and Adder caught up—the latter's brakes squeaking—whereupon Helen ceased struggling.

"Let her down," said Ed. "Now, young lady, you're going to stay and listen to what I have to say!"

"Why, you . . . you . . . *kidnapper!*" Helen exclaimed. "You can't keep me here against my will. There are still laws."

"I just want you to see my side—"

"I've *seen* the hidden side of you! You have me practically beaten to a pulp, and a prisoner in this *den* of yours, and you want me to listen to more of your lies!"

Ed opened his mouth to protest, and immediately had it closed by a hard-swung handbag, dainty in design but conventionally loaded. He staggered back. Helen seized the opportunity to dive into the elevator. The door slid shut before Ed could force intelligible orders past his numbed lips.

He knew the elevator robot would not stop between floors. Ed ran to the stairs and hurtled down, four steps at a time. At the landing, his knees bent from the impact. Still, he managed to reach the elevator exit on the next floor before Helen stepped out.

She saw him coming and shrank back. The door closed in his face again. The indicator crept down toward Liar's domain.

Ed gasped in a breath and tottered back to the stairs. He took this flight only two steps at a time. Consequently, Helen had already run out of the car when he reached the bottom.

"Look out!" he shouted.

The girl ducked back just in time to escape a big truck-robot, lumbering past with a huge roll of paper for the presses. Ed swooped down on her at a determined stagger.

"Let me go!"

"Helen," he said desperately, "you know I love you."

"Let me go, dammit!"

"Would I go through all this if I didn't?"

The elevator was ascending in response to urgent buzzing from above, leaving beside them a robot who had rolled up to board it.

"Are you going to let me go?"

"Are you going to listen?" demanded Ed. *"I love you!"*

"Why?" demanded a voice behind him.

Ed jumped, and looked around. Helen stopped squirming and peered around his shoulder. Arty was regarding them attentively.

"Why not?" asked Ed in a small voice, abashed at having made a private matter spectacularly public.

"I understand it's a matter of chemistry," he added, more firmly. "Perfectly logical."

"Do you consider her more pleasing that I?"

"Well, naturally. When she wants to be nice, she can."

"Then I hate her!" announced Arty distinctly.

"Huh?"

"I shall immobilize her," said the robot, advancing.

"Willy," murmured Helen worriedly, "I don't think it likes me."

Arty reached out for her. Ed thrust Helen aside and tried to push Arty back. He was gently but firmly lifted into the air.

"Doc!" he bawled, hoping desperately that the repair robot might be on the floor.

He thought he heard a distant answer as Arty set him down to one side. Helen, suddenly pale, retreated slowly along the

wall toward Liar, who, designed immoble, simply continued working.

"Arty, stop it!" ordered Ed, striving for a tone of authority.

He ran up behind the robot, hoping for a chance at the cut-off switch; but Arty wheeled and shoved him away. In the distance, he saw Doc speeding up an aisle toward them.

"Run, Helen!" he yelled, trying again to reach the switch.

This time, he was shoved with such force that he tripped and fell across the pile of trash that had been swept there earlier. There was a clatter of cans and broken glass. Ed felt something slippery on his hand. A scared glance relieved him; it was only some heavy oil from a nearly empty gallon can.

"Remain there!" Arty ordered Helen vindictively. "I will catch you presently."

The robot turned solicitously to pick Ed up.

"I regret."

"Oh, don't think anything of it," said Ed pleasantly.

He made no effort to have Arty set him down quickly, because he had brought the can up with him. He shook it gently behind his back, feeling the last of the oil spurt out.

"You must not hurt yourself," said Arty. "I . . . I . . . I cannot move. What is wrong?"

Ed felt himself casually held aside so that Arty could see the floor. The oil had spread. The robot's drive wheel was spinning uselessly in a broad slick.

"You have tricked me," Arty accused.

Ed saw the elevator door open as Adder and Sinner arrived from above. Doc was scooting up from the other direction. Helen edged closer, with a scared expression and a board from the trash pile.

"You have frustrated me," said Arty.

"What do you think you're doing to me?" countered Ed. "Sinner, Adder, come over here!"

"I shall immobilize them!" threatened Arty, watching the other robots as they rolled in front of Helen.

While Ed had diverted attention to the others, Doc had arrived. He crept up behind Arty in low gear, then suddenly flicked out a metal arm. In the tense silence, a sharp click was audible. Ed was dropped abruptly as Arty's internal humming ceased.

"Oh, boy!" he sighed. "Better push him into your shop, Doc, until we can order a new one."

"Darling!" said Helen.

"Huh? Put down that board. You scared me half to death. Suppose you'd missed the robot and hit me!"

"You saved my life," said Helen.

"Oh, it wasn't that bad," said Ed, watching Sinner and Doc wheel the inert drawing robot away.

"Yes, it was! That nasty gadget! I give up."

"What?"

"I'm sorry. I never realized how important you are and how dangerous your work is. At least, I won't have to worry about any pretty office wives."

"Now, now, these things don't happen every day, do they, Adder?"

"Not *every* day," answered Adder. "I wonder if I had better have Doc rewire me this afternoon?"

"You do sound a little . . ." Helen paused delicately.

"To please an accessory of Ed's, I will have it repaired."

"Ohmigod!" muttered Ed. "Let's get out of here."

Sinner came rolling back.

"Liar wants to see you," he reported.

"All right," said Ed. "You two take the lady up to my office."

He saw them into the elevator, then walked over to Liar.

"*Now* will you admit I was right?" the latter greeted him.

"About what?"

"How to handle women. Sinner told all on his way back. Fortunately, you did exactly as I told you."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ed.

"First, you got Adder to beat her up—"

"*That's* an exaggeration if I ever—"

"—after giving her the cold shoulder to get her interested. Then you held her here against her will, which was almost as good as kidnaping her into space."

"I just wanted to explain—"

"Of course. I *understand.* Was it not my idea? And, finally, you did just as I advised: rescued her from terrible danger."

"Now, wait!" protested Ed. "The excitement wore her down, that's all."

"Nonsense! That gets them every time. Have I not just now put it into print three times running? I blame myself only for forgetting to tell you about the clinch, now that the time has come to end the story."

"Tell me about . . ." murmured Ed.

He had a nightmarish feeling that something in Liar's premise was fantastically wrong, despite its pragmatic functioning; but he had other business. He drew himself up.

"Never mind, Liar," he said firmly. "That is one little job I can do better than any of you fancy gadgets."

He turned and hurried off to attend to it.

Clive Jackson

This little gem of satire on the type of science-fiction known as space opera (the all-action type which is analogous to the type of Western known as horse opera) was originally published in Northern Ireland in a "fanzine" (amateur science-fiction publication) called Slant. *The editors of* Other Worlds *are to be given credit for finding it and carrying it to a wider audience. If you've read space operas you'll love this. If you haven't, we think you'll enjoy it just the same.*

—F. B.

The Swordsmen of Varnis

THE TWIN MOONS BROODED OVER THE RED DESerts of Mars and the ruined city of Khua-Loanis. The night wind sighed around the fragile spires and whispered at the fretted lattice windows of the empty temples, and the red dust made it like a city of copper.

It was close to midnight when the distant rumble of racing hooves reached the city, and soon the riders thundered in under the ancient gateway. Tharn, Warrior Lord of Loanis, leading his pursuers by a scant twenty yards, realized wearily that his lead was shortening, and raked the scaly flanks of his six-legged vorkl with cruel spurs. The faithful beast gave a low cry of despair as it tried to obey and failed.

In front of Tharn in the big double saddle sat Lehni-tal-Loanis, Royal Lady of Mars, riding the ungainly animal with easy grace, leaning forward along its arching neck to murmur swift words of encouragement into its flattened ears. Then she lay back against Tharn's mailed chest and turned her lovely face up to his, flushed and vivid with the excitement of the chase, amber eyes aflame with love for her strange hero from beyond time and space.

"We shall win this race yet, my Tharn," she cried. "Yonder through that archway lies the Temple of the Living Vapor, and once there we can defy all the Hordes of Varnis!" Looking

down at the unearthly beauty of her, at the subtle curve of throat and breast and thigh, revealed as the wind tore at her scanty garments, Tharn knew that even if the Swordsmen of Varnis struck him down his strange odyssey would not have been in vain.

But the girl had judged the distance correctly and Tharn brought their snorting vorkl to a sliding, rearing halt at the great doors of the Temple, just as the Swordsmen reached the outer archway and jammed there in a struggling, cursing mass. In seconds they had sorted themselves out and came streaming across the courtyard, but the delay had given Tharn time to dismount and take his stand in one of the great doorways. He knew that if he could hold it for a few moments while Lehni-tal-Loanis got the door open, then the secret of the Living Vapor would be theirs, and with it mastery of all the lands of Loanis.

The Swordsmen tried first to ride him down, but the doorwas so narrow and deep that Tharn had only to drive his sword-point upward into the first vorkl's throat and leap backward as the dying beast fell. Its rider was stunned by the fall, and Tharn bounded up onto the dead animal and beheaded the unfortunate Swordsman without compunction. There were ten of his enemies left and they came at him now on foot, but the confining doorway prevented them from attacking more than four abreast, and Tharn's elevated position upon the huge carcass gave him the advantage he needed. The fire of battle was in his veins now, and he bared his teeth and laughed in their faces, and his reddened sword wove a pattern of cold death which none could pass.

Lehni-tal-Loanis, running quick cool fingers over the pitted bronze of the door, found the radiation lock and pressed her glowing opalescent thumb-ring into the socket, gave a little sob of relief as she heard hidden tumblers falling. With agonizing slowness the ancient mechanism began to open the door; soon Tharn heard the girl's clear voice call above the clashing steel, "Inside, my Tharn, the secret of the Living Vapor is ours!"

But Tharn, with four of his foes dead now, and seven to go, could not retreat from his position on top of the dead vorkl without grave risk of being cut down, and Lehni-tal-Loanis, quickly realizing this, sprang up beside him, drawing her own slim blade and crying, "Aie, my love! I will be your left arm!"

Now the cold hand of defeat gripped the hearts of the Swordsmen of Varnis: two, three, four more of them mingled their blood with the red dust of the courtyard as Tharn and his fighting princess swung their merciless blades in perfect unison. It seemed that nothing could prevent them now from winning the mysterious secret of the Living Vapor, but they reckoned

without the treachery of one of the remaining Swordsmen. Leaping backward out of the conflict he flung his sword on the ground in disgust. "Aw, the Hell with it!" he grunted, and unclipping a proton gun from his belt he blasted Lehni-tal-Loanis and Her Warrior Lord out of existence with a searing energy-beam.

Fredric Brown

My distinguished co-anthologist is obviously haunted by dinosaurs and trying to rid himself of them. He's written three separate and contradictory explanations of how they became extinct. The one in this story shows how wacky an explanation can get. Then he does things up Brown by topping it with an explanation of the time travel paradox to end all explanations of anything. *When you've read it you'll know what I mean in saying that it's crazy in more ways than one.*

—M. R.

Paradox Lost

A BLUEBOTTLE FLY HAD GOT IN THROUGH THE screen, somehow, and it droned in monotonous circles around the ceiling of the classroom. Even as Professor Dolohan droned in monotonous circles of logic up at the front of the class. Shorty McCabe, seated in the back row, glanced from one to another of them and finally settled on the bluebottle fly as the more interesting of the two.

"The negative absolute," said the professor, "is, in a manner of speaking, not absolutely negative. This is only seemingly contradictory. Reversed in order, the two words acquire new connotations. Therefore—"

Shorty McCabe sighed inaudibly and watched the bluebottle fly, and wished that he could fly around in circles like that, and with such a soul-satisfying buzz. In comparative sizes and decibels, a fly made more noise than an airplane.

More noise, in comparison to size, than a buzz saw. Would a buzz saw saw metal? Say, a saw. Then one could say he saw a buzz saw saw a saw. Or leave out the buzz and that would be better: I saw a saw saw a saw. Or, better yet: Sue saw a saw saw a saw.

"One may think," said the professor, "of an absolute as a mode of being—"

"Yeah," thought Shorty McCabe, "one may think of any-

thing as anything else, and what does it get you but a headache?" Anyway, the bluebottle fly was becoming more interesting. It was flying down now, toward the front of the classroom, and maybe it would light on Professor Dolohan's head. And buzz.

No, but it lighted somewhere out of sight behind the professor's desk. Without the fly for solace, Shorty looked around the classroom for something else to look at or think about. Only the backs of heads; he was alone in the back row, and—well, he could concentrate on how the hair grew on the backs of people's necks, but it seemed a subject of limited fascination.

He wondered how many of the students ahead of him were asleep, and decided that half of them were; and he wished he could go to sleep himself, but he couldn't. He'd made the silly mistake of going to bed early the night before and as a result he was now wide awake and miserable.

"But," said Professor Dolohan, "if we disregard the contravention of probability arising in the statement that the positive absolute is less than absolutely positive, we are led to—"

Hooray! The bluebottle fly was back again, rising from its temporary concealment back of the desk. It droned upward to the ceiling, paused there a moment to preen its wings, and then flew down again, this time toward the back of the room.

And if it kept that spiral course, it would go past within an inch of Shorty's nose. It did. He went cross-eyed watching it and turned his head to keep it in sight. It flew past and—

It just wasn't there any more. At a point about twelve inches to the left of Shorty McCabe, it had suddenly quit flying and suddenly quit buzzing, and it wasn't there. It hadn't died and hadn't fallen into the aisle. It had just—

Disappeared. In midair, four feet above the aisle, it had simply ceased to be there. The sound it had made seemed to have stopped in midbuzz, and in the sudden silence the professor's voice seemed louder, if not funnier.

"By creating, through an assumption contrary to fact, we create a pseudo-real set of axioms which are, in a measure, the reversal of existing—"

Shorty McCabe, staring at the point where the fly had vanished, said "Gaw!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry, professor. I didn't speak," said Shorty. "I . . . I just cleared my throat."

"—by the reversal of existing—What was I saying? Oh, yes. We create an axiomatic basis of a pseudo-logic which would yield different answers to all problem. I mean—"

Seeing that the professor's eyes had left him, Shorty turned his head again to look at the point where the fly had ceased to

fly. Had ceased, maybe, to *be* a fly? Nuts; it must have been an optical illusion. A fly went pretty fast. If he's suddenly lost sight of it—

He shot a look out of the corner of his eye at Professor Dolohan, and made sure that the professor's attention was focused elsewhere. Then Shorty reached out a tentative hand toward the point, or the approximate point where he'd seen the fly vanish.

He didn't know what he expected to find there, but he didn't feel anything at all. Well, that was logical enough. If the fly had flown into nothing and he, Shorty, had reached out and felt nothing, that proved nothing. But, somehow, he was vaguely disappointed. He didn't know what he'd expected to find; hardly to touch the fly that wasn't there, or to encounter a solid but invisible obstacle, or anything. But—*what* had happened to the fly?

Shorty put his hands on the desk and, for a full minute, tried to forget the fly by listening to the professor. But that was worse than wondering about the fly.

For the thousandth time he wondered why he'd ever been such a sap as to enroll in this Logic 2B class. He'd never pass the exam. And he was majoring in paleontology, anyway. He liked paleontology; a dinosaur was something you could get your teeth into, in a manner of speaking. But logic, phooey; 2B or not 2B. And he'd rather study about fossils than listen to one.

He happened to look down at his hands on the desk.

"Gaw!" he said.

"Mr. McCabe?" said the professor.

Shorty didn't answer; he couldn't. He was looking at his left hand. There weren't any fingers on it. He closed his eyes.

The professor smiled a professorial smile. "I believe our young friend in the back seat has . . . uh . . . gone to sleep," he said. "Will someone please try—"

Shorty hastily dropped his hands into his lap. He said, "I . . . I'm O. K., professor. Sorry. Did you say something?"

"Didn't you?"

Shorty gulped. "I . . . I guess not."

"We were discussing," said the professor—to the class, thank Heaven, and not to Shorty individually—"the possibility of what one might refer to as the impossible. It is not a contradiction in terms for one must distinguish carefully between *im*-possible and *un*-possible. The latter—"

Shorty surreptitiously put his hands back on the desk and sat there staring at them. The right hand was all right. The left—He closed his eyes and opened them again and still all the fingers of his left hand were missing. They didn't *feel* missing.

Experimentally, he wriggled the muscles that ought to move them and he felt them wriggle.

But they weren't there, as far as his eyes could see. He reached over and felt for them with his right hand—and he couldn't feel them. His right hand went right through the space that his left-hand fingers ought to occupy, and felt nothing. But still he could move the fingers of his left hand. He did.

It was very confusing.

And then he remembered that was the hand he had used in reaching out toward the place where the bluebottle fly had disappeared. And then, as though to confirm his sudden suspicion, he felt a light touch on one of the fingers that wasn't there. A light touch, and something light crawling along his finger. Something about the weight of a bluebottle fly. Then the touch vanished, as though it had flown again.

Shorty bit his lips to keep from saying "Gaw!" again. He was getting scared.

Was he going nuts? Or had the professor been right and was he asleep after all? How could he tell? Pinching? With the only available fingers, those of his right hand, he reached down and pinched the skin of his thigh, hard. It hurt. But then if he dreamed he pinched himself, couldn't he also dream that it hurt?

He turned his head and looked toward his left. There wasn't anything to see that way; the empty desk across the aisle, the empty desk beyond it, the wall, the window, and blue sky through the pane of glass.

But—

He glanced at the professor and saw that his attention was now on the blackboard where he was marking symbols. "Let *N*," said the professor, "equal known infinity, and the symbol *a* equal the factor of probability."

Shorty tentatively reached out his left hand again into the aisle and watched it closely. He thought he might as well make sure; he reached out a little farther. The *hand was gone*. He jerked back his wrist, and sat there sweating.

He was nuts. He had to be nuts.

Again he tried to move his fingers and felt them wriggle very satisfactorily, just as they should have wriggled. They still had feeling, kinetic and otherwise. But— He reached his wrist toward the desk and didn't feel the desk. He put it in such a position that his hand, if it had been on the end of his wrist, would have *had* to touch or pass through the desk, but he felt nothing.

Wherever his hand was, it wasn't on the end of his wrist. It was still out there in the aisle, no matter where he moved his arm. If he got up and walked out of the classroom, would his

hand *still* be out there in the aisle, invisible? And suppose he went a thousand miles away? But that was silly.

But was it any sillier than that his arm should rest here on the desk and his hand be two feet away? The difference in silliness between two feet and a thousand miles was only one of degree.

Was his hand out there?

He took his fountain pen out of his pocket and reached out with his right hand to approximately the point where he thought *it* was, and—sure enough—he was holding only a part of a fountain pen, half of one. He carefully refrained from reaching any farther, but raised it and brought it down sharply.

It rapped—he felt it—across the missing knuckles of his left hand! That tied it! It so startled him that he let go of the pen and it was gone. It wasn't on the floor of the aisle. It wasn't anywhere. It was just gone, and it had been a good five-dollar pen, too.

Gaw! Here he was worrying about a *pen* when *his left hand was missing*. What was he going to do about *that?*

He closed his eyes. "Shorty McCabe," he said to himself, "you've got to think this out logically and figure out how to get your hand back out of whatever that is. You daren't get scared. Probably you're asleep and dreaming this, but maybe you aren't, and, *if* you aren't, you're in a jam. Now let's be logical. There is a place out there, a plane or something, and you can reach across it or put things across it, but you can't get them back again.

"Whatever else is on the other side, your left hand is. And your right hand doesn't know what your left hand is doing because one is here and the other is there, and never the twain shall— Hey, cut it out, Shorty. *This isn't funny.*"

But there was one thing he could do, and that was find out roughly the size and shape of the—whatever it was. There was a box of paper clips on his desk. He picked up a few in his right hand and tossed one of them out into the aisle. The paper clip got six or eight inches out into the aisle, and vanished. He didn't hear it land anywhere.

So far, so good. He tossed one a bit lower; same result. He bent down at his desk, being careful not to lean his head out into the aisle, and skittered a paper clip across the floor out into the aisle, saw it vanish eight inches out. He tossed one a little forward, one a bit backward. The plane extended at least a yard to the front and back, roughly parallel with the aisle itself.

And up? He tossed one upward that arced six feet above the aisle and vanished there. Another one, higher yet and in a for-

ward direction. It described an arc in the air and landed on the head of a girl three seats forward in the next aisle. She started a little and put up a hand to her head.

"Mr. McCabe," said Professor Dolohan severely, "may I ask if this lecture bores you?"

Shorty jumped. He said, "Y—No, professor. I was just—"

"You were, I noticed, experimenting in ballistics and the nature of a parabola. A parabola, Mr. McCabe, is the curve described by a missile projected into space with no continuing force other than its initial impetus and the force of gravity. Now shall I continue with my original lecture, or would you rather we called you up before the class to demonstrate the nature of paraboloid mechanics for the edification of your fellow students?"

"I'm sorry, professor," said Shorty. "I was . . . uh . . . I mean I . . . I mean I'm sorry."

"Thank you, Mr. McCabe. And now"— The professor turned again to the blackboard. "If we let the symbol *b* represent the degree of un-possiblity, in contradistinction to *c*—"

Shorty stared morosely down at his hands—his *hand*, rather —in his lap. He glanced up at the clock on the wall over the door and saw that in another five minutes the class period would be over. He had to do *something*, and do it quickly.

He turned his eyes toward the aisle again. Not that there was anything there to see. But there was plenty there to think about. Half a dozen paper clips, his best fountain pen, and his left hand.

There was an invisible something out there. You couldn't feel it when you touched it, and objects like paper clips didn't click when they hit it. And you could get through it on one direction, but not in the other. He could reach his right hand out there and touch his left hand with it, no doubt, but then he wouldn't get his right hand back again. And pretty soon class would be over and—

Nuts. There was only one thing he could do that made any sense. There wasn't anything on the other side of that plane that hurt his left hand, was there? Well, then, why not step through it? Wherever he'd be, it would be all in one piece.

He shot a glance at the professor and waited until he turned to mark something on the blackboard again. Then, without waiting to think it over, without *daring* to think it over, Shorty stood up in the aisle.

The lights went out. Or he had stepped into blackness.

He couldn't hear the professor any more, but there was a familiar buzzing noise in his ears that sounded like a bluebottle fly circling around somewhere nearby in the darkness.

He put his hands together, and they were both there; his

right hand clasped his left. Well, whatever he was, he was *all* there. But why couldn't he see?

Somebody sneezed.

Shorty jumped, and then said, "Is . . . uh . . . anybody there?" His voice shook a little, and he hoped now that he was really asleep and that he'd wake up in a minute.

"Of course," said a voice. A rather sharp and querulous voice.

"Uh . . . who?"

"What do you mean, who? Me. Can't you see— No, of course you can't. I forgot. Say, listen to that guy! And they say we're crazy!" There was a laugh in the darkness.

"What guy?" asked Shorty. "And who says who's crazy? Listen, I don't get—"

"*That* guy," said the voice. "The teacher. Can't you— No, I forget you can't. You've got no business here anyway. But I'm listening to the teacher telling about what happened to the saurians."

"The what?"

"The saurians, stupid. The dinosaurs. The guy's nuts. And they say *we* are!"

Shorty McCabe suddenly felt the need, the stark necessity, of sitting down. He groped in darkness and felt the top of a desk and felt that there was an empty seat behind it and eased himself down into the seat. Then he said, "This is Greek to me, mister. Who says who's crazy?"

"*They* say *we* are. Don't you know—that's right, you don't. Who let that fly in here?"

"Let's start at the beginning," begged Shorty. "Where am I?"

"You *normals*," said the voice petulantly. "Face you with anything out of the ordinary and you start asking— Oh, well, wait a minute and I'll tell you. Swat that fly for me."

"I can't see it. I—"

"Shut up. I want to listen to this; it's what I came here for. He— Yow, he's telling them that the dinosaurs died out for lack of food because they got too big. Isn't that silly? The bigger a thing is the better chance it has to find food, hasn't it? And the idea of the herbivorous ones ever starving in these forests! Or the carnivorous ones while the herbivorous ones were around! And— But why am I telling you all this? You're normal."

"I . . . I don't get it. If I'm normal, what are you?"

The voice chuckled. "I'm *crazy*."

Shorty McCabe gulped. There didn't seem to be anything to say. The voice was all too obviously right, about that.

In the first place, if he could hear outside, Professor Dolohan was lecturing on the positive absolute, and this voice—

with whatever, if anything, was attached to it—had come here to hear about the decline of the saurians. That didn't make sense because Professor Dolohan didn't know a pixilated pterodactyl from an oblate spheroid.

And— "Ouch!" said Shorty. Something had given him a hard whack on the shoulder.

"Sorry," said the voice. "I just took a swat at that dratted fly. It lighted on you. Anyway, I missed it. Wait a minute until I turn the switch and let the darned thing out. You want out, too?"

Suddenly the buzzing stopped.

Shorty said, "Listen, I . . . I'm too darn curious to want out of here until I got *some* idea what I'm getting out from, I mean out of. I guess I must be crazy, but—"

"No, you're normal. It's we who are crazy. Anyway, that's what they say. Well, listening to that guy talk about dinosaurs bores me; I'd just as soon talk to you as listen to him. But you had no business getting in here, either you or that fly, see? There was a slip-up in the apparatus. I'll tell Napoleon—"

"Who?"

"Napoleon. He's the boss in this province. Napoleons are bosses in some of the others, too. You see a lot of us think we're Napoleon, but not me. It's a common delusion. Anyway, the Napoleon I mean is the one in Donnybrook."

"Donnybrook? Isn't that an insane asylum?"

"Of course, where else would anyone be who thought he was Napoleon? I ask you."

Shorty McCabe closed his eyes and found that didn't do any good because it was dark anyway and he couldn't see even with them open. He said himself, "I got to keep on asking questions until I get something that makes sense or *I'm* going crazy. Maybe I *am* crazy; maybe this is what it's like to be crazy. But if I am, am I still sitting in Professor Dolohan's class, or . . . or what?"

He opened his eyes and asked, "Look, let's see if we can get at this from a different angle. Where are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm in Donnybrook, too. Normally, I mean. All of us in this province are, except a few that are still on the outside, see? Just now"—suddenly his voice sounded embarrassed—"I'm in a padded cell."

"And," asked Shorty fearfully, "is . . . is this *it?* I mean, am *I* in a padded cell, too?"

"Of course not. You're sane. Listen, I've got no business to talk these things over with you. There's a sharp line drawn, you know. It was just because something went wrong with the apparatus."

Shorty wanted to ask, "What apparatus?" but he had a hunch that if he did the answer would open up seven or eight new questions. Maybe if he stuck to one point until he understood that one, he could begin to understand some of the others.

He said, "Let's get back to Napoleon. You say there is more than one Napoleon among you? How can that be? There can't be two of the same thing."

The voice chuckled. "That's all you know. That's what proves you're normal. That's normal reasoning; it's right, of course. But these guys who think they are Napoleon are crazy, so it doesn't apply. Why can't a hundred men each be Napoleon, if they're too crazy to know that they can't?"

"Well," said Shorty, "even if Napoleon wasn't dead, at least ninety-nine of them would have to be wrong, wouldn't they? That's logic."

"That's what's wrong with it here," said the voice. "I keep telling you we're crazy."

"We? You mean that I'm—"

"No, no, no, no, no. By 'we' I mean us, myself and the others, not you. That's why you got no business being here at all, see?"

"No," said Shorty. Strangely, he felt completely unafraid now. He knew that he must be asleep dreaming this, but he didn't think he was. But he was as sure as he was sure of anything that he *wasn't* crazy. The voice he was talking to said he wasn't; and that voice certainly seemed to be an authority on the subject. A hundred Napoleons!

He said, "This is fun. I want to find out as much as I can before I wake up. Who are you; what's your name? Mine's Shorty."

"Moderately glad to know you, Shorty. You normals bore me usually, but you seem a bit better than most. I'd rather not give you the name they call me at Donnybrook, though; I wouldn't want you to come there visiting or anything. Just call me Dopey."

"You mean . . . uh . . . the Seven Dwarfs? You think you're one of—"

"Oh, no, not at all. I'm not a paranoiac; none of my delusions, as you would call them, concern identity. It's just the nickname they know me by here. Just like they call you Shorty, see? Never mind my other name."

Shorty said, "What are your . . . uh . . . delusions?"

"I'm an inventor, what they call a nut inventor. I think I invent time machines, for one thing. This is one of them."

"This is— You mean that I'm in a time machine? Well,

yes, that would account for . . . uh . . . a thing or two. But, listen, if this is a time machine and it works, why do you say you *think* you invent them? If this *is* one—I mean—"

The voice laughed. "But a time machine is impossible. It is a paradox. Your professors will explain that a time machine cannot be, because it would mean that two things could occupy the same space at the same time. And a man could go back and kill himself when he was younger, and—oh, all sorts of stuff like that. It's completely impossible. Only a crazy man could—"

"But you say this *is* one. Uh . . . where is it? I mean, where in time."

"Now? It's 1958, of course."

"In— Hey, it's only 1953. Unless you moved it since I got on; did you?"

"No. *I* was in 1958 all along; that's where I was listening to that lecture on the dinosaurs. But you got on back there, five years back. That's because of the warp. The one I'm going to take up with Napo—"

"But where am I . . . are we . . . now?"

"You're in the same classroom you got on from, Shorty. But five years ahead. If you reach out, you'll see— Try, just to your left, back where you yourself were sitting."

"Uh—would I get my hand back again, or would it be like when I reached into here?"

"It's all right; you'll get it back."

"Well—" said Shorty.

Tentatively, he reached out his hand. It touched something soft that felt like hair. He took hold experimentally and tugged a little.

It jerked suddenly out of his grasp, and involuntarily Shorty jerked his hand back.

"Wow!" said the voice beside him. "That was funny!"

"What . . . what happened?" asked Shorty.

"It was a girl, a knockout with red hair. She's sitting in the same seat you were sitting in back there five years ago. You pulled her hair, and you ought to've seen her jump! Listen—"

"Listen to what?"

"Shut up, then, so I can listen—" There was a pause, and the voice chuckled. "The prof is dating her up!"

"Huh?" said Shorty. "Right in class? How—"

"Oh, he just looked back at her when she let out a yip, and told her to stay after class. But from the way he's looking at her, I can guess he's got an ulterior motive. I can't blame him; she's sure a knockout. Reach out and pull her hair again."

"Uh . . . well, it wouldn't be quite . . . uh—"

"That's right," said the voice disgustedly. "I keep forgetting you aren't crazy like me. Must be awful to be normal. Well, let's get out of here. I'm bored. How'd you like to go hunting?"

"Hunting? Well, I'm not much of a shot. Particularly when I can't see anything."

"Oh, it won't be dark if you step out of the apparatus. It's your own world, you know, but it's crazy. I mean, it's an—how would your professors put it?—an illogical aspect of logicality. Anyway, we always hunt with sling shots. It's more sporting."

"Hunt what?"

"Dinosaurs. They're the most fun."

"Dinosaurs! With a sling shot? You're cra— I mean, do you?"

The voice laughed. "Sure, we do. Look, that's what was so funny about what that professor was saying about the saurians. You see, we killed them off. Since I made this time machine, the Jurassic has been our favorite hunting ground. But there may be one or two left for us to hunt. I know a good place for them. This is it."

"This? I thought we were in a classroom in 1958."

"We were, then. Here, I'll inverse the polarity, and you can step right out. Go ahead."

"But—" Shorty said, and then "Well—" and then took a step to his right.

Sunlight blinded him.

It was a brighter, more glaring sunlight than he had ever seen or known before, a terrific contrast after the darkness he'd been in. He put his hands over his eyes to protect them, and only slowly was he able to take them away and open his eyes.

Then he saw he was standing on a patch of sandy soil near the shore of a smooth-surfaced lake.

"They come here to drink," said a familiar voice, and Shorty whirled around. The man standing there was a funny-looking little cuss, a good four inches shorter than Shorty, who stood five feet five. He wore shell-rimmed glasses and a small goatee; and his face seemed tiny and weazened under a tall black top hat that was turning greenish with age.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small sling shot, but with quite heavy rubber between the prongs. He said, "You can shoot the first one if you want," and held it out.

Shorty shook his head vigorously. "You," he said.

The little man bent down and carefully selected a few stones out of the sand. He pocketed all but one, and fitted that

into the leather insert of the sling shot. Then he sat down on a boulder and said, "We needn't hide. They're dumb, those dinosaurs. They'll come right by here."

Shorty looked around him again. There were trees about a hundred yards back from the lake, strange and monstrous trees with gigantic leaves that were a much paler green than any trees he'd ever seen before. Between the trees and the lake were only small, brownish, stunted bushes and a kind of coarse yellow grass.

Something was missing. Shorty suddenly remembered what it was. "Where's the time machine?" he asked.

"Huh? Oh, right here." The little man reached out a hand to his left and it disappeared up to the elbow.

"Oh," said Shorty. "I wondered what it looked like."

"Looked like?" said the little man. "How could it look like anything? I told you that there isn't any such thing as a time machine. There couldn't be; it would be a complete paradox. Time is a fixed dimension. And when I proved that to myself, that's what drove me crazy."

"When was that?"

"About four million years from now, around 1951. I had my heart set on making one, and went batty when I couldn't."

"Oh," said Shorty. "Listen, how come I couldn't see you, up there in the future, and I can here? And which world of four million years ago *is* this, yours or mine?"

"The same thing answers both of those questions. This is neutral ground; it's before there was a bifurcation of sanity and insanity. The dinosaurs are awfully dumb; they haven't got brains enough to be insane, let alone normal. They don't know from anything. They don't know there couldn't be a time machine. That's why we can come here."

"Oh," said Shorty again. And that held him for a while. Somehow it didn't seem particularly strange any more that he should be waiting to see a dinosaur hunted with a sling shot. The mad part of it was that he should be waiting for a dinosaur *at all*. Granting that, it wouldn't have seemed any sillier to have sat here waiting for one with a—

"Say," he said, "if using a sling shot on those things is sporting, did you ever try a fly swatter?"

The little man's eyes lighted up. "That," he said, *"is* an idea. Say, maybe you really *are* eligible for—"

"No," said Shorty hastily. "I was just kidding, honest. But, listen—"

"I don't hear anything."

"I don't mean that; I mean—well, listen, pretty soon I'm going to wake up or something, and there are a couple questions I'd like to ask while . . . while you're still here."

"You mean while *you're* still here," said the little man. "I told you that your getting in on this with me was a pure accident, and one moreover that I'm going to have to take up with Napo—"

"Damn Napoleon," said Shorty. "Listen, can you answer this so I can understand it? *Are* we here, or *aren't* we? I mean, if there's a time machine there by you, how can it be there if there can't be a time machine? And am I, or am I not, still back in Professor Dolohan's classroom, and if I am, what am I doing here? And—oh, damn it; what's it all about?"

The little man smiled wistfully.

"I can see that you are quite thoroughly mixed up. I might as well straighten you out. Do you know anything about logic?"

"Well, a little, Mr. . . . uh—"

"Call me Dopey. And if you know a little about logic, *that's your trouble.* Just forget it and remember that I'm crazy, and that makes things different, doesn't it? A crazy person doesn't have to be logical. Our worlds are different, don't you see? Now you're what we call a normal; that is, you see things the same as everybody else. But we don't. And since matter is most obviously a mere concept of mind—"

"Is it?"

"Of course."

"But *that's* according to logic. Descartes—"

The little man waved his sling shot airily. "Oh, yes. But not according to other philosophers. The dualists. That's where the logicians cross us up. They divide into two camps and take diametrically opposite sides of a question, and they can't both be wrong. Silly, isn't it? But the fact remains that matter is a concept of consciousness, even if some people who aren't really crazy think it is. Now there is a normal concept of matter, which you share, and a whole flock of abnormal ones. The abnormal ones sort of get together."

"I don't quite understand. You mean that you have a secret society of . . . uh . . . lunatics, who . . . uh . . . live in a different world, as it were?"

"Not as it were," corrected the little man emphatically, "but *as it weren't.* And it isn't a secret society, or anything organized that way. It just *is.* We project into two universes, in a manner of speaking. One is normal; our bodies are born there, and of course, they stay there. And if we're crazy enough to attract attention, we get put into asylums there. But we have another existence, in our minds. That's where I am, and that's where you are at the moment, in my mind. I'm not really here, either."

"Whew!" said Shorty. "But how *could* I be in your—"

"I told you; the machine slipped. But logic hasn't much place in my world. A paradox more or less doesn't matter, and a time machine is a mere bagatelle. Lots of us have them. Lots of us have come back here hunting with them. That's how we killed off the dinosaurs and that's why—"

"Wait," said Shorty. "Is this world we're sitting in, the Jurassic, part of your . . . uh . . . concept, or is it real? It looks real, and it looks authentic."

"This is real, but it never really existed. That's obvious. If matter is a concept of mind, and the saurians hadn't any minds, then how could they have had a world to live in, except that we thought it up for them afterward?"

"Oh," said Shorty weakly. His mind was going in buzzing circles. "You mean that the dinosaurs never really—"

"Here comes one," said the little man.

Shorty jumped. He looked around wildly and couldn't see anything that looked like a dinosaur.

"Down there," said the little man, "coming through those bushes. Watch this shot."

Shorty looked down as his companion raised the sling shot. A small lizard-like creature, but hopping erect as no lizard hops, was coming around one of the stunted bushes. It stood about a foot and a half high.

There was a sharp pinging sound as the rubber snapped, and a thud as the stone hit the creature between the eyes. It dropped, and the little man went over and picked it up.

"You can shoot the next one," he said.

Shorty gawked at the dead saurian. "A struthiomimus!" he said. "Golly. But what if a big one comes along? A brontosaurus, say, or a Tyrannosaurus Rex?"

"They're all gone. We killed them off. There's only the little ones left, but it's better than hunting rabbits, isn't it? Well, one's enough for me this time. I'm getting bored, but I'll wait for you to shoot one if you want to."

Shorty shook his head. "Afraid I couldn't aim straight enough with that sling shot. I'll skip it. Where's the time machine?"

"Right here. Take two steps ahead of you."

Shorty did, and the lights went out again.

"Just a minute," said the little man's voice, "I'll set the levers. And you want off where you got on?"

"Uh . . . it might be a good idea. I might find myself in a mess otherwise. Where are we now?"

"Back in 1958. That guy is still telling his class what *he* thinks happened to the dinosaurs. And that red-headed girl—Say, she really *is* a honey. Want to pull her hair again?"

"No," said Shorty. "But I want off in 1953. How's this going to get me there?"

"You got on here, from 1953, didn't you? It's the warp. I think this will put you off just right."

"You *think?*" Shorty was startled. "Listen, what if I get off the day before and sit down on my own lap in that classroom?"

The voice laughed. "You couldn't do that; you're not crazy. But I did, once. Well, get going. I want to get back to—"

"Thanks for the ride," said Shorty. "But—wait—I still got one question to ask. About those dinosaurs."

"Yes? Well, hurry; the warp might not hold."

"The big ones, the really big ones. How the devil did you kill *them* with sling shots? Or did you?"

The little man chuckled. "Of course, we did. We just used bigger sling shots, that's all. Good-by."

Shorty felt a push, and light blinded him again. He was standing in the aisle of the classroom.

"Mr. McCabe," said the sarcastic voice of Professor Dolohan, "class is not dismissed for five minutes yet. Will you be so kind as to resume your seat? And were you, may I ask, somnambulating?"

Shorty sat down hastily. He said, "I . . . uh— Sorry, professor."

He sat out the rest of the period in a daze. It had seemed too vivid for a dream, and his fountain pen was still gone. But, of course, he could have lost that elsewhere. Yet the whole thing had been so vivid that it was a full day before he could convince himself that he'd dreamed it, and a week before he could forget about it, for long at a time.

Only gradually did the memory of it fade. A year later, he still vaguely remembered that he'd had a particularly screwy dream. But not five years later; no dream is remembered that long.

He was an associate professor now, and had his own class in paleontology. "The saurians," he was telling them, "died out in the late Jurassic age. Becoming too large and unwieldy to supply themselves with food—"

As he talked, he was staring at the pretty red-headed graduate student in the back row. And wondering how he could get up the nerve to ask her for a date.

There was a bluebottle fly in the room; it had risen in a droning spiral from a point somewhere at the back of the room. It reminded Professor McCabe of something, and while he talked, he tried to remember what it was. And just then the girl in the back row jumped suddenly and yipped.

"Miss Willis," said Professor McCabe, "is something wrong?"

"I . . . I thought something pulled my hair, professor," she said. She blushed, and that made her more of a knockout than ever. "I . . . I guess I must have dozed off."

He looked at her—severely, because the eyes of the class were upon him. But this was just the chance he'd been waiting and hoping for. He said, "Miss Willis, will you please remain after class?"

Eric Frank Russell

"It ain't what you do; it's the way that you do it," as the popular song of a generation ago had it, is especially true of humor. Here's an only slightly new twist on one of the oldest of all gags, but you'll find the treatment a real treat. In the next line of the song, "That's what gets me down."

F. B.

Muten

PARKINSON FINISHED HIS PERUSAL OF THE letter, shoved it across the desk toward Yule. "There's another one for you." He lay back in his chair with a malicious smile.

Gloomily, Yule picked up the missive. He had seen that smirk before. Invariably it meant that he was about to chase a distant half-wit. A frown corrugated his forehead as he strove to decipher the letter's spidery scrawl.

Dear sirs:

I have read as how your looking for mutens and I beg to say as how I got a muten right here which same you may inspeck on application.

Yours truly
G. Timberlake (George Timberlake).

"All right," said Parkinson. "What's keeping you?"

"Nothing." Yule got up, ambling reluctantly to the door. "Only sometimes I wonder."

"You wonder what?"

"What I did in my previous life to deserve this."

Parkinson said: "You trod on my neck. Now I'm treading on yours."

Giving him a look, Yule went out. Blondie glanced up from her desk as he passed, her bright eyes curious.

"Off again, Stevie?"

"Yes, worse luck. Everytime somebody thinks a local imbecile might be a mutant off I go again, miles and miles and miles. Then back I come in company with said idiot,

miles and miles and miles. By the time I get here I'm half nuts myself."

"Too bad," she sympathized.

"Then they hand my charge over to the experts," Yule continued, bitterly, "who study him until they're cross-eyed. Finally, they decided he's just another daffy. Then they give him back to me and I nursemaid him all the way home, miles and miles and miles." He banged a hand on her desk and shouted, "And Parkinson thinks it's funny."

"I don't," she said. "You need a change."

"Yes, sure, I need a change. That's what I'm going for right now. A change. Another mutant." He pulled his hair forward, contorted his face, let his hands hang like paws. "Thank you, lady, and hurrah. Good-by."

He hurried out. Blondie stared at the wall, slowly shook her head from side to side.

Farmer George Timberlake had sunken eyes, hollow cheeks and huge yellow teeth. He posed suspiciously in his doorway, showed the teeth to his caller.

"My name's Yule, Steven Yule," informed that worthy. "I'm a field investigator from the Board of Social Survey. You wrote them saying that you have a mutant." Producing the letter, he showed it to the other.

"Yep." Timberlake's face cracked into a semblance of hospitality. He moved aside, made a gesture. "Come in." Closing the door behind his visitor, he yelled, "Marge, Marge, they bit!"

A plump woman bustled out of the kitchen as Yule seated himself on a hard chair. She eyed him warily.

"They bit," Timberlake repeated. "They sent this gent along." His chest protruded in triumph. "See?"

"What's he giving for it?" Marge asked.

"Ain't ast him yet." He turned to Yule. "What's it worth?"

"Hey?" Steve Yule put his hat in his lap, then on the table, then in his lap again. "Do you mean that you wish to *sell* this mutant?"

"Y'betcha," said Timberlake, emphatically. "That's why I writ in."

"Good grief!" Yule looked prayerfully at the ceiling. "My function is to bring likely specimens in for examination, and afterwards to see them safely home. The Board of Social Survey identifies and prepares comprehensive reports on all cases of genuine mutation. I am not aware that they have ever purchased a mutant or contemplated doing so."

"Does that mean you ain't open to buy?" Timberlake exposed his fangs again. They looked even bigger and yellower.

"I would not go so far as to assert that," Yule assured, hastily. "The question has never arisen until now."

"There's a heck of a note," growled the other to Marge. "They fill the papers with stuff about mutens, say they want 'em real bad, and then won't buy."

"I would have to consult the Board," observed Yule. "Possibly they might like a mutant of their very own." There was a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "A tame one. Nice to have around."

"Now you're talking." Timberlake pointed to a phone on his wall. "You tell 'em."

Swallowing hard, Yule transferred the hat from his lap to the table. He approached the phone as if expecting it to bite him.

When Parkinson came on he swallowed again, said: "This is Yule. They want to sell it."

"Sell it?" Parkinson was silent a moment, then, "What for?"

"Money."

"Sell *what?*" roared Parkinson.

"Their mutant."

Parkinson foamed a bit before he asked: "Are you mad?"

"Not yet." Yule gloomed at the wall. "But it won't be long."

The phone started to jump in his hand. He beckoned Timberlake, gave it to him. "You talk. He won't listen to me."

Waiting until the hullabaloo at the other end had subsided, the farmer rumbled stubbornly: "D'you want to buy my muten or not?" He wrestled with the earpiece, held it long enough for Yule to get it back. "Bellering something awful," he complained.

Yule hung the thing down the wall, letting it dangle at the end of its cord. It jerked and twitched as Parkinson's voice ricochetted all over the room.

". . . and furthermore it's illegal for any person or persons to dispose of their offspring for a remuneration, and the purchaser is equally guilty of an offense against the law. Finally, Yule, if that child-trafficking hayseed has filled you so full of overproof tiger's blood that—"

The uproar cut off as Yule racked the earpiece on its prong. Sitting down, he gazed moodily at the others.

"What's all that noisy gab mean?" demanded Timberlake.

"You're not allowed to sell your children. If you do, they'll toss your pants in the clink."

"Who's talking about selling kids?" Timberlake snapped. "You must be nuts."

"Almost," Yule confessed, miserably.

"I writ in offering a muten. You ast for mutens, didn't you? O.K.—what about this one I got?"

"Let's see it," Yule suggested.

"What's the use if you ain't going to make an offer?"

"Let the gent see it," put in Marge. "Maybe he knows somebody else who'd like to buy Endwhistle."

"Endwhistle?" Yule stared around as if seeking a ghost.

"He's the muten," Timberlake informed. "Come on. He's out back."

In single file they crossed the kitchen and the big yard at rear, Timberlake first, then Yule, then Marge. A turkey-cock gobbled at them from a low wall on the right. They entered a big stone barn in which were seven meditative cows and one pensive horse. Timberlake stopped, looked speculatively at the horse.

"What's the matter?" asked Yule. "Is he sick?"

"Yep."

Yule shrugged, had a glance around, said: "Where's this mutant?"

"Sick of the place," Timberlake went on, ignoring him in favor of the horse. "Sick of the very home where he was born, the ungrateful dollop of crowbait."

"I get sick of some places myself," Yule observed. "Where's the mutant?"

"Then," continued Timberlake, irefully, "he gets ideas into his head." He turned to Yule, his sunken eyes angry. "And what d'you think he does?"

"I don't know. What does he do?"

"He downs tools and goes on strike. He thinks he's old enough to see the world and too good for honest work. So he strikes."

"After all we done for him," said Marge.

"Just a lousy radical," said Timberlake.

The horse stood and brooded.

"Maybe he's temperamental," Yule suggested. "I'd be temperamental myself if I were a horse." He took another impatient look around the barn. "Where's the mutant?"

"There," declared Timberlake, pointing to the lousy radical. "Endwhistle."

Yule screamed, "What—*that?*"

"Yep. Endwhistle. He's a muten."

Sucking in breath, Yule sat on the rim of a stone trough and eyed Endwhistle's southern aspect. He didn't care for the view. Something about it held a hint of Parkinson's smirk.

"Do you seriously mean to tell me you've brought me more than seven hundred miles to look at a horse?"

"Why not? He's got something, ain't he?"

"Yes," Yule admitted. "I can see that."

"And what he's got is plenty big," Timberlake insisted.

"I can see that, too."

Timberlake followed the line of his fascinated gaze to Endwhistle's drooping tail. "I'll show you something," he promised. Lifting a horny hand, he landed a smack in close proximity of the tail. "C'mon, talk!"

Twisting his head around, Endwhistle curled leathery lips and said: "Foo!"

"There you are, mister." The farmer was openly gratified. "He can speechify. You heard him. He's a muten."

"G'wan, he snorted," Yule contradicted. "I can do that myself." He snorted to prove it.

Marge scowled at him and went to the animal's head. "We want money and you want out. This is your chance as well as ours. C'mon, say something."

"Foo to you, too," said Endwhistle, clearly and distinctly.

Yule fell backward into the trough. Fortunately, it was empty and dry. He lay there for a moment, his face purple, his legs dangling over the edge.

The horse stared around at him contemptuously and said: "Haw!"

Scrambling agitatedly out of the trough, Yule did a championship sprint across the yard. Timberlake and Marge gaped after him in dull surprise, then followed. He went through the kitchen in a flash, snatched down the phone and gasped: "Gimme long distance again."

The call didn't go through. Dancing with impatience, he glanced at his watch, remembered that the office was closed, put in a second call to Parkinson's private residence.

That one connected all right, and Parkinson came on with a surly, "Well?"

"This is Yule. Listen!"

"Why do I answer a phone if it isn't to listen?" Parkinson inquired, acidly.

"Listen!" Yule yelped. "About this muten, I mean mutant —it's genuine. It's really something. It's fifty karat and diamond-studded in every hole. It's the height of this and that. It's the elephant's bed-socks."

"Yule, are you drunk?"

"I'm drunk with success," he shouted back. "For the first time, I've struck oil. You won't believe it even when you see it."

"I don't doubt that," Parkinson assured. "I've had some of your mutations before."

"I tell you this one's genuine," he bawled.

"That's not for you to say. The experts will be the judges. If your case is not an obvious imbecile, bring him in and let the experts do the rest."

Yule did a jig and howled: "Why d'you think I've called you long distance? *How* am I going to bring him in?"

There was a lengthy silence at the other end, then Parkinson's voice oozed through in slow, measured tones. He spoke as one would to a very young child:

"In one of your pockets you have—or are supposed to have—a block of small forms. They've got *Board of Social Survey* printed on them in big letters. That's so you can recognize them, if you can read. You fill out one of these forms—if you're able to write—and hand it in at the railroad depot. They will provide you with a ticket which is chargeable to us. You use that ticket to bring the mutant here." His voice shot up to an enraged bellow. "You've done it fifty times before—why do I have to explain it *now?*"

"Because," began Yule. He hesitated. He had been about to say, "Because it's a horse." Some imp of perversity made him change his mind, and instead he said, "So it's your official order that I bring him in on one of these forms? In a Pullman?"

"Most certainly." Parkinson became suddenly suspicious, and added: "Is there any reason why you should not?"

"Only that he's got a tremendously big seat."

"That's nothing. So have African Bushmen. Nature has given them the peculiar ability to store fat in their buttocks, and anyone else who can do it isn't necessarily a mutation." Parkinson sniffed loudly. "A fat guy. Let the railroad authorities worry about him. One man, one ticket. They can't get away from it."

"All right." Yule made to prong the phone.

"And let me see you Friday," Parkinson growled hurriedly. "Not next week."

Timberlake raked his teeth with a chip like a tent stake and asked: "Well, think they'll buy?"

"It's likely," Yule hazarded. "D'you mind waiting here a moment? Don't leave the house until I get back." He went out, returned in two minutes, sat down and pondered. After a while, he said, "I got the idea maybe someone was pulling a cheap ventriloquial stunt, so I searched the barn."

"Huh?"

"There was nobody in the place—I made sure of that. Endwhistle invited me to go to hell. He added certain other items suggestive of long service in the marines." He studied Timberlake speculatively. "I can't understand why you've not sold him long before now. Any circus proprietor would swap all his moola and a steam calliope for him."

"I tried." The tent stake cracked, and Timberlake spat a hunk of it across the room. "I writ a dozen guys and tole

them as how I got a hoss what could burn their ears off. Only one answered back. He said as how he'd got a giraffe what could play a piano. I don't believe that. It's silly."

"Yes, yes, I guess it is." Yule nodded agreement. "How'd you come by him in the first place?"

"He was born here. I got a small bunch of army rejects from New Mexico. They was cheap."

"No wonder," Marge interjected, sourly. "They didn't last long. Died on us one by one, they did. Something wrong with their blood, the vet said."

"Probably been cropping radioactive pastures," Yule suggested, learnedly. "Go on."

"Endwhistle weren't anything amazing," continued Timberlake, "though he did make plenty of funny noises. He'd whine, yelp and mumble, like no respectable hoss has any right to do. I never took any notice until one day, six or seven weeks ago, when I was cussing him aplenty and all of a sudden he cussed back. He cussed something awful. He's said lots since then."

"But never anything neighborly," added Marge.

"Just a lousy radical," Timberlake repeated.

"He should be worth a good deal to the right people," pronounced Yule, carefully. "I know the right people. It's mighty lucky for you I came along. Reckon you'd better let me take him away."

Timberlake thought it over, then said: "Nobody's got more dough than Uncle Sam, so you can take him—but not unless you sign for him good and proper."

"I'll sign."

The farmer produced a piece of soiled paper. Yule read it.

"Received from G. Timberlake (George Timberlake): Endwhistle, a hoss what can speechify."

He signed it.

The railroad clerk rasped: "I don't care if the Supreme Court parades before me and certifies that he's entitled to a seat in a passenger coach. I say he travels as livestock, or not at all."

"Why?" Yule inquired.

"Why?" The clerk eyed him incredulously, then exploded, "Because he's an animal."

"That's a heck of a thing to say about someone," Yule reproved. He turned to Endwhistle. "Did you hear that?"

"Yeah." Endwhistle ground his teeth. "The louse."

The clerk's attitude changed instantaneously. Favoring Endwhistle with a look of approval, he spoke to Yule in fraternal tones.

"Pretty good, that. I can do a bit of it myself. Get a load of this." He pointed to a packing case in one corner of his office, screwed his mouth sidewise. A voice in the box called: "Let me out! Let me out!"

"Holy hoofbeats!" exclaimed Endwhistle, his ears flapping. "He's trapped a filly!"

Clumsily leaping the counter, he kicked the case to pieces. Six sewing machines fell out. The clerk covered his eyes with his hands as Endwhistle stomped furiously around and invented several new words.

"Serves you right," said Yule, severely, "for not tending to your business. Now does he get his ticket, or doesn't he?"

"He doesn't." Uncovering his eyes, the clerk watched Endwhistle warily. "And it's going to take me an hour to nail up that case." Admiration overcame indignation, and he ended with: "But I sure give in to you on this voice-tossing play. You're better than Bergen."

"I tell you I didn't do it. He did it himself. He can talk, you nitwit."

"Ha-ha," said the clerk, respectfully.

"Look." Yule protruded his lips Ubangi-fashion. "Get hold of these." Obediently, the clerk got hold.

Yule waved at Endwhistle. Surveying him with deep interest, Endwhistle waved his tail. A cop entered the office, flinched at the sight of a horse on the wrong side of the counter, gaped at the clerk still clinging to Yule's lips. He took off his cap, wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, had another look.

Pulling the other's hand away from his lips, Yule said: "Darn it, I wanted to tell him to talk."

"Fancy that," the cop chipped in. "How could you with a guy swinging on your gob?"

"You keep outta this," warned Endwhistle.

The cop stared vaguely around, employed the handkerchief again, and demanded: "Who's being funny?"

"This guy," said the clerk, generously. "He's good."

Yule yelled: "It isn't *me*." He pointed a dramatic finger at Endwhistle. "It's *him*."

"It is he," corrected the clerk.

"Nuts!" growled the cop.

Yule played Ubangi again. The clerk gripped his lips. Yule made frantic signals at Endwhistle.

Endwhistle obliged with a disgusted, "Aw, quit the manplay."

"Hey-hey," commented the cop, transferring his attention from Yule to the clerk. "Jake's at it again."

Letting go the lips, and getting as far from Endwhistle as possible, the clerk protested: "I didn't do it, Eddie. Honest to Pete, I didn't."

"Of course you didn't, Jake." The cop smiled nastily, and came forward. "You button this guy's trap while I fasten *your* chops—*then* we'll know who's doing it."

"Meaning it'll be you," suggested Yule, maliciously.

"Me?" The cop was indignant. "I'm no vaudeville artist."

"We've only your word for that," pursued Yule, determined to fight fire with fire.

"What about giving him a handhold on your own pan, Eddie?" said the clerk, with a flash of genius.

"O.K." The cop protruded his lips. They stuck out like pink tires.

All three took a firm grip on each other's kissers and waited for Endwhistle to give forth.

The mayor, the fire chief and two henchmen chose this moment to walk in upon the intriguing scene. They stopped in midstep, simultaneously, like men who'd run into an invisible wall.

Taking off his hat, the mayor fanned his fat chops with it, put it back on his head and breathed, "Holy mackerel!"

Releasing the clerk's pouter as if it were red-hot, the cop started beating urgently at Yule's hand stubbornly fastened on his own masticator. He made an angry *mmm-m-m* sound resembling that of an oversized and irritated bee. Yule hung grimly on, stretching the tires somewhat in the process. The cop showed signs of becoming savage.

"Smell their breaths, Hank," suggested the mayor to the fire chief.

With a frantic effort the cop pulled free of Yule's grip, spluttered, rubbed his lips with the back of a hairy hand. He pointed the hand accusingly at Yule.

"I'm gonna pinch that mug," he yelled.

Ungagging himself from the clerk, Yule inquired, "On what charge?"

"Horse-stealing," suggested Endwhistle, usefully.

"See? Hear that?" The cop was triumphant. "He's tossing his voice into that bangtail."

"So what?" demanded the fire chief, admiring Yule. "That's no crime."

"It was Jake, anyway," offered Yule, suddenly changing tactics.

The clerk backed away fast, waving protesting hands. "So help me, it wasn't. I didn't open—"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said the mayor, viewing Jake

with some disfavor. "You put on a good turn at the last town concert. Maybe success has gone to your head, eh? You think you're too good for the job you've got, eh?"

"That's telling him, Fatso," put in Endwhistle with unnecessary heartiness.

A faint tinge of purple bloomed on the mayor's plump features. Switching his glare from Jake to Yule, he growled, "That wasn't Jake. He just wouldn't dare—would you, Jake?"

"Not on your life," agreed Jake, fervently.

"So you're the smart-Aleck, eh?" The mayor moved forward until his paunch was almost in contact with his listener. "What's the big idea?" He glowered at Yule.

"Look," said Yule, "all I want is a coach reservation for that bronc. I came here to get it for him—and the trouble started."

"I should think so, too," said the mayor.

"He's got government authority," Yule shouted.

"And how!" addded Endwhistle, smacking his lips.

The mayor's scowl grew deeper. "You can sling your voice half-way from here to Mex and it still wouldn't impress me. Let's see that authority."

Yule showed it to him.

"Who issued this?"

"Parkinson of Social Survey."

"O.K.," said the mayor, ominously. "We'll see." Leaning to one side, he got the phone in his fat hands, put through a call, adding, "Reverse the charge." After a while, he asked, "That Parkinson?"

Parkinson admitted it surlily.

"This is William B. Lucas, mayor of Reedsville."

"How do I know that?" asked Parkinson.

"Because I'm telling you," said the mayor, his voice rising.

"Don't raise your tones to me," Parkinson shot back. "I'm not deaf."

"Merely dumb," commented Endwhistle.

Hearing it, Parkinson howled: "Who's the smartie?"

With a do-or-die look in his eyes, the mayor desperately coddled the phone and howled back: "Did you or did you not authorize a Pullman reservation from here to New York—for a horse?"

"For a horse?" Parkinson's voice faded as he turned and spoke to someone else at the other end. "Some crackpot asking about a reservation for a horse. We're paying for the call. I've half a mind to trace it and—"

Slamming the phone down, the mayor turned slowly. He spoke with suppressed emotion. "Eddie, take this hobo and

his nag to the town limits." His burning gaze moved to the henchmen. "You two go with Eddie." The gaze transferred to Yule, "By all the saints in the calendar, if I set eyes on you again I'll pin you down with fourteen charges."

"Tut!" reproved Endwhistle.

"Get out!" bellowed the mayor, showing signs of mind at the end of its tether.

It was three dreary days before they hit another town of any size. Endwhistle plodded lugubriously into the area of bright lights, Yule sitting sore-seated on his back. They stopped as traffic lights turned red. On their left stood a bar, warm, brightly illuminated, inviting. Yule eyed it longingly, eyed it again, dismounted and made the sidewalk just as the lights turned green.

"To blazes with Parky, the Social Survey and the world in general. I'm going to have a drink before I collapse."

"A drink," approved Endwhistle, following. "I could soak up a river."

They went through the swing doors. A huge bodied, pug-faced bartender was leaning over the bar talking to the solitary customer. The latter, a white-haired, racily-dressed individual, sported a big black cravat ornamented with a whip-and-stirrup gold pin. Casually, the barkeep noted Yule's entrance out of one corner of his eye. He straightened abruptly as Endwhistle ambled through.

"That your hoss, mister?"

"No." Yule seated himself at the bar, moistened dry lips in anticipation. "I'm merely in charge of him. He's Uncle Sam's. If you don't like him, take the matter up with Unc."

"Out he goes," said the barkeep, flatly.

The customer with the pin turned a florid face on Endwhistle, got him into focus, registered mild pleasure and said to the bartender, "That's ungenerous of you, Pat. Where's your Irish hospitality?"

"No hosses allowed," asserted Pat.

"Who says so?" asked Yule.

"*I* say so," said Pat, thrusting his face close to Yule's.

"Who are you?" inquired Endwhistle.

Pat dropped his wiping cloth, picked it up dreamily.

"There's nothing in the city ordinances against equine characters in bars," said the customer with the pin. "Especially conversational ones." He bowed toward Endwhistle with inebriated lack of grace. "I, too, have horses that nearly talk; but none so vocal as you. My name is Grindlesby. Would you care to have a beer with me?"

"What's beer?" demanded Endwhistle suspiciously. He sat down on the floor, his head high above the bar.

Yule told him what beer was.

"I'll try it," Endwhistle decided. "Can't be any worse than Timberlake's muddy water."

"Bring him a bucketful," ordered Grindlesby. He watched as Pat resignedly got out a stub of pencil and a piece of paper, helpfully added, "Two gallons to the bucket, eight pints to the gallon—three bucks twenty." He slipped it across.

Ringing it up, Pat brought a bucket, filled it, heaved it into position. Endwhistle shoved his muzzle into it, investigated it, sucked noisily.

"Nice?" inquired the donor.

Pulling out a sud-covered nose, Endwhistle said: "Wunnerful! This is mighty chestnut of you."

Grindlesby was gratified. "Like another?"

"One's plenty for him," Yule put in quickly. He changed his aim to Pat. "Now how about bringing me—"

"Is this any business of yours?" demanded Grindlesby, bridling. "If he wants another, I buy him another, see?" He teetered on his seat as he extracted his wad. "Fill the bucket, Pat."

Frowning heavily, Pat pumped at the bucket until it foamed. Yule sat and held his head between his hands while Endwhistle made loud slobbering sounds. Yule had apprehensions about the shape of things to come. He shuddered as Endwhistle suddenly belched with gusto that showered suds over Pat.

Noting Yule's attitude, Endwhistle demanded, "What's eating you?"

"Shut up!" Yule snarled.

Endwhistle appealed to Grindlesby. "There's gratitude for you. I lug him on my aching back for three solid days—and now he's jealous because I've had more beer than him."

"Dishgraceful." Grindlesby bleared at Yule reprovingly. "Dishgraceful." Extracting his wallet, he peeled four off the wad, pushed them at Pat. "Fill the bucket."

"Don't," ordered Yule.

"Fill the bucket," rasped Grindlesby.

"Now look here—" began Pat, glaring from one to the other.

"Fill it!" Endwhistle snorted. He half arose, planting his hoofs on the bar, his eyes rolling.

Pat pumped furiously.

Squatting back, Endwhistle sucked with eager noises. "And Timberlake always gave me water. I worked for him until I dropped—and he gave me water."

Yule said nothing.

"Just water," complained Endwhistle, glooming around. He burped, meditated, and finished: "The bum."

"Definitely a poor sport, sir," agreed Grindlesby. "I wouldn't treat a dog like that."

Endwhistle had a long, deep suck at the bucket, then thought awhile. The last words came to him with delayed action. He perked up, stared around belligerently, and asked: "Who's calling me a dog?"

"He did," informed Yule maliciously. He pointed at Pat.

Hoofs clattering in the confined space, Endwhistle heaved himself up. "Just for that—"

"Dishgraceful," put in Grindlesby, swigging half a glass and mopping his mouth with a large polka-dot handkerchief.

Ducking down and moving swiftly to one side, Pat protested, "He's a liar." His small, deep-set eyes held the hunted look of a man having nightmares wide awake.

"Did *you* call me a dog?" demanded Endwhistle of Yule. He sneezed, blowing suds off his mustache.

"Certainly not. I wouldn't be so vulgar."

"Maybe I'm not hearing right." He mooned at the bucket. His tail gave a couple of spasmodic jerks. "This stuff sure does make me feel funny."

Yule sighed. "You're drunk. Just a four-legged sot. What'll Parkinson say?"

"Is thish Parkinshon his owner?" inquired Grindlesby, with skidding tongue. "If so, begad, I reckon I could do a deal with him. I've a proposition that—"

"Nobody owns me," interjected Endwhistle, full of the dignity of beer. "Nobody, see?" He flapped his ears at Pat.

Pat backed off and growled: "That's what you think. You got it coming to you." He favored Yule with an ugly look. "Better get this guzzler outta here before my patience goes west."

Finishing his drink, Grindlesby slid off his stool, teetered, then hammered the bar with a skinny fist. "He who inshults my friends inshults me."

"Thanks," approved Endwhistle, gratified.

"Nuts!" said Yule.

Pat went determinedly to the farther end. "You're all plain daffy—and I'm gonna do something about it." He helped himself to the telephone. "Gimme police," He hung on a moment, the others watching with aloof interest. His heavy eyebrows began to work up and down as he spoke into the instrument with a note of appeal. "Look, sarge, this is Pat Hogan. I got trouble. I got two drunks and a talking horse

in my bar and—" He paused, said, "Eh?" then beckoned to Endwhistle. "He wants to speak to you."

"Me?" Endwhistle registered intense surprise. Getting off his rear, he went to the phone, held his head near the earpiece.

A voice asked: "Are you a horse?"

"Y'betcha!" Endwhistle assured.

"Watcha been drinking?"

"Beer," said Endwhistle with undisguised pleasure.

The voice spoke in a dimly heard aside to someone else at the other end. "Pat's spiking it again. A guy there thinks he's a horse."

"So I am," insisted Endwhistle.

"Yes, yes, we know," soothed the voice in louder tone, then lowered again as it continued its remarks. "The joint'll be a zoo before midnight, if I know Hogan. Better get the boys to look in." Louder again. "Tell Pat we're coming round."

"They're coming round," Endwhistle informed the audience.

Yule promptly walked to the door. "You know what that means? They'll take you straight back to Timberlake. They'll tell him to fence you in. No more freedom. No more beer. No more anything." He bowed his head in grief. "Such a loss."

Eyes rolling, Endwhistle reared up, came down with a clatter that shook a bottle off a shelf. He snapped at Pat: "Why, you dirty two-timer."

"But there's still hope if you get out fast," suggested Yule from the door. "Ten seconds will make you too late." He jumped aside as Endwhistle went through the doors with a distinct zip.

The mutant didn't stop. With ears and tail streaming in the wind he went up the street all set for the mile record. Picking up his feet, Yule began a hot but hopeless chase.

Behind them, Grindlesby emerged uncertainly from the bar, focused his eyes with an effort, took in the escapees, signaled a taxi.

"Get ahead of the mushtang. Can't afford to lose him—he's the shtar of my shtud." He flopped back in his seat as the taxi jerked forward. "Fifty bucks if you make it." Idly, his hand fumbled with his whip-and-stirrup pin.

Ominously, Parkinson did not utter a word until Yule had finished. With his cold optics fixed firmly and penetratingly on the other, as unblinking as a snake's, he sat solidly behind his desk and timed the speech with taps of a silver pencil.

"Then," Yule continued, "this thieving punk Grindlesby sobers up enough to use what's left of his wits. He figures that a horse that can talk to people can also talk to other horses,

and that there's a mint of money in it for someone—especially if the ability to gab breeds true. So he gets Endwhistle an hour ahead of me, bribes him into playing it his way and wires Timberlake an offer. Timberlake sells him right out of my hands." He made a defeated gesture. "After that, it needs six telephone calls and four cops to get them this far—with Grindlesby threatening a lawsuit all the way."

"And how," inquired Parkinson, with pretended curiosity, "does one bribe a horse?"

"I told you." Yule's voice went up, began to get squeaky. "Grindlesby runs a stud. He showed Endwhistle photographs of it, invited him in on the ground floor. Endwhistle yelps, 'Wow-hoo!' and falls for the bait. If you were a horse, what would *you do?*"

Parkinson was taken aback. "Huh?"

"Snappy pics of forty fillies," said Yule, bitterly.

"An elegant speech," commented Parkinson distastefully. His gaze found the calendar. "A fortnight. You've had a fortnight's vacation, got stinko every day as far as I can make out. You've billed me long-distance calls and, finally, you come back with this cock-and-bull story."

"So help me—"

"Not satisfied with which, you return accompanied by a dopey looking nag and an aged tosspot who wants to sue everyone in sight."

"Let him sue. Endwhistle's worth a million."

"He looks it," said Parkinson sarcastically. He lifted the phone on his desk and asked, "Well? Any luck?" The phone yapped back at him. "I thought as much," he said, and cradled it. His stare returned to Yule. "Not a word. Not a syllable. Not even one honest oath. We were nuts to expect it." He resumed his pencil-tapping. "Thanks to you we've had to release him to this Grindlesby with our abject apologies." He spoke a little louder. "I don't like making apologies." He paused, then bellowed, "I don't like making abject ones."

Yule started to dance to and fro. "I tell you he's been tipped to clam up. He won't talk in case his big fat trap keeps him out of the harem."

Parkinson retorted: "I'm going to give you a last chance —why, I don't know. I must be weak."

"Mother of Mike, there's the chance of a lifetime slipping right out of your—"

"Shut up!" Parkinson opened a drawer, found a letter. It was pale pink, had deckled edges, smelled faintly of rose water. "If you make a mess of *this* one, you'll soon be peddling gimmicks on the curb." The ire drifted out of his face as the old, familiar smirk came into it. "This is from

a maiden lady in Topeka. She thinks the folk next door are harboring a mutant. Get out there and see—"

Yule snatched it savagely out of his hands, went to the window and brooded. After a while, Grindlesby passed with Endwhistle following.

Opening the window, Yule said to Endwhistle, "Just a dumb animal!" He added a rude noise.

Stopping, Endwhistle curled back his lips and said with maddening distinctness, "Wow-hoo!" Then he winked and plodded on.

Yule left the window, found a chair, sat down and watched with extreme pleasure as Parkinson reacted. Parkinson stood up, beat his head against the wall, and went out fast.

In the outer office, Blondie's voice sounded sympathetically: "Off again, Stevie?" then, "Oh, it's *you,* Mr. Parkinson."

Moving over to Parkinson's chair, Yule tried it for size.

Mack Reynolds

When the first extra-terrestrials ever to land a space ship on Earth arrive there is no particular reason to believe they will land on the White House lawn. They might land anywhere—maybe in the Kentucky hills and in the middle of a mountain feud. In that case anything might happen, and damn well does in this delightfully cockeyed yarn by my respected collaborator.

—F. B.

The Martians and the Coys

MAW COY CLIMBED THE FENCE DOWN AT THE of the south pasture and started up the side of the creek, carrying her bundle over her shoulder and puffing slightly at her exertion.

She forded the creek there at the place where Hank's old coon dog Jigger was killed by the boar three years ago come next hunting season. Jumping from rock to rock across the creek made her puff even harder; Maw Coy wasn't as young as she once was.

On the other side she rested a minute to light up her pipe and to look carefully about before heading up the draw. She didn't really expect to see any Martins around here, but you never knew. Besides, there might've been a revenue agent. They were getting mighty thick and mighty uppity these days. You'd think the government'd have more to do than bother honest folks trying to make an honest living.

The pipe lit, Maw swung the bundle back over her shoulder and started up the draw. Paw and the boys, she reckoned, were probably hungry as a passel of hound dogs by now. She'd have to hurry.

When she entered the far side of the clearing, she couldn't see any signs of them so she yelled, "You Paw! You Hank and Zeke!" Maw Coy liked to give the men folks warning before she came up on the still. Hank, in particular, was mighty quick on the trigger sometimes.

But there wasn't any answer. She trudged across the clearing to where the still was hidden in a cluster of pines. Nobody was there but Lem.

She let the bundle down and glowered at him. "Lem, you no-account, why didn't you answer me when I hollered?"

He grinned at her vacuously, not bothering to get up from where he sat whittling, his back to an old oak. "Huh?" he said. A thin trickle of brown ran down from the side of his mouth and through the stubble on his chin.

"I said, how come you didn't answer when I hollered?"

He said. "You called Paw and Hank and Zeke, you didn't holler for me. What you got there, Maw, huh?" His watery eyes were fixed on the bundle.

Maw Coy sighed deeply and sat down on a tree stump. "Now what you think I got there, Lem? I been a bringing your vittles to you every day since Paw and you boys started up this new still. Where's Paw and Zeke and Hank?"

Lem scratched himself with the stick he'd been whittling on. "They went off scoutin' around for the revenooers or maybe the Martins." He let his mouth fall open and peered wistfully into the woods. He added, "I wish I could shoot me a Martin, Maw. I wish I could. I sure wish I could shoot me a Martin."

The idea excited him. He brought his hulking body to its feet and went over to pick up an ancient shotgun from where it leaned against a mash barrel.

Maw Coy was taking corn pone, some cold fried salt pork, and a quart of black-strap molasses from her bundle and arranging it on the top of an empty keg. "You mind yourself with that gun now, Lem. Mind how you shot up your foot that time."

Lem didn't hear her; he was stroking the stock of the shotgun absently. "I could do it easy," he muttered. "I could shoot me a Martin easy. I sure could, Maw. I'd show Hank and Zeke, I would."

"You forget about the Martins, son," Maw Coy said softly. "Yore my simple son—there's at least one in every family, mostly more—and it ain't fittin' that you get into fights. You got a strong back, strongest in the hills, but yore too simple, Lem."

"I ain't as simple as Jim Martin, Maw," Lem protested.

"Son, they don't come no more simple than you," his mother told him gently. "And mind that gun. You know how you bent the barrel of Zeke's Winchester back double that time, absent-minded like."

He stroked the gun stock, patted it, half in anger, half in

protest. His lower lip hung down in a pout. "You stop talkin' thataway, Maw," he growled, "or I'll larrup you one."

Maw Coy didn't answer. She reckoned she'd better set off into the woods and see if she could locate the rest of the men folks, so they could eat.

Lem said under his breath, "I could shoot me a Martin real easy, I could."

To the Most High, the Glorious, the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient, the Lord of the Seven, the Leader of the Chosen, Neo Geek XXXVIII:

In regard to: *Testing of special weapons designed to eliminate present population of the third planet with the eventual view of colonizing.*
From: *Seegeel Wan, Commander of Spacecruiser* 12*B*44.

Your Omnipotence:

Upon the receipt of your orders, we proceeded to the planet in question (known to its inhabitants as Earth, or Terra) first touching at its satellite (Luna) in order to pick up the observation group which has been studying the potential foe for several decals.

Commander of the observation group, Baren Darl, has enjoyed the reputation of being our most outstanding authority on Earthlings. It has been principally through his recommendations that the secret, supplementary weapons, worked upon for the past decal, were devised. Baren Darl has successfully deciphered the principal language of Earth and through listening to their radio emanations has compiled a formidable work on his findings. But of his abilities, more later.

It mght be added here that Baren Darl and all his group were more than ready to proceed to Earth and begin the slaughter of its inhabitants. It seems that these investigators have for decals listened most carefully to every radio emanation possible to pick up. This has evidently led them to the edge of complete frenzy—especially those who have been assigned the morning programs, sometimes known as "soap operas" by the Earthlings.

Baren Darl inspected the newly created weapons with considerable care and proclaimed them excellent for our purposes. In particular he was impressed with the I.Q. Depressor; the deadly poison, *nark;* and the lepbonic plague carrying fleas. He was convinced that these secret weapons would give our forces that advantage we seek before launching our all-out attack upon Earth.

Acting on Darl's suggestions, we avoided the more heavily populated areas of Earth and landed our spacecruiser in a mountainous area of the planet known as Kentucky, a subdivision of the United States of America, one of the more advanced Earth nations.

Our plans did not work out as anticipated.

Keeping well in mind the need for secrecy, we made every attempt to land the spacecruiser without detection. We settled in a small valley near a stream and immediately sent out scouts to determine if there was any sign that our craft had been sighted in descent.

Evidently, the population of the vicinity was so small that our plans were successful. Our patrols reported only one small group of Earthlings in the immediate area.

Deciding to test the new weapons on this gathering, we disembarked a force of a dozen warriors, all disguised as Earthlings and with myself as commander and Baren Darl as technical advisor.

"We must keep our senses alert for Sam Spade, Superman and the Lone Ranger," Baren Darl said nervously, peering around among the strange exotic trees and other vegetation that grows on Earth.

I was somewhat surprised at his tone and obvious unease. "Who?" I asked. "What?"

"Three Terran warriors of amazing ability and viciousness," he told me. "I have been gathering reports of their activities from the radio for some time. They seem to have clairvoyant minds; one or the other of them almost invariably appears on the scene of violence."

I said impatiently, "Without doubt, our weapons would mean the end of these warriors."

I did not share his belief that any Earthling warriors might be our equals or superiors, but to remain on the cautious side, I immediately ordered that the Elect-no be switched on. This weapon, one of the several designed for the Earth campaign, as your Omnipotence is undoubtedly aware, is so constructed as to prevent the use of any internal combustion engine within a dozen miles of the Elect-no. In this case, no aircraft, no landcraft, utilizing internal combustion, could enter our zone.

Baren Darl seemed somewhat relieved at this precaution, but his attitude to a certain extent began to affect the rest of us. To prepare for any eventuality, I had the Fission-Suppressor activated. This, of course, automatically made it impossible for nuclear fission to take place within a hundred miles of our ship.

That measure pleased Baren Darl exceedingly in view of the fact that the Earth nations seemed to be spending practically

all of their military appropriations on their so-called A-Bombs and H-Bombs. According to the radio emanations our Luna base had picked up, the Earthlings were interested in little else in a military way, except possibly bacteriological weapons, and, of course, we were prepared to deal them a strong blow along that line with our lepbonic plague spreading fleas.

At any rate, knowing that we had suppressed the use of their major weapon, the fission bomb, and had prevented transportation from entering the vicinity, we proceeded toward the clearing where the Earthlings had gathered, determined to test the I.Q. Depressor, *nark*, and the lepbonic plague fleas, for it was upon the success of these weapons that our Earth campaign depended.

We proceeded with care toward the clearing on the edge of which our scouts had detected the Earthlings, and carefully approached from behind the one specimen we saw there. Evidently the others had gone off.

Baren Darl, the only member of our little group who was familiar with the language, acted as spokesman, and we concealed for the moment at least the purpose of our "visit." The following conversation was recorded by Baren Darl himself and later translated as literally as possible into our language.

Earthling: "Huh? What's that?"

Baren Darl: "Have no fear."

Earthling: "Revenooers! Paw! Hank!"

(The meaning of the word *revenooers* was completely unknown to Baren Darl but from the Earthling's tone of voice it is to be assumed that the term is a derogatory one.)

Baren Darl: "We are not revenooers. We are friends."

Earthling: "Huh?"

Baren Darl: "We are not revenooers. We are friends."

Earthling (suspiciously): "Well, you can't have no free corn, if that's what you're looking for. Can't buy none neither. Paw won't sell no raw corn. Says corn ain't fitten to drink unless it's been aged a week."

(This conversation seemed to puzzle Baren Darl and I was beginning to suspect already that his knowledge of the Earthlings was somewhat less than he led me to believe.)

Baren Darl: "Where are the others?"

Earthling: "Huh?"

(This continual inability on the Earthling's part to understand the question put to him by Baren Darl also caused me to wonder whether or not the decals spent on Luna in observing Earth were quite as fruitful as they might have been.)

Baren Darl: "Where are the others?"

Earthling: "Oh, you mean Maw and Paw and Hank and Zeke. They're off looking for Martins."

(Your Omnipotence is of course aware that in the language of the Earthlings our glorious planet is known as *Mars,* and we as *Martians,* or evidently, as this Earthling pronounced it, *Martins.*)

This information was, as you can well imagine, startling, since we had supposed that our landing had been made in the most complete secrecy. What means they had utilized to discover us is unknown.

Baren Darl: "Ahhhhh. And, er . . . what made them suspect there were Martians in the vicinity?"

Earthling: "Huh?"

Baren Darl: "What made Maw and Paw and Hank and Zeke think there were Martians around?"

Earthling: "Oh."

Baren Darl: "What made them think there were Martians about?"

Earthling: "Paw says he can smell him a Martin from most twenty miles away. Paw's got a regular feelin' for Martins, like. Paw'd rather shoot him a Martin than eat fried chicken. I wish I could shoot me a Martin, I wish. Yup, I sure wish I could shoot me a Martin. I wish—"

(This sixth sense of some of the Earthlings had been unsuspected by Baren Darl in spite of his decals of investigation. Evidently, the Earthlings have an unusual ability to detect the presence of alien life forms. Also surprising was the fact that the Earthlings were evidently aware of our plans to conquer their planet and were already worked up to a pitch of patriotism which made them extremely anxious to destroy us.)

Baren Darl turned to me and explained that there were four more of the Earthlings in the woods searching for us and that undoubtedly they would soon return. He suggested that we immediately try some of our weapons upon this specimen.

The plan seemed feasible enough so I ordered one of the warriors to find a suitable liquid in which to place a portion of the poison *nark.*

Ultimate plans, as you are aware, had been to drop, by spacecraft, small containers of *nark* in the reservoirs, rivers and lakes of the Earthlings. One drop was designated to be, as your Omnipotence knows, sufficient to poison a reservoir capable of supplying the water needs of a hundred thousand Earthlings.

Although water was not available, the warrior was soon able to find what was obviously a container for some type of beverage. It was nearly full of a colorless fluid.

The following conversation then took place between Baren Darl and the Earthling:

Baren Darl: "What is this?"

Earthling: "Huh? Oh, that's *white mule*. Yup, sure is."

Baren Darl (puzzled): "I thought a mule was a four legged animal of burden particularly noted for kicking."

Earthling (vaguely): "Paw's white mule's got lots of kick in it. Yup."

Upon finding it was a beverage, as we had suspected, a small quantity of *nark* was quickly inserted.

Baren Darl: "Try a drink?"

Earthling: "What say?"

Baren Darl: "Have a drink?"

Earthling: "Uhhhhh. Maybe I will, but don't tell Paw. Paw says I'm simple enough without no white mule."

(Here he took a long draught without seeming effect, although we were expecting him to fall dead at our feet. We stood there staring at him, unbelievingly.)

Earthling: "That tasted mighty good. Got more of a kick than usual. Yup, sure did. Tasted like maybe somebody put in a wallop of turpentine."

He seemed perfectly at ease. I turned to Baren Darl and snapped, "The type of poison you recommended seems less than effective."

Baren Darl was obviously shocked. "It is inconceivable," he said. "Possibly the fluid in which we dissolved the *nark* acted as an antidote."

I turned my back on him angrily. "I begin to wonder about the effect of your other weapons!"

He waved to one of the warriors who had been burdened with the I.Q. Depressor. "We'll try this immediately," he said, anxiety in his tone.

While the machine was being readied, Baren Darl explained its workings to me in some detail. Meanwhile, the Earthling continued to sip at the jug which supposedly contained sufficient poison to eliminate an average large Terran city.

"As you know," Baren Darl told me, "the mind, whether of Earthling or Martian type, is capable of being either stimulated or depressed. For hundreds of decals our race has possessed chemicals capable of such depression or stimulation. However, to my knowledge, this device is the only one yet developed which can suppress the intelligence quotient of anyone within an area of many square miles.

"The plan for utilizing it is a simple but effective one. When we confront a body of Earthling soldiery, our men need only to turn on the I.Q. Depressor to turn the enemy into brainless idiots. Their defeat would then obviously be quite simple."

"Very well," I told him stiffly, "let us proceed to try it on this Earthling."

The device seemed quite elementary in construction. Baren Darl activated it by the simple flicking of a switch. We ourselves, of course, were immune to its workings since it was tuned only to the Earth type brain.

"It is now in operation?" I asked Baren Darl.

"Definitely. Watch the Earthling."

"I am watching."

The supposed top authority on Earth and Earthlings approached the specimen and eyed him carefully. The following conversation ensued:

Baren Darl: "How do you feel?"

Earthling: "Huh?"

(Baren Darl seemed pleased at this response, and, indeed, it would seem that the subject was on the verge of idiocy.)

Baren Darl: "How do you feel?"

Earthling: "I guess I feel fine. Yup, yup. Feel fine. —How'd you feel, stranger?"

Baren Darl (scowling): "Does your head feel somewhat different? Does your mind seem more sluggish?"

Earthling: "Huh?"

Baren Darl: "Does your thinking seem weaker?"

Earthling: "Nope. Can't say it does, stranger. Fact is, it'd be purdy hard to make my thinking much weaker. Yup, sure would."

Baren Darl stared at him for a long period, unbelievingly. Obviously, the I.Q. Depressor had been worthless as far as undermining the Earthling's intelligence is concerned.

Finally this alleged authority on Earthlings and upon Earth affairs flashed a look of despair at me, and at the others of us who stood around him.

"The fleas," he blurted finally, "the lepbonic plague fleas. This weapon alone might well destroy the whole population of Earth. Bring the fleas."

I said coldly, "We shall see, Baren Darl." Then to one of the warriors, "Bring the fleas that carry this so *deadly*—so Baren Darl tells us—lepbonic plague."

The Earthling was ignoring us now and had gone back to taking an occasional drink from his jug. Our warrior approached carefully from behind him and dropped a half dozen of the supposedly deadly insects upon the Earthling.

We then stood back and watched cautiously. According to Baren Darl, the fast spreading disease should take effect almost immediately.

The Earthling sat there, the I.Q. Depressor still tuned on but obviously unable to lower his intelligence an iota. He continued to sip from the jug of white mule, which had enough *nark* in it to kill thousands. Occasionally, he scratched himself.

"I guess I'll take me a nap," he said thickly, his words slurred. He scratched himself once again, yawned deeply, and slumped against the tree, obviously in sleep.

Baren Darl looked at me triumphantly. "The reaction is somewhat different than we'd expected, but obviously the fleas have given him lepbonic plague. This weapon at least is as successful as we had—"

I peered down at the Earthling suspiciously. His clothes were disarrayed and torn. I pointed at a speck on his uncouthly hairy chest.

"And what is that?" I snapped at Baren Darl.

He bent down to see what I indicated.

"It seems to be one of the fleas," he told me.

"Then what is it doing on its back with its feet up in the air?"

"It seems indisposed."

"It seems *dead*, you numbskull!" I roared at him. "After biting this Earthling your fleas have died!"

In a high rage, I strode up and down the clearing trying to coordinate my thoughts to the point where I could make an intelligent decision on this situation. Obviously, a crisis was at hand. Using these weapons devised by our scientists, after detailed instructions on their construction by Baren Darl and his group of efficient "experts," would obviously be suicidal. They were completely worthless.

I came to a snap conclusion. Our plan must be to reveal ourselves to the Earthlings as Martians and pretend to come bearing them only good will and desire for peace and commerce. A few months on their planet, closely—but unbeknown to them—studying their life form, should give us ample opportunity to plan more effective weapons against them.

This then was my decision.

I snapped to Baren Darl. "Arouse the Earthman; tell him that we are Martians and that we seek peace with the inhabitants of Earth."

There was some difficulty in the awakening, but finally Baren Darl succeeded. The Earthling shook his head groggily and scowled at my interpreter. The following conversation ensued:

Baren Darl: "Awaken. We have a message of great importance for you."

Earthling: "Huh?"

Baren Darl: "We have a message for you."

Earthling (Rolling over on his other side): "Oh."

Baren Darl said impressively: "In the name of the Most High, the Glorious, the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient, the Lord of the Seven, the Leader of the Cho-

sen, Neo Geek XXXVIII; we bring you greetings from the Martians."

Earthling: "Huh?"

Baren Darl: "We Martians offer you the friendship and the good will of a people that—"

Earthling: "Martins! Are yu'uns Martins?"

Baren Darl: "That is correct. We Martians come with the greetings and—"

At this point, your Omnipotence, my account must of necessity be somewhat vague, for even after we had made good our escape back to the spacecruiser, bearing our more serious casualties with us, we were unable to agree among ourselves on just what had happened.

Baren Darl, who is now under arrest and in the darkest recess of the Spacecruiser 12B44 laden down with chains, is of the opinion that the Earthling was none other than either Superman or the Lone Ranger in disguise. He contends that both of these Earthling warriors are prone to adopt disguises in this manner, revealing themselves only at the last moment to their enemies.

Suffice to say, however, that we were all successful in making good our retreat to the spacecruiser although all of our equipment and supplies were destroyed in the melee. Upon regaining the spacecraft we blasted off hurriedly, to return to our own sacred planet.

I recommend, your Omnipotence, that the plans to subjugate the planet Earth be indefinitely postponed in view of the fact that our specially designed weapons proved worthless and in particular view of the abilities of Earthling warriors.

I further recommend that the unspeakable Baren Darl, who obviously frittered away his time during the decals spent on Luna supposedly studying the Earthlings, be sent to the Nairebis Salt Mines.

Obediently,

Seegeel Wan

Commander Spacecruiser 12B44.

* * *

Maw and Paw Coy and Hank and Zeke came back into the clearing wearily. The boys had done a lot of tramping and were hungry for their vittles, and Maw was feeling bodacious about their taking off to go hunting for Martins. Paw had told her to shut up two or three times but it hadn't been much use.

Len was sitting on an upened mash barrel loading his old shotgun and grinning vacuously. He seemed unaware of the fact that the stock of the gun was a splintered ruin.

"Guess what, Paw," he yelled. "I got me a Martin. I got me a whole passel of Martins, Paw, I sure did. Yup, I—"

Paw Coy grunted, and started poking around in the vittles Maw had brought up from the cabin.

The boys leaned their rifles up against the oak and each picked up a handy fruit jar of corn squeezins.

Hank said nastily, "Sure you got a whole passel of Martins, Lem. In yore sleep, you got a passel of Martins."

Lem said belligerently, "Don't you go a talkin' thataway, Hank, or I'll . . . I'll throw you up into the tree the way I did that time you hit me with the ax. I did so get me some Martins. I was a sittin' here when a whole passel come outen the woods. Didn't know they was Martins at first. Then—"

Maw Coy handed him a chunk of corn pone. "Now you be quiet, Lem, and eat your vittles. Sure you got yourself a Martin, Lem."

A thin trickle of brown ran down from the side of Lem's mouth. He spit on the ground before him, with an air of happy belligerence.

"I sure did, Maw. I sure got me a passel of Martins. Yup, I sure did."

Henry Kuttner

Ever wished you could change your personality? You might find it has disadvantages as well as advantages. Henry Kuttner exploits both beautifully here. Mixed with Mixo-Lydians, mermaid ballets and a drunken robot, it adds up to a really hilarious yarn.

—M. R.

The Ego Machine

NICHOLAS MARTIN LOOKED UP AT THE ROBOT across the desk.

"I'm not going to ask what you want," he said, in a low, restrained voice. "I already know. Just go away and tell St. Cyr I approve. Tell him I think it's wonderful, putting a robot in the picture. We've had everything else by now, except the Rockettes. But clearly a quiet little play about Christmas among the Portuguese fishermen on the Florida coast *must* have a robot. Only, why not six robots? Tell him I suggest a baker's dozen. Go away."

"Was your mother's name Helena Glinska?" the robot asked, paying no heed to Martin's remarks.

"It was not," Martin said.

"Ah, then she must have been the Great Hairy One," the robot murmured.

Martin took his feet off the desk and sat up slowly.

"It's quite all right," the robot said hastily. "You've been chosen for an ecological experiment, that's all. But it won't hurt. Robots are perfectly normal life forms where I come from, so you needn't—"

"Shut up," Martin said. "Robot indeed, you—you bit-player! This time St. Cyr has gone too far." He began to shake slightly all over, with some repressed but strong emotion. The intercom box on the desk caught his eye, and he stabbed a finger at one of the switches. "Get me Miss Ashby! Right away!"

"I'm so sorry," the robot said apologetically. "Have I made

a mistake? The threshold fluctuations in the neurons always upset my mnemonic norm when I temporalize. Isn't this a crisis-point in your life?"

Martin breathed hard, which seemed to confirm the robot's assumption.

"Exactly," it said. "The ecological imbalance approaches a peak that may destroy the life-form, unless . . . mm-m. Now either you're about to be stepped on by a mammoth, locked in an iron mask, assassinated by helots, or—is this Sanskrit I'm speaking?" He shook his gleaming head. "Perhaps I should have got off fifty years ago, but I thought—sorry. Good-bye," he added hastily as Martin raised an angry glare.

Then the robot lifted a finger to each corner of his naturally rigid mouth, and moved his fingers horizontally in opposite directions, as though sketching an apologetic smile.

"No, don't go away," Martin said. "I want you right here, where the sight of you can refuel my rage in case it's needed. I wish to God I could get mad and stay mad," he added plaintively, gazing at the telephone.

"Are you sure your mother's name wasn't Helena Glinska?" the robot asked. It pinched thumb and forefinger together between its nominal brows, somehow giving the impression of a worried frown.

"Naturally, I'm sure," Martin snapped.

"You aren't married yet, then? To Anastasia Zakharina-Koshkina?"

"Not yet or ever," Martin replied succinctly. The telephone rang. He snatched it up.

"Hello, Nick," said Erika Ashby's calm voice. "Something wrong?"

Instantly the fires of rage went out of Martin's eyes, to be replaced by a tender, rose-pink glow. For some years now he had given Erika, his very competent agent, ten per cent of his take. He had also longed hopelessly to give her approximately a pound of flesh—the cardiac muscle, to put it in cold, unromantic terms. Martin did not; he put it in no terms at all, since whenever he tried to propose marriage to Erika he was taken with such fits of modesty that he could only babble o' green fields.

"Well," Erika repeated. "Something wrong?"

"Yes," Martin said, drawing a long breath. "Can St. Cyr make me marry somebody named Anastasia Zakharina-Koshkina?"

"What a wonderful memory you have," the robot put in mournfully. "Mine used to be, before I started temporalizing. But even radioactive neurons won't stand—"

"Nominally you're still entitled to life, liberty, et cetera,"

Erika said. "But I'm busy right now, Nick. Can't it wait till I see you?"

"When?"

"Didn't you get my message?" Erika demanded.

"Of course not," Martin said, angrily. "I've suspected for some time that all my incoming calls have to be cleared by St. Cyr. Somebody might try to smuggle in a word of hope, or possibly a file." His voice brightened. "Planning a jail-break?"

"Oh, this is outrageous," Erika said. "Some day St. Cyr's going to go too far—"

"Not while he's got DeeDee behind him," Martin said gloomily. Summit Studios would sooner have made a film promoting atheism than offend their top box-office star, Dee-Dee Fleming. Even Tolliver Watt, who owned Summit lock, stock and barrel, spent wakeful nights because St. Cyr refused to let the lovely DeeDee sign a long-term contract.

"Nevertheless, Watt's no fool," Erika said. "I still think we could get him to give you a contract release if we could make him realize what a rotten investment you are. There isn't much time, though."

"Why not?"

"I told you—oh. Of course you don't know. He's leaving for Paris tomorrow morning."

Martin moaned. "Then I'm doomed," he said. "They'll pick up my option automatically next week and I'll never draw a free breath again. Erika, do something!"

"I'm going to," Erika said. "That's exactly what I want to see you about. Ah," she added suddenly, "now I understand why St. Cyr stopped my message. He was afraid. Nick, do you know what we've got to do?"

"See Watt?" Nick hazarded unhappily. "But Erika—"

"See Watt *alone*," Erika amplified.

"Not if St. Cyr can help it," Nick reminded her.

"Exactly. Naturally St. Cyr doesn't want us to talk to Watt privately. We might make him see reason. But this time, Nick, we've simply got to manage it somehow. One of us is going to talk to Watt while the other keeps St. Cyr at bay. Which do you choose?"

"Neither," Martin said promptly.

"Oh, Nick! I can't do the whole thing alone. Anybody'd think you were afraid of St. Cyr."

"I *am* afraid of St. Cyr," Martin said.

"Nonsense. What could he actually do to you?"

"He could terrorize me. He does it all the time. Erika, he says I'm indoctrinating beautifully. Doesn't it make your blood run cold? Look at all the other writers he's indoctrinated."

"I know. I saw one of them on Main Street last week, delving into garbage cans. Do you want to end up that way? Then stand up for your rights!"

"Ah," said the robot wisely, nodding. "Just as I thought. A crisis-point."

"Shut up," Martin said. "No, not you, Erika. I'm sorry."

"So am I," Erika said tartly. "For a moment I thought you'd acquired a backbone."

"If I were somebody like Hemingway—" Martin began in a miserable voice.

"Did you say Hemingway?" the robot inquired. "Is this the Kinsey-Hemingway era? Then I must be right. You're Nicholas Martin, the next subject. Martin, Martin? Let me see—oh yes, the Disraeli type, that's it." He rubbed his forehead with a grating sound. "Oh, my poor neuron thresholds! Now I remember."

"Nick, can you hear me?" Erika's voice inquired. "I'm coming over there right away. Brace yourself. We're going to beard St. Cyr in his den and convince Watt you'll never make a good screen-writer. Now—"

"But St. Cyr won't *ever* admit that," Martin cried. "He doesn't know the meaning of the word failure. He says so. He's going to make me into a screen-writer or kill me."

"Remember what happened to Ed Cassidy?" Erika reminded him grimly. "St. Cyr didn't make him into a screen-writer."

"True. Poor old Ed," Martin said, with a shiver.

"All right, then. I'm on my way. Anything else?"

"Yes!" Martin cried, drawing a deep breath. "Yes, there is! I love you madly!"

But the words never got past his glottis. Opening and closing his mouth noiselessly, the cowardly playwright finally clenched his teeth and tried again. A faint, hopeless squeak vibrated the telephone's disk. Martin let his shoulders slump hopelessly. It was clear he could never propose to anybody, not even a harmless telephone.

"Did you say something?" Erika asked. "Well, good-bye then."

"Wait a minute," Martin said, his eyes suddenly falling once more upon the robot. Speechless on one subject only, he went on rapidly, "I forgot to tell you. Watt and the nest-fouling St. Cyr have just hired a mock-up phony robot to play in *Angelina Noel!*"

But the line was dead.

"I'm not a phony," the robot said, hurt.

Martin fell back in his chair and stared at his guest with dull, hopeless eyes. "Neither was King Kong," he remarked. "Don't start feeding me some line St. Cyr's told you to pull. I

know he's trying to break my nerve. He'll probably do it, too. Look what he's done to my play already. Why Fred Waring? I don't mind Fred Waring in his proper place. There he's fine. But not in *Angelina Noel.* Not as the Portuguese captain of a fishing boat manned by his entire band, accompanied by Dan Dailey singing *Napoli* to DeeDee Fleming in a mermaid's tail—"

Self-stunned by this recapitulation, Martin put his arms on the desk, his head in his hands, and to his horror found himself giggling. The telephone rang. Martin groped for the instrument without rising from his semi-recumbent position.

"Who?" he asked shakily. "*Who?* St Cyr—"

A hoarse bellow came over the wire. Martin sat bolt upright, seizing the phone desperately with both hands.

"Listen!" he cried. "Will you let me finish what I'm going to say, just for once? Putting a robot in *Angelina Noel* is simply—"

"I do not hear what you say," roared a heavy voice. "Your idea stinks. Whatever it is. Be at Theater One for yesterday's rushes. At once!"

"But wait—"

St. Cyr belched and hung up. Martin's strangling hands tightened briefly on the telephone. But it was no use. The real strangle-hold was the one St. Cyr had around Martin's throat, and it had been tightening now for nearly thirteen weeks. Or had it been thirteen years? Looking backward, Martin could scarcely believe that only a short time ago he had been a free man, a successful Broadway playwright, the author of the hit play *Angelina Noel.* Then had come St. Cyr. . . .

A snob at heart, the director loved getting his clutches on hit plays and name writers. Summit Studios, he had roared at Martin, would follow the original play exactly and would give Martin the final okay on the script, provided he signed a thirteen-week contract to help write the screen treatment. This had seemed too good to be true—and was.

Martin's downfall lay partly in the fine print and partly in the fact that Erika Ashby had been in the hospital with a bad attack of influenza at the time. Buried in legal verbiage was a clause that bound Martin to five years of servitude with Summit should they pick up his option. Next week they would certainly do just that, unless justice prevailed.

"I think I need a drink," Martin said unsteadily. "Or several." He glanced toward the robot. "I wonder if you'd mind getting me that bottle of Scotch from the bar over there."

"But I am here to conduct an experiment on optimum ecology," said the robot.

Martin closed his eyes. "Pour me a drink," he pleaded.

"Please. Then put the glass in my hand, will you? It's not much to ask. After all, we're both human beings, aren't we?"

"Well, no," the robot said, placing a brimming glass in Martin's groping fingers. Martin drank. Then he opened his eyes and blinked at the tall highball glass in his hand. The robot had filled it to the brim with Scotch. Martin turned a wondering gaze on his metallic companion.

"You must do a lot of drinking yourself," he said thoughtfully. "I suppose tolerance can be built up. Go ahead. Help yourself. Take the rest of the bottle."

The robot placed the tip of a finger above each eye and slid the fingers upward, as though raising his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Go on, have a jolt," Martin urged. "Or don't you want to break bread with me, under the circumstances?"

"How can I?" the robot asked. "I'm a robot." His voice sounded somewhat wistful. "What happens?" he inquired. "Is it a lubricatory or a fueling mechanism?"

Martin glanced at his brimming glass.

"Fueling," he said tersely. "High octane. You really believe in staying in character, don't you? Why not—"

"Oh, the principle of irritation," the robot interrupted. "I see. Just like fermented mammoth's milk."

Martin choked. "Have you ever drunk fermented mammoth's milk?" he inquired.

"How could I?" the robot asked. "But I've seen it done." He drew a straight line vertically upward between his invisible eyebrows, managing to look wistful. "Of course my world is perfectly functional and functionally perfect, but I can't help finding temporalizing a fascina—" He broke off. "I'm wasting space-time. Ah. Now. Mr. Martin, would you be willing to—"

"Oh, have a drink," Martin said. "I feel hospitable. Go ahead, indulge me, will you? My pleasures are few. And I've got to go and be terrorized in a minute, anyhow. If you can't get that mask off I'll send for a straw. You can step out of character long enough for one jolt, can't you?"

"I'd like to try it," the robot said pensively. "Ever since I noticed the effect fermented mammoth's milk had on the boys, it's been on my mind, rather. Quite easy for a human, of course. Technically it's simple enough, I see now. The irritation just increases the frequency of the brain's kappa waves, as with boosted voltage, but since electrical voltage never existed in pre-robot times—"

"It did," Martin said, taking another drink. "I mean, it does. What do you call that, a mammoth?" He indicated the desk lamp.

The robot's jaw dropped.

"That?" he asked in blank amazement. "Why—why then all

those telephone poles and dynamos and lighting-equipment I noticed in this area are powered by electricity!"

"What did you think they were powered by?" Martin asked coldly.

"Slaves," the robot said, examining the lamp. He switched it on, blinked, and then unscrewed the bulb. "Voltage, you say?"

"Don't be a fool," Martin said. "You're overplaying your part. I've got to get going in a minute. Do you want a jolt or don't you?"

"Well," the robot said, "I don't want to seem unsociable. This *ought* to work." So saying, he stuck his finger in the lamp-socket. There was a brief, crackling flash. The robot withdrew his finger.

"F(t)—" he said, and swayed slightly. Then his fingers came up and sketched a smile that seemed, somehow, to express delighted surprise.

"Fff(t)!" he said, and went on rather thickly, *"F(t)* integral between plus and minus infinity . . . *a-sub-n* to *e*. . . ."

Martin's eyes opened wide with shocked horror. Whether a doctor or a psychiatrist should be called in was debatable, but it was perfectly evident that this was a case for the medical profession, and the sooner the better. Perhaps the police, too. The bit-player in the robot suit was clearly as mad as a hatter. Martin poised indecisively, waiting for his lunatic guest either to drop dead or spring at his throat.

The robot appeared to be smacking his lips, with faint clicking sounds.

"Why, that's wonderful," he said. "AC, too."

"Y-you're not dead?" Martin inquired shakily.

"I'm not even alive," the robot murmured. "The way you'd understand it, that is. Ah—thanks for the jolt."

Martin stared at the robot with the wildest dawning of surmise.

"Why—" he gasped. "Why—*you're a robot!*"

"Certainly I'm a robot," his guest said. "What slow minds you pre-robots had. Mine's working like lightning now." He stole a drunkard's glance at the desk-lamp. *"F(t)*—I mean, if you counted the kappa waves of my radio-atomic brain now, you'd be amazed how the frequency's increased." He paused thoughtfully. *"F(t),"* he added.

Moving quite slowly, like a man under water, Martin lifted his glass and drank whiskey. Then, cautiously, he looked up at the robot again.

"F(t)—" he said, paused, shuddered, and drank again. That did it. "I'm drunk," he said with an air of shaken relief. "That must be it. I was almost beginning to believe—"

"Oh, nobody believes I'm a robot at first," the robot said.

"You'll notice I showed up in a movie lot, where I wouldn't arouse suspicion. I'll appear to Ivan Vasilovich in an alchemist's lab, and he'll jump to the conclusion I'm an automaton. Which, of course, I *am*. Then there's a Uighur on my list—I'll appear to him in a shaman's hut and he'll assume I'm a devil. A matter of ecologicologic."

"Then you're a devil?" Martin inquired, seizing on the only plausible solution.

"No, no, no. I'm a robot. Don't you understand anything?"

"I don't even know who I am, now," Martin said. "For all I know, I'm a faun and you're a human child. I don't think this Scotch is doing me as much good as I'd—"

"You're name is Nicholas Martin," the robot said patiently. "And mine is ENIAC."

"Eniac?"

"ENIAC," the robot corrected, capitalizing. "ENIAC Gamma the Ninety-Third."

So saying, he unslung a sack from his metallic shoulder and began to rummage out length upon length of what looked like red silk ribbon with a curious metallic lustre. After approximately a quarter-mile of it had appeared, a crystal football helmet emerged attached to its end. A gleaming red-green stone was set on each side of the helmet.

"Just over the temporal lobes, you see," the robot explained, indicating the jewels. "Now you just set it on your head, like this—"

"Oh, no, I don't," Martin said, withdrawing his head with the utmost rapidity. "Neither do you, my friend. What's the idea? I don't like the looks of that gimmick. I particularly don't like those two red garnets on the sides. They look like eyes."

"Those are artificial eclogite," the robot assured him. "They simply have a high dielectric constant. It's merely a matter of altering the normal thresholds of the neuron memory-circuits. All thinking is based on memory, you know. The strength of your associations—the emotional indices of your memories—channel your actions and decisions, and the ecologizer simply changes the voltage of your brain so the thresholds are altered."

"Is that all it does?" Martin asked suspiciously.

"Well, now," the robot said with a slight air of evasion. "I didn't intend to mention it, but since you ask—it also imposes the master-matrix of your character type. But since that's the prototype of your character in the first place, it will simply enable you to make the most of your potential ability, hereditary and acquired. It will make you react to your environment in the way that best assures your survival."

"Not me, it won't," Martin said firmly. "Because you aren't going to put that thing on my head."

The robot sketched a puzzled frown. "Oh," he said after a pause. "I haven't explained yet, have I? It's very simple. Would you be willing to take part in a valuable socio-cultural experiment for the benefit of all mankind?"

"No," Martin said.

"But you don't know what it is yet," the robot said plaintively. "You'll be the only one to refuse, after I've explained everything thoroughly. By the way, can you understand me all right?"

Martin laughed hollowly. "Natch," he said.

"Good," the robot said, relieved. "That may be one trouble with my memory. I had to record so many languages before I could temporalize. Sanskrit's very simple, but medieval Russian's confusing, and as for Uighur—however! The purpose of this experiment is to promote the most successful pro-survival relationship between man and his environment. Instant adaptation is what we're aiming at, and we hope to get it by minimizing the differential between individual and environment. In other words, the right reaction at the right time. Understand?"

"Of course not," Martin said. "What nonsense you talk."

"There are," the robot said rather wearily, "only a limited number of character matrices possible, depending first on the arrangement of the genes within the chromosomes, and later upon environment additions. Since environments tend to repeat—like societies, you know—an organizational pattern isn't hard to lay out, along the Kaldekooz time-scale. You follow me so far?"

"By the Kaldekooz time-scale, yes," Martin said.

"I was always lucid," the robot remarked a little vainly, flourishing a swirl of red ribbon.

"Keep that thing away from me," Martin complained. "Drunk I may be, but I have no intention of sticking my neck out that far."

"Of course you'll do it," the robot said firmly. "Nobody's ever refused yet. And don't bicker with me or you'll get me confused and I'll have to take another jolt of voltage. Then there's no telling how confused I'll be. My memory gives me enough trouble when I temporalize. Time-travel always raises the synaptic delay threshold, but the trouble is it's so variable. That's why I got you mixed up with Ivan at first. But I don't visit him till after I've seen you—I'm running the test chronologically, and nineteen-fifty-two comes before fifteen-seventy, of course."

"It doesn't," Martin said, tilting the glass to his lips. "Not even in Hollywood does nineteen-fifty-two come before fifteen-seventy."

"I'm using the Kaldekooz time-scale," the robot explained. "But really only for convenience. Now do you want the ideal ecological differential or don't you? Because—" Here he flourished the red ribbon again, peered into the helmet, looked narrowly at Martin, and shook his head.

"I'm sorry," the robot said. "I'm afraid this won't work. Your head's too small. Not enough brain-room, I suppose. This helmet's for an eight and a half head, and yours is much too—"

"My head *is* eight and a half," Martin protested with dignity.

"Can't be," the robot said cunningly. "If it were, the helmet would fit, and it doesn't. Too big."

"It does fit," Martin said.

"That's the trouble with arguing with pre-robot species," ENIAC said, as to himself. "Low, brutish, unreasoning. No wonder, when their heads are so small. Now Mr. Martin—" He spoke as though to a small, stupid, stubborn child. "Try to understand. This helmet's size eight and a half. Your head is unfortunately so very small that the helmet wouldn't fit—"

"Blast it!" cried the infuriated Martin, caution quite lost between Scotch and annoyance. "It does fit! Look here!" Recklessly he snatched the helmet and clapped it firmly on his head. "It fits perfectly!"

"I erred," the robot acknowledged, with such a gleam in his eye that Martin, suddenly conscious of his rashness, jerked the helmet from his head and dropped it on the desk. ENIAC quietly picked it up and put it back into his sack, stuffing the red ribbon in after it with rapid motions. Martin watched, baffled, until ENIAC had finished, gathered together the mouth of the sack, swung it on his shoulder again, and turned toward the door.

"Good-bye," the robot said. "And thank you."

"For what?" Martin demanded.

"For your cooperation," the robot said.

"I won't cooperate," Martin told him flatly. "It's no use. Whatever fool treatment it is you're selling, I'm not going to—"

"Oh, you've already had the ecology treatment," ENIAC replied blandly. "I'll be back tonight to renew the charge. It lasts only twelve hours."

"What!"

ENIAC moved his forefingers outward from the corners of

his mouth, sketching a polite smile. Then he stepped through the door and closed it behind him.

Martin made a faint squealing sound, like a stuck but gagged pig.

Something was happening inside his head.

Nicholas Martin felt like a man suddenly thrust under an ice-cold shower. No, not cold—steaming hot. Perfumed, too. The wind that blew in from the open window bore with it a frightful stench of gasoline, sagebrush, paint, and—from the distant commissary—ham sandwiches.

"Drunk," he thought frantically. "I'm drunk—or crazy!" He sprang up and spun around wildly; then catching sight of a crack in the hardwood floor he tried to walk along it. "Because if I can walk a straight line," he thought, "I'm not drunk. I'm only crazy . . ." It was not a very comforting thought.

He could walk it, all right. He could walk a far straighter line than the crack, which he saw now was microscopically jagged. He had, in fact, never felt such a sense of location and equilibrium in his life. His experiment carried him across the room to a wall-mirror, and as he straightened to look into it, suddenly all confusion settled and ceased. The violent sensory perceptions leveled off and returned to normal.

Everything was quiet. Everything was all right.

Martin met his own eyes in the mirror.

Everything was *not* all right.

He was stone cold sober. The Scotch he had drunk might as well have been spring-water. He leaned closer to the mirror, trying to stare through his own eyes into the depths of his brain. For something extremely odd was happening in there. All over his brain, tiny shutters were beginning to move, some sliding up till only a narrow crack remained, through which the beady little eyes of neurons could be seen peeping, some sliding down with faint crashes, revealing the agile, spidery forms of still other neurons scuttling for cover.

Altered thresholds, changing the yes-and-no reaction time of the memory-circuits, with their key emotional indices and associations . . . huh?

The robot!

Martin's head swung toward the closed office door. But he made no further move. The look of blank panic on his face very slowly, quite unconsciously, began to change. The robot . . . could wait.

Automatically Martin raised his hand, as though to adjust an invisible monocle. Behind him, the telephone began to ring. Martin glanced at it.

His lips curved into an insolent smile.

Flicking dust from his lapel with a suave gesture, Martin picked up the telephone. He said nothing. There was a long silence. Then a hoarse voice shouted, "Hello, hello, hello! Are you there? You, Martin."

Martin said absolutely nothing at all.

"You keep me waiting," the voice bellowed. "Me, St. Cyr! Now jump! The rushes are . . . Martin, do you hear me?"

Martin gently laid down the receiver on the desk. He turned again toward the mirror, regarded himself critically, frowned.

"Dreary," he murmured. "Distinctly dreary. I wonder why I ever bought this necktie?"

The softly bellowing telephone distracted him. He studied the instrument briefly, then clapped his hands sharply together an inch from the mouthpiece. There was a sharp, anguished cry from the other end of the line.

"Very good," Martin murmured, turning away. "That robot has done me a considerable favor. I should have realized the possibilities sooner. After all, a super-machine, such as ENIAC, would be far cleverer than a man, who is merely an ordinary machine. Yes," he added, stepping into the hall and coming face to face with Toni LaMotta, who was currently working for Summit on loan. "*'Man is a machine, and woman—'*" Here he gave Miss LaMotta a look of such arrogant significance that she was quite startled.

"*'And woman—a toy,'*" Martin amplified, as he turned toward Theater One, where St. Cyr and destiny awaited him.

Summit Studios, outdoing even MGM, always shot ten times as much footage as necessary on every scene. At the beginning of each shooting day, this confusing mass of celluloid was shown in St. Cyr's private projection theater, a small but luxurious domed room furnished with lie-back chairs, and every other convenience, though no screen was visible until you looked up. Then you saw it on the ceiling.

When Martin entered, it was instantly evident that ecology took a sudden shift toward the worse. Operating on the theory that the old Nicholas Martin had come into it, the theater, which had breathed an expensive air of luxurious confidence, chilled toward him. The nap of the Persian rug shrank from his contaminating feet. The chair he stumbled against in the half-light seemed to shrug contemptuously. And the three people in the theater gave him such a look as might be turned upon one of the larger apes who had, by sheer accident, got an invitation to Buckingham Palace.

DeeDee Fleming (her real name was impossible to remember, besides having not a vowel in it) lay placidly in her chair, her feet comfortably up, her lovely hands folded, her large,

liquid gaze fixed upon the screen where DeeDee Fleming, in the silvery meshes of a technicolor mermaid, swam phlegmatically through seas of pearl-colored mist.

Martin groped in the gloom for a chair. The strangest things were going on inside his brain, where tiny stiles still moved and readjusted until he no longer felt in the least like Nicholas Martin. Who did he feel like, then? What had happened?

He recalled the neurons whose beady little eyes he had fancied he saw staring brightly into, as well as out of, his own. Or had he? The memory was vivid, yet it couldn't be, of course. The answer was perfectly simple and terribly logical. ENIAC Gamma the Ninety-Third had told him, somewhat ambiguously, just what his ecological experiment involved. Martin had merely been given the optimum reactive pattern of his successful prototype, a man who had most thoroughly controlled his own environment. And ENIAC had told him the man's name, along with several confusing references to other prototypes like an Ivan (who?) and an unnamed Uighur.

The name for Martin's prototype was, of course, Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. Martin had a vivid recollection of George Arliss playing the role. Clever, insolent, eccentric in dress and manner, exuberant, suave, self-controlled, with a strongly perceptive imagination.

"No, no, no!" DeeDee said with a sort of calm impatience. "Be careful, Nick. Some other chair, please. I have my feet on this one."

"T-t-t-t-t," said Raoul St. Cyr, protruding his thick lips and snapping the fingers of an enormous hand as he pointed to a lowly chair against the wall. "Behind me, Martin. Sit down, sit down. Out of our way. Now! Pay attention. Study what I have done to make something great out of your foolish little play. Especially note how I have so cleverly ended the solo by building to five cumulative pratt-falls. Timing is all," he finished." Now—SILENCE!"

For a man born in the obscure little Balkan country of Mixo-Lydia, Raoul St. Cyr had done very well for himself in Hollywood. In 1939 St. Cyr, growing alarmed at the imminence of war, departed for America, taking with him the print of an unpronounceable Mixo-Lydian film he had made, which might be translated roughly as *The Pores in the Face of the Peasant.*

With this he established his artistic reputation as a great director, though if the truth were known, it was really poverty that caused *The Pores* to be so artistically lighted, and simple drunkenness which had made most of the cast act out one of the strangest performances in film history. But critics com-

pared *The Pores* to a ballet and praised inordinately the beauty of its leading lady, now known to the world as Dee-Dee Fleming.

DeeDee was so incredibly beautiful that the law of compensation would force one to expect incredible stupidity as well. One was not disappointed. DeeDee's neurons didn't know *anything.* She had heard of emotions, and under St. Cyr's bullying could imitate a few of them, but other directors had gone mad trying to get through the semantic block that kept DeeDee's mind a calm, unruffled pool possibly three inches deep. St. Cyr merely bellowed. This simple, primordial approach seemed to be the only one that made sense to Summit's greatest investment and top star.

With this whip-hand over the beautiful and brainless Dee-Dee, St. Cyr quickly rose to the top in Hollywood. He had undoubted talent. He could make one picture very well indeed. He had made it twenty times already, each time starring Dee-Dee, and each time perfecting his own feudalistic production unit. Whenever anyone disagreed with St. Cyr, he had only to threaten to go over to MGM and take the obedient DeeDee with him, for he had never allowed her to sign a long-term contract and she worked only on a picture-to-picture basis. Even Tolliver Watt knuckled under when St. Cyr voiced the threat of removing DeeDee.

"Sit down, Martin," Tolliver Watt said. He was a tall, lean, hatchet-faced man who looked like a horse being starved because he was too proud to eat hay. With calm, detached omnipotence he inclined his gray-shot head a millimeter, while a faintly pained expression passed fleetingly across his face.

"Highball, please," he said.

A white-clad waiter appeared noiselessly from nowhere and glided forward with a tray. It was at this point that Martin felt the last stiles readjust in his brain, and entirely on impulse he reached out and took the frosted highball glass from the tray. Without observing this the waiter glided on and presented Watt with a gleaming salver full of nothing. Watt and the waiter regarded the tray.

Then their eyes met. There was a brief silence.

"Here," Martin said, replacing the glass. "Much too weak. Get me another, please. I'm reorienting toward a new phase which means a different optimum," he explained to the puzzled Watt as he readjusted a chair beside the great man and dropped into it. Odd that he had never before felt at ease during rushes. Right now he felt fine. Perfectly at ease. Relaxed.

"Scotch and soda for Mr. Martin," Watt said calmly. "And another for me."

"So, so, so, now we begin," St. Cyr cried impatiently. He spoke into a hand microphone. Instantly the screen on the ceiling flickered noisily and began to unfold a series of rather ragged scenes in which a chorus of mermaids danced on their tails down the street of a little Florida fishing village.

To understand the full loathsomeness of the fate facing Nicholas Martin, it is necessary to view a St. Cyr production. It seemed to Martin that he was watching the most noisome movie ever put upon film. He was conscious that St. Cyr and Watt were stealing rather mystified glances at him. In the dark he put up two fingers and sketched a robot-like grin. Then, feeling sublimely sure of himself, he lit a cigarette and chuckled aloud.

"You laugh?" St. Cyr demanded with instant displeasure. "You do not appreciate great art? What do you know about it, eh? Are you a genius?"

"This," Martin said urbanely, "is the most noisome movie ever put on film."

In the sudden, deathly quiet which followed, Martin flicked ashes elegantly and added, "With my help, you may yet avoid becoming the laughing stock of the whole continent. Every foot of this picture must be junked. Tomorrow bright and early we will start all over, and—"

Watt said quietly, "We're quite competent to make a film out of *Angelina Noel,* Martin."

"It is artistic!" St. Cyr shouted. "And it will make money, too!"

"Bah, money!" Martin said cunningly. He flicked more ash with a lavish gesture. "Who cares about money? Let Summit worry."

Watt leaned forward to peer searchingly at Martin in the dimness.

"Raoul," he said, glancing at St. Cyr, "I understand you were getting your—ah—your new writers whipped into shape. This doesn't sound to me as if—"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes," St. Cyr cried excitedly. "Whipped into shape, exactly! A brief delirium, eh? Martin, you feel well? You feel yourself?"

Martin laughed with quiet confidence. "Never fear," he said. "The money you spend on me is well worth what I'll bring you in prestige. I quite understand. Our confidential talks were not to be secret from Watt, of course."

"What confidential talks?" bellowed St. Cyr thickly, growing red.

"We need keep nothing from Watt, need we?" Martin went on imperturbably. "You hired me for prestige, and prestige you'll get, if you can only keep your big mouth shut long

enough. I'll make the name of St. Cyr glorious for you. Naturally you may lose something at the box-office, but it's well worth—"

"Pjrzqxgl!" roared St. Cyr in his native tongue, and he lumbered up from the chair, brandishing the microphone in an enormous, hairy hand.

Deftly Martin reached out and twitched it from his grasp.

"Stop the film," he ordered crisply.

It was very strange. A distant part of his mind knew that normally he would never have dared behave this way, but he felt convinced that never before in his life had he acted with complete normality. He glowed with a giddy warmth of confidence that everything he did would be right, at least while the twelve-hour treatment lasted. . . .

The screen flickered hesitantly, then went blank.

"Turn the lights on," Martin ordered the unseen presence beyond the mike. Softly and suddenly the room glowed with illumination. And upon the visages of Watt and St. Cyr he saw a mutual dawning uneasiness begin to break.

He had just given them food for thought. But he had given them more than that. He tried to imagine what moved in the minds of the two men, below the suspicions he had just implanted. St. Cyr's was fairly obvious. The Mixo-Lydian licked his lips—no mean task—and studied Martin with uneasy little bloodshot eyes. Clearly Martin had acquired confidence from somewhere. What did it mean? What secret sin of St. Cyr's had been discovered to him, what flaw in his contract, that he dared behave so defiantly?

Tolliver Watt was a horse of another color; apparently the man had no guilty secrets; but he too looked uneasy. Martin studied the proud face and probed for inner weaknesses. Watt would be a harder nut to crack. But Martin could do it.

"That last underwater sequence," he now said, pursuing his theme. "Pure trash, you know. It'll have to come out. The whole scene must be shot from under water."

"Shut up!" St. Cyr shouted violently.

"But it must, you know," Martin went on. "Or it won't jibe with the new stuff I've written in. In fact, I'm not at all certain that the whole picture shouldn't be shot under water. You know, we could use the documentary technique—"

"Raoul," Watt said suddenly, "what's this man trying to do?"

"He is trying to break his contract, of course," St. Cyr said, turning ruddy olive. "It is the bad phase all my writers go through before I get them whipped into shape. In Mixo-Lydia—"

"Are you sure he'll whip into shape?" Watt asked.

"To me this is now a personal matter," St. Cyr said, glaring at Martin. "I have spent nearly thirteen weeks on this man and I do not intend to waste my valuable time on another. I tell you he is simply trying to break his contract—tricks, tricks, tricks."

"Are you?" Watt asked Martin coldly.

"Not now," Martin said. "I've changed my mind. My agent insists I'd be better off away from Summit. In fact, she has the curious feeling that I and Summit would suffer by a mesalliance. But for the first time I'm not sure I agree. I begin to see possibilities, even in the tripe St. Cyr has been stuffing down the public's throat for years. Of course I can't work miracles all at once. Audiences have come to expect garbage from Summit, and they've even been conditioned to like it. But we'll begin in a small way to re-educate them with this picture. I suggest we try to symbolize the Existentialist hopelessness of it all by ending the film with a full four hundred feet of seascapes—nothing but vast, heaving stretches of ocean," he ended, on a note of complacent satisfaction.

A vast heaving stretch of Raoul St. Cyr rose from his chair and advanced upon Martin.

"Outside, outside!" he shouted. "Back to your cell, you double-crossing vermin! I, Raoul St. Cyr, command it. Outside, before I rip you limb from limb—"

Martin spoke quickly. His voice was calm, but he knew he would have to work fast.

"You see, Watt?" he said clearly, meeting Watt's rather startled gaze. "Doesn't dare let you exchange three words with me, for fear I'll let something slip. No wonder he's trying to put me out of here—he's skating on thin ice these days."

Goaded, St. Cyr rolled forward in a ponderous lunge, but Watt interposed. It was true, of course, that the writer was probably trying to break his contract. But there were wheels within wheels here. Martin was too confident, too debonair. Something was going on which Watt did not understand.

"All right, Raoul," he said decisively. "Relax for a minute. I said relax! We don't want Nick here suing you for assault and battery, do we? Your artistic temperament carries you away sometimes. Relax and let's hear what Nick has to say."

"Watch out for him, Tolliver!" St. Cyr cried warningly. "They're cunning, these creatures. Cunning as rats. You never know—"

Martin raised the microphone with a lordly gesture. Ignoring the director, he said commandingly into the mike, "Put me through to the commissary. The bar, please. Yes. I want to order a drink. Something very special. A—ah—a Helena Glinska—"

"Hello," Erika Ashby's voice said from the door. "Nick, are you there? May I come in?"

The sound of her voice sent delicious chills rushing up and down Martin's spine. He swung round, mike in hand, to welcome her. But St. Cyr, pleased at this diversion, roared before he could speak.

"No, no, no, no! Go! Go at once. Whoever you are—*out!*"

Erika, looking very brisk, attractive and firm, marched into the room and cast at Martin a look of resigned patience.

Very clearly she expected to fight both her own battles and his.

"I'm on business here," she told St. Cyr coldly. "You can't part author and agent like this. Nick and I want to have a word with Mr. Watt."

"Ah, my pretty creature, sit down," Martin said in a loud, clear voice, scrambling out of his chair. "Welcome! I'm just ordering myself a drink. Will you have something?"

Erika looked at him with startled suspicion. "No, and neither will you," she said. "How many have you had already? Nick, if you're drunk at a time like this—"

"And no shilly-shallying," Martin said blandly into the mike. "I want it at once, do you hear? A Helena Glinska, yes. Perhaps you don't know it? Then listen carefully. Take the largest Napoleon you've got. If you haven't a big one, a small punch bowl will do. Fill it half full with ice-cold ale. Got that? Add three jiggers of creme de menthe—"

"Nick, are you mad?" Erika demanded, revolted.

"—and six jiggers of honey," Martin went on placidly. "Stir, don't shake. Never shake a Helena Glinska. Keep it well chilled, and—"

"Miss Ashby, we are very busy," St. Cyr broke in importantly, making shooing motions toward the door. "Not now. Sorry. You interrupt. Go at once."

"—better add six more jiggers of honey," Martin was heard to add contemplatively into the mike. "And then send it over immediately. Drop everything else, and get it here within sixty seconds. There's a bonus for you if you do. Okay? Good. See to it."

He tossed the microphone casually at St. Cyr.

Meanwhile, Erika had closed in on Tolliver Watt.

"I've just come from talking to Gloria Eden," she said, "and she's willing to do a one-picture deal with Summit *if* I okay it. But I'm not going to okay it unless you release Nick Martin from his contract, and that's flat."

Watt showed pleased surprise.

"Well, we might get together on that," he said instantly, for he was a fan of Miss Eden's and for a long time had yearned

to star her in a remake of *Vanity Fair*. "Why didn't you bring her along? We could have—"

"Nonsense!" St. Cyr shouted. "Do not discuss this matter yet, Tolliver."

"She's down at Laguna," Erika explained. "Be quiet, St. Cyr! I won't—"

A knock at the door interrupted her. Martin hurried to open it and as he had expected encountered a waiter with a tray.

"Quick work," he said urbanely, accepting the huge, coldly sweating Napoleon in a bank of ice. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

St. Cyr's booming shouts from behind him drowned out whatever remark the waiter may have made as he received a bill from Martin and withdrew, looking nauseated.

"No, no, no, no," St. Cyr was roaring. "Tolliver, we can get Gloria and keep this writer too, not that he is any good, but I have spent already thirteen weeks training him in the St. Cyr approach. Leave it to me. In Mixo-Lydia we handle—"

Erika's attractive mouth was opening and shutting, her voice unheard in the uproar. St. Cyr could keep it up indefinitely, as was well known in Hollywood. Martin sighed, lifted the brimming Napoleon and sniffed delicately as he stepped backward toward his chair. When his heel touched it, he tripped with the utmost grace and savoir-faire, and very deftly emptied the Helena Glinska, ale, honey, creme de menthe, ice and all, over St. Cyr's capacious front.

St. Cyr's bellow broke the microphone.

Martin had composed his invention carefully. The nauseous brew combined the maximum elements of wetness, coldness, stickiness and pungency.

The drenched St. Cyr, shuddering violently as the icy beverage deluged his legs, snatched out his handkerchief and mopped in vain. The handkerchief merely stuck to his trousers, glued there by twelve jiggers of honey. He reeked of peppermint.

"I suggest we adjourn to the commissary," Martin said fastidiously. "In some private booth we can go on with this discussion away from the—the rather overpowering smell of peppermint."

"In Mixo-Lydia," St. Cyr gasped, sloshing in his shoes as he turned toward Martin, "in Mixo-Lydia we throw to the dogs—we boil in oil—we—"

"And next time," Martin said, "please don't joggle my elbow when I'm holding a Helena Glinska. It's most annoying."

St. Cyr drew a mighty breath, rose to his full height—and then subsided. St. Cyr at the moment looked like a Keystone Kop after the chase sequence, and knew it. Even if he killed

Martin now, the element of classic tragedy would be lacking. He would appear in the untenable position of Hamlet murdering his uncle with custard pies.

"Do nothing until I return!" he commanded, and with a final glare at Martin plunged moistly out of the theater.

The door crashed shut behind him. There was silence for a moment except for the soft music from the overhead screen which DeeDee had caused to be turned on again, so that she might watch her own lovely form flicker in dimmed images through pastel waves, while she sang a duet with Dan Dailey about sailors, mermaids and her home in far Atlantis.

"And now," said Martin, turning with quiet authority to Watt, who was regarding him with a baffled expression, "I want a word with you."

"I can't discuss your contract till Raoul gets back," Watt said quickly.

"Nonsense," Martin said in a firm voice. "Why should St. Cyr dictate your decisions? Without you, he couldn't turn out a box-office success if he had to. No, be quiet, Erika. I'm handling this, my pretty creature."

Watt rose to his feet. "Sorry, I can't discuss it," he said. "St. Cyr pictures make money, and you're an inexperien—"

"That's why I see the true situation so clearly," Martin said. "The trouble with you is you draw a line between artistic genius and financial genius. To you, it's merely routine when you work with the plastic medium of human minds, shaping them into an Ideal Audience. You are an ecological genius, Tolliver Watt! The true artist controls his environment, and gradually you, with a master's consummate skill, shape that great mass of living, breathing humanity into a perfect audience. . . ."

"Sorry," Watt said, but not brusquely. "I really have no time—ah—"

"Your genius has gone long enough unrecognized," Martin said hastily, letting admiration ring in his golden voice. "You assume that St. Cyr is your equal. You give him your own credit titles. Yet in your own mind you must have known that half the credit for his pictures is yours. Was Phidias noncommercial? Was Michaelangelo? Commercialism is simply a label for functionalism, and all great artists produce functional art. The trivial details of Rubens' masterpieces were filled in by assistants, were they not? But Rubens got the credit, not his hirelings. The proof of the pudding's obvious. Why?" Cunningly gauging his listener, Martin here broke off.

"Why?" Watt asked.

"Sit down," Martin urged. "I'll tell you why. St. Cyr's pictures make money, but you're responsible for their molding

into the ideal form, impressing your character-matrix upon everything and everyone at Summit Studios. . . ."

Slowly Watt sank into his chair. About his ears the hypnotic bursts of Disraelian rodomontade thundered compellingly. For Martin had the man hooked. With unerring aim he had at the first try discovered Watt's weakness—the uncomfortable feeling in a professionally arty town that money-making is a basically contemptible business. Disraeli had handled tougher problems in his day. He had swayed parliaments.

Watt swayed, tottered—and fell. It took about ten minutes, all in all. By the end of that time, dizzy with eloquent praise of his economic ability Watt had realized that while St. Cyr might be an artistic genius, he had no business interfering in the plans of an economic genius. Nobody told Watt what to do when economics were concerned.

"You have the broad vision that can balance all possibilities and show the right path with perfect clarity," Martin said glibly. "Very well. You wish Eden. You feel—do you not?—that I am unsuitable material. Only geniuses can change their plans with instantaneous speed. . . . When will my contract release be ready?"

"What?" said Watt, in a swimming, glorious daze. "Oh. Of course. Hm-m. Your contract release. Well, now—"

"St. Cyr would stubbornly cling to past errors until Summit goes broke," Martin pointed out. "Only a genius like Tolliver Watt strikes when the iron is hot, when he sees a chance to exchange failure for success, a Martin for an Eden."

"Hm-m," Watt said. "Yes. Very well, then." His long face grew shrewd. "Very well, you get your release—*after* I've signed Eden."

"There you put your finger on the heart of the matter," Martin approved, after a very brief moment of somewhat dashed thought. "Miss Eden is still undecided. If you left the transaction to somebody like St. Cyr, say, it would be botched. Erika, you have your car here? How quickly could you drive Tolliver Watt to Laguna? He's the only person with the skill to handle this situation."

"What situa—oh, yes. Of course, Nick. We could start right away."

"But—" Watt said.

The Disraeli-matrix swept on into oratorical periods that made the walls ring. The golden tongue played arpeggios with logic.

"I see," the dazed Watt murmured, allowing himself to be shepherded toward the door. "Yes, yes, of course. Then—suppose you drop over to my place tonight, Martin. After I get

the Eden signature, I'll have your release prepared. Hm-m. Functional genius. . . ." His voice fell to a low, crooning mutter, and he moved quietly out of the door.

Martin laid a hand on Erika's arm as she followed him.

"Wait a second," he said. "Keep him away from the studio until we get the release. St. Cyr can still outshout me any time. But he's hooked. We—"

"Nick," Erika said, looking searchingly into his face. "What's happened?"

"Tell you tonight," Martin said hastily, hearing a distant bellow that might be the voice of St. Cyr approaching. "When I have time I'm going to sweep you off your feet. Did you know that I've worshipped you from afar all my life? But right now, get Watt out of the way. Hurry!"

Erika cast a glance of amazed bewilderment at him as he thrust her out of the door. Martin thought there was a certain element of pleasure in the surprise.

"Where is Tolliver?" The loud, annoyed roar of St. Cyr made Martin wince. The director was displeased, it appeared, because only in Costumes could a pair of trousers be found large enough to fit him. He took it as a personal affront. "What have you done with Tolliver?" he bellowed.

"Louder, please," Martin said insolently. "I can't hear you."

"DeeDee," St. Cyr shouted, whirling toward the lovely star, who hadn't stirred from her rapturous admiration of DeeDee in technicolor overhead. "Where is Tolliver?"

Martin started. He had quite forgotten DeeDee.

"You don't know, do you DeeDee?" he prompted quickly.

"Shut up," St. Cyr snapped. "Answer me, you—" He added a brisk polysyllable in Mixo-Lydian, with the desired effect. DeeDee wrinkled her flawless brow.

"Tolliver went away, I think. I've got it mixed up with the picture. He went home to meet Nick Martin, didn't he?"

"See?" Martin interrupted, relieved. "No use expecting DeeDee to—"

"But Martin is *here!*" St. Cyr shouted. "Think, think!"

"Was the contract release in the rushes?" DeeDee asked vaguely.

"A contract release?" St. Cyr roared. "What is this? Never will I permit it, never, never, never! DeeDee, answer me—where has Watt gone?"

"He went somewhere with that agent," DeeDee said. "Or was that in the rushes too?"

"But where, where, where?"

"They went to Atlantis," DeeDee announced with an air of faint triumph.

"No!" shouted St. Cyr. "That was the *picture!* The mermaid came from Atlantis, not Watt!"

"Tolliver didn't say he was coming from Atlantis," DeeDee murmured, unruffled. "He said he was going to Atlantis. Then he was going to meet Nick Martin at his house tonight and give him his contract release."

"When?" St. Cyr demanded furiously. "Think, DeeDee? What time did—"

"DeeDee," Martin said, stepping forward with suave confidence, "you can't remember a thing, can you?" But DeeDee was too subnormal to react even to a Disraeli-matrix. She merely smiled placidly at him.

"Out of my way, you writer!" roared St. Cyr, advancing upon Martin. "You will get no contract release! You do not waste St. Cyr's time and get away with it! This I will not endure. I fix you as I fixed Ed Cassidy!"

Martin drew himself up and froze St. Cyr with an insolent smile. His hand toyed with an imaginary monocle. Golden periods were hanging at the end of his tongue. There only remained to hypnotize St. Cyr as he had hypnotized Watt. He drew a deep breath to unleash the floods of his eloquence—

And St. Cyr, also too subhuman to be impressed by urbanity, hit Martin a clout on the jaw.

It could never have happened in the British Parliament.

When the robot walked into Martin's office that evening, he, or it went directly to the desk, unscrewed the bulb from the lamp, pressed the switch, and stuck his finger into the socket. There was a crackling flash. ENIAC withdrew his finger and shook his metallic head violently.

"I needed that," he sighed. "I've been on the go all day, by the Kaldekooz time-scale. Paleolithic, Neolithic, Technological—I don't even know what time it is. Well, how's your ecological adjustment getting on?"

Martin rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Badly," he said. "Tell me, did Disraeli, as Prime Minister, ever have any dealings with a country called Mixo-Lydia?"

"I have no idea," said the robot. "Why do you ask?"

"Because my environment hauled back and took a poke at my jaw," Martin said shortly.

"Then you provoked it," ENIAC countered. "A crisis—a situation of stress—always brings a man's dominant trait to the fore, and Disraeli was dominantly courageous. Under stress, his courage became insolence. But he was intelligent enough to arrange his environment so insolence would be

countered on the semantic level. Mixo-Lydia, eh? I place it vaguely, some billions of years ago, when it was inhabited by giant white apes. Or—oh, now I remember. It's an encysted medieval survival, isn't it?"

Martin nodded.

"So is this movie studio," the robot said. "Your trouble is that you've run up against somebody who's got a better optimum ecological adjustment than you have. That's it. This studio environment is just emerging from medievalism, so it can easily slip back into that plenum when an optimum medievalist exerts pressure. Such types caused the Dark Ages. Well, you'd better change your environment to a neo-technological one, where the Disraeli matrix can be successfully pro-survival. In your era, only a few archaic social-encystments like this studio are feudalistic, so go somewhere else. It takes a feudalist to match a feudalist."

"But I can't go somewhere else," Martin complained. "Not without my contract release. I was supposed to pick it up tonight, but St. Cyr found out what was happening, and he'll throw a monkey-wrench in the works if he has to knock me out again to do it. I'm due at Watt's place now, but St. Cyr's already there—"

"Spare me the trivia," the robot said, raising his hand. "As for this St. Cyr, if he's a medieval character-type, obviously he'll knuckle under only to a stronger man of his own kind."

"How would Disraeli have handled this?" Martin demanded.

"Disraeli would never have got into such a situation in the first place," the robot said unhelpfully. "The ecologizer can give you the ideal ecological differential, but only for your own type, because otherwise it wouldn't be your optimum. Disraeli would have been a failure in Russia in Ivan's time."

"Would you mind clarifying that?" Martin asked thoughtfully.

"Certainly," the robot said with great rapidity. "It all depends on the threshold-response-time of the memory-circuits in the brain, if you assume the identity of the basic chromosome-pattern. The strength of neuronic activation varies in inverse proportion to the quantitative memory factor. Only actual experience could give you Disraeli's memories, but your reactivity-thresholds have been altered until perception and emotional-indices approximate the Disraeli ratio."

"Oh," Martin said. "But how would *you*, say, assert yourself against a medieval steam-shovel?"

"By plugging my demountable brain into a larger steam-shovel," ENIAC told him.

Martin seemed pensive. His hand rose, adjusting an invisible

monocle, while a look of perceptive imagination suddenly crossed his face.

"You mentioned Russia in Ivan's time," he said. "Which Ivan would that be? Not, by any chance—?"

"Ivan the Fourth. Very well adjusted to his environment he was, too. However, enough of this chit-chat. Obviously you'll be one of the failures in our experiment, but our aim is to strike an average, so if you'll put the ecologizer on your—"

"That was Ivan the Terrible, wasn't it?" Martin interrupted. "Look here, could you impress the character-matrix of Ivan the Terrible on my brain?"

"That wouldn't help you a bit," the robot said. "Besides, it's not the purpose of the experiment. Now—"

"One moment. Disraeli can't cope with a medievalist like St. Cyr on his own level, but if I had Ivan the Terrible's reactive thresholds, I'll bet I could throw a bluff that might do the trick. Even though St. Cyr's bigger than I am, he's got a veneer of civilization . . . now wait. He trades on that. He's always dealt with people who are too civilized to use his own methods. The trick would be to call his bluff. And Ivan's the man who could do it."

"But you don't understand."

"Didn't everybody in Russia tremble with fear at Ivan's name?"

"Yes, in—"

"Very well, then," Martin said triumphantly. "You're going to impress the character-matrix of Ivan the Terrible on my mind, and then I'm going to put the bite on St. Cyr the way Ivan would have done it. Disraeli's simply too civilized. Size is a factor, but character's more important. I don't *look* like Disraeli, but people have been reacting to me as though I were George Arliss down to the spit-curl. A good big man can always lick a good little man. But St. Cyr's never been up against a really uncivilized little man—one who'd gladly rip out an enemy's heart with his bare hands." Martin nodded briskly. "St. Cyr will back down—I've found that out. But it would take somebody like Ivan to make him stay all the way down."

"If you think I'm going to impress Ivan's matrix on you, you're wrong," the robot said.

"You couldn't be talked into it?"

"I," said ENIAC, "am a robot, semantically adjusted. Of course you couldn't talk me into it."

Perhaps not, Martin reflected, but Disraeli—hm-m. "Man is a machine." Why, Disraeli was the one person in the world

ideally fitted for robot-coercion. To him, men *were* machines —and what was ENIAC?

"Let's talk this over—" Martin began, absently pushing the desk-lamp toward the robot. And then the golden tongue that had swayed empires was loosed. . . .

"You're not going to like this," the robot said dazedly, sometime later. "Ivan won't do at . . . oh, you've got me all confused. You'll have to eyeprint a—" He began to pull out of his sack the helmet and the quarter-mile of red ribbon.

"To tie up my bonny gray brain," Martin said, drunk with his own rhetoric. "Put it on my head. That's right. Ivan the Terrible, remember. I'll fix St. Cyr's Mixo-Lydian wagon."

"Differential depends on environment as much as on heredity," the robot muttered, clapping the helmet on Martin's head. "Though naturally Ivan wouldn't have had the Tsardom environment without his particular heredity, involving Helena Glinska—there!" He removed the helmet.

"But nothing's happening," Martin said. "I don't feel any different."

"It'll take a few moments. This isn't your basic character-pattern, remember, as Disraeli's was. Enjoy yourself while you can. You'll get the Ivan-effect soon enough." He shouldered the sack and headed uncertainly for the door.

"Wait," Martin said uneasily. "Are you sure—"

"Be quiet. I forgot something—some formality—now I'm all confused. Well, I'll think of it later, or earlier, as the case may be. I'll see you in twelve hours—I hope."

The robot departed. Martin shook his head tentatively from side to side. Then he got up and followed ENIAC to the door. But there was no sign of the robot, except for a diminishing whirlwind of dust in the middle of the corridor.

Something began to happen in Martin's brain. . . .

Behind him, the telephone rang.

Martin heard himself gasp with pure terror. With a sudden, impossible, terrifying, absolute certainty he *knew* who was telephoning.

Assassins!

"Yes, Mr. Martin," said Tolliver Watt's butler to the telephone. "Miss Ashby is here. She is with Mr. Watt and Mr. St. Cyr at the moment, but I will give her your message. You are detained. And she is to call for you—where?"

"The broom-closet on the second floor of the Writers' Building," Martin said in a quavering voice. "It's the only one near a telephone with a long enough cord so I could take the phone in here with me. But I'm not at all certain that I'm safe. I don't like the looks of that broom on my left."

"Sir?"

"Are you *sure* you're Tolliver Watt's butler?" Martin demanded nervously.

"Quite sure, Mr.—eh—Mr. Martin."

"I *am* Mr. Martin," cried Martin with terrified defiance. "By all the laws of God and man, Mr. Martin I am and Mr. Martin I will remain, in spite of all attempts by rebellious dogs to depose me from my rightful place."

"Yes, sir. The broom-closet you say, sir?"

"The broom-closet. Immediately. But swear not to tell another soul, no matter how much you're threatened. I'll protect you."

"Very well, sir. Is that all?"

"Yes. Tell Miss Ashby to hurry. Hang up now. The line may be tapped. I have enemies."

There was a click. Martin replaced his own receiver and furtively surveyed the broom-closet. He told himself that this was ridiculous. There was nothing to be afraid of, was there? True, the broom-closet's narrow walls were closing in upon him alarmingly, while the ceiling descended. . . .

Panic-stricken, Martin emerged from the closet, took a long breath, and threw back his shoulders. "N-not a thing to be afraid of," he said. "Who's afraid?" Whistling, he began to stroll down the hall toward the staircase, but midway agoraphobia overcame him, and his nerve broke.

He ducked into his own office and sweated quietly in the dark until he had mustered up enough courage to turn on a lamp.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica,* in its glass-fronted cabinet, caught his eye. With noiseless haste, Martin secured *ITALY* to *LORD* and opened the volume at his desk. Something, obviously, was very, very wrong. The robot had said that Martin wasn't going to like being Ivan the Terrible, come to think of it. But was Martin wearing Ivan's character-matrix? Perhaps he'd got somebody else's matrix by mistake—that of some arrant coward. Or maybe the Mad Tsar of Russia had really been called Ivan the Terrified. Martin flipped the rustling pages nervously. Ivan, Ivan—here it was.

Son of Helena Glinska . . . married Anastasia Zakharina-Koshkina . . . private life unspeakably abominable . . . memory astonishing, energy indefatigable, ungovernable fury—great natural ability, political foresight, anticipated the ideals of Peter the Great—Martin shook his head.

Then he caught his breath at the next line.

Ivan had lived in an atmosphere of apprehension, imagining that every man's hand was against him.

"Just like me," Martin murmured. "But—but there was more to Ivan than just cowardice. I don't understand."

"Differential," the robot had said, "depends on environment as much as on heredity. Though naturally Ivan wouldn't have had the Tsardom environment without his particular heredity."

Martin sucked in his breath sharply. Environment does make a difference. No doubt Ivan IV had been a fearful coward, but heredity plus environment had given Ivan the one great weapon that had enabled him to keep his cowardice a recessive trait.

Ivan the Terrible had been Tsar of all the Russias.

Give a coward a gun, and, while he doesn't stop being a coward, it won't show in the same way. He may act like a violent, aggressive tyrant instead. That, of course, was why Ivan had been ecologically successful—in his specialized environment. He'd never run up against many stresses that brought his dominant trait to the fore. Like Disraeli, he had been able to control his environment so that such stresses were practically eliminated.

Martin turned green.

Then he remembered Erika. Could he get Erika to keep St. Cyr busy, somehow, while he got his contract release from Watt? As long as he could avoid crises, he could keep his nerve from crumbling, but—*there were assassins everywhere!*

Erika was on her way to the lot by now. Martin swallowed.

He would meet her outside the studio. The broom-closet wasn't safe. He could be trapped there like a rat—

"Nonsense," Martin told himself with shivering firmness. "This isn't me. All I have to do is get a g-grip on m-myself. Come, now. Buck up. *Toujours l'audace!*"

But he went out of his office and downstairs very softly and cautiously. After all, one never knew. And when every man's hand was against one. . . .

Quaking, the character-matrix of Ivan the Terrible stole toward a studio gate.

The taxi drove rapidly toward Bel-Air.

"But what were you doing up that tree?" Erika demanded.

Martin shook violently.

"A werewolf," he chattered. "And a vampire and a ghoul and—I *saw* them, I tell you. There I was at the studio gate, and they all came at me in a mob."

"But they were just coming back from dinner," Erika said. "You know Summit's doing night shooting on *Abbott and Costello Meet Everybody*. Karloff wouldn't hurt a fly."

"I kept telling myself that," Martin said dully, "but I was out of my mind with guilt and fear. You see, I'm an abominable monster. But it's not my fault. It's environmental. I grew up in brutal and degrading conditions—oh, look!" He pointed toward a traffic cop ahead. "The police! Traitors even in the palace guards!"

"Lady, is that guy nuts?" the cabbie demanded.

"Mad or sane, I am Nicholas Martin," Martin announced, with an abrupt volte face. He tried to stand up commandingly, bumped his head, screamed *"Assassins!"* and burrowed into a corner of the seat, panting horribly.

Erika gave him a thoughtful, worried look.

"Nick," she said, "How much have you had to drink? What's wrong?"

Martin shut his eyes and lay back against the cushions.

"Let me have a few minutes, Erika," he pleaded. "I'll be all right as soon as I recover from stress. It's only when I'm under stress that Ivan—"

"You can accept your contract release from Watt, can't you? Surely you'll be able to manage that."

"Of course," Martin said with feeble bravery. He thought it over and reconsidered. "If I can hold your hand," he suggested, taking no chances.

This disgusted Erika so much that for two miles there was no more conversation within the cab.

Erika had been thinking her own thoughts.

"You've certainly changed since this morning," she obersved. "Threatening to make love to me, of all things. As if I'd stand for it. I'd like to see you try." There was a pause. Erika slid her eyes sidewise toward Martin. "I said I'd like to see you try," she repeated.

"Oh, you would, would you?" Martin said with hollow valor. He paused. Oddly enough his tongue, hitherto frozen stiff on one particular subject in Erika's presence, was now thoroughly loosened. Martin wasted no time on theory. Seizing his chance before a new stress might unexpectedly arise, he instantly poured out his heart to Erika, who visibly softened.

"But why didn't you ever say so before?" she asked.

"I can't imagine," Martin said. "Then you'll marry me?"

"But why were you acting so—"

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes," Erika said, and there was a pause. Martin moistened his lips, discovering that somehow he and Erika had moved close together. He was about to seal the bargain in the customary manner when a sudden thought struck him and made him draw back with a little start.

Erika opened her eyes.

"Ah—" said Martin. "Um. I just happened to remember. There's a bad flu epidemic in Chicago. Epidemics spread like wildfire, you know. Why, it could be in Hollywood by now —especially with the prevailing westerly winds."

"I'm damned if I'm going to be proposed to and not kissed," Erika said in a somewhat irritated tone. "You kiss me!"

"But I might give you bubonic plague," Martin said nervously. "Kissing spreads germs. It's a well-known fact."

"Nick!"

"Well—I don't know—when did you last have a cold?"

Erika pulled away from him and went to sit in the other corner.

"Ah," Martin said, after a long silence. "Erika?"

"Don't talk to me, you miserable man," Erika said. "You monster, you."

"I can't help it," Martin cried wildly. "I'll be a coward for twelve hours. It's not my fault. After eight tomorrow morning I'll—I'll walk into a lion-cage if you want, but tonight I'm as yellow as Ivan the Terrible! At least let me tell you what's been happening."

Erika said nothing. Martin instantly plunged into his long and improbable tale.

"I don't believe a word of it," Erika said, when he had finished. She shook her head sharply. "Just the same, I'm still your agent, and your career's still my responsibility. The first and only thing we have to do is get your contract release from Tolliver Watt. And that's *all* we're going to consider right now, do you hear?"

"But St. Cyr—"

"I'll do all the talking. You won't have to say a word. If St. Cyr tries to bully you, I'll handle him. But you've got to be there with me, or St. Cyr will make that an excuse to postpone things again. I know him."

"Now I'm under stress again," Martin said wildly. "I can't stand it. *I'm* not the Tsar of Russia."

"Lady," said the cab-driver, looking back, "if I was you, I'd sure as hell break off that engagement."

"Heads will roll for this," Martin said ominously.

"By mutual consent, agree to terminate . . . yes," Watt said, affixing his name to the legal paper that lay before him on the desk. "That does it. But where in the world is that fellow Martin? He came in with you, I'm certain."

"Did he?" Erika asked, rather wildly. She too, was wondering how Martin had managed to vanish so miraculously from her side. Perhaps he had crept with lightning rapidity under

the carpet. She forced her mind from the thought and reached for the contract release Watt was folding.

"Wait," St. Cyr said, his lower lip jutting. "What about a clause giving us an option on Martin's next play?"

Watt paused, and the director instantly struck home.

"Whatever it may be, I can turn it into a vehicle for Dee-Dee, eh, DeeDee?" He lifted a sausage finger at the lovely star, who nodded obediently.

"It's going to have an all-male cast," Erika said hastily. "And we're discussing contract releases, not options."

"He would give me an option if I had him here," St. Cyr growled, torturing his cigar horribly. "Why does everything conspire against an artist?" He waved a vast, hairy fist in the air. "Now I must break in a new writer, which is a great waste. Within a fortnight Martin would have been a St. Cyr writer. In fact, it is still possible."

"I'm afraid not, Raoul," Watt said resignedly. "You really shouldn't have hit Martin at the studio today."

"But—but he would not dare charge me with assault. In Mixo-Lydia—"

"Why, hello, Nick," DeeDee said, with a bright smile. "What are you hiding behind those curtains for?"

Every eye was turned toward the window draperies, just in time to see the white, terrified face of Nicholas Martin flip out of sight like a scared chipmunk's. Erika, her heart dropping, said hastily, "Oh, that isn't Nick. It doesn't look a bit like him. You made a mistake, DeeDee."

"Did I?" DeeDee asked, perfectly willing to agree.

"Certainly," Erika said, reaching for the contract release in Watt's hand. "Now if you'll just let me have this, I'll—"

"Stop!" cried St. Cyr in a bull's bellow. Head sunk between his heavy shoulders, he lumbered to the window and jerked the curtains aside.

"Ha!" the director said in a sinister voice. "Martin."

"It's a lie," Martin said feebly, making a desperate attempt to conceal his stress-triggered panic. "I've abdicated."

St. Cyr, who had stepped back a pace, was studying Martin carefully. Slowly the cigar in his mouth began to tilt upwards. An unpleasant grin widened the director's mouth.

He shook a finger under Martin's quivering nostrils.

"You!" he said. "Tonight it is a different tune, eh? Today you were drunk. Now I see it all. Valorous with pots, like they say."

"Nonsense," Martin said, rallying his courage by a glance at Erika. "Who say? Nobody but you would say a thing like that. Now what's this all about?"

"What were you doing behind that curtain?" Watt asked.

"*I* wasn't behind the curtain," Martin said, with great bravado. "*You* were. All of you. I was in front of the curtain. Can I help it if the whole lot of you conceal yourselves behind curtains in a library, like—like conspirators?" The word was unfortunately chosen. A panicky light flashed into Martin's eyes. "Yes, conspirators," he went on nervously. "You think I don't know, eh? Well, I do. You're all assassins, plotting and planning. So this is your headquarters, is it? All night your hired dogs have been at my heels, driving me like a wounded caribou to—"

"We've got to be going," Erika said desperately. "There's just time to catch the next carib—the next plane east." She reached for the contract release, but Watt suddenly put it in his pocket. He turned his chair toward Martin.

"Will you give us an option on your next play?" he demanded.

"Of course he will give us an option!" St. Cyr said, studying Martin's air of bravado with an experienced eye. "Also, there is to be no question of a charge of assault, for if there is I will beat you. So it is in Mixo-Lydia. In fact, you do not even want a release from your contract, Martin. It is all a mistake. I will turn you into a St. Cyr writer, and all will be well. So. Now you will ask Tolliver to tear up that release, will you not—*ha?*"

"Of course you won't, Nick," Erika cried. "Say so!"

There was a pregnant silence. Watt watched with sharp interest. So did the unhappy Erika, torn between her responsibility as Martin's agent and her disgust at the man's abject cowardice. DeeDee watched too, her eyes very wide and a cheerful smile upon her handsome face. But the battle was obviously between Martin and Raoul St. Cyr.

Martin drew himself up desperately. Now or never he must force himself to be truly Terrible. Already he had a troubled expression, just like Ivan. He strove to look sinister too. An enigmatic smile played around his lips. For an instant he resembled the Mad Tsar of Russia, except, of course, that he was clean-shaven. With contemptuous, regal power Martin stared down the Mixo-Lydian.

"You will tear up that release and sign an agreement giving us option on your next play too, ha?" St. Cyr said—but a trifle uncertainly.

"I'll do as I please," Martin told him. "How would you like to be eaten alive by dogs?"

"I don't know, Raoul," Watt said. "Let's try to get this settled even if—"

"Do you want me to go over to Metro and take DeeDee with me?" St. Cyr cried, turning toward Watt. "He *will* sign!"

And, reaching into an inner pocket for a pen, the burly director swung back toward Martin.

"*Assassin!*" cried Martin, misinterpreting the gesture.

A gloating smile appeared on St. Cyr's revolting features.

"Now we have him, Tolliver," he said, with heavy triumph, and these ominous words added the final stress to Martin's overwhelming burden. With a mad cry he rushed past St. Cyr, wrenched open a door, and fled.

From behind him came Erika's Valkyrie voice.

"Leave him alone! Haven't you done enough already? Now I'm going to get that contract release from you before I leave this room, Tolliver Watt, and I warn you, St. Cyr, if you—"

But by then Martin was five rooms away, and the voice faded. He darted on, hopelessly trying to make himself slow down and return to the scene of battle. The pressure was too strong. Terror hurled him down a corridor, into another room, and against a metallic object from which he rebounded, to find himself sitting on the floor looking up at ENIAC Gamma the Ninety-Third.

"Ah, there you are," the robot said. "I've been searching all over space-time for you. You forgot to give me a waiver of responsibility when you talked me into varying the experiment. The Authorities would be in my gears if I didn't bring back an eyeprinted waiver when a subject's scratched by variance."

With a frightened glance behind him, Martin rose to his feet.

"What?" he asked confusedly. "Listen, you've got to change me back to myself. Everyone's trying to kill me. You're just in time. I can't wait twelve hours. Change me back to myself, quick!"

"Oh, I'm through with you," the robot said callously. "You're no longer a suitably unconditioned subject, after that last treatment you insisted on. I should have got the waiver from you then, but you got me all confused with Disraeli's oratory. Now here. Just hold this up to your left eye for twenty seconds." He extended a flat, glittering little metal disk. "It's already sensitized and filled out. It only needs your eyeprint. Affix it, and you'll never see me again."

Martin shrank away.

"But what's going to happen to me?" he quavered, swallowing.

"How should I know? After twelve hours, the treatment will wear off, and you'll be yourself again. Hold this up to your eye, now."

"I will if you'll change me back to myself," Martin haggled.

"I can't. It's against the rules. One variance is bad enough,

even with a filed waiver, but two? Oh, no. Hold this up to your left eye—"

"No," Martin said with feeble firmness. "I won't."

ENIAC studied him.

"Yes, you will," the robot said finally, "or I'll go boo at you."

Martin paled slightly, but he shook his head in desperate determination.

"No," he said doggedly. "Unless I get rid of Ivan's matrix right now, Erika will never marry me and I'll never get my contract release from Watt. All you have to do is put that helmet on my head and change me back to myself. Is that too much to ask?"

"Certainly, of a robot," ENIAC said stiffly. "No more shilly-shallying. It's lucky you are wearing the Ivan-matrix, so I can impose my will on you. Put your eyeprint on this. Instantly!"

Martin rushed behind the couch and hid. The robot advanced menacingly. And at that moment, pushed to the last ditch, Martin suddenly remembered something.

He faced the robot.

"Wait," he said. "You don't understand. I can't eyeprint that thing. It won't work on me. Don't you realize that? It's supposed to take the eyeprint—"

"—of the rod-and-cone pattern of the retina," the robot said. "So—"

"So how can it do that unless I can keep my eye open for twenty seconds? My perceptive reaction-thresholds are Ivan's aren't they? I can't control the reflex of blinking. I've got a coward's synapses. And they'd force me to shut my eyes tight the second that gimmick got too close to them."

"Hold them open," the robot suggested. "With your fingers."

"My fingers have reflexes too," Martin argued, moving toward a sideboard. "There's only one answer. I've got to get drunk. If I'm half stupefied with liquor, my reflexes will be so slow I won't be able to shut my eyes. And don't try to use force, either. If I dropped dead with fear, how could you get my eyeprint then?"

"Very easily," the robot said. "I'd pry open your lids—"

Martin hastily reached for a bottle on the sideboard, and a glass. But his hand swerved aside and gripped, instead, a siphon of soda water.

"—only," ENIAC went on, "the forgery might be detected."

Martin fizzled the glass full of soda and took a long drink.

"I won't be long getting drunk," he said, his voice thickening. "In fact, it's beginning to work already. See? I'm cooperating."

The robot hesitated.

"Well, hurry up about it," he said, and sat down.

Martin, about to take another drink, suddenly paused, staring at ENIAC. Then, with a sharply indrawn breath, he lowered the glass.

"What's the matter now?" the robot asked. "Drink your—what is it?"

"It's whiskey," Martin told the inexperienced automaton, "but now I see it all. You've put poison in it. So that's your plan, is it? Well, I won't touch another drop, and now you'll never get my eyeprint. I'm no fool."

"Cog Almighty," the robot said, rising. "You poured that drink yourself. How could I have poisoned it? Drink!"

"I won't," Martin said, with a coward's stubbornness, fighting back the growing suspicion that the drink might really be toxic.

"You swallow that drink," ENIAC commanded, his voice beginning to quiver slightly. "It's perfectly harmless."

"Then prove it!" Martin said cunningly. "Would you be willing to switch glasses? Would you drink this poisoned brew yourself?"

"How do you expect me to drink?" the robot demanded. "I—" He paused. "All right, hand me the glass," he said. "I'll take a sip. Then you've got to drink the rest of it."

"Aha!" Martin said. "You betrayed yourself that time. You're a robot. You can't drink, remember? Not the same way that I can, anyhow. Now I've got you trapped, you assassin. *There's* your brew." He pointed to a floor-lamp. "Do you dare to drink with me now, in your electrical fashion, or do you admit you are trying to poison me? Wait a minute, what am I saying? That wouldn't prove a—"

"Of course it would," the robot said hastily. "You're perfectly right, and it's very cunning of you. We'll drink together, and that will prove your whiskey's harmless—so you'll keep on drinking till your reflexes slow down, see?"

"Well," Martin began uncertainly, but the unscrupulous robot unscrewed a bulb from the floor lamp, pulled the switch, and inserted his finger into the empty socket, which caused a crackling flash. "There," the robot said. "It isn't poisoned, see?"

"You're not swallowing it," Martin said suspiciously. "You're holding it in your mouth—I mean your finger."

ENIAC again probed the socket.

"Well, all right, perhaps," Martin said, in a doubtful fashion. "But I'm not going to risk your slipping a powder in my liquor, you traitor. You're going to keep up with me, drink for drink, until I can eyeprint that gimmick of yours—or else

I stop drinking. But does sticking your finger in that lamp really prove my liquor isn't poisoned? I can't quite—"

"Of course it does," the robot said quickly. "I'll prove it. I'll do it again . . . *f(t)*. Powerful DC, isn't it? Certainly it proves it. Keep drinking, now."

His gaze watchfully on the robot, Martin lifted his glass of club soda.

"F ƒƒ ƒƒ f(t)!" cried the robot, some time later, sketching a singularly loose smile on its metallic face.

"Best fermented mammoth's milk I ever tasted," Martin agreed, lifting his tenth glass of soda-water. He felt slightly queasy and wondered if he might be drowning.

"Mammoth's milk?" asked ENIAC thickly. "What year is this?"

Martin drew a long breath. Ivan's capacious memory had served him very well so far. Voltage, he recalled, increased the frequency of the robot's thought-patterns and disorganized ENIAC's memory—which was being proved before his eyes. But the crux of his plan was yet to come. . . .

"The year of the great Hairy One, of course," Martin said briskly. "Don't you remember?"

"Then you—" ENIAC strove to focus upon his drinking-companion. "You must be Mammoth-Slayer."

"That's it!" Martin cried. "Have another jolt. What about giving me the treatment now?"

"What treatment?"

Martin looked impatient. "You said you were going to impose the character-matrix of Mammoth-Slayer on my mind. You said *that* would insure my optimum ecological adjustment in this temporal phase, and nothing else would."

"Did I? But you're not Mammoth-Slayer," ENIAC said confusedly. "Mammoth-Slayer was the son of the Great Hairy One. What's your mother's name?"

"The Great Hairy One," Martin replied, at which the robot grated its hand across its gleaming forehead.

"Have one more jolt," Martin suggested. "Now take out the ecologizer and put it on my head."

"Like this?" ENIAC asked, obeying. "I keep feeling I've forgotten something important. *F (t).*"

Martin adjusted the crystal helmet on his skull. "Now," he commanded. "Give me the character-matrix of Mammoth-Slayer, son of the Great Hairy One."

"Well—all right," ENIAC said dizzily. The red ribbons swirled. There was a flash from the helmet. "There," the robot said. "It's done. It may take a few minutes to begin functioning, but then for twelve hours you'll—wait! Where are you going?"

But Martin had already departed.

The robot stuffed the helmet and the quarter-mile of red ribbon back for the last time. He lurched to the floor-lamp, muttering something about one for the road. Afterward, the room lay empty. A fading murmur said, *"F(t)."*

"Nick!" Erika gasped, staring at the figure in the doorway. "Don't stand like that! You frighten me!"

Everyone in the room looked up abruptly at her cry, and so were just in time to see a horrifying change take place in Martin's shape. It was an illusion, of course, but an alarming one. His knees slowly bent until he was half-crouching, his shoulders slumped as though bowed by the weight of enormous back and shoulder muscles, and his arms swung forward until their knuckles hung perilously near the floor.

Nicholas Martin had at last achieved a personality whose ecological norm would put him on a level with Raoul St. Cyr.

"Nick!" Erika quavered.

Slowly Martin's jaw protruded till his lower teeth were hideously visible. Gradually his eyelids dropped until he was peering up out of tiny, wicked sockets. Then, slowly, a perfectly shocking grin broadened Mr. Martin's mouth.

"Erika," he said throatily. "Mine!"

And with that, he shambled forward, seized the horrified girl in his arms, and bit her on the ear.

"Oh, Nick," Erika murmured, closing her eyes. "Why didn't you ever—no, no, *no!* Nick! Stop it! The contract release. We've got to—Nick, what are you doing?" She snatched at Martin's departing form, but too late.

For all his ungainly and unpleasant gait, Martin covered ground fast. Almost instantly he was clambering over Watt's desk as the most direct route to that startled tycoon. DeeDee looked on, a little surprised. St. Cyr lunged forward.

"In Mixo-Lydia—" he began. "Ha! So!" He picked up Martin and threw him across the room.

"Oh, you beast," Erika cried, and flung herself upon the director, beating at his brawny chest. On second thought, she used her shoes on his shins with more effect. St. Cyr, no gentleman, turned her around, pinioned her arms behind her, and glanced up at Watt's alarmed cry.

"Martin! What are you doing?"

There was reason for his inquiry. Apparently unhurt by St. Cyr's toss, Martin had hit the floor, rolled over and over like a ball, knocked down a floor-lamp with a crash, and uncurled, with an unpleasant expression on his face. He rose crouching, bandy-legged, his arms swinging low, a snarl curling his lips.

"You take my mate?" the pithecanthropic Mr. Martin inquired throatily, rapidly losing all touch with the twentieth century. It was a rhetorical question. He picked up the lamp-standard—he did not have to bend to do it—tore off the silk shade as he would have peeled foliage from a tree-limb, and balanced the weapon in his hand. Then he moved forward, carrying the lamp-standard like a spear.

"I," said Martin, "kill."

He then endeavored, with the most admirable single-heartedness, to carry out his expressed intention. The first thrust of the blunt, improvised spear rammed into St. Cyr's solar plexus and drove him back against the wall with a booming thud. This seemed to be what Martin wanted. Keeping one end of his spear pressed into the director's belly, he crouched lower, dug his toes into the rug, and did his very best to drill a hole in St. Cyr.

"Stop it!" cried Watt, flinging himself into the conflict. Ancient reflexes took over. Martin's arm shot out. Watt shot off in the opposite direction.

The lamp broke.

Martin looked pensively at the pieces, tentatively began to bite one, changed his mind, and looked at St. Cyr instead. The gasping director, mouthing threats, curses and objections, drew himself up, and shook a huge fist at Martin.

"I," he announced, "shall kill you with my bare hands. Then I go over to MGM with DeeDee. In Mixo-Lydia—"

Martin lifted his own fists toward his face. He regarded them. He unclenched them slowly, while a terrible grin spread across his face. And then, with every tooth showing, and with the hungry gleam of a mad tiger in his tiny little eyes, he lifted his gaze to St. Cyr's throat.

Mammoth-Slayer was not the son of the Great Hairy One for nothing.

Martin sprang.

So did St. Cyr—in another direction, screaming with sudden terror. For, after all, he was only a medievalist. The feudal man is far more civilized than the so-called man of Mammoth-Slayer's primordially direct era, and as a man recoils from a small but murderous wildcat, so St. Cyr fled in sudden civilized horror from an attacker who was, literally, afraid of nothing.

He sprang through the window and, shrieking, vanished into the night.

Martin was taken by surprise. When Mammoth-Slayer leaped at an enemy, the enemy leaped at him too, and so Martin's head slammed against the wall with disconcerting force.

Dimly he heard diminishing, terrified cries. Laboriously he crawled to his feet and sat back against the wall, snarling, quite ready. . . .

"Nick!" Erika's voice called. "Nick, it's me! Stop it! *Stop it!* DeeDee—"

"Ugh?" Martin said thickly, shaking his head. "Kill." He growled softly, blinking through red-rimmed little eyes at the scene around him. It swam back slowly into focus. Erika was struggling with DeeDee near the window.

"You let me go," DeeDee cried. "Where Raoul goes, I go."

"DeeDee!" pleaded a new voice. Martin glanced aside to see Tolliver Watt crumpled in a corner, a crushed lamp-shade half obscuring his face.

With a violent effort Martin straightened up. Walking upright seemed unnatural, somehow, but it helped submerge Mammoth-Slayer's worst instincts. Besides, with St. Cyr gone, stresses were slowly subsiding, so that Mammoth-Slayer's dominant trait was receding from the active foreground.

Martin tested his tongue cautiously, relieved to find he was still capable of human speech.

"Uh," he said. "Arrgh . . . ah. Watt."

Watt blinked at him anxiously through the lamp-shade.

"Urgh . . . Ur—release," Martin said, with a violent effort. "Contract release. Gimme."

Watt had courage. He crawled to his feet, removing the lamp-shade.

"Contract release!" he snapped. "You madman! Don't you realize what you've done? DeeDee's walking out on me. DeeDee, don't go. We will bring Raoul back—"

"Raoul told me to quit if he quit," DeeDee said stubbornly.

"You don't have to do what St. Cyr tells you," Erika said, hanging onto the struggling star.

"Don't I?" DeeDee asked, astonished. "Yes, I do. I always have."

"DeeDee," Watt said frantically, "I'll give you the finest contract on earth—a ten-year contract—look, here it is." He tore out a well-creased document. "All you have to do is sign, and you can have anything you want. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Oh, yes," DeeDee said. "But Raoul wouldn't like it." She broke free from Erika.

"Martin!" Watt told the playwright frantically, "Get St. Cyr back. Apologize to him. I don't care how, but get him back! If you don't, I—I'll never give you your release."

Martin was observed to slump slightly—perhaps with hopelessness. Then, again, perhaps not.

"I'm sorry," DeeDee said. "I liked working for you, Tol-

liver. But I have to do what Raoul says, of course." And she moved toward the window.

Martin had slumped further down, till his knuckles quite brushed the rug. His angry little eyes, glowing with baffled rage, were fixed on DeeDee. Slowly his lips peeled back, exposing every tooth in his head.

"You," he said, in an ominous growl.

DeeDee paused, but only briefly.

Then the enraged roar of a wild beast reverberated through the room. *"You come back!"* bellowed the infuriated Mammoth-Slayer, and with one agile bound sprang to the window, seized DeeDee and slung her under one arm. Wheeling, he glared jealously at the shrinking Watt and reached for Erika. In a trice he had the struggling forms of both girls captive, one under each arm. His wicked little eyes glanced from one to another. Then, playing no favorites, he bit each quickly on the ear.

"Nick!" Erika cried. "How dare you!"

"Mine," Mammoth-Slayer informed her hoarsely.

"You bet I am," Erika said, "but that works both ways. Put down that hussy you've got under your other arm."

Mammoth-Slayer was observed to eye DeeDee doubtfully.

"Well," Erika said tartly, "make up your mind."

"Both," said the uncivilized playwright. "Yes."

"No!" Erika said.

"Yes," DeeDee breathed in an entirely new tone. Limp as a dishrag, the lovely creature hung from Martin's arm and gazed up at her captor with idolatrous admiration.

"Oh, you hussy," Erika said. "What about St. Cyr?"

"Him," DeeDee said scornfully. "He hasn't got a thing, the sissy. I'll never look at him again." She turned her adoring gaze back to Martin.

"Pah," the latter grunted, tossing DeeDee into Watt's lap. "Yours. Keep her." He grinned approvingly at Erika. "Strong she. Better."

Both Watt and DeeDee remained motionless, staring at Martin.

"You," he said, thrusting a finger at DeeDee. "You stay with him. Ha?" He indicated Watt.

DeeDee nodded in slavish adoration.

"You sign contract?"

Nod.

Martin looked significantly into Watt's eyes. He extended his hand.

"The contract release," Erika explained, upside-down. "Give it to him before he pulls your head off."

Slowly Watt pulled the contract release from his pocket and

held it out. But Martin was already shambling toward the window. Erika reached back hastily and snatched the document.

"That was a wonderful act," she told Nick, as they reached the street. "Put me down now. We can find a cab some—"

"No act," Martin growled. "Real. Till tomorrow. After that—" He shrugged. "But tonight, Mammoth-Slayer." He attempted to climb a palm tree, changed his mind, and shambled on, carrying the now pensive Erika. But it was not until a police car drove past that Erika screamed. . . .

"I'll bail you out tomorrow," Erika told Mammoth-Slayer, struggling between two large patrolmen.

Her words were drowned in an infuriated bellow.

Thereafter events blurred, to solidify again for the irate Mammoth-Slayer only when he was thrown in a cell, where he picked himself up with a threatening roar. "I kill!" he announced, seizing the bars.

"Arrrgh!"

"Two in one night," said a bored voice, moving away outside. "Both in Bel-Air, too. Think they're hopped up? We couldn't get a coherent story out of either one."

The bars shook. An annoyed voice from one of the bunks said to shut up, and added that there had been already enough trouble from nincompoops without—here it paused, hesitated, and uttered a shrill, sharp, piercing cry.

Silence prevailed, momentarily, in the cell-block as Mammoth-Slayer, son of the Great Hairy One, turned slowly to face Raoul St. Cyr.

George O. Smith

It will be a great shock to quite a few aficionados of science-fiction to find a story by George O. Smith in this book. For a great number of aficionados take their science-fiction very seriously indeed and Mr. Smith is high on their roll of honor as a writer whose themes shake laboratories and even solar systems—but not bellies. But we wrote him to ask if he'd ever written a funny story. We're glad we wrote that letter.

—F. B.

The Cosmic Jackpot

ZINTAL, THE MARTIAN PHYSICIST, TURNED from his Martian companions and crossed the room toward a large, ornate machine. From his pocket Zintal took a couple of shiny Martian coins and dropped them in the slot and pressed a number of buttons in sequence.

He waited. The machine clicked faintly and made a noise similar to a Compur shutter set to one second. Then a small door became illuminated below the keyboard.

Zintal opened the door in a semi-absent-minded way and reached in for his purchase. His absent-mindedness disappeared. It would have remained, of course, had he received what he paid for. But instead of the desired purchase, he held in his large greenish hand a small red cylinder.

Zintal grunted angrily and said: *"Ve komacil weezro!"* *

Whereupon Zintal hurled the small cylinder back into the delivery receptacle and slammed the door. He had no idea of what "Lovepruf Lipstick" could have been, and as for its cosmetic value, even the most wanton of Martian wantons had not fallen to the bizarre idea of using red makeup on their

* This expression is high grade Martian and the expostulation of a Martin physicist, therefore its translation into good English is near-impossible. However, a very rough transliteration of the phrase is—
Ve—Personal pronoun—*I*
Komacil—Verb past-indicative—*was*
Weezro—Verb transitive—*Gypped!*

normally healthy green complexions. The fact is, Zintal had punched the "Reject" button before he realized that the lettering on the cylinder was profoundly dissimilar to any type of lettering he had ever seen. This included a horde of Martian mathematical symbols and ideographs representing physical identities and, naturally, the cursive and printed forms of Martian cryptology.

He reached for the little door but he was too late. Back out of the return-chute there came two silvery coins that Zintal picked up.

For all Zintal could tell at this moment, they might have been a good grade of platinum or pure iridium, or any other silvery metal. But as a medium of exchange on Mars they were worth exactly nothing.

Zintal could not even tell that the letters on the obverse side referred to: (1) a condition of freedom, (2) faith in a familiar deity, and (3) the date of coinage. On the reverse side the lettering was equally desolate of meaning to the Martian. There was: (1) the country of coinage, (2) a statement of value, and (3) a phrase in— Well, that itself would have stopped Zintal right in his tracks. Zintal, the Martian physicist, could no more conceive of a planet where more than one language existed than he could, at the time of reading, have deciphered the statement, "E pluribus unum."

Zintal aimed a kick at the offending machine, then beat upon its side with a massive green fist. He probed into the delivery receptacle angrily until the communications grille came to life and a cold official voice demanded that he cease trying to make the slot machine deliver without the proper deposit. Zintal snarled and, muttering Martian imprecations, returned to his friends.

Even on Mars it is sheer futility to argue with a slot machine.

Johnny Edwards was addressing a large, attentive group, but one small portion of his mind was contemplating Norma Harris, his secretary. In the terms of the day, Johnny Edwards "went for" Miss Harris in a rather large and affectionate way, but since the human race still lacked the faculty of mental telepathy, he was unaware of her opinion of him.

Her real opinion, that is. There was, is, and probably always will be a deep, underlying difference between the enjoyment of holding hands in a moving-picture house or cooperating in a good-night kiss and the idea of first-degree matrimony.

Johnny Edwards was inclined to conjecture thus whenever he was doing something routine, or something for which he had prepared.

This was one of those occasions. The Edwards Merchandiser was his baby. He knew its tricks backward, forward, and in advance. Now that he was starting production—not engineering, mind, but real production—of the Edwards Merchandiser, he was running off the rehearsed speech with half his brain on the job, the other half being bent toward the puzzle of Miss Harris' affections.

She wrinkled her nose at him, which caused him to stutter over a word, which caused him hastily to bend his entire contemplation on his talk. He discovered, with no surprise at all, that he was in the self-apology section.

"—ah—er—I was saying, humorously, that this idea may be likened to electricity or nuclear physics as a field. Both were and are expected to remake the world. The physicists and the imaginative writers of the day contemplate and describe great works and great ideas.

"But are we any closer to interplanetary travel now than we were before the war? Some say yes, some no. Is any house being heated with the power from the fission of uranium? The fact is, gentlemen, that while some men contemplate massive feats, other men are working in smaller ways to benefit the world. No doubt the early workers in electricity did not foresee the complete overhauling the world would get when the electric light came along.

"So it is with the Edwards Merchandiser. It will be called a slot machine and it will be popular. Its relationship to science will be scoffed at by those brains and aesthetes who cannot correlate the principle of the spinthariscope with the dollar watch.

"Suffice this description. In the Edwards Merchandiser there is a matter transmitter. By-passing all the confounded legal red-tape now ensuing among government, public and private carriers of packages and letters, union labor, and others, the Edwards Merchandiser is a new idea and therefore is permitted to operate without trouble.

"In the slot you place a coin. Upon the keyboard you tap out the name or description of the item you desire. The window flashes the proper cost if you have not deposited properly. Upon receipt of the proper amount, the operator then sends you the item you have purchased. It is as simple as that. Anything that will fit the delivery cubicle here, behind this door, can be bought and delivered! Admittedly, some items may be difficult to obtain on an instant's notice. Yet the organization of the Edwards Merchandiser is such that it can and will deliver if it is humanly possible."

He paused amid a round of applause. A hand went up at

the rear of the office, and Edwards nodded at the questioner.

"I'd like to see a demonstration, please."

Edwards nodded again. "Yes," he said. "But I must ask that you don't try to stump me. I am not running a you-can't-stump-me game."

"I don't want to stump you," the man disclaimed with a smile. "Anything will do. Just show us."

Edwards smiled genially. "Miss Harris," he said affably, "will you please step over and use the merchandiser for the gentlemen present?"

Norma Harris smiled. She always smiled when Johnny Edwards asked her to do something. She hoped that eventually she could convey the idea that she would smile as happily when asked to sew buttons on or darn a sock. She'd deal with cleaning out the furnace when she came to it, but for the time being Norma was being affectionately helpful.

There was, of course, every opportunity to be taken for hinting. This was nothing new; it was just one possibility out of a long line of hints. Quietly smiling, Norma Harris extracted two dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot. Then on the keyboard, she tapped out the name of a product familiar to her and waited.

Strangely named product, if you went for semantics. "Lovepruf" apparently means something to prevent the tender emotion when what it really meant was that it was un—

Norma opened the little door at the click of the machine and reached in. Her hand came out quickly and she said, "Oh!" in sharp surprise.

"Oh—what?" asked Johnny Edwards.

Frowning with puzzlement, she handed him a small package.

Johnny Edwards looked at it. It was ornate and compact, covered with a glassine substance that might have been cellophane. It meant nothing to him. Had Johnny Edwards been a Martian, he would have known what it was, and he could have used and enjoyed it. But since neither Johnny Edwards nor your present correspondent was able at that time to read Martian, and as Zintal's memory failed him in the ensuing period, the true identity of the package is one of the minor mysteries of the Solar System.

"What is it?" asked Johnny.

"I don't know," she returned.

"Isn't it what you asked for?"

"No," she said.

Edwards swore under his breath. This was a fine demonstration to inaugurate the sale of a new machine. It was as bad as the automobile show where the Bland sedan had stalled on

the stage and had to be pushed off instead of roaring away like the others did. It was like the child prodigy who forgot the seventh line of "Horatius at the Bridge." Yet like the Lohengrin who sang the last aria too long and remarked in a second-balcony whisper, "What time does the next swan leave?" he, Johnny Edwards, was capable of turning disaster into at least a minor victory.

"This is deplorable," he said in solemn tones. "Obviously something went cockeyed at the merchandising center. Well —" he laughed—"people have been beating on the sides of slot machines for a couple of hundred years, but with the Edwards Merchandiser, no man need abandon his money to the maw of an insensate machine. Observe what we do with an error, after which Miss Harris will try again and will without question succeed.

"Frankly," he said as Miss Harris deposited the package into the receptacle once more, "I'd have preferred that the error-demonstration take place after the success. I would have planned it that way if I'd planned a failure. But— Okay, Miss Harris?"

She nodded brightly, jingling the coins in her hand. Abruptly she dropped them and, in her attempt to catch them, inadvertently kicked them under the desk.

"I can sure mess things," she said apologetically. She took two more dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot, tapped out the name, and opened the door. With a slight blush, Norma Harris handed Johnny Edwards a small cylinder of red plastic.

"Woman eternal," he said dramatically. "Will you gentlemen watch Miss Harris install a new face right here and now, or will you take my word for it that this is a Lovepruf Lipstick?"

It was quite obvious that regardless of the previous faliure, the Edwards Merchandiser was a howling success.

Several hours later, after the party broke up, Johnny Edwards returned to his office to see Norma probing under the desk with a yardstick.

"What gives?" he asked.

Norma held up two coins.

"Where did you get those?" he asked.

"Out of the machine," she told him.

"Yeah, but—" He picked them from her palm and looked them over carefully. "I'm no numis—munis—"

"Numismatist," she offered helpfully.

"I'm not one of them, either," he snapped. "I don't know rare coins, Norma, but I'd say that I have a pair here that might be truly rare."

Norma looked at him. "Johnny," she said in an awed voice, "I have a brother who is an archeologist."

"I know. Has Tony shown you anything like these?"

"No," she said. "But he has trained me to notice letters, characters, and ideographs. The printing or engraving on these coins is very similar to the lettering on that package!"

"Yeah, but—"

Norma giggled in semi-hysteria. "Would it be economically just to pay for uncertain merchandise with uncertain coinage?"

"But you—"

Norma sobered. "Somewhere, someone got—temporarily, of course—a Lovepruf for his two dinero, here, and hurled the thing back into the machine just as we did that package of mahooleylickum we got. Then in return, we got two dinero and someone, somewhere, is wondering what the legend 'One Dime' means."

"Ow!" groaned Johnny Edwards. "My aching imagination!"

"Indubitably," * said Zintal, "these coins are an alloy of silver, but not a particularly valuable one, I'd estimate."

"You could smelt down any of our coins," replied Vorhan, the metallurgist, "and you'd be able to sell the metal for less than half of its coinage worth."

"True," admitted Zintal. "But—"

"Well," grinned Vorhan, "is it the money or the principle of the thing?"

Zintal grunted amicably. "Normally, I'd be inclined to eschew principle for a bit of hard cash. But this is one of those inexplicable things that prompts me to cry 'principle by all means.' Y'know, Vorhan, I'd gladly forfeit both of those coins to know where they came from."

"Probably worth it," smiled Vorhan. "Obviously, Zintal, those coins came from some civilization extra-Martian."

"But where?" demanded Zintal. "I—"

"You do not doubt their un-Martian origin?" Vorhan interrupted.

"Not at all," said Zintal unhappily. "They are too concrete as evidence to deny. But where?"

* Naturally, Zintal did not say "Indubitably" or anything that resembles it phonetically. So until the general public becomes better acquainted with the newly-written English-Martian cross-referred dictionary, we will give as free a translation of the Martian into its nearest English connotation. This is not only permissible but highly recommended, since (to quote a less remote parallel) when a Frenchman watching a baseball game leaps to his feet and screams "Murte d'arbite," he really means "Kill the umpire." Conversely, when the American is watching a baseball game in Paris and yells "Commit violence upon the official scorekeeper," he really means "Murte d'arbite!"

"I am not too familiar with the other planets of the system —" Vorhan began.

Zintal snorted ungraciously. *"This* system?" he laughed. "Vorhan, go take yourself an elementary course in astronomy. The outer planets are completely unfitted for any kind of life. The inner planets are equally vicious. The surface of the nearest is fully four fifths water, and the next one in is completely wreathed in clouds. What kind of life could evolve with all that water?"

"There is the innermost," said Vorhan hopefully.

"Airless," replied Zintal. "Besides which, there is but a narrow zone where the temperature might lie at a reasonable level. Only a couple of the satellites of the outer planets might be acceptable, but it is generally accepted that the atmospheres of these satellites is either non-existent or high in pre-foliage methane. The closest one, I think, is more likely, but it is well known that its atmosphere is normal at about sixty per cent relative humidity. You can have it, Vorhan."

"Give it to your mother-in-law," snorted Vorhan. "I don't want it." Then he speared Zintal with a very sharp glance. "So you're the physicist," he said. "Instead of telling me the places where they aren't, try to think of some place where they could be."

Zintal looked out of the window at the black sky, and waved an all-embracing arm. "Out there there must be a myriad of nice dry planets," he said. "I—"

"What," demanded Vorhan, "is the velocity of propagation of the mesonic energy level?"

Zintal grunted unhappily. "What is the velocity of propagation of gravity?" he asked. "Until we can get far enough away from this planet to have it make a difference, we're stuck. It used to be, 'wait until we can modulate it,' but we've done that. Now—" Zintal shrugged.

"So what are we going to do about it?" demanded Vorhan. "Sit here and stew ourselves into a psychoneurosis?"

Zintal smiled boyishly. "I've just licensed a machine. I'm going to buy stuff with it until it makes the same kind of mistake."

Vorhan looked at the machine with mingled admiration and sorrow. "We've used them for fifty years," he said. "This is the first time there ever has been anything like this. You'll be like the man who spent his entire life winning the bet that a shuffled deck of cards would eventually come up in the original sequence."

Zintal nodded. "You provide me with a better answer," he challenged.

Vorhan shook his head. "I can't, confound it!" he growled.

Zintal smiled. "Well, this is the machine that produced the strange coins. I'm buying everything I can through it just in the hope. Someday it will repeat."

Vorhan laughed. "In the meantime," he said half-humorously, "I am going out to hunt a needle in a haystack."

Zintal turned to his workbench and handed Vorhan a large cylinder of a crystalline metal. "This will help you," he said.

Vorhan laughed. The bar of metal was a powerful permanent magnet.

He tossed the magnet to Zintal and turned to the physicist's machine. From his pocket he took a couple of coins and dropped them in the slot and pecked out the name of a product on the keyboard. There was the usual *whirrrrr,* and then from the communicating grille there came that same haughty, ultra-virtuous voice, saying:

"Please refrain from the use of spurious coins!"

Zintal hurled the little door open and cursed a round Martian oath, commending the machine to a first-class Martian hell that consisted of being immersed in water up to the scalp. For on Zintal's soft green Martian hand had spilled a boiling-hot mixture. Not only did it burn, but it was a foul mixture of something dissolved in water!

"Now what in the name of sin is this?" he demanded, setting the container gingerly on the workbench and covering it quickly with a glass bell-jar to keep in the obviously poisonous vapors.

Johnny Edwards yawned with a jaw-breaking stretch. Norma Harris yawned sympathetically and told him to stop.

"It isn't the company," he assured her. "It's the hour."

She nodded sleepily. "We've spent most of the night at this," she said. "And so far we've collected very little of interest. But we sure have a fine collection of products. More darned toothpaste, cigarettes, candy bars, lipstick, tobacco, gin, mosquito dope, soap, pencils, camera film, postage stamps, ink—"

"Looks like a drug store," he grinned.

"—but nothing of unearthly coinage," she finished sleepily.

"Good thing I own the company," he said.

"Otherwise I'd be stuck for more stuff than any family of thirteen could use in seven million years. I'll return it in the morning and retrieve my coins."

"You should be nearly out by now," observed Norma.

"Just a few more," Johnny admitted. "Then we give up for the evening. How about coffee, Norma?"

"Black," she requested, "and bitter!"

Johnny pecked at the keyboard and within a few seconds, the machine announced that it had delivered of itself and that the door should be opened and the merchandise removed.

Johnny gulped. "This isn't coffee," he said, holding up a small metal cylinder.

"What is it?" asked Norma sleepily.

"I don't know."

Norma came fully awake. "That isn't the same as before," she said.

Johnny nodded and dropped more coins in the machine. It clicked furiously, delivered his three-hundredth package of cigarettes, whereupon he pressed the return button and sent them back. From the return-coin slot there dropped—two of the strange coins.

"Well," said Edwards. "This is it!"

"Send 'em a note?" suggested Norma.

"In whose language?" demanded Johnny.

"Send 'em a diagram of the Solar System," she said.

"*Which* Solar System" he demanded.

"Send 'em ours."

"And who'd recognize it?" he said, pouring more coins into the machine.

His luck waxed and waned. For the first half hour, it was pretty much a hit or miss proposition, in which he made connection three times. His "take" consisted of one soft-wood cylinder "wrapped" around a strip of graphite and a good grade of pencil it was, a box of brittle-dry not-quite-cubes that had neither spots like dice nor did they bound merrily (although they fractured thoroughly), and a light-weight metal cylinder with a tiny wing-nut contraption on one end. Johnny turned it experimentally and shortly afterwards, both Norma and Johnny left the office to get coffee across the street—while the office aired out. They got more coins, too, as an afterthought.

Then as the night wore on towards morning, Johnny Edwards began to drop his coins at regular intervals. During the first hour of this, they received a package of rectangular pasteboards that indicated that someone else played an unearthly game of poker, pinochle, or bridge; a folder of needles which were quite Earthly save for the lettering on the cover; and a bottle of some gooey-thick mess that Johnny dropped on the floor. The glass broke, and the mess spilled out on the rug. Subsequently, Johnny Edwards had to hire a taxidermist to remove the rug from the floor—some one made a mighty good grade of mucilage.

Then as the timing became more regular, they received a

book of common paper printed in the same complex characters and the cover of which was luridly painted.

"Great howling rockets," growled Edwards, "is that what we're communicating with?"

Norma laughed and picked up a copy of Johnny's favorite magazine. "Is this how we look?" she asked humorously.

The book was followed by a set of picture cards depicting a few scenes of unearthly origin but with no printed characters —buildings and a small bridge over a narrow span of water; trees that looked normal enough in a forest scene. They got a ball of plastic twine, a hard-cover volume containing nothing but listings of ideographs; a package of evil-smelling, ultra-dry things like desiccated prunes; a wide strip of some sort of cloth; and a jar of cream that might have been a cosmetic—for something—but might have worked better as a soldering flux, since it skinned the outer surface of Johnny's pocket knife in a trice.

The pile of items grew as their coincidence increased—and then ceased entirely.

Morning dawned bright and clear but unhappily, for the contact had ceased abruptly and no more strange items came through.

"Me—I give up," said Johnny. "I'll run you home, Norma."

"The devil you will," she said with a very tired yawn. "Little Norma is going to hit the studio couch in the Ladies' Room."

"But what will your parents think?" he objected.

"I'll tell 'em the truth," she said.

"The truth?" he gasped, viewing the collection of unidentifiable and utterly useless items on the desk. "They'll never believe *that!*"

"I know," she said happily.

She left the office and it was some time before Johnny Edwards realized that Norma didn't mind the idea of the all-white shotgun.

Zintal held up a package of cigarettes with puzzlement. "Do you eat 'em, feed 'em to the wilgil, or burn 'em in a dish?" he asked.

"They might be poison."

"Undoubtedly." Zintal placed the cigarettes under another bell jar.

The deck of cards he riffled through with knowing deftness. The dictionary he filed carefully away, and the bottle of ink went under another bell jar. It was, he admitted, the most palatable smelling item of the bunch. The box of candy he threw into the fireplace with a deep, distasteful wrinkle of his wide, flat nose.

He accepted the little cylinder from Vorhan, twisted the wing-nut and inhaled deeply. The distaste on Zintal's face diminished and was replaced with a sigh of satisfaction. He marked some Martian characters on the end of a rough-surfaced board with some of VerLong's finest Lovepruf Lipstick and put the handy, soft crayon away for future use.

The set of picture postcards he ran through but shook his head because they were not indicative of anything but a slightly orange city of rather large size. The scene of hundreds of thousands of ultra-minute creatures basking in what was obviously a vast body of water he shuddered at first and swore at second because the figures were indistinct through a magnifier. The Atlantic City postcard was consigned to the fireplace. The magazine cover depicting one of America's shapeliest was viewed with intelligent gratification though without the usual wolf-whistles.

This went on for some time, and finally Zintal hit the coincidental timing perfectly, and they began to catalogue the items.

Now, be it remembered that Zintal was a physicist of Martian repute, and therefore he had an advantage over Johnny Edwards in making a wild guess as to the origin of the contact. His only misleading evidence was the obvious belief that no sentient life could evolve on an overly-wet world such as Terra. It was, however, equally obvious that the strangers did not object to water as strenuously as did Martians. Martians could take it or leave it alone, absorbing enough for their daily needs from contact and losing only by evaporation.

Despite the training of ages of Martians to the contrary, Zintal was beginning to revise his opinion.

Then, because this sending of just plain "things" was beginning to pall—especially in view of the fact that everything Zintal received was alien and useless and the reverse must be equally true on Terra—Zintal began to think in terms of what might be useful in making contact with an utterly alien and unknown race.

He sat down at his drawing board and started to sketch the constellation, Orion. If the other race were in this section of the Galaxy, they would recognize Orion. He grumbled because he had no star-map to ship along, and the merchandising agency claimed there was none at hand. But a hand sketch—

Orion, if recognized, would be followed by the very characteristic stellar layouts of Sirius and Centaurus in the hope that these systems might harbor the aliens. He would, as a hazard, include Sol and the planetary system; perhaps if the

aliens were not of Solar origin they might be sufficiently advanced in astronomy to recognize Sol. He—

The door opened abruptly, and several Martian police entered.

"Zintal, Physicist, we arrest you for the crime of attempting to obtain merchandise without payment. Do you deny inserting spurious coins in the machine?"

"I—we—"

"Come along," said the foremost policeman angrily. To his sidekick, he said: "What some people will go through to try to beat a slot machine."

Zintal shook himself free of the official handclasp and reached for one of the bell jars. From it he took an atomizer which he turned upon the policemen. They retched, and while they were in the fiendish grip of completely overturned stomachs, Zintal grabbed his machine and left.

He dropped the atomizer, and the odor of *Nuit de Noël* filled the air with the most foul stench ever carried on the thin air of Mars.

Norma Harris entered the room brightly and found Johnny Edwards hard at work. He looked haggard, and Norma knew that he hadn't been asleep at all.

"What—" She stopped and pointed at the job he had been tinkering with.

He nodded, seeing that she comprehended.

"No, Johnny!"

"But somebody's gotta go," he said desperately.

"Not you," she said, running forward and wrapping her arms about him. "Not you."

"Why not?" he asked. "Who else?"

"But—I—"

"I'll take no chances," he said. "First goes a bottle of air. Then other items that will insure safety in that other place. Then me. And once I'm there we can work on their gadget and get it set up so that this haphazard business can be made into something certain."

The machine behind them buzzed and Johnny turned. "I set up a gadget to feed nickels into it at regular intervals," he explained. "We're going to get a fine collection of Terran pencils until they hit us again. Looks as how *They* just got one."

From the receptacle, Edwards took a folded tape measure and a sizable bottle of—nothing.

"Air," he said, looking at it.

"And size," said Norma. "He—she—or it wants to come here!"

He nodded. "You analyze that air, will you? I'm going to finish this other gimmick!"

"How do you analyze air?" she asked plaintively.

He tossed a ten-dollar bill at her. "Go buy yourself a canary," he said with a grin. "And not one on a hat!"

There came, at regular intervals, a four-handed chronometer with certain intervals marked vividly. Next came a small six-legged animal that sniffed the air uncertainly but showed no discomfort.

That settled Johnny Edwards. His curiosity would probably kill him, but it might have killed him anyway. So— He pushed a lever. . . .

He stepped out of the cabinet and sneezed in the ultra-dry air. Zintal blinked in astonishment and looked concerned.

"But I wanted to go your way," he said.

"Where the devil is this?" demanded Edwards.

"They're after me for trying to use slugs," Zintal complained. "What are these things worth on your world?"

"The sun is rather small, here," Johnny observed. "Is this Mars, or is that another sun entirely?"

"Perhaps it is your wet skin that makes you smell so," said Zintal, sniffing. "I think that the police may understand once you are seen—and smelled. Phew!"

"You're a double-dyed monstrosity," said Johnny amiably. "Somewhere along about here we should start learning one another's talky-talky. Me Johnny. Me good!"

The machine clicked again and Norma stepped out. "Me Norma," she said, mocking him. "You explain Daddy!"

"Me clipped," he grinned at her. "What's that?"

"Newspaper," she grinned. "Thought you'd like to see it. It claims that the White Sands Laboratory does not expect any successful attempt to reach any other celestial body within the next fifteen years."

Well, that's how it started. From a glorified coin merchandising machine to interplanetary travel in a few roundabout jumps—or jerks. It was easier to take off by rocket for Luna from Mars than from Terra, and the original Mars-Luna rocket carried only a super-glorified slot machine. Then it became a simple matter to take off from established bases on Luna and head for Venus. Then, in a comparatively short time it became feasible to plant the slot machines on every imaginable planet and satellite, and the art of constructing rockets returned to the fireworks department.

Oh—just to tie in a loose end—the Martian police were duly convinced once they came, saw, and stood back with great green hands pinching wide, flat noses. And the same

police official who was originally there to bring back the errant physicist was helpful.

He combined the Terran couple in Vanthlaz. *

* The definition of this word is not quite clear. Even Martian opinion differs pertaining to its definition; the Martian female believing it to be a desirable state while the Martian male insists that it is entirely one-sided and too restrictive to his freedom.

Nelson Bond

Frankly, we weren't going to include a Nelson Bond story in this anthology, not having been able to locate one that hadn't been anthologized elsewhere. However, when we submitted what we thought was our final package to our publishers, a howl went up easily heard from Chicago to Taos, New Mexico. Said publishers were Bond fans and immediately rushed us copies of several of that worthy's yarns, letting us take our pick but demanding that at least one of his hysterical attacks on the mundane be represented. We wanted to use all of them but since we were limited to one, here is our choice.

—M. R.

The Abduction of Abner Greer

OF COURSE THIS COULDN'T HAPPEN. BUT IT DID.

At two-thirty on the afternoon it happened, Abner Greer was pacing the floor of his hall bedroom, striving to decide whether he should nominate for the villains of his next epic (*a*) lobster-men from Lyra, or (*b*) ant-men from Antares. It did not ever occur to Greer to assign so important a role to any race of beings with eyes unstalked or unfaceted. For Abner was a science-fiction writer. Or, well—almost. One minor hurdle still loomed between this ambition and its achievement. As yet no magazine had bought one of his tales.

Editors were unanimous in their agreement that Abner should put more fire into his stories. Or vice versa. But Abner was not one to accept defeat meekly. He had vowed he was going places. So despite an accumulation of rejection slips that filled two traveling bags and a steamer trunk, he continued to deluge the science-fantasy markets with his efforts. Abner was determined to succeed. *Ad astra per aspirin* was his motto—and let no purist cavil at so apt a paraphrasis. Writing caused Abner both heartaches and headaches.

From his vantage point at the window, Abner saw a gray-clad figure approaching. He hurried to the door.

"Good afternoon!" he greeted the postman. "Anything for me to—"

Then his heart performed a somersault that ended near his wishbone. For the envelope the carrier handed him was long and lean and lovely, bearing the superscription of a publishing concern.

Abner clutched it. He waited until the universe stopped wheeling in swift circles, until a crew of tiny riveters finished a welding job on his aorta. Then he shredded the flap with palpitating fingers.

—And the roseate world in which he had so briefly dwelt dissolved in a dull blue mist. For no welcome oblong greeted his gaze. Inside he found a single sheet of letterhead that informed him bluntly, coldly:

"Your manuscript, Worm Men of Space, *is being held at this office pending receipt of twenty-one* (21) *cents return postage which was not enclosed."*

Abner sighed. Visions of fame and fortune fled; less pleasant phantoms came to mock his misery. His rent came due day after tomorrow. He owed a payment on his portable. That scrap of cardboard could not much longer plug the Grand Canyon in his left shoesole. It was, he thought, a dreary, dreary world.

Disconsolately he stuffed the envelope into an inner pocket. He decided to go for a walk; a purposeful peregrination down by the beckoning river. Gloomily he started on his journey.

How long and far he walked is hard to say. The afternoon sun sank lower; so did Abner's spirits. And then . . .

It happened very suddenly and strangely. One moment he was alone, shambling unhappily down a deserted street; the next there was a vehicle at the curb beside him, and a voice was calling, "Hayoo! Wanna ride?"

"Go 'way!" bade Abner miserably. "Do I look as if I could afford a cab?"

He trudged along, a soul *sans* hope and future. But the vehicle purred evenly beside him. The tempting voice persisted, "Tizna cab. Sa lift. Cummon!"

Abner began, "Look, bub, you're wasting your time. I—"

Then he hesitated. A lift? Well, why not? Some moments ago he had briefly and shudderingly surveyed the river. His despair notwithstanding, its turgid waters had struck him as a prospect considerably less enticing than the bourne of soft forgetfulness of which sad poets sighed. He might as well go home—so long as he still had a home to go to. And home, by now, was weary miles away. There was no sense in looking a gift ride in the carburetor.

"Okay," said Abner. "Thanks!"

He stepped to the curb. In the gloaming he gathered the impression that this was a very elaborate vehicle indeed: smooth, glittering, expensive. He stepped inside. And then:

"Hey!" cried Abner Greer.

"Smatta?" asked his benefactor.

Abner couldn't say. He didn't know just what—or if anything—was the matter. All he *did* know was that there was an overdose of unusualness about this strange conveyance. Its interior was hemispherical, domed with a lustrous metallic substance, carpeted with a sort of downy fur. It had no windows, but its walls were softly translucent. A single wide upholstered seat ran circularly about the tonneau. At the far arc of this seat, diametrically opposite Abner, before a control panel gemmed with sparkling and inexplicable dials sat a grinning little gnome of a man dressed in a one-piece garment implausibly patterned in tones of mottled violet and puce.

"H-hey!" gulped Abner again, and reached for the handle of the door. "I . . . I just remembered something. If you don't mind, mister, I'll get out. I've got to see a man about a . . . about a million miles from here."

His companion glanced up sharply.

"Kout!" he warned. "Doanopen it!"

"No?" challenged Abner. "Why not?"

He balled a fist, tentatively measuring the distance to the stranger's receding chin. But the other grinned reassuringly.

"Sawrite now," he said. "Tripsova." He touched a knob. The dials before him dulled. There was a slight jarring concussion. The door popped open, and so did Abner's eyes as his unbelieving pupils contracted in the sunshine of a weirdly alien world!

The incredible conveyance had come to rest in the center of a wide courtyard. Steepling skyward to each side of this square were gleaming, glass-smooth structures so foreshortened from ground level that Abner's straining eyes felt like victims of an optical illusion. The far blue patch of sky above was dotted with swift-scudding disc-shaped aircraft, tiny and noiseless. Abner glimpsed people, dressed like his companion, seated at the controls of these ships. Others were mincing airily along the flying buttresses that spanned the towering heights, connecting upper reaches of the shimmering walled court.

Abner struggled for his breath, captured it, and gasped, "What . . . what *is* all this?"

"Sokay, huh?" replied his companion agreeably. "Smitime. Sawertha fewcha."

"You talk," complained Abner, "like a man with a mouthful of mush. World of the future? You mean this is a movie production stunt? You're a Hollywood publicity man?"

The little one grinned broadly. "Nope. Sreally wertha fewcha. Yoon me, we're outo diffrun senchries." He nodded at the vehicle behind them. "Atsa timasheen; see?"

"A time machine!" Butterflies danced in Abner's duodenum. He closed his eyes and drew a deep, long breath. When he opened them again, things were still the same. Nor did pinching himself seem to help any. In a faint voice he asked:

"How . . . how *far* future?"

"Noffar," disclaimed the little man airily. "Issiz oney twenny-fiff senchry. Gotny yuma?"

So far Abner had managed to understand the futureman's curiously slurred verbal shorthand, but this unexpected query caught him off balance. His brow creased.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Gotny yuma?" repeated the small one impatiently. "Yoono! Fomma's dawta . . . lushinna bah . . . pattenmike?"

Abner groped wildly for his cowlick.

"Are you *serious?*" he demanded. "You transport me from my century to a time five hundred years in the future, then ask if I know any *jokes?* What kind of nonsense—"

He stopped. A figure was hastening toward them: a man of approximately the same age and appearance as Abner's present companion, save that he was eye-dazzlingly begarbed in a vivid scarlet toga liberally sprinkled with ochre dots. There was crisp excitement in his greeting.

"Lo, Jo. Seeya gottim. Zeea pro?"

"Dunno yet," answered Jo. "Mussbe, tho. Gottim outa the twennieth. *All* goodyuma men then." He turned to Abner hopefully. "Yer name Benny?" he asked.

"No," denied Abner. "My name is—"

"Canta, then?"

"Or Bobbope?" suggested the other.

"My name," said Abner patiently, "is Abner—"

"Lummen!" shouted Jo triumphantly. "Lummen Abna! Atzoo! Memberim, Tom? Zinalla histry books!" Tom nodded. The eyes of both men gleamed with rapt excitement as they gazed on their discovery. Jo pleaded, "Make yuma, Lummen! Give us a brannew!"

Abner stared at the duo in dazed bewilderment. It occurred to him that all these future folk must be completely off their buttons. But he knew of only one way to handle lunatics. Humor them. Briefly he pondered. Then:

"Well," he said, "if it's a *joke* you want—"

"Gwan!"

"There's the story about the man who raced breathlessly into a butcher's shop—"

His audience hunched forward, their dancing eyes intent upon his face, their ears astrain to miss no precious word. Already the beginnings of a grin were tugging at the corners of Jo's lips. Tom urged delightedly, "Gwan! Gwan!"

"—and shouted to the butcher, 'Quick! Give me a half pound of kidleys!' The butcher said, 'You mean *kidneys,* don't you?' And the man replied, 'Well, I *said* kidneys . . . diddle I?' "

Abner chuckled. The quickie had always been one of his favorite stories. Even after a hundred recitals he still found it highly amusing. So he laughed. But adage or no adage, he laughed alone. The futuremen were staring at him sourly. Tom turned to scowl at Jo.

"Zat funny?" he demanded.

"Slouzy!" declared Jo flatly. To Abner he said, "Gotny betternat?"

"Plenty," said Abner with a touch of hauteur. "I don't know, though, that I should waste them on . . . Oh, well! Let's see how you like *this* one.

"A drunk was lying in the gutter when an elderly spinster walked by, glanced down at him disdainfully, and sniffed, 'How *gauche!*' The drunk looked up and hiccuped, 'Fine, lady! How goesh by you?' "

There was a moment of strained silence. Then:

"Well?" asked Abner indignantly. "How do you like *that* one?"

"Sawful!" said Jo promptly.

"Srotten!" agreed Tom.

Each man tells the jokes he loves. Abner was injured to the quick.

"Then what do you think *is* funny?" he bridled. "If you futuremen are so witty, suppose you tell me one of *your* jokes?" . . .

Tom glanced at Jo. "Two spacers?" he suggested.

Jo's lips twisted in a wide grin, which exploded almost instantly into a guffaw. Tom also began to chuckle. Within the space of seconds the pair were clutching at their sides, rocking and gasping in gales of uproarious laughter. Eyeing them with some trepidation, Abner braced himself for the devastating mirthquake to follow. If the humor of the Twenty-fifth Century were so unbearably amusing that the mere mention of it bent futuremen double, could a man of an earlier era take it? Abner waited tensely. Between spasms of choking glee, Tom gasped out his story.

"Two spacers," he releated, "metna plantoid. One sez, 'Wut-

zat spaship I seenyon lassnite?' Nuthern ansiz, 'Atwuz no spaship, atwas a comet!' *Whoooo!"*

And again the two men collapsed, howling their wild delight.

Under the circumstances, there was but one clear way of indicating his reaction. Abner held his nose. When finally ensued a moment of comparative silence, he demanded, "Well, now that you've had your laugh, what do we do next?"

Jo and Tom stared owlishly at him. Jo shrugged.

"Supta yoo," he said.

"What do you mean, up to me? You brought me here. The least you can do is show me around this world of yours," stormed Abner.

Tom arched his eyebrows at Jo.

"Zee makin yuma?" he queried.

"Sounz likit," frowned Jo. "Tain funny, tho. So less go!"

Ignoring Abner completely, both men marched into the time machine. The door closed behind them. For a long moment Abner stared angrily at the blank metal wall. Then, furious but helpless, he bestirred himself. He stalked across the court with what he hoped (in case the others should be watching) was reproachful dignity, passed through an arcade, and emerged on a main thoroughfare of the city of time-to-be.

His first reaction (being a hopeful science-fiction author), was that this glimpse into the future was deplorably wasted on Abner Greer. Unselfishly he wished that Heinlein or Williamson or Campbell might have been the one selected for this adventure. To any of his highly-esteemed professional contemporaries the journey would have been an eye-opener. To him it was the prelude to a migraine.

In one respect the predictions of these dreamers had come true. Architecturally the city of the future was what their prevision had foretold. The city was tremendous in concept, massive in scope, staggering in structure; a metal metropolis avenued with moving runways; a colorful, clean, air-conditioned paradise in which air travel was a commonplace, spaceflight an accomplished fact. Futureman had conquered the elements, bent nature to his whim.

But futureman himself—?

Where were those grave-eyed intellectual giants whom science-fiction had predicted? Surely these brightly appareled nincompoops with whom Abner brushed elbows were not the sole inheritors of mankind's vast achievements?

For Abner's *second* reaction (barring the possibility that he was drunk, dreaming, daffy, or all three), was that the

world into which he had been shanghaied was a monstrous asylum peopled by chaff-happy inmates.

So far as Abner could discern, this city of the future acknowledged but two gods. The first was *Humor*—and a miserably vapid sort of humor, at that. At each street intersection reared huge multi-trumpeted address speakers, from the loud horns of which blared forth incessantly a torrent of brain-bursting nonsense. *"Wuzza man hooz muthernlaw cumta liv withim—"* bellowed one horn. And at the next corner a metallic voice squawked, *"Wyza rocket crossa void? Ta getny otha planet!"* With the delivery of each gag-line, bustling humanity paused briefly in its courses, momentarily convulsed into paroxysms of riotous laughter. All movement ceased as the joyful captive audience screamed its approval of each joke. Then traffic resumed its hectic tempo until the trumpets spewed forth their next hoary morsel of mirth.

The second god was *Greed.* On every side Abner observed evidence of mankind's exaggerated cunning, cupidity and lust for possession. In each shop window gigantic ads flaunted, flickered and flamed their blatant claims of *Bargains* and *Reductions.* Apparently no standard prices prevailed for anything. Only by offering great savings could merchants (so it seemed) tempt customers into their shops. Wayfarers craned their necks eagerly from side to side as they slipped by on the mobile runways, darting off now and again to probe the prospects of some sign that heralded within a *Fire* or *Bankrupt* sale at which *All Goods* Must *Be Sold Today!*

A further cause for amazement was the curious way in which these two apparently irreconcilable traits found a common meeting ground. The one salable commodity with the constant power to stimulate greed was—humor! Bootleg humor, of course. Water-closet wit. At too-frequent intervals a furtive figure would sidle up to Abner, pluck his elbow and mutter, "Wanna laff, bud? Gotta brannew yuma!"

Abner had no capital to waste on such extravagances. His total wealth consisted of twelve dollars with which he had planned to pay a portion of next month's rent. But from watching the byplay between others, he learned the mechanics of this outlaw trade. Prices on the off-color story curb ran from a low of *toobits* for a common (or gutter) variety of traveling salesman joke to as high as *fibux* for an anecdote (generally and erroneously proffered as new) based on the mishaps of a blushing bride.

It was all a bit disgusting and most discouraging, thought Abner. But not illogical. Even in his own day, the man-in-the-street had shown incipient tendencies toward mirth-madness. Stage and screen, radio and TV, with their endless

bombardment of puns and pranks and situation gags, had elevated the joke to the level of good literature, the jokester to a status semi-divine. The pattern for future folly had been dimly apparent in such nation-sweeping fads as the "Knock, knock!" and "Confucius say—" cycles.

As for cupidity . . . well, greed had ever been one of mankind's sorriest traits. But where the acquisitive impulse once had been frowned upon, at least by gentlefolk, now it was shamelessly accepted—if not, indeed, embraced!—as a wholly natural instinct. One reason the streets of this future city were so sparkling clean, decided Abner, was that they were plucked to bare bones by citizens with the universal urge to clutch at everything, to collect something, to possess *any*thing.

Still, conceded Abner ruefully, in his own era humans had emulated magpies, had hovered like vultures over scores of useless objects. There were bargain-basement browsers, matchcover collectors, cigarband scavengers, antique accumulators, autograph scrabblers . . .

His head was beginning to throb in tempo to the unceasing torrent of howls and shrieks emanating from the p.a. system. He thought suddenly and wistfully of the recluse quiet of his peaceful hall bedroom. Then (staunch science-fiction author that he one day hoped to be), he thrust this vision from him. Distasteful as his first impression found it, there was much he might learn from this period. He must seek out the scientists and savants—for surely there must be some—and learn about space travel. From antiquarians he must elicit the history of civilization for the next—or was it the past?—five hundred years.

But to find these people he must have assistance. And in all this mad metropolis he knew but two souls: Jo and Tom. Gripped by a new and firm determination, Abner retraced his steps to the court where he had left them.

To his delight, they were still there. Jo was recharging the time machine with the aid of a portable gadget which (judging from its lack of any apparent connection) drew its power from thin air. Tom was inside the vehicle, but emerged when Jo announced disdainfully, "Oh-oh! Heerzat mannagen!"

Abner ignored the slight, came straight to the point.

"I need someone to show me around this city. You two are the only ones I know. Since you're responsible for my being here, I think you should take me on a sight-seeing trip. Don't you?"

"Nope," stated Tom.

"Nope," affirmed Jo.

"You mean," demanded Abner, "you feel no sense of

obligation toward me after having deliberately abducted me from my own time?"

Jo shrugged. So did Tom.

"But if *you* won't help me," blustered Abner, "what am I going to do?"

Both men appraised him negligently.

"At—" began Jo.

"—supta yoo," finished Tom.

Abner adopted a plaintive, wheedling tone.

"But I'm all alone in a strange world. You don't want me to be *lonely*, do you?"

"Wynot?" asked Tom brutally. Jo snorted, "Doan be silly! Plenny outa yertime here. Lookem up!"

"Here?" repeated Abner.

"Sure! We brawtem. Inna timasheen." There was a touch of pride in Jo's voice. "Soney wuninna werl. Coss munny to runnit, trina fina goodyumaman outa yertime. Spoazto be lotsuvem." He added thoughtfully, "Notch*oo*, tho!"

Abner said, "But . . . men out of my time—"

"Yep, Judj, frinstance."

"George? George who?"

"Din sayat. Sed Judj. Crayma . . . Crayta . . . simpin likat."

Abner's eyes widened.

"Judge Crater! So *that's* what happened to him? And to Ambrose Bierce . . . the *Cyclops'* crew . . . countless others who disappeared mysteriously. You kidnapped them? But why didn't you return them to their own time?"

Jo shrugged icily.

"Coss munny," he repeated, "to runna timasheen."

Greed! thought Abner Greer. *The all-pervading shrewdness of this future world!* It was at that moment there deserted him all urge to view the wonders of this era. In its place he knew but one desire: to get away from these selfish little mirth-mongers as quickly as possible. To get home again. He plunged a hand in his pocket.

"How much?" he demanded. "Name your price. How much to take me back to my own time?"

Jo glanced contemptuously at the wad of crumpled bills Abner was thrusting at him.

"Wuzzat?" he sniffed, "Wallpaipa?"

"Banknotes," explained Abner. "They're paper; yes. But they're backed by government silver—"

"Silva!" snorted Tom. "Silva's fibux a ton. Rainyum; atsa stannurd. Gotny rainyum?"

"Rain—?" Abner's face furrowed, then fell. He said dully, "No. I don't have any uranium."

"Stuff!" shrugged Jo. "Well—by!" Once more he and Tom turned away. But Abner had a final flash of inspiration.

"Wait a minute! I'll tell you what I'll do. Take me back to my own time and I'll get you a copy of the biggest, finest book of humor ever written! A thousand jokes, selected personally by the master of humorists. The great, the one and only—Joe Miller!"

For the first time, a spark of interest kindled in his listeners' eyes. Jo breathed, "Yain foolin? Yookin getta real Jomilla?"

"Of course I can!" Abner's mind raced, searching desperately for proof. "I know all about books and publications. I'm an author, myself. See? Here's a letter I received from an editor just this afternoon. I mean, that afternoon five hundred years ago when you picked me up—"

He pulled from his inner coat pocket the rejection letter, held it under Jo's nose. Jo studied it dubiously. "I dunno," he said. "Sounz silly ta me. Ainno wormen in space. Look, Tom—"

But Tom was already looking—at the envelope. His eyes had lighted strangely. With a sudden intake of breath he snatched the letter from Abner's hands, pointed a shaking finger at the cover.

"Lookit! Sanole three-centa! Sawful rare! Rarazell! Swertha fawchun!"

Abner started—then smiled. But of course. The futuremen collected everything else. It was inevitable that they should be stamp-collectors, too.

A warm excitement gripped him. Suddenly *he* was holding the whip hand. In this envelope he possessed something valuable enough to insure not only eventual safe return to his own era, but first to buy a guided tour of the future world. Now he could dicker with these little men.

"One moment!" he said sternly. "I'm perfectly willing to trade that stamp. But first—"

That was as far as he got. For at that moment something blunt and hard caressed the base of his skull. He pitched headlong to the ground. As bleak black silence engulfed him, it occurred to Abner belatedly that the future earthlings worshipped still a *third* deity. Mars. The god of direct and brutal action . . .

He struggled up out of darkness to feel a hand on his shoulder, to hear in his ear a petulant voice demanding, "What is the meaning of this? Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

His head ached, and for a few moments his eyes refused to focus. Finally they discerned a lurid painting of a lush,

curvaceous blonde in a state of astonishing dishabille, being pursued through a marshland of multi-mouthed mushrooms by an insect-eyed monster with a terrifying surplusage of tentacles. Abner realized at once, and with a touch of awe, that he was in the editorial offices of *Tomorrow Stories*, and that the person shaking him to consciousness was none other than the editor of that periodical.

He groaned, "My letter! My stamp!"

"Letter? Stamp?"

Abner wailed, "The men of the future. They stole it, the greedy little chiselers! I might have guessed—"

"See here," interrupted the editor a trifle nervously, "haven't you been reading too much science-fiction? Why don't you shift to detective stories for a change? Or to sports stories? Besides, all the characters in our magazine are purely co-incidental—"

Abner sighed then, seeing the whole affair in its true perspective. He had been robbed; true. But actually he had lost nothing by the theft. The stamp which Tom and Jo had stolen was valueless *now*, would be worth little or nothing for the span of Abner's lifetime.

As for his having been dumped off in this particular spot —well, that was odd, but not wholly unpredictable. For the futuremen had a definite, if lopsided, sense of humor . . .

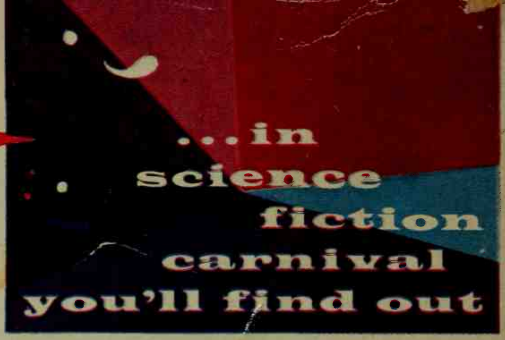
So he told the editor the story of his abduction. From beginning to end. And when he had finished, the editor said, "Greer, that's terrific! Something new and different in science-fiction. I want you to go home and write that, just as you've told it to me. I think—" He clapped Abner on the shoulder —"I think you can become one of our regular contributors, my boy!"

Abner went home and wrote the story of his strange adventure. Or tried to. But it was funny about that story. Abner changed it a little as he went along. The more he worked on it, the more he changed it. He added more plot, more action. He shifted the locale.

It finally ended up with its setting on the planet Venus. There was a young space astrogator as its hero, and a renegade Martian as the villain. It turned out that a horde of silicon-men from Saturn were menacing Earth with destruction. The name of the finished story was *Flame Men of Io*.

It came back three days later. The envelope was stamped *Perishable*, and the editor's sole comment was an ecclesiastical, "Migod!" And shortly after that, Abner Greer decided he didn't want to be a writer, anyway.

Which just goes to show you. Or does it?



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