

No. 1

\$4.50

... Tales of Scientifiction

# ASTRO- Adventures



*New Stories by*

Frank Belknap Long • Carl Jacobi • Lin Carter  
and Clark Ashton Smith



# ASTRO- ADVENTURES

TALES OF SCIENTIFICTION

January 1987

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Number One

## CONTENTS

Editorial. . . . .	2
Robert M. Price	
The Soaring. . . . .	3
Frank Belknap Long	
Murder in Space. . . . .	8
Lin Carter	
Prisoners of Vibration . . . . .	21
Carl Jacobi	
Mnemoka. . . . .	32
Clark Ashton Smith	

# blast off !

## EDITORIAL

Return with us now to the thrilling days of the future of the past. The future as pictured in every era is a function of that present. Speculative fiction always tells us more about the age in which it is written than about the future age it tries to describe. One can easily denominate distinctive periods in the development of modern science fiction. One decade differs from another in readily perceptible ways. Today's "hard science fiction" is much, much different from the "scientifiction" of the pulp era. And it may be somehow contradictory to pine nostalgically for a "past future," but many of us do. In this case, such backward-looking futurism has led to the creation of Astro-Adventures.

This first issue presents two stories written in that era of ray-guns and bug-eyed monsters, but sealed in the vaults of time until now. Carl Jacobi, whose exciting tales of extra-terrestrial adventure regularly appeared in such magazines as Planet Stories and Startling Stories, submitted "Prisoners of Vibration," a fast-moving story of a mad scientist hell-bent on world domination, to Thrilling Wonder Stories and Astounding Stories in 1936 and to Amazing Stories two years later. Finally, fifty years in the future (which somehow seems appropriate), it appears in Astro-Adventures.

Clark Ashton Smith, frequent contributor to Wonder Stories and author of such classics as "The Amazing Planet" and "The Immortals of Mercury," left the manuscript for "Mnemoka" lying around in his cabin, where it nearly perished in flames. Smithologist Steve

Behrends has managed to assemble the surviving pages (most of the story) and to fill in small lacunae and supply an ending. (How much did Behrends write? We'll tell you when the story's over.) Many thanks to Steve and to Mark Brown at the Clark Ashton Smith Collection of the John Hay Library at Brown University, as well as Richard Kuhn for the Estate of Clark Ashton Smith, by all of whose good graces this story appears here.

Frank Belknap Long, a veteran of the glorious pulp era (you saw him then in Astounding Science Fiction and Startling Stories), has penned a new science fictional tale for this issue, "The Soaring." This story makes clear both that Long's imagination has not stood still any more than the science fiction field itself has, and that science fiction has at least as much to do with inner as with outer space adventure!

Lin Carter's "Murder in Space" is a special treat, as it is only the third adventure of his galactic cavalier Hautley Quicksilver, and the first to appear in eighteen years! This Simon Templar of the stars first appeared in "The Thief of Thoth" in the November 1966 issue of Worlds of Tomorrow. A much longer version appeared two years later along with Frank Belknap Long's "...And Others Shall Be Born" in a Belmont Double. The next year Quicksilver returned in "The Purloined Planet" under the same roof with John Brunner's "The Evil That Men Do" in another Belmont Double. His return is long overdue. And what's a science fiction pulp without a series hero?

When you finish this issue, strap

Continued on p. 38

# THE SOARING

by Frank Belknap Long

In a few more minutes, Holden knew, the Silverlark would be traveling on, deeper and deeper into space, with all of its integrated circuitry humming--without him.

When it arrived at its destination with only one navigator he would be missed, and there would be moments of consternation and horror, for what he was about to do had never been attempted before.

The most audacious of all conspiracies . . . an outrageous act of defiance . . .

He could hear the teletapes proclaiming that no such dangerous example had ever been set, from the earliest days of the space programs, on Terra, the colonized planets, and the lonely outposts on Pluto, toward which the Silverlark would be traveling soon with a computerized substitute for himself floating opposite Walter Glenwald, his briefly drugged co-pilot.

Would Glenwald curse him on awakening, roundly, perhaps savagely? He hoped not, for he could not have admired and trusted a man more. But even trust can be relative when there is too much at stake to keep the bonds of friendship from fraying at their weakest point. Obeying orders with no questions asked was basic to the co-pilot's integrity, and that Holden could understand and respect. Just the fact that he was of a different breed gave him no right to condemn a man for being so much the opposite of himself.

The decisive moment about which almost everything else revolved was very near now. At such moments the time flow seemed to have a way of passing in and out through

a man, setting every nerve to quivering.

"Here it comes," a voice seemed to whisper, deep in his mind. "This is it!"

With an abrupt, downward thrust of his thumb Holden set the entire auxiliary-module release and projection mechanism in motion. With flawless timing he floated in the necessary direction, and was very quickly inside the module, which instantly sealed itself.

Cushioned against the jolting of a very minor nature which was about to ensue, he watched on the screen three feet in front of him the module change position and glide swiftly toward the star glow no more than forty feet beyond where Holden was floating. The panel had darted open with such gaze-eluding swiftness that the glow, as it always did, made the wall of the compartment seem simply to dissolve in brightness.

For what seemed like an eternity, but could not have been more than three or four minutes, with the jolting subsiding, he watched the screen recording the module's passing from the ship to become a gleaming speck of matter, too tiny even to be thought of as minuscule, amidst star fields incalculable.

After that he became occupied with thoughts of a less immediate nature, as a man will when he must wait out, alone in space, the outcome of some tremendous act of daring.

He had left a record of everything he had accomplished which Glenwald would find on awakening. His own integrity had demanded that he do so. But he had provided no clue as to the location of the small world toward which the module was now trav-

eling.

For a very long time he remained alone in space. But the instant the small world came into view all of his loneliness vanished.

There was nothing in the least difficult--or even complicated--about his landing, for the module possessed a many-times-tested abundance of smoothly-functioning mechanisms. Only five were needed and three of them were built-in automatic, requiring no human manipulation.

The module came down on a level expanse of greenery that on Terra would have been called a meadow, and a meadow seemed just the right place for a long-anticipated homecoming. How could he think of it otherwise, when he had made it possible for so many of his friends to be there--and one other important person, the closest to him, and the dearest? If a home was where you had always felt yourself to be, it did not matter that you were seeing it for the first time.

Homecoming was the right word, and it was wonderful and it was ecstatic, and the instant he took her into his arms on his arrival until they were alone together in the old frame house, with its slanting roof and weathered gray shingles, any slight doubt he may have had of that vanished completely.

"Oh, darling, it's incredible," Helen Holden said. "Even now I still can't quite believe it. But I know it's not a dream, wild or otherwise. It couldn't be. After so many years of careful planning, and the way you made it possible for so many of us to get here--"

"Hush," he said, smoothing her hair and kissing her lips and holding her very tightly. "Let's not talk of what I did. Only that I'm quite sure it will take the space Johnnies a long time to find us, if ever."

He was about to reassure her concerning the entire Saturn field with its many moons, still totally uncolonized and bypassed because both of the great outer planets had presented some insurmountable colonizing problems. But it suddenly seemed unimportant compared to her closeness, and the yielding magic of her slender young body, and the fragrance of her lustrous dark hair, which descended in twin braids to her shoulders.

He looked around him, and saw what he had hardly dared hope to find on a Saturn moon, no matter how clever had been the secretive transporting of such precious things to a small world far out in space.

An old oaken water bucket, just inside the door, a rocking chair by the window, with a brightly-colored patchwork quilt thrown over one of its arms. A long mantel with a blue china vase at one end, a bowl of roses at the other, and in the middle a tall, slightly rusted clock. It had a porcelain face, and was loudly ticking. There was a cuckoo inside perhaps that night, he felt, at any moment pop out. The hour hand stood at eight.

Why was he uncertain about a few small objects, while others struck a totally familiar chord in the recent memory range? The cuckoo, for instance. He was almost sure Helen had shown him the clock, and that he had examined it on a moonlit terrace on Terra not very long ago.

"I'll make sure it will be there when you arrive," he was almost sure he'd told her. "Small things like this can make our reunion more complete. Small familiar things we both treasure. Nothing could be quite so important."

He was still holding her closely and staring about the room--his gaze had come to rest on an axe-splintered tree-trunk on sturdy iron supports, which served as a cot--when he heard a sound that was far from his liking at that particular hour.

It was clearly the sound of hoofbeats--the clatter was unusually loud--and it was just as unmistakably coming from very near at hand. A few feet from the house perhaps, or no more distant than the opposite end of the yard.

Helen straightened in sudden alarm. "That's probably Jack Gage," she said. "He's been reckless all week, riding wild, going as far as he dares without getting himself shot."

"This could be his last gamble in that respect," Holden heard himself saying, a little surprised by the absolute steadiness of his own voice.

"But you've never met him. You don't know--" She broke off abruptly, as if torn by a sudden doubt as to how much truth there might be in that. "He's intent on taking over the entire town," she added, in a tremulous voice. "A bully--a peculiarly vicious one. He's got to be stopped. Oh, it's been terrible to be alone here, without protection you can depend on to put a stop to that kind of lawlessness. The worst part is just feeling help will never come in time--"

"That feeling won't be around much longer," Holden said. "Where's my gun belt?"

"Your gun--"

Holden was sure he could find it, and he did. It took him only a moment, for he was spared the need of searching around for it. The belt, with its two long-barreled Colts, was hanging from a peg in the wall a few feet from where he was standing, made inconspicuous by the shadow cast by a half-opened window shutter.

He kept his eyes averted as he strapped it about his waist, for fear that the look on his face would increase his wife's alarm. Gage, he knew, was the kind of surly ruffian it was dangerous to take chances with even when

he was sober. If he happened to be drunk the usual cautionary admonition: "It's better to watch his gun hand closely than to be the first to draw" might have to go out the window.

The need to keep the town from living in fear would have made Holden risk the hangman's noose, and he didn't want his wife to see that in him. But she saw it anyway, as he strode toward the door.

"Don't lose your head, darling," she pleaded. "For my sake at least--be careful. It's cowardice that makes him so dangerous--"

Dangerous was hardly the word for the sight that confronted Holden the instant he emerged from the house.

Gage had descended from his horse and was staggering about directly in front of the door. The animal was not rearing but seemed on the verge of doing so, as he had just let go of the bridle and lost all control over it.

The loss of control clearly extended to himself as well, for he had drawn his gun and was brandishing it in wildly haphazard fashion.

It was only when he saw Holden standing in the doorway, too startled for an instant to do anything but stare, that a murderous purposefulness seemed to come upon him.

He took aim and fired, leapt back and fired again, the thunder of his six-shooter echoing through the night like two dynamite sticks exploding.

The first blast missed Holden completely, but the second did not. There was a moment of agonizing pain in his right shoulder, followed by a numbness, as if an iron weight with many times the massiveness of a bullet had been hurled against it with stunning, quickly paralyzing violence.

For the barest instant he went reeling backwards, remembering, incredible as it seemed to him at so critical a moment, that a blast at close range from a forty-five could

lift a man from his feet and send him hurtling to oblivion. It hadn't happened, and that fact alone enabled him to fight off panic, and become a left-handed weapon user before Gage could fire again.

Holden fired four times, and before his knees gave way and a great wave of dizziness came sweeping over him he was sure that at least two of the bullets had ripped and torn at Gage in a probably fatal way, just from seeing him collapse with convulsive writhings, his chest blood-spattered, a killer biting dust.

After that Holden felt himself to be lying flat on his back and in very great pain, with nothing but a kind of dark swirling passing back and forth before his eyes as he stared upwards. He couldn't see Helen's face at all. But he could hear her whispering to him in a voice so choked with emotion that he could catch only a few of her words.

"Bullet went . . . right through your shoulder. Doc Willis will see . . . wounds taken care of. I'll ride into town . . . come back quickly. The sheriff . . ."

She was doing her best to calm and reassure him, and not succeeding very well. Of that he had no doubt. But a man is often the best judge of his own condition, even when there is no bullet inside of him that has to be cut out, and Holden felt that he was going to die, and was only grateful for two things. He would be spared the agony of crude frontier surgery with no anaesthesia to ease the pain--and old Doc Willis was too fond of the bottle to be trusted anyway--and he had known a great and enduring love in the town of his young manhood. That the town had been brought into existence again through his own efforts in the valley shadows of a Saturn moon in defiance of the Space Auth-

ority was surely no mean achievement.

"You have to see it to believe it," a familiar voice said, out of what seemed even deeper, quite different shadows. "The associational areas we've been exploring had sufficient somatic strength to abrade the skin of his shoulder."

"A Colt automatic was a formidable hand weapon to men who knew no other that could remotely compare with it," a second voice said. "Deep in his mind, until we remove the electrode, he'll feel himself to be more a man of the Old American West than of any other historical period."

"But it's incredible, isn't it? The remote era of the pioneers who crossed the plains in covered wagons has become more unconsciously real to him in an emotional sense than his--well, his own late twentieth-century boyhood."

"Not too surprising," the second voice said. "He did a great deal of reading, and became obsessed with that particular period. That's why these cerebral scannings of every man we send to the Mars Colony is of such vital importance. We have to know exactly what his most deeply buried, subconscious drives are like."

"Remember," the same voice added, after a pause. "Holden gave his consent to this. He knows we can both explore and have the techniques to erase completely all memory of the scanning. What we have now found out about him will remain deeply buried. It will not arise as an obstacle on a conscious level to his efficient functioning as a copilot and later as a Martian colonist. A decade ago we could never have achieved that, as you know."

"Naturally I know. But that's not quite the same thing as ceasing to be amazed at the ingenuity of the human brain in reconciling oppo-



sites at different levels of consciousness. Think of it! The tiniest of stimulations to the exploratory area made him think of himself as already in space, traveling toward Pluto, with the countdown still two hours away. Pluto, instead of Mars, for some unheard-of reason. Then his choice of a non-existent colony on a Saturn moon with outpost folks and historical pathfinders in a town he'd shipped building materials and people to in other rockets, surreptitiously, and in total defiance of the Space Authority. Could anything be more fantastically wild?"

"You're new at these cerebral cortex scanning procedures, or it would not have surprised you so much," the second voice said. "We encounter flights like that more often than you might suspect. They're such deeply buried subconscious figments that we have the means now of making sure they'll never arise into consciousness and be acted out. I shouldn't have to remind you of that."

"But--"

"Wait, hear me out," the other protested. "It was natural for a strong-willed man to feel he'd helped create that town, and that his arrival there to rejoin his wife in a shared rejoicing was a kind of homecoming. On a subconscious fantasizing level it was as natural to him as breathing. It was, quite simply, the great human dream in one of its manifestations. That dream takes unusual forms at times, but in an age like ours there is one thing you can count on. There will be a soaring."

"A soaring?"

"In a spaceward direction, yes. A man goes very far and dares greatly, for the joy and wonder of coming home. We need men like him in the Mars Colony. He has

the kind of sturdy independence on a high-risk level that made the Old American West a legend as innovative in its time as the space perspective that made NASA possible, in the earliest of its constantly greater triumphs."

"I understand all that, sir," the first voice said. "But his rebelliousness, his defiance of the Space Authority, of which we are all a part? You're not afraid of that?"

"Not with the figment prevented from becoming actualized in an action-distorting way. Not at all. We need such subconscious creative drives too, on a new, still dangerously unexplored planet. As a pioneer colonist he has every quality that is basic to innovative triumphs on a very high level. Especially when he knows, as he does, that his wife will soon be joining him in the Colony--"

Holden saw them then, for the barest instant, with the towering space-vehicle bulk of the Silverlark looming on its launching pad a short distance away. His immediate superior, takeoff consultant Hiram Markham, and the little man everyone knew, quiet, unassuming and with nothing about him to make him conspicuous except the calm wisdom of his words. In the entire Space Authority there was no one in a higher position of command than Michael Hughes.

He knew as well that just before the electrode was removed there were a few things he might overhear and see that he would cease to have any conscious knowledge of. Having been warned in advance, he was not surprised when a total blackout came sweeping in upon him.

"Just ten minutes and the countdown starts," Glenwald said, casting a quick glance at his co-pilot, and shaking his head. "You're taking

Continued on p. 20

# MURDER IN SPACE

by Lin Carter

I

At Ardarcar Station, Hautley Quicksilver boarded the IVS luxury liner, Arthur C. Clarke. While standing in line, he thought grimly to himself that this trip had better be everything he wished it to be. It was his friend and sometime colleague, Barsine Torsche, who had recommended the Clarke to him; he had made his reservations for the vacation with some trepidation: previous vacation trips on the IVS liners Olaf Stapledon and Robert A. Heinlein had proved less than salubrious experiences, to one of his fastidious taste.

The reception clerk at the desk was, he noted with mild surprise, a human being, rather than a robotic servitor. This was only to be the first of the many surprises--some pleasant and some less than pleasant--which awaited him on the voyage to come.

Quicksilver proffered his Citizen's Card, a thin wafer of indestructible, plastex, which the clerk inserted into the console slot. Instants later the viewpanel informed the clerk that Ser Hautley Quicksilver's credit rating was thus-and-such, his visa status thus-and-so, and that his identity was confirmed.

Hautley rode the gravity well up to Starflite Deck, where the most luxurious accommodations were reserved for those whose social rank, or at least wealth, were commensurate. He entered his suite, an airy, sunny sequence of rooms, to find a servitor act-

ing as valet, unpacking his luggage and storing his things neatly away in wall-cubicles. The servitor turned upon him a bland, pleasant face of flesh-tinted synthetic and inquired in a mellow voder if there was anything he desired. Hautley shook his head and left the suite, and sought the bar in the lounge.

Another surprise: the bartender was also human, no servitor: a silver-haired man of exquisite manners and indeterminate age, who assembled the cocktail which Hautley ordered with the care and precision of a sculptor preparing a masterpiece. Hautley sipped the beverage and relaxed.

From where he sat at the head of the bar, transparent panels gave a broad view of the lounge itself; thus, Hautley gained his first look at those who would be his companions on the journey. Would he make new friends, arrange new erotic liaisons, find enemies? There was no predicting these eventualities, but their very unpredictability was one of the elements which caused Hautley to savor life to the fullest.

There went past in stately robes a Chonga Taivena Matriarch with her usual entourage of pubescent girls. These were attired in severe gowns which covered their bodies from throat to wrist and heel, while their hair was decently kerchiefed in sober colors. For the most part they paced along behind the Matriarch with modestly downcast eyes, all but one bright-eyed little minx who glanced up, caught Hautley's eye, looked him up and down with brazen appraisal, smiled a slow smile with parted, moist, watermelon-pink lips, and passed on.

Hautley elevated one brow, and shook his head, musing: the Matriarch will have her hands full watching over that one.

A plump Magnate from one of the Technarch worlds came waddling by, importantly dictating in a hush-phone strapped to his fat throat, followed by three innocuous clerks. He was followed next by an Imperial courier whose brassard-of-office gave him precedence over anyone of lower rank than a reigning monarch. This particular individual was lean as a whip-pet, face like space-tanned leather, with ivory hair.

Then came a brash personage, red-faced and hearty, whose expensive but rather gaudy costume fairly advertised him to be some sort of a theatrical entrepreneur. He was conversing loudly with two other men, possibly employees, or clients.

Hautley sipped his cocktail meditatively, watching the passing show. Several Companions were now circulating in the lounge of the starship, some male, some female. The men were either pale, slender and epicene, or brawny and bronzed; the girls were all very young and of extraordinary beauty. For the most part, these last wore frocks of fashionable transplex, that fabric which has the disconcerting property of becoming completely transparent, here and there, at spaced intervals. One of the girls had her back to Quicksilver and was conversing with two men at a table, although she was standing: as he idly watched, a portion of her gown became transparent, revealing an enticingly globular brown buttock.

Turning away, the girl caught Hautley's eyes, smiled, and came towards where he sat. She had an intriguingly lopsided smile, and amethyst eyes, probably ion-dyed. Her hair, worn long and

sleek, was of an unusual shade of very dark red. As she strolled towards him, between the tables, another panel of her gown went transparent, revealing her left breast, which was perfectly shaped, with a pouting pink nipple: it was obvious the young woman wore no under-clothing at all.

She entered the bar and came up to him; Hautley gestured to the next seat.

"I am not really looking for a Companion, citizeness, but let me buy you a drink. Bartender?"

She ordered a Cinnabar Moonrise, and they toasted each other. Her amethyst eyes were flirtatious, but also demure: an interesting combination, thought Hautley.

"Are you on business or vacation?" the girl inquired in a warm, husky voice.

"Vacation, I'm glad to say. I'm bound for Paragon; I have a yearning for white beaches, emerald palms, warm lagoons, dusky maidens," he said half-humorously. She laughed, and, without being at all as brazen about it as had the precocious Novice in the entourage of the Chonga Tailvena Matriarch, appraised him. Tall, lean, mahogany-tanned, his pewter-gray locks meticulously arranged across his brow in a frieze that suggested a bust from Imperial Rome. His shaped suit was of expensive cut, but decorous; his personal jewellery discreet but valuable.

They chatted lightly: there would be a dance that night after dinner in the Grand Hall; tomorrow night, there would be a masquerade, with prizes. A costume shop on the Mall would be open early, so that entrants might procure their garments and masks. Finishing her cocktail, and declining in a friendly manner his proffer of a second, she shook hands with him--a surprisingly masculine gesture which he found titillating.

"I must go; but here is my Code. If you wish a Companion, please ring for me. You have an interesting

face. My name is Taurean Hakefield." She smiled again, that whimsical, lopsided smile, and sauntered away. Hautley gazed after her, speculatively.

On his way out of the bar after her, Hautley almost collided with a tall, gaunt man with a long jaw and sad eyes. He wore the gray tunic and white-winged collar of a Psychist deacon. They exchanged polite apologies.

Now why would a member of that harsh, dour cult be riding on an expensive luxury liner? Hautley asked of himself, striding on.

The answer was not at all apparent.

At some interval while Hautley had talked to the girl, Taurean Hakefield, in the bar, the Arthur C. Clarke had slipped her moorings and had entered flight mode. The transition from parking orbit to free flight had been accomplished so adroitly that even Quicksilver, with his keen, alert senses, had not discerned it.

He changed for dinner: formal dinnerwear this year was black-and-silver, and Hautley donned a shaped suit zebra-striped in those hues. Upon sudden impulse, he dialed the Code which Taurean Hakefield had given him and invited her to join him for dinner. She replied that she would be delighted to do so.

He descended to the dining room in pleasant anticipation of an excellent meal and interesting companionship. It did not occur to Hautley that he was embarking upon an adventure.

## 2

The table assigned was set for seven, and Quicksilver discovered with mixed feelings that his companions for dinner were to be among those whom he had earlier glimpsed

in the Starflite Lounge. These were the Matriarch, Great-Mother Parcella and one of her girls, the saucy-eyed little minx who had so boldly looked Hautley up and down: she was the Novice Alia. The other girls in the entourage dined in their suite; perhaps Great-Mother Parcella felt it needful to keep a close watch on this particular Novice, Hautley mused to himself with a private smile.

The entrepreneur was a brash, overdressed man named Jarles Rapsallion. He wore loud checked dinner clothes with large squares of black-and-silver, with a huge silk handkerchief in his breast pocket. Theoretically, this was an accessory limited by custom to the Nobility, but the sumptuary laws were not restrictive on the detail. Hautley found him boisterous, talkative, and boorish.

The fussy, self-important Magnate was called Turgo Barnavelt, an exporter of para-electronic components from Syron III. His shaped suit did all that a shaped suit could do to restrain or conceal his round little belly; he was red-faced and perspiring, and dictated memos into his hush-phone between bouts of conversation.

The gaunt Psychist deacon was also at their table: his name was Carrison Fane, en route to inspect the Deaconate on Arlion II. Both he and the Matriarch and her Novice declined the rather excellent wine in favor of tea; Rapsallion and Barnavelt, however, imbibed of cocktails rather freely, much to the detriment of the table conversation.

As for Taurean Hakefield, the red-headed girl was modishly attired in a discreet gown which fell in many alternately black-and-silver pleats to her knees, from a low yoke collar. Hautley found her quite entrancing. He lit a stimulette, offering one to her, which she politely declined. They sipped their cocktails.

Rapsallion seized control of the

conversation early on. He was voyaging to the ocean world of Paragon, Quicksilver's own destination. There he hoped to raise sufficient capital to organize an aquatic extravaganza with divers, synchronized swimmers, trained eels, and such. He boasted loudly of his former theatrical triumphs and only the dour Psychist, to whom he deferred, was able to interrupt his voluble monologue. The entrepreneur was, it turned out--and rather surprisingly--a devout convert to Psychist Science. He praised the abilities of Carrison Fane in this regard most fulsomely.

"We are a science, you know, Ser Hautley, not a group of woolly-brained mystics! Meaning no offense, Great-Mother. Ours is an exact discipline, is it not, Deacon Fane? And capable of scientific validation."

"I know little of the subject," Quicksilver admitted, hoping to thus terminate the monologue. But, with the obstreperous fanaticism of a recent convert, the remark had the opposite effect. As their meals were served, Rapsallion urged Carrison Fane to give the scientific rationale behind Psychist Science. Deacon Fane looked slightly annoyed, but did so briefly, while munching on his salad.

"Psychist theory holds that, upon the death of an individual, the vital energy or life force does not disperse, but conglomerates into what we call a 'prime node,' composed of twinned particles---vitons, which are the particles of life energy, and psychons, which are the particles of thought. The prime node, then, retains vitality as well as sentience, memory, self-awareness."

The Matriarch sniffed disparagingly, lips thinned in disapproval. Hautley murmured a polite phrase of interest.

"It is the purpose of our study

groups--for we do not, of course, have churches per se, not being in any sense a religious cult--to become receptors, in communication with discarnate prime nodes. This is accomplished by a strict regimen of training, combining certain austerities, meditation, and, ah, the use of certain drugs which retard sensory immediacy--our awareness of our surroundings--and make a receptor such as myself the, um, channel of Psychist communion . . . the, ah--"

"Medium, perchance?" smiled Hautley. He reflected, over his entree, small roast fowl on sharp skewers, that under one name or another, this so-called "science" had been around for centuries--without, insofar as he was aware, yet attaining scientific credibility.

"How fascinating!" breathed Taur-ean Hakefield, sipping her wine. "Then you can actually communicate with the dead?"

Deacon Fane winced, as if the term were distasteful to him, even somewhat obscene.

"Our science teaches that there is no such thing as 'death,' Citizeness," he said reprovingly. "There is only the state of discarnation . . ."

At this point the Magnate Turgo Barnavelt interjected on a scoffing note. Coming from the Technarchate as he did, he could hardly be less than skeptical of this mystical philosophy dressed in the sober garb of a science. An exchange, while brief, became a trifle heated, with the Magnate demanding proof of such claims.

"Nothing would be simpler, Cn. Barnavelt," retorted Jarles Rapsallion. "Deacon Fane's cabin is not far; after dinner, perhaps all of you would care to join in what we call a Linkage, while the Deacon serves as receptor for Psychist communion. Visible, and even tangible, evidence will thus be displayed--unless, of course, you are inclined

to doubt the evidence of your own senses! Surely, Deacon Fane, you will oblige these skeptics?"

The Psychist agreed with obvious reluctance.

Hautley elevated an inquiring brow, finishing his coffee and apertif. "And we are to be under the influence of the drugs you mention, Cn. Rapsallion? How can we know they do not contain hallucinogens or hypnotics?"

Carrison Fane took severe exception to this suggestion. "Naturally, Ser Hautley, we will eschew the use of the narcotics for the session which Rapsallion proposes," he snapped.

The Matriarch glared reprovingly about the table. "It would be highly unsuitable to one of my Order to attend such a superstitious debauch," she said harshly. "Neither would I care to subject my Novice to such a spiritual orgy!"

"Oh, but please, Great-Mother," urged the child Alia, with mischief in her sparkling eyes. "It would be so instructive!"

"And it sounds very entertaining," added Taurean Hakefield eagerly. "Please join us, Great-Mother! One of your sobriety and character will readily discern charlatanism, if any should be employed."

"I beg you, Great-Mother, to join us!" urged Jarles Rapsallion. "We are customarily seven at Linkage, just as we are seven at table here . . . and if you decline to attend, we shall have to scare up two more, or cancel the demonstration."

"Very well, then," sniffed the Matriarch. "But I utterly disapprove of such meddlings in the Beyond!"

And so it was mutually agreed. Since all had by now finished their dessert, they repaired at once to the cabin occupied by Deacon Fane, which was only a few steps away.

Taurean Hakefield clung to Hautley's arm all the way, her amethyst eyes glistening with excitement and anticipation.

## 3

Compared to the spacious, luxurious suite which Hautley Quicksilver occupied, that assigned to Carrison Fane was spartan, to say the least. It was essentially a square room, with an adjoining 'fresher cubicle for sanitary purposes. At Hautley's suggestion, the guests joined hands and traversed the space, encountering no confederate who might have been concealed from view behind a light-baffle.

Then seven pneumos unfolded from storage-spaces in the walls. They seated themselves in a circle thusly:

Deacon Fane

Jarles Rapsallion Hautley Quicksilver  
Turgo Barnavelt Taurean Hakefield  
The Great-Mother Novice Alia

They joined hands, after a servitor had been summoned: Hautley's right hand clasped the left hand of Deacon Fane; his left was held by the right hand of Taurean Hakefield, and thus around the circle. On voice command, the servitor left the cabin, turning off the ceiling luminants and locking the door from the outside. They were left in all but utter darkness: a small degree of light leaked in from the luminant panels in the 'fresher, whose door was an inch ajar.

The light was just sufficient for Hautley's keen vision to discern the white wings of Carrison Fane's spread collar in the gloom.

"I shall now attain receptor-mode through self-induced trance," the Psychist announced. "Pray be still . . ."

"Is there any possible danger attached to this, ah, experiment?" demanded the Matriarch. Deacon Fane assured her that there was none,

although:

"Occasionally, a prime node will be bitterly aggrieved at its discarnate state, mischievous, even malignant. We shall simply dismiss from Linkage any entity thus attuned. Silence, now, all, please!"

His breathing deepened, slowly. Hautley unobtrusively placed a forefinger on the Deacon's pulse: it slowed, slowed. The trance-state he was entering seemed genuine enough.

There was no sound, save for the sigh of air-currents through the wall-vent, a barred grill; the faint hum of the ship itself; the purr of heating units at base-board; their own breathing.

Every sense alert, searching the all but unbroken gloom, Hautley felt amused, excited. The staging, the showmanship, were impeccable: and far beyond the gross crudities that such as the entrepreneur Rapsallion might approach. The silence became deafening, broken largely by Carrison Fane's breathing, which became ragged, uneven.

Suddenly, there sounded a gargling gasp, as of someone being strangled. A scraping thump, as of a body relaxing, dragging its heels. Cries burst out in alarm:

"Something's gone wrong! Help! Lights--!"

The circle of linked hands was broken; pneumos scraped back; feet thudded on the slick black glassine flooring for the door; bodies grappled in panic for the light-switch.

The luminants came to life, flooding the black cubicle with brilliance.

Hautley, who had not moved from his pneumo, saw three astounding things with utter clarity.

Carrison Fane sprawled, slumped over, in the cushioned embrace of his pneumo. The soft part of his throat, directly beneath his adam's apple, had been punctured. Therefrom leaked scarlet blood.

Between his outspread feet, a steel knife of some sort glittered; its blade was wet with fresh blood.

There was no one else in the room; no one at all, but the seven who had entered the cubicle to contact the spirit-world.

The Matriarch shuddered, gasped, strained the little Novice to her bony bosom. The child observed everything with bright, avid gaze.

The entrepreneur Rapsallion looked pale and shaken; Barnaveit wet dry lips with a dryer tongue; Taurean Hakefield clung to Hautley's arm, seemingly faint.

He knelt swiftly, touched the body of the Psychiat at pressure points. There was neither heartbeat nor wrist-pulse to be detected. Lacking such as Rapsallion's huge, ostentatious kerchief, Hautley commandeered same; he wrapped the hilt of the knife with it, to avoid smearing whatever fingerprints might be thereupon. Rising, he addressed the frozen company in sparse words:

"This man is dead. Cn. Barnaveit, you are nearest to the wall unit: please call the Purser. We need a medico, and a ship's officer. Murder has been committed here--"

Whether by a human agency, or a malignant spirit?

That was the one thought that flashed through the minds of many.

The Captain of the Arthur C. Clarke was a large, distinguished-looking man with silver temples; his name was Renwald Larlavon. He assumed command of the situation promptly. The ship's chief medico, a plum-skinned Spican named Ordovcovor, examined the body and pronounced it dead some eight minutes from a puncture wound in the throat. The body was carried out of the room on a gravity-lift, to be frozen in the cryonics unit.

"Ladies, gentlemen," said the Captain in somber, measured tones, "when we arrive at Paragon, there will, of course, be a police inquiry.

Until then, and until the criminal is apprehended, I declare martial law upon this vessel; all--and I mean all--civil rights are suspended. You may go, so that the cabin may be sealed off. Ser Hautley, I would see you in my stateroom."

"Certainly," murmured Quicksilver.

Captain Larlavon's stateroom proved spacious but sparsely appointed. Scanning a computer facsimile at his desk, Larlavon gestured for Hautley to seat himself.

"Ser Hautley, I have asked Computer Central for a brief dossier on every individual present in cabin S-14 during this incredible atrocity: yours came out first, as you are of Prime-A-plus-A status."

Hautley made a noncommittal sound. The Captain eyed him gravely.

"You are, it seems, a private inquiry agent; a professional criminologist?" It was not actually a query, but Hautley replied in the affirmative.

"And one of great distinction, as I read. Ser Hautley, I will not mince words: we are still two full days out of our first port, which is Paragon. No one can keep passengers from gossiping. We cannot tolerate the presence of a vicious murderer aboard the Clarke, if only for passenger morale. Will you assist, advise, in a preliminary round of questioning?"

"My services are at your command," said Quicksilver. "However, I must remind the Captain that, being present at the scene of the crime, I am myself one of the six suspects."

"Understood," nodded Captain Larlavon. "And your offer of assistance, guidance, is gratefully received. What do you advise?"

Hautley concentrated briefly, then said: "Let us interview each

of those present in turn. I suggest, also, that you inquire of Computer Central a fax of all financial transactions made by each within the past year."

"Certainly, but . . ." The Captain looked puzzled. Hautley smiled briefly.

"Sir, the one and only motive for murder is personal gain. No other has ever been discovered. Since it seems unlikely that we deal here with a crime of passion, then monetary motives are suspected."

"Personal gain . . . what of the actions of a homicidal maniac?" asked the officer.

"All murders, whether premeditated or committed on impulse, are committed for personal gain. Crimes of passion, which you might suspect to be otherwise, are still connected with personal gain--the elimination of an erotic rival, the punishment of a straying mate. Personal gain. Murders committed by paranoid psychotics are for the purpose of removing suspected enemies: personal gain, again. More sordidly, most murders are committed solely with wealth in mind: thus I would scrutinize briefly the monetary records of those involved."

"You shall have the facsimiles shortly," affirmed the Captain, turning to the computer terminal.

## 4

One by one, the persons present at the scene of the crime were admitted to the Captain's stateroom, beginning with Jarles Rapsallion. The boisterous entrepreneur was shaken, subdued; also, faintly surprised to see Hautley present in an advisory capacity.

"Indeed?" he murmured. "I had not realized that Ser Hautley was a private investigator . . . well, ask me what you will!"

"According to Computer Central, both yourself and the, um, deceased



were resident upon Illadion IV. You are also both members of study groups devoted to Psychic Science. Were you acquainted?" inquired the Captain. Rapsallion shook his head.

"There are upwards of one hundred thirty million carnate nodes on Illadion IV," he said. "It would be impossible to know everyone on the planet personally... I knew of Deacon Fane by reputation, of course, and heard him lecture on Psychist Science on at least two occasions that I can recall, but to the best of my recollection we never met, never exchanged words."

Hautley leaned forward, unfolding the white kerchief. The steel blade glittered in the brilliantly lit cabin.

"Have you ever seen this instrument before?" he asked.

The entrepreneur stared at the thing with surprise and a certain revulsion. It was not a knife, but a handled skewer; the entire item had been dusted for fingerprints, but none were found; it did not even bear a smudge. It was as if the hand that had held it had been immaterial.

"It . . . it looks very like one of the implements we used at table," he murmured faintly. "The entree was small roasted sea-fowl . . . we each used such a skewer to hold the fowl while slicing off tidbits."

"It is, in fact, just such an implement," said Hautley gravely.

Rapsallion wet his lips, staring at the deadly thing. "Were any of the skewers absent from our table?" he asked.

"That is impossible to tell. After we left the table, a servitor piled the dishes and tableware on a gravitic tray; they were taken to the galley and deposited in sterilizers. They were not counted. The servitor was not programmed to notice if anything

was missing from the table service," said Hautley.

Rapsallion was followed by Barnavelt, who also seemed surprised to learn of Hautley's profession. He claimed never to have visited Illadion IV in his life, and had no prior acquaintance with, or even knowledge of, the murdered man. He was not an adherent of Psychist Science, he told them, but a follower of the Vuudhana philosophy.

The Matriarch also disclaimed any knowledge of the murdered man. A certain air of smug, self-righteous satisfaction was visible in her angular features. It took no telepath to discern that she was thinking along the lines of, "Just desserts for meddling so impiously in the mysteries of the Beyond!"

"Great-Mother, Carrison Fane was traveling to a world in the Matriarchy to inspect Psychist study groups there, and their financial records. A sort of Inspector-General, you might say. What is the official opinion of the Matriarchy upon Psychist Science?"

"Total disdain and utter disapproval. Under Imperial law, I fear we are forced to tolerate such heretical and even blasphemous cults. We do not, however, have to enjoy their existence in our hegemony," she snapped.

"How severe is this disapproval? Are there demonstrations, marches, bombings of study groups?" asked the Captain.

"Certainly not!" she exclaimed piously. "We abhor violence, even when undertaken in a holy cause. We simply ignore the existence of such cults."

She, too, knew nothing of the skewer. She had not, in fact, eaten the fowl served, since flesh was repugnant to her. Her meal had consisted of salad, scallion soup, biscuits and tea.

Little Alia also had nothing to add. Of the six, however, the pre-

cocious child alone seemed exhilarated by the murder, and was hard put to repress her delight in the adventure.

Taurean Hakefield admitted to having visited Illadion IV on several occasions, and had spent up to a week on the planet at one point in time. It was frequently the custom of Companions to "lay over" for a time at the end of a trip, catching a ride on the next IVS liner to arrive. She also was of the Vuudhana faith, but had not attended chapel in some years, her allegiance being nominal.

After the questioning, Hautley and the Captain conferred briefly. Hautley summed up the situation thusly:

"Both Cn. Rapsallion and Cns. Hakefield could have met, even known, Carrison Fane, although both say they did not. Neither seems to have sufficient motive for the killing. Rapsallion is an ardent follower of Psychist Science; the murder of so promising an rising a star in the Psychist firmament as Fane seems a blow to him."

"Quite so," murmured the Captain.

"The Great-Mother, the Magnate, and, I suppose, the child, have a certain bias against Psychist Science. The Matriarch's is purely theological, as would be that of her Novice; the Magnate, as a citizen of the Technarchate, is against the Psychist beliefs, which seem to him wanton and harmful superstition. Only the Great-Mother seems fanatical enough in her rigorous faith as to be remotely capable of murder. But she does not seem to me the sort which are inclined to martyrdom

\*\*\*"

"The child, Alia, might have committed the deed in order to curry favor with the Great-Mother,"

the Captain pointed out.

"Not inconceivable, I suppose," murmured Quicksilver thoughtfully.

"Could the hand of a woman, or a child, have driven home the weapon with sufficient force as to cause death?"

"Of course," replied Hautley. "The soft part of the throat is an easy target, and the skewer is very keen. Tell me, sir, the ship's sensors monitor energy-consumption in every part of the vessel, do they not?"

"They do," affirmed the Captain. "A balanced energy-consumption is required in order to maintain flight mode. Would you care to examine a fax of this?" Hautley did.

"Here is the time the lights were extinguished in Fane's cabin," remarked the Captain. "8:59. Notice the sudden drop in consumption of energy to the minimal level required for heating and the circulation of air . . . were you thinking, Ser Hautley, that perhaps the weapon was sustained and directed by a gravitic field, and rendered invisible behind a light-baffle?"

"The possibility had occurred to me," smiled Hautley. "A very remote possibility, but, still, every detail must be scrutinized. Had such technology been employed, however, the ship's sensors would have reported the energy consumption at higher levels."

"I gather that you eliminate the theory that the murder was committed by an immaterial entity . . . a spirit?"

"I am quite positive there was a human agent," said Quicksilver. "There is no doubt in my mind on that point."

"Well, I am bewildered by the entire matter," the Captain confessed. "In my fifteen years of employment by the Inter-Void Service, I have never before had a murder on one of my ships. Oh, accidents, of course; even, once, years ago, a suicide. But never a murder. . .

the entire thing seems inexplicable! If you discard the possibility of an, ah, discarnate, spiritual murderer, I can see no explanation as to how the deed could possibly have been committed. No one can thrust a blade into a man's throat when both hands are being held; and, without exception, everyone interviewed is adamant that the handclasp was not broken until the murder was discovered and you rose to turn on the illuminants."

Hautley looked faintly surprised: "Oh, I know exactly how the murder was committed, the only problem is the motive--"

"You do?" cried the Captain incredulously.

"Of course! It's perfectly obvious, and extremely simple. I knew the method of murder within minutes after the lights went on. I even have a fairly firm suspicion as to the murderer's identity. But proving all of this in a court of law is quite another matter: for that, we need motive, not merely suspicion. Tell me, have you obtained from Computer Central the financial records I asked for?"

"I have; they are here on my desk."

Hautley took them to his cabin to study them thoroughly, leaving behind a bewildered Captain, who stared after him with bemusement.

## 5

That evening the six witnesses were summoned by Captain Larlavon to the cabin which had been occupied by the late Carrison Fane. They found the cabin untouched; it was exactly as they had left it the night before, except that naturally the corpse had been removed.

"We are going to reenact the events of last night," Hautley informed them, "with the Captain taking the place of Deacon Fane.

Please take the same seats as before, then join hands."

They did so, however gingerly. Quicksilver smiled.

"I assure you all that the murder will not be repeated," he said gravely. A servitor was summoned to switch off the illuminants and leave the cabin, locking the door from outside.

Silence ensued, disturbed only by rapid breathing from one or another of those present. Taurean Hakefield's little hand was cool and firm in Hautley's grasp; the Captain's hand, however, was sweating.

The black gloom was relieved only by the faintest glimmer of light from the ceiling illuminants in the 'fresher cubicle, whose door was ajar half an inch. In that feeble ghost of illumination, the silver insignia on the Captain's collar could faintly be glimpsed.

The suspense became all but unendurable: they sat motionlessly, waiting for something to happen. When it finally did, it took them by surprise--

A strangled gasp. The scraping of heels against the flooring.

"Lights--quickly!" cried Quicksilver. The linked handclasp was broken; figures lurched to their feet, bumping into one another in the dark. Then the lights came on.

Captain Larlavon was unharmed, pale but composed.

On the floor before him lay a gleaming skewer.

"Let us see if there are any fingerprints on the weapon," suggested Hautley. "Cn. Rapsallion, if you still have that kerchief about you, may I borrow it again?" Rapsallion produced the article; Quicksilver used it to pick up the skewer and examined the handle by means of a powerful lens.

"No fingerprints at all," he decided. "Not even a smudge."

"Ser Hautley, I presume you have some purpose behind this grisly mum-

mery?" demanded the Matriarch impatiently.

"I have indeed, Great-Mother," replied Quicksilver. "We have exactly duplicated the events of yesterday evening with the sole exception that Captain Larlavon is unharmed. Now I will explain how the murder was committed. One of us at table purloined a skewer which was unobtrusively concealed on his or her person--probably slipped into the waistband of the murderer's garment. With our hands joined it was simply impossible for any of us to have wielded the sharp instrument, therefore the murder was not committed until after the cry for lights went up and our handclaps were broken."

"After?" murmured Taurean Hakefield, wrinkling her brow. "But we all heard--"

"A strangled gasp; the dragging of heels; yes," nodded Hautley Quicksilver. "But any one of us could have uttered that gasp and dragged his or her heels against the flooring. The moment our circle of linked hands was broken, it would be the act of an instant to whip out the skewer--holding it with a piece of cloth so as not to leave fingerprints--and plunge the instrument into Deacon Fane's throat. The target was hard to miss, even in the dark. The faintest glimmer of light from the 'fresher gleamed on the white winged collar Fane was wearing, just as it picked out the silver rank insignia on the Captain's collar. The skewer was then deposited at Fane's feet, and the piece of cloth returned to pocket or waistband or wherever it had formerly reposed."

"Ingenious!" breathed Turgo Barnavelt. "But so completely simple!"

"Simplicity itself," agreed Hautley. "Merely a bit of misdirection, a stage magician's stock in trade. The whole idea was to

make us assume the murder was committed before we broke our handclasp. And one does not have to be a ventriloquist to utter a strangled gasp. We were seated so close together that any one of us could have made the sound, without any of us guessing from whose mouth it came."

"This is all very clever," said Jarles Rapsallion. "Now we know how the murder was committed; a more significant question is, by whom?"

Hautley smiled. "An interesting question, Cn. Rapsallion: but as we both know, you, yourself, are the murderer."

A thunderclap could not have been more shocking. They stared at each other, and at Rapsallion; the entrepreneur himself seemed stunned.

"Surely, you jest!" he cried. "I? For what conceivable reason--from what possible motive--what evidence have you--?"

"I recently obtained from Computer Central a record of your financial transactions over the past year or so," said Hautley. "There were regular withdrawals of sizeable amounts; indeed, the size of the amount grew steadily--"

"My theatrical enterprises--"

--are financed by private investors. No; you were being blackmailed by Deacon Fane," Hautley interposed. Rapsallion looked baffled.

"For what reason? How could anyone know anything about me to occasion blackmail? You are simply bluffing, Ser Hautley!"

"Not at all. Hypnotic drugs are regularly imbibed at Psychiat meetings. Under the influence of a stronger dose than usual you confided to Fane certain discrepancies in your finances; perhaps you pocketed some of the gate receipts, or padded your expenses in order to bilk your investors out of a considerable amount of cash. You were being blackmailed: the signs are unmistakable."

"Well . . . even if I were, and I deny it, that is in itself no

evidence of murder!" blustered Rapsallion.

"No, merely a link in the chain. I have no doubt that before you attained your present entrepreneurial prominence, you performed in less prestigious theatrical roles. Perhaps as a stage magician, even a ventriloquist; if not, then you probably had the opportunity to observe such at close hand and to learn their skills."

"More flim-flam," stormed Rapsallion. "You yourself said not very many minutes past that the murderer did not need to know either the magician's trick of misdirection, or ventriloquism."

"Quite true; one more link in the chain, however. The scraping of heels is another such link: the sound was meant to suggest that Fane, upon being stabbed in the throat, thrust out his legs, which in fact he did, but that was moments later, and the sound he produced was masked behind the noise of several people jumping to their feet, the confusion of chairs being thrust back, as we tried to get the lights on. You scraped your own heels on the floor beneath your chair. See? The marks are still visible on the slick black flooring, as are those beneath my own chair, which I made a few moments ago, when simulating the crime."

All eyes traveled from the scrape marks beneath Hautley's chair to those beneath Rapsallion's.

"When I jumped to my feet--"

"You were naturally on your toes," said Hautley smoothly. "Not on your heels. Try it and see . . ."

Rapsallion sneered. "Any further links in the chain?" he demanded grumpily. Quicksilver nodded.

"You alone wore a silk kerchief prominently displayed and easy to hand, wherewith you whipped

the purloined skewer either from the waistband of your slacks or from the breast pocket of your coat."

"Pfah! I have no doubt we all bear kerchiefs on our person."

"But none so readily to hand as yours . . . moreover, if my auditors will try to recollect our conversation at table yestereve, they will recall that it was you--the glib, smooth-tongued theatrical promoter--who suggested the seance and prodded Deacon Fane into agreeing to it."

"I--"

"Back on your home world, it would have been simplicity itself for you to have learned from Psychist circles of Fane's appointment as Inspector General. You contrived to take passage on the same liner as Fane. You asked to be seated with him at dinner; the tables are set for seven, but it made no difference to you whom else might be dining with yourself and your victim, so long as they could be coaxed to attend the seance. The more witnesses, the merrier."

"Conjecture; pure bluff and conjecture; not an atom of solid proof," wheezed Rapsallion, red in the face and now perspiring.

At this point the Captain spoke up. "Sufficient, however, for me to order you detained under guard. Cn. Rapsallion, will you voluntarily agree to a mindprobe?"

"I will not," snapped the other.

The door opened, revealing a ship's officer and two brawny crewmen. All three were armed with stun guns.

"Bosun, place Cn. Rapsallion in close confinement. When we reach parking orbit tomorrow, a police gig from Paragon will match velocities; the officers will take the suspect into custody."

Rapsallion lurched clumsily to his feet, swaying.

"I'll have my day in court," he growled. Hautley smiled.

"Not necessarily . . . I've no doubt the lawmen can obtain a court

order for a mindprobe," he drawled. Rapsallion sagged like a punctured balloon.

"He was draining me dry, the swine," he breathed. "Ever more demands . . . I would have gone bankrupt if I hadn't--hadn't--"

"Take the prisoner away, bossun," ordered the Captain.

As they left the cabin, Taurean Hakefield entwined her arm with Hautley's. "That was brilliant," she breathed. "Brilliant! Let me buy you a drink?"

"You may; I could certainly use one," confessed Quicksilver.

They repaired to the Starflite Lounge, where the silver-haired bartender gave Hautley his usual cocktail and served Cns. Hakefield

a Cinnabar Moonrise. They clinked glasses and sipped their beverages. Hautley cleared his throat.

"I believe you are entitled to lay over at any given stop and wait for the next IVS liner," he said. "Why not spend two or three days on Paragon with me? I can offer you white beaches, emerald palms, warm lagoons . . .?"

"And what about the dusky maidens?" she inquired with a twinkle of mischief in her eye. He grinned.

"I will gladly pass them up for a slim girl with dark red hair, amethyst eyes and a lopsided smile," said Hautley gallantly.

She smiled and squeezed his hand.

#### Continued from p. 7:

it more clamly than I thought you would. Mars is not for everyone, never could be. In a strange, genuinely humble way I've never felt quite so proud."

"I'm sure they want us to feel that way," Holden said. "That's why, I think, they put off the scanning until we've had no time to get restless or feel uncertain.

We emerge as from a dream, strange, unfathomable, remembering nothing that we saw or felt. We only know that if we hadn't come through with flying colors, we wouldn't be sitting here now waiting for the glory blaze to lift us from the pad. It's far more than just a space vehicle that will be arriving on Mars."

# PRISONERS OF VIBRATION

by Carl Jacobi

It was nightfall of the third day up the tributary when Herrick heard the bell. The distant booming sound rose up over the Borneo jungle, rumbled down the yellow river and died into silence. In the sampan Herrick leaped to his feet, commanded the Dyak paddlers to stop.

"Did you hear it, Charlie? The bell! It came from off there to the east!"

Charles Trane, the other white man, poised a match half way in the act of lighting his pipe and nodded. His grey eyes caught the excitement in his companion's voice.

"Heard it plain enough," he replied. "But I'm not so sure of the direction."

The boat drifted gently in the current, occupants frozen to immobility. Thick shadows were carpeting the narrow waterway, and from out of the surrounding gloom came the chatter of an alarmed monkey, the scream of a parakeet. But the bell-ringing was not repeated.

Herrick shrugged his broad shoulders and lowered himself into the seat across the improvised stern thwart.

"Guess we'd better make camp," he said. "We're sure of one thing anyway. We're close to the place where Professor Le Gare was last seen before he disappeared."

He gave a terse command, and the Dyak paddlers dipped their blades. Across to the left shore, into a small inlet, the sampan moved. Landing, the natives quickly built a fire, erected the wall tent.

Herrick opened his packsack,

took out a map and began to study it.

"According to the Kayan rumors that drifted downriver to Samarinda," he said slowly, "Le Gare struck across country about here. He sent his last communication by portable radio, dismissed his guides and headed due east. Two days later he released a carrier pigeon with a garbled message, describing his discovery of the first Bengaran bell. You know the rest."

Trane stared down into the fire and sighed audibly. Yes, he knew the rest. It all went back to the University of Minnesota where Felix Le Gare had served on the faculty of the archaeology department and where he--Trane--and Stan Herrick had once been students.

In September of the preceding year Le Gare, financed by the university and by the Northwest Science Club, had left for Dutch East Borneo.

"My studies have led me to believe," he had said before his departure, "that somewhere in the Borneo interior, in a district known as Bengara country, can be found traces of a lost civilization antedating any so far known, which was remarkably learned in the fields of abstract mathematical calculation and theoretical physics."

He had said more, most of which was little understood. Something about the science of vibration and the huge "harmonic" bells which were still standing on the borders of unexplored Bengara country, former warning outposts.

Then somewhere in the jungle Le Gare had vanished. The newspapers had gone wild after the reception of his last carrier pigeon message. Either Le Gare had been delirious

with tropic fever or he had found things to startle the scientific world. The civilization he sought was not dead. It still existed, isolated, fortified by a circle of giant bells which were controlled by some mysterious power and which still rang at certain intervals.

The Northwest Science Club had finally offered to finance a second expedition to search for the missing scientist and had called for qualified volunteers. All of which brought Trane to their present situation: thirty days from the coast, sixty miles up an unexplored river, at the edge of the unknown.

"Quiet!" Herrick snapped suddenly. "Listen!"

The sound was coming again, this time distinctly from the east, the low, deep-pitched ringing of a giant bell. For sixty seconds it continued, reverberating high over the sago palms like some mysterious voice of the past. Then, as if afraid of the echo, it died away.

Herrick leaped to his feet. "I'm going out and find that thing," he said. "It must be close at hand." He strapped a Luger automatic around his waist, slid a small compass in his pocket and moved across the glade. Trane, with a shrug, followed.

"No use telling the Dyaks. They've been scared stiff ever since we got into this district. Let 'em think we're going after game."

For half an hour they fought their way eastward, consulting the compass at intervals. Farther from the river the jungle thinned perceptibly, the ground grew higher, and the going became less rough.

And then abruptly for the third time the bell sounded. It was just before them now, sending out its clamor into the blackness,

pounding against their eardrums. Herrick broke into a run.

He circled a Palapak tree, climbed a short rise and stopped short, switching on a powerful flashlight before him.

"By the Lord Harry," breathed Trane. "It is a bell!"

They were standing at the edge of a natural clearing. In the center, rising sixty feet, was a column of basalt, a miracle of ancient masonry, covered with strange hieroglyphics. At the top, outlined vaguely in the light of the flash, an open belfry projected over the sides. And suspended in that belfry was a huge bell.

The bell was ringing now. Peal after peal issued from it to echo over the inky jungle.

"There's no clapper," Herrick cried suddenly. "And the bell isn't moving!"

Trane stared. "Then how do you account for the sound?"

Herrick moved the white flash-ray back and forth above him. "I think I've got it," he said. "You know I talked with Le Gare in his laboratory before he left. What he told me I thought then were the wildest kind of dreams. But that bell is ringing by what is known as sympathetic vibration. There must be a master bell somewhere miles away. When the master bell rings, this one--and maybe a hundred others for all we know--ring in unison. If you remember your schooling, it's an application of the old Helmholtz law. Two resonant bodies are in harmony when their material, cross-section and tension are the same, provided their size is the ratio of one to two, two to three, or three to four."

"And with what motive? What's it all for?"

"I'm not so sure I can answer that. Le Gare believed a civilization existed near here which in the beginning originated from Egypt. According to his theory, this race



was highly developed in science, especially the science of acoustics and harmonics. These bells in some way served as watchtowers, though how I don't know."

Herrick stiffened suddenly and twisted the flashlight. A low humming sound had risen into the air like the drone of a rapidly approaching electric motor.

For a moment as the narrow ray moved across the clearing the two white men saw nothing. Then Trane uttered a cry of astonishment.

Emerging single file from the jungle wall a dozen men advanced toward them. They were not Dyaks or Malays or natives of any kind, though their skin was dark almost unto chocolate. They were, as Herrick instantly realized, different from any homo sapiens he had ever seen.

Towering nearly seven feet in height, the men wore hauberks of gleaming chain mail. Scabbarded swords were strapped to their waists. The leader carried a large metal box shaped like an oversize mandolin, upon the top of which was mounted a complicated instrument panel, several queer-shaped vacuum tubes and a cordon of fine wires. The humming sound issued from this box.

And then Herrick received his second shock. The leader strode forward, addressed him in stilted English.

"Infidel," he said, "you have crossed the boundary of ancient Bengara. You have trespassed the country of the mighty Garale. For that you will consider yourselves our prisoners of war. Relinquish your arms, please."

Slowly Herrick's right hand dropped toward his holstered Luger. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Relinquish your arms!"

Herrick's fingers reached the Luger butt. He grasped the weapon, clawed it out of its holster, then rocked backward with a cry of pain. His gun hand had suddenly stiffened

into a limb of inflexible muscles. Like a band of steel it remained outstretched before him, powerless to move.

The leader regarded him with emotionless eyes. The humming in the metal box increased to a high-frequency drone, then diminished, and Herrick's arm dropped useless and numb to his side.

"Resistance will avail you nothing," the dark-faced man said. "One false move and the electric vibrane will paralyze you for life."

Vaguely as in a dream Herrick heard the man speak a sharp command, saw half of his followers leap forward. An instant later his arms were bound behind him, and he and Charles Trane were prisoners.

The leader snapped a second knob on the metal box, and the humming rose higher in pitch. As the sound grew louder a shutter opened at one end, and a glow of light appeared, illuminating the jungle about them.

"Walk between us, infidel."

Prodded by a sword in his back Herrick was forced across the clearing, past the carved bell tower and into a small trail that led into the bush. At his side Trane struggled vainly with his bonds.

Like automata, voicing no comments, the armored men marched at a fast grueling pace. The glow from the metal box burned steadily, lighting the way ahead, casting fantastic shadows to the rear.

Frantically Herrick sought an answer to the parade of questions that were broiling in his brain. Who were these creatures who spoke his language and yet dressed in the garb of a past age? Where was he being taken? Escape, he realized, was for the moment impossible. The metal box which the leader carried apparently had unlimited power, though what was the nature of that power he couldn't guess.

All through the night they marched. Exhausted from long hours on the steaming river Herrick's muscles began to ache and stiffen. His

throat became parched. Yet when he asked for water a prod from a sword was his only answer. Spots began to form in his vision. The captors did not lessen their pace.

And then at dawn the leader changed his direction. Emerging from the jungle they found the way before them bastioned by a high limestone cliff. Fifty yards beyond a natural passage led through the barrier.

The passage was not long. When they reached its farther end Herrick uttered a hoarse cry. He was entering into a circular pocket, completely walled in by high, almost perpendicular cliffs. From one side to the other the interior expanse was covered with an array of fantastic buildings.

White dome-shaped structures glittered blindingly in the glare of the sunlight. The architecture was strange, unreal. Hybrids between ancient Egyptian obelisks and Mayan and Toltec temples, they lay in symmetrical rows, separated by narrow cobbled streets.

In the corner stood a huge dais, upon the top of which was mounted a gigantic bell. A tessellated chrome-finished fence-work circled the upper half of the bell, the rungs separated by great white insulators. Farther to the left was a larger building. The dome here was constructed of silvered metal and was crossed with a weird antenna of copper wires.

But in the entire city no human being was in evidence.

The leader turned. "Bengara," he said shortly. "Come. I will see if the great Garale will receive you."

They descended a series of natural steps and entered the widest of the streets.

"Am I dreaming?" demanded Trane. "Or is all this real?"

Passing down the thoroughfare they saw that the mark of age and desolation was on all sides. The

buildings bore no sign of human occupation. Heavy layers of dust covered the cobblestones. The very air seemed disturbed by their invasion.

A moment later they were led through a gate and pushed into the doorway of the building with the silver dome. Inside the two men walked forward slowly, staring about them.

The place was a completely equipped laboratory of huge proportions. Tiers of shelves lined with scientific equipment and strange apparatus lined either wall. In the center was a desk roughly hewn from nibong wood. And behind that desk sat--a white man.

For an instant as he looked upon the familiar countenance a feeling of relief swept through Herrick. Then he caught the sardonic gleam in the black eyes, and he nodded coldly.

"Professor Le Gare?"

Deliberately the name stared at him. "That was my name in the past," he said. "I am called Garale now. A Bengaran anagrammatization--the Great Garale. What do you want?"

The calm suavity of the speech cut into Herrick's temper. He took a step forward, lips tight.

"Listen," he said, "I risked my life, traveled thousands of miles to find you. Back in the States they don't like the idea of a man left to die in the jungle. But apparently there's been a mistake. If you'll call off these henchmen of yours, we'll make tracks for home."

Felix Le Gare smiled again, lit a cheroot.

"Not so fast," he replied. "To let you leave now would hardly speak well for my hospitality. You were, if I remember correctly, at one time one of my most advanced students, were you not, Mr. Herrick?"

Herrick shot a quick glance about, seeking a means of escape. He saw none.

"It will be a pleasure," Le Gare

went on, "to demonstrate to a person of my own race the developments I have brought about in this laboratory. An assistant--two assistants--will be most welcome."

He clapped his hands. A door opened, and a young girl strode into the room. Clad in breast plates and skirt of metallic beads, she was a creature of grace and beauty. But she bore no resemblance to the armored men. Her features were white.

"This is Dromeda," Le Gare said, "the last living descendant of Bengaran royalty. She will show you to your room."

The girl nodded obediently. She turned, led the way through the door. Swords drawn, three of the armored men forced Trane and Herrick to follow. Down a long corridor they passed to a low, dimly lit room at the far end.

When they were alone Herrick looked at Trane, shrugged his shoulders eloquently. The girl had locked the door behind her. Stout iron bars lined the single window. It was evident they were still prisoners.

"Nice situation," Trane said sarcastically. "We go half way across the earth to find a half-baked scientist, and he claps us in a cell."

Herrick lit a cigarette. "Le Gare has something up his sleeve," he scowled. "But I think we've got an ace in the hole. That girl--did you see the way she looked at him? Hatred, if I ever saw it. A little persuasion and . . ."

His voice cut off. From beyond the door a low roar suddenly sounded. Like the thunder of monstrous machinery it cannonaded through the room to end in an ear-splitting explosion. In the ceiling above came a grinding of stone against stone.

Herrick looked up. His eyes widened with horror, and he threw

himself sideward in one mad frantic lunge. Too late--the heavy ceiling-block hurtled downward to crash with sickening impact upon his head. A burst of colored lights flamed in Herrick's vision. Then blackness, and he felt himself falling . . .

When he opened his eyes, Charles Trane was bathing his temple with water and Professor Le Gare was bent over him, examining him critically.

"I'm very sorry," Le Gare said. "A mixture of trinitro cellulose accidentally exploded in my laboratory. The impact must have loosened one of the ceiling stones. Fortunately it struck you only a glancing blow."

Herrick groped to his feet, swayed dizzily.

"I believe you will be all right now," Le Gare said. "I want you and Mr. Trane to view my experiments. Follow me, please!"

He led the way down the corridor and into a room on the opposite side. Herrick, head still throbbing, looked about him, bewildered. If the central laboratory had been well equipped, this auxiliary chamber was a miracle in itself. But the apparatus which met his eyes was all unrecognizable. Huge dial-mounted rubber panels covered the four walls. A long table stood in the center. At either end was a glass cylinder through which pulsed a scarlet liquid. And depending from the ceiling was a large screen, made of an asbestos-like material.

"Gentlemen," Le Gare said, "I have told you my work had to do with vibration. Step to the table, please, and I will demonstrate."

"When I came here I knew to a certain extent what to expect. The Bengarans migrated from Egypt where they developed the science of acoustics and harmonics to a high degree. By studying the manuscripts which they left, I have been able to advance even farther along this line."

Herrick said nothing. He was studying the Professor closely, and

a vague feeling of unease was beginning to close over him.

"As you know," Le Gare continued, "sound, color, radio--all are produced by vibratory waves in various degrees of intensity. In sound, the pitch of a note depends upon the number of waves entering the ear. Those less than thirty do not produce a musical tone, and wave numbers exceeding 40,000 are not audible to man at all.

"You perhaps wondered at the bell tower which you saw and heard in the jungle. There are one hundred and sixty similar bells, equally spaced, located in a huge circle around this city. Ages ago their use was simple. By striking the master bell here, the distant ones were caused to ring in unison. Sympathetic vibration. The ringing served to frighten off any invading tribes that might be in the district. Until today I have kept them ringing for experimental purposes only.

"Now--" Le Gare's eyes began to glitter with craft and determination--"I have arranged to sound those bells for an entirely different purpose."

He pulled a switch, twisted a rheostat, and the screen before them began to glow with a soft red light.

"You might call this a television set," Le Gare went on. "It too is based on vibration, a super-delicate receiver and amplifier of light rays. The apparatus needs no transmitter to operate. It will photograph any scene anywhere."

He turned the rheostat farther. A shadow flickered across the screen, came into slow focus. It was a moving picture before them, a dull grey expanse of open sea. No land was visible on the horizon, but above rode heavy storm clouds, and the waves rolled mountain high.

Le Gare consulted a dial. "You

are looking at a point in the Arafura sea," he said, "somewhere off the coast of New Guinea. In a moment, with good luck, I should be able to pick up a ship, a tramp freighter probably."

Like an expert musician his fingers played with the dials. The screen became a racing panorama, now blurred, now clear. Herrick felt as if he were viewing a scene from the doorway of another world.

And then abruptly a darker shape appeared on the screen. It was a ship, a single-stacked freighter, wallowing sluggishly through heavy seas. At her masthead flew a tri-colored flag, the emblem of the Queen of Holland.

"A Dutchman," Le Gare scowled. "Too bad she isn't British or American. However, she will serve my purpose."

Herrick felt a chill streak up his spine. "What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"Do? I am going to demonstrate to you the powers of the vibratory wave. By throwing this switch," Le Gare swept his arm toward the panel, "I will set into motion a gigantic electric hammer inside the master bell here in the city. The hammer will strike intermittently at intervals of 15 seconds and will automatically cause the one hundred and sixty watchtower bells to ring in unison. I will thus have set into motion a huge series of vibratory waves which will spread outward spherically. By powerful induction I will build those vibrations from one hundred per second to 40,000 to 500,000 to a pitch higher than ever attempted by man. When angled so that those waves strike simultaneously at one central point they will have more power than the strongest explosive. They will be an unleashed volcano, a ringing typhoon . . ."

"Power in sound?" objected Herrick.

"In vibration. You have heard the oft-quoted example: a small dog

walking across a bridge at regular precise steps in the dead of winter. The steady pulsations, feeble as they were, cracked the steel girders. It will be the same here. But watch."

With one hand he focused the moving ship on the scene more clearly. With the other he grasped a long-bladed switch. For a moment he hesitated. Then he pushed the switch into contact.

Instantly from without a terrific clamor rose into the air. The master bell on the dais was ringing in great deafening peals. The booming sound thundered over the city, pounded into Herrick's ears like the blows of a bludgeon.

A moment later it began to mount higher in pitch. Up the octaves the sound raced, became a shrill tintinnabulation, a jangling, brain-grinding screech. Herrick clenched his fists, stared at the television screen.

The Dutch ship still fought its way forward serenely. But suddenly something happened. A violent tremor shook the vessel. She faltered, lost steerageway. And then as if being torn asunder by a giant hand, she began to disintegrate. The superstructure collapsed. A gaping hole appeared in the bows.

Seconds later she began to submerge. Herrick could see the crew rush wildly about the deck. He could vision rather than hear the frantic shouts of bewilderment and alarm. And then all was over. Before the life-boats could be launched the freighter sank beneath the waves, and only a tangle of wreckage remained on the surface.

"You've sunk her!" Charles Trane cried. "You've murdered . . .!"

"In the interests of science," interposed Le Gare. A mocking smile crossed his lips. "I have no quarrel with the Dutch Government in particular. My combat

is aimed at each and all nations. I propose to reestablish the empire of Bengara to its rightful position, that is all."

Cold sweat stood out on Herrick's brow. "What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I mean simply this. When I came here I found but twenty-five true Bengarans still alive, twenty-six counting Dromeda who was their queen and who, being of royal blood, was white. There were many others, but they had intermarried with neighboring Dyak natives. I have forced these to leave and laid down strict eugenic laws. In a few decades I will have started the empire on the road to the glory it once possessed.

"But I must have world recognition. And recognition comes only through military power. By means of vibration I propose to enlarge the boundaries of Bengara to cover all Borneo. I shall wipe out Samarinda, Bandjermasin, Sandakan, all foreign towns and settlements. I shall demand equal rights with all governments, give us a rightful place on the sea. My word will be law. By a turn of a switch I can annihilate any invading force.

"After that perhaps I may extend our territory to include the entire Malay archipelago, all of Asia. And tonight I show my hand for the first time to the world."

"Tonight?" Herrick swung slowly.

"The American Pacific fleet is cruising in China seas," Le Gare replied. "Bound for Manila. Battleships and destroyers. It will be a beautiful bait, will it not? I shall wait until it is within sight of land. Then I will broadcast my challenge to the world and sink it."

For a long minute Herrick stood there rigid while the significance of the Professor's words filtered slowly into his brain. With a low cry he jerked around, grasped Le Gare by the arm.

"Are you mad? Do you realize what you're saying?"

"I know perfectly well what I'm

saying." The Professor threw him off. "And I advise you, Mr. Herrick, to mind your own business."

Herrick waited no longer. Fists clenched, he lunged forward, shot out his arm and struck hard at Le Gare's jaw. The impact sent the man staggering backward. Blood welled to his lips. But there was no time for a second blow.

Even as Charles Trane circled the television cable to attack from the side, Le Gare clawed his right hand downward, whipped out an automatic revolver.

"Stand where you are!" he snarled. "One move, and I fire!" A slow sneer twisted his lips. "Did you think that after going as far as I have I was to be upset so easily? No, my friends, I am not quite as stupid as that. I have taken full precautions, and nothing can stop me."

He arced the automatic before him. "You will go to your room now. You will stay there until I call you tonight. Then you may witness a most unusual sight, the destruction of the entire American fleet."

Back in the little room which served as their cell, Herrick slumped into a bamboo chair, sat staring into space. Despair had entered his eyes. His lips were blood-drained.

"What are we going to do?" Trane demanded. "Good Lord, we can't stand by and see wholesale slaughter without raising a finger."

Herrick shook his head slowly. What was there to do when one was walled in like a rat in a cage? He got up, paced to the window, peered out between the heavy iron grilling.

Ahead, across an open square of the strange city, stood the center dais and the huge master bell. It was silent now, that bell, but its black bulk hung there ominously, a significant monument

of things yet to happen.

Herrick stiffened, turned. "If I can get out of here," he said excitedly, "I can sneak across to that platform, fix that bell so it's useless. Le Gare said it operated by an electric hammer. That should be easy . . ."

"Sure." Trane waved his arm sarcastically toward the locked door. "All you have to do is walk through a few feet of solid stone. Or maybe Le Gare will furnish you with an armed escort."

Herrick scowled, made fists of his hands. The scowl passed quickly as footsteps sounded along the passage without. The door opened, and Dromeda entered the room. Carrying a tray to the center table, she said:

"I have brought food, strangers."

Herrick crossed to her side. "You speak English?"

Dromeda half nodded. "I know that which the Great Garale taught me," she said. She glanced furtively over her shoulder. "I must go."

"Not so fast," said Herrick seizing her arm gently. "You speak of the Great Garale. Why do you acknowledge him as your leader?"

The girl's blue eyes widened. "Because," she replied, "he is carrying on the work of my ancestors. He has read and deciphered the manuscripts of our vaults, and he alone understands them. Because he has promised to return Bengara to its former power . . ."

"Would you want that power if it came at the expense of hundreds of lives?"

Quickly Herrick plunged into his appeal. In straight simple language he told her all he knew, described Le Gare's preliminary experiment in the laboratory, outlined the professor's cold-blooded plan for the future. As he spoke his eyes drank in the wild beauty that was Dromeda's. A bewildered frown slowly crossed the girl's face.

"The Great Garale has told me nothing of this," she said. "Bengara

has always been a peaceful nation. We desire no quarrel with the outside world."

Herrick nodded. "Bengara will continue to live in peace if you will but help me. When you go out leave the door unlocked. It's all I ask. I want only to prevent the murder of my own people before it is too late."

Ten minutes later Herrick advanced stealthily down the narrow corridor toward the central laboratory and the outside entrance. His plans were hazy. Trane had remained in the cell, would watch through the barred window, ready to call out a warning. If Herrick could but reach the bell on the dais he felt sure he could do something to its mechanism which would temporarily thwart Le Gare's plans.

He reached the door to the laboratory, cautiously inched it open. The room beyond was empty. Like a shadow Herrick stole inside, crossed toward the entrance.

Ten feet from the door he stiffened. Voices were speaking outside the building. Lightly Herrick slipped behind a ceiling column and listened. Professor Le Gare was addressing one of the armored men of Bengara.

"You are positive," Le Gare said, "that the three negative and the two positive antennae are separated with new insulators? Tonight I use the full charge of the generators, and there must be no danger of the wires crossing."

The Bengaran nodded. "All is as you have ordered," he said. "I have installed the new insulators, and I have braced the bamboo poles."

"Very well. Go to your quarters."

Le Gare reentered the laboratory, strode past Herrick's hiding place and sat down behind his desk. Heart pounding, Herrick slipped across the five feet of open space,

gained the exit unobserved.

Outside he made his way down the steps and looked about him. No one was in sight. The strange city with its rows of white buildings lay silent as a giants' graveyard. Up above on the laboratory dome the network of copper wires glittered in the sunlight.

For a moment Herrick stood motionless, staring at those wires. Abruptly impulse seized him. He stole cautiously around the building's side wall to where a bracketed ladder led upward to the roof. With a last glance at the surrounding grounds he began to mount upward.

On the dome, swaying dizzily, he forced himself along a series of cleats to the summit. The triple antennae stretched above him. Ten bamboo poles supported it, and all around was a jungle of large white insulators. Beyond, extending down the wall of the building to the laboratory, were the three lead-in wires.

Herrick whipped a knife out of his pocket, a weapon which Le Gare had overlooked, and began to hack at the center bamboo pole. These wires, he knew, served a double purpose. They were the receiving medium for the television apparatus, and they carried the Induction charge which built up the wave-length vibrations of the master bell. If he could but destroy them . . .

The knife ate through the dry bamboo. But Herrick got only half way. Below in the grounds a shout suddenly split the air. A Bengaran guard ran forward, waved his arms. An instant later Herrick saw two more guards race to a point directly beneath him, armed with those queer mandolin-shaped boxes.

He gave a last slash at the bamboo pole, turned and raced down the cleats. Even as he reached the ladder one of the guards snapped his box control knob.

There was a sharp clack, a twanging hum, and Herrick felt numbness

paralyze his body from head to foot. Muscular control left his hands. He toppled backward and catapulted into space.

An eternity seemed to have passed before Herrick returned to consciousness. Hands bound behind him, fastened to a wall hook, he stood in Le Gare's smaller laboratory. At his side Charles Trane sat helpless, handcuffed to a chair. Beyond, at the far wall, Dromeda cowered, watching the man at the center table.

Felix Le Gare made a last adjustment of one of the dials, turned slowly.

"My friends," he said mockingly, "we stand on the threshold of an historical moment. In a few minutes the country of Bengara will send its challenge to the civilized world, will lay claim to international recognition. The United States Pacific fleet is now anchored at Manila, a comparatively short distance away. In five minutes I will inform the Secretary of War at Washington, D.C., that that fleet has been totally destroyed. Watch closely."

The scarlet liquid in the two glass tubes boiled madly. Above, on the black instrument panel, twin ammeter and voltmeter needles oscillated back and forth. Le Gare twisted a knob, and the center screen began to glow with its reddish light. The beginning shadow appeared, gyrated slowly into focus.

Herrick struggled with his bonds as the scene cleared. He saw the smooth blue water of the Manila roadstead. He saw trim, heavily gunned warships, battleships and destroyers. He saw the stars and stripes waving in the breeze.

Le Gare moved a microphone within reach.

"The flagship goes first," he said. "After that, each vessel in rotation. When all are de-

stroyed I broadcast my message simultaneously on all wavelengths to every antion of the globe. Bengara must be classed a first-rate power."

Herrick's arms ached in their sockets as behind him he twisted at his lashings. The main rope loosened a fraction. A thrill of hope shot through him.

"I will now start the circle of vibratory waves," Le Gare said. His black eyes narrowed to evil crescents.

He pulled a switch. Outside in the square a thunderous booming roar began. It was the master bell ringing in deafening peals. Like the plangent beating of surf the sound rose over the city. The walls shook to the echo and from the instrument table came a deep drone as huge induction coils hurled their charge into the antennae on the dome above.

In one minute all would be over. In one minute the Pacific fleet would be a twisted mass of wreckage at the bottom of the sea. Madly Herrick gave one last frantic wrench at his bonds. The ropes gave.

He kicked himself free of the chair and lunged forward. Across to the instrument table he leaped, seized Le Gare by the throat, spun him around.

"You fiend!" he shouted. "You murdering fiend!"

The Professor was not caught off guard. Even as Herrick doubled his fists and bored in, he gave a low snarl and answered the attack. He ducked his head, launched his two gaunt arms outward, clawing for Herrick's throat.

They locked together, wrestled silently. Back and forth they surged. As he fought, Herrick struggled to reach the control switch on the panel. He slammed a left to Le Gare's jaw, followed it with a right and a jabbing uppercut. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Charles Trane twisting at his bonds, the girl, Dromeda, staring white-faced in a corner.



Le Gare's eyes were blazing with wrath. Leaping to the wall, he pulled down a heavy iron crow-bar, whipped it back high over his head. For a split second of horror Herrick realized he would be unable to avoid the blow.

And then a triple row of objects flash-focused in his vision --the three lead-in wires connecting the laboratory apparatus with the antennae on the dome above.

Herrick's hand streaked forward. He grasped the wires, gave them a terrific yank.

From above came the cracking and splintering of the knife-weakened central bamboo pole. And then it happened!

A blinding flash of light issued from the apparatus on the table. A thunderous report sounded, and a column of white smoke billowed outward. Felix Le Gare gave a hoarse cry and rushed for the instrument panel.

Even as he reached it a second report sounded. Sheet flame enveloped the Professor, coiled around

his body like a crimson winding-sheet. He staggered backward, flailed his arms and crashed to the floor.

Like a man in a trance Herrick crossed to Charles Trane's side, silently took the key from the table and unlocked his handcuffs. Passing his arms around Dromeda he led her to the door.

Outside in the corridor the three halted a moment to stare in each other's faces.

"It's all over," Herrick said to the girl. "Felix Le Gare is dead. His secrets will die with him. You are once again queen of Bengara."

Dromeda looked wan and tired in the half-light. Her lips quivered and a strange light of admiration shone in her eyes.

"Queen again," she repeated slowly. Then: "A queen is but one side of the royal dynasty, Stranger Herrick. There must be two sides--always."

And Herrick grinned. He understood.

# MNEMOKA

by Clark Ashton Smith

(Assembled from the burned manuscripts,  
and completed, by Steve Behrends)

"I must warn you that the drug is not wholly reliable," said the drum-chested, mummy-lean keeper of the dive. His voice boomed like the croaking of some gigantic frog, that had contrived to shape itself into human vocables. "Before and after it, you must keep your mind fixed undeviatingly on whatever events you have desired to re-live. Otherwise you may re-live happenings which you have wished to forget."

"In other words, the clock is turned back? I have heard that the drug creates a complete illusion of reality--vision, hearing, taste and touch."

"Yes, as you earthmen understand illusion. When the mnemoka has taken full effect, you will have all the sensation of experiencing certain past events as if they were part of the present. There is, however, what one might call a penumbral period, varying from a half hour to a full hour, during which the past and present may intermingle or alternate, often in a very confusing manner. And sometimes the re-lived events may take a variant turn, with intervals or endings not hitherto experienced. Such variations, it would seem, are determined by hidden desires--or fears. According to our theory, this is the only way in which the past can be altered. Of course, it is all subjective . . . and yet there have been, in some cases, results which earthmen would hardly call subjective. Again, it is my duty to warn you . . . There are good rea-

sons why the sale of mnemoka is forbidden."

"Thanks," said Space-Alley Jon, squinting upward with inexpressive eyes at Pnaglak, the gaunt Aihai who overtowered his own medium stature by a full half-yard. "You've done your duty. Now give me the drug."

The Martian's arm, long as that of a gorilla, thin as that of an age-embalmed Pharaoh, reached upward to a shelf close to the ceiling of the high, narrow vault in which he and his customer stood. He brought down a wide-bottomed vial, opaque as obsidian, with a spire-like stopper encrusted with bitumen that had run downward on the bottle itself in finger-shaped streaks before hardening.

The bitumen seal fell off in flakes under his pointed onyx-tough nails. He removed the stopper and poured the vial's contents into a small beaker standing on a tripodal table, the sole furniture of the crypt. Lifting the beaker in his leathery claws, he offered it to Jon.

"Drink the stuff quickly," he urged. "Then pay me, and go as far away from here as your legs will carry you. Users of mnemoka are not allowed to linger in the bar upstairs."

"I'll pay you first," said Jon with testy curtness. "And don't worry about my staying. I've already swilled enough of your putrid swamp-weed brandy."

With his free hand he pulled out a wallet of bright-pebbled skin that had originally formed the crop of

a chameleon-bird from Venus, and tossed it, jangling harshly, on the table.

Pnaglak unzipped the wallet, took out twenty djangas of gold and silver alloy, and returned it.

Jon raised the beaker to his nostrils, sniffing cautiously. With senses sharpened by the perfumes and fetors of alien worlds, he could detect no odor in the thick sepia-brown liquid that foamed to immense iridescent bubbles.

"Here's wishing you a bellyful of your own poisons," he toasted the proprietor, and swallowed the tasteless liquor to its last slow-oozing drops.

Before he could lower the emptied cup, it was snatched from his fingers, and the Alhai nudged him toward a flight of stairs opposite to that by which he had entered. Up steps that climbed into darkness, spaced for the gangling shins of the planet's natives, he was shooed or pushed bodily when he stumbled. As they went, the dive-keeper lapsed into the guttural Martian language that human vocal organs can hardly approximate. "Ngrhk, grkg, grkg, ngrhk," he croaked in anxious ob-jurgation.

At the top of the blind stairs, a door was opened quickly on oiled, noiseless hinges. Jon was thrust forth into a lampless alley black as the guts of an undersea fish, and the door closed behind him, its closing perceived only by a faint, sighing wafture of air.

He stood a long moment, trying to orient himself. The cold of the thin-aired night, well-nigh bitter as that of space, began to gnaw him with black teeth that pierced through his padded tunic.

The stars of Lyra's handle, swinging westward in the roof-verged chasm overhead, enabled him to regain his bearings. He followed the alley to his right,

knowing that it should debouch on an esplanade along the great canal that divided Ignarh-Luth the space-port from the immemorial capitol, Ignarh-Vath. A mile eastward, on the same canal, was the Ghaggan Hotel, in which he had taken lodgings.

It was a hazardous and unsavory neighborhood, with whose doings the police concerned themselves only in some explosion of civic virtue. Here the cryptic and crafty natives pandered to the space-wandering scum of a dozen worlds and moons. Outlawed, fantastic drugs were sold, and exotic crimes and vices, older than Babylon, burgeoned darkly. But even here it had been none too easy to find a seller of mnemoka, a narcotic distilled from a Martian cactus, and strictly tabooed by the Martians themselves. They would dispense it only, and then rarely, to aliens. This taboo, it seemed, was of religious origin. Some sort of vague unspecified damnation would supposedly ensue the drug's use. The stigma of necromancy was attached even to drug-dreamers who attempted to evoke the past in their dreams.

Jon had heard alluring accounts, though never at first hand, of the fabulous evocative powers of mnemoka. It was said that certain terrestrial addicts had been able under its influence to repeat the happiest hours of their lives, even back to infancy. As yet no earth-scientist had analyzed this narcotic, which could induce hallucinations of reality more vivid and complete than those created by any other known agent. As Pnaglak had warned, it was also tricky, and would sometimes reproduce events and effects more painful than pleasant; or would even twist the past in devious and aberrant ways. In some cases it had left stigmata such as would normally be caused only by actual physical experience.

In obedience to Pnaglak's injunction, Jon had been trying to concentrate his thoughts on the far-

off episode he had consciously chosen to re-live. Rapt in this endeavor, he hastened his steps through the blind alley. There should be ample time to regain the security of his room before the drug could take its full effect. But even now he noticed a curious altering of his senses, as if the process of detachment from present realities had already begun.

The barb-tipped cold had become a little blunted, as if a pre-mature sun had risen somewhere behind the lofty maze of buildings. In lieu of the metal-hard pavement, he seemed to be treading at times on something resilient as grass or moss. The familiar alley-stench no longer stung his nostrils with ammoniac keenness; and through them he caught evanescent waftures of bruised mint--faint but at moments unmistakable . . . There was no mint anywhere on Mars. But he had lain long ago--and not alone--in a bed of mint on his natal Earth. It was that episode, removed in time by years spent on half the solar worlds, which he had wished to re-experience.

He sought to vision the face of Sophia, the young girl who had shared with him that fragrant bed. He could see her small but nubile breasts, under the lace of sunlight and willow leaf shadows; could see, could feel, the warm body that had basked in the summer noon. The thrill of that yielding, virginal for both of them, remained poignant in memory. But her face returned to him with the vagueness of a reflection in moving water. Between, in brief flashes, came other faces, unbidden and unwelcome: faces of women whose venal passion or perversity he had bought--and could buy again--in many space-ports. There was no need of mnenoka to revive such loves as these. The price of the flame-

sapphires he had sold would bring them about him in seraglios with all their languors and writhings.

With a violent effort of will, he banished the faces--and with them the tantalizing phantom of mint, the warmth which had tempered the bleak night, the ambiguous softness beneath his feet. Once again there was nothing but the black, fetor-infested alley along which he hastened.

It was his taste, perhaps, that caused him to stumble over some unseen, heavy object. Cursing, he regained his balance and pulled out the small but powerful flash-light that he carried.

It was a man's body that had blocked his way, lying transversely, face upward, on the filthy pavement. The light played on knee-length boots and broadly belted tunic such as he himself wore--the traditional garb of space-men. The body itself might have been of many thousands . . . but the face was one that he knew well, and had never thought to see again.

For an instant, Jon was aware of no horror, only the shock of a thing impossible, when his light centered upon that dead familiar face. Then came the wild hope that he was mistaken--that the man was merely someone who resembled Boris. Seeking evidence of such a mistake, he bent closer.

With sick consternation he identified the large mole above the right brow, the two identical reddish knife-scars running from jowl to eye-socket on the left cheek. The hook-nose, broken midway in its bridge, the rufous chin-beard half concealing a deep cleft, the ponderous lids above ill-matched eyes, the massively hanging under-lip--these could belong only to Boris. In further confirmation, there was the wound itself.

It could only have been caused by a soft-nosed bullet such as Jon had used, forgetting in his haste

that the gun was loaded with cartridges of that type. The bullet, fired close to the right temple, had made a neat clean hole on that side. Emerging on the other, it had blown away the left ear and much of the skull and hair. Jon had regretted such messiness afterward: it had taken time to mop up the vessel's spattered wall and floor.

He had loaded the automatic with those mushroom bullets for possible use against certain rumored European monsters, whose diffused vital spots could be injured little by anything less barbarous. Such monsters had remained shy and aloof during his sojourn on the moon.

And now that grisly wound, whose congealing effluent he had seen turn to crystal in the space between the worlds, was rilling fresh blood that pooled darkly upon the paving. Jon accepted the unbelievable tableau before him, as one accepts the absurd horror of an oft-remembered dream, a dream whose beginning lay many months and many million miles away, when he had shot Boris with an old-type automatic kept beneath the control panel of their small space-flier, the Pelican, and had promptly heaved his corpse overboard in the emptiness somewhere between Europa and the asteroid belt. The two had been returning Mars-ward from Europa, after a successful season among the aborigines of that Joviterian moon. They had traded bangles and other cheap trinkets for the gorgeous and precious flame-sapphires found in the soft marls of Europa. The simple natives, having no conception of money values, were well satisfied by such traffic. But the jewels purchased during that trip would bring them enough in Martian djangas to enable a middle-aged man to retire permanently from space-faring.

Wearry of the vast bleak gulfs too often crossed, the bewildering

alienage of outer worlds, and sick with a growing nostalgia for his native planet, Jon had planned the murder from the beginning of his partnership with Boris. They had met in a little-used, obscure port of Venus, when both had been seeking refuge from the overly inquisitive police; and on that same night started their long voyage to Europa.

No crime, it seemed, could be safer: there were few earth-men on Europa, a moon as yet uncolonized. Returning to Mars afterward, it was needless to report an accidental death for Boris, whose very existence had not been known to the authorities of that world. According to his own records, he had travelled alone. The Pelican belonged legally to Jon, and Boris had left no least trace of his presence aboard the vessel.

All the evidence that might have been incriminating to him had been carefully disposed of; and now the impossible corpse of Boris lay huddled in this rank alleyway, its blood steaming as it seeped about his boots, glittering as darkly in the beam of his belt-light as had the choicest of his flame-sapphires.

At this moment, as if through some necromantic incantation, Jon found himself aboard the Pelican, its familiar interior spattered with fresh blood--a blood, Jon knew, that had been spilt months past; and yet he felt only a dim consternation over past and present, about that which had and that which had not been. Cool, unquestioning, the murderer looked down at the murdered: all had happened as he had planned. Two things alone remained: First, to take from Boris the pouch in which he carried his share of the flame-sapphires, which he had strapped closely to his skin. Second, to eject the corpse, together with any evidence that another person had been within the Pelican during that voyage.

Wasting no reflection on the ghouliness of his job, he turned

the body over, and groped beneath his partner's tunic for the pouch, which he unstrapped and then tossed to the deck. Next, he covered the bloody head with thick sacking, lifted the lifeless form, and carried it into the air-lock. He returned to the vessel's interior, and closed the air-lock's inner door behind him. His powerful arms straining at the task, he shifted the lever that unsealed the outer hatch, hearing as he did so the swish of escaping air that ejected his partner into the realm of eternal night.

He was back once more in that odor-haunted alley, standing on an empty pavement. There was about him only the accustomed filth and offal. He recalled the warning he had been given in Pnaglak's cellar. It was all, then, an illusion brought on by the drug.

His brain and senses were clear now except for a feeling of dizziness, a humming as of a light fever in his head. Attempting to shake himself of this malaise, he walked onward, and in a moment came upon the esplanade with its brilliant but remotely spaced lamps. By its side, dark and silent, flowed the immemorial canal, ebbing slowly between slanted banks of water-scored and pitted stone; and upon its surface the reflected lamps were like fallen stars.

He thought again of Sophia--and was lying beside her, upon the wild summer-warm mint. The sun, striking her hair, bejewelled it with iridescent spangles. The rose-flushed skin between her breasts was delicately dewed with sweat. He reached out a hand to caress her. Then, abruptly, he had returned to the Pelican.

With old rags, and water taken from the privy, Jon knelt, cleaning the half-clotted blood from the floor. When all was to his satisfaction, he brought out from

a closet the ether-suit that had belonged to Boris, together with all other articles of his clothing and personal possessions. He might have kept the suit, which had been little worn. But Boris had incised on its bosom of grey plastic the initials B.W. in crudely sprawling letters and had filled them in with an orange-red lacquer. Unzipping it, Jon stuffed all the other belongings into its legs and body, and added Boris' mess-kit and gun, and the wet, bloody rags. A minute later, it was floating in space with the corpse of its owner.

There remained the basinful of bloodied water. Jon thought of recycling it in the purifier, as was done to the water used in ablutions and all ordinary washing and cleaning. Instead, he poured it into the vessel's toilet. Anyway, there could be no shortage of water now, with himself alone for consumer.

He remembered now to set the Pelican's course, locking its gears. There would be small need of vigilance before the ship reached the asteroidal zone. He took a seat on the deck beside the pouch he had taken from Boris, and spilled its contents upon the lustrous metal hull. The count of the jewels was equal to that which he himself had retained: a baker's dozen. They blazed before him, interweaving their deep blues with effulgent flames of sea-green and emerald. They were the prize of a man's life--and his own insurance against toil, poverty, and the rigors of space travel and old age.

The light of every gem flashed in his avaricious eyes, each adding its own unique shades of indigo or green to the cumulative, soul-capturing glow. The jewels lay as they had fallen from the pouch, and yet their pattern captivated Jon, seeming to hold an intangible, evanescent meaning for him, like some indecipherable rune glimpsed in a book of antiquity.

As Jon stared, he became distantly aware that the emerald glow was expanding, laying a verdant patina upon the silver deck surrounding him. Only with difficulty could he see through the lambent haze to the sapphires themselves.

The misty light, such as might be seen by dwellers in ocean depths, withdrew after a moment. In the wake of its passage Jon saw before him not the gem-strewn deck of the Pelican, but a wildflower-scattered heath of grass and clover, enmeshed in the tattered shadow of a willow tree. There was once again the cool scent of mint, and the lovely Sophia reclined by his side.

The sight of her soft, parted lips, and the smooth ivory of her skin, brought waves of desire pulsing through his body; his senses stirred with her nearness. Here was the light he had lost in his empty wanderings, his vain and violent pursuits. And yet, as he gazed more closely at this vision of his first love, drawn from the tombs of the past by the necromancy of the Martian drug, Jon felt the stirrings of a vague unease.

The eyes of Sophia looked approvingly into his own, without warmth. Her smile, which before had held only shyness and adoration, seemed more enigmatic than he remembered, and he thought to see a hint of chill satisfaction in her expression. Nonetheless, in the blindness of his yearning Jon made to move close to her; but as he did so, Sophia calmly lifted her gaze to something beyond his right shoulder, as though wishing to forestall his ardour in the light of more pressing business.

Turning, Space-Alley Jon glimpsed a man in an ether suit a few paces behind him. Years of hateful experience stood him in good stead:

he leaped to his feet, whirling into a tense crouch to face the intruder.

For a moment the figure stood unmoving, with dark visor pulled down and gloved hands at hip-level, while Jon stared in puzzlement. His opponent was of average height and seemingly stocky build, although he was unable to determine this with any certainty. The suit configured its occupant very strangely, with many abrupt swellings and concavities along the limbs and torso. His eyes scanned further, searching for the tell-tale indications of hidden weaponry, until his gaze reached the chest of the stranger. What Jon saw there brought on a numbing of mind that rendered his many defenses useless; and the earth beneath his feet seemed to lurch with some profound dislocation. For upon the chest, lit by that warm summer sun of a year long dead, lay the deeply scored initials B.W. marked in an orange-red lacquer.

With an alien slowness the suited arm raised to the visor, bending in a boneless, fluid arc like the tentacle of a cuttlefish. The oddly bulging glove drew the visor up and back.

Jon's mind reacted sluggishly to the sight before him. "A face of smoke," he thought, "black swirls of smoke." The helmet of the ether-suit framed an oval of ebon mist, like the huge, blind eye of a Cyclops, into which light would scarcely penetrate.

The hand reached slowly into the helmet, disturbing its half-seen contents; and like some grey adder breaching a riven crypt, the ash-colored arm followed it over the lip of the face-plate, sliding deeper into the body of the suit. The broad chest bulged and buckled to the movements of the arm, and the initials painted upon it seemed to move rhythmically in cruel mockery of a heart's beating. As the dark shapes rustled and shifted beneath the passage of the arm, Jon dazedly realized that

the void of the helmet held not smoke, but folds of a dark, wet cloth. The arm acquired great streaks of crimson as it moved among them.

After a time the sinuous member withdrew, dislodging ensanguined scraps of cloth in a foul vomit upon the grass. Held within the horribly stained glove was a glistening thing that Jon could not see clearly; and with the same unutterable languor that had characterized all its motions, the crumpled arm raised level with Jon's face.

As was the fashion of dawns in Ignarh-Luth, the paling indigo of the sky heralded a chill wind from regions beyond the Pole, heavy with the red dust of outer deserts and the grey dust of vast and ruinous cities.

Like a thing lost and suffering, the wind moaned and sighed as it scoured the deserted streets and twisted alleyways, tracing paths worn smooth by its aeons of pass-

age. But beside the Yahan canal, whose waters still held the shadow of the night, and along the ancient esplanade, it seemed that the wind passed more quietly; the air hardly stirred about the group of silent Aihais that had gathered there.

At such an early hour, only the beggars, pariahs, and prophets of the city are on hand. Such as these stood encircling the corpse of an earthman, whose head had been shattered by a slow, heavy bullet. The copious amount of blood and other matter that should have flowed from such a devastating wound was nowhere in evidence, indicating that the death had occurred in some other locale.

Blood was found on the dead man's boots, however, in addition to the leafy sprigs of some aromatic plant, which none present could identify. There was no mint anywhere on Mars.

[Smith passes the baton to Behrends with the paragraph beginning "The light of every gem . . ."--Ed.]

#### Continued from p. 2:

let it be noted that Astro-Adventures #1 is dedicated to Sam Moskowitz, the very incarnation of science fiction

fandom, whose matchless efforts to preserve the science fiction of the past for new generations have made happy time travelers of us all.



By the Plenum! We've made an error! The earlier version of Lin Carter's "The Thief of Thoth" that appeared in Worlds of Tomorrow was called "The Crown of Stars." Sorry!

