

L92-567

BELMONT

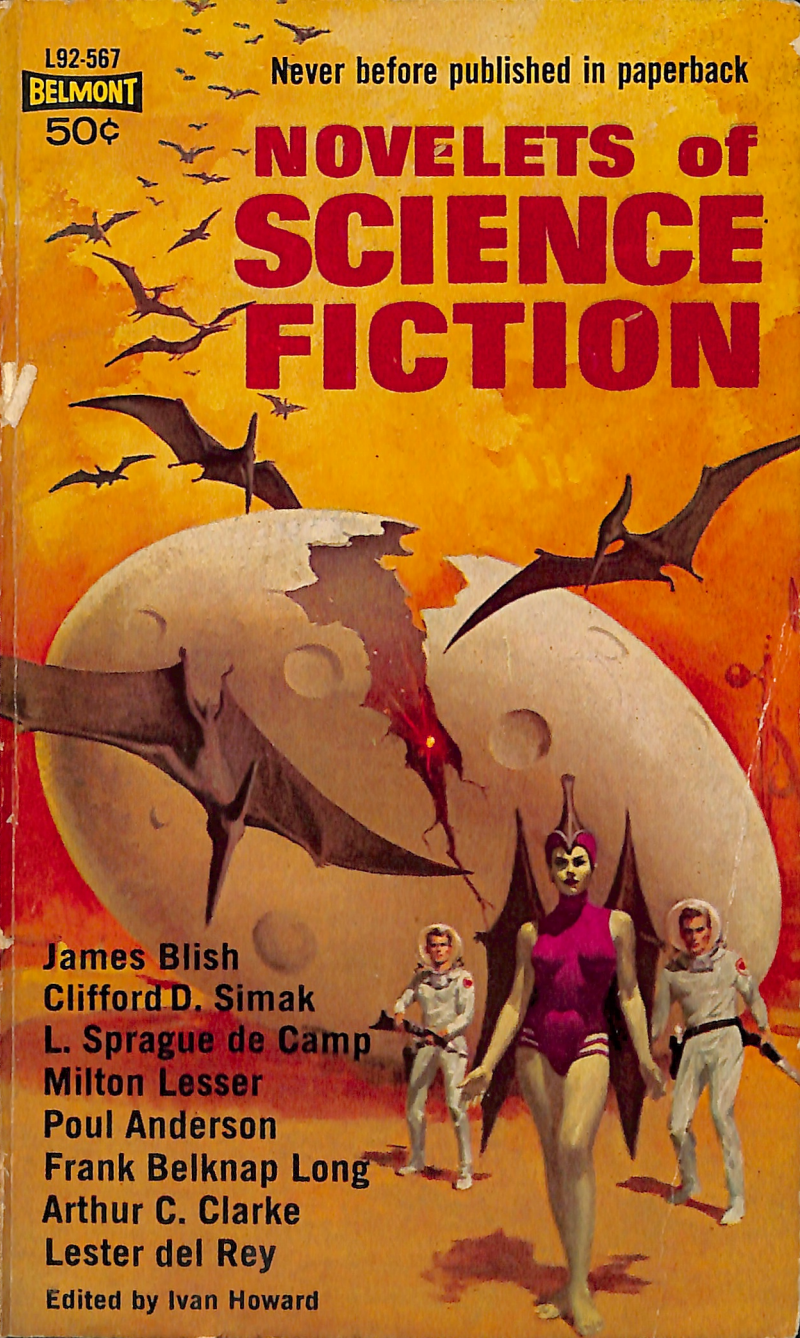
50¢

Never before published in paperback

NOVELETS of SCIENCE FICTION

**James Blish
Clifford D. Simak
L. Sprague de Camp
Milton Lesser
Poul Anderson
Frank Belknap Long
Arthur C. Clarke
Lester del Rey**

Edited by Ivan Howard



*The last man alive. The last man
in all the world!*

He screamed, then, and began to run.
His feet clattered on the road; the
small sound was quickly swallowed by
silence, and he covered his face against
the relentless blaze of the stars. But
there was no place to run to, no place
at all . . .

In these pages you will find situations so
provocative, characters so tantalizing,
and action so pulse-quickenning,
that you will understand why Ivan Howard
says:

"NOVELETS OF SCIENCE FICTION
is the richest collection of
unpublished stories ever put
between the covers of a
paperback book!"

Also Available

RARE SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by Ivan Howard

#L92-557, 50¢

6 AND THE SILENT SCREAM

Edited by Ivan Howard

#L92-564, 50¢

**THE MACHINE IN WARD
ELEVEN**

by Charles Willeford

#90-286, 40¢

*See special-offer coupon
on last page of this book*

**NOVELETS of
SCIENCE
FICTION**

Edited by
IVAN HOWARD

BELMONT BOOKS • NEW YORK CITY

BELMONT BOOKS

First Printing July 1963

Second Printing October 1964

Published by
Belmont Productions, Inc.
66 Leonard St., New York 13, N. Y.

© 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, *Columbia Publications, Inc.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

ULTRASONIC GOD	7
L. Sprague de Camp	
THE CHAPTER ENDS	35
Poul Anderson	
"A" AS IN ANDROID	61
Milton Lesser	
. . . AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE	74
Clifford D. Simak	
NIGHT FEAR	91
Frank Belknap Long	
I AM TOMORROW	96
Lester del Rey	
TESTAMENT OF ANDROS	142
James Blish	
THE POSSESSED	168
Arthur C. Clarke	

ULTRASONIC GOD

by L. Sprague de Camp

1

ADRIAN FROME regained consciousness to the sound of harsh Dzlieri consonants. When he tried to move, he found he was tied to a tree by creepers, and that the Vishnuvan centaurs were cavorting around him, fingering weapons and gloating.

"I think," said one, "that if we skinned him carefully and rolled him in salt . . ."

Another said, "Let us rather open his belly and draw forth his guts little by little. Flaying is too uncertain; Earthmen often die before one is half done."

Frome saw that his fellow surveyors had indeed gone, leaving nothing but two dead zebras (out of the six they had started out with) and some smashed apparatus. His head ached abominably. Quinlan must have conked him from behind while Hayataka was unconscious, and then packed up and shoved off, taking his wounded chief but leaving Frome.

The Dzlieri yelled at one another until one said, "A pox on your fancy slow deaths! Let us stand off and shoot him, thus ridding ourselves of him and bettering our aim at once. Archers first. What say you?"

The last proposal carried. They spread out as far as the dense vegetation allowed.

The Dzlieri were not literally centaurs in the sense of looking like handsome Greek statues. If you imagine the front half of a gorilla mounted on the body of a tapir you will have a rough idea of their looks. They had large mobile ears, a caricature of a human face covered with

red fur, four-fingered hands, and a tufted tail. Still, the fact that they were equipped with two arms and four legs apiece made people who found the native name hard call them centaurs, though the sight of them would have scared Phidias or Praxiteles out of his wits.

"Ready?" said the archery enthusiast. "Aim low, for his head will make a fine addition to our collection if you spoil it not."

"Wait," said another. "I have a better thought. One of their missionaries told me an Earthly legend of a man compelled by his chief to shoot a fruit from the head of his son. Let us therefore..."

"No! For then you will surely spoil his head!" And the whole mob was yelling again.

Lord, thought Frome, *how they talk!* He tested his bonds, finding that someone had done a good job of tying him up. Although badly frightened, he pulled himself together and put on a firm front: "I say, what are you chaps up to?"

They paid him no heed until the William Tell party carried the day and one of them, with a trader's stolen rifle slung over his shoulder, approached with a fruit the size of a small pumpkin.

Frome asked, "Does that gun of yours shoot?"

"Yes," said the Dzlieri. "I have bullets that fit, too!"

Frome doubted this, but said, "Why not make a real sporting event of it? Each of us put a fruit on our heads and the other try to shoot it off?"

The Dzlieri gave the gargling sound that passed for laughter. "So you can shoot us, eh? How stupid think you we are?"

Frome, thinking it more tactful not to say, persisted with the earnestness of desperation: "Really, you know, it'll only make trouble if you kill me, whereas if you let me go..."

"Trouble we fear not," roared the fruit-bearer, balancing the fruit on Frome's head. "Think you we should

let go such a fine head? Never have we seen an Earthman with yellow hair on head and face."

Frome cursed the coloration that he had always been rather proud of hitherto, and tried to compose more arguments. It was hard to think in the midst of this deafening racket.

The pseudo-pumpkin fell off with a thump. The Dzlieri howled, and he who had placed it came back and belted Frome with a full-armed slap across the face. "That will teach you to move your head!" Then he tied it fast with a creeper that went over the fruit and under Frome's chin.

Three Dzlieri had been told off to loose the first flight.

"Now look here, friends," said Frome, "you know what the Earthmen can do if they—"

T-twunk! The bowstrings snapped; the arrows came on with a sharp whistle. Frome heard a couple hit. The pumpkin jerked, and he became aware of a sharp pain in his left ear. Something sticky dripped onto his bare shoulder.

The Dzlieri shouted: "Etsnoten wins the first round!"

"Was that not clever, to nail his ear to the tree?"

"Line up for the next flight!"

"Hoy!" Hooves drummed and more Dzlieri burst into view. "What is this?" asked one in a crested brass helmet.

They explained, all jabbering at once.

"So," said the helmeted one, whom the others addressed as Mishinatven. (Frome realized that this must be the insurgent chief who had seceded from old Kama-tobden's rule. There had been rumors of war . . .) "The other Earthman knocked him witless, bound him, and left him for us, eh? After slaying our fellows there in the brush?" He pointed to the bodies of the two Dzlieri that had fallen to the machine gun in the earlier skirmish.

Mishinatven then addressed Frome in the Brazilo-Portuguese of the spaceways, but very brokenly: "Who—you? What—name?"

"I speak Dzlieri," said Frome. "I'm Frome, one of the

survey-party from Bembom. Your folk attacked us without provocation this morning as were were breaking camp, and wounded our chief."

"Ah. One of those who bounds and measures our country to take it from us?"

"No such thing at all. We only wish . . ."

"No arguments. I think I will take you to God. Perhaps you can add to our store of the magical knowledge of the Earthmen. For instance, what are these?" Mishinatven indicated the rubbish left by Quinlan.

"That is a thing for talking over distances. I fear it's broken beyond repair. And that's a device for telling direction, also broken. That—" (Mishinatven had pointed to the radar target, an aluminum structure something like a kite and something like a street sign) "is—uh—a kind of totem pole we were bringing to set up on Mount Ertma."

"Why? That is my territory."

"So that by looking at it from Bembom with our radar—you know what radar is?"

"Certainly; a magic eye for seeing through fog. Go on."

"So you see, old fellow, by looking at this object with the radar from Bembom we could tell just how far and in what direction Mount Ertma was, and use this information in our maps."

Mishinatven was silent, then said, "This is too complicated for me. We must consider the deaths of my two subjects against the fact that they were head-hunting, which God has forbidden. Only God can settle this question." He turned to the others. "Gather up these things and bring them to Amnairad for salvage." He wrenched out the arrow that had pierced Frome's ear and cut the Earthman's bonds with a short hooked sword like an oversized linoleum knife. "Clamber to my back and hold on."

Although Frome had ridden zebras over rough country (the *Viagens Interplanetarias* having found a special strain of Grevy's zebra, the big one with narrow stripes on the rump, best for travel on Vishnu where mechanical

transport was impractical) he had never experienced anything like this wild bareback ride. At least he was still alive, and hoped to learn who "God" was. Although Mishinatven had used the term *gimoa-brtsqun*, "supreme spirit," the religion of the Dzlieri was demonology and magic of a low order, without even a centaur-shaped creator-god to head its pantheon. Or, he thought uneasily, by "taking him to God" did they simply mean putting him to death in some formal and complicated manner?

Well, even if the survey was washed up for the time being, perhaps he could learn something about the missing missionary and the trader. He had come out with Hayataka, the chief surveyor, and Pete Quinlan, a new man with little background and less manners. He and Quinlan had gotten on each other's nerves, though Frome had tried to keep things smooth. Hayataka, despite his technical skill and experience, was too mild and patient a little man to keep such an unruly subordinate as Quinlan in line.

First the Dzlieri guide had run off, and Quinlan had begun making homesick noises. Hayataka and Frome, however, had agreed to try for Mount Ertma by traveling on a magnetic bearing, though cross-country travel on this steaming soup kettle of a planet with its dense jungle and almost constant rain was far from pleasant.

They had heard of the vanished Earthfolk yesterday when Quinlan had raised Comandante Silva himself on the radio: "...and when you get into the Dzlieri country, look for traces of Sirat Mongkut and Elena Millan. Sirat Mongkut is an entrepreneur dealing mainly in scrap metals with the Dzlieri, and has not been heard of for a Vishnuvan year. Elena Millan is a Cosmotheist missionary who has not been heard of in six weeks. If they're in trouble, try to help them and get word to us..."

After signing off, Quinlan had said: "Ain't that a hell of a thing, now? As if the climate and bugs and natives wasn't enough, it's hunting a couple of fools we are.

What was that first name? It don't sound like any Earthly name I ever heard."

Hayataka answered: "Sirat Mongkut. He's a Thai—what you would call a Siamese."

Quinlan laughed loudly. "You mean a pair of twins joined together?"

Then this morning a party of Dzlieri, following the forbidden old custom of hunting heads, had rushed the camp. They had sent a javelin through both Hayataka's calves and mortally wounded the two zebras before Frome had knocked over two and scattered the rest with the light machine gun.

Quinlan, however, had panicked and run. Frome, trying to be fair-minded, couldn't blame the lad too much; he panicked on his first trail trip himself. But when Quinlan had slunk back, Frome, furious, had promised him a damning entry in his fitness report. Then they had bound Hayataka's wounds and let the chief surveyor put himself out with a trance pill while they got ready to retreat to Bembom.

Quinlan must have brooded over his blighted career, slugged Frome, and left him for the Dzlieri, while he hauled his unconscious supervisor back to Bembom.

2

AFTER A COUPLE of hours of cross-country gallop, the party taking Frome to Amnairad began to use roads. Presently they passed patches of clearings where the Dzlieri raised the pushball-sized lettucelike plants they ate. Then they entered a "town," which to human eyes looked more like a series of corrals with stables attached. This was Amnairad. Beyond loomed Mount Ertma, its top hidden in the clouds. Frome was surprised to see a half-dozen zebras in one of the enclosures; that meant men.

At the center of this area they approached a group of "buildings"—enclosed structures made of poles with

sheets of matting stretched between them. Up to the biggest structure the cavalcade cantered. At the entrance a pair of Dzlieri, imposing in helmets, spears, and shields, blocked the way.

"Tell God we have something for him," said Mishinatven.

One of the guards went into the structure and presently came out again. "Go on in," he said, "Only you and your two officers, Mishinatven. And the Earthman."

As they trotted through the maze of passages, Frome heard the rain on the matting overhead. He noted that the appointments of this odd place seemed more civilized than one would expect of Dzlieri, who, though clever in some ways, seemed too impulsive and quarrelsome to benefit from civilizing influences. They arrived in a room hung with drapes, of native textiles and decorated with groups of crossed Dzlieri weapons: bows, spears, and the like.

"Get off," said Mishinatven. "God, this is an Earthman named Frome we found in the woods. Frome, this is God."

Frome watched Mishinatven to see whether to prostrate himself on the pounded-clay floor or what. But as the Dzlieri took the sight of his deity quite casually, Frome turned to the short, burly man with the flat Mongoloid face, wearing a pistol and sitting in an old leather armchair of plainly human make.

Frome nodded, saying: "Delighted to meet you, God old thing. Did your name used to be—uh—Sirat Mongkut before your deification?"

The man smiled faintly, nodded, and turned his attention to the three Dzlieri, who were all trying to tell the story of finding Frome and shouting each other down.

Sirat Mongkut straightened up and drew from his pocket a small object hung round his neck by a cord: a brass tube about the size and shape of a cigarette. He placed one end of this in his mouth and blew into it,

his yellow face turning pink with effort. Although Frome heard no sound, the Dzlieri instantly fell silent.

Sirat put the thing back in his pocket, the cord still showing, and said in Portuguese, "Tell us how you got into that peculiar predicament, Senhor Frome."

Unable to think of any lie that would serve better than simple truth, Frome told Sirat of his quarrel with Quinlan and its sequel.

"Dear, dear," said Sirat. "One would almost think you two were a pair of my Dzlieri. I am aware, however, that such antipathies arise among Earthmen, especially when a few of them are confined to enforced propinquity for a considerable period. What would your procedure be if I released you?"

"Try to beat my way back to Bembom, I suppose. If you could lend me a Grevy and some rations . . ."

Sirat shook his head, still smiling like a Cheshire cat. "I fear that is not within the bourne of practicability. But why are you in such a hurry to get back? After the disagreement of which you apprised me, your welcome will hardly be fraternal; your colleague will have reported his narrative in a manner to place you in the worst possible light."

"Well, what then?" said Frome, thinking that the entrepreneur must have swallowed a dictionary in his youth. He guessed that Sirat was determined not to let him go, but on the contrary might want to use him. While Frome had no intention of becoming a renegade, it wouldn't hurt to string him along until he learned what was up.

Sirat asked: "Are you a college-trained engineer?"

Frome nodded. "University of London; Civil Engineering."

"Can you run a machine shop?"

"I'm not an expert machinist, but I know the elements. Are you hiring me?"

Sirat smiled. "I perceive you usually anticipate me by a couple of steps. That is, roughly, the idea I had in mind. My Dzlieri are sufficiently clever metal workers but lack

the faculty of application; moreover I find it difficult to elucidate the more complicated operations to organisms from the pre-machine era. And finally, Senhor, you arrive at an inopportune time, when I have projects under way news of which I do not desire to have broadcast. Do you comprehend?"

Frome at once guessed Sirat was violating Interplanetary Council Regulation No. 368, Section 4, Subsection 26, Paragraph 15, which forbade imparting technical information to intelligent but backward and warlike beings like the Dzlieri without special permission. This was something Silva should know about. All he said, though, was: "I'll see what I can do."

"Good." Sirat rose. "I will patch up your ear and then show you the shop myself. Accompany us, Mishinatven."

The Siamese led the way through the maze of mat-lined passages and out. The "palace" was connected by a breezeway with a smaller group of structures in which somebody was banging on an anvil; somebody was using a file; somebody was pumping the bellows of a simple forge.

In a big room several Dzlieri were working on metal parts with homemade tools, including a crank-operated lathe and boringmill. In one corner rose a pile of damaged native weapons and tools. As his gaze roamed the room, Frome saw a rack holding dozens of double-barreled guns.

Sirat handed one to Frome. "Two-centimeter smooth bores, of the simplest design. My Dzlieri are not yet up to complicated automatic actions, to say nothing of shock guns and paralyzers and such complex weapons. That is why the guns they expropriate from traders seldom remain long in use. They will not clean guns, nor believe that each gun requires appropriate ammunition. Therefore the guns soon get out of order and they are unable to effect repairs. But considering that we are not yet up to rifling the barrels, and that vision is limited in the jungle,

one of these with eight-millimeter buckshot is quite as effective as an advanced gun.

"Now," he continued, "I contemplate making you my shop foreman. You will first undergo a training-course by working in each department in turn for a few days. As for your loyalty—I trust to your excellent judgment not to attempt to depart from these purlieus. You shall start in the scrap-sorting department today, and when you have completed your stint, Mishinatven will escort you to your quarters. As my Dzlieri have not yet evolved a monetary economy, you will be recompensed in copper ingots. Lastly, I trust I shall have the gratification of your companionship for the evening repast tonight?"

The scrap-sorting room was full of piles of junk, both of human and of native origin. Idznamen, the sorter, harangued Frome on such elementary matters as how to tell brass from iron. When Frome impatiently said, "Yes, yes, I know that," Idznamen glowered and went right on. Meanwhile Frome was working up a state of indignation. An easy-going person most of the time, he was particular about his rights, and now was in a fine fury over the detention of him, a civil servant of the mighty *Viagens*, by some scheming renegade.

During the lecture Frome prowled, turning over pieces of junk. He thought he recognized a motor armature that had vanished from Bembom recently. Then there was a huge copper kettle with a hole in its bottom. Finally he found the remains of the survey party's equipment, including the radar target.

Hours later, tired and dirty, he was dismissed and taken by Mishinatven to a small room in this same building. Here he found a few simple facilities for washing up. He thought he should mow the incipient yellow beard in honor of dining with God, but Mishinatven did not know what a razor was. The Dzlieri hung around, keeping Frome in sight. Evidently Sirat was taking no chances with his new associate.

At the appointed time, Mishinatven led him to the

palace and into Sirat's dining room, which was fixed up with considerable elegance. Besides a couple of Dzlieri guards, two people were there already: Sirat Mongkut and a small dark girl, exquisitely formed but clad in a severely plain Earthly costume—much more clothes than human beings wore on this steaming planet.

Sirat said, "My dear, allow me to present Senhor Adrian Frome; Senhor, I have the ineffable pleasure of introducing Senhorita Elena Millan. Will you partake of a drink?" he added offering a glass of *moikhada*.

"Righto," said Frome, noticing that Sirat already held one but that Miss Millan did not.

"It is contrary to her convictions," said Sirat. "I hope to cure her of such unwarranted extremism, but it consumes time. Now narrate your recent adventures to us again."

Frome obliged.

"What a story!" said Elena Millan. "So that handsome North European coloring of yours was almost your death! You Northerners ought to stick to the cold planets like Ganesha. Not that I believe Junqueiros's silly theory of the superiority of the Mediterranean race."

"He might have a point as far as Vishnu is concerned," said Frome. "I do notice that the climate seems harder on people like Van der Gracht and me than on natives of tropical countries like Mehtalal. But perhaps I'd better dye my hair black to discourage these chaps from trying to collect my head as a souvenir."

"Truly I regret the incident," said Sirat. "But perhaps it is a fortunate misfortune. Is there not an English proverb about ill winds? Now, as you observe, I possess a skilled mechanic and another human being with whom to converse. You have no conception of the *ennui* of seeing nobody but extraterrestrials."

Frome watched them closely. So this was the missing missionary! At least she had a friendly smile and a low sweet voice. Taking the bull by the horns, he asked, "How did Miss Millan get here?"

Elena Millan spoke: "I was traveling with some Dzlieri into Mishinatven's territory, when a monster attacked my party and ate one of them. I should have been eaten, too, had not Mr. Sirat come along and shot the beast. And now . . ."

She looked at Sirat, who said with his usual smile: "And now she finds it difficult to accustom herself to the concept of becoming the foundress of a dynasty."

"What?" said Frome.

"Oh, have I not enlightened you? I am imbued with considerable ambitions—exalted, I think, is the word I want. Nothing that need involve me with Bembom, I trust, but I hope before many years have elapsed to bring a sizable area under my sovereignty. I already rule Mishinatven's people for all practical purposes, and within a few weeks I purpose to have annexed old Kamatobden's as well. Then for the tribe of Romeli living beyond Bembom . . ." He referred to the other intelligent species of the planet, six-limbed ape-like beings who quarreled constantly with the Dzlieri.

"You see yourself as a planetary emperor?" said Frome. This should certainly be reported back to his superiors at Bembom without delay!

Sirat made a deprecating motion. "I should not employ so extravagant a term—at least not yet. It is a planet of large land area. But—you comprehend the general idea. Under unified rule I could instill real culture into the Dzlieri and Romeli, which they will never attain on a basis of feuding tribes." He chuckled. "A psychologist once asserted that I had a power complex because of my short stature. Perhaps he was correct; but is that any pretext for neglecting to put this characteristic to good use?"

"And where does Miss Millan come in?" asked Frome.

"My dear Frome! These primitives can comprehend the dynastic principle, but are much too backward for your recondite democratic ideals, as the failure of attempts to teach the representative government has amply

demonstrated. Therefore we must have a dynasty, and I have elected Miss Millan to assist me in founding it."

Elena's manner changed abruptly and visibly. "I never shall," she said coldly. "If I ever marry, it will be because the Cosmos has infused my spiritual self with a Ray of its Divine Love."

Frome choked on his drink, wondering how such a nice girl could talk such tosh.

Sirat smiled. "She will alter her mind. She does not know what is beneficial for her, poor infant."

Elena said, "He walks in the darkness of many lives' accumulated karma, Mr. Frome, and so cannot understand spiritual truths."

Sirat grinned broadly. "Just a benighted old ignoramus. I suppose, my love, you would find our guest more amenable to your spiritual suasion?"

"Judging by the color of his aura, yes." (Frome glanced nervously about.) "If his heart were filled with Cosmic Love, I could set his feet on the Seven-Fold Path to Union with the Infinite."

Frome almost declared he wouldn't stand by and see an Earthwoman put under duress—not while he had his health—but thought better of it. Such an outburst would do more harm than good. Still, Adrian Frome had committed himself mentally to helping Elena, for while he affected a hardboiled attitude towards women, he was secretly a sentimental softhead towards anything remotely like a damsel in distress.

Sirat said, "Let us discuss less rarefied matters. How are affairs proceeding at Bembom, Mr. Frome? The information brought hither by my Dzlieri is often garbled in transit."

After that the meal went agreeably enough. Frome found Sirat Mongkut, despite his extraordinary pedantic speech, a shrewd fellow with a good deal of charm, though obviously one who let nothing stand in his way. The girl, too, fascinated him. She seemed to be two different people—one, a nice normal girl whom he found altogether

attractive; the other, a priestess of the occult who rather frightened him.

When Sirat dismissed his guests, a Dzlieri escorted each of them out of the room. Mishinatven saw to it that Frome was safely in bed (Frome had to move the bed a couple of times to avoid the drip of rain water through the mat ceiling) before leaving him. As for Adrian Frome, he was too tired to care whether they mounted guard over him or not.

3

DURING THE ENSUING days Frome learned more of the workings of the shop and revived his familiarity with the skills that make a metal worker. He also got used to being tailed by Mishinatven or some other Dzlieri. He supposed he should be plotting escape, and felt guilty because he had not been able to devise any clever scheme for doing so. Sirat kept his own person guarded, and Frome under constant surveillance.

And assuming Frome could give his guards the slip, what then? Even if the Dzlieri failed to catch him in his flight (as they probably would) or if he were not devoured by one of the carnivores of the jungle, without a compass, he would get hopelessly lost before he had gone one kilometer and presently die of the deficiency diseases that always struck down Earthmen who tried to live on an exclusively Vishnuvan diet.

Meanwhile he liked the feeling of craftsmanship that came from exercising his hands on the tough metals, and found the other human beings agreeable to know.

One evening Sirat said, "Adrian, I should like you to take tomorrow off to witness some exercises I am planning."

"Glad to," said Frome. "You coming, Elena?"

She said, "I prefer not to watch preparations for the crime of violence."

Sirat laughed. "She still thinks she can convert the

Dzlieri to pacifism. You might as well instruct a horse to perform on the violin. She tried it on Chief Kamatobden and he thought her simply deranged."

"I shall yet bring enlightenment to these strayed souls," she said firmly.

The exercises took place in a large clearing near Amnairad. Sirat sat on a saddled zebra watching squadrons of Dzlieri maneuver at breakneck speed with high precision: some with native weapons, some with the new shot guns. A troop of lancers would thunder across the field in line abreast; then a square of musketeers would run onto the field, throw themselves down behind stumps and pretend to fire, and then leap up and scatter into the surrounding jungle, to reassemble elsewhere. There was some target practice like trapshooting, but no indiscriminate firing; Sirat kept the ammunition for his new guns locked up and doled it out only for specific actions.

Frome did not think Sirat was in a position to attack Bembom—yet. But he could certainly make a sweep of the nearby Vishnuvan tribes, whose armies were mere yelling mobs by comparison with his. And then . . . Silva *must* be told about this.

Sirat seemed to be controlling the movements in the field, though he neither gestured nor spoke. Frome worked his way close enough to the *renegado* to see that he had the little brass tube in his mouth and was going through the motions of blowing into it. Frome remembered: *a Galton whistle, of course!* It gave out an ultrasonic blast above the limits of human hearing, and sometimes people back on Earth called their dogs with them. The Dzlieri must have a range of hearing beyond 20,000 cycles per second.

At dinner that night he asked Sirat about this method of signaling.

Sirat answered, "I thought you would so conjecture. I have worked out a system of signals, something like Morse. There is no great advantage in employing the whistle against hostile Dzlieri, since they can perceive it

also; but with human beings or Romeli. . . . For instance, assume some ill-intentioned Earthman were to assault me in my quarters when my guards were absent? A blast would bring them running without the miscreant's knowing I had called.

"That reminds me," continued the adventurer, "tomorrow I desire you to commence twenty more of these, for my subordinate officers. I have decided to train them in the use of the device as well. And I must request haste, since I apprehend major movements in the near future."

"Moving against Kamatobden, eh?" said Frome.

"You may think so if you wish. Do not look so fearful, Elena; I will take good care of myself. Your warrior shall return."

Maybe, thought Frome, that's what she's jolly well scared of.

Frome looked over the Galton whistle Sirat had left with him. He now ran the whole shop and knew he could lay hands on a length of copper tubing (probably once the fuel line of a helicopter) that should do for the duplication of the whistle.

With the help of one of the natives he completed the order by nightfall, plus one whistle the Dzlieri had spoiled. Sirat came over from the palace and said, "Excellent, my dear Adrian. We shall go far together. You must pardon my not inviting you to dine with me tonight, but I am compelled to confer with my officers. Will you and Miss Millan carry on in the regular dining room in my absence?"

"Surely, Dom Sirat," said Frome. "Glad to."

Sirat wagged a forefinger. "However, let me caution you against exercising your charm too strongly on my protegee. An inexperienced girl like that might find a tall young Englishman glamorous, and the results would indubitably be *most* deplorable for all concerned."

When the time came, he took his place opposite Elena Millan at the table. She said, "Let us speak English, since some of our friends here" (she referred to the ubiquitous

Dzlieri guards) "know a little Portuguese, too. Oh, Adrian, I'm so afraid!"

"Of what; Sirat? What's new?"

"He has been hinting that if I didn't fall in with his dynastic plans, he would compel me. You know what that means."

"Yes. And you want me to rescue you?"

"I—I should be most grateful if you could. While we are taught to resign ourselves to such misfortunes, as things earned in earlier incarnations, I don't think I could bear it. I should kill myself."

Frome pondered. "D'you know when he's planning this attack?"

"He leaves the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow night the Dzlieri will celebrate."

That meant a wild orgy, and Sirat might well take the occasion to copy his subjects. On the other hand, the confusion afforded a chance to escape.

"I'll try to cook up a scheme," he told her.

Next day Frome found his assistants even more restless and insubordinate than usual. About noon they walked out for good. "Got to get ready for the party!" they shouted. "To hell with work!"

Mishinatven had vanished, too. Frome sat alone, thinking. After a while he wandered around the shop, handling pieces of material. He noticed the spoiled Galton whistle lying where he had thrown it the day before; the remaining length of copper tubing from which he had made the whistles; the big copper kettle he had never gotten around either to scrapping or to fixing. Slowly an idea took shape.

He went to the forge room and started the furnace up again. When he had a hot fire, he brazed a big thick patch over the hole in the kettle, on the inside where it would take pressure. He tested the kettle for leakage and found none. Then he sawed a length off the copper tube and made another Galton whistle, using the spoiled one as a model.

In the scrap-sorting room he found a length of plastic which he made into a sealing ring or gasket to go between the kettle and its lid. He took off the regular handle of the kettle, twisted a length of heavy wire into a shorter bail, and installed it so that it pressed the lid tightly down against the gasket. Finally he made a little conical adapter of sheet-copper and brazed it to the spout of the kettle, and brazed the whistle to the adapter. He then had an air-tight kettle whose spout ended in the whistle.

Then it was time for dinner.

Sirat seemed in a rollicking good humor and drank more moikhada than usual.

"Tomorrow," he said, "tomorrow we cast the die. What was that ancient European general who remarked about casting the die when crossing a river? Napoleon? Anyway, let us drink to tomorrow!" He raised his goblet theatrically. "Will you not weaken, Elena? Regrettable; you do not know what you miss. Come, let us fall upon the provender, lest my cook decamp to the revelers before we finish."

From outside came Dzlieri voices in drunken song, and sounds of a fight. The high shriek of a female Dzlieri tore past the palace, followed by the laughter and hoofbeats of a male in pursuit.

These alarming sounds kept the talk from reaching its usual brilliance. When the meal was over, Sirat said, "Adrian, you must excuse me; I have a portentous task to accomplish. Please return to your quarters. Not you, Elena; kindly remain where you are."

Frome looked at the two of them, then at the guards, and went. In passing through the breezeway he saw a mob of Dzlieri dancing around a bonfire. The palace proper seemed nearly deserted.

Instead of going to his room he went into the machine shop. He lit a cresset to see by, took the big copper kettle out to the pump, and half filled it with several liters of water. Then he staggered back into the shop and heaved the kettle up on top of the forge. He clamped the lid on,

stirred the coals, and pumped the bellows until he had a roaring fire.

He hunted around the part of the shop devoted to the repair of tools and weapons until he chose a big spear with a three-meter shaft and a broad keen-edged half-meter head. Then he went back to the forge with it.

After a long wait, a faint curl of water vapor appeared in the air near the spout of the kettle. It grew to a long plume, showing that steam was shooting out fast. Although Frome could hear nothing, he could tell by touching a piece of metal to the spout that the whistle was vibrating at a tremendous frequency.

Remembering that ultrasonics have directional qualities, Frome slashed through the matting with the broad blade of the spear until the forge room lay open to view in several directions. Then he went back into the palace.

By now he knew the structure well. Toward the center of the maze Sirat had his private suite: a sitting room, bedroom, and bath. The only way into this suite was through an always-guarded door into the sitting room.

Frome walked along the hallway that ran beside the suite and around the corner to the door into the sitting room. He listened, ear to the matting. Although it was hard to hear anything over the racket outside, he thought he caught sounds of struggle within. And from up ahead came Dzlieri voices.

He stole to the bend in the corridor and heard: "... surely some demon must have sent this sound to plague us. In truth it makes my head ache to the splitting point!"

"It is like God's whistle," said the other voice, "save that it comes not from God's chambers, and blows continually. Try stuffing a bit of this into your ears."

The first voice (evidently that of one of the two regular guards) said, "It helps a little; remain you here on guard while I seek the medicine-man."

"That I will, but send another to take your place. for God will take it amiss if he finds but one of us here. And hasten, for the scream drives me to madness!"

Dzlieri hooves departed. Frome grinned in his whiskers. He might take a chance of attacking the remaining guard, but if the fellow's ears were plugged there was a better way. Sirat would have closed off his bedroom from the sitting room by one of those curtains of slats that did duty for doors.

Frome retraced his steps until he was sure he was opposite the bedroom. Then he thrust his spear into the matting, slashed downward, and pushed through the slit into a bedroom big enough for basketball.

Sirat Mongkut looked up from what he was doing. He had tied Elena's wrists to the posts at the head of the bed, so that she lay supine, and now, despite her struggle, was tying one of her ankles to one of the posts at the foot. Here was a conqueror who liked to found his dynasties in comfort.

"Adrian!" cried Elena.

Sirat's hand flashed to his hip—and came away empty. Frome's biggest gamble had paid off; he assumed that just this once Sirat might have discarded his pistol. Frome had planned, if he found Sirat armed, to throw the spear at him; now he could take the surer way.

He gripped the big spear in both hands, like a bayoneted rifle, and ran towards Sirat. The stocky figure leaped onto the bed and then to the floor on the far side, fumbling for his whistle. Frome sprang onto the bed in pursuit, but tripped on Elena's bound ankle and almost sprawled headlong. By the time he recovered he had staggered nearly the width of the room. Meanwhile Sirat, having avoided Frome's rush, put his whistle to his mouth, and his broad cheeks bulged with blowing.

Frome gathered himself for another charge. Sirat blew and blew, his expression changing from confidence to alarm as nobody came. Frome knew that no Dzlieri in the neighborhood could hear the whistle over the continuous blast of the one attached to the kettle. But Sirat, unable to hear ultrasonics, did not know his signals were jammed.

As Frome started towards him again, Sirat threw a chair. It flew with deadly force; part of it gave Frome's knuckles a nasty rap while another part smote him on the forehead, sending him reeling back. Sirat darted across the room again on his short legs and tore from the wall one of those groups of native weapons he ornamented his palace with.

Down with a clatter came the mass of cutlery: a pair of crossed battle-axes, a gisarme, and a brass buckler. By the time Frome, having recovered from the impact of the chair, came up, Sirat had possessed himself of the buckler and one of the axes. He whirled and brought up the buckler just in time to ward off a lunge of the spear. Then he struck out with his axe and spun himself half around as he met only empty air. Frome, seeing the blow coming, had leaped back.

Sirat followed, striking out again. Frome gave ground, afraid to parry for fear of having his spear ruined, then drove Sirat back again by jabs at his head, legs, and exposed arm. They began to circle, the spear-point now and then clattering against the shield. Frome found that he could hold Sirat off by his longer reach, but could not easily get past the buckler. Round they went, *clank! clank!*

Sirat was slow for a second and Frome drove the spear-point into his right thigh, just above the knee... But the thrust, not centered, inflicted only a flesh wound and a great rip in Sirat's pants. Sirat leaped forward, whirling his axe, and drove Frome back almost to the wall before the latter stopped him with his thrusts.

They circled again. Then came a moment when Sirat was between Frome and the door to the sitting room. Quick as a flash Sirat threw his axe at Frome, dropped his shield, turned, and ran for the curtained door, calling, "Help!"

Frome dodged the axe, which nevertheless hit him a jarring blow in the shoulder. As he recovered, he saw Sirat halfway to safety, hands out to wrench the curtain aside. He could not possibly catch the Siamese before

the latter reached the sitting room and summoned his delinquent guards to help him.

Frome threw his spear like a javelin. The shaft arced through the air and the point entered Sirat's broad back. In it went. And in, until half its length was out of sight.

Sirat fell forward, face down, clutching at the carpet and gasping. Blood ran from his mouth.

Frome strode over to where the would-be emperor lay and wrenched out the spear. He held it poised, ready to drive home again, until Sirat ceased to move. He was almost sorry . . . But there was no time for Hamletlike attitudes; he wiped the blade on Sirat's clothes, carried it over to the bed, and sawed through Elena's bonds with the edge. Without waiting for explanations he said, "If we're quick, we may get away before they find out. That is, if the guards haven't heard the noise in here."

"They will think it was he and I," she replied. "Before he dragged me in here he told them not to come in, no matter what they heard, unless he whistled for them."

"Serves him right. I'm going downstreet to get some of his zebras. Where's that bloody gun of his?"

"In the chest," she said, pointing. "He locked it in there, I suppose because he was afraid I'd snatch it and shoot him—as though I could kill any sentient being."

"How do we get into—" Frome began, and stopped as he saw that the chest had a combination lock. "I fear we don't. How about his ammunition chest in the store room?"

"That has a combination lock, too."

"*Tamates!*" growled Frome. "It looks as though we'd have to start out without a gun. While I'm gone, try to collect a sack of tucker from the kitchen, and whatever else looks useful." And out he went through the slit.

Outside the palace, he took care to saunter as if on legitimate business. The Dzlieri, having cast off what few inhibitions they normally possessed, were too far gone in their own amusements to pay him much heed, though one or two roared greetings at him.

Catching the zebras, though, was something else. The animals dodged around the corral, evading with ease his efforts to seize their bridles. Finally he called to a Dzlieri he knew: "Mzumelitsen, lend me a hand, will you? God wants a ride."

"Wait till I finish what I am doing," said the Dzlieri.

Frome waited until Mzumelitsen finished what he was doing and came over to help collect three zebras. Once caught, the animals followed Frome back to the palace tamely enough. He hitched them to the rail in the rear and went into the machine shop, where he rummaged until he found a machete and a hatchet. He also gathered up the radar target, which looked still serviceable if slightly battered.

When he got back he found that Elena had acquired a bag of food, a supply of matches, and a few other items. These they loaded on one of the zebras, and the other two they saddled.

When they rode out of Annairad, the Dzlieri celebration was still in its full raucous swing.

4

NEXT DAY THEY WERE beginning to raise the lower slopes of the foothills of Mount Ertma when Frome held up a hand and said, "Listen!"

Through the muffling mass of the Vishnuvan jungle they heard loud Dzlieri voices. Then the sound of bodies moving along the trail came to their ears.

Frome exchanged one look with Elena and they broke into a gallop.

The pursuers must have been coming fast also, for the sounds behind became louder and louder. Frome caught a glimpse of the gleam of metal behind them. Whoops told them the Dzlieri had seen them, too.

Frome said, "You go on; I'll lead them off the trail and lose them."

"I won't! I won't desert you—"

"Do as I say!"

"But—"

"Go on!" he yelled so fiercely that she went. Then he sat waiting until they came into sight, fighting down his own fears, for he had no illusions about being able to "lose" the Dzlieri in their native jungle.

They poured up the trail towards him with triumphant screams. If he only had a gun . . . At least they did not seem to have any, either. They had only a few guns that would shoot (not counting the shotguns, whose shells were still locked up) and would have divided into many small parties to scour the trails leading out from their center.

Frome turned the zebra's head off into the jungle. Thank the gods the growth was thinner here than lower down, where the jungle was practically impassable off the trails.

He kicked his mount into an irregular run and vainly tried to protect his face from the lashing branches. Thorns ripped his skin and a trunk gave his right leg a brutal blow. As the Dzlieri bounded off the trail after him, he guided his beast in a wide semicircle around them to intersect the trail again behind his pursuers.

When he reached the trail, and could keep his eyes open again, he saw that the whole mob was crowding after him and gaining, led by Mishinatven. As the trail bent, Sirat's lieutenant cut across the corner and hurled himself back on the path beside the Earthman. Frome felt for his machete, which had been slapping against his left leg. The Dzlieri thundered at him from the right, holding a javelin up for a stab.

"Trickster! Deicide!" screamed Mishinatven, and thrust. Frome slashed through the shaft. As they galloped side by side, the point grazed Frome's arm and fell to the ground.

Mishinatven swung the rest of the shaft and whacked Frome's shoulders. Frome slashed back; heard the clang of brass as the Dzlieri brought up his buckler. Mishin-

atven dropped the javelin and snatched out his short sword. Frome parried the first cut and, as Mishinatven recovered, struck at the Dzlieri's sword hand and felt the blade bite bone. The sword spun away.

Frome caught the edge of the buckler with his left hand, pulled it down, and hacked again and again until the brass was torn from his grip by the fall of his foe.

The others were still coming. Looking back, Frome saw that they halted when they came to their fallen leader.

Frome pulled on his reins. The best defense is a bloody strong attack. If he charged them now . . . He wheeled the zebra and went off for them at a run, screeching and whirling his bloody blade.

Before he could reach them, they scattered into the woods with cries of despair. He kept right on through the midst of them and up the long slope until they were far behind and the exhaustion of his mount forced him to slow down.

When he finally caught up with Elena Millan, she looked at him with horror. He wondered why until he realized that with blood all over he must be quite a sight.

They made the last few kilometers on foot, leading their zebras zigzag among the immense boulders that crested the peak and beating the beasts to make them buck-jump up the steep slopes. When they arrived at the top, they tied the beasts to bushes and threw themselves down to rest.

Elena said, "Thank the Cosmos that's over! I could not have gone on much further."

"We're not done yet," said Frome. "When we get our breath we'll have to set up the target."

"Are we safe here?"

"By no means. Those Dzlieri will go back to Amnairad and fetch the whole tribe, then they'll throw a cordon around the mountain to make sure we shan't escape. We can only hope the target brings a rescue in time."

Presently he forced himself to get up and go to work

again. In half an hour, with Elena's help, the target was up on its pole, safely guyed against the gusts.

Then Adrian Frome flopped down again. Elena said, "You poor creature! You're bruised all over."

"Don't I know it! But it might have been a sight worse."

"Let me at least wash those scratches, lest you get infected."

"That's all right; Vishnuvan germs don't bother Earth-folk. Oh, well, if you insist..." His voice trailed off sleepily.

He woke up some hours later to find that Elena had gotten a fire going despite the drizzle and had a meal laid out.

"Blind me, what have we here?" he exclaimed. "I say, you're the sort of trail mate to have!"

"That is nothing. It's you who are wonderful. And to think I've always been prejudiced against blond men, because in Spanish novels the villain is always pictured as a blond!"

Frome's heart, never so hard as he made it out to be, was full to overflowing. "Perhaps this isn't the time to say this but—uh—I'm not a very spiritual sort of bloke, but I rather love you, you know."

"I love you too. The Cosmos has sent a love ray..."

"*Oi!*" It was a jarring reminder of that other Elena.

"That's enough of that, my girl. Come here."

She came.

When Peter Quinlan got back to Bembom with the convalescing Hayataka, Comandante Silva listened eagerly to Quinlan's story until he came to his flight from Mishinatven's territory.

"...after we started," said Quinlan, "while Hayataka was still out, they attacked again. I got three, but not before they had killed Frome with javelins. After we beat them off I buried—"

"Wait! You say Frome was killed?"

"*Pois sim.*"

"And you came right back here, without going to Ertma?"

"Naturally. What else could I do?"

"Then who set up the radar target on the mountain?"

"What?"

"Why yes. We set up our radars on the ends of the base line yesterday, and the target showed clearly on the scopes."

"I don't understand," said Quinlan.

"Neither do I, but we'll soon find out. *Amigo*," he said to the sergeant Martins, "tell the aviation group to get the helicopter ready to fly to Mount Ertma, at once."

When the pilot homed on the radar target, he came out of the clouds to see a kitelike polygonal structure gleaming with a dull gray aluminum finish on top of a pole on the highest peak of Mount Ertma. Beside the pole were two human beings sitting on a rock and three tethered zebras munching the herbage.

The human beings leaped to their feet and waved wildly. The pilot brought his aircraft around, tensely guiding it through gusts that threatened to dash it against the rocks, and let the rope ladder uncoil through the trapdoor. The man leaped this way and that, like a fish jumping for a fly, as the ladder whipped about him. Finally he caught it.

Just then a group of Dzlieri came out of the trees. They pointed and jabbered and ran towards the people, whipping out javelins.

The smaller of the two figures was several rungs up the ladder when the larger one, who had just begun his ascent, screamed up over the whirr of the rotor blades and the roar of the wind: "Straight up! Quick!"

More Dzlieri appeared—scores of them—and somewhere a rifle barked. The pilot (just as glad it was not he dangling from an aircraft bucking through a turbulent overcast) canted his blades and rose until the clouds closed in below.

The human beings presently popped into the cabin,

gasping from their climb. They were a small dark young woman and a tall man with a centimeter of butter-colored beard matted with dried blood. Both were nearly naked save for tattered canvas boots and a rag or two elsewhere, and were splashed with half-dried mud. The pilot recognized Adrian Frome the surveyor.

"Home, Jayme," said Frome.

Frome, cleaned, shaved and looking his normal self once more except for a notch in his left ear, sat down across the desk from Silva, who said, "I cannot understand why you ask for a transfer to Ganesha now of all times. You're the hero of Bembom. I can get you a permanent P-5 appointment; perhaps even a P-6. Quinlan will be taken to Krishna for trial; Hayataka is retiring on his pension; and I shall be hard up for surveyors. So why must you leave?"

Frome smiled a wry, embarrassed smile. "You'll manage, *Chefe*. You will still have Van der Gracht and Mehtalal, both good men. But I'm quite determined, and I'll tell you why. When Elena and I got to the top of that mountain were were in a pretty emotional state, and what with one thing and another, and not having seen another human female for weeks, I asked her to marry me and she accepted."

Silva's eyebrows rose. "Indeed! My heartiest congratulations! But what has that to do with—"

"Wait till you hear the rest! At first everything was right as rain. She claimed it was the first time she'd been kissed, and speaking as a man of some experience I suppose it was. However, she soon began telling me *her* ideas. In the first place this was to be a purely spiritual marriage, the purpose of which was to put my feet on the sevenfold path of enlightenment so I could be something better than a mere civil engineer in my next incarnation—a Cosmotheist missionary, for example. Now I ask you!

"Well, at first I thought that was just a crochete I'd get her over in time; after all we don't let our women walk

over us the way the Americans do. But then she started preaching Cosmotheism to me. And during the two and a half days we were up there, I'll swear she didn't stop talking five minutes except when she was asleep. The damndest rot you ever heard—rays and cosmic love and vibrations and astral planes and so on. I was never so bored in my life."

"I know," said Silva. He too had suffered.

"So," concluded Frome, "about that time I began wishing I could give her back to Sirat Mongkut. I was even sorry I'd killed the blighter. Although he'd have caused no end of trouble if he'd lived, he was a likeable sort of scoundrel at that. So here I am with one unwanted fiancée, and I just *can't* explain the facts of life to her. She once said as a joke that I'd be better off on Ganesha, and damned if I don't think she was right. Now if you'll just endorse that application . . . Ah, *muito obrigado*, Senhor Augusto! If I hurry I can just catch the ship to Krishna. Cheerio!"

THE CHAPTER ENDS

by Poul Anderson

1

"No," said the old man.

"But you don't realize what it means," said Jorun. "You don't know what you're saying."

The old man, Kormt of Huerdar, Gerlaug's son, and Speaker for Solis Township, shook his head till the long, grizzled locks swirled around his wide shoulders. "I have thought it through," he said. His voice was deep and slow and implacable. "You gave me five years to think about it. And my answer is no."

Jorun felt a weariness rise within him. It had been like this for days now, weeks, and it was like trying to knock down a mountain. You beat on its rocky flanks till your hands were bloody, and still the mountain stood there, sunlight on its high snowfields and in the forests that rustled up its slopes, and it did not really notice you. You were a brief thin buzz between two long nights, but the mountain was forever.

"You haven't thought at all," he said with a rudeness born of exhaustion. "You've only reacted unthinkingly to a dead symbol. It's not a human reaction, even, it's a verbal reflex."

Kormt's eyes, meshed in crow's feet, were serene and steady under the thick gray brows. He smiled a little in his long beard, but made no other reply. Had he simply let the insult glide off him, or had he not understood it at all? There was no real talking to these peasants; too many millennia lay between. and you couldn't shout across that gulf.

"Well," said Jorun, "the ships will be here tomorrow or the next day, and it'll take another day or so to get all your people aboard. You have that long to decide, but after that it'll be too late. Think about it, I beg of you. As for me, I'll be too busy to argue further."

"You are a good man," said Kormt, "and a wise one in your fashion. But you are blind. There is something dead inside you."

He waved one huge gnarled hand. "Look around you, Jorun of Fulkhis. This is *Earth*. This is the old home of all humankind. You cannot go off and forget it. Man cannot do so. It is in him, in his blood and bones and bones and soul; he will carry Earth within him forever."

Jorun's eyes traveled along the arc of the hand. He stood on the edge of the town. Behind him were its houses—low, white, half-timbered, roofed with thatch or red tile, smoke rising from the chimneys; carved galleries overhung the narrow, cobbled, crazily twisting streets; he heard the noise of wheels and wooden slogs, the shouts of

children at play. Beyond that were trees and the incredible ruined walls of Sol City. In front of him, the wooded hills were cleared and a gentle landscape of neat fields and orchards rolled down toward the distant glitter of the sea: scattered farm buildings, drowsy cattle, winding gravel roads, fence walls of ancient marble and granite, all dreaming under the sun.

He drew a deep breath. It was pungent in his nostrils. It smelled of leaf mould, plowed earth baking in the warmth, summery trees and gardens, a remote ocean odor of salt and kelp and fish. He thought that no two planets ever had quite the same smell, and that none was as rich as Terra's.

"This is a fair world," he said slowly.

"It is the only one," said Kormt. "Man came from here; and to this, in the end, he must return."

"I wonder—" Jorun sighed. "Take me; not one atom of my body was from this soil before I landed. My people lived on Fulkhis for ages, and changed to meet its conditions. They would not be happy on Terra."

"The atoms are nothing," said Kormt. "It is the form which matters, and that was given to you by Earth."

Jorun studied him for a moment. Kormt was like most of this planet's ten million or so people—a dark, stocky folk, though there were more blond and red-haired throwbacks here than in the rest of the Galaxy. He was old for a primitive untreated by medical science—he must be almost two hundred years old—but his back was straight, and his stride firm. The coarse, jut-nosed face held an odd strength. Jorun was nearing his thousandth birthday, but couldn't help feeling like a child in Kormt's presence.

That didn't make sense. These few dwellers on Terra were a backward and impoverished race of peasants and handicraftsmen; they were ignorant and unadventurous; they had been static for more thousands of years than anyone knew. What could they have to say to the ancient and mighty civilization which had almost forgotten their little planet?

Kormt looked at the declining sun. "I must go now," he said. "There are the evening chores to do. I will be in town tonight if you should wish to see me."

"I probably will," said Jorun. "There's a lot to do, readying the evacuation, and you're a big help."

The old man bowed with grave courtesy, turned, and walked off down the road. He wore the common costume of Terran men, as archaic in style as in its woven fabric material: hat, jacket, loose trousers, a long staff in his hand. Contrasting the drab blue of Kormt's dress, Jorun's vivid tunic of shifting rainbow hues was like a flame.

The psychotechnician sighed again, watching him go. He liked the old fellow. It would be criminal to leave him here alone, but the law forbade force—physical or mental—and the Integrator on Corazuno wasn't going to care whether or not one aged man stayed behind. The job was to get the *race* off Terra.

A lovely world. Jorun's thin mobile features, pale skinned and large-eyed, turned around the horizon. *A fair world we came from.*

There were more beautiful planets in the Galaxy's swarming myriads—the indigo world ocean of Loa, jeweled with islands; the heaven-defying mountains of Sharang; the sky of Jareb, that seemed to drip light—oh, many and many, but there was only one Earth.

Jorun remembered his first sight of this world, hanging free in space to watch it after the grueling ten-day run, thirty thousand light years, from Corazuno. It was blue as it turned before his eyes, a burnished turquoise shield blazoned with the living green and brown of its lands, and the poles were crowned with a shimmering haze of aurora. The belts that streaked its face and blurred the continents were cloud, wind and water and the gray rush of rain, like a benediction from heaven. Beyond the planet hung its moon, a scarred golden crescent, and he had wondered how many generations of men had looked up to it, or watched its light like a broken bridge across moving waters. Against the enormous cold of the sky—utter

black out to the distant coils of the nebulae, thronging with a million frosty points of diamond-hard blaze that were the stars—Earth had stood as a sign of haven. To Jorun, who came from Galactic center and its uncountable hosts of suns, heaven was bare, this was the outer fringe where the stars thinned away toward hideous immensity. He had shivered a little, drawn even the envelope of air and warmth closer about him, with a convulsive movement. The silence drummed in his head. Then he streaked for the north pole rendezvous of his group.

Well, he thought now, we have a pretty routine job. The first expedition here, five years ago, prepared the natives for the fact they'd have to go. Our party simply has to organize these docile peasants in time for the ships. But it had meant a lot of hard work, and he was tired. It would be good to finish the job and get back home.

Or would it?

He thought of flying with Zarek, his teammate, from the rendezvous to this area assigned as theirs. Plains like oceans of grass, wind-rippled, darkened with the herds of wild cattle whose hoofbeats were a thunder in the earth; forests, hundreds of kilometers of old and mighty trees, rivers piercing them in a long steel gleam; lakes where fish leaped; spilling sunshine like warm rain, radiance so bright it hurt his eyes, cloud shadows swift across the land. It had all been empty of man, but still there was a vitality here which was almost frightening to Jorun. His own grim world of moors and crags and spin-drift seas was a niggard beside this; here life covered the earth, filled the oceans, and made the heavens clangorous around him. He wondered if the driving energy within man, the force which had raised him to the stars, made him half-god and half-demon, if that was a legacy of Terra.

Well—man had changed; over the thousands of years, natural and controlled adaptation had fitted him to the worlds he had colonized, and most of his many races could not now feel at home here. Jorun thought of his

own party: round, amber-skinned Culi from a tropic world, complaining bitterly about the cold and dryness; gay young Cluthe, gangling and bulge-chested; sophisticated Taliuvenna of the flowing dark hair and the lustrous eyes—no, to them Earth was only one more planet, out of thousands they had seen in their long lives.

And I'm a sentimental fool.

2

HE COULD HAVE WILLED the vague regret out of his trained nervous system, but he didn't want to. This was the last time human eyes would ever look on Earth, and somehow Jorun felt that it should be more to him than just another psychotechnic job.

"Hello, good sir."

He turned at the voice and forced his tired lips into a friendly smile. "Hello, Julith," he said. It was a wise policy to learn the names of the townspeople, at least, and she was a great-great-grandaughter of the Speaker.

She was some thirteen or fourteen years old, a freckle-faced child with a shy smile, and steady green eyes. There was a certain awkward grace about her, and she seemed more imaginative than most of her stolid race. She curtsied quaintly for him, her bare foot reaching out under the long smock which was daily female dress here.

"Are you busy, good sir?" she asked.

"Well, not too much," said Jorun. He was glad of a chance to talk; it silenced his thoughts. "What can I do for you?"

"I wondered—" She hesitated, then, breathlessly: "I wonder if you could give me a lift down to the beach? Only for an hour or two. It's too far to walk there before I have to be home, and I can't borrow a car, or even a horse. If it won't be any trouble, sir."

"Mmmm—shouldn't you be at home now? Isn't there milking and so on to do?"

"Oh, I don't live on a farm, good sir. My father is a baker."

"Yes, yes, so he is. I should have remembered." Jorun considered for an instant. There was enough to do in town, and it wasn't fair for him to play hooky while Zarek worked alone. "Why do you want to go to the beach, Julith?"

"We'll be busy packing up," she said. "Starting tomorrow, I guess. This is my last chance to see it."

Jorun's mouth twisted a little. "All right," he said; "I'll take you."

"You are very kind, good sir," she said gravely.

He didn't reply, but held out his arm, and she clasped it with one hand while her other arm gripped his waist. The generator inside his skull responded to his will, reaching out and clawing itself to the fabric of forces and energies which was physical space. They rose quietly, and went so slowly seaward that he didn't have to raise a wind screen.

"Will we be able to fly like this when we get to the stars?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not, Julith," he said. "You see, the people of my civilization are born this way. Thousands of years ago, men learned how to control the great basic forces of the cosmos with only a small bit of energy. Finally they used artificial mutation—that is, they changed themselves, slowly, over many generations, until their brains grew a new part that could generate this controlling force. We can now even fly between the stars, by this power. But your people don't have that brain, so we had to build spaceships to take you away."

"I see," she said.

"Your great-great-great-grandchildren can be like us, if your people want to be changed thus," he said.

"They didn't want to change before," she answered. "I don't think they'll do it now, even in their new home." Her voice held no bitterness; it was an acceptance.

Privately, Jorun doubted it. The psychic shock of this

uprooting would be bound to destroy the old traditions of the Terrans; it would not take many centuries before they were culturally assimilated by Galactic civilization.

Assimilated—nice euphemism. Why not just say—eaten?

They landed on the beach. It was broad and white, running in dunes from the thin, harsh, salt-streaked grass to the roar and tumble of surf. The sun was low over the watery horizon, filling the damp, blowing air with gold. Jorun could almost look directly at its huge disc.

He sat down. The sand gritted tinily under him, and the wind ruffled his hair and filled his nostrils with its sharp wet smell. He picked up a conch and turned it over in his fingers, wondering at the intricate architecture of it.

"If you hold it to your ear," said Julith, "you can hear the sea." Her childish voice was curiously tender around the rough syllables of Earth's language.

He nodded and obeyed her hint. It was only the small pulse of blood within him—you heard the same thing out in the great hollow silence of space—but it did sing of restless immensities, wind and foam, and the long waves marching under the moon.

"I have two of them myself," said Julith. "I want them so I can always remember this beach. And my children and their children will hold them, too, and hear our sea talking." She folded his fingers around the shell. "You keep this one for yourself."

"Thank you," he said. "I will."

The combers rolled in, booming and spouting against the land. The Terrans called them the horses of God. A thin cloud in the west was turning rose and gold.

"Are there oceans on our new planet?" asked Julith.

"Yes," he said. "It's the most Earth-like world we could find that wasn't already inhabited. You'll be happy there."

But the trees and grasses, the soil and the fruits thereof, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the waters beneath, form and color, smell and sound,

taste and texture, everything is different. Is alien. The difference is small, subtle, but it is the abyss of two billion years of separate evolution, and no other world can ever quite be Earth.

Julith looked straight at him with solemn eyes. "Are you folk afraid of Hulduvians?" she asked.

"Why, no," he said. "Or course not."

"Then why are you giving Earth to them?" It was a soft question, but it trembled just a little.

"I thought all your people understood the reason by now," said Jorun. "Civilization—the civilization of man and his non-human allies—has moved inward, toward the great star clusters of Galactic center. This part of space means nothing to us any more; it's almost a desert. You haven't seen starlight till you've been by Sagittarius. Now the Hulduvians are another civilization. They are not the least bit like us; they live on big, poisonous worlds like Jupiter and Saturn. I think they would seem like pretty nice monsters if they weren't so alien to us that neither side can really understand the other. They use the cosmic energies too, but in a different way—and their way interferes with ours just as ours interferes with theirs. Different brains, you see.

"Anyway, it was decided that the two civilizations would get along best by just staying away from each other. If they divided up the Galaxy between them, there would be no interference; it would be too far from one civilization to the other. The Hulduvians were, really, very nice about it. They're willing to take the outer rim, even if there are fewer stars, and let us have the center.

"So by the agreement, we've got to have all men and manlike beings out of their territory before they come to settle it, just as they'll move out of ours. Their colonists won't be coming to Jupiter and Saturn for centuries yet; but even so, we have to clear the Sirius Sector now, because there'll be a lot of work to do elsewhere. Fortunately, there are only a few people living in this whole part of space. The Sirius Sector has been an isolated, primi—ah

—quiet region since the First Empire fell, fifty thousand years ago.”

Julith's voice rose a little. “But those people are *us*!”

“And the folk of Alpha Centauri and Procyon and Sirius and—oh, hundreds of other stars. Yet all of you together are only one tiny drop in the quadrillions of the Galaxy. Don't you see, Julith, you have to move for the good of all of us?”

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, I know all that.”

She got up, shaking herself. “Let's go swimming.”

Jorun smiled and shook his head. “No, I'll wait for you if you want to go.”

She nodded and ran off down the beach, sheltering behind a dune to put on a bathing suit. The Terrans had a nudity taboo, in spite of the mild interglacial climate; typical primitive irrationality. Jorun lay back, folding his arms behind his head, and looked up at the darkening sky. The evening star twinkled forth, low and white on the dusk-blue horizon. Venus—or was it Mercury? He wasn't sure. He wished he knew more about the early history of the Solar System, the first men to ride their thunderous rockets out to die on unknown hell-worlds—the first clumsy steps toward the stars. He could look it up in the archives of Corazuno, but he knew he never would. Too much else to do, too much to remember. Probably less than one percent of mankind's throngs even knew where Earth was, today—though, for a while, it had been quite a tourist center. But that was perhaps thirty thousand years ago.

Because this world, out of all the billions, has certain physical characteristics, he thought, my race has made them into standards. Our basic units of length and time and acceleration, our comparisons by which we classify the swarming planets of the Galaxy, they all go back ultimately to Earth. We bear that unspoken memorial to our birthplace within our whole civilization, and will bear it forever. But has she given us more than that? Are our own

selves, bodies and minds and dreams, are they also the children of Earth?

Now he was thinking like Kormt, stubborn old Kormt who clung with such a blind strength to this land simply because it was his. When you considered all the races of this wander-footed species—how many of them there were, how many kinds of man between the stars! And yet they all walked upright; they all had two eyes and a nose between and a mouth below; they were all cells of that great and ancient culture which had begun here, eons past, with the first hairy half-man who kindled a fire against night. If Earth had not had darkness and cold and prowling beasts, oxygen and cellulose and flint, that culture might never have gestated.

I'm getting unlogical. Too tired, nerves worn too thin, psychosomatic control slipping. Now Earth is becoming some obscure mother symbol for me.

Or has she always been one, for the whole race of us?

A seagull cried harshly overhead and soared from view.

The sunset was smoldering away and dusk rose like fog out of the ground. Julith came running back to him, her face indistinct in the gloom. She was breathing hard, and he couldn't tell if the catch in her voice was laughter or weeping.

"I'd better be getting home," she said.

3

THEY FLEW slowly back. The town was a yellow twinkle of lights, warmth gleaming from windows across many empty kilometers. Jorun set the girl down outside her home.

"Thank you, good sir," she said, curtsying. "Won't you come in to dinner?"

"Well—"

The door opened, etching the girl black against the rudiness inside. Jorun's luminous tunic made him like a

torch in the dark. "Why, it's the star man," said a woman's voice.

"I took your daughter for a swim," he explained. "I hope you don't mind."

"And if we did, what would it matter?" grumbled a bass tone. Jorun recognized Kormt; the old man must have come as a guest from his farm on the outskirts. "What could we do about it?"

"Now, Granther, that's no way to talk to the gentleman," said the woman. "He's been very kind. Won't you come eat with us, good sir?"

Jorun refused twice, in case they were only being polite, then accepted gladly enough. He was tired of cookery at the inn where he and Zarek boarded. "Thank you."

He entered, ducking under the low door. A single long, smoky rafted room was kitchen, dining room and parlor; doors led off to the sleeping quarters. It was furnished with a clumsy elegance, skin rugs, oak wainscoting, carved pillars, glowing ornaments of hammered copper. A radium clock, which must be incredibly old, stood on the stone mantel, above a snapping fire; a chemical-powered gun, obviously of local manufacture, hung over it. Julith's parents, a plain, quiet peasant couple, conducted him to the end of the wooden table, while half a dozen children watched him with large eyes. The younger children were the only Terrans who seemed to find this removal an adventure.

The meal was good and plentiful: meat, vegetables, bread, beer, milk, ice cream, coffee, all of it from the farms hereabouts. There wasn't much trade between the few thousand communities of Earth; they were practically self-sufficient. The company ate in silence, as was the custom here. When they were finished, Jorun wanted to go, but it would have been rude to leave immediately. He went over to a chair by the fireplace, across from the one in which Kormt sprawled.

The old man took out a big-bowled pipe and began stuffing it. Shadows wove across his seamed brown face,

his eyes were a gleam out of darkness. "I'll go down to City Hall with you soon," he said; "I imagine that's where the work is going on."

"Yes," said Jorun. "I can relieve Zarek at it. I'd appreciate it if you did come, good sir. Your influence is very steadying on these people."

"It should be," said Kormt. "I've been their Speaker for almost a hundred years. And my father Gerlaug was before me, and his father Kormt was before him." He took a brand from the fire and held it over his pipe, puffing hard, looking up at Jorun through tangled brows. "Who was your great-grandfather?"

"Why—I don't know. I imagine he's still alive somewhere, but—"

"I thought so. No marriage. No family. No home. No tradition." Kormt shook his massive head, slowly, "I pity you Galactics!"

"Now please, good sir—" Damn it all, the old clodhopper could get as irritating as a faulty computer. "We have records that go back to before man left this planet. Records of everything. It is you who have forgotten."

Kormt smiled and puffed blue clouds at him. "That's not what I mean."

"Do you mean you think it is good for men to live a life that is unchanging, that is just the same from century to century—no new dreams, no new triumphs, always the same grubbing rounds of days? I cannot agree."

Jorun's mind flickered over history, trying to evaluate the basic motivations of his opponent. Partly cultural, partly biological, that must be it. Once Terra had been the center of the civilized universe. But the long migration starward, especially after the fall of the First Empire, drained off the most venturesome elements of the population. That drain went on for thousands of years. Sol was backward, ruined and impoverished by the remorseless price of empire, helpless before the storms of barbarian conquest that swept back and forth between the stars. Even after peace was restored, there was nothing to hold

a young man or woman of vitality and imagination here—not when you could go toward Galactic center and join the new civilization building out there. Space traffic came ever less frequently to Sol; old machines rusted away and were not replaced; best to get out while there was still time.

Eventually there was a fixed psychosomatic type, one which lived close to the land, in primitive changless communities and isolated farmsteads—a type content to gain its simple needs by the labor of hand, horse, or an occasional battered engine. A culture grew up which increased that rigidity. So few had visited Earth in the last several thousand years—perhaps one outsider a century, stopping briefly off on his way to somewhere else—that there was no challenge or encouragement to alter. The Terrans didn't *want* more people, more machines, more anything; they wished only to remain as they were.

You couldn't call them stagnant. Their life was too healthy, their civilization too rich in its own way—folk art, folk music, ceremony, religion, the intimacy of family life which the Galactics had lost—for that term. But to one who flew between the streaming suns, it was a small existence.

Kormt's voice broke in on his reverie. "Dreams, triumphs, work, deeds, love and life and finally death and the long sleep in the earth," he said. "Why should we want to change them? They never grow old; they are new for each child that is born."

"Well," said Jorun, and stopped. You couldn't really answer that kind of logic. It wasn't logic at all, but something deeper.

"Well," he started over, after a while, "as you know, this evacuation was forced on us, too. We don't want to move you, but we must."

"Oh, yes," said Kormt. "You have been very nice about it. It would have been easier, in a way, if you'd come with fire and gun and chains for us, like the barbar-

ians did long ago. We could have understood you better then."

"At best, it will be hard for your people," said Jorun. "It will be a shock, and they'll need leaders to guide them through it. You have a duty to help them out there, good sir."

"Maybe." Kormt blew a series of smoke rings at his youngest descendant, three years old, who crowed with laughter and climbed up on his knee. "But they'll manage."

"You can't seem to realize," said Jorun, "that you are the *last man on Earth* who refuses to go. You will be *alone*. For the rest of your life! We couldn't come back for you later under any circumstances, because there'll be Hulduvian colonies between Sol and Sagittarius which we would disturb in passage. You'll be alone, I say!"

Kormt shrugged. "I'm too old to change my ways; there can't be many years left me, anyway. I can live well, just off the food stores that'll be left here." He ruffled the child's hair, but his face drew into a scowl. "Now, no more of that, good sir, if you please; I'm tired of this argument."

Jorun nodded and fell into the silence that held the rest. Terrans would sometimes sit for hours without talking, content to be in each other's nearness. He thought of Kormt, Gerlaug's son, last man on Earth, altogether alone, living alone and dying alone; and yet, he reflected, was that solitude any greater than the one in which all men dwelt all their days?

Presently the Speaker set the child down, knocked out his pipe, and rose. "Come, good sir," he said, reaching for his staff. "Let us go."

They walked side by side down the street, under the dim lamps and past the yellow windows. The cobbles gave back their footfalls in a dull clatter. Once in a while they passed someone else, a vague figure which bowed to Kormt. Only one did not notice them, an old woman who walked crying between the high walls.

"They say it is never night on your worlds," said Kormt.

Jorun threw him a sidelong glance. His face was a strong jutting of highlights from sliding shadow. "Some planets have been given luminous skies," said the technician, "and a few still have cities, too, where it is always light. But when every man can control the cosmic energies, there is no real reason for us to live together; most of us dwell far apart. There are very dark nights on my own world, and I cannot see any other home from my own—just the moors."

"It must be a strange life," said Kormt. "Belonging to no one."

They came out on the market square, a broad paved space walled in by houses. There was a fountain in its middle, and a statue dug out of the ruins had been placed there. It was broken, one arm gone—but still the white slim figure of the dancing girl stood with youth and laughter, forever under the sky of Earth. Jorun knew that lovers were wont to meet here, and briefly, irrationally, he wondered how lonely the girl would be in all the millions of years to come.

The City Hall lay at the farther end of the square, big and dark, its eaves carved with dragons, and the gables topped with wing-spreading birds. It was an old building; nobody knew how many generations of men had gathered here. A long, patient line of folk stood outside it, shuffling in one by one to the registry desk; emerging, they went off quietly into the darkness, toward the temporary shelters erected for them.

Walking by the line, Jorun picked faces out of the shadows. There was a young mother holding a crying child, her head bent over it in a timeless pose, murmuring to soothe it. There was a mechanic, still sooty from his work, smiling wearily at some tired joke of the man behind him. There was a scowling, black-browed peasant who muttered a curse as Jorun went by; the rest seemed to accept their fate meekly enough. There was a priest, his head bowed, alone with his God. There was a younger

man, his hands clenching and unclenching, big helpless hands, and Jorun heard him saying to someone else: "—if they could have waited till after harvest. I hate to let good grain stand in the field."

Jorun went into the main room, toward the desk at the head of the line. Hulking hairless Zarek was patiently questioning each of the hundreds who came hat in hand before him: name, age, sex, occupation, dependents, special needs or desires. He punches the answers out on the recorder machine, half a million lives were held in its electronic memory.

"Oh, there you are," his bass rumbled. "Where've you been?"

"I had to do some concy work," said Jorun. That was a private code term, among others: concy, conciliation, anything to make the evacuation go smoothly. "Sorry to be so late. I'll take over now."

"All right. I think we can wind the whole thing up by midnight." Zarek smiled at Kormt. "Glad you came, good sir. There are a few people I'd like you to talk to." He gestured at half a dozen seated in the rear of the room. Certain complaints were best handled by native leaders.

Kormt nodded and strode over to the folk. Jorun heard a man begin some long-winded explanation: he wanted to take his own plow along, he'd made it himself and there was no better plow in the universe, but the star man said there wouldn't be room.

"They'll furnish us with all the stuff we need, son," said Kormt.

"But it's *my* plow!" said the man. His fingers twisted his cap.

Kormt sat down and began soothing him.

The head of the line waited a few meters off while Jorun took Zarek's place. "Been a long grind," said the latter. "About done now, though. And will I be glad to see the last of this planet!"

"I don't know," said Jorun. "It's a lovely world. I don't think I've ever seen a more beautiful one."

Zarek snorted. "Me for Thonnvar! I can't wait to sit on the terrace by the Scarlet Seat, fern trees and red grass all around, a glass of oehl in my hand and the crystal geysers in front of me. You're a funny one, Jorun."

The Fulkhisian shrugged slender shoulders. Zarek clapped him on the back and went out for supper and sleep. Jorun beckoned to the next Terran and settled down to the long, almost mindless routine of registration. He was interrupted once by Kormt, who yawned mightily and bade him good night; otherwise it was a steady, half-conscious interval in which one anonymous face after another passed by. He was dimly surprised when the last one came up. This was a plump, cheerful, middle-aged fellow with small shrewd eyes, a little more colorfully dressed than the others. He gave his occupation as merchant—a minor tradesman, he explained, dealing in the little things it was more convenient for the peasants to buy than to manufacture themselves.

"I hope you haven't been waiting too long," said Jorun. Concy statement.

"Oh, no." The merchant grinned. "I knew those dumb farmers would be here for hours, so I just went to bed and got up half an hour ago, when it was about over."

"Clever." Jorun rose, sighed, and stretched. The big room was cavernously empty, its lights a harsh glare. It was very quiet here.

"Well, sir, I'm a middling smart chap, if I say it as shouldn't. And you know, I'd like to express my appreciation of all you're doing for us."

"Can't say we're doing much." Jorun locked the machine.

"Oh, the apple-knockers may not like it, but really, good sir, this hasn't been any place for a man of enterprise. It's dead. I'd have got out long ago if there'd been any transportation. Now, when we're getting back into civilization, there'll be some real opportunities. I'll make my pile inside of five years, you bet."

Jorun smiled, but there was a bleakness in him. What

chance would this barbarian have even to get near the gigantic work of civilization—let alone comprehend it or take part in it. He hoped the little fellow wouldn't break his heart trying.

"Well," he said, "good night, and good luck to you."

"Good night, sir. We'll meet again, I trust."

Jorun switched off the lights and went out into the square. It was completely deserted. The moon was up now, almost full, and its cold radiance dimmed the lamps. He heard a dog howling far off. The dogs of Earth—such as weren't taken along—would be lonely, too.

Well, he thought, the job's over. Tomorrow, or the next day, the ships come.

4

HE FELT very tired, but didn't want to sleep, and willed himself back to alertness. There hadn't been much chance to inspect the ruins, and he felt it would be appropriate to see them by moonlight.

Rising into the air, he ghosted above roofs and trees until he came to the dead city. For a while he hovered in a sky like dark velvet, a faint breeze murmured around him, and he heard the remote noise of crickets and the sea. But stillness enveloped it all, there was no real sound.

Sol City, capital of the legendary First Empire, had been enormous. It must have sprawled over forty or fifty thousand square kilometers when it was in its prime, when it was the gay and wicked heart of human civilization and swollen with the lifeblood of the stars. And yet those who built it had been men of taste, they had sought out genius to create for them. The city was not a collection of buildings; it was a balanced whole, radiating from the mighty peaks of the central palace, through colonnades and parks and leaping skyways, out to the templelike villas of the rulers. For all its monstrous size, it had been a fairy sight, a woven lace of polished metal and white, black, red

stone, colored plastic, music and light—everywhere light.

Bombarded from space; sacked again and again by the barbarian hordes who swarmed maggotlike through the bones of the slain Empire; weathered, shaken by the slow sliding of Earth's crust; pried apart by patient, delicate roots; dug over by hundreds of generations of archeologists, treasure-seekers, the idly curious; made a quarry of metal and stone for the ignorant peasants who finally huddled about it—still its empty walls and blind windows, crumbling arches and toppled pillars held a ghost of beauty and magnificence which was like a half-remembered dream. A dream the whole race had once had.

And now we're waking up.

Jorun moved silently over the ruins. Trees growing between tumbled blocks dappled them with moonlight and shadow; the marble was very white and fair against darkness. He hovered by a broken caryatid, marveling at its exquisite leaping litheness; that girl had borne tons of stone like a flower in her hair. Further on, across a street that was a lane of woods, beyond a park that was thick with forest, lay the nearly complete outline of a house. Only its rain-blurred walls stood, but he could trace the separate rooms: here a noble had entertained his friends, robes that were fluid rainbows, jewels dripping fire, swift cynical interplay of wits like sharpened swords rising above music and the clear sweet laughter of dancing-girls; here people whose flesh was now dust had slept and made love and lain side-by-side in darkness to watch the moving pageant of the city; here the slaves had lived and worked and sometimes wept; here the children had played their ageless games under willows, between banks of roses. Oh, it had been a hard and cruel time; it was well gone but it had lived. It had embodied man, all that was noble and splendid and evil and merely wistful in the race, and now its late children had forgotten.

A cat sprang up on one of the walls and flowed noiselessly along it, hunting. Jorun shook himself and flew toward the center of the city, the imperial palace. An owl

hooted somewhere, and a bat fluttered out of his way like a small damned soul blackened by hellfire. He didn't raise a wind screen, but let the air blow around him, the air of Earth.

The palace was almost completely wrecked, a mountain of heaped rocks, bare bones of "eternal" metal gnawed thin by steady ages of wind and rain and frost, but once it must have been gigantic. Men rarely built that big nowadays, they didn't need to; and the whole human spirit had changed, become ever more abstract, finding its treasures within itself. But there had been an elemental magnificence about early man and the works he raised to challenge the sky.

One tower still stood—a gutted shell, white under the stars, rising in a filigree of columns and arches which seemed impossibly airy, as if it were built of moonlight. Jorun settled on its broken upper balcony, dizzily high above the black-and-white fantasy of the ruins. A hawk flew shrieking from its nest, then there was silence.

No—wait—another yell, ringing down the star ways, a dark streak across the moon's face. "Hai-ah!" Jorun recognized the joyful shout of young Cluthe, rushing through heaven like a demon on a broomstick, and scowled in annoyance. He didn't want to be bothered now.

Well, they had as much right here as he. He repressed the emotion, and even managed a smile. After all, he would have liked to feel gay and reckless at times, but he had never been able to. Jorun was little older than Cluthe—a few centuries at most—but he came of a melancholy folk; he had been born old.

Another form pursued the first. As they neared, Jorun recognized Taliuvenna's supple outline. Those two had been teamed up for one of the African districts, but—

They sensed him and came wildly out of the sky to perch on the balcony railing and swing their legs above the heights. "How're you?" asked Cluthe. His lean face laughed in the moonlight. "Whoo-oo, what a flight!"

"I'm all right," said Jorun. "You through in your sector?"

"Uh-huh. So we thought we'd just duck over and look in here. Last chance anyone'll ever have to do some sight-seeing on Earth."

Taliuvenna's full lips dropped a bit as she looked over the ruins. She came from Yunith, one of the few planets where they still kept cities, and was as much a child of their soaring arrogance as Jorun of his hills and tundras and great empty seas. "I thought it would be bigger," she said.

"Well, they were building this fifty or sixty thousand years ago," said Cluthe. "Can't expect too much."

"There is good art left here," said Jorun. "Pieces which for one reason or another weren't carried off. But you have to look around for it."

"I've seen a lot of it already, in museums," said Taliuvenna. "Not bad."

"C'mon, Tally," cried Cluthe. He touched her shoulder and sprang into the air. "Tag! You're it!"

She screamed with laughter and shot off after him. They rushed across the wilderness, weaving in and out of empty windows and broken colonnades, and their shouts woke a clamor of echoes.

Jorun sighed. *I'd better go to bed*, he thought. *It's late.*

The spaceship was a steely pillar against a low gray sky. Now and then a fine rain would drizzle down, blurring it from sight; then that would end, and the ship's flanks would glisten as if they were polished. Clouds scudded overhead like flying smoke, and the wind was loud in the trees.

The line of Terrans moving slowly into the vessel seemed to go on forever. A couple of the ship's crew flew above them, throwing out a shield against the rain. They shuffled without much talk or expression, pushing carts filled with their little possessions. Jorun stood to one side, watching them go by, one face after another—scored and

darkened by the sun of Earth, the winds of Earth, hands still grimy with the soil of Earth.

Well, he thought, there they go. They aren't being as emotional about it as I thought they would. I wonder if they really do care.

Julith went past with her parents. She saw him and darted from the line and curtsied before him.

"Goodbye, good sir," she said. Looking up, she showed him a small and serious face. "Will I ever see you again?"

"Well," he lied, "I might look in on you sometime."

"Please do! In a few years, maybe, when you can."

It takes many generations to raise a people like this to our standard. In a few years—to me—she'll be in her grave.

"I'm sure you'll be very happy," he said.

She gulped. "Yes," she said, so low he could barely hear her. "Yes, I know I will." She turned and ran back to her mother. The raindrops glistened in her hair.

Zarek came up behind Jorun. "I made a last-minute sweep of the whole area," he said. "Detected no sign of human life. So it's all taken care of, except your old man."

"Good," said Jorun tonelessly.

"I wish you could do something about him."

"So do I."

Zarek strolled off again.

A young man and woman, walking hand in hand, turned out of the line not far away and stood for a little while. A spaceman zoomed over to them. "Better get back," he warned. "You'll get rained on."

"That's what we wanted," said the young man.

The spaceman shrugged and resumed his hovering. Presently the couple reentered the line.

The tail of the procession went by Jorun and the ship swallowed it fast. The rain fell harder, bouncing off his force shield like silver spears. Lightning winked in the west, and he heard the distant exuberance of thunder.

Kormt came walking slowly toward him. Rain streamed off his clothes and matted his long gray hair and beard.

His wooden shoes made a wet sound in the mud. Jorun extended the force shield to cover him. "I hope you've changed your mind," said the Fulkhisian.

"No, I haven't," said Kormt. "I just stayed away till everybody was aboard. Don't like goodbyes."

"You don't know what you're doing," said Jorun for the—thousandth?—time. "It's plain madness to stay here alone."

"I told you I don't like goodbyes," said Kormt harshly.

"I have to go advise the captain of the ship," said Jorun. "You have maybe half an hour before she lifts. Nobody will laugh at you for changing your mind."

"I won't." Kormt smiled without warmth. "You people are the future, I guess. Why can't you leave the past alone? I'm the past." He looked toward the far hills, hidden by the noisy rain. "I like it here, Galactic. That should be enough for you."

"Well, then—" Jorun held out his hand in the archaic gesture of Earth. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye." Kormt took the hand with a brief, indifferent clasp. Then he turned and walked off toward the village. Jorun watched him till he was out of sight.

The technician paused in the airlock door, looking over the gray landscape and the village from whose chimneys no smoke rose. *Farewell, my mother*, he thought. And then, surprising himself: *Maybe Kormt is doing the right thing after all.*

Toward evening, the clouds lifted and the sky showed a clear pale blue—as if it had been washed clean—and the grass and leaves glistened. Kormt came out of the house to watch the sunset. It was a good one, all flame and gold. A pity little Julith wasn't here to see it; she'd always liked sunsets. But Julith was so far away now that if she sent a call to him, calling with the speed of light, it would not come before he was dead.

Nothing would come to him. Not ever again.

He tamped his pipe with a horny thumb and lit it and

drew a deep cloud into his lungs. Hands in pockets, he strolled down the wet streets. The sound of his clogs was unexpectedly loud.

Well, son, he thought, now you've got a whole world all to yourself, to do with just as you like. You're the richest man who ever lived.

There was no problem in keeping alive. Enough food of all kinds was stored in the town's freeze vault to support a hundred men for the ten or twenty years remaining to him. But he'd want to stay busy. He could maybe keep three farms from going to seed—watch over fields and orchards and livestock, repair the buildings, dust and wash and light up in the evening. A man ought to keep busy.

He came to the end of the street, where it turned into a graveled road winding up toward a high hill and followed that. Dusk was creeping over the fields, the sea was a metal streak very far away and a few early stars blinked forth. A wind was springing up, a soft murmurous wind that talked in the trees. But how quiet things were!

On top of the hill stood the chapel, a small steepled building of ancient stone. He let himself in the gate and walked around to the graveyard behind. There were many of the demure white tombstones—thousands of years of Solis Township men and women who had lived and worked and begotten, laughed and wept and died. Someone had put a wreath on one grave only this morning; it brushed against his leg as he went by. Tomorrow it would be withered, and weeds would start to grow. He'd have to tend the chapel yard, too. Only fitting.

He found his family plot and stood with feet spread apart, fists on hips, smoking and looking down at the markers Gerlaug Kormt's son, Tarna Huwan's daughter, these hundred years had they lain in the earth. Hello, Dad, hello, Mother. His fingers reached out and stroked the headstone of his wife. And so many of his children were here, too; sometimes he found it hard to believe that tall Gerlaug and laughing Stamm and shy, gentle Huwan were gone. He'd outlived too many people.

I had to stay, he thought. This is my land, I am of it and I couldn't go. Someone had to stay and keep the land, if only for a little while. I can give it ten more years before the forest comes and takes it.

Darkness grew around him. The woods beyond the hill loomed like a wall. Once he started violently, he thought he heard a child crying. No, only a bird. He cursed himself for the senseless pounding of his heart.

Gloomy place here, he thought. Better get back to the house.

He groped slowly out of the yard, toward the road. The stars were out now. Kormt looked up and thought he had never seen them so bright. Too bright; he didn't like it.

Go away, stars, he thought. You took my people, but I'm staying here. This is my land. He reached down to touch it, but the grass was cold and wet under his palm.

The gravel scrunched loudly as he walked, and the wind mumbled in the hedges, but there was no other sound. Not a voice called; not an engine turned; not a dog barked. No, he hadn't thought it would be so quiet.

And dark. No lights. Have to tend the street lamps himself—it was no fun, not being able to see the town from here, not being able to see anything except the stars. Should have remembered to bring a flashlight, but he was old and absent-minded, and there was no one to remind him. When he died, there would be no one to hold his hands; no one to close his eyes and lay him in the earth—and the forests would grow in over the land and wild beasts would nuzzle his bones.

But I knew that. What of it? I'm tough enough to take it.

The stars flashed and flashed above him. Looking up, against his own will, Kormt saw how bright they were, how bright and quiet. And how very far away! He was seeing light that had left its home before he was born.

He stopped, sucking in his breath between his teeth. "No," he whispered.

This was his land. This was Earth, the home of man;

it was his and he was its. This was the *land*, and not a single dust mote, crazily reeling and spinning through an endlessness of dark and silence, cold and immensity. Earth could not be so alone!

The last man alive. The last man in all the world!

He screamed, then, and began to run. His feet clattered loud on the road; the small sound was quickly swallowed by silence, and he covered his face against the relentless blaze of the stars. But there was no place to run to, no place at all.

"A" AS IN ANDROID

by Milton Lesser

IT WAS ONE hell of a place for a nightmare. But then, Saturn's seventh moon, Hyperion, would be a hell of a place for just about anything. Oh, Government had done wonders—and spent fortunes—giving tiny Hyperion a warm, breathable atmosphere and earth-norm gravity. Outside of that, the jumble of rocky crags and powdered pumice might have been the space side of Pluto. I know, because I've been there.

Now I heard the anxious stirring among the tough spacehands and miners as they waited for the first wonder of the Saturnian System—Hyperion's Dancing Girls. You couldn't blame them. Girls were girls, Andies or not, and the female of the species was about as common out here as an aardvark.

But frankly, I was more than a little sore at the over-patriotic deckhand who had reported the existence of the Dancing Girls to Tycho City on Luna. It meant I had to traipse almost a billion miles to collect the tax. If the

Dancing Girls were androids; if their maker had the money; if someone didn't put an end to the whole affair by deciding that a knife in my back might be distinctly better than paying a hundred bucks per head . . .

I saw those Dancing Girls. Let me tell you about them briefly. No, I won't go into detail. I remember they got my mind off all those morbid thoughts out in Hyperion City, and I don't want my mind to stray now, not while I'm trying to tell you this story.

They came out, about a dozen of them, and they danced. There wasn't a sound in the Hyperion Club. Not even music. Not even breathing. I've never seen anything like it. And it took me a while before I realized just why those tall slim girls were so graceful. Well, graceful isn't quite the word, but then, no word exists in any language I know which can describe the something-more-than-grace which those girls had. They danced. All other dancing was mere walking, stumbling, clumsy tripping.

They had long legs. Not so you'd say they were nice long-stemmed chicks, but really long. Half again as long as they should be, or maybe more. But on them it looked good.

That clinched it. They were Andies, a dozen untaxed androids. I sighed and hoped the owner had his tax money. I didn't want to impound these Andies for the government, not these dancers.

When it was over I didn't hear a sound. No clapping, no roaring, no stamping of feet. Not even shouts for an encore. Anything would have been superfluous.

I got up. I took my time walking across the now empty dance floor to a door which was marked, quite plainly, *Keep Out*.

I didn't. I walked right on through and a big guy with a seamy face stood in front of me, shaking his head slowly.

"Move, friend," he said; "can't you read signs?"

I told him that although I was not a college boy I could

read, and would he please get out of my way because I had official business with the owner of the Hyperion Club. All he knew how to do was shake his head, but when I showed him the card in my billfold with the big letter *A* on it, the motion of his head changed. Now the seamy face bobbed up and down, but it looked worried. There's one thing about being in the Android Service—it sure can open doors for you.

Seamy Face ushered me through a corridor and down a flight of stairs. He only paused long enough outside a metal door to knock, and then I followed him inside.

The card on the desk said, *Mr. Tuttle: Manager*, and behind his thick-rimmed glasses Mr. Tuttle looked like he had insomnia. A little guy, and tired. He just wasn't cut out for the frontier. Maybe he should have had a curio shop in Marsport.

Seamy Face said, "This guy's from Android Service, Mr. T."

Tuttle looked up unhappily. He waved me over to a chair and I sat down, taking out my card again. "Car-mody's the name," I said. "That's a nice act you have out there, Mr. Tuttle. Very nice. In fact, I've never seen anything like it. Androids?"

He didn't answer the question, not right away. Instead, he said in his tired voice: "A lot of people think so. Orders are beginning to pour in from all over the outworlds. There'll be thousands—"

I cleared my throat. "Andies will cost you exactly a hundred dollars a head, Mr. Tuttle. You know that, of course. What I want to know is this: why didn't you report the manufacture of your androids to the government? There's a reason for it, and for the tax, too. It isn't legal to upset the balance like this."

Tuttle sounded so tired I thought he'd fall right over into a deep sleep any moment. He said, "Who told you anything about androids? What makes you think they're androids?"

I smiled. "No stilts," I said. "Don't tell me they're wearing stilts. It's either that or androids, Mr. Tuttle."

Tuttle didn't answer that one either. Instead, he asked a question of his own. "How would you like to earn five thousand dollars, Mr. Carmody?"

I told him that was my year's salary, exactly, and I'd love it. Only I had a funny suspicion that whatever the offer was, I'd have to turn it down. Maybe we honest guys are fools; maybe ten years from now I'd still be earning exactly five thousand, but at least I'd be able to live with myself. I'm no saint, but I've got a conscience.

"All you have to do," Tuttle said, "is this. Go back where you came from and say my dancers are not androids—for five thousand dollars, utterly no strings attached."

I asked him what I thought was purely a rhetorical question. "Are they androids, Mr. Tuttle?"

He was always answering a question with one of his own. "Define your term, Mr. Carmody. What is an android?"

I felt a little silly, and I said: "Why don't you ask your friend here?"

Seamy Face brightened. He said, "Well, an Andie is kinda like a person, only it's made in a laboratory, not born. You know—chemistry, not biology." Seamy Face was very proud of his answer.

"Does that satisfy you?" Tuttle wanted to know.

I told him it did, and he said: "In that case, Mr. Carmody, I can assure you that Hyperion's Dancing Girls are not androids."

I just sat there, hardly hearing Tuttle repeat his five thousand dollar offer. It didn't sound like he was lying, yet the whole situation smelled fishy. "Maybe you ought to let me see one of the—uh, girls," I told him.

"I wouldn't advise it, Mr. Carmody."

"Nah," Seamy Face agreed. "Better stay happy, friend."

"I'm stupid," I said. "I don't know when I'm well off. I want to see one of them."

Tuttle shrugged, pressed a button on his desk. "Tara, that you? Will you come in, please?"

I didn't have long to wait. In a few moments the door swung in, and the Dancing Girl closed it softly behind her.

She wore a pair of big gold earrings, with her long hair swept back and hanging halfway down to her waist. She had on one of those flimsy garments popular with the dancers these days, dark red and oddly metallic, with a bright gold sash. A lot of flesh showed, especially with those overlong legs. Android flesh, I was sure. She had an innocent face.

"What is it, Tuttle?" Nice voice, neither friendly nor hostile. Just plain nice. But no respect at all for Tuttle, the man who evidently had manufactured her.

Tuttle was sad, and afraid. "This man is from the Android Service," he told her. "I mentioned the Android Service to you, Tara. A matter of tax—"

"Why don't you pay the tax, Tuttle?" Even less respect this time. Still a nice voice, but haughty.

"I can't. You know I'm in debt, and I've been paying; I haven't got the money."

"Stupid of you," she told him, still in her nice innocent voice. "You!" She turned in my direction, almost languidly.

"Me?" I said. Maybe Tuttle's fear was contagious, and I felt like seven different kinds of a damned fool. Only I was afraid, too.

"Yes, you. Do I look like an android?"

I looked her up and down, slowly, spending a lot of time on the graceful incredibly long legs. I nodded. "Yes."

That set her back for a moment. "Come here, man. Come on. I won't bite."

Woodenly, I crossed the room to her. Don't ask me why, but I was plenty scared. Ever see a terrestrial dog on Mars, in the presence of some of the Martian fauna for the first time? Don't ask me why, but that's the way I felt. Worse.

The nice voice told me, "Touch. Go ahead, touch me."

I tried to act casual. I lit a cigarette, and I had to cup both my hands tightly around the match, so it *wouldn't* shake.

"Do you have to do that to touch me?" she demanded.

I stuck out my hand, foolishly. I grabbed her bare arm, high up, near the shoulder. I pulled my hand away, like it had been in fire.

She smiled. "Am I an android?"

I didn't say a word, not immediately. I just stood there, looking at my hand. What it had touched was cold—oh, not frigid, like a slab of ice, but cold, say, like the glass top on Tuttle's desk. Androids are just like humans; they're not hot, not feverish, but they feel pleasantly alive because they're warm-blooded. Tara's arm had a nice, rosy color, but it was cold.

Strange noises clucked in my throat before I could say anything. My voice came from way down inside me, much too deep. "If you're an android, you're new. I didn't know androids could be—"

"Cold?" she smiled. "Not really cold. About seventy of your degrees on the Fahrenheit scale. That's not cold. Really, I find it pleasant." She shrugged. "But then, that happens to be the temperature of this room. I vary."

"She varies," I said.

Tuttle seemed a bit happier. "Well, now that you're satisfied she's not an android, I suppose you can go home and make your report. No tax, of course."

"Of course," Tara said.

If I ever get my conscience out in front of me where I could see it, I think I would kick it. Hard. "I'm not satisfied at all," I said. "She may not be an ordinary android, but she's not human. You're tax-free for the present, but I'm going to order an investigation by some technicians."

Tuttle shook his head, sadly. Tara shrugged her cold rosey shoulders. "Borden, you will take him, please."

Seamy Face didn't like the idea, but he came at me ponderously, a great big slab of a man. It occurred to me at that moment that Tuttle's five thousand dollar offer had been about as sincere as a Venusian assertion of good will. We've been warring on and off with Venus for a hundred years. Because if Tuttle didn't have twelve hundred dollars to pay his tax, then he didn't have five thousand to pay me. Any way you looked at it, it came out murder. Or, I hoped, *attempted* murder.

Seamy Face swung a big fist which could have pulverized an adobe wall. I ducked and stepped inside of his flailing arms. They don't take weaklings for the Android Service, and I slugged away at his midsection, carefully. He grunted, and his guard came down, fast. Big men always do that. I stepped back, panting, and planted a right flush on his jaw, the way you see the Space Marines do it on video. Seamy Face shuddered and flopped about loosely for a moment, then he tumbled over on his face.

I felt cocky. "Who's next?" I demanded.

Tara's voice was still nice and innocent. "Why, you are," she said.

I should have known it would be the overlong leg. It started at the floor, long and graceful, and it moved so fast I hardly could see it. It caught me under the chin, and I think my feet left the floor. I had a quick, spinning view of Tuttle shaking his head, sadly, and then something crashed against my stomach. I remember sitting down, and I tried to get up. I could see the long legs standing over me, see the hands on feminine hips. I tried to reach out for those legs, only I never made it.

Hyperion is almost a million miles out, and I could see Saturn with her majestic rings in the port, the size of a silver dollar held at arms length. That was all kind of hazy and far away, but it was enough to tell me I was in a spaceship before I blacked out again. Only I didn't quite black out, or, if I did, I had one crazy dream . . .

I remember Tara and half a dozen others stripping

me, peeling off the jumper and the spaceboots as objectively as you might flay an extraterrestrial animal to study its insides, leaving me in my shirt and trousers, and then carrying me. One of them, Tara again, I think, took me over her shoulder like maybe I weighed thirty pounds, and then I remember a big bright room with a lot of machinery. I was on a table and loud noises buzzed in my ear and I felt oddly like a lot of sharp things were going inside of me. I don't mean inside my clothing—I mean inside me, all the way. My head, my chest, all over, with a gentle but outrageous insistency. Probing. Probing. Countless little knives which were very sharp. So sharp that they didn't hurt at all. So utterly sharp that I knew they wouldn't leave any marks. Provided this wasn't some kind of an impossible, drugged dream.

The next part of the dream is even crazier. I sat up, still with too much fuzziness in my head to see clearly, and someone lay on the table next to me. That someone wore a jumper and heavy spaceboots. You could tell he was dead. You could tell—

I think I screamed, or at least I tried to scream. I saw everything through a fog, but the corpse looked just like me. Down to the last detail. Through all that fuzziness I could even see the little scar on the right temple. Me. A dead me, while the live me lay back and watched.

Someone was screaming and screaming, because the knives which were so sharp that you hardly felt them were going in again, doing their work. The someone was the live me.

"You feeling all right now, Jones?" Tara asked me.

"My name is Carmody." My mouth tasted like someone had rammed it full of a lot of copper coins. "Carmody," I said again, stubbornly. I should have known I was wasting my breath.

"You want a mirror, Jones? It may help convince you." She gave me a big mirror, watched me with her innocent eyes.

I looked. I was twenty-five when Tara kicked me into her dream-world on Hyperion. I looked fifty now. I didn't look anything like Mike Carmody. I had gray hair and dull gray eyes, a very red face with tight, thin lips. Trembling, I stood up. Mike Carmody is six feet tall in his socks. Tara is a big girl, maybe six feet herself. The top of my head didn't quite come up to her nose.

Something made me look at my right wrist, the inside of it, over the big blue vein. There was a bright letter *A*. Half an inch high. Capital *A* as in "Android"... It was the law, I knew, for all androids to be so identified.

I grabbed Tara's arm and she didn't try to pull away. She had no letter *A*.

"You seem confused, Jones."

"I—" I couldn't say a thing. I just sat there.

"You were made fifty-three years ago, on Ganymede. You're a mechanic by trade, and a pretty good one."

I shook my head. I hardly felt like fighting about it, but I said, "I was born on Earth, in Chicago, twenty-five years ago. I'm an investigator for Android Service. Name's Mike Carmody."

She smiled. "While you were asleep, Jones, we landed back on Hyperion. Here's a newspaper." She handed the sheet to me, still smiling.

It was a newspaper, all right. The Hyperion City Gazette. I looked at the headline, and what followed.

ANDROID SERVICE INVESTIGATOR SLAIN HERE

At four p.m. yesterday, Earth Greenwich time, the body of Michael Carmody, Special Investigator for Android Service, was found in an alley connecting Dana and Bodini Streets in this city. Carmody had been slain some two or three hours before that time, in a bold daylight attack by unknown thugs who succeeded in taking Carmody's money, although his of-

ficial papers were found on his person. Carmody, it is believed. . . .

There wasn't a thing to say. I was dead and my name was Jones now, and I'd better listen to Tara.

"So you see, Jones, you obviously couldn't be this Carmody. No, not you. He's a dead man, and you're a living android. Soon we'll put you to sleep again, and when you wake up, you'll understand. I can't blame you for being a little confused now, not really."

"You mean—you'll make my mind believe that story?"

"Yes, something like that. We erase the memory waves present and put in their place certain other—memories. Simple. Why?"

I thought fast. Hell, I didn't stand a chance getting off this ship alive, but at least I wanted to know what the hell was going on. You couldn't blame me. I said, "Well, if you're going to do that, maybe you can tell me the truth now." I meant it. I was a pretty resigned individual right then and there, and I wanted to know the truth as much as a man dying of thirst would want water. Even if the truth wouldn't stay with me very long.

Tara said, "All right, Jones. I suppose it won't hurt."
"Carmody."

"Carmody, then. What do you want to know?"

"Just about everything," I said.

Her voice was still nice and innocent. "Tuttle and Borden are dead. I had no choice. So now we need you, Jones-Carmody. Carmody is dead too. You're Jones, an android. Soon you'll think that, too."

"Yes, but—who are you? The Dancing Girls—"

"I assure you, we are not 'girls,' Carmody. You wouldn't understand. You just wouldn't, not at all."

"Try me," I suggested. I turned idly to look about the room, and my eyes took in the port first. Outside, I could see Saturn's great bulk, low in the right side of the port, and much closer, so close that it couldn't have been more than a few miles away in space, was a ship. A ship! There

were spacesuits here on this boat someplace, and if I could reach one, could kick myself clear of the lock and jet out to that ship...

"...Dimensions. Interlocking, say like two soap bubbles, Carmody. You live in one; we live in the other. There aren't a lot of us—perhaps a billion—and if you saw our dimension, you'd know why we like yours better. Just a question of infiltration now—and what could arouse less suspicion than some innocent, wonderfully graceful Dancing Girls? We'll get popular, Carmody. It's starting already; so popular that there'll be a dozen Dancing Girls in every nightclub in the solar system. Then, in time—"

I was hardly listening. A door opened, and one of the other Dancing Girls came into the room.

"Is he ready now?" she demanded.

Tara nodded. "I guess so. Carmody, are there any other questions before you're Jones, completely? No hard feelings, I hope. And even if you have them now, you won't—not when you're Jones. You'll have the memories of an android named Jones, who was made here, on this ship, a few days ago, but your memories will go back fifty years, and you'll be loyal to us. A publicity agent for us in your spare time, a mechanic otherwise. Any questions?"

I fiddled about for a question. I needed time. If they could take themselves from another dimension and assume their present, almost-earthly shapes, if they could kill me and yet somehow not kill me, leaving my body dead in an alley in Hyperion City, but leaving me alive in the scrawny body of android Jones...

I had to believe Tara. I couldn't doubt a word of it. So incredibly simple. Sure, no one would suspect a dancing girl of anything. What did you have to be afraid of?

"One more question," I said. I lifted a big bowl off the table and hurled it at her. "Just how strong are you?"

She stumbled back a few steps, trying to wipe some liquid from her eyes. She cursed roundly, and she may

have been from another dimension, she may have assumed the shape of a girl here, but let me tell you she knew how to curse.

The other dancing girl leaped at me, and I side-stepped. I didn't want her to grab me, not when I remembered what Tara had done that day in Tuttle's office.

I ran out the door and I kept running. Behind me, I heard feet pounding down the corridor.

I don't know where they got the ship, but the single spacesuit I found hanging on a hook looked awfully old. I hoped it would be airtight, and I didn't have much time to think about it one way or the other. I stepped into the suit and took down the plexi helmet, and then someone spun me around and I saw it was Tara.

I swung my arm in a wide arc, starting from around someplace behind my back, and the helmet pounded against her face like a runaway meteor. It staggered her. The blow could have killed a man, but Tara just stumbled back a few steps, momentarily dazed.

The helmet fit in place snugly, the way it should, and I prayed again for air. Then I swung the lock door up, and I got a surprise.

There was no lock. Just cold empty space, with Saturn far off and the other ship hanging in space like a silver dart, much further than it had been before, but still close enough to reach with the suit jets.

I sensed the air wooshing out of Tara's ship, and I smiled. Maybe my worries were over. They had to be. You don't just go walking around in deep space, even if it's inside a ship.

Only Tara did. Her damned synthetic body—or whatever the make-believe dancing girl's flesh housed, could adjust to anything, instantly. She came for me, smiling innocently, still as if almost nothing was wrong. Maybe I'd been naughty, but that's all.

I kicked away from the ship a few yards. Tara stood in the simple doorway, and I felt a little giddy. I thumbed my nose at her.

It didn't last. She lifted a blaster and fired, and then I switched my jets on and began to soar away, darting, spinning, weaving—until I felt something like a gyroscope which lost its bearings.

The beam from her blaster zipped through space on all sides of me, but in a little while I was out of range, and by the time she could turn that ship around—even if she could withstand more gravities than a robot—I'd be in safe hands.

I smiled grimly as I swept closer to the other ship.

"Look," I said. "Please, this is the fourth time I've told my story. It's been six months since the freighter picked me up."

The police officer shrugged. "What do you want me to do, Jones? We like to be nice to you Andies—"

"I'm not an android!"

"We checked your fingerprints. There's the characteristic inverted V in the whorls. You have the android identification mark. You have your papers. Sylvester Jones, Android 1st class, Mechanic. So what do you want us to do? This Carmody guy is dead. He's buried now."

"Please. I'm Carmody—"

"Now listen! We're going to have to put you away, Jones. We don't like to be hard on androids, but—"

"Carmody! Carmody! That's me, damn it—"

"Now, Jones, you'd better go away. We took you to Carmody's widow. She gave you the answer. Please, Jones, like a good Andie." He frowned. "And that story you tell, better keep it to yourself. Dancing Girls invading the solar system. Ha, ha ha..."

I stood outside in the streets of Earth. Chicago. Home Town. It looked strange. I saw a billboard. "A hundred Dancing Girls in the Club Falcon. See them..."

The craze had swept the system. Every habitable world. Every club. They all had their long-stemmed Dancing Girls. Androids now, with little A's on their wrists, paying taxes properly, no questions asked. Infiltration...

. . . AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

by Clifford D. Simak

1

THEY KNEW when they stepped out of the ship and saw it. There was, of course, no way that they could have known it, or been sure they knew it, for there was no way to know what one might be looking for. Yet, they did know it for what it was—and three of them stood and looked at it, while the fourth one floated and looked at it. And each of them, in his brain or heart or intuition—whatever you may name it—knew deep inside himself a strange conviction that here finally was the resting place (or one of the resting places) of that legendary fragment of the human race that, millennia before, had broken free of the chains of ordinary humans to make their way into the darkness of the outer galaxy. But whether they fled from mediocrity; or whether they deserted; or whether they left for any one of a dozen other reasons was a thing that no one now might know; the matter had become an academic question that had split into several cults of erudite belief, and still was fiercely debated in a very learned manner.

In the minds of the four who looked, however, there was no shred of question that here before them lay the place that had been sought—in a more or less haphazard fashion—for a hundred thousand years. It was a place. One hesitated to call it a city, although it probably was a city. It was a place of living, and of learning, and of working, and it had many buildings; but the buildings had been made a part of the landscape and did not outrage the eye with their grossness nor their disregard for the land

they stood upon. There was greatness about the place—not a greatness of gigantic stones heaped on one another, nor the greatness of a bold and overwhelming architecture, nor even the greatness of indestructibility. For there was no massiveness of structure, and the architecture seemed quite ordinary; some of the buildings had fallen into disrepair, and others were weathered into a mellowness that blended with the trees and grass of the hills on which they stood.

Still there was a greatness in them, the greatness of humility and purpose—and the greatness, too, of well-ordered life. Looking at them, one knew that he had been wrong in thinking this a city—that this was no city, but an extensive village, with all the connotations that were in the word.

But most of all there was humanness—the subtle touch that marked the buildings as ones that had been planned by human minds, and raised by human hands. You could not put your finger upon any single thing and say, “This is human”; any one of those things you put your finger on might have been built or achieved by another race. But when all those single things you might put your finger on were rolled into the whole concept, there could be no doubt that this was a human village.

Sentient beings had hunted for this place, had sought the clue that might lead to the vanished segment of the race; when they failed, some of them had doubted there had been such a segment—for the story was one that was based upon little more than myth, with the records that told of it often in dispute. There were those, too, who had said that it mattered little if you found the missing fragment, since little that was of any value would come from a race so insignificant as the human race. What were the humans, they would ask you—and would answer before you had a chance to speak. Gadgeteers, they said, gadgeteers who were singularly unstable. Great on gadgets, they would say, but with very little real intelligence. It was, they would point out, only by the slightest margin of

intelligence that even they were accepted into the galactic brotherhood. And, these detractors would remind you, humans had not improved much since. Still marvelous gadgeteers, of course, but strictly third-rate citizens who now quite rightly had been relegated to the backwash of the empire.

The place had been sought, and there had been many failures. It had been sought, but not consistently; there were matters of much greater import than its finding. It was simply an amusing piece of galactic history—or myth, if you would rather. As a project, its discovery had never rated very high.

But here it was, spread out below the high ridge on which the ship had landed; and if any of them wondered why it had not been found before, the answer was simple—there were just too many stars; you could not search them all.

"This is it," said the Dog, speaking in his mind; he looked slantwise at the Human, wondering what the Human might be thinking; of all of them, the finding of this place must mean the most to him.

"I am glad we found it," said the Dog, speaking directly to the Human; and the Human caught the nuances of the thought, the closeness of the Dog, his great compassion and his brotherhood.

"Now we shall know," the Spider said; and each of them knew, without his actually saying so, that now they'd know if these humans were any different from the other humans—or if they were just the same old humdrum race.

"They were mutants," said the Globe, "or they were supposed to be."

The Human stood there, saying nothing, just looking at the place.

"If we'd tried to find it," said the Dog, "we never would have done it."

"We can't spend much time," the Spider told them. "Just a quick survey, then there's this other business."

"The point is," said the Globe, "we know now that it

exists, and where it is. They will send experts out to investigate."

"We stumbled on it," said the Human, half in wonderment; "we just stumbled on it."

The Spider made a thought that sounded like a chuckle, and the Human said no more.

"It's deserted," said the Globe; "they have run away again."

"They may be decadent," said the Spider. "We may find what's left of them huddled in some corner, wondering what it's all about—loaded down with legends and with crazy superstitions."

"I don't think so," said the Dog.

"We can't spend much time," the Spider stated again.

"We *should* spend no time at all," the Globe told him. "We were not sent out to find this place; we have no business letting it delay us."

"Since we've found it," said the Dog, "it would be a shame to go away and leave it, just like that."

"Then let's get at it," said the Spider. "Let's break out the robots and the ground car."

"If you don't mind," the Human said, "I think that I will walk. The rest of you go ahead; I'll just walk down and take a look around."

"I'll go with you," said the Dog.

"I thank you," said the Human, "but there really is no need."

So they let him go alone. The three of them stayed on the ridge top, and watched him walk down the hill toward the silent buildings; then they went to activate the robots.

The sun was setting when they returned; The Human was waiting for them, squatting on the ridge, staring at the village.

He did not ask them what they found. It was almost as if he knew, although he could not have found the answer by himself, just walking around.

They told him.

The Dog was kind about it. "It's strange," he said.

"There is no evidence about any great development; no hint of anything unusual. In fact, you might guess that they had retrogressed. There are no great engines, no hint of any mechanical ability."

"There are gadgets," said the Human. "Gadgets of comfort and convenience. That is all I saw."

"That is all there is," the Spider said.

"There are no humans," said the Globe. "No life of any kind; no intelligence."

"The experts," said the Dog, "may find something when they come."

"I doubt it," said the Spider.

The Human turned his head away from the village and looked at his three companions. The Dog was sorry, of course, that they had found so little—sorry that the little they had found had been so negative. The Dog was sorry because he still held within himself some measure of racial memory, and of loyalty. The old associations with the human race had been wiped away millennia ago; but the heritage still held—the old heritage of sympathy with, and for, the being that had walked with his ancestors so understandingly.

The Spider was almost pleased about it—pleased that he had found no evidence of greatness, that this last vestige of vanity that might be held by humans now would be dashed forever. The race must now slink back into its corner and stay there, watching the greatness of the Spiders, and the other races, with furtive eyes.

The Globe didn't care. Floating there, at head-level with the Spider and the Dog, it meant little to him whether humans might be proud or humble. Nothing mattered to the Globe except that certain plans went forward; that certain goals were reached; that progress could be measured. Already the Globe had written off this village; already he had erased the story of the mutant humans as a factor that might affect progress, one way or another.

"I think," the Human said, "that I will stay out here for a while. That is, if you don't mind."

"We don't mind," the Globe told him.

"It will be getting dark," the Spider said.

"There'll be stars," the Human said. "There may even be a moon. Did you notice if there was a moon?"

"No," the Spider said.

"We'll be leaving soon," the Dog said to the Human.

"I will come out and tell you when we have to leave."

There were stars, of course. They came out when the last flush of the sun still flamed along the west. First there were but a few of the brighter ones; then there were more, and finally the entire heavens was a network of unfamiliar stars. But there was no moon. Or, if there was one, it did not show itself.

Chill crept across the ridge top and the Human found some sticks of wood lying about—dead branches, and shriveled bushes, and other wood that looked as if it might at one time have been milled and worked—and built himself a fire. It was a small fire, but it flamed brightly in the darkness; he huddled close against it, more for its companionship than for any heat it gave.

He sat beside it, looked down upon the village, and told himself there was something wrong. The greatness of the human race, he told himself, could not have gone so utterly to seed. He was lonely—lonely with a throat-aching loneliness that was more than the loneliness of an alien planet, and a chilly ridge-top, and unfamiliar stars. He was lonely for the hope that once had glowed so brightly; for the promise that had gone like dust into nothingness before a morning wind; for a race that huddled in its gadgetry in the backwash of the empire.

Not an empire of humanity, but an empire of Globes and Spiders; of Dogs; and other things for which there was scarcely a description.

There was more to the human race than gadgetry. There was destiny somewhere, and the gadgetry was simply the means to bridge the time until that destiny should become apparent. In a fight for survival, the Human told himself, gadgetry might be the expedient, but it

could not be the answer; it could not be the sum total, the final jotting down of any group of beings.

The Dog came and stood beside him, without saying anything. He simply stood there and looked with the Human down at the quiet village that had been quiet so long; the firelight flamed along his coat and he was a thing of beauty, with a certain inherent wildness still existing in him.

Finally the Dog broke the silence that hung above the world and seemed a part of it. "The fire is nice," he said. "I seldom have a fire."

"The fire was first," the Human said. "The first step up. Fire is a symbol to me."

"I have symbols, too," the Dog said, gravely. "Even the Spider has some symbols. But the Globe has none."

"I feel sorry for the Globe," the Human said.

"Don't let your pity wear you down," the Dog told him. "The Globe feels sorry for you. He is sorry for all of us—for everything that is not a Globe."

"Once my people were sorry like that, too," the Human said; "but not any more."

"It's time to go," the Dog said. "I know you would like to stay, but . . ."

"I am staying," said the Human.

"You can't stay," the Dog told him.

"I am staying," the Human said. "I am just a Human, and you can get along without me."

"I thought you would be staying," said the Dog. "Do you want me to go back and get your stuff?"

"If you would be so kind," the Human said. "I'd not like to go myself."

"The Globe will be angry," said the Dog.

"I know it."

"You will be demoted," said the Dog; "it will be a long time before you're allowed to go on a first-class run again."

"I know all that."

"The Spider will say that all humans are crazy. He will say it in a very nasty way."

"I don't care," the Human said; "somehow, I don't care."

"All right then," said the Dog. "I will go and get your stuff. There are some books, and your clothes, and that little trunk of yours."

"And food," the Human said.

"Yes," declared the Dog; "I would not have forgotten food."

After the ship was gone, the Human picked up the bundles the Dog had brought; in addition to all the Human's food, the Human saw that the Dog had left him some of his own as well.

2

THE PEOPLE of the village had lived a simple and a comfortable life. Much of the comfort paraphernalia had broken down, and all of it had long since ceased to operate; but it was not hard for one to figure out what each of the gadgets did, or once had been designed to do.

They had held a love of beauty, for there still were ruins of their gardens left; here and there one found a flower, or a flowering shrub that once had been tended carefully for its color and its grace. But these things now had been long forgotten, and had lost the grandeur of their purpose—the beauty they now held was bitter-sweet and faded.

The people had been literate, for there were rows of books upon the shelves; but books went to dust when they were touched, and one could do no more than wonder at the magic words they held.

There were buildings which, at one time, might have been theatres; there were great forums where the populace may have gathered to hear the wisdom, or the argument, that was the topic of the day.

And even yet one could sense the peace and leisure,

the order and the happiness that once had held the place.

There was no greatness. There were no mighty engines, nor the shops to make them. There were no launching platforms, and no other hint that the dwellers in the village had ever dreamed of going to the stars—although they must have known about the stars since their ancestors once had come from space. There were no defenses, and there were no great roads leading from the village into the outer planet.

One felt peace when he walked along the street, but it was a haunted peace—a peace that balanced on a knife's edge; while one wished with all his heart that he could give way to it, and live with it, one was afraid to do so for fear of what might happen.

The Human slept in the homes, clearing away the dust and the fallen debris, building tiny fires to keep him company. He sat outside, on the broken flagstones or the shattered bench, before he went to sleep and stared up at the stars, and thought how once those stars had made familiar patterns for a happy people. He wandered in the winding paths that were narrower now than they once had been, and hunted for a clue; he did not hunt too strenuously, for there was something here which said you should not hurry, and you should not fret, for there was no purpose in it.

Here once had lain the hope of the human race, a mutant branch of that race that had been greater than the basic race. Here had been the hope of greatness—and there was no greatness. Here was peace and comfort; intelligence and leisure, but nothing else that made itself apparent to the eye.

Although there must be something else, some lesson, some message, some purpose—the Human told himself again and again that this could not be a dead end, that it was more than some blind alley.

On the fifth day, in the center of the village, he found a building that was a little more ornate and somewhat more solidly built—although all the rest were solid

enough, for all conscience's sake. There were no windows and the single door was locked and he knew at last that he had found the clue he had been hunting for.

He worked for three days to break into the building, and there was no way that he could. On the fourth day he gave up and walked away—out of the village and across the hills—looking for some thought, or some idea, that might gain him entry to the building. He walked across the hills—as one will pace his study when he is at loss for words, or take a turn in the garden to clear his head for thinking.

And that is how he found the people.

First of all, he saw the smoke coming from one of the hollows that branched down toward the valley where a river ran, a streak of gleaming silver against the green of pasture grass.

He walked cautiously, so that he would not be surprised—but strangely, without the slightest fear—there was something in this planet—something in the arching sky, and the song of bird, and the way the wind blew out of the west—that told a man he had not a thing to fear.

Then he saw the house beneath the mighty trees. He saw the orchard and the trees bending with their fruit, and heard the thoughts of people talking back and forth.

He walked down the hill toward the house—not hurrying, for suddenly it had come upon him that there was no need to hurry. And just as suddenly, it seemed that he was coming home; that was the strangest of all, for he had never known a home that resembled this.

They saw him coming when he strode down across the orchard, but they did not rise and come to meet him. They sat where they were and waited—as if he already were a friend of theirs, and his coming was expected.

There was an old lady—with snow-white hair and a prim, neat dress, the collar coming up high at her throat to hide the ravages of age upon the human body. But her face was beautiful—the restful beauty of the very

old who sit and rock, and know their day is done, and that their life is full, and that it has been good.

There was a man of middle age or more, who sat beside the woman. The sun had burned his face and neck until they were almost black; his hands were calloused and pockmarked with old scars, and half-crippled with heavy work. But upon his face, too, was a calmness which was an incomplete reflection of the face beside him—incomplete because it was not as deep and settled, because it could not as yet know the full comfort of old age.

The third was a young woman and the Human saw the calmness in her, too. She looked back at him out of cool grey eyes; he saw her face was curved and soft, and that she was much younger than he first had thought.

He stopped at the gate, and the man rose and came to where he waited. "You're welcome, stranger," said the man. "We heard you coming since you stepped into the orchard."

"I have been at the village," the Human said; "I am just out for a walk."

"You are from outside?"

"Yes," the Human told him, "I am from outside. My name is David Grahame."

"Come in David," said the man, opening the gate. "Come and rest with us; there will be food, and we have an extra bed."

He walked along the garden path with the man and came to the bench where the old lady sat.

"My name is Jed," the man said, "and this is my mother, Mary; the other of us is my daughter, Alice."

"So you finally came to us, young man," the old lady said to David.

She patted the bench with a fragile hand. "Here, sit down beside me and let us talk awhile. Jed has chores to do, and Alice will have to cook the supper. But I am old and lazy, and I only sit and talk."

Now that she talked, her eyes were brighter, but the

calmness still was in them. "We knew you would come, someday," she said. "We knew someone would come; for surely those who are outside would hunt their mutant kin."

"We found you," David said, "quite by accident."

"We? There are others of you?"

"The others went away; they were not human and they were not interested."

"But you stayed," she said. "You thought there would be things to find. Great secrets to be learned."

"I stayed," said David, "because I had to stay."

"But the secrets? The glory and the power?"

David shook his head. "I don't think I thought of that—not of power and glory. But there must be something else. You sense it walking in the village, and looking at the homes; you sense a certain truth."

"Truth," the old lady said. "Yes, we found Truth."

And the way she said it, "Truth" was capitalized.

He looked quickly at her and she sensed the unspoken, unguarded question that flicked across his mind. "No," she told him, "not religion. Just Truth; the plain and simple Truth."

He almost believed her, for there was a quiet conviction in the way she said it, a deep and solid surety. "The truth of what?" he asked.

"Why, Truth," the old lady said. "Just Truth."

3

IT WOULD BE something more than a simple truth, of course, it would have nothing to do with machines, and it would concern neither power nor glory. It would be an inner truth—a mental, or a spiritual or a psychological truth—that would have a deep and abiding meaning, the sort of truth that men had followed for years and even followed yet in the wish worlds of their own creation.

The Human lay in the bed close beneath the roof and listened to the night-wind that blew itself a lullaby along

the eaves and shingles. The house was quiet, and the world was quiet except for the singing wind. The world was quiet and David Grahame could imagine, lying there, how the galaxy would gradually grow quiet under the magic and the spell of what these human folk had found.

It must be great, he thought, this truth of theirs. It must be powerful, and imagination-snaring, and all-answering to send them back like this—to separate them from the striving of the galaxy, and send them back to this pastoral life of achieved tranquility in this alien valley; to make them grub the soil for food and cut the trees for warmth; to make them content with the little that they had.

To get along with that little, they must have much of something else, some deep conviction, some inner knowledge that had spelled out to them a meaning to their lives, to the mere fact and living of their lives, that no one else could have.

He lay on the bed, pulled the covers up more comfortably about him, and hugged himself with inner satisfaction.

Man cowered in one corner of the galactic empire, a maker of gadgets—tolerated only because he was a maker of gadgets, and because the other races never could be sure what he might come up with next. They tolerated him, and threw him crumbs enough to keep him friendly, but wasted scant courtesy upon him.

Now, finally, Man had something that would win him a place in the respect and the dignity of the galaxy. For a truth is a thing to be respected.

Peace came to the Human, but he would not let it in; he fought against it so that he could think, so that he could speculate. First, he imagined that this must be the truth that the mutant race had found, then he abandoned that idea . . .

Finally the lullabying wind and the sense of peace and the tiredness of his body prevailed against him and

he slept. The last thought that he had was: *I must ask them. I must find out.*

But it was days before he asked them, for he sensed that they were watching; he knew that they wondered if he could be trusted with the truth and if he was worthy of it.

He wished to stay; but for politeness sake he said that he must go, and raised no great objection when they said that he must stay. It was as if each of them knew this was a racial ritual which must be observed, and all were glad when it once was done and was over with.

He worked in the fields with Jed, and got to know the neighbors up and down the valley; he sat long evenings talking with Jed, and his mother and the daughter, and with the other valley folk who dropped in to pass a word or two.

He had expected that they would ask him questions, but they did not ask; it was almost as if they didn't care, as if they so loved this valley where they lived that they did not even think upon the teeming galaxy their far ancestors had left behind to seek, here on this world, a destiny that was better than common human destiny.

The Human did not ask them questions, either; he felt them watching him, and he was afraid that questions would send them fleeing from the strangeness of him.

But he was not a stranger. It took only a day or two for him to know that he could be one of them, so he made himself become one of them; he sat for long hours and talked of common gossip that ran up and down the valley, and it was kindly gossip. He learned many things—that there were other valleys where other people lived; that the silent, deserted village was something they did not fret about, although each of them it seemed had no ambition and no hope beyond this life of theirs, and all were well content.

The Human grew content himself, content with the rose-grey mornings; with the dignity of labor; with the

pride of growing things. But even as he grew content, he knew he could not be content—that he must find the answer to the truth they had found and must carry that truth back to the waiting galaxy. Before long, a ship would be coming out to explore the village and to study it; and before the ship arrived, he must know the answer. When the ship arrived, he must be standing on the ridge above the village to tell them what he'd found.

One day Jed said to him, "You will be staying with us?"

David shook his head. "I have to go back, Jed; I would like to stay, but I must go back."

Jed spoke slowly, calmly. "You want the Truth? That's it?"

"If you will give it to me," David said.

"It is yours to have," said Jed; "you will not take it back."

That night Jed said to his daughter, "Alice, teach David how to read our writing. It is time he knew."

In the corner by the fireplace, the old lady sat rocking in her chair. "Aye," she said, "it is time he read the Truth."

4

THE KEY HAD COME by special messenger from its custodian, five valleys distant; Jed held it in his hand now, and slid it in the lock of the door, in the building that stood in the center of the old quiet, long-deserted village.

"This is the first time," Jed said, "that the door has been opened, except for the Ritualistic reading. Each hundred years the door is opened, and the Truth is read so that those who then are living may know that it is so."

He turned the key and David heard the click of the tumblers turning in the lock.

"That way," said Jed, "we keep it actual fact; we do not allow it to become a myth.

"It is," he said, "too important a thing to become a myth."

Jed turned the latch and the door swung open just an inch or two. "I said Ritualistic reading," he added, "but perhaps that is not quite right; there is no ritual to it. Three persons are chosen; they come here on the appointed day, and each of them reads the Truth and then goes back as living witnesses. There is no more ceremony than there is with you and I."

"It is good of you to do this for me," David said.

"We would do the same for any of our own who should doubt the Truth," said Jed. "We are a very simple people and we do not believe in red tape or rules; all we do is live.

"In just a little while," he said, "you will understand why we are people."

He swung the door wide open and stepped to one side so that David might walk in ahead of him. The place was one large room and it was neat and orderly. There was some dust, but not very much.

Half the room was filled to three quarters of its height with a machine that gleamed in the dull light that came from some source high in the roof.

"This is our machine," said Jed.

And so it was gadgetry, after all. It was another machine, perhaps a cleverer and sleeker machine, but it was still a gadget and the human race still were gadgeteers.

"Doubtless you wondered why you found no machines," said Jed. "The answer is that there is only one and this is it."

"Just one machine!"

"It is an answerer," said Jed. "A logic. With this machine, there is no need of any others."

"You mean it answers questions?"

"It did at one time," said Jed. "I presume it still would if there were any of us who knew how to operate it. But there is no need of asking further questions."

"You can depend on it?" asked David. "That is, you can be sure that it tells the truth?"

Jed said soberly, "My son, our ancestors spent thousands of years making sure that it would tell the truth. They did nothing else. It was not only the lifework of each trained technician, but the lifework of the race. And when they were sure that it would know and tell the truth—when they were certain that there could be no slightest error in the logic of its calculations—they asked two questions of it."

"Two questions?"

"Two questions," Jed said, "and they found the Truth."

"And the Truth?"

"The Truth," Jed said, "is here for you to read. Just as it came out those centuries ago."

He led the way to a table that stood in front of one panel of the great machine. There were two tapes upon the table, lying side by side. The tapes were covered by some sort of transparent preservative.

"The first question," said Jed, "was this: What is the purpose of the universe? Now read the top tape, for that is the answer."

David bent above the table and the answer was upon the tape: *The universe has no purpose. The universe just happened.*

"And the second question . . ." said Jed, but there was no need for him to finish, for what the question had been was implicit in the wording of the second tape: *Life has no significance. Life is an accident.*

"And that," said Jed, "is the Truth we found; that is why we are a simple people."

David lifted stricken eyes and looked at Jed, the descendant of that mutant race that was to have brought power and glory, respect and dignity to the gadgeteering humans.

"I am sorry, son," said Jed; "that is all there is."

They walked out of the room and Jed locked the door and put the key into his pocket.

"They'll be coming soon," said Jed, "the ones who will

be sent out to explore the village. I suppose you will be waiting for them."

David shook his head. "Let's go back home," he said.

NIGHT FEAR

by Frank Belknap Long

IN THE BIG house, upstairs, a child was sobbing. Dr. Brannon could hear the sobs from the foot of the stairs, and his nearsighted eyes grew troubled. It was more than he could understand. Johnny wasn't a maladjusted youngster, starved for sympathy and affection; he was a perfectly normal seven-year-old, fond of games and well-liked by his playmates. A self-reliant, confident lad, even if he did have a way of smiling which made him seem wise beyond his years, at times.

Dr. Brannon tried hard to swallow his fear as he climbed the stairs. For the first time in ten years he felt really old—weary and baffled and old. He found himself thinking of Johnny's pretty young mother, and how hard she had tried to spare her son the loneliness and dread which had cast a shadow on her own childhood.

Even unto the third generation, he thought, and for an instant bitterness tightened his lips and drove the gentleness from his eyes. Why should a child playing with other children in the warm, bright sunlight feel a sudden, terrifying sense of insecurity? What could have darkened the sunlight for him, and undermined his confidence in himself?

Dr. Brannon glanced nervously at his watch. Try as he might, he could not rid his mind of the alarming hour-old memory of a laughing, healthy child eclipsed by a

white-faced stranger with tormented eyes and tear-stained cheeks.

Psychologists were always harping on the almost-miraculous sanity of childhood, its freedom from morbidity, its joyous acceptance of life as a shining, untarnished coin. How blind they were not to realize that children were at the mercy of night fears—great, shadowy-winged creatures which could inflict cruel wounds, and go flapping off into the darkness, leaving their small, terrified victims in full flight from reality on a plane incomprehensible to adults.

It is always a trying moment when an elderly physician must win the confidence of a young patient by absolutely untried methods. Dr. Brannon could still hear himself asking, "What frightened you, Johnny? Did you talk it over with the other children? Is that why you're so frightened?"

He might as well have saved his breath. Johnny hadn't wanted sympathy of a wheezing, red-faced old fool of a doctor.

The door of Johnny's room was ajar. Dr. Brannon could hear Johnny's mother moving about and making a difficult situation worse by talking to her son as if he were still a tot of three with a stubborn streak, and a bad case of sulks.

With an impatient grimace, he stepped into the room, and shut the door quickly behind him. "Well, Johnny, how do you feel now?" he asked. "Don't you think we'd better have another little talk—man to man?"

Johnny's mother ceased rearranging the pillows at her son's back and straightened with a sigh that was half a sob, the bedside lamp casting a circle of radiance about her pale hair.

"I'm sure he'll talk to me now," Dr. Brannon said, conscious of a faint irritation with the woman for being so beautiful seven years after the death of her husband. Somehow the mother of an ailing child who was not a

little worn-looking grated obscurely on his sense of propriety.

In utter silence he drew up a chair, sat down and looked at the lad on the bed over the top of his spectacles. He saw Johnny's face as a misty oval, the eyes darkly shining.

He coughed and adjusted his glasses. Seeing Johnny's face clearly, he felt a curious helplessness which his reason could not justify. Surely Johnny wasn't beyond help; he wasn't physically ill, or running a fever. His mother had perhaps unwisely put him to bed, and pulled down the shades, leaving him for a full hour in deep darkness. Naturally he would be blinking now, and confused, and resentful. He couldn't possibly be as tormented as he looked, as inwardly beyond hope of rescue.

Dr. Brannon hitched his chair nearer to the bed, and the smile that came to his face was slow and friendly. "If you were away at school I could understand your not wanting to talk about it," he said. "Strangers might not know what a brave lad you really are. But *I know*, Johnny. Surely you can talk freely to an old friend in your own home!"

For an instant Johnny drew back as if in secret pain. Then, abruptly, he leaned forward, his eyes accusing, his hands tightly clenched. "This *isn't* my home!" he said, and his voice seemed no longer the voice of a child, but that of some aging wanderer, shaken by despair and wretchedness.

Dr. Brannon stared for a long moment into the bewildered, angry eyes in shocked disbelief. Then his lips tightened, and he said in a voice that was almost a whisper: "So you've found that out at last, lad!"

Johnny's mother straightened as if stung by a hornet. "How *could* he find out?" she breathed. "None of the other children knew."

"How did you find out, Johnny?" Dr. Brannon asked. Johnny shook his head, then looked away quickly.

"All right, Johnny," Dr. Brannon said, gently. "Keep it to yourself, if you wish."

He turned around to face Johnny's mother. "You can't keep secrets from some youngsters," he said. "You just can't, that's all. It's as great a folly as trying to hide a jam pot on a high shelf. Most likely the other children knew just enough to enable him to put two and two together."

Dr. Brannon took his spectacles and blew upon them. "Children's minds are tricky. When a lad like Johnny puts two and two together he'll come up with a figure that cuts across all mathematical boundaries. Not four, mind you, but a figure that cuts much closer to the truth."

Johnny's mother sat down on the side of the bed, put her arm around him and kissed him. "Johnny—" she whispered.

Dr. Brannon's eyes had a glint that might have been compassion or amusement—or both. "Your mother's here, Johnny," he said. "Doesn't that make it your home?"

"No, it doesn't."

"You're afraid, lad—is that it? For the first time in your life, you feel lost and afraid and alone?"

There was a quick, answering look of torment in Johnny's eyes.

Good lad, Dr. Brannon thought. Someday, Johnny, you'll answer all the well-meant questions fearlessly. It's the only way we can give and receive help in the loneliness and the darkness.

Dr. Brannon pushed back his chair, and stood up. "I'm going to prove to you that you have a home, Johnny," he said. "There's something you've got to face, and we're going to face it together."

At the door he paused to speak to Johnny's mother. "Get him ready," he said. "I'll be back in twenty minutes."

When Dr. Brannon returned Johnny was ready. If Dr.

Brannon had moved wearily before he now seemed to bear the weight of the world on his shoulders. "All right, lad," he said. "We may as well get going."

Dr. Brannon took Johnny by the hand, and together they descended the stairs of the big, silent house, moving slowly and awkwardly. Then out across a sun-drenched playroom they went, and down a long sloping corridor with shining walls.

Doors opened at their approach with an eerie droning, and closed noiselessly behind them. Five doors with winking lights, and then they were in another corridor which was almost a tunnel, and a cold wind seemed to blow in upon them.

At the end of the corridor they halted, and Dr. Brannon said, "You were born here, Johnny. For all the years of your life, this has been your home. A good home, Johnny, a home to be proud of. I was not born here, but the sunlight up above is as warm and bright as the sunlight I knew as a child."

"It's not real sunlight," Johnny said.

"No, of course not; but it's just as healthful. You see, lad, even now we who should be strong and self-reliant sometimes become frightened. We let ourselves become frightened, and it is very foolish."

Dr. Brannon pressed Johnny's hand. "We thought we could protect you from the cold and the dark—to keep you from feeling lost and afraid for the few happy years before eight. We of an old generation had a less secure childhood."

Dr. Brannon scratched his ear. "I'm afraid we were not too successful; you were too smart for us. Youngsters really know how to cut corners to get at the truth, and when they do—" He smiled. "There's a fine kettle of fish to unboil, lad!"

Dr. Brannon tightened his grip on Johnny's hand. "So now for the first time you'll see your home as it really is. I'll tell you how it became your home, and you'll be proud—you'll be so very proud of the men who gave

their lives to make it your home—you'll forget to be afraid.

"Now remember what I told you. That spacesuit is heavy and weighs you down. But away from the station's artificial gravity, you'll be as spry as a harvest mouse in a field of summer corn."

Dr. Brannon pressed a button and there was a steady, humming sound.

Dr. Brannon said slowly, "Now put on your oxygen-helmet, lad. That's right; just let it settle gently on your shoulders, the way your father did when the Earth was forever behind him, and he walked from the rocket with the courage of a true pioneer."

For a moment Dr. Brannon seemed to grow in stature, as if the bracing of his shoulders had added a cubit to his height. Then the airlock swung open, and the man and the boy walked forward together, and emerged hand in hand on the cold, dark surface of the moon.

I AM TOMORROW

by Lester del Rey

1

IDIOCY WRENCHED at the mind of Thomas Blake; the television cameras, the fine old mansion, the people cheering, all seemed to vanish into a blankness. His mind was suddenly alien to his brain, his thoughts twisting against a weight of absolute blankness that resisted, with a fierce impulse to live. Before him, light seemed to lash down; and a grim, expressionless face swam out of nothing, while an old man's voice dinned in ears that were curiously not his.

It passed, almost at once, leaving only the sureness that

this was more than fancy. Blake caught a quick view of himself in a monitor, spotting the sagging muscles of his face, and carrying them back to a smile. His eyes darted to the face of Gideon Pierce, and he saw that the slip could only have been momentary; his campaign manager was still smiling the too-warm smile of a professional politician, creasing his fat jowls into false pleasantness.

The shouting behind him caught Blake's ears then, making him realize that his short speech was ended. He stood there, studying himself in the monitor. He was still lean and trim at forty, with the finest camera face in politics. To the women, he had looked like a man who was still boyish; to the men, like a man among men. And none of that had hurt, though it wasn't the only reason he had just been conceded victory as the youngest governor of the state, on his first entry into politics.

But under his attempt to appraise himself, Blake's mind was still trembling as if huddled down into the familiar pattern of his physical brain. Mice, with icy feet, sneaked up his backbone, and centipedes with hot claws crawled down. No man can ever *feel* another brain—and yet Blake had just experienced that very feeling—contact with a vague, mindless, inchoate brain that no dream, or attack of nerves, could have conjured up for him.

He reached for a glass of Chablis and downed it at a sudden gulp, before the wash of congratulatory handclaps could reach him. Gideon Pierce suddenly snapped to life and was at his side, sensitive to every deviation from the normal. "Nerves, Tom?"

Blake nodded. "Excitement, I guess."

"Go on up, then; I'll take care of them here."

For a second, Blake almost liked the man, hollow though he knew Gideon to be. He let Pierce clear the way for him, not even listening to the men's explanations, and slipped out. Blake's room was on the fourth floor, where he had grown up as a boy, but with a private entrance and stairs that were a later addition. He slipped up

to its quiet simplicity; there, in the soft light, with the big logs burning down to coals in the fireplace, seated in his worn leather chair before his desk, he should have been safe from anything.

He should have—but the wrenching came again. There was no light this time, but the same voice was droning frantically in the distance; and again he felt the touch of a brain, filled with stark idiocy, fighting to drive him out of its alien cells. He was aware of a difference this time, though—a coarser, cruder brain, filled with endocrine rage in spite of its lack of thought. It fought, and won, and Blake was suddenly back in his room.

For a second, his senses threatened to crack under hysteria, but he caught them up. In the small bathroom, he found a four-year-old box of barbiturates and swallowed two of them. He knew they wouldn't work for minutes, but the psychological relief of taking them meant something.

The idea of a strange attack on him hit Blake; at once, his fingers flew out to a knob on the desk, pressing it in a secret combination. A concealed drawer slipped out, and he grabbed at the papers inside—they were all there. His brother, James, had spent ten years—and fifty million dollars, that had bankrupt and killed him, to get a few diagrams and instructions onto these papers.

Silas McKinley had postulated that some form of military absolutism was inevitable when the greatest weapons of the time required great means to use them—as had the phalanx, the highly trained Roman Legion, the heavy equipment of feudal knights, or the atomic bombs, planes, and tanks of modern war. Contrariwise, when the major weapons could be owned and used by the general citizenry, then reasonably peaceful democracy must result, as it had from the colonial muskets of the eighteenth century, and would do from the use of James Blake's seemingly impossible accomplishment.

Unless, Tom added to himself, it could be suppressed. Stealing the papers wouldn't be enough for that; he had

them all completely memorized. He managed to grin at his fear, and closed the drawer, just as a knock sounded and Gideon Pierce came in.

Watching the man's public mask slip off and reveal a cynical, old face did more to stabilize Blake's emotions than any amount of barbiturates could have done. He motioned to another chair and poured whiskey and soda into a glass, adding ice from the small freezer in the little bar. "Rough down there?"

The older man shook his head. "No—not after we knew you won; I'm used to celebrations. But—my God, Tom—the last month—the way you were going, you didn't have a chance! Getting the nomination was miracle enough—you had no business winning with the stuff you were handing out! It's all right to promise things—but you have to be realistic about even that! When you can't deliver . . ."

"I'll deliver," Blake told him. "I've always delivered on everything I ever said I'd do; and I've always tried to give them what they really wanted. Now *I* want something—and they give it to me. The old principle, Gideon—cast thy bread upon the water and it shall return after many days."

"Yeah—soggy!" Pierce swirled the drink in his mouth and swallowed it without tasting it. "So what do you get out of it, if you *do* manage to keep some of your promises?"

Insanity, maybe, Blake thought, remembering the mind-wrenching; then he thrust it down. "I get to be President—where I can really do some good; where I can give them decent, honest, democratic peace and self-respect."

"Sure." Pierce dragged out a cigar and began chewing on it, shaking his head. "Tom, I'm beginning to believe you mean it. If you do, take the advice of a man who has been around longer; get out of politics! It's no place for you. You're too naive—too filled with bright ideals that are one hundred percent right—except that they neglect human nature. You'll find even the President has opposition, boy, once you *have* the power and somebody bucks

you, well—you've seen it happen. And you get bitter. I was full of noble thoughts once myself; take a look at what you see on my face now. You don't belong in this racket."

Blake held out a lighter to the other, grinning. "They told me I didn't belong in the newspaper business, Gideon. When I inherited my foster father's string of yellow, war-mongering journals and decided to build them into the honest, fighting group they are now, they told me I'd go broke. I doubled the circulation."

"Yeah—and probably convinced a few thousand voters to change their ideas—until they voted; then they cast their ballot for favors, and with the same selfish reasons they'd had before. You're as hopeless as your brother James; burning himself out and wasting a fortune on a perpetual motion machine. But you're going to break *my* heart when you find out the facts. Oh, hell! Good night, Governor!"

Pierce got up and went out, grumbling before Tom could sputter the words that came to his lips. Then he shrugged; James Blake had deliberately built up a reputation as a crackpot while he went ahead turning a gadget out of the wildest of science fiction speculations into reality. He'd developed a hand weapon which was equal to a cannon, for offense, and simultaneously protected the user from anything up to the first blast of a hydrogen bomb.

And now it was up to Tom Blake to get to a position where he could have this weapon produced in quantity, and released before it could be suppressed. As President, there would be ways he could do that; with it would come an end to war, once and for all, and the genuine equality of all men. Maybe this was idealism, perhaps even naive—but the Blakes got what they wanted.

He started to undress, and then flopped down on the bed with half his clothes on. It had been a hard day, and those two attacks hadn't helped any; they must have been caused by nervous strain, he thought... and knew he

was only trying to deceive himself. But the barbiturates were working, finally, bringing a cloudy euphoria that kept him from pursuing his doubts.

He was reaching up for the light switch when the third attack came.

2

THIS TIME it was different; the first ones had been mere feelers; now the attack on his mental stability had the sure drive of power and firmness behind it.

The euphoria vanished, as if Blake's thoughts no longer had any relation to his body—which seemed to be the case. He tried to see, and found that there was jet darkness around him. He could no longer feel his arm raised toward the switch—though he was sure he hadn't dropped it, and that the light must still be on. There was no feeling of any kind.

That was wrong, though; he could feel a *pull*, but it bore no relation to anything he had experienced before, except in the two previous fantasies. It was as if immaterial tongs had clasped his thoughts and were lifting them, delicately, but with all the power of the universe. There was a snapping, and then only a wild, confused feeling of transition.

Everything seemed slower than before. Now the pressure guided him toward something—and there was a resistance which the guiding force could overcome only partially. Streamers of emotion shot out at him—and his own wild desire for a locus and a point of stability met them and clashed in something which managed to be agonizingly painful, yet without sensation!

Idiocy again!

The brain set against Blake's own mind resisted without thought, without the slightest trace of knowledge. He could sense the wild frenzy with which it collected data as it went and tried to find answers that were not there. Something that might have been a soundless scream of

desperation went up from it, as the force guiding Blake managed to press it aside.

Blake felt the probing brain wrenched more wildly than he himself had been handled; again, there was a feeling of something snapping. Beside him, something tried to maintain itself, but without enough individuality to hold; it began drifting into nothing, and then was gone. But where it had been, was a suction that dragged him toward it.

He settled suddenly, feeling the alienness of a new location. It wasn't either of the two other places where he *had* been—this was new. There were nothing here to contest with him for his place, but something tried to erase him into the emptiness that had been the idiot thing before him. From somewhere outside, force and pressure seemed to descend, to mold Blake's new haven into the patterns of his thoughts, and made it accept him. The effort of holding his own, where he himself was still alien, became less; but it now fitted his mind. It was cramped, and without the warmth of his own body, but he was physically alive again.

The pressure vanished, and he relaxed back on the bed suddenly.

But this wasn't Tom Blake's own bed, any more than it was his own body. This was a hard pad under him, in place of the foam rubber cushion—and this new body seemed to be quite unmindful of the bumpiness, which his own body would have found intolerable.

Blake shook himself, chasing away the final stages of the fantasy this had to be. He was probably half-asleep, which made this one last longer; if he opened his eyes . . .

They seemed to work with difficulty, but they came open finally, to show the contour of a body under a dingy, gray sheet—something that must have been black, before it faded. Blake moved his hand, glancing at it. His eyes focussed slowly on a heavy, muscular arm, deep brown from sun and wind, that ended in a hand covered with hair, and lacking a finger.

Blake tried to scream. He was hysterical inside, but no sound came out; the lack of physical response struck him like a second blow, snapping him out of it.

He wasn't in his own body, and this wasn't a dream. Somehow, something had picked up his thoughts and memories and planted them in the skull of an entirely different man. It couldn't be done, but Blake was here to prove it.

"Magic," came the memory of his brother's words from their adolescence, *"does not exist. It is only a distortion of what could be scientific facts, if properly understood. If poltergeists exist, then accept them, but remember they're natural phenomena obeying natural principles we don't fully understand. That's science."*

Blake clutched at the idea. Nobody had conjured him here, wherever here was; it was the work of intelligence, operating with natural laws—and that could never be fully horrible. He was only feeling horror because the cave beast that feared the dark was part of his emotional and environmental heritage.

He put the cave beast down enough to try to find where "here" was.

He found that his head was strapped down, and that webbing under the sheet restrained his new body. Inability to move more than his eyes limited his view to one end of this room. He could see monotracks over his head, with great machines that might have been anything from lamps, to oversized routers sliding along them, under the cold glare of fluorescent tubes. The wall ahead of him was a featureless gray; the floor was out of his view. And along the wall was a single bench, covered with cots, each holding a body strapped down as Blake's was. Their heads were clamped, hiding them from him; but he could see that each had a hairy hand outside the sheet, and that all the bodies were about the same height and build—fairly tall, and uniformly solid in build. He supposed he fitted the same description, since there was so much uniformity.

As he watched, the machines traveled down the track,

stopping in clusters over a few heads at a time, while odd lights glowed, and a whirring sound came from them. From each man under a cluster of machines, there would be a mutter, then a prolonged groan . . . and silence, until the machines moved on.

It wasn't an inspiring view, and it told Blake almost nothing. He seemed to have seen bits of it before in his first attack, but he couldn't be sure.

As he watched, a door opened in the wall, and a man came through, dressed in a smock that fell to the floor and was of shiny black material. He was tall and thin but wide-shouldered, with a face that was frozen into complete lack of expression. A chill shuddered through Blake; this was the same face he'd first seen. Then, somehow, even that bit of familiarity made it easier to take.

He wasn't surprised to hear a mutter in the voice of an old man. It was a complaining sound, ending in a sharp question.

The smocked man shrugged. "I know, Excellency, but we're beyond even the borderland of familiar science here. If it works, it will be a miracle. I told you that then, and I still say it. Once we catch him, we can erase him. But the problem is to catch him—on fancy guesswork as to just what mind pattern we're looking for, way back then."

"Something worked before." The figure coming through the door now looked at the rows of men, with a sharpness oddly in contrast with the voice. He was of indeterminate age—somewhere between sixty and eighty, Blake thought. But his body was reasonably straight, and with none of the fat or gauntness most older men have. His hair was steel grey—just a shade darker than the soft grey uniform he wore—and his movements were seemingly easy and sure. His face was handsome except for the expression there. The mouth was too straight, the eyes too cynical—and over the aura of power was a hint of repressed but seething fear.

He coughed, and turned to the nearer group of figures

on the cots. His voice suddenly lost its touch of tremor, and became the firm, modulated tones of a trained speaker. "Well, don't you think it's time you asked where you are, young man?" he asked.

The nearer figure struggled to sit upright. "*Wahnsinnigkeit! Um Gottes Willen, wenn ich nur frei waehre . . .*"

"German," the man in the black smock said. "And you don't speak it."

"Never learned it," the older man agreed. He looked down the line, started toward another, and then shrugged; a sudden smile flashed over his face. "Tom Blake, you're the man we want; are you here?"

"Here!" The word ripped out of Blake with an explosive force of its own, while all his uncertainties gathered themselves together in expectation of the explanation that would now mercifully be forthcoming.

The other man beamed. "Good, Tom! Remember the desk combination? We have to be sure." His voice was almost young now.

"Right in, left in, left out, twice left," Blake repeated.

"That's it!" The old man beamed again, and was still smiling as he turned to the man in the black smock. "Okay, Sarnoff. Burn out his brain—and do a good job of it, because I'm watching!"

3

BLAKE SCREAMED as the machines suddenly swooped over him, and one began droning again. He had no way of knowing what it would do—but the result was obvious from the shouted words. Sarnoff climbed up and inspected it, giving it a sudden test. Something in Blake's mind slithered, and the force of the alienness grew stronger.

"Pure luck," Sarnoff said, his voice as emotionless as his expression. "Even with what we had to work with, guessing his resonant frequency range was just good luck." I didn't even know whether we could reach back forty

years into the past. Excellency, I deserve that bonus—but chance deserves a bigger one.”

“You’ll get your bonus,” the older man agreed, and some of the age crept back into his speech. “Double it. We’ve got his mind matrix here—here where we can work on it with the burner; that’s all I care about. I want it eliminated permanently, Sarnoff!”

The other nodded. The machine began to purr again, and Blake felt another scream come to his lips, and freeze there. Forty years into the future—to be eliminated! It wasn’t science or magic—it was simply horror. There was no purpose . . . no right . . . no . . .

The silthering began in his brain again. This wasn’t the same as the previous force; it was an erasing of himself. Tom Blake’s memories began to blur, beginning with the earliest ones. His foster father suddenly stepped before his mental eye, chuckling at a successful creation of trouble at a disputed border that would be constant headlines for his papers. Then the foster father was gone, and Blake had no memory of anything before the age of ten.

His brother . . . what had his brother said? Funny, how he’d ever gotten the chain of newspapers? Someone must have given them to Tom. Then the election was gone, and all he had heard here.

He lay staring up at the pretty lights that glistened in the machine. A dim consciousness of self was left, but it seemed to be half outside his head—as if a funny part of him were trying to pull away and go back somewhere. He had no words, nor could he understand the words that were said in front of him.

His eyes moved whenever sudden motion brought them around by catching their attention. But it was all something interesting in a purely sensory way. He saw Sarnoff test him; he lay for hours in a big room with other bodies that stirred senselessly. He felt them carry him to a truck and place him inside. The motion of the truck was scary and exciting at first, but he went to sleep soon after. His bodily functions woke him, just as the truck came to a

sudden halt and other men climbed into it and began carting the drooling creatures with him away somewhere. But then he went to sleep again.

Far away, a part of himself as bereft of words as Tom was, began to cry unhappily, as if conscious that this was wrong. But it didn't waken him.

There were the beginnings of words again, when he finally did begin to come out of his sleep. Slow, bit by tedious part, his mind seemed to be reaching back to its dimmest recesses and pulling facts up for him. Sometimes whole chains of thought would pop into his mind and fade back into his permanent memory. Again, it would take what seemed like years of concentration to root out one totally unimportant thing.

Blake was delighted when he discovered who he was. He mouthed his name to himself, soundlessly. The motion brought some attention; a sharp prick that he somehow identified as a hypodermic needle was thrust into his arm.

"Go to sleep," a soft voice whispered. "Sleep, Jed. We need you whole, and you'll come back better if you don't try too hard. That's it, honey!"

Blake was himself when he wakened—or rather, that other body with its alien brain which somehow had become himself. He was in a basement, from the smell and the dampness; lying on a cot across the dimly lighted room from a small, crude machine that resembled one he had seen in Sarnoff's place. Another of the men who had been on one of Sarnoff's cots sat near him, watching doubtfully, with some kind of a gun in his hand. And beside him, leaning over to kiss him as he opened his eyes, was a girl with an intense, half-pretty face and eyes that could have drawn the damned from hell straight through the pearly gates.

She held him, moaning softly against him as her lips burned on his. Blake wanted to push her aside for a moment, but the body and brain in which he now lived had a warmer endocrine balance than his own. Desire washed over him, yet with a strange mingling of gentleness and

protective instinct. She drew away at last, her eyes misty and shining. "Jed! Oh, Jed."

From the other cot, the man chuckled. "Give him a chance, Sherry! The guy's been through plenty—I know!"

She blushed, and dropped her eyes. Blake's mind jerked at the archaic behavior. He studied her more carefully, waiting for hints from them. Obviously, they knew him as the person who had formerly inhabited this body. But beyond that, he had no clues.

Sherry was clothed in a dress that touched the floor and came high on her throat. Even the sleeves were fastened at her wrists. She blushed again, as he watched, and tried to pull the hem of the skirt—or rather, the floor-length, ballooning jodhpurs—down over a toe that was showing. "Jed!" she breathed indignantly. "Not here!"

The man chuckled again, not too nicely, and gave up trying to see the whole of the girl's shoe. He came over to drop on the cot beside Blake, tossing the gun at him. "Here, Jed, you'll need your statidyne. Lucky for you you'd had a light dose of mind-burning before; they really gave you the works that time. We thought there wasn't a trace of a memory left in your head, but Mark swore the brain can't be washed completely a second time. We put you under his restorer, on a chance—and here you are, good as new."

"Not quite." Blake knew he couldn't stay silent for ever, and a little truth might help. "I'm not quite the same. I..."

"Blank spots!" Sherry moaned. "We had them with Herman, too. . . . Rufe, can we put him back under the restorer?"

"Mark said he'd gone as far as he could," Rufe told her. "Jed, what's missing? The last few years? After you joined the movement, or before?"

"Not after, Jed," Sherry begged. But Blake nodded slowly.

Rufe motioned Sherry out. "This is going to be rough," he warned her. "No stuff for mixed company when we

talk about *him* in a hurry. Even if you have been married three years."

She kissed Blake quickly, while he absorbed the fact that he was now officially married, and then she slipped out after an elaborate examination through small cracks in a doorway. Rufe came closer, squatting down.

Rufe's talk was a quick summary of why Blake had apparently joined a rebel movement against the dictator this world seemed to have. It was old stuff to anyone who had grown up in a world where Hitler and Mussolini had been daily fare in the papers, with only a personal element added. The Bigshot—obviously a swearword now—had taken over slowly, always with the velvet glove over the steel fist. He'd apparently had some sort of invincible weapon, since he'd united the whole world under his heel.

Then he'd begun reforming it. Criminals first—and then nonconformists had been treated to progressively more severe erasure of all memory and personality. The unfit had been sterilized. All labor had been handled through the State; a profits were "equalized," and the Iron Guard had grown up, using weapons that could not be overcome. Finally, the mind-burning and sterilization had gotten out of hand; complaints had added up until the rebels began to sprout under every tree—as Blake found he had rebelled after being pronounced unsafe, and receiving sterilization. Twice, they had tried to revolt, and twice they had been battered down. Now the third try was due, without any better chance against the invincible Bigshot.

But they had discovered from Mark, the spy in Sarnoff's laboratory who had built their restorer, that there was less time than they thought. A new rejuvenation treatment had been found: in two weeks the eighty-year-old dictator would be restored to something like forty. From his meaningless gabble with Blake, in Sarnoff's laboratory, Rufe was sure the man was now in his dotage; however, there wouldn't be any chance against him after he was restored to his age of greatest vigor.

"Playing jokes like that," Rufe finished, shaking his

head. "Used to burn us quick, but now he's making a big game of it, *drat*—no, by golly, darn him! You rest up a couple days, Jed. We're going to need you."

Blake didn't try to press Rufe for more details; this was an old, familiar story in history, even though it seemed to be a burning new one to Rufe. But it puzzled Blake—here was exactly the events which he was hoping to end with his brother's weapon. He protested weakly. "I'm not that important to you, Rufe."

"You're not! You don't think they pulled a broad daylight rescue for me, do you? No sir! Another week, when we get that entrance blasted, you're going to be the man of the hour—the man who can outshoot all of us, that's who. We can't go without our head executioner can we? Jed, when you get Mr. Bigshot Thomas Blake in your sights I'd . . . Hey what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Blake managed.

But Rufe was already leaving. "I talk too much when you need sleep. You rest up, Jed, and I'll see you later."

4

BLAKE SAT rigidly, trying to fit it into his knowledge, and finding it an indigestible lump. For minutes, he tried to convince himself he was suffering from delusions—but that explanation required such a degree of insanity that the question of "reality" wouldn't matter at all; he rejected it.

Blake decided to see what sort of order he could make by accepting these events and objects at their face value.

There was a sort of pattern. Someone had taken the trouble to fish Tom Blake's mind up through forty years, in the hope of eliminating it. That "someone" was Sarnoff, and Sarnoff was obviously working for—for the Bigshot: then the man behind what had happened to Tom Blake had to be Tom Blake himself, as he was in this later age—or, perhaps, someone near the throne who regarded the Blake of forty years ago a menace to the Blake

of "now." Then, because of this man Mark, he—the younger Blake—had been saved, simply because the body in which the younger Blake's consciousness rested was the body of one of the rebels' chief tools.

Blake remembered a phrase he'd often heard, "A is not A"; here was an example of it, and with a vengeance!

Somehow, on all sides, he—young Tom Blake as he now was beginning to think of himself—was supposed to be a menace to his later self. Tom Blake A was presently embroiled in a war—a "future" war—where his sole purpose was to kill off Tom Blake N—the product of forty years of Tom Blake A's living.

He wanted to reject the proposition; he rebelled against it; every reaction shouted "I am I; I am Tom Blake; I *won't* change!"

He put it into the back of his mind, as he had learned slowly to do with things that had no seeming answer, afraid to touch it further—consciously, at least. He picked up the gun Rufe had left him, and began examining it. A hinge on the top of the plastic case caught his eye, and a second later the case lay open.

It was the gun James Blake had invented—the gun that was supposed to end all strife, prevent war, and bring in eternal democracy!

Then Tom shook his head; this was only part of that gun. The original invention, which had taken years of work by "geniuses" under the "supergenius" leadership of James, was simply a selective stasis field. It surrounded a man with a bubble of force—or lack of force, depending on how you phrased it; that bubble was carefully adjusted on several levels, so that nothing material beyond a certain low speed, and no energy particle beyond a certain level of energy, could travel through it. The further from the limits, the greater the resistance, on an asymptotic curve. Light could pass; soft x-rays were slowed and worked down to safe limits; gamma radiation was bounced back. Or, while something traveling only a few miles an hour, up to about fifty, met almost no opposition, any-

thing having the speed of a bullet, or that of a concussion wave from a bomb met an impregnable wall.

But all that was missing from this gun. There was only the offensive force—a simple means of projecting a beam of that static force at a variable speed, so that whatever it hit seemed to be moving toward it. At low speeds, it could knock over or stun; at light speed, it could blast a hole through a mountain, with absolutely no reaction against the user's hand. Theoretically, its range was infinite, limited only by the fact it traveled in a straight line. Since it wasn't a true force, it actually required almost no energy, and could run for years off a tiny dry cell.

On the back was stamped the serial number—a figure over forty billion—and the price—two dollars! Obviously, James' weapon was being used generally, but not as it had been intended; apparently only the Iron Guard had the whole mechanism—if anyone had.

Damn the dictator who could pervert it to such use!

Tom Blake stopped, realizing he was damning himself; it made less sense than ever. All the rest of the indictment against the Bigshot had more sides; there was justification for erasing the brains of criminals and for sterilizing the unfit—and he had heard only one side, which might actually be a criminal side. The uniting of the world under one rule was something he had long dreamed of, and was certainly justified.

But such perversion of the weapon was another matter; it was something Blake felt he could never rationalize to himself, even if he lived to be a hundred.

And the morality bothered him. Obviously, prudery had been reintroduced, and carried to an extreme. He'd been puzzling over it, without too much success. For an absolute ruler, it might have its advantages; it would both serve to occupy a good deal of time and thought on the part of the masses, and impose limits on them, which the ruler would not necessarily be compelled to admit for himself. It would make them more subservient to authori-

ty. But it wasn't the move of a man who wanted to improve the world.

Sherry came in, then, as if to prove his point. She drew a cot up beside him and lay down, fully clothed. He noticed that her garments were fastened with a great many buttons, and without a zipper anywhere. His own clothes, when he looked, were as intricately fastened.

"Jed," she whispered. "Jed, I'm sorry I—I kissed you—in front of Rufe. I'm so ashamed!"

He reached out a reassuring hand, flame leaping up in his body again. There was something about her eyes and the way she avoided showing even a trace of her feet; and wrists . . .

She caught his hand, then jerked her own back. "Jed—not here. Someone might come in!"

Someone did, shortly after she fell asleep, while Blake was still twisting and turning in his own mind—if even his mind was still his own. He pretended sleep, when Rufe led the other up to him.

"You're crazy, Mark," the man whispered; "do you think Sherry wouldn't know her own husband?"

Mark was a young man with a troubled face and eyes sunk in their sockets under scraggly brows. He looked like early pictures of Lincoln, except for the incongruity of a short, stubbed nose. Now he shook his head. "I don't know, Rufe. I didn't quite like his response when I got out to rebuild his brain patterns. Sarnoff's switching minds—it's the only answer I can get to all the machinery he's using. And I think he may have been trying to run in a ringer on us."

"A spy?"

"What else. Probably one of those other men was from the Guard, and they switched minds. But still . . . well, I can't see Sherry sleeping beside anyone unless she was sure it was Jed! And I don't see why a ringer wouldn't pretend to remember everything, instead of admitting his mind is partly numbed—as it should be, after what hit Jed!"

"So what do we do?" Rufe asked.

"We don't do anything. We can't test him by having him shoot—that's conditioned reflex, outside his mind. We take him along, making sure he doesn't meet anyone else until we break in. Then he either shoots the Bigshot—"

"Shh, Mark! Sherry's here."

"Sorry. Slipped. He either shoots, or we shoot him. With the only opening we can find, that first shot has to be good all the way across the chamber, before the automatics cut on the screen around *him*! Jed's got the only reflexes that can do it."

They went out, leaving Blake to his thoughts—which weren't pretty. He wasn't going to enjoy shooting himself on the amount of evidence he had; and he liked the idea of being shot at his present age even less.

They didn't sound like a criminal mob—nor even like one of the possible radical malcontent segments that might grow up in any government. They sounded, unfortunately, like honest citizens getting ready for another Lexington and Concord—the very type of citizen he had hoped to develop with his own ideas and James' gun.

But Tom Blake still couldn't picture himself as a monster. He'd spent a good many years under every sort of temptation he could imagine, and he'd grown steadily more convinced that the world belonged to the decent, normal folk in it—not to any Bigshot, including himself. He felt he should be able to trust himself more than he could trust anyone else in this cockeyed age.

The trouble was that it was cockeyed—and there was no reason for it. It should have been a utopia; why hadn't the later Blake given the defensive part of the gun out?

Or was that one under the control of someone else—the old man who had been with Sarnoff, perhaps? The old man looked capable of anything, and he'd proved completely ruthless. If the real Thomas Blake of this period

were simply a front, forced somehow to do the will of another . . .

But how could he be forced when no weapon would hurt him?

Blake got up in the morning with his eyes burning from lack of sleep, and no nearer the answer than before. Under Sherry's urging, he began an hour of target practice, using the slowest "speed" of the gun; Mark had been right—his shooting was pure conditioned reflex, and hadn't been hurt by the change.

He'd reached only one emotional and one logical conclusion, and he mulled them over at breakfast. Emotionally, he wanted to get back to his own age somehow, to his own body—as he had to do sometime if there was ever to be an elder Blake. Logically, he knew he couldn't go, if he had the choice, until he found out the facts about what he had become.

But there were a number of questions that had come up as he lay tossing. He didn't believe in variable time—the whole theory of the stasis gun demanded a fixed, absolute cause-and-effect time scheme in the universe, somehow; and the gun worked. That meant the elder Blake had been through all this before, and should know every move he would make. Why had he slipped through the fingers of the Sarnoff group? Also, if he did get back to his own time—as he had to, seemingly—how could he do anything about what he could become, even if the worst was true?

That night he was assigned permanent quarters—his old ones, apparently—with Sherry. There he found that some of her morality vanished, while some of his own got in his way, at first. And it didn't make it any easier to feel that she belonged to a crowd of criminals or crackpots when his emotions began to become solidly entrenched in his head.

He was obviously falling in love with a girl who believed his highest mission in life was to shoot his older self!

5

BLAKE—or rather Jed—was supposed to be a spatula man at the local yeast works, but he'd saved up three of his quarterly vacations to take a whole month off now. Sherry had done the same with her vacations at the fabric converter. As a result, they had time on their hands while the major part of the revolutionists were away at work; there were a number of places of entertainment, but Blake chose a newsreel theater.

He came away disgusted, and yet doubtful. All the old trappings of a dictator's propaganda bureau were there, with the usual justifications and arbitrary associations of words that had no real meaning. There was brutality enough. A revolt in Moscow against the local office of the State had been put down by Iron Guards, who moved about in complete invulnerability, using their weapons to stun the roiling crowds. There was surprisingly little bloodshed, though. But the scene where the prisoners were released mercifully back to their parents and friends was far from a happy one. All had been put through the mind-burners, and were back to the first days of infancy, mentally.

Still, there was a regular shuttle running to the Moon, and Mars was being explored. China, on the other hand, was starving; and obviously no attempt was being made to alleviate the situation. Apparently the State believed in letting local suffering go—or perhaps had insufficient resources.

He guessed that the latter was the case, particularly when a new edict of sterilization was announced for Brazil, due to unchecked birth rate. The sterilization was painless enough, and didn't impair sexuality, but such blanket use could only come from sheer necessity.

The State was loose at the seams; disease had been conquered, and while the rejuvenation process was new, secret—and obviously forbidden for general use—the progress in gereontology and geriatrics had been amazing.

In making the whole world one State, the birth rate of one section had simply flooded another, leaving no natural controls. There were no wars. Progress in foods had been good, but it hadn't equaled the birth rate; there were over ten billion inhabitants of Earth.

Perhaps the new morality had been an attempt to check the birth rate, but it had failed; public morals can be swayed—private hungers only break out more intensely. Then, apparently, had come an increasing use of sterilization against progressive feeble-mindedness, physical hereditary ills, alcoholism, subnormal intelligence, subversive tendencies, and so on up the list, until less than half the population could pass the tests. When India refused to use voluntary birth control, the first large use of the sterility process had been forced on her, leaving less than five percent of her people fertile. It hadn't helped much; China had immediately begun to flow over the borders.

And, inevitably, people suffered. Housing was bad—single-room shacks were common, except in what could be called the modern slums, thrown up to house hordes in worse conditions. Food was mostly synthetic now. The people lived poorly, even though they were on a twenty-hour week, and free to buy surprising types of luxuries at small prices.

The newsreel had referred to this as "the Period of Transition," but there was no sign of it getting anywhere.

Blake came out shaken, unable to justify the results or to condemn the ideas behind them, completely. Back in 1960, it had been a simple world, with a few minor troubles; now, he wondered. Most of the troubles here came from the relief of those simple troubles there—and it was questionable whether the dictatorship had much to do with it, beyond attempts to cure the ills so obvious then. He suspected that the brewing revolution had more connection with the bad food and inadequate housing than the more obvious high-handed State methods.

He found himself liking the people. They were what he had always dreamed of—a group devoted to liberty, willing to sacrifice themselves if necessary, with an amazing respect for each other's rights. Out of them, conceivably, a new world could come—the world he had always aimed for.

Do nothing, Blake told himself, and the plot would fail. The rebels made tests of the gun's reaction time, measuring the period between the instant that the peep-hole in the weapon's shield was uncovered to the moment when firing the gun would accomplish nothing. The period was too short for most of them to pull the trigger. He, in Jed's body, had been just enough better than the others to make it possible; no automatic device would work, because they had no way of knowing where the Bigshot would be in the single room where he apparently gave himself the luxury of going without his personal shield.

Do something, and he was killing himself—and perhaps ruining what was really only the "Period of Transition" they prattled about.

He got back to the little shack where he and Sherry lived just in time to see a new development. A wail went up along the street as a great van drove up, and Blake stopped to stare at the miserable creatures that were piling out. They couldn't stand on their legs; their minds had been burned completely. And among them was Rufe.

Two fingers were missing from the gun-hands of each of them, cut off and already healing under the efficient modern surgery.

Mark met Blake and yanked him inside, where Sherry was crying. "We thought they'd got you. New orders. Not even the technicians at Sarnoff's know, but I saw a copy. All men with hairy hands are to get fifteen minute burns—enough so they'll never be more than morons, and we can't rebuild their minds. And—well, you saw the rest. Sherry, shut up! They didn't get him!"

"They will . . . they will . . ." She lay huddled for a

second more. Then, as the van drove off, leaving the people to sort out their unfortunate friends, she dashed out to help. Her sobs drifted back to him, but didn't seem to hurt her usefulness in the crowd.

Blake went to the rickety cabinet where his gun lay and picked it up. Mark caught him. "That can wait. Come in here." Lather and razor were waiting, and he began shaving the back of Blake's hands deftly. "We can't do much of this—the others will have to take their chances. But we need you."

The anger wore off as the shaving was completed.

Mark stepped back to inspect Blake's hands. "You'll do—Sherry can take care of it the rest of the time. Jed, I still can't trust you completely, but you've got to come through. Once we get the Bigshot, we can move on down the line. All the shields have time limits built in—that's why we never got anywhere trying to get any for our own use. In two weeks, the second group will have to recharge the trigger battery relay; only the Bigshot has the key for that. Another ten days, and the third line drops; and it goes on down to the Guards. They have to get their shields set every day. Maybe a few of the higher group will manage to get guns from lowers they can recharge themselves—but their keys change automatically every period, so it won't help much, if we move fast. It all depends on your getting the Bigshot."

"You're going to have a busy time converting them or burning their minds," Blake guessed.

"Burning! Don't be a fool, Jed. We'll kill the bas—the sons! They've got it coming to them. And don't think we're just talking. The rebels, as they call us, outnumber the rest of the world five to one!"

Blake put the gun back on the table as if it had stung him. Killing off twenty percent of the population might help the crowding, but it wasn't his idea of a solution—particularly when a lot of the higher technicians, scientists, and coordinators necessarily belonged to the elite who owned the guns that were equipped with shields.

Anyhow, even without the shields, there were enough plain guns, and the whole State corps would have to fight back—those in secret sympathy with the rebel movement would be driven to it by self-preservation. It would be a welter of blood to make the worst war in history seem anemic.

“When?” he asked, finally. “The same date?”

Mark shook his head. “I got orders today. We move on the palace night after tomorrow—as soon as we can force through the passage we found on the maps and set up equipment to rip away the wall where you shoot. And you’d better shoot straight!”

6

THOMAS BLAKE watched them assemble, while sounds from above-ground told him that operations were already in progress. They’d modeled their outward move on a slight improvement over the second revolt. It meant that a fair number of them would be killed in the crisscrossing of stunt blasts, but nobody seemed to consider that important.

It would at least keep all the local Iron Guard busy, and probably stir up their officers enough to disorganize the whole palace. There would be fighting on almost every street, and the bulk of their mob would be storming the palace itself from mined tunnels they were digging frantically. All was to be concentrated to reach its highest fury at precisely midnight.

“How do you know *he* will be there?” Blake asked.

Sherry looked at him in surprise. “He’s been boasting for years that clear conscience induces sleep, and that his puts him to bed at midnight every night. He’ll never believe we have a chance until it’s too late.”

It sounded plausible; dictators usually showed their pride in just such stupid ways. Anyhow, Blake had to confess to himself, it was exactly the thing he’d been starting

to say for the past year; he'd meant it as a joke, but such things became habits in time.

Yet he *must* know. Thomas Blake, the Bigshot, had necessarily been Thomas Blake in Jed's body forty years before. He'd heard every plan, and he should remember it.

Blake fingered the two guns he carried—one for any trouble on the street, the other for the coup they were attempting. He couldn't let these people down. The honest desperation on their faces wouldn't permit all this courage and planning to go for nothing. He couldn't kill his older self and invite such a savage massacre as only the French Reign of Terror could match.

History was becoming clearer now. Blake's fine, free colonial people had been men of courage—and men of strong hatreds. They'd slaughtered the Indians just as readily as they had marched against tyranny. And even their opposition to tyranny had been founded more on hate than on any innate love of justice. Justice, in fact, had come about as a sort of afterthought—when the men they hated had fled or were killed.

He was sweating coldly in the dank basement under the old auditorium. Some decision *had* to be made; none was possible.

The ten in the execution party moved out at last, trying to look like nonpartisans caught in the whirls of the rising rebellion, and anxiously heading homeward.

Something struck against Blake's back, and he stumbled. His hand leaped to the gun at his waist instantly, and he fired before he was sure of his target. It was a head shot, by sheer instinct; the blow that might have only stunned, knocked the man's head back sharply, until it seemed to dangle on his neck.

Surprisingly, the weapons of the others echoed his—silent in themselves, but causing loud thuds whenever the beams hit. The surprise of seeing the whole group fire into their own crowd of rebels cut short the sickness that was

rising in Blake. He turned, just as one of the black-clothed Iron Guard came up.

"Good shooting," the man said. "But take it easy. That first shot was vicious and we don't want killing. Here, bunch up. So—I think I can stretch my shield enough to give us all some protection."

Sherry looked up at him with grateful awe written large on her face. "Thank you, officer. We were going home to my aunt's from a party—and then all—this happened . . ."

The Guard nodded. "It'll get worse, from what I'm told. But right now, I guess I can escort you a ways. Where to, ma'am?"

"The subway, I guess," she answered; "we'll be safer there than on the street, anyway."

The Guard nodded, and began leading them. Some of the force from the stun blasts got through, with the shield stretched out—a trick Blake hadn't known was possible—but it helped.

Blake caught at the man's sleeve while they waited for a yelling mob to dash by. "How do you get to be a Guard?" he asked.

The man looked around in surprise. "I thought everyone knew that, citizen. We're picked when we're in school—character, intelligence, all that. Then we get twenty years' training in science, sociology, and everything else you can name. It's pretty tough, but worth it—except for these riots. There the mob has all the advantage—our shields don't protect us from stones and clubs, and we can't use lethal speed on our guns without special orders. Lot of the mob gets trampled on, too."

They were at the subway, then, and Blake started down. He jerked back at a sudden gasp, to see the Guard falling, his head a bloody pulp from a sap in Mark's hand.

The leader of the group put the sap away, smiling in grim satisfaction. "Darned—sorry, Sherry—dratted hypocrite. I don't mind the ones that go around beating us up on the sly or giving us tickets for standing on corners.

But these mealy-mouthed polite ones! Fpha! They're too good for us! Hey, Jed, what's the matter?"

Blake held back the retching of his stomach and forced a grin to his lips. "Too much Guard," he answered, and saw an approving smile cross Sherry's lips.

He avoided looking at her then as they went down the steps. He'd heard enough to know that in general the Guards were like the one Mark had killed; they'd been conditioned into believing that to serve the State was all that mattered, but they'd also been taught manners, courtesy, and at least a normal consideration of the people under them. There was no more justice in Mark's words than in his brutal action.

The train was pulling in, and Mark waved them aboard. If the riots developed properly, it might be one of the last ones to run along on its rubber-insulated monorail.

They found their mistake too late, just as the door was closing. It was a Guard train, carrying prisoners back to the palace. Apparently the Guards who had taken it over had lacked the key needed to break the automatic controls that stopped it at every station.

They were inside before the Guards at the door could stop them. Mark yelled once, and began swinging the sap. Blake skewed sideways as the train started, to pounce into the stomach of an older Guard. He kicked at a shin, jerked around the pain-doubled man, and darted for a strap. His other hand found the big clasp knife that most of the men carried, and he dragged it from his pocket. The plastic strap came loose, its heavy metal hand-hold forming a perfect close-quarters club.

This was no time to argue about the right and wrong of killing Guards. His pacifist inclinations were intellectual, and his emotions had been well conditioned in two lives: Jed had been a natural brawler, and Blake had done rather well in the usual school and high school fracasess. In a brawl of this side, the issues were simplified to the basic question of whose side you came in on.

The Guards were handicapped. They were responsible

for a group of prisoners, and their normal security was useless here, since all fighting was at close quarters, with weapons too slow to be bothered by their shields. The prisoners were naturally against them—and even handcuffed, their legs were enough to upset the Guards, while some of them were able to get to the doors and prevent men from joining the police force from other cars.

Blake swung out, protecting the rest of his party on one side while they cut their own straps. Then a pattern of general mayhem began; he felt a big fist jolt against his ear and reeled, but Jed's body was rugged. He swung a backhand that dragged the handle across the Guard's teeth with a crescendo clicking. It caught one of the prisoners on the followthrough, but the man cheerfully plunged into the pleasure of breaking the Guard's ribs with his heavy shoes.

The train slowed at another station, but nobody left; the Guards were jammed in, and the citizens were too busy. Blake's wrist was sore from the pounding when he finally switched hands. At the next station, they heaved out the unconscious Guards. Mark prepared to move back into the next car, until one of the other men caught his hand and pointed. Apparently, they'd reached their destination.

The closing doors caught Blake across the shoulders, sending him sprawling to his hands and knees. He saw that most of the party, including Sherry and Mark, were out, and then was up, dashing after them. Guards were pouring down the entrance, with a mob behind them. Mark yelled.

The group darted into the men's washroom. Sherry hesitated, but she swallowed her inculcated prudery and followed them. The door shut with a sound that indicated a lock had already been added to it. Mark knocked on a white panel, and it swung open.

"Clear sailing," he told them, breathing harshly through what remained of his teeth. One eye was swelling closed, and his lip was smashed, but he obviously didn't feel it.

"Good work, Jed; I guess I was wrong about you, at that. Well, we're under the palace!"

7

WITH THE TWO who had been waiting in the tunneled passage from the washroom, there were nine of them now. Nine men to end the tightest rule any man had held on the planet—and uncounted millions outside serving as a screen for their operations.

For a few minutes, all Blake's doubts had been settled, but they came back now.

"Two minutes, maybe," Mark announced. "Lew, you come with Jed and me. The rest stay back."

"I'm coming," Sherry stated. Her glance at Mark was defiant, and then surprised as the man merely shrugged.

Two minutes to make up his mind. Blake couldn't even get his ledgers out for a book-balancing in that length of time. He'd posted too many entries in the daybook, and the whole business needed a complete new audit. But now it boiled down to the simple question of whether he *could* kill himself—even if he decided he *should* do so.

He thought he *could*. He'd always been sure he could commit suicide for a cause he believed in, if necessary—and this was the same thing, with a forty-year lapse between pulling the trigger and dropping dead.

The passageway was crude, and they stumbled upward slowly. They were obviously inside a wall, where tamped earth had been used to fill the space left by the masonry. It was thick with age and dirt odors, and Mark's flash barely lighted their way. They crawled up now on their hands and knees. Then a bulky piece of machinery appeared ahead, facing a blank stone wall.

Lew went to it. "All tapped. If we aimed it right, this should pull out the plug left, and there'll be a hole big enough to shoot through. Better get used to the light, Jed."

Blake focussed his eyes where the flash was, while Mark brought it around until it rested on the plug that

the machine was gripping. Lew touched a button, and the machine whined faintly.

For the moment, he had decided. On one side was courage and devotion; on the other side, retreat and aloofness behind thick stone walls. When in Rome . . . well, it was as good a rule as any now. And maybe he was only doing it to convince himself he had the courage to fire at himself.

The plug popped out and sidewise, leaving a six-inch opening. Blake got a quick view of a tremendous room, at least a hundred feet long, with a bed at the far side. On the bed, stark naked and asleep lay the older man who had been in Sarnoff's laboratory—Thomas Blake the Big-shot. Tom Blake N. He should have guessed!

The gun was already up, and swinging into position. His thoughts seemed to have swiveled off into a dimension where time was infinitely variable. It wouldn't be hard now. The man had already proven his duplicity, had tried to wipe out his own younger self. Why shouldn't that younger self eliminate him?

"He's naked!" Sherry's horrified whisper sounded beside Blake's ear, just as the trigger came back.

It was a clean miss, he had jerked at the last split second.

Hell exploded inside. Gongs sounded, and Guards came pouring out of every cranny, while the old man sat up, staring quietly at the hole in the wall. His old eyes found it before the Guards did, and he pointed.

Mark let out a yell, and pushed the other three ahead of him. They went sprawling down the tunnel, just as a tremendous thwack reached their ears, what was left of Mark fell past them. Sherry was ahead, and Lew behind. Blake started to look back, but he had no need, another sound broke out, and half of Lew's head went past his ear, spattering gore.

Then they hit a curve in the tunnel. The big booming of the high-speed stasis guns went on, but they were simply

cutting holes through the palace now, unable to locate their targets.

They hit the washroom, charging through those who had waited behind. The lock was stuck, and one of the men was working on it. There was no need to report the results to anyone—Sherry's face gave that away.

She was sobbing and cursing herself in the same breath. Then she met Blake's eyes hopelessly, with the expression of Judas the day after. He started toward her, but she cut him off quickly. "We'll have to split up—they saw us together, up there. I'll be at the cellar—where they brought you back—tomorrow!"

The door finally came loose, and she darted out. He could sense the feelings in her, but there was nothing he could do. He let her go, giving her time to get away, before he sped up the steps after her. The station was almost deserted, except for a dead Guard and several badly wounded citizens.

Behind him, the sound of the stasis guns came again, indicating that guards had broken down through the tunnel and were after him. He sped up the stairs, expecting to find the street, instead, he came out into a monstrous hall, crowded at the entrance by a mass of guards defending a big gate which had dropped. Blake raced up the hall, swinging off at the first stairway. He cut down another hall, and darted into a room at random. There was a fat dowager inside, stripped to ankle-length pantaloons and camisole, but she gave no trouble; she simply fainted.

On a dressing table, he spotted a gun and picked it up. There were stasis screen controls on it, but a series of buttons along the side indicated some sort of combination lock—which explained why the citizens didn't bother to fool with them; they probably were set to explode on tampering.

He dropped it and went through the back of the suite. There windows opened on a closed court. It was a drop of no more than ten feet, and he took it. One set of windows was dark. He kicked through one of them, and banged

his head against something hanging from the ceiling. By the dim light of the red and green lights on a control panel, he suddenly recognized it as the laboratory of Sarnoff.

He knew the way out, now—and one which was probably less besieged than others, simply because men avoided something that was a chancre in their minds. But he halted suddenly, moving toward the control panel.

Blake was right—there was a scattering of tools in a drawer under it, and barely enough light to work by. He yanked out the two guns and opened them; they were familiar enough—mere simplifications of the complete models his brother had made.

Blake ripped the tiny coil out of one hastily, and fitted it into open space in the other. There was room enough. He found small screwdrivers and began working on the adjustments to the coils, hoping that the numbering around the slots was the same. Alpha 10 changed to alpha 2 to give a protective sphere instead of an offensive beam; beta 5 would regulate the speed which would be denied penetration; delta 7 should be about right for energy penetration. He checked that, setting it up to 9, until the green bulbs seemed to come down to the red, and back to 7. Apparently, there had been no basic change in the little coils, and offensive and protective coils were still the same, except for setting. He found contacts within the gun for the second coil, indicating that both models were made from the same basic parts. He had to leave the defensive coil on, since he could find no way of installing a switch.

If his settings were right, he was now safe from bombs and bullets, though a club or a knife would kill him as easily as before. But the main problem was the offensive beams from other guns, and there a rough setting would cancel it out.

He shoved the gun that was now complete into its holster and headed toward the entrance.

From the side, a quiet voice reached him. "Nice work, Thomas Blake!"

The lights snapped on to show Sarnoff standing expressionlessly beside the main door.

8

SARNOFF NODDED toward the gun that had snapped out in Blake's hand. "It probably works now, just as you expect. But it wasn't that which gave you away. You might as well put it away, anyhow; naturally, I'm shielded."

Blake had already realized that, from the gun on the other's hip. He dropped his own back, trying to estimate his chances to reach the other before the man could get out the door. It seemed impossible.

Sarnoff nodded again. "You're right; you couldn't make it. I've been ready for you since you tripped the alarms getting in here. I could have shot you while you were working on the gun, you see. But naturally, I didn't."

"Naturally."

"Certainly; why else do you think I faked the last half of the mind burning? I'm all in favor of your living. I'd hate to try to figure out any system of logic that would permit you to be killed without ruining most of the life I've led these last years. Anyhow, I always back the winner."

Blake let it sink in, and began breathing again. "You mean you're on the side of the rebels?"

"Hardly." A trace of a smile flickered over the other's face and vanished again. "I'm on the side of whichever one wins, though that's rather obvious, if you'll use your head. I fish you out of the past for your distinguished senior self—and I make sure that you go into the head of a man the rebel spy Mark wanted saved; he can't prove I'm on his side, but he suspects so—particularly after I showed him the rough diagram of the restorer a year ago and never noticed the parts he stole."

"Mark's dead," Blake told him.

"I know—he was a fanatic, so of course he's dead. But he wasn't the leader of the group anyhow! I have my con-

nections, still. I'll come out on top—as a realist always will, unless he's a deliberate villain which I'm not.”

“All right,” Blake conceded wearily. He had no time to talk of idealism and realism now, when his first job was to escape long enough to locate Sherry. “So what happens next?”

Sarnoff shrugged. “So you go out the door, I suppose, and into the arms of the Guards who *are* there—or down this little private stair to the subway station, where you'll never be noticed by now. And I report to your rebel leaders—whom you don't know—that you are the original Blake, complete with all plans for the James Blake statidyne gun.”

Blake turned toward the little private door, and was almost surprised to find that there was a stairway there. Probably most of the so-called “public” sections of the palace had such exits.

Sarnoff's voice halted him. “Not a louse, Blake,” he said quietly. “Just an opportunist, like every successful animal up the long road of evolution. And paradoxical as you may think it, I privately wish you the best of luck. I've thoroughly liked your senior self, and I would probably like you. Take care of yourself.”

The laboratory was suddenly dark. Blake stumbled down the stairs, to find that the riots were nearly over, and the subways were running smoothly again. Guards were patrolling the platform, but the monotrains were already in. For the third time, Blake barely made it before the door could close.

He grinned bitterly at Sarnoff's words that were still ringing in his ears. It wasn't hard to tell who'd lose, at least; Blake had forty-three cents to his name, and knew nothing about the city. The State wanted him as an attempted assassin. Now, with Sarnoff's spreading the good word, the rebels would be looking for him as a traitor to them, and the very man they most wanted to eliminate from all history. It wouldn't do to argue immutable time with them, either.

He was safe from bombs, bullets, and guns—but there was always the knife. And when she found the facts, even Sherry might be happy to use it.

He should never have been stampeded into mob action—his reason for killing the Bigshot because of the first meeting was no more valid than the Bigshot's reason for trying to destroy him in self-defense. And now that he cooled down, he could never take the secret of the guns to the rebels. There had been blood enough shed, without putting them in a position to exterminate all the other side.

He never knew exactly how he managed to get through the night. Time after time, he saw Guards or rebels patrolling, and he suspected most of them were looking for him. Probably the complete dejection and the slowness of his walk saved him, they must have been looking for a man who was skulking up dark alleys, or running from them.

He found the house where he had first come to in the cellar by sheer hunt and try search, though he knew the general location. It was locked, of course, and he realized suddenly that he did not know the secret for opening it.

But he was tired of running, and a cellar door in the shack across the street was open. He crossed to it, and went inside, leaving the door open a crack.

Daylight crept through the opening, and reached the full brightness of noon. There was no sign of Sherry. Above him, he could hear a family stirring over their noon lunch, discussing the riots. Apparently they had been involved only indirectly, but there was enough misery in their guesses as to how many of their friends would be picked up and mindburned.

At four in the afternoon, Guards came and broke in the house where the place of meeting was. They scoured it thoroughly, then posted it.

Blake knew that Sherry hadn't told on him—she should have, if she'd heard the truth about him, but he was sure somehow that she would never turn him over to the

Guards. He also knew then that she'd never keep the rendezvous.

He buckled his gun on more firmly, knocked the dust off his knees where he had been kneeling, and stood up. The cellar door creaked as he went through it, but the Guards did not look up from their duty. Blake crossed the street and went up to them.

"If you're looking for a lady, she won't be here," he said, and only the deadness of his voice registered in his own ears.

The younger Guard growled impatiently. "Scram. We know what we're doing!"

"Dan!" The senior Guard glowered at the other. "That's enough of that. Citizen, the State apologizes; but I'm afraid your information is already in the papers, so we do know about it."

Blake nodded, and shuffled off down the dingy street. He found a newsstand and put down a coin for one of the papers he had managed forty years in the past. It was thinner, due to the paper scarcity, but the lack was mostly in the advertising. He had no trouble finding the story.

Sherry was dead!

She'd been found by the Guards early in the morning with a printed label claiming she had betrayed the cause by ruining the shot. It was clearly murder.

He might have guessed. The hatred that had flowered so long had to take root somewhere, and she had been as good a scapegoat as any other, Blake supposed. He dropped the paper into a can without bothering to read further. He'd seen that she was being kept at the palace morgue for the claiming of her body.

They'd dragged him into this crazy future to keep him from killing himself, by a tortuous logic of their own. Then they'd tossed him to the other side, to force him to kill himself. Now, the only good thing he'd found was killed, and nothing else had been accomplished. No paradox had been solved; but if the Bigshot remembered when

he had been dragged here, he could have saved Sherry, at least.

Blake saw another of the Guards on the corner, and approached him quietly. "Where can I find the subway to the palace?"

"To your left three blocks," the Guard answered absently. Then he looked up, reached for his gun, and moved forward. "Your identification papers, citizen!"

"No matter," Blake told him. "I'm the assassin!"

9

BLAKE SWUNG on his heel and headed toward the subway. He didn't bother to look back at the faint sound of the gun being drawn. Either his shield worked, and he would have no way of knowing whether the man fired, or he'd find out soon enough. Nothing happened.

Then the Guard was running up to him, white of face, with the gun shaking in his hands. The man stuttered as he grabbed for Blake's arm. "You're under arrest!"

"All right," Blake agreed. "I'm it; now you go hide."

He walked on steadily, while the Guard pawed at his arm and then desisted. Physically, he was more than a match for most of the Guards, and their superior weapons had lost all superiority. Blake could have watched the whole civilization shatter and have cared as little as he did for the shock on the other's face.

He found the subway entrance while the Guard was tardily blowing his whistle. He was beginning to think the trains ran every fifteen seconds, since one was again waiting. He climbed on, with the puffing Guard at his heels. "You'll get used to it, whatever your name is," he told the other.

"Colton," the black-clad man told him unhappily. "And why couldn't you have picked someone else? I broke a toe and got a brick over my head last night. Today—you!"

"Tough. I guess you'll just have to string along until we find some of your buddies to subdue me, Colton."

Colton nodded glumly, and they sat in silence while the quiet train moved along. Blake was emotionally numbed, and the problems that had bothered him were operating only on a semiconscious level.

No man, he supposed, could really accept predestination. The idea was something that could be agreed to on an intellectual level, but inside a man had to feel that he decided things for himself. Actually, there were no paradoxes; everything was decided, and things didn't happen because of either his actions or those of his older self—they happened only because that was the way they happened. The Bigshot was no more responsible than he was.

It wasn't hard, when you considered things carefully, to see why he'd tried to eliminate his younger self and put himself out of danger. Intellectually, he might realize nothing he did could alter the fabric of the events that must happen, but emotionally he couldn't stand by—and his logic was as much shaped by emotions as by facts.

And even explaining why he did things was a refusal to accept predestination, Blake knew. Looking for the reason behind his own or any other man's actions meant an attempt to see why something happened or didn't happen—and there was no real "why" in a universe on a fixed time track.

He got up at the palace stop and went out with Colton at his heels. The Guard again reached for his whistle, but stopped when he saw Blake head for the door leading to the stairs that went up to Sarnoff's laboratory. The door was locked, of course, but a blast from the gun opened it.

Sarnoff was opening the upper door as Blake came to it, and he motioned the two men inside. "I heard you break the other," he explained. "I've been expecting you. Guard there's nothing you can do—your prisoner's as untouchable as I am."

Colton shrugged, but stayed.

"Where's Sherry's body?" Blake asked woodenly.

Sarnoff moved toward the end of the room, where a couch had been brought in. He lifted the sheet silently. "She's in good hands, Tom," he said softly. "She was my daughter, though you wouldn't know that. And she hated me, long before she ran away to join your group. I used to wonder, once in a while, what happened to her. Now—I know."

Blake looked down at the still figure. Sherry still bore the look he had last seen, though her eyes were closed. Her clothing was in place, he noticed, with even her toes concealed. He was glad of that.

"She must have hated me," he said, at last.

Sarnoff shook his head. "No—she never knew; she was dead before I passed the word about you."

His expressionless face studied her body, and then he drew the sheet up.

Blake sighed softly, and turned toward the entrance to the main palace, with Colton still at his heels. Sarnoff shook his head slightly, and moved toward another door, waiting for them until Blake shrugged and climbed into the little elevator. Then Sarnoff pressed the top button, and they moved upward.

There was neither austerity nor overlavishness to the private part of the palace. Blake took it for granted; he'd been brought up to have good taste, and becoming a dictator hadn't changed that.

There were a few men in the outer office, but they left at Sarnoff's motion, retreating into a second room beyond. Here and there along the walls were niches where Guards might be stationed, but Blake could see no sign of them—they were at least well hidden.

Sarnoff picked up a phone from a desk and pressed a button. "Tell his Excellency I have the assassin," he said. Then, after a moment, he turned back to Blake. "We'll have to wait. He's taking a bath—or calling his top Guards. He's grown nervous, these last few days."

Blake dropped to the seat behind the desk. He picked up a volume there, saw that it was a leather-bound biog-

raphy of himself, and started to put it down. Then he opened it and began scanning it.

There'd been war, after all. He'd had to wait two terms as Governor to become President, and then it was only a few weeks before the hydrogen bombs fell—too little time to prepare. He'd saved most of the cities with his large shields, but the terrible days had made an absolute dictatorship necessary; and through that, it hadn't been too hard to conquer the whole world, given both large supplies of bombs and a base immune to the bombs of others. Blake skimmed on, surprised to see how often Sarnoff's name cropped up. The man was obviously far more than a mere scientist.

And there was another name that meant nothing. Ainslee seemed to be almost as important as the dictator, though the people never had mentioned him.

Blake put the book back, just as the phone buzzed and a group of Guards in spotless white uniforms came out. Sarnoff motioned them aside, and they fell into step behind as Blake headed toward the door. Colton started forward, and then shrugged helplessly. He turned back slowly, probably to return to his beat.

This was it, Blake told himself. This was the point toward which the whole silly business had been driving. It seemed almost anticlimactic.

The Bigshot sat at a small desk, surrounded by his Guards. He was probably shielded, but he seemed to have less faith in the shield than it deserved. His voice was nervous as he rearranged the papers before him, and some of the power seemed to have drained from his face. But he gathered himself together.

"You are charged with an attempt to assassinate your rightful ruler," he began.

Blake cut him off. "I'm here by my own will—as much as either one of us can have a will. And I'm shielded; I combined two of your citizen guns into the weapon James invented—the weapons on the papers in the secret drawer of my desk."

The older man sat stiffly for a long minute. Then he put down the papers he held. "So all my efforts go for nothing? Your brain wasn't exterminated. But there are still enough men here to overcome you physically, even if you are shielded."

"It won't work," Blake told him. "It's all happened before, from your viewpoint; and I suggest that you dismiss the Guards."

The Bigshot nodded. "Guards dismissed," he said slowly. They stared at him, but slowly withdrew, leaving only the two men who were both Thomas Blake and Sarnoff behind.

Theoretically, there was no way to end what was now a perfect stalemate—except that the Bigshot could always call back his Guards to batter Blake down with their fists; there was no way in which he could win.

But he had resolved all that before, and knew the answer. He knew that in this case, his decision to accept the facts would inevitably create those facts—so far as even the decision was his free will. Predestination seemed to be working, and that would make the decision something he had no control over, too.

"You lost," Blake told the Bigshot. "Every step shows that. If you hadn't lost—if your younger self, when you stood in my position, here—hadn't remembered that you lost, you wouldn't have gone to the trouble of getting my mind drawn here to attempt to exterminate me. I should have seen it sooner, but that doesn't matter; you have to lose."

"If I hadn't taken on Ainslee . . ." the Bigshot began, but his face was drawn now.

"There aren't any 'ifs,'" Blake told him remorselessly. "You lost. You're fighting with no hope at all. You can try anything you want to, but the end is already written; you lost."

He had no idea of what would happen, and yet he knew it was inevitable. Then, slowly, the answer came. He should have seen it from the beginning. No man can ac-

cept predestination within himself—yet the Bigshot knew now that there was no answer save predestination. He had to solve a completely impossible problem, and no mind could stand that.

"You lost." Blake repeated it, emotionlessly; "You lost."

And slowly, the Bigshot crumpled. He dropped his hands on his knees, and then brought his head down against them, sobbing softly.

Sarnoff stepped in quickly. "Stop it, Tom. Stop it. You don't have to solve anything now. It's all over; you don't have to solve anything."

The Bigshot looked up then, with tears streaming from his eyes, staring forlornly at the two men. "I'm lost," he said miserably. "I don't like this place. I don't like you. I want my mama!"

Blake turned to the window, while Sarnoff led the Bigshot out of the room. There, forty years from now, was the end of his own plans—the reward for all his hopes and struggles.

10

SARNOFF FOUND Blake finally, down in the laboratory, lying on the cot where his mind had first come into the future.

"The council of the head Guards and the rebel leaders want you, Tom," he said quietly. "They've already published the plans for turning two of the citizen guns into a single complete one, in case your curiosity is still working."

Blake nodded. He'd asked for that—the only thing he could do for this tangled future; his decision was the only one he could make. Human nature couldn't be changed, and compulsory improvement was something which might not be good. But no society could be healthy where one group enjoyed a terrible power that the other group could not have.

There were guns enough for all to make the conversion

—and that way, the fanatics would find the rest of the world shielded by the time they got their own shields made and were ready to go out killing or converting others. It was a problem that had always plagued him somewhat, since a total weapon in the hands of a crackpot could wreak incalculable damage if there were others without such a shield.

His only function, after all, had been to make sure that his original plan went through—that all men had such guns. It had been his basic motivation for going into politics, but it had only succeeded when he'd driven himself completely out of such politics.

"I suppose you'll be the next dictator," he told Sarnoff bitterly.

"Pro-tem president," the man answered. "But only pro-tem; I prefer to have Ainslee take over, if anyone has to. There's no real advantage to absolute power, and I'm still an opportunist. I'm in solid—but behind the scenes, where I'd rather be. I suspect we're in for a period of democracy, anyhow."

They'd have to be, if Silas McKinley had been right—and for a long, long spell of it—at least until something greater than the stasis gun and shield could come along.

"Then send my mind back," Blake decided. "They can get along without me."

Sarnoff began moving the machines along their tracks. And the sight of the action suddenly focussed Blake's thoughts on what the return would be like—and the paradoxes his own inability to accept predestination involved.

He couldn't be such a fool as the Bigshot had been; with all he remembered, he *couldn't*.

"This body will be left a complete idiot, of course," Sarnoff said. "But your mind should snap back to your own body—and if I'm right, it will be only a few minutes in your time after you left. There's no real time barrier for the mind—and no reason to expect the time spent

here to be equalled by elapsed time in a trance back there. Maybe you can help by focussing your thoughts on when you want to return; I don't know."

Blake had wondered about that. He tried to think of his body just after his mind had left it, while Sarnoff adjusted the mind-burner. Then, without preamble or wasted farewells, the scientist depressed the switch.

For a moment, it was horrible, as it had been before. Then the full power seemed to snap his thoughts out into a roaring nothingness. Something pulled at him. Unlike the force trip into the future, the move back was almost instantaneous.

Thomas Blake found his arm halfway to the light switch. He dropped it, and looked at the clock; but the faint sounds of the party still going on downstairs convinced him. He was back in his own world—and almost no time had elapsed there.

Sarnoff, Sherry, assassination . . .

He could feel it slipping from him. There was no machine here to intensify his thoughts, and to force them onto his brain cells and channel them into his permanent memory, as had been done by Sarnoff when his mind first touched the brain of Jed.

And the brain cells could not absorb what had happened during long days, now in these first few seconds of awakening. But now, whatever his mind matrix was, it was slipping back into relation with those cells. It was like a dream that seems to be completely intense and to span hours, but which slips out of the mind almost as soon as that mind awakens.

Blake jumped for the wire recorder, and began spouting the bits he still remembered into it, before they could go. But he found curiously little to dictate; he'd been in the future where he'd tried to kill himself. There'd been a girl named Sherry. And he'd had hairy hands—aside from that, he had no idea of what he'd looked like. He'd never seen a reflection of his face.

He dredged up other bits, but most of it was gone,

except for the general realization that it had not been a dream. But what he had dictated was still more than he could have remembered—it was already more than he had known as his older self.

Then he glanced down to see that the recorder was still turning—but without effect. He'd forgotten to replace the spool of wire!

Gideon Pierce came into the office of Governor Blake, shaking his head. "You were right, Tom. They had a deal cooked up, just as you thought; I must be getting old."

Blake grinned at him, but he secretly agreed. Pierce should have spotted the opposition move. In time, you could get used to such business, and learn to expect the moves before they came. He'd have to watch Pierce from now on; the man had been loyal enough, but still . . .

Well, Blake thought, I'm not naive any more. Idealism is a good thing, the only important thing. But a man has to be a realist, too. Like that business of the gun James had invented. It had to be given to the people, of course—but they had to be protected from the crackpot who might seize on it first. It was a problem and one that could only be faced realistically.

"Forget it, Gideon," he said; "we all slip sometimes. Go back down there and keep them whipped into line. We've got to put that across, if I'm to get the nomination for President this time."

He watched Pierce leave, and consulted his calendar. There was only an appointment with the mathematician—a brilliant man, even if a bit too starry-eyed. Still, if his theory of cause and effect could be proved, it should make a difference. It began to look as if all the predestination he'd been worrying about was as much nonsense as the argument about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin.

But that appointment could be postponed. He flipped through his book, until he came to another name. Then he reached for his intercom.

"Call up Professor Houton, Miss Brightly, and ask him if he can change that appointment to next week at the same time," he instructed. "Then get hold of Ainslee—you have his number—and tell him it's urgent I see him this afternoon. As soon as he can make it."

Ainslee should be a good man to replace Pierce. A little cold-blooded, perhaps but he got things done....

TESTAMENT OF ANDROS

by James Blish

*Beside the dying fire lie the ashes.
There are voices in them. Listen:*

1

MY NAME is Theodor Andresson. I will write my story if you wish. I was at one time Resident in Astrophysics at Krajputnii, which I may safely describe as the greatest center of learning in the Middle East, perhaps of the entire Eastern Hemisphere. Later—until the chain of incidents which brought me to this *Zucht-Haus*—I was professor emeritus in radio-astronomy at Calimyrna University, where I did the work leading to the discovery of the solar pulsation cycle.

I am sure that this work is not credited to me; that is of no importance. I would like it clearly understood that I am not making this record for your benefit, but for mine. Your request means nothing to me, and your pretense of interest in what I may write cannot deceive me. My erstwhile colleagues in the so-called sciences were masters of this kind of pretense; but they, too, were unable to prevent me from penetrating the masquerade at the end. How then does a simple doctor hope to succeed where the finest charlatanry has failed?

And what is allocation of credit—of what importance is priority of discovery before the inexorability of the pul-

sation cycle? It will work to its new conclusion without regard for your beliefs, my colleagues', or mine. Neither the pretended solicitude nor the real metal bars with which you have surrounded me will matter after that.

I proceed, therefore, to the matter at hand. My position at Calimyrna in that remote time before the cycle was discovered, befit my age (eighty-four years) and the reputation I had achieved in my specialty. I was in excellent health, though subject occasionally to depressions of spirit, readily ascribable to my being in a still-strange land and to those scars inflicted upon me in earlier times.

Despite these fits of moodiness, I had every reason to be happy. My eminence in my field afforded me the utmost satisfaction; despite poverty and persecution in youth, I had won to security. I had married Marguerita L—, in her youth and mine the toast of twelve continents, not only for her beauty but for her voice. I can still hear now the sound of her singing as I heard it for the first time—singing, on the stage of La Scala in Moscow, the rapturous quartet from the second act of Wagner's *Tristan et Messalina*.

It is quite true—I admit it immediately and calmly—that there were certain flaws in my world, even at Calimyrna. I do not mean the distractions which in old age replace, in the ordinary man, the furies of youth, but rather certain faults and fissures which I found in the world outside myself.

Even a man of my attainments expects at some time to grow old, and to find that process changing the way in which he looks at the world around him. There comes a time, however, when even the most rational of men must notice when these changes exceed the bounds of reason—when they begin to become extraordinary, even sinister. Shall I be specific? Consider, then—quite calmly—the fact that Marguerita did not herself grow old.

I passed into my eighth decade without taking more than perfunctory notice. I was deeply involved in the solar work we were then carrying on at Calimyrna. I had

with me a young graduate student, a brilliant fellow of about thirty, who assisted me and who made certain original contributions of his own to the study. His name, and you will recognize it, was Mario di Ferruci. Calimyrna had completed its thousand-inch radio-telescope, the largest such antenna anywhere in the world—except for the 250-foot Manchester instrument. This was at once put to work in the search for so-called radio stars—those invisible bodies, many of them doubtless nearer to Earth than the nearest visible star, which can be detected only by their emission in the radio spectrum.

Completion of the thousand-inch freed the 600-inch paraboloid antenna for my use in solar work. The smaller instrument had insufficient beam-width between half-power points for the critical stellar studies, but it was more suitable for my purpose.

I had in mind at that time a study of the disturbed sun. Hagen of the Naval Research Laboratory had already done the definite study on the sun in its quiet state. I found myself more drawn to what goes on in the inferno of the sunspots—in the enormous, puzzling catastrophes of the solar flares—the ejection of immense radioactive clouds from the sun's interior high into its atmosphere.

It had already become clear that the radio-frequency emission from the disturbed sun was not, and could not be, thermal in origin, as in the RF emission of the quiet sun. The equivalent temperature of the disturbed sun in selected regions at times rises to billions of degrees, rendering the whole concept of thermal equivalency meaningless.

That the problem was not merely academic impressed me from the first. I have, if you will allow me the term, always had a sense of destiny, of *Schicksal*, an almost Spenglerian awareness of the pressure of fate against the retaining walls of human survival. It is not unique in me; I lay it to my Teutonic ancestry. And when I first en-

countered the problem of the disturbed sun, something within me felt that I had found destiny itself.

For here, just *here* was the problem in which destiny was interested, in which some fateful answer awaited the asking of the omnipotent question. I felt this from the moment when I had first opened Hagen's famous paper—NRL Report 3504—and the more deeply I became interested in the sun as an RF radiator, the more the sensation grew.

Yet how to describe it? I was eighty-four, and this was early in 1976; in all those preceding years I had not known that the mortal frame could sustain such an emotion. Shall I call it a sensation of enormous unresolvable dread? But I felt at the same time an ecstasy beyond joy, beyond love, beyond belief; and these transports of rapture and terror did not alternate as do the moods of an insane man, but occurred simultaneously—they were one and the same emotion.

Nor did the solar flares prove themselves unworthy of such deep responses. Flares have been observed in many stars. Some of them have been major outbursts, as indeed they would have to be to be visible to us at all. That such a flare could never occur on our own sun, furthermore, could not be said with certainty, for flares are local phenomena—they expend their energy only on one side of a star, not in all directions like a nova—and we had already seen the great detonation of July 29, 1948 on our own sun, which reached an energy level one hundred times the output of the quiet sun, which showed that we did not dare to set limits to what our own sun might yet do.

It was here, however, that I ran into trouble with young di Ferruci. He persistently and stubbornly refused to accept the analogy.

"It's penny-dreadful," he would say, as he had said dozens of times before. "You remind me of Dr. Richardson's stories—you know, the ones he writes for those magazines, about the sun going nova and all that. When-

ever it's cloudy at Palomar he dreams up a new catastrophe."

"Richardson is no fool," I would point out. "Other suns have exploded. If he wants to postulate that it could happen to ours, he has every right to do so."

"Sure, Dr. Andresson, in a story," di Ferruci would object. "But as a serious proposition it doesn't hold water. Our sun just isn't the spectral type that goes nova; it hasn't even even approached the critical instability percentage. It can't even produce a good flare of the Beta Centauri type."

"I don't expect it to go nova. But it's quite capable of producing a major flare, in my opinion. I expect to prove it."

Di Ferruci would shrug, as he always did. "I wouldn't ride any money on you, Dr. Andresson. But I'll be more than interested in what the telescope shows—let's see what we have here right now. The thermocouple's been calibrated; shall I cut in the hot load?"

At this point—I am now reporting a particular incident, although it, too, was frequently typical of these conversations—I became aware that Marguerita was in the observatory. I swung sharply around, considerably annoyed. My wife is innocent of astronomical knowledge, and her usually ill-timed obtrusions upon our routine—although I suppose they were of the desire to "take an interest" in her husband's profession—were distracting.

Today, however, I was not only annoyed, but stunned. How had I failed to notice this before—I, who pride myself on the acuity of my observation? What stood before me was a young woman!

How shall I say how young? These things are relative. We had married when she was thirty-six and I was forty-four; a difference of eight years is virtually no difference during the middle decades, though it is enormous when both parties are young. Marguerita had been in no sense a child at the time of our marriage.

Yet now, as I was finding, a spread as small as eight

years can again become enormous when the dividing-line of old age insensibly approaches. And the difference was even greater than this—for now Marguerita, as she stood looking down at our day's three-dimensional graph of solar activity, seemed no older to me than the day on which I had first met her: a woman, tall, graceful, lithe, platinum-haired, and with the somber, smoldering, unreadable face of Eve—and yet compared to me now a child in truth.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Andresson," di Ferruci said, smiling.

She looked up and smiled back. "Good afternoon," she said. "I see you're about to take another series of readings. Don't let me interrupt you."

"That's quite all right; thus far it's routine," di Ferruci said. I glanced sidewise at him and then back to my wife. "We'd just begun to take readings to break up the monotony of the old argument."

"That's true," I said. "But it would be just as well if you didn't drop in on us unexpectedly, Marguerita. If this had been a critical stage—"

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I should have phoned, but I'm always afraid that the telephone will interrupt you, too. When I'm here I can hope to see whether or not you're busy—and you can see who's calling. The telephone has no eyes."

She touched the graph, delicately. This graph, I should explain, is made of fourteen curves cut out in cardboard, and assembled so that one set of seven curved pieces is at right angles to the other set. It expresses the variation in intensity of RF emanation across the surface of the sun at the ten-centimeter wavelength, where our readings commonly are taken; we make a new such model each day. It shows at a glance, by valley or peak, any deviation from the sun's normal output, thus helping us greatly in interpreting our results.

"How strange it looks today," she said. "It's always in

motion, like a comber racing toward the shore. I keep expecting it to begin to break at the top."

Di Ferruci stopped tinkering with the drive clock and sat down before the control desk, his blue-black helmet of hair—only a little peppered by his memories of the Inchon landing—swiveling sharply toward her. I could not see his face. "What an eerie notion," he said. "Mrs. Andresson, you and the doctor'll have me sharing your presentiments of doom any minute now."

"It isn't a question of presentiments," I said sharply. "You should be aware by now, Mario, that in the RF range the sun is a variable star. Does that mean nothing to you? Let me ask you another question: How do you explain Eta Carina?"

"What's Eta Carina?" Marguerita said.

I did not know quite how to begin answering her, but di Ferruci, who lacked my intimate knowledge of her limitations, had no such qualms.

"It's a freak—one of the worst freaks of the past ten years," he said eagerly. "It's a star that's gone nova three times. The last time was in 1972, about a hundred years after the previous explosion. Before that it had an outburst in the 1600s, and it may have blown up about 142 A. D., too. Each time it gains in brightness nearly one hundred thousand times—as violent a stellar catastrophe as you can find anywhere in the records." He offered the data to her like a bouquet, and before I could begin to take offense, swung back upon me again. "Surely, Doc, you don't maintain that Eta Carina is a flare star?"

"All stars are flare stars," I said, looking steadily at him. His eyes were in shadow. "More than that; all stars are novae, in the long run. Young stars like our sun are variable only in the radio spectrum, but gradually they become more and more unstable, and begin to produce small flares. Then come the big flares, like Beta Centauri outburst; then they go nova; and then the cycle begins again."

"Evidence?"

"Everywhere. The process goes on in little in the short-term variables, the Cepheids. Eta Carina shows how it works in a smaller, noncluster star. The other novae we've observed simply have longer periods—they haven't had time to go nova again within record history. *But they will.*"

"Well," di Ferruci said. "If that's so, Richardson's visions of our sun exploding seems almost pleasant. You see us being roasted gradually instead, in a series of hotter and hotter flares. When does the first one hit us, by your figures?"

Mario was watching me steadily. Perhaps I looked strange, for I was once again in the grip of that emotion, so impossible to describe, in which terror and ecstasy blended and fused into some whole beyond any possibility of communication. As I had stated for the first time what I saw, and saw so clearly, was ahead for us all, this deep radical emotion began to shake me as if I had stepped all unawares from the comfortable island of relative, weighable facts into some blastingly cold ocean of Absolute Truth.

"I don't know," I said. "It needs checking. But I give us six months."

Marguerita's and di Ferruci's eyes met. Then he said, "Let's check it, then. We should be able to find the instability threshold for each stage, from RR Lyrae stars right through classical Cepheids, long-periods, and irregulars to radio-variables. We already know the figure for novae. Let's dot the i's and cross the t's—and then find out where our sun stands."

"Theodor," Marguerita said. "What—what will happen if you're right?"

"Then the next flare will be immensely greater than the 1948 one. The Earth will survive it; life on Earth probably will not—certainly not human life."

Marguerita remained standing beside the model a moment longer, nursing the hand which had been touch-

ing it. Then she looked at me out of eyes too young for me to read, and left the observatory.

With a hasty word to di Ferruci, I followed her, berating myself as I went. Suspecting as I did the shortness of the span left to us, I had not planned to utter a word about was to be in store for us in her presence; that had been one of the reasons why I had objected to her visits to the observatory. There had simply been no reason to cloud our last months together with the shadow of a fate she could not understand.

But when I reached the top of the granite steps leading down to the road, she was gone—nor could I see either her figure or any sign of a car on the road which led down the mountain. She had vanished as completely as if she had never existed.

Needless to say, I was disturbed. There are cabins in the woods, only a short distance away from the observatory proper, which are used by staff members as temporary residences; we had never made use of them—radio-astronomy being an art which can be carried on by day better than by night—but nevertheless I checked them systematically. It was inconceivable to me that she could be in the main observatory, but I searched that too, as well as the solar tower and the Schmidt shed.

She was nowhere. By the time I had finished searching, it was sunset and there was no longer any use in my returning to my own instrument. I could only conclude that I had miscalculated the time lag between her exit and my pursuit, and that I would find her at home.

Yet, somehow I did not go home. All during my search of the grounds, another thought had been in my head: What if I were wrong? Suppose that there were no solar pulsation cycle? Suppose that my figures were meaningless? If this seems to you to be a strange thing for a man to be thinking, while searching for an inexplicably vanished wife, I can only say that the two subjects seemed to me to be somehow not unconnected.

And as it turned out, I was right. I have said that I have a sense of fate.

In the end, I went back to the observatory, now dark and, I supposed, deserted. But there was a light glowing softly inside; the evenly lit surface of the transparency viewer. Bent over it, his features floating eerily in nothingness, was Mario di Ferruci.

I groped for the switch, found it, and the fluorescents flashed on overhead. Mario straightened, blinking.

"Mario, what are you doing here? I thought you had left before sundown."

"I meant to," di Ferruci said slowly. "But I couldn't stop thinking about your theory. It isn't every day that one hears the end of the world announced by a man of your eminence. I decided I just had to run my own check, or else go nuts wondering."

"Why couldn't you have waited for me?" I said. "We could have done the work together much quicker and more easily."

"That's true," he said slowly. "But, Dr. Andresson, I'm just a graduate student, and you're a famous man; young as you are. I'm a little afraid of being overwhelmed—of missing an error because you've checked it already, or failing to check some point at all—that kind of thing. After all, we're all going to die if you're right, and that's hardly a minor matter; so I thought I'd try paddling my own canoe. Maybe I'll find the world just as far up the creek as you do. But I had to try."

It took me a while to digest this, distracted as I already was. After a while I said, as calmly as I could, "And what have you found?"

"Dr. Andresson—you're wrong."

For an instant I could not see. All the red raw exploding universe of unstable stars went wheeling through my old head like maddened atoms. But I am a scientist; I conquered it.

"Wherein am I wrong?"

Di Ferruci took a deep breath. His face was white

and set under the fluorescents. "Dr. Andresson, forgive me; this is a hard thing for me to say. But the error in your calcs is way the hell back in the beginning, in your thermodynamic assumptions. It lies in the step between the Chapman-Cowling expression, and your derivation for the coefficient of mutual diffusion. Your derivation is perfectly sound in classical thermodynamics, but that isn't what we have to deal with here; we're dealing instead with a completely ionized binary gas, where your quantity D12 becomes nothing more than a first approximation."

"I never called it anything else."

"Maybe not," di Ferruci said doggedly. "But your math handles it as an absolute. By the time your expanded equation 58 is reached, you've lost a complete set of subscripts and your expressions for the electron of charge wind up all as odd powers! I'm not impugning your logic—it's fantastically brilliant—but insofar as it derives from the bracketed expression D12 it doesn't represent a real situation."

He stared at me, half-defiantly, half in a kind of anxiety the source of which I could not fathom. It had been many years since I had been young; now I was gravid with death—his, mine, yours, Marguerita's, everyone's. I said only: "Let's check it again."

But we never had the chance; at that moment the door opened soundlessly, and Marguerita came back.

"Theodor, Mario!" she said breathlessly. "Are you trying to work yourselves to death? Let's all live to our appointed times, whenever they come! Theodor, I was so frightened when you didn't come home—why didn't you call—"

"I'm not sure anyone would have answered," I said grimly. "Or if someone had, I would have suspected her of being an imposter—or a teleport."

She turned her strange look upon me. "I—don't understand you."

"I hope you don't, Marguerita. We'll take that matter

up in private. Right now we're making a check. Dr. di Ferruci was about to knock the solar pulsation theory to flinders when you entered."

"Doc!" di Ferruci protested. "That wasn't the point at all. I just wanted to find—"

"Don't call me 'Doc'!"

"Very well," di Ferruci said. His face became whiter still. "But I insist on finishing my sentence. I'm not out to kick apart your theory; I think it's a brilliant theory and that it may still very well be right. There are holes in your math, that's all. They're big holes and they need filling; maybe, between us, we could fill them. But if you don't care enough to want to do the job, why should I?"

"Why, indeed?"

He stared at me with fury for a moment. Then he put his hand distractedly to his forehead, stood up slowly, and began to pace. "Look, Doc—Dr. Andresson. Believe me, I'm not hostile to the idea. It scares me, but that's only because I'm human. There's still a good chance that it's basically sound. If we could go to work on it now, really intensively, we might be able to have it in shape for the triple-A-S meeting in Chicago two months from now. It'd set every physicist, every astronomer, every scientist of any stripe by the ears!"

And there was the clue for which, all unconsciously, I had been waiting. "Indeed it would," I said. "And for four months, old Dr. Andresson and young Dr. Ferruci would be famous—as perhaps no scientists had ever been famous before. Old Dr. Andresson has had his measure of fame and has lost his faith in it—but for young Dr. Ferruci, even four months would be a deep draught. For that he is willing to impugn his senior's work, to force endless conferences, to call everything into question—all to get his own name added to the credits on the final paper."

"Theodor," Marguerita said, "Theodor, this isn't like you. If—"

"And there is even a touch of humor in this little

playlet," I said. "The old man would have credited young Dr. Ferruci in the final paper in any case. The whole maneuver was for nothing."

"There was no maneuver," di Ferruci ground out, his fist clenched. His nervous movements of his hand across his forehead had turned his blue-black hair into a mare's nest. "I'm not an idiot. I know that if you're right, the whole world will be in ashes before the year is out—including any research papers which might carry my name, and any human eyes which might see them."

"What I want to do is to pin down this concept to the point where it's unassailable. The world will demand nothing less of it than that. *Then* it can be presented to the AAAS—and the world will have four months during which the best scientific brains on Earth can look for an out, a way to save at least a part of the race, even if only two people. What's fame to me, or anyone else, if this theory is right? Gas, just gas. But if we can make the world believe it, utterly and completely, then the world will find a loophole. Nothing less than the combined brains of the whole of science could do the job—and we won't get those brains to work unless we convince them!"

"Nonsense," I said calmly. "There is no 'out,' as you put it. But I'll agree that I looked deeper into you than I needed for a motive. Do you think that I have overlooked all these odd coincidences? Here is my wife, and here are you, both at improbable hours, neither of you expecting me; here is young Dr. di Ferruci interrupted at his task of stealing something more than just my work; here is Marguerita Andresson, emerged from wherever she has been hiding all evening, unable to believe that Earth's last picture is all but painted, but ready to help a young man with blue-black hair to steal the pretty notion and capitalize on it."

There was a faint sound from Marguerita. I did not look at her.

After a long while, di Ferruci said, "You are a great astronomer, Dr. Andresson. I owe you twenty years of

inspiration from a distance, and five years of the finest training a master ever gave a tyro. You are also foul-minded, cruel-tongued, and very much mistaken. I resign from this University as of now; my obligation to you is wiped out by what you saw fit to say of me." He searched for his jacket, failed to find it, and gave up at once in trembling fury. "Goodbye, Mrs. Andresson, with my deepest sympathy. And Doc, goodbye—and God have mercy on you."

"Wait," I said. I moved then, after what seemed a century of standing frozen. The young man stopped, his hand halfway to the doorknob, and his back to me. Watching him, I found my way to a chart-viewer, and picked up the six-inch pair of dividers he had been using to check my charts.

"Well," he said.

"It's not as easy as that, Mario. You don't walk out of a house with the stolen goods under your arm when the owner is present. A strong man armed keepeth his house. You may not leave; you may not take my hard-won theory to another university; you may not leave Hamelin with pipes in your hand. You may not carry both my heart and my brains out of this observatory as easily as you would carry a sack of potatoes. In short—you *may not leave!*"

I threw the points of the dividers high and launched myself soul and body at that hunched, broad back. Marguerita's sudden scream rang deafeningly as a siren in the observatory dome.

The rest you know.

I have been honest with you. Tell me: where have you hidden her now?

2

I, ANDREW, a servant of the Sun, who also am your brother, he who was called and was sanctified, say unto

you, blessed be he that readeth, and keepeth the word; for for behold, the time is at hand; be thou content.

2. For behold, it was given to me, in the City of Angels, upon a high hill, to look upon His Face; whereupon I fell down and wept;

3. And He said, I am the Be-All and End-All; I am the Being and the Becoming; except that they be pure, none shall look upon Me else they die, for the time is at hand. And when He had spoken thus, I was sore afraid.

4. And He said, Rise up, and go forth unto the peoples, and say thou, Unless thou repent, I will come to thee quickly, and shine My countenance upon thee. I shall loosen the seals, and sound the trumpets, and open the vials, and the deaths which shall come upon thee will be numbered as seven times seven.

5. The Sun shall become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon become as blood; and the stars of heaven shall fall onto the earth, and the heaven depart as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island be moved out of their places. And all men shall hide themselves, and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne.

6. There will be hail and fire mingled with blood, and these cast upon the earth; a great mountain burning with fire shall be cast into the sea; and there will fall a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, upon the fountains of waters; and the third part of the Sun shall be smitten, and the third part of the moon; and there shall arise a smoke out of the pit, so that the air and the day be darkened.

7. And if there be any who worship not Me, and who heed not, I say unto you all, woe, woe, for ye shall all die; ye shall feast without sacraments, ye shall batten upon each other; ye shall be clouds without water, driven by dry winds; ye shall be dry sterile trees, twice dead, and withered; wandering stars, to whom is given the dark of the emptiness of eternity; verily, I say unto you,

8. Ye shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, the third part of trees shall be burnt up, and all green grass be burnt up, and the third part of creatures which were in the sea, and had life, shall die; and the waters shall become blood, and many men die of the waters, because they be bitter; and the smoke of your torment shall ascend up for ever and ever, and thou shalt have no rest, neither day nor night; for the hour of judgment is come.

9. And saying thus, He that spake to me departed, and His dread spirit, and I went down among the people, and spoke, and bade men beware; and none heeded.

10. Neither those who worshiped the stars, and consulted, one among the others; nor those who worshiped man and his image; nor those who made prayers to the invisible spirits of the air; nor those who worshiped any other thing; and the spirit of Him who had spoken was heavy upon me, so that I went unto my chambers and lay me down in a swoond.

11. And the angel of the Sun spoke to me as I lay, and spake with a voice like trombones, and said, Behold, all men are evil, but thou shalt redeem them, albeit thou remain a pure child of the Sun, and thou alone. Thou shalt have power; a two-edged sword shall go out of thy mouth, and thou shalt hold seven times seven stars in thy palm, and be puissant; this I shall give thee as thine own, if only thou remainest, and thou alone. And I said: Lord, I am Thine; do with me as Thou wilt.

12. And I went forth again, and spoke, and the nations of men hearkened, and the kings of the world bent the knee, and the princes of the world brought tribute, seven times seven; and those who worshiped the stars, and the spirits of the air, and all other things, bowed down before Him; and it was well with them.

13. Now at this time there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a star clothed in a glory of hair, like a woman; and the people gathered and murmured of wonder, say-

ing: Beware, for there is a god in the sky, clothed in hair like a woman, and with streaming of robes and bright garments; and behold, it draws near in the night, and fears not the Sun; the hem of this robe gathers about us.

14. And there arose a woman of the world, and came forward, preaching the gospel of the wild star, saying: Our god the Sun is a false god; his mate is this great star; they will devour us. There is no god but man.

15. And this woman, which was called Margo, summoned the people and made laughter with them, and derision, and scorned the Sun, and gave herself to the priests of the voices in the air, and to those who worshiped numbers, and to the kings and princes of the world; and there was whirling of tambourines in the high towers of the Sun.

16. And the angel of the Sun spoke to me with the sound of trombones, saying, Go with thy power which has been given to thee, and crush this woman else thou shalt be given to the wild star, and to the flames of the wild star's hair, and with thee the world; I command thee, slay this woman, for thou hast been given the power, nor shall it be given thee again; I have spoken.

17. And I went, and the woman called Margo spoke unto me, saying: Thou art fair, and hath power. Give me thy power, and I will give you of mine. Neither the wild star nor the Sun shall have such power as we have.

18. And I looked upon her, and she was fair, beyond all the daughters of the earth; and when she spoke, her voice was as the sounding of bells; and there was a spirit in her greater than the souls of men; and a star, clothed in a glory of hair, with streaming of robes and bright garments; and I kissed the hem of her robe.

19. And the voice of the angel of the Sun was heard like a sounding of trombones, saying: Thou hast yielded thy power to an harlot, and given the earth to the fire; thy power is riven from thee, and all shall die;

20. So be it.

3

MY NAME is George Anders. I have no hope that anyone will read this record, which will probably be destroyed with me—I have no safer place to put it than on my person—but I write it anyhow, if only to show that man was a talkative animal to his last gasp. If the day of glory which has been foretold comes about, there may well be a new and better world which will cherish what I put down here—but I am desperately afraid that the terrible here-and-now is the day the voices promised, and that there will be nothing else forever and ever.

This is not to say that the voices lied. But since that first night when they spoke to me, I have come to know that they speak for forces of tremendous power, forces to which human life is as nothing. A day of glory we have already had, truly—but such a day as no man could long for.

It was on the morning of March 18, 1976, that that day dawned, with a sun so huge as to dominate the entire eastern sky—a flaring monster which made the memory of our accustomed sun seem like a match flame. All the previous night had been as hot as high summer, although not four days before we had a blizzard. Now, with the rising of this colossal globe, we learned the real meaning of heat.

A day of glory, of glory incredible—and deadly. The heat grew and grew. By a little after noon the temperature in the shade was more than 150 degrees, and in the open—it is impossible to describe what an inferno it was under the direct rays of that sun. A bucket of water thrown into the street from a window boiled in mid-air before it could strike the pavement.

In some parts of the city, where there were wooden buildings and asphalt or tarred-black streets, everything was burning. In the country, the radio said, it was worse; forests were ablaze, grasslands, wheatfields, everything.

Curiously, it was this that saved many of us, for before the afternoon could reach its full fury the sky was gray with smoke, cutting off at least a little of the rays of that solar horror. Flakes of ash fell everywhere.

Millions died that day. Only a few in refrigerated rooms—meat-coolers, cold-storage warehouses, the blast tunnels of frozen food firms, under ground fur storage vaults—survived, where the refrigeration apparatus itself survived. By a little after midnight, the outside temperature had dropped to only slightly above 100 degrees, and the trembling and half-mad wraiths who still lived emerged to look silently at the ruined world.

I was one of these; I had planned that I would be. Months before, I had known that this day of doom was to come upon us, for the voices had said so. I can still remember—for as long as I live I will remember, whether it be a day or forty years—the onset of that strange feeling, that withdrawal from the world around me, as if everything familiar had suddenly become as unreal as a stage setting. What had seemed commonplace became strange, sinister: what was that man doing with the bottles which contained the white fluid. Why was the uniform he wore also white? Why not blood in the bottles? And the man with the huge assemblage of paper; why was he watching it so intently as he sat in the subway? Did he expect it to make some sudden move if he looked away? Were the black marks with which the paper was covered the footprints of some miniscule horde?

And as the world underwent its slow transformation, the voices came. I cannot write here what they said, because paper would not bear such words. But the meaning was clear. The destruction of the world was at hand. And beyond it—

Beyond it, the day of glory. A turn toward something new, something before which all men's previous knowledge of grandeur would pale; a new Apocalypse and Resurrection? So it seemed, then. But the voices spoke in

symbol and parable, and perhaps the rising of the hellish sun was the only "day of glory" we would ever see.

And so I hid in my shelter, and survived that first day. When I first emerged into the boiling, choking midnight smoke I could see no one else, but after a while something white came out of the darkness toward me. It was a young girl, in what I took to be a nightgown—the lightest garment, at any event, which she could have worn in this intolerable heat.

"What will happen to us?" she said, as soon as she saw me. "What will happen to us? Will it be the same tomorrow?"

"I don't know," I said. "What's your name?"

"Margaret." She coughed. "This must be the end of the world. If the sun is like this tomorrow—"

"It *is* the end of the world," I said. "But maybe it's the beginning of another. You and I will live to see it."

"How do you know?"

"By your name. The voices call you the mother of the new gods. Have you heard the voices?"

She moved away from me a little bit. There was a sudden, furious gust of wind, and a long line of sparks flew through the lurid sky overhead. "The voices?" she said.

"Yes. The voices of the powers which have done all this. They have promised to save us, you and I. Together we can recreate—"

Suddenly, she was running. She vanished almost instantly into darkness and the smoke. I ran after her, calling, but it was hopeless; besides, my throat was already raw, and in the heat and the aftermath of the day I had no strength. I went back to my crypt. Tomorrow would tell the tale.

Sleep was impossible. I waited for dawn, and watched for it through my periscope, from the buried vault of the bank where, a day before, I had been a kind of teller. This had been no ordinary bank, and I had never taken or

issued any money; but otherwise the terms are just. Perhaps you have already guessed, for no ordinary vault is equipped with periscopes to watch the surrounding countryside. This was Fort Knox, a bed of gold to be seeded with promise of the Age of Gold under this golden fire.

And, at last, the sun came up. It was immense. But I waited a while, and watched the image of it which was cast from the periscope eyepiece onto the opposite wall of the vault. It was not as big as it had been yesterday. And where yesterday the direct rays from the periscope had instantly charred a thousand-dollar bill, today they made only a slowly growing brown spot which never found its kindling point.

The lesson was plain. Today most of what remained of mankind would be slain. But there would be survivors.

Then I slept.

I awoke toward the end of the day and set about the quest which I knew I must make. I took nothing with me but water, which I knew I could not expect to find. Then I left the vault forever.

The world which greeted me as I came to the surface was a world transformed: blasted. Nearly everything had been leveled, and the rest lay in jumbled, smoking ruins. The sky was completely black. Near the Western horizon, the swollen sun sank, still monstrous, but now no hotter than the normal sun at the height of a tropic day. The great explosion, whatever it had been, was nearly over.

And now I had to find Margaret, and fulfill the millennium which the voices had promised. The tree of man had been blasted, but still it bore one flower. It was my great destiny to bring that flower to fruit.

Thus I bring this record to a close. I leave it here in the vault; then I shall go forth into the desert of the world. If any find it, remember: I am your father and the father of your race. If not, you will all be smoke.

Now I go. My knife is in my hand.

4

MY NAME is Andy Virchow, but probably you know me better as Admiral Universe. Nowhere in the pages of galactic history has there ever been a greater champion of justice. Who do you know that doesn't know Universe, ruler of the spaceways, hero of science, bringer of law and order in the age of the conquest of space? Not a planetary soul, that's who.

Of course not everybody knows that Andy Virchow is Admiral Universe. Sometimes I have to go in disguise and fool criminals. Then I am Andy Virchow, and they think I am only eight years old, until I have them where I want them and I whip out my cosmic smoke gun and reveal my indentification.

Sometimes I don't say who I am but just clean the crooks up and ride off in my rocket, the *Margy II*. Then afterwards the people I have saved say, "He didn't even stay to be thanked. I wonder who he was?" and somebody else says, "There's only one man on the frontiers of space like him. That's Admiral Universe."

My rocket is called the *Margy II* partly because my secret interstellar base is on Mars and the Mars people we call Martians call themselves Margies and I like to think of myself as a Margy *too*, because the people of Earth don't understand me and I do good for them because I am champion of justice, not because I like them. Then they're sorry, but it's too late. Me and the Margies understand each other. They ask me for advice before they do anything important, and I tell them what to do. Earth people are always trying to tell other people what to do; the Margies aren't like that, they ask what to do instead of always giving orders.

Also Admiral Universe calls his rocket *Margy II*, because my patron saint is St. Margaret who gets me out of trouble if I do anything wrong. Admiral Universe never does anything wrong because St. Margaret is on his side

all the time. St. Margaret is the patron saint of clocks and is called the Mother of Galaxies, because she was a mother—not like my mother, who is always shouting and sending me to bed too early—and mothers have milk and *galaxy* is Greek for milk. If you didn't know I was Admiral Universe you'd ask how I know what's Greek for anything, but Admiral Universe is a great scientist and knows everything. Besides, my father was a teacher of Greek before he died and he was Admiral Universe's first teacher.

In all the other worlds in the universe everything is pretty perfect except for a few crooks that have to be shot. It's not like Earth at all. The planets are different from each other, but they are all happy and have lots of science and the people are kind and never raise their hands to each other to send each other to bed without their supper.

Sometimes there are terrible accidents in the spacelanes and Admiral Universe arrives on the scene in the nick of time and saves everybody, and all the men shake his hand and all the girls kiss him and say mushy things to him, but he refuses their thanks in a polite way and disappears into the trackless wastes of outer space because he carries a medal of St. Margaret's in his pocket over his heart. She is his only girl, but she can't ever be anybody's girl because she is a saint, and this is Admiral Universe's great tragedy which he never tells anybody because it's his private business that he has to suffer all by himself, and besides if anybody else knew it they would think he was mushy too and wouldn't be so afraid of him, like crooks I mean.

Admiral Universe is always being called from all over outer space to help people and sometimes he can't be one place because he has to be in some other place. Then he has to set his jaw and do the best he can and be tough about the people he can't help because he is helping somebody else. First he asks St. Margaret what he should do and she tells him. Then he goes and does it, and he is very sorry for the people who get left out, but he knows that he did what was right.

This is why I wasn't there when the sun blew up, because I was helping people somewhere else at the time. I didn't even know it was the sun, because I was so far away that it was just another star, and I didn't see it blow up, because stars blow up all the time and if you're Admiral Universe you get used to it and hardly notice. Margaret might have told me, but she's a saint, and doesn't care.

If I'd been there I would have helped. I would have saved my friends, and all the great scientists, and the girls who might be somebody's mothers some day, and everybody that was anybody expect Dr. Ferguson, I would have left him behind to show him how wrong he was about me.

But I wasn't there at the time, and besides Admiral Universe never did like the Earth much. Nobody will really miss it.

5

MY NAME is T. V. Andros. My father was an Athenian immigrant and a drunkard. After he came here he worked in the mines, but not very often because he was mostly soused.

Sometimes he beat my mother. She had TB but she took good care of us until I was eight; early that year, my father got killed in a brawl in a bar, and the doctor—his name I forget—sent her back to the little town in Pennsylvania where she was born. She died that March.

After that I worked in the mines. The law says a kid can't work in the mines but in company towns the law don't mean much. I got the cough too but the other miners took care of me and I grew up tough and could handle myself all right. When I was fourteen, I killed a man with a pick handle, one blow. I don't remember what we was fighting about.

Mostly I kept out of fights, though. I had a crazy idea I wanted to educate myself and I read a lot—all kinds

of things. For a while I read those magazines that tell about going to other planets and stuff like that. I didn't learn anything, except that to learn good you need a teacher, and the last one of those had been run out by the company cops. They said he was a Red.

It was tough in the mines. It's dark down there and hot, and you can't breathe sometimes for the dust. And you can't never wash the dirt off, it gets right down into your skin and makes you feel black even at noon on Sundays when you've scrubbed till your skin's raw.

I had a sixteen-year-old girl but I was too dirty for her. I tried to go to the priest about it but he wasn't looking for nothing but sin, and kept asking me had I done anything wrong with the girl. When I said I hadn't he wasn't interested no more. I hadn't, either, but he made me so mad he made me wish I had. After that I sort of drifted away from going to church because I couldn't stand his face. Maybe that was bad but it had its good side, too, I missed it and I took to cracking the Bible now and then. I never got much of the Bible when I was going to church.

After a while I took to drinking something now and then. It wasn't right for a kid but I wasn't a kid no more, I was eighteen and besides in the company towns there ain't nothing else to do. It helped some but not enough. All the guys in the bar ever talk about are wages and women. You got to drink yourself blind and stupid to keep from hearing them, otherwise you go nuts. After a while I was blind and stupid a lot of the time and didn't no longer know what I did or didn't.

Once when I was drunk I mauled a girl younger than I was; I don't know why I did it. She was just the age I had been when my mother left me to go home and die. Then it was all up with me at the mines. I didn't mean her any harm but the judge gave me the works. Two years.

I got clean for once in my life while I was in the jug and I did some more reading but it just mixed me up more. Two years is a long time. When I got out I felt

funny in my head. I couldn't stop thinking about the girl who thought I was too dirty for her. I was at the age when I needed girls.

But I wasn't going to mess with girls my age who could see the prison whiteness on the outside and all that ground-in coal dust underneath it. I couldn't forget Maggy, the girl that got me into the jam. That had been a hot night in summer, with a moon as big as the sun as red as blood. I hadn't meant her any harm. She reminded me of myself when my mother had gone away.

I found another Maggy and when the cops caught me they worked me over. I can't hear in one ear now and my nose is skewed funny on my face. I had it coming because I hurt the girl. When they let me out again I got a job as a super, but there was another girl in the apartment above, and I went to fix a pipe there while her mother was away. It was a hot day with a big sun and no air moving, just like the day my mother left. I didn't really know nothing had happened until I saw that one of my hands was dark red. Then I tried to get her to talk to me but she wouldn't move. After a while I felt some woman's hands beating at my neck. She said, "Stop, you!"

This time they took me to a hospital and a Dr. Ferdinand talked to me. Write it all down, he said. It may help you. So I wrote it all down, like you see it here. Then they put me in a cell and said I would have to stay for a while. I don't talk to them much any more.

It is a real hot day. Outside the cell the sun is bigger. I don't breathe good any more but there's something wrong with the air. I pulled my mattress to pieces but I didn't find nothing. Maybe something is going to happen. Something is going to happen.

6

MY NAME is Man. I will write my story if you wish. I was . . .

Here the ashes blow away. The voices die.

THE POSSESSED

by Arthur C. Clarke

AND NOW the sun ahead was so close that the hurricane of radiation was forcing the Swarm back into the dark night of space. Soon it would be able to come no closer: the gales of light on which it rode from star to star could not be faced so near their source. Unless it encountered a planet very soon, and could fall down into the peace and safety of its shadow, this sun must be abandoned as had so many before.

Six cold outer worlds had already been searched and discarded. Either they were frozen beyond all hope of organic life, or else they harbored entities of types that were useless to the Swarm. If it was to survive, it must find hosts not too unlike those it has left on its doomed and distant home. Millions of years ago, the Swarm had begun its journey, swept starwards by the fires of its own exploding sun. Yet, even now, the memory of its lost birthplace was sharp and clear, an ache that would never die.

There was a planet ahead, swinging its cone of darkness through the flame-swept night. The senses that the Swarm had developed upon its long journey reached out towards the approaching world, reached out and found it good.

The merciless buffeting of radiation ceased as the black disc of the planet eclipsed the sun. Falling freely under gravity, the Swarm dropped swiftly until it hit the outer fringe of the atmosphere. The first time it had made planetfall, it had almost met its doom; now it contracted its tenuous substance with the unthinking skill of long

practice, until it formed a tiny, close-knit sphere. Slowly its velocity slackened, until at last it was floating motionless between earth and sky.

For many years it rode the winds of the statosphere from Pole to Pole, or let the soundless fusillades of dawn blast it westwards from the rising sun. Everywhere it found life, but nowhere intelligence. There were things that crawled and flew and leapt, but there were no things that talked or built. Ten million years hence there might be creatures here with minds that the Swarm could possess, and guide for its own purposes: there was no sign of them now. It could not guess which of the countless life forms on this planet would be heir to the future, and without such a host it was helpless—a mere pattern of electric charges, a matrix of order and self-awareness in a universe of chaos. By its own resources, the Swarm had no control over matter; yet once it had lodged in the mind of a sentient race there was nothing that lay beyond its powers.

It was not the first time, and it would not be the last, that the planet had been surveyed by a visitant from space—though never by one in such peculiar and urgent need. The Swarm was faced with a tormenting dilemma. It could begin its weary travels once more, hoping that—ultimately—it might find the conditions it sought; or it could wait here on this world, biding its time until a race had arisen which would fit its purpose.

It moved like mist through the shadows, letting the vagrant winds take it where they willed. The clumsy, ill-formed reptiles of this young world never saw its passing, but it observed them, recording, analyzing, trying to extrapolate into the future. There was so little to choose between all these creatures: not one showed even the first faint glimmerings of conscious mind. Yet if it left this world in search of another, it might roam the Universe in vain until the end of time.

At last it made its decision. By its very nature, it could choose both alternatives. The greater part of the Swarm would continue its travels among the stars, but

a portion of it would remain on this world, like a seed planted in the hope of future harvest.

It began to spin upon its axis, its tenuous body flattening into a disc. Now it was wavering at the frontiers of visibility—it was a pale ghost, a faint will-of-the-wisp that suddenly fissured into two unequal fragments. The spinning slowly died away: the Swarm had become two, each an entity with all the memories of the original—and all its desires and deeds.

There was a last exchange of thoughts between parent and child who were also identical twins. If all went well with them both, they would meet again in the far future here at this valley in the mountains. The one who was staying would return to this point at regular intervals down the ages: the one who continued the search would send home an emissary if ever a better world was found. And then they would be united again, no longer exiles vainly wandering among the indifferent stars.

The light of dawn was spilling over the raw, new mountains when the parent swarm rose up to meet the sun. At the edge of the atmosphere, gales of radiation caught it and swept it unresisting out beyond the planets, to start again upon the endless search.

The one that was left began its almost equally hopeless task. It needed an animal that was not so rare that disease or accident could make it extinct, nor so tiny that it could never acquire any power over the physical world. And it must breed rapidly, so that its evolution could be directed and controlled as swiftly as possible.

The search was long and the choice difficult, but at last the Swarm selected its host. Like rain sinking into thirsty soil, it entered the bodies of certain small lizards and began to direct their destiny.

It was an immense task, even for a being which could never know death. Generation after generation of the lizards was swept into the past before there came the slightest improvement in the race. And always, at the appointed time, the Swarm returned to its rendezvous among

the mountains. Always it returned in vain; there was no messenger from the stars, bringing news of better fortune elsewhere.

The centuries lengthened into millennia; the millennia into aeons. By the standards of geological time, the lizards were now changing rapidly. Presently they were lizards no more—but warm-blooded fur-covered creatures that brought forth their young alive. They were still small and feeble, and their minds were rudimentary; but they contained the seeds of future greatness.

Somewhere in the labyrinth of evolution the Swarm made its fatal mistake and took the wrong turning. A hundred million years had gone since it came to Earth, and it was very weary. It could not die, but it could degenerate. The memories of its ancient home and of its destiny were fading: its intelligence was waning, even while its hosts climbed the long slope that would lead to self-awareness.

By a cosmic irony, in giving the impetus which would one day bring intelligence to this world, the Swarm had exhausted itself. It had reached the last stage of parasitism: no longer could it exist apart from its hosts; never again could it ride free above the world, driven by wind and sun. To make the pilgrimage to the ancient rendezvous, it must travel slowly and painfully in a thousand little bodies. Yet it continued the immemorial custom, driven on by the desire for reunion which burned all the more fiercely now that it knew the bitterness of failure. Only if the parent swarm returned and reabsorbed it, could it ever know new life and vigor.

The glaciers came and went: by a miracle the little beasts that now housed the waning alien intelligence escaped the clutching fingers of the ice. The oceans overwhelmed the land, and still the race survived. It multiplied, but it could do no more; this world would never be its heritage. Far away, in the heart of another continent, a certain monkey had come down from the trees and was looking at the stars with the first glimmerings of curiosity.

The mind of the Swarm was dispersing, scattering among a million tiny bodies, no longer able to unite and assert its will. It had lost all cohesion: its memories were fading. In a million years, at most, they would all be gone.

Only one thing remained—the blind urge which still, at intervals which by some strange aberration were becoming ever shorter, drove it to seek its consummation in a valley that long ago had ceased to exist.

Quietly riding the lane of moonlight, the pleasure steamer passed the island with its winking beacon and entered the fjord. It was a calm and lovely night, with Venus sinking in the west out beyond the Faroes, and the lights of the harbor reflected with scarcely a tremor in the still waters far ahead.

Nils and Christina were utterly content. Standing side by side against the boat rail, their fingers locked together, they watched the wooded slopes drift silently by. The tall trees were motionless in the moonlight, their leaves unruffled by even the merest breath of wind, their slender trunks rising whitely from pools of shadow. The whole world was asleep: only the moving ship dared to break the spell that had bewitched the night.

Then, suddenly, Christina gave a little gasp and Nils felt her fingers tighten convulsively on his. He followed her gaze: she was staring across the water, looking towards the silent sentinels of the forest.

"What is it, darling?" he asked anxiously.

"Look!" she replied, in a whisper Nils could scarcely hear. "There—under the pines!"

Nils stared, and as he did so the beauty of the night ebbed slowly away and ancestral terrors came crawling back from exile. For beneath the trees the land was alive, a dappled brown tide was moving down the slopes of the hill and merging into the dark waters. Here was an open patch on which the moonlight fell unbroken by shadow. It was changing even as he watched: the surface of the

land seemed to be rippling downwards like a slow waterfall seeking union with the sea.

And then Nils laughed and the world was sane once more. Christina looked at him, puzzled but reassured.

"Don't you remember?" he chuckled. "We read all about it in the paper this morning. They do this every few years, and always at night. It's been going on for days."

He was teasing her, sweeping away the tension of the last few minutes. Christina looked back at him, and a slow smile lit up her face. "Of course!" she said. "How stupid of me!"

Then she turned once more towards the land and her expression became sad. "Poor little things!" she sighed. "I wonder why they do it?"

Nils shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "No one knows," he answered. "It's just one of those mysteries. I shouldn't think about it if it worries you. Look—we'll soon be in harbor!"

They turned towards the beckoning lights, where their future lay, and Christina glanced back only once towards the tragic, mindless tide that was still flowing beneath the moon.

Obedying an urge whose meaning they had never known, the doomed legions of the lemmings were finding oblivion beneath the waves.

THE END

OTHER WORLDLY

THE LATEST AND THE BEST
SCIENCE FICTION

from
BELMONT BOOKS

THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH

Philip K. Dick

The time is 1982, the story a unique blend of genius and madness—of men and machines gone berserk in a world they created. By the author of "Best Science Fiction Novel of Year" award.

50c

92-603

MASTERS OF SCIENCE FICTION

A rare find! Stories of the future by 7 of the world's greatest science fiction writers—Poul Anderson, Lester Del Ray, Philip K. Dick, Sam Merwin, Jr., M. C. Pease, Frederik Pohl, Eric Frank Russell. First paperback publication.

50c

92-606

ODD SCIENCE FICTION

Frank Belknap Long

This novel was written inside a capsule, traveling through space to a land where humanity still uses materialistic symbols to enforce its evil will, but in a dimension we should hope never to know.

50c

L92-600

ORDER FROM YOUR BOOKSELLER OR USE
SPECIAL OFFER COUPON ON LAST PAGE

If You Enjoyed Reading This Book, You Will Want to Read These Other Belmont Books

SEE SPECIAL-OFFER COUPON ON LAST PAGE

- ☐ **UNION SQUARE**, by Albert Halper
The giant All-American novel selected by the Literary Guild and acclaimed by all critics. *Complete edition.* #L92-556, 50¢
- ☐ **IT WAS THE DAY OF THE ROBOT**, by Frank Belknap Long
A science-fiction novel that is so chillingly, terrifyingly real it will send shivers up and down your spine. #90-277, 40¢
- ☐ **WALK SOFTLY, WALK DEADLY**, by Lee Bergman
A terror-ridden "street-side story" of lust and raw emotion. #90-282, 40¢
- ☐ **IN A WORD**, Cartoons by James Thurber, Definitions by Margaret S. Ernst
"Priceless entertainment, scholarly as well as hilarious"—*The N. Y. Times*. The novelty book of the year! #L92-566, 50¢
- ☐ **THE MACHINE IN WARD ELEVEN**, by Charles Willeford
"The weirdest tale that has been published in America since Edgar Allan Poe"—*Science Fiction Quarterly*. #90-286, 40¢
- ☐ **MY SON THE TEENAGER: A Cartoon Satire**
Meet Seymour! What happens when a juvenile menace becomes a teenager? Here's the uproarious picture book by his celebrated father (who prefers anonymity). #91-288, 35¢
- ☐ **NOVELETS OF SCIENCE FICTION**, edited by Ivan Howard
Never before published in any book—superlative tales by the modern masters of S-F. #L92-567, 50¢
- ☐ **THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**, Frank Belknap Long
The science fiction masterwork, in paperback at last. "Ingenious"—*N. Y. Times*. #L92-569, 50¢
- ☐ **WEST OF APACHE PASS**, Charles Alden Seltzer
Arizona ablaze with violence! The all-time great western best-seller. #90-295, 40¢
- ☐ **SHOCK CORRIDOR**, by Michael Avallone
The suspense thriller of the year—from the chilling motion picture. #L92-570, 50¢
- ☐ **ESCAPE TO EARTH**, ed. by Ivan Howard
Original novelets of Science Fiction by Judith Merril, Robert Sheckley, other masters. #L92-571, 50¢
- ☐ **TALES OF THE FRIGHTENED**
Complete text (we dare you to read it aloud!) of the famous Boris Karloff recording. #90-297, 40¢
- ☐ **RETURN OF THE SHADOW**, by Walter B. Gibson
America's all-time suspense best-seller—the famous "Avenger" in a brand-new mystery. #90-298, 40¢
- ☐ **"SLOW" BURGESS**, by Charles Alden Seltzer
In Palo City, you lived by the gun and you died by the gun. And the top gun was always "Slow" Burgess. #90-299, 40¢
- ☐ **FEUD AT BLUE CANYON**, by Frank C. Robertson (Orig. title: *Bandits of the Barrens*)
Only fast guns and raw guts could settle the feud at Blue Canyon. (Abridged) #90-301, 40¢
- ☐ **NOBODY LOVES A LOSER**, by Henry Kane
It was a beautiful trap. Deadly. Foolproof. Made for someone else and Pete Chambers had to walk right into it. #90-302, 40¢
- ☐ **WAY OUT**, edited by Ivan Howard
Seven new and frightful tales of tomorrow's way out world. Science Fiction designed to appeal to the far out fiend and far in recesses of your mind. #L92-575, 50¢
- ☐ **ONLY AN INCH FROM GLORY**, by Albert Halper
The best-selling novel of love that turned to lust, and ambition that turned to greed. "Ferocious realism . . . a ruthless slash of the knife"—*N. Y. Times*. #L92-577, 50¢
- ☐ **THE DARK BEASTS**, by Frank Belknap Long
Nine spine-chilling tales from the famous science fiction masterwork *The Hounds of Tindalos*. First time in paperback. #L92-579, 50¢
- ☐ **MURDER IN THE FAMILY**, by James Ronald
The gripping story of a family with one murder and too many confessions. "A baffler of the first order"—*N. Y. Times*. (Abridged) #90-303, 40¢

- ☐ **THINGS**, edited by Ivan Howard
Lurking in tomorrow to make you scream tonight—six masters of science fiction doing their fiendish best to scare you back into the twentieth century. #L92-582, 50¢
- ☐ **GUILTY WITNESS**, by Morris Hershman
They were about to break the case—until one of them was found inside it. #90-306, 40¢
- ☐ **DOUBLE CROSS RANCH**, by Charles Alden Seltzer
It takes an outlaw to catch an outlaw. #90-307, 40¢
- ☐ **TRAIL SOUTH FROM POWDER VALLEY**, by Peter Field
It took a man with nerves of steel and blazing guns to gallop down the bloody trail. #90-308, 40¢
- ☐ **WORLDS WITHOUT END**, by Clifford D. Simak
Never before in book form, three masterful stories from one of the greatest writers of terror and science fiction. #L92-584, 50¢
- ☐ **SWING LOW, SWING DEAD**, by Frank Gruber
A Johnny Fletcher mystery with a brand-new beat, where a beautiful blonde discovers that the pop music business can be murder—literally. #L92-586, 50¢
- ☐ **SNAKE RIVER AMBUSH**, by Robert Ames Benet (Orig. title: *The Brand-Blotters*)
Who but a man like Stan Autry would dare use a triggerless gun—and even he didn't know that squashshooters can kill too. #90-309, 40¢
- ☐ **THE NON-STATISTICAL MAN**, by Raymond F. Jones
One man's mind spins a taut and eerie arc from the dark past into the distant future—and suddenly the world looks *different*. #L92-588, 50¢
- ☐ **THE SPY WHO LOVED AMERICA**, by Jack Laflin
Take one handsome Soviet spy, one luscious American wife, and buckets of champagne, mix well and come up with an uproarious new spy thriller. #L92-597, 50¢
- ☐ **FERGUSON'S TRAIL**, by Charles Alden Seltzer
He came to town a stranger and alone—but he was on a deadly mission. #90-312, 40¢
- ☐ **GODLING GO HOME!** by Robert Silverberg
A new collection by one of America's foremost science fiction writers. The time had come for the great test—would Earthman be hailed as a god when he returned to those people? #L92-591, 50¢
- ☐ **ODD SCIENCE FICTION**, by Frank Belknap Long
In this legendary trilogy, presented for the first time in book form, Long takes us into a world-time-place only he could create. #L92-600, 50¢
- ☐ **BRETT RANDALL, GAMBLER**, by Zachary Strong
He played a losing game of death . . . wanted by the sheriff and hunted by his friends. (Formerly: *Outlaws Against the Law Badge*) #90-313, 40¢
- ☐ **THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH**, by Philip K. Dick
Genius and madness—men and machines gone berserk in a world they created. By author of "Best Science Fiction Novel of Year" award. #92-603, 50¢
- ☐ **MASTERS OF SCIENCE FICTION**
A rare find! Stories of the future by 7 great science fiction writers, including, Poul Anderson, Philip K. Dick, Eric Frank Russell. First paperback publication. #92-606, 50¢
- ☐ **MR. GEORGE AND OTHER ODD PERSONS**, by August Derleth
17 tales of unthings which exist not in the past nor in the future—but in the unknown world *beyond*. "Ranks among Derleth's best tales of the supernatural"—*N. Y. Times*. #L92-594, 50¢
- ☐ **RARE SCIENCE FICTION**, Edited by Ivan Howard
Science fiction stories by masters of the weird and fantastic, including Algis Budrys, Milton Lesser and L. Sprague de Camp. First paperback publication. #L92-557, 50¢

Order from your bookseller, or use this special-price coupon.

BELMONT BOOKS, Dept. 567

66 Leonard Street, New York 13, N. Y.

Please send me the books I have checked above at these special prices: three 40¢ books for \$1.00 or two 50¢ books for \$1.00—postage free. Single copies, list price plus 5¢ for postage and handling.

Name

Address

CityZone.....State.....

THE BOOK OF THE YEAR

50¢

TESTAMENT OF ANDROS

James Blish

...AND THE TRUTH
SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

Clifford D. Simak

ULTRASONIC GOD

L. Sprague de Camp

"A" AS IN ANDROID

Milton Lesser

THE CHAPTER ENDS

Poul Anderson

NIGHT FEAR

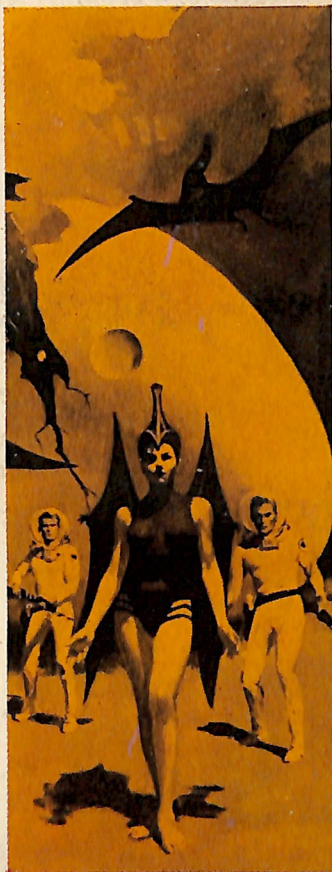
Frank Belknap Long

THE POSSESSED

Arthur C. Clarke

I AM TOMORROW

Lester del Rey



Here are 8 modern masters of science fiction... and their superlative stories. Not a single one has ever appeared in paperback form before: At 50¢ this is one of the year's bonanzas for every reader of science fiction.

Novelets of SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by Ivan Howard

BELMONT

192-567

BELMONT SCIENCE FICTION SERIES