

VISION

OF TOMORROW

JANUARY 5!



Trojan Horse by E. C. TUBB.
Psycho-Land by Philip E. HIGH.
And other outstanding science fiction stories by -
J. Wodhams, C. Priest, S. J. Bounds.



VISION OF TOMORROW

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For many years science fiction has been regarded as a minority "cult" medium of limited appeal. It had its vocal adherents, certainly, but they did not represent a high proportion of magazine readers. But we of VISION OF TOMORROW believe this is no longer true today. Consider: Man has set foot upon the moon, and as many as a dozen lunar voyages may be undertaken over the next few years. These events, which are science fiction come true, have been receiving saturation television coverage and world-wide publicity . . . during which time the press and television mediums are constantly calling attention to the justification and validity of science fiction. Many of our most popular sf authors are now regularly appearing as pundits on TV and radio. With this acceptance by the mass media, sf writing is universally acknowledged as being respectable. There is even a text book primer being used in schools, and extension classes are held in Universities and Evening Institutes. From our own magazine, Walter Gillings is lecturing on sf two evenings a week, and Kenneth Bulmer is in demand as a University speaker.

The fact is that sf is no longer the province of a few thousand "fans" but is appreciated by the entire populace. The steady proliferation of sf in paperback and hardcovers by every major publisher is proof of the phenomenon.

With VISION OF TOMORROW we are attempting to reach out to this vast audience. To do this, our format has been designed in these generous proportions so that readers can buy our issues over their newsagent's counter. We hope to appeal to the average reader in search of relaxation and entertainment, or who is curious about the world around him and its future. We try to present stories that are concerned with *people*, which is what most folk want to read about. The era of "things" and "rays" went out the window years ago.

As editor, my firm contention is that our magazine can be read and enjoyed by any reader who likes good fiction. For good measure, our regular series of articles, "The Impatient Dreamers" is telling in popular form the entire history of sf writing and publishing in this country; our mail bag shows that this is being welcomed by the new devotee. Authors, too, are welcoming our magazine which is providing them with a national outlet for their writing. They have long desired to break free of the "ghetto" of a specialised circumspect medium. We are now receiving some excellent MSS, which we shall be presenting in forthcoming issues. New writers are also coming forward, and we are pleased to welcome such promising young men as Christopher Priest, Eric Harris, and Peter Cave to our pages. We hope you will enjoy their work, as well as the fine stories by old favourites.

The Editor

Here is another hilarious yarn by our popular Australian author that is truly unlike any sf story you have read before!



THE ILLWIND

JACK WODHAMS

A man does not like to stink. Some creatures stink quite naturally. Skunks, beetles and others employ nasally offensive aromas as a defensive weapon, or perhaps as a mating instrument. Decaying matter, dung, all kinds of fermentation and rot, are attended in varying degree of emanations which perceptive nostrils may find agreeable or otherwise, usually otherwise. Open drains, rotten eggs, a putrefying carcass, these are things that, in the general consensus, are regarded, nosewise, as being extremely unpleasant, and a vicinity containing such saturation is commonly avoided, kept upwind of, detoured, or similarly sought to be kept beyond waft range.

Human beings, while not being devoid of scent (as the success of bloodhounds can attest) nevertheless rarely with persistence give off an objectionable stench—that is, to other humans at least. Certainly there are exceptions. A person unwashed for a considerable time can acquire for himself a goodly area for free movement in many places, but this can be said to be a fostered condition. Less fortunate are those few who are born with glandular secretions that, for one reason or another, ostentatiously refuse to secrete secretly. Some do have luck, as one man in Oxford whose effluvia, reputedly, tainted the air with the delicate fragrance of violets. And then, of course, there is the well-known odor of sanctity.

Mostly, though, where the muted tone of human scent is violated, the result is one to occasion distaste. Bad breath, sweat, the escape of internal gaseous accumulation, these are things which a best friend may not comment upon, such a best friend being either olfactorily blind, or not venturing close enough for his shouted opinion to be comprehended. An ability to swiftly impregnate sox with a rank reek, a gastric condition beyond command, some unlucky persons have these undesirable physical characteristics, and it is alas that a veritable swamp of deodorant engages combat for but limited duration.

Oh dear, oh dear. No man likes to stink.

No man likes to stink, but Gongi Wackerman stank. Pungently, rancidly, foully, Gongi Wackerman gave off a phev pong like the exhalation of a regiment of garlicaters, carried with him the radiating unsavoriness of a squad of bathers who had just been exercising in a cess-pool.

'You've got to do something about it!' Gongi cried. 'How much longer? You must know by now what caused it.'

'Mr. Wackerman, you must be patient. We are strenuously working on your case.' From behind his glass screen Dr. Hokintok smiled encouragement. 'We hope to have something for you shortly.'

Gongi stamped restlessly. 'You keep saying that.' The room was cool. He rubbed his arms. He could stand himself better when he was shivering a little. 'Is the pipe still lit?'

'Ah, no.' The pipe was a reference to a tube which carried the piquant vapours that were constantly being removed from the room. A spark had achieved ignition at the vent to obtain a satisfactory nullifying burn-off. 'No, it is being drawn off now and packed into cylinders.'

'What? What's the big idea? Say . . . Say, you're not thinking of turning me into a commercial proposition?' Gongi became alarmed. 'Now see here, you got me into this mess, you've got to get me out!'

'Mr. Wackerman, believe me, we are doing our best,' Hokintok soothed. 'As for being a commercial proposition—ha-ha—what an amusing thought. You're so droll, Mr. Wackerman.'

'Ha-ha,' Gongi mimicked sourly. 'It's not so funny. I know you research types. You get something new and you want to study it forever. Well I haven't got forever. You'd better get me cured. How am I supposed to work without social contacts?'

'Yes, Mr. Wackerman, we . . .'

'You can't keep me here indefinitely. It's like a prison, and I've committed no crime.'

'Oh, well, of course, Mr. Wackerman, we can't hold you here against your will. However, surely you have no wish to walk abroad in your present state? We are, I assure you,

earnestly seeking a means to relieve your complaint, and it is in your own best interests . . .'

'Never mind, never mind,' Gongi interrupted. He hugged himself and scowled. 'I can't stand being cooped up much longer. I want to get out into the open. Somewhere where . . . where the breezes blow. Somewhere out of this . . . this draughty damned box.'

'Yes, Mr. Wackerman, please, please give us a little more time. I am sure that we shall discover a reversing trigger soon . . .'

'Huh,' Gongi grunted. 'Me it should happen to. Why couldn't it have been Ballard or Russ?'

'Biochemically we can find nothing of particular exception. Samples centrifuged have revealed no material content or combination of extraordinary composition.'

'Medically it can be asserted that his constitution is sound. Through the usual tests, and some not-so-usual tests, we can state categorically that physically he is as sound as a jazz LP. Under-exercised, perhaps, but sound.'

Dr. Hokintok surveyed his team. 'In other words we can discover no connection between the treatment he was given for his psoriasis and his subsequent state of fetor?'

'Ah, well,' one of them rubbed his chin, 'it can't be proved that there was but, again, it can't be proved that there wasn't.'

'He didn't smell like that before he came here, or at any time previously.'

'Medical diagnosis is one thing, but empirical observation is another. Before he received treatment a dab of after-shave lotion masked any displeasing odor he may have had. After treatment he smells like a cadaver ripening in the sun—not at all nice for a man who is still alive.'

'From that approach cause to effect cannot be denied. But what, in fact, did we do? A few jabs of HOD-Z and a dose of Grurch's U.G.H., one K oral vaccine. The M.M.J. 5S should have had no appreciable deleterious effect upon him.'

'That's what did it, the M.M.J. 5S. He was all right till he was given that.'

'But it is innocuous. Haven't we tried the same sequence on a dozen volunteers of the same blood group? Corresponding side effects have been nil.'

'Yes. The fault must lie with Wackerman himself.'

'Ah,' Hokintok said, 'you think that it might be psychosomatic rather than organic or metabolic?'

'Yes,' they said unanimously.

'Psychosomatic? Are you mad?' Gongi said. 'How do you get a psychosomatic stink?'

'Our conclusion,' Hokintok said, unperturbed behind his glass screen, 'is that you have some form of hysterical disorder. In some such cases people with perfectly sound, functional organs become blind, or deaf, or perhaps lose the use of a limb. It is a protective bloc of self-deception.'

'You're crazy,' Gongi said. 'Is my stink an illusion?'

'Oh, c'h'm, the body is wondrous in its ways,' Hokintok said. 'The nature of your work, perhaps, stress and what-not. Your defensive mechanism has thrown up a barrier, quite a literal barrier, against whatever it is that your subconscious wishes to repudiate.'

'Rubbish! It was those damned drugs. There was nothing wrong with me before you put all that goeey into me.'

'Yes, ah, no. We, ah, feel that a course of psychiatric treatment might be of marked benefit to you. Doctor Suss-rind has agreed to accept you into his Clinic, and it only

remains for you to give your consent. I strongly urge you to comply. Dr. Sussrind is noted for his success with difficult cases and . . .

'He won't prove that this stink is all coming out of my head,' Gongi said. 'It was those drugs. And it looks like you can't find a cure for me, hey? Okay. I'll go along and give you a last chance. But I can see that I'll be suing you just the same. Psychosomatic? Huh! . . .'

Dr. Oystred Sussrind had not the accommodation for quarantine cases but he had done his best. A high corner room, in line with the departing prevailing wind and doubly air-conditioned and double doored with rubber sealing-strips, was provided for his new patient.

Not a little intrigued by the novelty of his latest commission, Sussrind was not long in setting to work on the case. 'Do you like your work, Gongi? I may call you Gongi, mayn't I?' came muffled through his gas-mask.

'Sure. Of course I like my work. I wouldn't do it otherwise, would I?'

'I see. And how long have you been doing it?'

'Doing what? Writing science fiction? What difference does it make?'

'Oh well, it's rather a twitchy group. Tell me, your latest work—is it selling well?'

'Why do you ask?'

'Oh, just curious.'

'Well it isn't. All my new stuff keeps coming back.'

'Yes? Why is that do you think? Is your work deteriorating?'

'Are you kidding? I'm not even in stride yet. Why, these past few weeks I've been getting more ideas than I know what to do with.'

'Huh.' The face-plate on the gas-mask was fogging up. 'Why, then, is it, do you think, that your recent efforts have met, huh-hoo, with failure?'

'I don't know,' Gongi said. 'I can't understand it. Izzy Bedo has been sending it back without even opening it. Sent me a memo even, telling me not to send any more. Wouldn't surprise me if that fellow Dish wasn't behind it all. They're up to something. I tell you, the old cranium has been working in three-five time. They're jealous, that's what. It's a conspiracy. Say, are you listening in there?'

Sussrind coughed, played with his mask. 'It doesn't—cragh—seem to be—erryah—100%—phrooo—efficient.' He got to his feet and staggered backwards. 'Excuse me. Some . . . some other time. I'll be . . .' He curled over, groped, fumbled, found, stumbled out through the doors.

End of first session.

When Sussrind next appeared to Gongi Wackerman his upper part was clothed in an aquanaut's ensemble. To the standard breathing apparatus and head-bubble a two-way speaker had been added.

'I've some good news for you,' Sussrind said.

'Oh? Has Asimov defected to the East?'

'No, no, no.'

'Well maybe that Blish fellow has got his typing finger stuck in a naughty place, huh?'

'No, no, nothing like that. Listen—can you hear me all-right?'

'Yes. You'd better make it good. You've interrupted me just when my spy is going to make a break for it.'

'Spy? What spy?'

'My spy. They've just caught him, see? but they don't call him hollow-legs for nothing. The skin on his legs has

been treated to withstand instant elephantitis, and he trips the switch to his hydrogen-cylinder bones and phooompl up, up and away, he makes his escape—upside down in a very ragged pair of pants.'

'Oh? Oh really? How quaint. Yes, now look, you remember when I was last here I, ah, caught a whiff. Now this had rather a strange effect upon me, very peculiar. Most odd.'

'Yes?' Gongi looked a little irritable. 'Do you mind coming out with it? Things are kinda crowding in my head and I want to get it down. They're not going to stop me. I have to fight back.'

'Ah, that's it, you see, that's just it. This . . . This fug that surrounds you is some sort of inspirational mist. It has a quality that can send the mind reeling.'

'Send the mind reeling? Before they put me in isolation it knocked three nurses and a doctor cold. What's inspirational about that?'

'Sometimes the most obvious answers are overlooked. I've been making enquiries. Those persons you mentioned did indeed go into trauma, and they had fantastic dreams that bordered on insanity. It was akin to psychedelic experience.'

'How come they never found this out sooner?'

'They did not recognise it. It was put down to shock. The thought that your gross, er, bouquet acted as a stimulant to aught except retiring feet simply did not occur to them.'

'Uhh. So it's an exudation of provocative plasma. How is it that all the pieces I've put out recently have come bouncing back without so much as a Big Ed regrets?'

'Obvious,' Sussrind said. 'Postmen have nearly gone on strike over your letters. There is a law against sending fish through the mail, you know. And the receivers just won't handle them—to open one, they say, is to be prostrate for the rest of the day. Your, c'ha, letters lately have been going no farther than the local post-office outhouse.'

'What!!!'

'Uh-uh now,' Sussrind held up a flat palm, 'this contretemps can soon be overcome. We'll have your work re-typed outside by means of a viewer, how's that? Easily solved, we'll have it installed this afternoon. No,' Sussrind said, 'the important thing is the psychological effect that your inhaled fumes have upon other persons. There must be a crack in the wall or something because there has been some noticeable seepage into the room next door.'

'Oh?' Gongi said, still rankled by the postal deception. 'So what about it?'

'Yes, well, my patient in there, a Miss Swiss, has the delusion that she is a dog. Since the atmosphere in her room has been invaded, her condition seems to have become accentuated, more sharply defined.'

'Is that good or bad?'

'I don't know. It could possibly be an aid to abreaction but, of course, not all minds respond in the same way to a specific.'

'What are you going to do about it?'

'Um, ah, yes. There has been a lack of volunteers. Uh. As head, the ah, experimental responsibility, ah . . . I myself shall test the . . . the exposure sensations.'

'You will?' Gongi said. 'Go ahead then and be my guest. Take your hat off.'

'Later,' Sussrind said. 'Ah, later. Ah, we have to set up proper rescue facilities in case something goes wrong. H'm.'

Now then,' he adjusted his air-valve, 'tell me something of your history. . . .'

'Gongi, you're crazy. Okay so I'm crazy. I'm in the right place then, huh? Yeah, maybe. Maybe. Maybe should have been here long ago. But is *he* sane? Who, old Oystred? What kind of warped mentality wants to probe into warped minds? It's eroticism. Gongi, he's got a diploma. Yeah, so what? Professor Youstenbourger down the hall has a dozen diplomas, yet *he* thinks he's Tutankhamen. Look at it this way, psychiatrists are human and, logically, some are bound to be less sane than others, so how can we be sure our guy's lid's on tight? Yeah, Gong, you got a point there. Too right I've got a point. He's only guessing. He's picked up this hysterical kick and is trying to make it fit. And what do you think, Gong? Don't be stupid, you know as well as I do that it was those damn drugs. Yes, the coincidence is strong. Coincidence my fanny—use your head, Gong, you were all right before, weren't you? Yes. There you are then. You're not going to fall for their bluff, are you? No. I should say not. Hey, Gong, what are we going to do about this gas in the iceberg? Do? Fit it in somewhere. I'm more interested in this mirage army. See, Gong, they use this natural light refraction process to project the illusion of attacking soldiers and . . . No, Gong, I think we should work on this types of execution thing, like the squasher-hammer with its finely perforated plates and its squirt-proof rim, and that spinner thing that breaks him into little pieces. . . . Uh-uh, Gong, you know how they are about this up-beat skizazz. No, we want to get that line in where she says 'But I thought you took the pill!' But hey, Gong, how about this, to solve the world's food problem we start growing people smaller, see? A saving all round, they'd need less food, clothes, living space, it would in effect make the world a lot larger. Play a tune on the old harmonium. Wait though, Gong, I've got a great idea. There's this slow-motion drug, see? that an old guy can give to his young lady friend so that she gets the idea that when he goes into action he's faster than Lightning Gonzales. . . . Oo-ah, no, Gong, too sexy. . . . you know how they go ahem and tsK tsK. No, we've got to concentrate. What about the O.U. and Hippo versus the AMI and Mortsyn? Now there's something that that amateur Theodore would swap for Ursa Major with the Pleiades through in. . . .'

'I sometimes wonder,' Sussrind said, 'whether it is altogether desirable to cure some complaints. Some of my patients are so happy as they are. Take Miss Swiss for example. She finds that your fortified air heightens her awareness of being—as a dog. It has assisted her fixation. Superficially this might be regarded as a bad thing, but she is plainly so content and has such a delightfully cold nose that to recover her to humanity might be construed as a wish to return her to misery.'

'I'd like to meet her,' Gongi said. 'I've got an idea—you know, Dog Woman From Caninbras, that sort of thing. Could get the authentic touch. And if she can stand me. . . .'

'Um. Yes. I don't see why not. She can't become more extreme than she is now. . . .'

Miss Swiss came in on all fours, eagerly, dragging at the strap in Sussrind's hand. And indeed she did look well. Her face was radiant and her tongue lolled as she panted happily.

'Heel,' Sussrind said. 'Heel, girl.'

Obediently she stopped. Sussrind was panting, too. 'She sure does like her walkies.'

Miss Swiss raised her head and sucked in the overproof mixture. Her eyes rolled, glazed, shook free to sparkle. 'Oo-woof!' she said. 'Woof, woof!'

'Well, well,' Gongi said, 'it's nice to get some appreciation at last, even if it is only from a dog. Is she friendly?'

'Give her a pat and see.'

Gongi walked forward to pat her head. She reached around to lick his fingers.

'Shake hands with the gentleman,' Sussrind ordered.

She lifted a limp hand. Gongi soberly shook it. 'What breed is she?'

'St. Bernard,' Sussrind said. 'Ah, pedigreed. We're having a little trouble with that. It seems that she's taken a fancy to the gardener's Alsatian.'

'Arruff! Ahwooo!' Miss Swiss cried at the word 'Alsatian'.

'Naughty girl!' Sussrind chastised. 'Alsatian nasty!'

'Arrowwooooo!'

'We'll find you a better mate than that,' Sussrind promised.

'Woof!'

'Don't fret and get excited.'

'Woof! Wa-oooo!'

'Fairly soon,' Sussrind said. 'That's if you behave yourself and don't try to bite the cook again.'

'Ahhrraff!'

'Sit, come on, sit. Stay, now.'

Miss Swiss hunkered down. Her eyes now held a filmy brightness. Absently she began to sniff at a nearby chair-leg.

'You seem to have her well trained,' Gongi said. 'She's housebroken, of course?'

'She, ah, has her own plot in the yard. She's good that way. And it saves having her rear up the flower-beds if she wants to bury anything.'

'Yes I see,' Gongi said. 'Does she know many tricks? Can you get her to roll over?'

'For a biscuit, yes.'

'Fine looking dog,' Gongi said. 'It shouldn't be hard to find a mate for her. I can see it now, the landing on Caninbras, the dog-men lost on a hunting expedition, the dog-women getting desperate. Dick Flyte and his space-crew to the rescue, dabbing themselves with black spots and going ashore as Dalmatians. With handfuls of biscuits.'

'Gurrurruff! Ruff!'

'She likes the idea.'

'She's naughty,' Sussrind said. 'Sit, I said! I can see I shall have to give you some more powders.'

'Eeeyay!' she yelped.

'Well keep quiet then.' Sussrind came back to Gongi. 'She's very playful you know, at times. C'm. She, ah, seems to take no exception at all to the, ah, flavour in the air.'

'Well, she can't be more shocked into being more aberrated than she is, can she?'

'No. There must be something in that. The pheromone excitation must reach a pitch where the impression sensors are overwhelmed and numbed. Akin to an explosion too close to the ear, a silent buffeting rather than a bang.'

'You still haven't tried it yourself,' Gongi reminded him. 'There might be something in your theory, but you won't really know until you've imbibed a lungful or two your-



self.' He pointed to the glassily staring Miss Swiss. 'At least she proves that I'm not lethal. A whiff or two shouldn't hurt you.'

'You want me to try?' Sussrind asked. 'Why?'

'Because I'm as curious as you are. The power of scent is much neglected, yet scent is known to be a stronger trigger to mental imaginings. A faint smidgen of detected perfume can bring instant recall of a loved one, of a church, a distant park, a bakehouse, mother's mulligatawny stew, hospital, you smell it—your schnoz will put you right there.'

'Ah.' Sussrind fiddled with a vest-button. 'But the, ah, content here has an insalubrious quality of the most coarsely overpowering sort.'

'I wouldn't say. It's what you get used to,' Gongi said. 'People who work in sewers declare that it is the most healthy smell in the world down there, and they claim a total absence of bronchial complaints.'

'Do they?'

'They do. So you can see that, medically speaking, a jolt or two might help tone up your whole system.'

'H'm.' Sussrind thought about it. 'Yes, as you say, curiosity drives. I shall have to try someday, so why not now?'

'Why not?' Gongi said. 'It's free. Just take a couple of sniffs and see what happens.'

Sussrind thought some more, made a decision. He unfastened the clips at his neck, lifted the bubble from his head, but held it ready to drop back into place again. He exhaled.

Sussrind inhaled bravely through distended nostrils. For a space there was the poise of expectancy. Then Sussrind's face contorted in vain efforts to express his repugnance. Like a basketball player smitten with cramp on the point

of making a scoring throw, he leaned, twisting slightly sideways, and crashed in open-eyed unconsciousness to the floor.

'Dr. Sussrind,' Gongi patted his cheeks, 'are you alright?' Sussrind smiled idiotically. 'Woof,' he said softly.

'Woof?' Gongi recoiled. 'What kind of answer is that?'

'A dog-man's answer,' Sussrind said, his eyes wide and unfocused. 'Woof. I'm back from a hunting trip.' He rolled over onto hands and knees, pushing his buckled helmet to one side. 'I'm a dog-man, what else?' His eyes swung to bear with interest upon Miss Swiss.

'What kind of dog are you?' Gongi asked.

'A Dalmatian, of course. Arruff.'

'Uhh.' Gongi sat back on his haunches. His occupation greatly assisted his ability to assess. 'I get it. You have a sublimated desire for Miss Swiss. But as a doctor it would be highly unethical for you to develop a passion for a patient. So, in order not to lose her, instead of curing her you have, probably unconsciously, actually encouraged her in her self-deception. Your dog, man's faithful, loyal and devoted friend. And instead of keeping her away from me you created in your own mind an acceptable excuse to perhaps even further enhance her condition.'

'Arrrowrr. You're so right.' Sussrind crawled forward to sniff at Miss Swiss's sniffing nose, then padded off around to carry his proboscis to her rear.

'Yarrooo,' she said. 'You know, he's kind of cute, at that. With a name like Sussrind, though, couldn't he be a Great Dane. I'd like a Great Dane.'

'He is a Great Dane,' Gongi obliged, irked. 'He only thinks he's a Dalmatian.'

'Oh good. Rarrrr! Arrrrrr rrrrr!' she barked at Sussrind, and the two began to romp friskily about each other.

'Oh God,' Gongi muttered to himself, 'if only Avram could see this now he'd go over to writing the captions for Uncle Scrooge. . . .'

'You, ah, c'hm, ah, er, have, ah, decided to, ah, remain for, hm, more treatment, then?' Sussrind, in a new helmet, embarrassed, enquired. 'I'm, ah, sorry about what happened but, c'ha, but you saw the, um, effect that it had.'

'Yes,' Gongi said shortly. 'If I'm staying here, it's not necessarily for treatment. It's just that I haven't figured out yet just where else I can go.'

'Ah. Oh, I see. Yes, well then,' Sussrind braced himself, 'the, ah, c'hm, experience I had was most illuminating, has given me a great insight into your problem.'

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah. Er, yes. You have heard of the scent of fear. Yes. Now in your case, from the tapes we have taken, we can surmise that you have a basic fear of competition.'

'Tapes? What tapes?'

'Ah, you talk to yourself rather a lot, you know. And on analysis. . . .'

'I didn't know you took tapes. Where are they? What do you do with them when you've finished with them?'

'Do with them? Well, in the normal way we erase them. However, it so happens that a colleague has shown interest in your case, and the value of a second opinion cannot. . . .'

'Oh yes? And what's his name?'

'He lives in Mexico. A Dr. Reynolds. He pays us a nominal fee of two cents a yard. . . .'

'Aye-yi-yi!' Gongi cried. 'I might have known it! The vultures!' He began to pace up and down. 'Did he get the one about the teeth?'

'The teeth? I'm, ah. . . not quite sure. It's such a mish-mash. . . . What teeth particularly?'

'What teeth, he says! It's pure Bradbury. There's this woman, see? And she talks to her false teeth. Well, it's not long before they both get very chummy and she thinks "If my teeth talk, maybe they can eat, too". So she starts feeding them, first off with peanuts. And while the woman gums on gruel the teeth acquire an appetite, because no matter how much they eat it all goes into nothing, see? The woman shoves it in the front, looks over the back, but chomp, chomp, chomp, the victuals just disappear. And the teeth get more and more voracious, and one day the woman brings her feeding hand too close. . . . Did he get that?'

'I, ah, really can't remember. That wasn't something to do with your long erroneous dissertation upon the Oedipus Complex and Science Fiction?'

'No, no, no. . . . what do you mean erroneous? The mammary significance of planets with more than one moon, the symbolism of mother planet versus mistress planet. . . . don't tell me you gave all that to Mack the pseudo quack?' Gongi was horrified. 'Was he the only buyer?'

'Uh? Oh, well, there has been the odd enquiry here and there. . . .'

'They're after my life's blood! Plagiarism! Wait till I write to Harlan about this!' Gongi glowered. 'Come to think of it though, he's probably like the rest of them.'

'Calm down, calm down,' Sussrind urged. 'It won't happen again. I didn't realise. Those things are important to you, aren't they? Of course. It fits. A multiple schizoid personality, fragmented into sub-ids loosely reined to intumescence on occasion to replenish the supra-id which,

fundamentally, as evidenced by your sense of persecution, is exclusive paranoid in character.'

'Do you know what you're talking about?' Gongi said.

'Do you?'

'No.'

'That's all I worry about,' Sussrind replied. 'Now you just relax, don't worry about a thing. I'll see that the tapes get cleaned off in future. . . .'

'Gongi, if we stay here we'll go nuts. The worst place a madman can go is to a madhouse—God knows there's little enough rationality outside, but inside there's nothing at all. Now this Oystred could be anybody's loopy scientist. You can say that again, Gong. Well, he is. Is he smarter than you? No, I don't think so. There you are, then. What do you mean, there I am then? Use your head, Gong. If you can add up better than he can, whose maths results should you rely on? Mine. Exactly. Does he have an original idea in his head? Ideas are as cheap as bootlaces. Yes, yes, but does *he* know that? When he sucked in your elixir what did he do? He borrowed the idea you had just previously planted in his head. Say, that's right. And he thinks your gabbing is so much guff. Yeah, how'd you like that? The nerve! He doesn't recognise grandiloquent invention even when he hears it. What invention? Grandiloquent—what's the matter, you deaf or something? I only asked. Chee, but you're slow sometimes. So I can't ask now? I don't mind you asking as long as the question is intelligent. Okay, okay. Well, don't keep butting in. You want it all to yourself, Gong, that's your trouble. Aw, Gong, don't start that again. We've got no time to nag each other. Gongi, while we go on like this we'll get no work done. That's my fault? You're blaming me? No, no, look, let's forget it, huh? Pax, right? Okay, if you'll let me get a word in. Sure, sure, go ahead. Well, there's these two two-headed monsters getting married, see? And they say "I do," "I do," "I do," "I do". So? So what more do you want? Is that it? Okay, so it'll need working on. . . . Pshal Look, how about this—a usual phone seance, but one of the customers turns out to be a *real* medium? So what? Don't come the "So what?" routine with me. It was better than your idea. Say, Christmas is coming, how 'bout we do something like Santa and the U.F.O.? Nah. The seasonal stuff doesn't have time to do the rounds. No. Tell you what, there's these scientists in the Himalayas, see? And they've discovered the Philosopher's Bomb. Wherever they let it off people within a mile, okay kilometer diameter, get all their tooth enamel turned to gold. It kills 'em too, of course, and in a tryout in Katmandu they make a million bucks and wear out three pairs of pliers. . . .'

'Some good news for you,' Sussrind said, standing just inside the door.

'Oh? Anne has had bow-legged quads?'

'No, no, no.'

'Damon has caught the dreaded dry-ups?'

'No, no, there's some friends have come to see you.'

'Friends? What friends? I don't have any friends. Who are they?'

'A Mr. Harrison I think he said, and a Brian somebody-or-other.'

'Thieves!' Gongi yelled. 'They've come to have a free crack at my evocative aural Don't let them in!'

'But. . . . But I thought you'd be pleased to have some visitors at last,' Sussrind said. 'They've brought flowers and everything. . . .'

'Hh-ha,' Gongi said harshly. 'In the shape of a wreath, huh? No. Keep 'em out. Let them create their own effluent manifestations.'

'Ahh!' Sussrind said. 'So you *are* beginning to believe that your malady could primarily be a product of your subconscious?'

'What? Perhaps. I don't know. Maybe it is. But it's mine, see?'

'Oh, yes, indubitably it is yours. A screen, a wall to keep people out, an expressive sustentation of a desire for absolute privacy and exclusion, an illustration irrefutably demonstrating the power of the mind to shape physical processes. Fantastic.'

'Glad you think so,' Gongi said with blunt unenthusiasm. 'I still think the drugs fired the a-go-go. Whatever it is, while I've got it it's not for sale or giveaway, see? Those two guys out there are not spinning out on my so-called hysterical haze.'

'I'm sure they mean you no harm,' Sussrind said. 'I'm sure they wish only to make you happy.'

'Yeah? They want to do me a favour, why don't they go get permanent writer's cramp? Send them away. And hey! Gongi added, 'did you know you've got black marks all over your face?'

'H'm? Oh, er, yes. I've got them all over. I'm seeing Miss Swiss next and she is more, ah, calm and, ah, forthcoming if I go along and pretend to be . . . Purely in the interests of mental science, of course.'

'Of course,' Gongi said. 'Of course.'

'Here I have a mini-monster being chased by surgeons through the hero's bowels, and you have to come in and give me a subpoena?'

'I'm sorry,' Sussrind said, 'but I had no choice. Apparently you are a key witness in a case against Noyzome and Belcher Chemicals, Limited?'

'That's right. On behalf of the Clean-Air Association. Ah, Professor,' as a head peered around the door, 'you've come for another enlivened debate upon Ptolemy the First?'

The white, spikily hirsute head was followed by an ancient pyjama-clad figure. That's right, ancient pyjamas.

'Seee-a-hoooo!' The Professor's nose wrinkled. 'Blitzn der schnozzle! Like mit fist Superman der badder—Kapowl und Blat! Ja, like Kapowl! Is der Blat! Ondly suddener. Ssschact! Vot der pongi!'

'Has he been here before?' Sussrind asked.

'He wandered in a couple of days ago,' Gongi said. 'He thinks I'm Rameses. When he came to last we had a great talk about mummies.'

The Professor sank to his knees preparatory to passing out. 'Fraulein nodt needink to der Egypt goink to being der mommy, ja.' And smiling he sank the rest of the way.

'Ahum.' Sussrind reached to rub his nose, found his air-bubble preventive, scratched the glass while his nose twitched. 'When other people breathe your . . . your whatever-it-is, are you personally aware of any diminution of power?'

'I don't think so,' Gongi said, 'but that's no reason why more I realise that at all costs this essence of mine must be kept from the nasal passages of a certain unscrupulous and scoundrelly section of the community. Out there,' Gongi pointed, 'through that window I saw a group sitting on a knoll. Downwind. Picked them out with my telescope. Arthur was there, and Christopher, and Lloyd, and that

fellow Alexei. Hal I want this room sealed,' Gongi ordered. 'I don't want one wisp to get out.'

'Ah, c'hm, yes,' Sussrind said, 'but how do you propose to attend court?'

This stopped Gongi for a moment. Then, 'I'll have to wear that suit, I suppose. . . .'

'What is the meaning of that ridiculous outfit you're wearing?' the Judge asked. 'Were you under the impression that this session was to be held under water?'

'No, Judge, your Honour, sir,' Gongi was red-faced and stifling. The prolonged containment of his aroma within his suit was beginning to make his head swim. Tiny four-legged beetles with scapels were delving to extract the liverwurst from a bloated Cleopatra, with spotted space-ships on leashes dragging a ball of flame imminently about to go nova. 'I, that is, it's . . . it's . . . If I don't . . . wasn't . . . I'd, you see . . . phrooooo . . .'

'Speak up, speak up!' the Judge said crankily. 'What is this nonsense?'

'My patient,' Dr. Sussrind stood up, 'is suffering from stereophonic mephitis. An ailment open to psychical interpretation, extreme aerophagy . . .'

'And who are you?'

'I am his psychiatric counsellor, my Lord.'

'Hmph. That augurs well,' the Judge said grumpily. 'Surely he can take that dome thing off his head?'

'I assure you that it would be inadvisable, your Worship,' Sussrind said. 'Flatulence of an excessively robust and permeating nature . . .'

'I'm not having the rules of my courtroom ignored,' the Judge declared. 'I will tolerate the outlandish garb, but he must at least, out of respect, remove his headgear.'

Gongi's suit turgidly bulged with suppression. He did not know whether his sense of buoyancy was real or imagined. Acrid sweat was filling his boots.

'Your Grace,' Sussrind said, 'it would be most unwise to, ah, uncock him, as it were. The restraint, believe me, is necessary . . .'

'Rubbish!' the Judge snorted. 'I insist that he bares his head. Apart from being a breach of court etiquette, I am totally unable to make head nor tail of what he is mumbling about. Remove that childish goldfish bowl, sir, and let us have no more argument about it.'

Sussrind started to protest, but saw Gongi, dizzy and suddenly desperate for relief, working gladly at the catches on his helmet. Sussrind closed his mouth and, as discreetly as possible, began to back-pedal towards the exit.

Tsssssssssss. The fastenings undone, the helmet more or less lifted itself from Gongi's shoulders. He tucked it under one arm, gratefully began to breathe what to him was much fresher air as his suit deflated.

'Order! Order!' The Judge banged his gavel. 'Order, or I'll clear . . .' But the disturbance was the stampede to escape, and the Judge's warning was forestalled when the court precipitantly cleared itself.

'What the . . .?' Gavel hung suspended. 'Eeeyeeack! Errrrrrgh!' The Judge couldn't believe it. 'Hooooossh!' Stiffened, his eyes went to meet each other, and slowly, very slowly, his body eased down to rest on his bench.

The slow sprawled here and there gazing blankly at nothing, and the room was empty of conscious persons—except for the clerk of the court, who viewed the swiftly altered circumstances with some puzzlement.

Gongi stepped down from the witness stand. 'How come you're unaffected by the smell?' he queried.

'Sbell? Whad sbell? I dod sbell eddytig,' the man said. 'Whad's apped?'

'Air pollution,' Gongi answered. 'A vivid example of what can happen to us if we don't control the noxious substances that we pour into our skies.'

'Oh. Are dey dead?'

'No, just mildly asphyxiated.' Gongi paused. 'Polluted air is full of chemicals, right? If we can only show that extracting these chemicals from the air is a worthwhile endeavour, our air may be purified as a commercial proposition, see?'

'Uh.' The clerk's eyes were widely roving. He wasn't really listening. He fumbled in his pocket.

'I should have written a treatise on the matter,' Gongi said. 'Where's there's muck there's brass, you know. Oh well, I suppose I'd better open the windows and put my helmet back on.'

Gongi walked to one of the handles that worked the high fanlights. 'Do you know,' he said, turning, 'that . . . Don't light that cig . . . !'

PhooofooooomP!

'Ah, you're awake,' Dr. Sussrind said. 'How are you feeling?'

Gongi blinked heavy eyelids. 'You're not wearing your breathing gear.'

Sussrind patted one of Gongi's bandaged arms. 'You're cured,' he said genially. 'You've had what amounts to shock

therapy. You no longer exude that distressingly pervasive rankness. Your odor now is of inconsequential dimensions.'

Gongi's nose writhed and his lips curled in distaste. 'Oh yeah? Then what's the dead rat pickled in putrid that I'm receiving now?'

Sussrind sat back from the bed. He coughed. 'Er, no,' he apologised, waving his hat, 'that was me. I rather over-indulged myself at lunch, I'm afraid. . . .'

'So you're back with us again,' McGregor said, his gaze as ever unnervingly penetrating, his visage grimly one that could readily be construed as expressing regret.

'Uh, yes, uh, sir,' Gongi said. 'It's good to be back. To be back with normal people again. Or with people who are almost normal. That is, *our* kind of normal. The observers of the abnormal reality, so to speak. The projectors of the futuristic, the plumbers of esoteric pipelines, the cock-and-ball storytellers who apply the wrenches to their own nuts to unscrew and unplug the U-bend of yesterday-tomorrow.'

'Lyrical,' McGregor breathed. 'Poetic even.' He remained immobile, displaying amazing self-control.

'Yes, sir,' Gongi said. 'Back in business with a vengeance. Sane again. Or almost sane again. Well, as sane as the others, anyway. Nearly. Ah, but,' Gongi flexed his shoulders, 'it's good to be cured. To know that I don't stink any more.'

'That,' and McGregor's hard-bitten cigarette-holder angled 40 degrees to the roof, 'is what *you* think. . . .'

Meet the author of our next story . . .

E. C. TUBB

Born just after the First World War under the sign of Libra, Edwin Charles Tubb has read science fiction for more years than he cares to remember and still finds it the most fascinating and mentally stimulating type of literature.

He first began writing some twenty years ago, selling his first story—'No Short Cuts'—to the British magazine *NEW WORLDS* in 1950. Since then he has been a regular contributor to magazines in the English speaking world, and his novels have been published in a dozen languages. During the early 1950's he published a score of colourful novels, including the noted 'Charles Grey' series, which placed him in the forefront of British writers and won a considerable fan following.

In 1955 he gained the Cytricon Literary Award and for many years won the *Nebula Prize* and, more recently, has been included in the BSFA's list of the ten most popular British authors. In 1956 he became the editor of *AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION*, doing much to improve the magazine until its untimely demise.

Instrumental in helping to found the British Science Fiction Association in 1958, he also edited the first issue of the Association's official organ, *VECTOR*, and is now a member of the board. In 1964 he was guest of honour at

the BSFA Annual Convention in Peterborough.

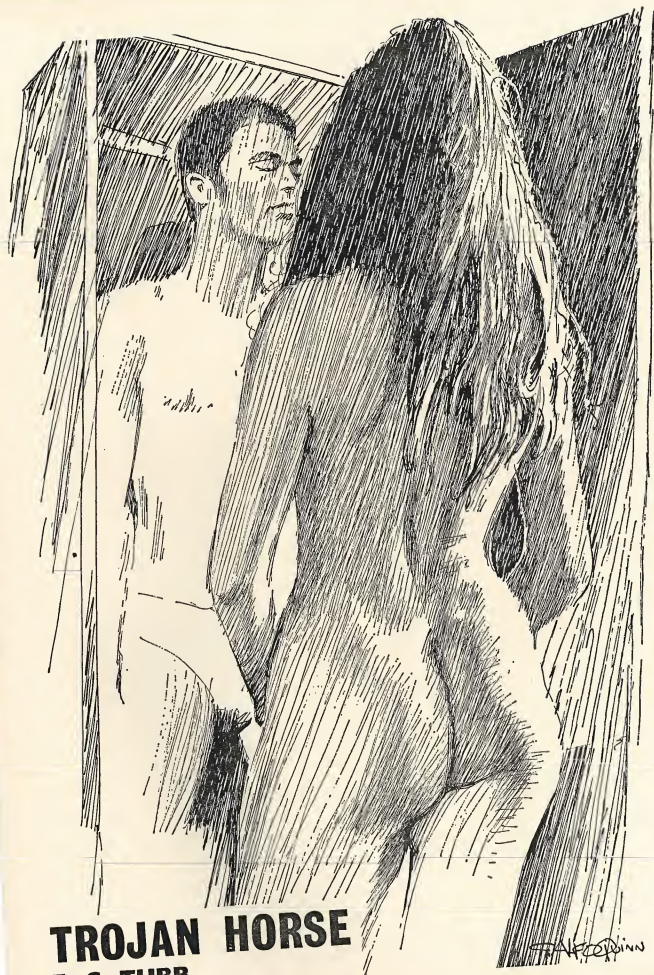
His work has also appeared in several anthologies, among them those edited by Judith Merril. Recent books include a collection of his best work. 'Ten From Tomorrow,' 'Death Is A Dream', and his 'Gath' series of novels which are proving a big success on both sides of the Atlantic.

A versatile career has included working as a carpenter, dishwasher, truck driver, printing machine salesman, cook, welfare officer, clerk, and interior decorator. He has also owned a mobile fried fish business and has managed a shop in the city of London.

He is firmly convinced that science fiction is here to stay—not as a novelty but as a mature and responsible medium of entertainment.

Hobbies include photography, astronomy, the armour and weapons of the middle ages, fencing, and the making of wine—at which he is remarkably adept. Another hobby is woodwork, and he is currently expanding his bookshelves to accommodate his large collection of science fiction magazines.

Ambitions are to see the science fiction film as firmly established as those in any other field, and to travel on a passenger-rocket to the Moon.



TROJAN HORSE
E. C. TUBB

SAFORIN

Do we really live in a Free World? In this compelling story a noted author gives us a hard-hitting picture of a world that is truly Free . . .

Marlo French woke, shivering, immediately conscious of the freezing chill. Rising he touched the radiator, Cold. In the bathroom icy water gushed from faucets which should have delivered hot. Snarling he padded into the living room, hit the switches of radio, perculator and fire. Music rose as he yelled at the phone. 'Get me the manager!'

He didn't recognise the face which looked at him from the screen. 'Can I be of service, sir?'

'The radiator's cold,' said Marlo. 'The water. The damn place is like an iceberg. Am I being given special treatment?'

'No, sir, but—'

'You're not the manager. Where's Hardy?'

'I am the assistant manager, sir.'

'Not good enough. Get Hardy.'

The fire was glowing red by the time he arrived. He looked pale, distraught. His left arm was cradled in a black sling. 'My apologies, sir. I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience but the trouble will be rectified as soon as possible.'

Marlo scowled. 'It shouldn't have happened. Am I supposed to catch pneumonia or something?'

Hardy looked embarrassed. 'The truth is, Mr. French,' he said with a burst of candour, 'we had a little trouble last night. An attempted take-over. It failed, of course, but they managed to get into the boiler room and some pipes got damaged. I had to shut off the steam in order to effect repairs but everything is now under control.' He hesitated. 'Your tolerance would be highly appreciated, Mr. French.'

'The hell with that,' snapped Marlo. 'With the rent I pay why should I be tolerant? Credit me a day and get the heat on fast!'

He killed the phone and stood warming himself before the fire. Some take-over! They hadn't even cut the power or perhaps they had and Hardy had managed to get it re-connected. Most probably it had been a gang of zanies on a raid or even a breakdown and the manager was making excuses. He remembered the sling. Well, maybe not, but even if the attempt had been genuine it didn't solve the problem of his shower.

He compromised, turning up the radio before going into the bathroom, washing face and neck and depilating his cheeks. The cream ran out before he'd covered all the stubble and he finished the job with a razor managing to nick a cheek. Scowling he examined the wound. It was slight but messy and made his lean, saturnine features even more sinister. Irritably he dabbed the cut with styptic and went to dress. He was checking his gun when the phone rang.

Holstering the weapon he looked at the compory information below the blank screen. Ed Whalen, High Boss of Chicago Chemicals, a top-graded character with a high reliability index and strong protective affiliations. Marlo flipped the switch.

'French? Whalen was in his late middle-age with deep-set eyes and a strong, heavily jowled face. 'Marlo French?'

'That's right.'

'I want to see you.'

'You're looking.'

'I mean personally. This is business. Are you interested in making money or not?'

Marlo glanced at the information panel below the screen

of the phone. The computer memory system had dug a little deeper and had analysed the emotional index of the caller. Whalen was at a high pitch of nervous tension, seething with frustrated anger, almost hysterical and on the very edge of panic-reaction. 'I'm interested,' he said. 'But I can't afford to throw away time. Can't you tell me what it is over the phone?'

'No,' snapped Whalen. 'I'm at the plant. Be there within the hour and you won't regret it.'

He sat in an office buried three hundred feet below the surface. The elevator was equipped with both spy and exterminating devices; the passage leading from it rigged with electronic bloodhounds. Marlo had to deposit his gun, knife and rings before he could pass into the office. Whalen rose as he entered. 'You want something? A drink?'

Marlo shook his head and glanced around the office as Whalen crossed to where bottles stood on a tray. The place reeked of luxury. The carpet was ankle deep, the ceiling a miniature replica of that in the Sistine Chapel, the furniture of real, hand-worked wood. Living murals gave the impression of actual scenes. Skiers on a mountain slope, camels on a desert, naked women swimming in the sea. One of them, a blonde, winked at him.

'All right,' said Marlo as Whalen walked towards him. 'Why me?'

'I don't get you.'

'Let's not play games,' said Marlo tiredly. 'Chicago Chemicals is big enough to have all kinds on its payroll. Troubleshooters, assassins, the lot. If you had to you could raise a private army so—why me?'

Whalen sipped at his drink. 'You've a good reputation. You're shrewd, smart, reliable. A man who knows how to be discreet and one with no interest in inter-firm politics. And—'

'I'm expendable,' interrupted Marlo. 'All right, I've got the picture. You want something done and you want it kept private. What's the problem?'

Whalen finished his drink and helped himself to another. 'It's a matter of recovery. Something was taken from our research laboratory and I want it back.'

Marlo waited.

'Wayne, my head chemist, has been working on a new compound. The initial test-batch was a hundred and fifty pills, lime-green in colour and two millimeters in diameter. One hundred and twenty-three of them were left after preliminary tests. Someone took them. I want them back.'

'And fast,' guessed Marlo. 'Before who has them can get them analysed. Am I warm?'

'Almost red hot,' admitted Whalen. 'Wayne hadn't bothered to introduce any blocking elements and unrecognisable essentials so as to safeguard the product. Any chemist who knows his stuff could break down the compound and discover the formula.'

'Now tell me the rest of it,' urged Marlo. 'Who it is who took the stuff and why you can't just reach out and take it back. The whole thing.' He frowned as Whalen hesitated. 'Look,' he said coldly. 'If you expect me to believe that a stranger walked into your laboratory, helped himself to something you consider valuable and simply walked out again you must think I'm crazy. Whoever it was took the stuff couldn't have been a stranger. It must be someone belonging to the firm and with right of entry because you'd have that place guarded at all times. So you must know who it is. And yet you send for me Why?'

'I told you.'

'That's right,' said Marlo sourly. 'I'm expendable.'

'Not that,' corrected Whalen. 'Discreet.' He looked at his glass then impatiently put it down on his desk. 'The person who took those pills is my daughter.'

Marlo nodded. 'That figures.'

'I discovered the loss and immediately checked the watch-system,' continued Whalen. 'There were photographs and other means of identification. Naomi worked here and had the right of entry. For her it would have been easy to take the stuff.'

'And easy for you to take back?'

'No!' Whelan's seething anger bubbled close to the surface and drove him to pace the floor. 'As yet it's been impossible! I haven't seen her,' he explained. 'She refuses to communicate. There seems to be no way I can get hold of her short of an outright war. Damn it, French! You've got to help me!'

'I'll help you,' promised Marlo. 'But it's going to cost you a lot of money.' He paused, thinking. 'Let me get this straight. Naomi has the stuff. She won't talk to you and is somewhere where you can't get at her. Right?'

'She's in the Staysafe Apartments,' said Whalen. 'I know that for certain.'

Marlo pursed his lips. 'I take it that she has protective affiliations so if you tried an outright raid things would get out of hand. But what if they did?' He snapped his fingers. 'Got it! That stuff she took—you want it kept secret. You daren't chance her spreading the information and if you make an attack that's just what she'll do. So you want me to get it back all nice and quietly. And if I have to kill her to get it?'

'You kill her,' said Whalen.

'Your own daughter?'

'Sure. Why not?'

'No reason,' admitted Marlo. 'I just wanted to be sure.'

The bed was a sea, a warm, scented, beautiful ocean enveloping, protecting, enfolding her in a miniature universe as snug and as comfortable as a womb. Naomi Whalen stirred, stretching, arching her back, eyes closed as she ran her hands over the febrile skin of her naked body. Desire was a living flame. Eyes still closed she reached out, felt the warm firmness of male contours, dug her nails deep into the surrogate muscles of the back.

'Darling!' The voice was soft, low, a husky whisper of passion. 'I love you, my darling. I need you. I long to possess your body.'

Her hands moved, nails digging a familiar pattern, pre-st controls yielding beneath their impact. The mannikin stirred, fluids coursing to produce an artificial perspiration, a growing tumescence. The limbs arranged themselves into a position of dominance, the respiration increased, synthetic passion faithfully duplicated.

'Talk to me!' she demanded. 'Talk to me!'

Triggered by the sonic command the mannikin's voice deepened, quickened, whispering a succession of image-producing concepts, obscenities, vulgar colloquialisms all calculated to induce maximum erotic response. The woman groaned in pleasure. As a lover the mannikin was unequalled because it was an extension of herself, programmed to do and say the things she most desired. And it was untiring.

Satisfied she commanded the mannikin to quiescence and sat upright in the bed. The apartment was warm, comfort-

able, an extension of the womb-bed. She rose, prowled the rooms, nerves jumping as they always did when she looked for signs of danger. The phone rang as she headed towards the bathroom; the compoxy told her that her father was calling again. She smiled as she read the emotional data. A little more and he would burst a blood-vessel or run wild and get himself shot. To hell with him.

She took her time over the shower, using plenty of deodorants and perfumes, brushing the long mane of her hair until it shone like polished gold. Dressed in a lounging suit which made the most of her legs and figure she fixed breakfast, using food from sealed cans. Curiosity made her switch on the window, the repeater screen fed from a scanner on the roof. The weather was lousy, cold rain driving from the lake and giving promise of a hard winter.

She dropped her coffee cup as the doorchime sounded.

'Miss Whalen.' The corridor-guard was punctiliously polite. His face on the door-screen was lined and solemn. 'The usual check, Miss Whalen. Is everything all right?'

'Yes.'

'I can't see you, Miss Whalen. Will you please activate your screen.' His eyes blinked as she did so. 'Thank you.'

'Nurd,' she said.

'Thank you, Miss Whalen.' The check was complete. The code word had told him that she was quite safe, that no one was crouched out of sight threatening her with a weapon. 'Will you be needing the cleaners today?'

'No.'

He touched the stiff visor of his helmet and turned away. At midday he or another would repeat the check. It would be done again in late afternoon, again at evening. At night the building was sealed like a vault with guards personally accompanying residents to their rooms. The Staysafe Apartments lived up to their reputation.

The phone rang, the compoxy signalling that the caller was a Julia Weston of the Lonely Lesbians, emotional index neutral. Naomi let it ring. During the next two hours she had calls from the Self-Satisfiers Society, the Church of the Hidden Truth, an agency specialising in weapon-implants, a mutual protection group and someone who had a perverted need to scream abuse at anyone he could get to listen. Finally she rang the manager.

'Yes, Miss Whalen?'

'I'm being assaulted,' she said coldly. 'Bothered by a lot of nuds ringing me up. What's happened to your filter?'

'Nothing, Miss Whalen. I'm sorry if you've been inconvenienced but you did ask that all calls be routed straight through. Would you like to change that instruction?'

'No,' she said. 'Forget it.'

Turning she saw the mannikin. It looked back at her, electronic magic giving the eyes a semblance of life so that, oddly, she felt a momentary embarrassment.

'Go to sleep,' she ordered.

Obediently the eyelids fluttered, the lashes coming to rest on the cheeks. Almost imperceptibly the chest rose and fell so that, to anyone unknowing, the mannikin looked exactly like a young and handsome man in a light and natural sleep.

When not on active duty the thing made an excellent watchdog.

Connors Lacey, Professor of Department, examined his class as they arrived for the morning session. Young men all eager to get up and on. With satisfaction he noted they all kept plenty of distance between each other. Waiting

until they had squatted on the padded floor he advanced to the rostrum, mounted, looked down at his pupils.

'Good morning,' he said politely. 'I trust you have all had a pleasant night's sleep?'

All but one chorussed their agreement. Connors glanced at him, checked his status on the rostrum compory. Phillip Wayne, chief of the research department of Chicago Chemicals. A young man to hold such a position and obviously with something on his mind.

'Wayne!' snapped Connors. 'I asked you a question.'

'Go to hell!'

Connors moved. A gun appeared in his hand, the hammer falling with a loud click. Had the weapon been loaded Wayne would now be dead.

'Once again I emphasise the primary lesson of survival,' said Connors. He was shaking a little; rudeness always threw him into a killing rage. 'Politeness is cheap and yet more lives have been saved by the use of a little courtesy than by all the protack ever taught. A man who avoids a fight has an immediate advantage over a man who has to win one. In your position, dealing as you do with people of aggressive natures, you will find that the use of politeness is a better weapon than all your guns, knives, gas and combat skills. A better defence than your padded caps and metal-lined clothing. In the field of social activity, as in the field of medicine, prevention is better than cure.'

He paused, became aware that he still held the pistol and threw it on the lectern. 'To sum up,' he said, emphasising every word, 'the real secret of success lies in the exercise of self-control.'

One of the class had an objection. 'Surely that can't be right. If a man's coming at you with a knife, what's the good of being polite?'

'None,' admitted Connors patiently. How the hell did some of these nurds ever get their jobs? 'If someone is coming at you you don't think—you react. But I was talking about prevention. What made the man blow his top in the first place? Maybe you did. Self-control could have prevented the situation. Think,' he insisted. 'Think before you act.'

'The thalamic pause,' said one of the class brightly. He sat towards the rear and carried MACE fed to a lapel-spray, the weapon triggered by toe-pressure. 'Professor Hay was telling us about it in psychology.'

'He wasn't talking about the same thing,' said Connors impatiently. 'Now listen. I call you a nurd—what do you do?'

'If you meant it I'd smash your face in,' said one.

'Shove a blade in your guts,' said another.

A third was even more terse. 'Kick,' he said.

Connors speared the first speaker with his finger. 'You,' he said. 'How would you know if I meant it or not?'

The pupil blinked.

'You would have exercised self-control,' said Connors triumphantly. 'You would have paused to think. Did I mean what I said? Was it an insult and did it call for action? If so would you have the advantage? An assessment of the probabilities,' he summed up. 'A moment of time in which to study the situation. Learn to do that and you have the world by the tail.'

The pupil who carried MACE frowned. 'Now wait a minute. You're talking about the censor, Professor Hay told us all about it. How it used to be a barrier between thought and action. How people used to resist their emotional drives, or if they didn't, used to be classified as dan-

gerously insane. Are you saying that we should redevelop it?'

'Certainly not!' Connors was disgusted at the suggestion. 'The censor was the worst thing which could have happened to the human race. What I am talking about isn't a built-in barrier between desire and action but a voluntary process of self-discipline by which we gain a choice of action. The difference is important. In the days when the race was cursed with an operative censor a man had no real freedom of choice when it came to action. He would feel desire, hate, hunger, all the normal emotions on the subconscious level but, before they could reach the conscious level the censor had done its work. Instead of a healthy reaction the man would be frustrated by that diabolical barrier. The result, of course, was a slave mentality and an insane culture.'

'Now we no longer have the censor. A man reacts to his emotional stimulus without any hampering restrictions. But that does not mean we must do without self-control. I call you an insulting name. Without training you will react in a predictable manner and seek to kill or injure me because I have aroused a hate-response. Now, if you can still feel that response but do not need to immediately react the advantages are obvious.' He pointed to a member of the class. 'Name one.'

'You could wait until he isn't looking then give it to him,' said the man.

'Right!' The finger moved. 'You! Give me another.'

'You could wait until the next time you met and then give it to him.'

'You're extending, not inventing,' said Connors. He pointed to Wayne. 'You!'

'You'd become an enigma,' said the chemist slowly. 'Unpredictable and therefore dangerous and all the more respected.'

Connors nodded. 'Very good. At least you have imagination.' He clapped his hands. 'That's enough theory for today. Let's get on with some practice. Don't forget that the art of protack is to couple both attack and defence. Now, take partners and begin. Left side, thumb to the eye and knee to the groin. Right side, knock aside thumb, twist to avoid knee, respond with kick to ankle and chop to side of neck. Left side. . .'

They were a good class. A quarter of them would probably be dead before they rose from junior executive status but the rest should make it. Some of them might even reach old age.

The place smelt of perfume, of smoke and tweed and things masculine together with a subtle blend of rinse and powder and the skin-scents of women. Fragile chairs stood on a carpet of neutral grey. Soft fabrics lined the walls. A kaleidobulb threw a wash of ever-changing colored light over the ceiling and through the air. Against the pastel softness Marlo felt big and hard and grittily out of place.

'My dear sir!' Quentin Quail, middle-aged, bouncing, a little too full in the rear and a little too narrow in the chest, hair impossibly neat in mathematical disarray, hands white and plump and gesturing. 'Do be seated! Do relax! Do have confidence! I know exactly what you need!'

'You do?' Marlo took a chair.

'But, of course! A man like yourself, someone of sensitivity and imagination, a man who has depths it would take a normal partner a lifetime to plumb. Gentle and strong, generous and firm, ruthless and yet with an infinite capa-

city for understanding. Yes, my dear sir, I know exactly what you need.'

Marlo smiled. 'Tell me.'

'A brunette, Mr. French,' gushed Quail. 'But why should we restrict ourselves? A composite,' he decided. 'A model with variable-toned hair so that you may enjoy the pleasure of an infinite range of colour from silver to jet. Just think of it! Ash blonde, honey, stimulating russet, warm auburn, tantalising brown and rippling coils of lustrous black.' Quail sighed, hands shaping the air. 'It costs a trifle more, true, but think of the tremendous variety. And, after all, what is money?'

'Something to spend,' said Marlo. 'But—'

'A man of the world,' interrupted Quail, lost in a salesman's dream. 'I sensed it as soon as you stepped through the door. My technicians, I told myself, will have to work hard to satisfy this gentleman. They will need all their skill and cunning to satisfy his educated tastes. But, my dear sir, they willingly accept the challenge. No effort is too great for someone as appreciative as yourself. Some wine?'

He danced from the room before Marlo could answer, returned with a bottle and two glasses poised precariously on a tray. 'Champagne,' he said. 'Real wine made from genuine grapes and reserved, need I say, for those who are able to appreciate a true vintage.' He poured, sipped, looked thoughtfully over the rim of his glass.

'Now that we have settled the question of the hair I think it would be best to go the whole way and build you a special construction. The advantages are so great I do not for one moment even consider the possibility of your refusal. Sophistication,' said Quail putting down his glass so as to give free rein to his hands. 'When we are not confined by limitations of price true artistry comes into its own. The height can be variable up to six inches. The mammary development to eight and the hips the same. This will give you a choice from near-nymphet to junoesque and permit an interesting arrangement of combinations. More wine, Mr. French?'

'Why not?' said Marlo.

'And now we come to skin tones!' Quail looked at the ceiling and kissed the tips of his fingers. 'A world of women rolled into one. Like the hair the colour of the skin can range from white to black; shades controllable from albino to African negroid with a selector mechanism to govern racial characteristics. And, naturally, there will be all the usual refinements plus a few rather unusual combinations I am certain you will find engrossing.' Quail managed to convey the impression of winking without actually closing an eye. 'You may trust me, Mr. French. I shall build you the finest femmikin ever seen in this or any other age.'

'Thank you,' said Marlo patiently. 'But I don't want a femmikin. I've been trying to tell you that.'

Quail was immediately understanding. 'Not to worry, my dear sir. The same advantages I have enumerated can, naturally, be incorporated into a mannikin. To ensure complete satisfaction I would strongly advise that you place yourself unreservedly into the hands of my psychotechnicians so that your deepest yearnings can be discovered and appropriate reactions built into the model. We can start work on the transfer of fifty per cent of the estimated price.'

'I'm sure you can,' said Marlo. 'But I don't want a mannikin, either.'

Quail gurgled. 'Then what do you want?'

Marlo told him.



"If John Russell Fearn had been alive today, I am sure that he would be delighted with this epitaph and probably just as bewildered and surprised . . . I don't think that he ever realised just how much of a pioneer of science fiction he was: he wrote it because he liked the medium. I don't think he could ever be called a 'great' writer of SF, from the literary standpoint, although many of his ideas were revolutionary, but he was one of the Greats of the earlier ages, and his name should be there with Hugo Gernsback, John W. Campbell, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Murray Leinster, and all the other whose thoughts and works formulated today's modern science fiction".

JOHN CARNELL

This book presents an in-depth portrait of one of science fiction's most colourful contributors. The result of nine years' research, it sheds new light on Fearn's extraordinary writing career, beginning with the pre-war American SF magazines. It is also a history of much of the early development of SF in both Britain and America.

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from the author at: 27 Cheshire Gardens,
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As a plan it was simple but Marlo liked the simple plans—there was less to go wrong. And there had been a precedent, a good one. Discovering that Naomi owned a mannikin had been a routine checking of credit transfer. Guessing who had made it was a matter of elimination; Quail was the best in the business and she would have had nothing but the best. Getting him to agree to making the switch was the hard part.

Hard but not impossible. Every man had his price and Quail was no exception. It was a high price but Whalen was paying. All Marlo was risking was his neck.

Quail was positively eager now that he'd been bought and paid for. He led Marlo into a room scented with antiseptics and watched him strip.

'A good body,' he mused. 'But we'll have to disguise that scar tissue. A general skin-tone will take care of that together with any other blemishes.' He prodded Marlo as if he'd been a horse, gripping the stomach, nodding as he felt the slabs of hard muscle. 'A little surplus fat,' he murmured, 'but we've time to sweat that off. Let's check your measurements.'

Quail frowned over a sheaf of photographs.

'You're about the right height,' he said. 'The extra inch won't matter. Neither will the slight difference in musculature. We'll have to do something about the face and hair and you'll have quite a bit to learn from the tapes.' He picked up a hypodermic syringe. 'Turn around and keep still.'

Marlo felt a template touch his skin then grunted as the needle plunged repeatedly into his back. 'What's that for?'

'The control studs,' explained Quail. 'The real ones are plastic set beneath the skin but these are nodules of testosterone which will become assimilated in time.' He chuckled like a satyr. 'You should feel quite an improvement in certain abilities soon.' The needle dug in again, this time higher towards the nape of the skull. 'And this is the emergency stop button. Press it and the mannikin will freeze. Most customers insist on it. It gives them a feeling of confidence.'

'It's given me a sore back,' said Marlo. 'What next?'

A dentist did things to his mouth, an optician worked on his face, a hairdresser his hair. Two women concentrated on his face, moulding surrogate flesh, injecting absorbants which could be shaped, spraying and touching until Quail nodded his satisfaction.

There were tapes, recordings of Naomi's subconscious desires which had been incorporated into the response-mechanism of the mannikin. Marlo memorised them, then practiced adjusting his voice until the tones made a vibration pattern which matched a wavering line on a screen.

'Good,' said Quail finally. 'Mr. French, you are almost an identical facsimile of Miss Naomi Whalen's mannikin. Two things you must bear in mind. The first is not to get carried away. Do nothing that is not programmed on the tapes. You are, after all, supposed to be a machine. The other is not to stay too long. Fake a breakdown. She will call me and I'll make the reverse switch.' He glanced at his watch. 'Soon we shall be ready to move. Are you quite comfortable, Mr. French?'

Marlo nodded. His face and neck were stiff from applied cosmetics, his back itched from the injections and his head ached from forced tuition but, aside from that, he felt fine. 'Have you made arrangements for the exchange?'

'I have.' Quail pursed his lips. 'Miss Whalen was most difficult to contact and even more difficult to persuade.

However she accepted the fact that a small but vital component in her mannikin needs to be immediately replaced. Reluctantly she agreed to release her friend for a short while. Soon we shall be taking it—you—back to her.'

And then would come the hard part.

Marlo heard the sound of the doorchime, the exchange of words, the slight rumble as the handlers rolled in his crate. The lid lifted and fingernails dug into his back. Obediently he stepped forward. The handlers backed away together with Quail and the guards. The door closed. Feet padded softly over the carpet and he caught the scent of perfume.

'Darling,' said Naomi. 'Open your eyes.'

She was beautifully fresh from her bath, naked skin glowing beneath the semi-transparent material of her robe. Rippling over her shoulders the long mane of hair gave her an appearance of unspoiled young innocence. She stood before Marlo, her perfume a seductive cloud. Lifting her arms she rested her hands on his shoulders and smiled into his face.

'I've missed you, darling,' she said.

Beneath the make-up he felt himself begin to sweat.

'Did they have to take my lovely boy away,' she crooned. 'Operate on his poor head so as to remove that nasty spare part.' Her fingers caressed the top of his skull, slipped over his shoulder, dug nails into the flesh of his back.

'Darling,' he said in a soft, low, husky whisper. 'I love you, my darling. I need you. I long to possess your body.' He wasn't pretending. If she wanted to play the instant-anaphrodisiac the dentist had fitted in a tooth dispenser wouldn't be needed.

Nails dug again into his flesh. Bleakly he tongued the anti-passion dope also fitted as part of the service. Damn the girl! What was she playing at?'

'There's no time for games now, precious,' she murmured softly, running her hands over his bare torso. 'Undress and go to bed now.'

Obediently he stepped towards the bed, dropped the loin cloth Quail had draped about his lower regions and climbed between the sheets. His heart pounded like a drum and the inside of his mouth was dry. Every natural instinct was screaming out for him to reach out and grab the girl and to hell with everything else. He bit down on the inside of his cheek and tasted blood as he fought for control. The doorchime came to the rescue.

It was the guard making his last personal check of the day. Marlo took the opportunity to relax a little. The timing had been just right. Now there would be all night to operate without interruption. By a tremendous effort of will he managed not to look at her as she dropped her robe and slipped naked into the bed.

Nails dug into his back as she played with her toy.

'Talk to me,' she commanded. 'Darling, talk to me!'

Marlo punched her scientifically beneath the chin.

A hundred and twenty-three two-millimeter pills don't take up much room but they aren't invisible. They had mass, bulk, a distinct colour. They were soluble and would be in a container of sorts. Finding them could only be a matter of time.

Marlo checked the girl to make sure that she was both unconscious and comfortable. A third container in his mouth yielded an anaesthetic gas which would keep her quiet for fifteen minutes at a time. Before she woke he

would lie down beside her unresponsive to her commands. The punch would have been the last act of a failing mechanism. She would call Quail who would make the exchange carrying Marlo and the pills right out of the apartment under her very nose.

Simple.

Only he couldn't find the pills.

He went through the bathroom with a fine comb and drew a blank. Back in the bedroom he frowned, thinking. The apartment wasn't large. It had a bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and living room. The furniture was supplied together with the fittings. Naomi had brought little with her. A couple of cases with some clothes and other stuff aside from the mannikin. He checked the time and fed her another shot of gas.

The girl was a paranoiac. She would need to have the stuff close to her and, from what he could see, she spent most of the time in bed.

He found a mass of frilly underthings, a complete range of cosmetics, a stilleto, a small automatic pistol, a gas pencil, an anti-rape defence mechanism and a ring which squirted corrosive fluid. The wardrobe held street clothes and a folding container for the mannikin. There was also a man's suit together with shoes and underwear. Her fantasy had obviously included dressing up her toy as the occasion demanded.

Back in the living room he fought against the conviction that he was running out of time. The walls were of solid concrete without the trace of a crack. The seats and cushions were covered with tough plastic which showed no sign of break or tear. The furniture was made of steel tubing, the ends welded tight. Fuming he rolled back the carpet figuring that, maybe, she had spread out the pills between layers of plastic film.

Nothing.

The kitchen yielded another blank. He checked the time and stormed back into the bedroom. Half-way to the door the phone rang. Marlo ignored it, entered the room and grabbed Naomi as she snatched up the pistol.

'Drop it!' He shook it from her hand. Her eyes were wide, still vacuous from the effects of the gas. 'I've drawn the teeth of all your toys,' he said. 'Don't waste time trying to kill me.'

'Quail,' she said thickly. 'I'll kill him for this!'

She was smart and he regretted the gas had failed to keep her under. His own fault, he had stretched the time too fine, but her waking had put him in a spot. He spoke quickly before her gas-lethargy could give way to panic-hysteria.

'Relax. I don't want to hurt you. Your old man hired me to get what you took from the plant. Just give me the stuff and I'll be on my way.'

She snapped at his throat, her teeth nipping his skin before he could push her away, hands conscious of her nudity. He threw her back on the bed, flung a robe after her.

'Get dressed.'

She looked up, eyes calculating. 'Why? Don't you like me?'

'Sure I like you. Too much for my own peace of mind,' he said honestly. 'But what's that got to do with it? Where's the stuff?' He saw the muscles tighten along the line of her jaw. 'Look,' he said, sitting beside her. 'Let's be sensible about this. The game's over and you're lost.'

He caught her fingers as they thrust at his eyes. Her knee

lifted, reached for his groin but missed because of their awkward position. He swore as the top of her head butted him in the face. Violence aroused desire. He flung her away and rose from the bed. To yield to temptation now was to commit suicide.

'You're crazy!' Marlo wiped blood from his nose. 'Do you want to die for the sake of a few lousy pills?'

'You get them you'll kill me,' she said. 'Right?'

'Wrong.' Irritably he pulled at the surrogate flesh plastering his face. Sweat had weakened the bond. It pulled free in curling strips. He tore at his scalp wishing that he could use alcohol, soap and a stiff brush but not daring to leave the woman alone. One call and the place would be stiff with guards. 'Those pills,' he said. 'Just how important are they?'

'If you don't know then I'm not telling you.' She lit a cigarette and stared at him quizzically through the smoke. 'You know,' she said, 'you're quite handsome in a savage kind of way.'

'Let's keep to the point.'

'I am.' She blew more smoke. 'You're in a spot and we both know it. I'm the only one who can get you out of here alive. If you kill me then you're a dead duck. If you hurt me the same.' She smiled. 'You know what? You've got a tiger by the tail.'

Marlo scowled. What she said was true enough but he didn't have to like it. He didn't have to admit it either. Not if he hoped to stay alive.

He dressed, led the way into the living room, poured them both drinks. The phone rang as she took her glass. A spiritual teacher was offering his services. They both ignored the instrument. Marlo helped himself to one of her cigarettes. 'This,' he said casually, 'is an interesting situation.'

She smiled. 'It's an impasse.'

'Not exactly. Let's review it. If I kill you the guards will kill me. If I don't kill you then you will order the guards to kill me. I may not have any option but you have. You've got the choice between living and dying.'

Her smile wavered a little. 'You wouldn't kill me.'

'If you believed that you wouldn't be talking,' said Marlo. 'You'd be calling the guards.' Anger roughened his voice. 'Of course I'd kill you, why not? I'm hoping that you won't make me do it.' He sipped his drink, watched as she tasted hers. 'Let's make a deal,' he suggested. 'Figure some way out of this mess.'

'You do the figuring,' she said. 'It's you who are on—'

The phone rang, interrupting her. Marlo grabbed her arm as she lunged towards the instrument, eyes narrowed as he read the comports information.

The caller was Phillip Wayne of Chicago Chemicals. The face looked familiar. He had worn it himself. The mannikin still wore it.

Marlo held back the girl as she tried to reach the phone. 'No,' he said.

'But he's calling. I've got to answer.'

'Let him sweat.' Scowling he looked at the pictured face. 'So that's it,' he said. 'You and he all the time.'

'Not quite,' she protested. 'Not as you think.'

'You worked together,' he insisted. 'You must have been close.' His hand tightened on her wrist. 'Just what is this all about?'

He pushed her towards the bedroom, standing in the door, brooding, eyes dark with thought. More than ever he was conscious that time was running out. Wayne

wouldn't give up trying to contact the girl. He would try again and, if there was no answer, he might alert the guards.

He tensed as the phone rang again. If it was Wayne!

It was a little old lady representing a charitable institution. She was obviously insane.

"All right," said Marlo tightly. "Talk. What is this all about?"

"Money," she said. "Power. Everything you've ever dreamed of." She stepped towards him, smiling, as beautiful as sin. "Real power. Power which would make you a king among men. A literal king!"

Marlo sneered. "Words!"

"More than that," she insisted. "It's real. It's what you're looking for. Phillip discovered it. He's clever, dedicated. He has a dream and he's going to let me share it. Let me live and I'll share it with you. The three of us can rule the world!"

"The three of us?" Marlo raised his eyebrows. "What about your father? Won't he want a share of the cake?"

"He can go to hell!"

"He probably will," agreed Marlo. "But Wayne works for Chicago Chemicals. He made the stuff in your old man's laboratory. Couldn't others figure out what he did?"

Naomi laughed. "Phillip's no fool. He destroyed all his notes, dismantled all his apparatus. He got rid of his assistants and worked alone. He's got the secret locked in his head and no one can get it. If they try. If they hurt him—"

"You'll spread the discovery around," interrupted Marlo. "You'll pass the product to other chemical firms and they will learn the big secret. Smart," he admitted. "Phillip managed to get himself a load of insurance. A pity you haven't the same protection."

"But I have," she said quickly. "I've got the tablets."

"And if you get hurt what's your boy friend going to do—give away his big secret?" Marlo shrugged. "If you believe that you've got space between the ears. All Phillip has done is to aim the heat in your direction instead of his. He's used you. Let me out of this trap and I'll prove it."

She hesitated. "No," she decided. "While I've got the pills I'm safe."

"But you haven't got them," said Marlo quickly. "I have. At least I know exactly where they are." And then, as her defences crumpled. "Let's get out of here," he said gently. "Let's go home."

Home was a nice place, warm with its facsimile fire burning against one wall and a facsimile window showing wind-swept rain lashing through bending trees to the muted appropriate sound-accompaniment. Marlo leaned back at his desk, listening to the small sounds coming from the kitchen still hardly able to believe his luck. Reaching out he adjusted a control. The window changed, showed the real weather outside, sleet carried on wings of darkness, ice and chill of approaching winter.

A lamp flashed on the desk. Marlo pressed a button, listened, spoke softly. "Send him up."

He rose, closed the door to the kitchen and returned to the desk. From a drawer he produced a phial containing one hundred and twenty-three lime-green pills. He was looking at them when the door opened and a man walked into the apartment.

"Mr. Wayne," said Marlo. "Make yourself right at home."

"Where's Naomi?"

"A bad business," said Marlo. "The Staysafe Apartments didn't quite live up to their reputation. Still, there are compensations—even if you have lost your insurance."

Wayne frowned. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Marlo looked up and smiled. The chemist looked pale, distraught. He kept both hands buried deep in the pockets of his overcoat.

"I think you do," said Marlo quietly. "And before we say anything more I'd appreciate it if you would put both your hands where I can see them." He nodded as Wayne jerked out his hands. "That's better. Some coffee?"

Wayne shook his head.

"Then let's talk." Marlo picked up the phial of pills. "You recognise these? You know, Naomi was an odd girl. She forgot that the obvious can sometimes be just that. She—"

"Was?" Wayne leaned forward. "Is she dead?"

Marlo tossed the phial, caught it, tossed it again.

"So you killed her." Wayne shrugged. "Maybe it's just as well. A paranoiac like that can't be trusted. To hell with her." His eyes followed the phial as Marlo threw it into a drawer. "How?"

"Simple. I was with Naomi when you phoned," explained Marlo. "As soon as I saw your face I knew where they must be. In her mannikin. The facsimile of you she'd had made to give her what you never could." He looked at the chemist. "Didn't you know she loved you?"

"Sure I knew. Who better? I made her feel that way. I'm a chemist, remember? A few shots of this and wiffs of that and she fell like an overripe mango. Of course it wasn't really love just a biological reaction, but how was she to tell the difference?"

"She admired you," said Marlo softly. "She trusted you."

"Then she was a fool." Wayne was contemptuous. "In this world it's every man for himself and to hell with the rest. Start trusting someone and you put their hands around your throat." He looked curiously at Marlo. "You said that you were in her apartment. How did you get out?"

"It was simple," said Marlo blandly. "Naomi cleared me with the guards. That was before she—changed."

"You killed her," said Wayne. "Why be prissy about it? You're an assassin, aren't you? A man for hire to take care of trouble." He dismissed the subject. "Those pills, how much do you want for them?"

"One half of the world."

"I'm serious."

"So am I." Marlo leaned forward a little. "That's what they're worth, aren't they?" Naomi thought so. She said they spelt absolute power. Was she crazy?"

Wayne breathed deeply, the air hissing through his nostrils. "She wasn't crazy," he said at last. "Can you guess what those pills do? They re-establish the censor, that's what. You know what happens then?"

"Yes," said Marlo.

"Slavery," said Wayne. "Total and abject slavery. The rule of fear for everyone except us!"

Something fell in the kitchen. There was a clatter and the sound of a female voice raised in anger. Wayne looked towards the closed door, stared at Marlo. "Naomi!" he said. "She's alive!"

"That's right," said Marlo.

"But you told me that she was dead. That you'd killed her!"

'No,' said Marlo. 'I just let you think that. I wanted to get what you thought of her down on tape,' he explained. 'The way you felt. I don't want my wife dreaming of another man.'

'You married her? That paranoiac!'

'She isn't that unusual,' said Marlo slowly. 'Rich, envied, afraid that everyone she meets is after what she owns. Her trouble is that she needs someone to give her security. A sense of being wanted, of being special to someone.'

'A product of our age,' said Wayne. 'We could change it you and I. With my discovery we could put things back as they were. A time when the rich were respected and feared. When authority was obeyed. When the ordinary people kept their place.'

'And,' said Marlo drily, 'when lawbreakers were punished.'

'Exactly.'

'And who is to determine the law? Us?'

'Naturally.'

'And the same old cycle starts all over again.' Marlo shook his head. 'I prefer things as they are. Now we have no jails, no criminals, and courts, and no crime. Why? Because we have no law. A man has to protect what he owns—not expect others to do it for him.'

'A jungle,' said Wayne. 'That's what we're living in. A jungle.'

'We always have,' said Marlo. 'You should study history. Can you guess how many were slaughtered on the road each year? How many were attacked, beaten, robbed, raped, killed and maimed for life by thugs and villains? How much each working person had to pay in taxes simply to support an organisation dedicated to keeping them in line? Do you realise they even had a law saying it was illegal not to know the law—that ignorance was no excuse? Can you guess how many laws there were? That it was literally impossible for anyone to go through life without breaking some enforced or not. Don't talk to me about a jungle.'

'They had respect in those days. Respect for authority.'

Marlo flared. 'And why the hell should they have had? What did authority ever do for them? It kept them poor, kept them under. To hell with authority. This is a free world and I want it kept that way.'

'So that you can go around killing? A man with a gun and no brain? Someone who shoots down others for pay? Is that what you call living in a free world?'

'It's better than what we used to have,' said Marlo coldly. 'So a few mothers kill their babies because they run out of patience, but is that anything new? Is assassination? Is taking things you want without asking? Making a grab at a good-looking girl? Lifting a fist to someone who steps on your toes?' Irritably he shook his head. 'Forget it, Wayne. This is my world and I like it.'

'And that's good enough for you,' said Wayne. 'Have you ever thought why things are as they are?'

'Some bug,' said Marlo. 'Some virus that escaped from some laboratory. Or maybe they let off one bomb too many. Who gives a damn now? The censor lost its power to restrain the impulse to action. And,' he ended, 'the society it fashioned went with it.'

Wayne shrugged. 'It'll come back,' he said. 'Better than before because the right people will be running it.'

'You?'

'Why not?' Wayne shrugged again and a gun fell from his sleeve into his hand. 'All right,' he said softly. 'Pass me the tablets.'

Marlo hesitated.

'Do it. Before I shoot your head off!'

Marlo reached into the drawer. The pills were imitation, the genuine ones he'd washed down the sink but while Wayne lived no one could wash the information from his brain. His hand fell on the gun he'd planted. He fired as the chemist moved forward, the heavy bullet hitting below the chin, travelling upwards to tear out the side of the face, the top of the skull.

The sound of the shot was enough to wake the dead.

To bury forever a bad, old world.



Did you miss these?

Were you unlucky enough to miss out on our previous issues? VISION OF TOMORROW No. 1 contained top-line science fiction by Jack Wodhams, William F. Temple, Damien Broderick and others. Dan Morgan, John Rankine, and E. C. Tubb were featured in the second issue. Number 3 contained stories by Philip High, E. C. Tubb, Sydney J. Bounds and others and introduced a unique full colour spread for Walter Gilling's great series. *Copies are still available at five shillings each, post free from the editorial address.*

WARD



SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

A tale of the first Martian

Doctor Kirby glanced restlessly at his wrist-chron, flicked a fingernail against its plastic face, checked for accuracy with the big wall clock. He was on amber alert and young enough to feel impatience. Countdown was complete; now

he waited for the buzzer to sound, the warning light turn red. And it was the waiting that got him down every time.

The air was still and quiet in the underground garage beneath City Seven's sprawling hospital complex, the grind of moving ways filtered to a muted background murmur. Lighting was bright without glare, illuming plastic walls, vaulted overhead, the wide concrete hoverway slanting up towards surface level, the ranks of hover-ambulances waiting in their bays.

His own machine vibrated gently, motors idling over; he was next on call. He sniffed the air—Bert was having a sly smoke, against all the rules. Kirby shrugged it off. Bert was retiring next month and was a safe driver; there was no sense in riling him.

Jayne's voice echoed gently from the open back of the big hover-ambulance where she chatted up Oldbury, their current patient. She had a cuddlesome build, good for male patients, and Kirby hoped the time would come when she would be good to him—so far she'd stood him up. He breathed out in a long sigh of frustration.

He had a strong team; they had worked together for months now, knew exactly what to do without waiting for the word of command. And that was important for a Med car team when seconds were vital as they sped to the scene of an operation.

Kirby, young for a medical officer heading a Med car team, lean with muscle, rock-steady in the tightest emergency looked towards the moving ramp. Two figures were descending to the basement garage, and he blinked in recognition of the totally unexpected. He hissed a warning and automatically straightened up.

Bert, pint-sized with a wrinkled walnut face winked as he stubbed out his smoke. Jayne Archer stopped in mid-flow to look back at the ramp; then she too seemed to freeze with astonishment at the sight of Senior Surgeon Canning and Staff Nurse Grey.

Their appearance was so startling that, for a moment, Kirby imagined he must have committed some terrible blunder—like sewing up an instrument inside a patient—to bring down the wrath of City Seven on his head. For Canning to leave Ward Thirteen, the mystery ward of the hospital, was a rare event: a happening so unusual that rumours would be buzzing, rumours to add to those already circulating the entire complex. For Ward Thirteen was big as a research lab and continuously imported the most unlikely equipment. Just what did go on behind the locked doors, Kirby wondered . . . but it was unlikely that Canning was coming to tell him.

The Senior Surgeon reached the bottom of the ramp, his personal assistant at his heels. Impressingly tall, a presence with a pointed grey beard and black pupils that made people jump to obey him. As he strode up, his voice rang out:

'Doctor Kirby! There is a change in roster for your team. Staff Nurse Grey will replace Archer on this op.'

Grey stepped forward, willow-slender, serene face smiling. 'I'm delighted to work with you, Doctor.'

Kirby doubted his own ears. Replace a team nurse just before a mission? It was unheard of . . . he listened to himself protesting: 'But we're an integrated team, sir, used to each other's ways.'

Canning commented dryly: 'Im sure Grey will give a good account of herself.'

And, of course, she would; Canning had no use for anything or anybody who operated at less than one hundred

per cent efficiency. It was said his assistants had to simulate robots to last more than a day with him. Besides, she out-ranked Jayne . . . Kirby flushed.

'Nurse Archer has already established rapport with the patient,' he said stiffly. 'It would be unfortunate to break that relationship at this moment.'

Canning nodded pleasantly. 'Unfortunate—but necessary.' He turned full-face to Jayne, whose mouth gaped open. 'Report to staff assignment for your new duties. Grey takes over as of now.'

Jayne's mouth snapped shut. She looked at Kirby in silent appeal.

Kirby hesitated. Hell, he couldn't tell Canning to get lost—but a staff nurse! *Why?* And if they put Jayne on a different shift he might not see her again for—

The buzzer sounded, discreetly insistent. Amber flashed to red. Kirby moved fast, thrusting Grey into the back of the ambulance. Bert was already at the levers as he jumped into the cab.

'Get her rolling!'

The big hovercar picked up speed, gliding on its air-cushion up the slope to the surface, powerful turbo-jets gusting. The noise of the city mounted, penetrating even the sound-proofed cab.

They streaked out into daylight—the artificial daylight necessary at the bottom of deep man-made canyons—between stark concrete and glass towers. Bert expertly inserted them into a traffic flow, klaxon moaning.

The radio command voice filled the cab: 'Auto accident at crossing eleven Delta nine. Male, twenty-eight, head injury. Condition fatal.'

Bert plotted a course, slid from one lane to another. Traffic pulled over, jamming several thoroughways. At a circus, Med police waved them through; no-one stopped a team car taking a patient to an accident.

Kirby turned his head to the glass panel behind him, looked in at Grey with Oldbury. 'All right back there?'

Her voice came calmly, tinged with amusement. 'Every-thing's fine, doctor.'

The big hovercar jetted smoothly on, racing seconds. It was a bad time—a peak transition period with work-shifts changing—and the roads and moving belts were jammed solid. Still more people swarmed from the shopping arcades, poured out in never-ending streams. A city can hold only so many people . . .

What would he do without Bert, Kirby wondered gloomily; without an experienced driver he could arrive late on the scene. Too late for first-class work. Jayne already gone. Looked like the team was really breaking up.

The ambulance began to slow, almost imperceptibly and, with an effort, he broke his mood to become briskly professional. He had his emergency bag in his hand, the door open . . . jumped down seconds before the hovercar stopped and sank silently to the road.

Med police ringed a body on the ground. Wreckers hauled off the twin ruin of sports autos. Traffic flowed round their little island while, overhead, sun glistened faintly on the broken aerial way from where the cars had fallen. Racing maniacs.

Kirby knelt and felt for a heart-beat; it was there, faint but rhythmically strong. A fast over-all look; head damaged beyond any hope of repair, otherwise a perfect specimen. He injected, stood up.

Bert helped load the body into the operating theatre in the back of the ambulance. Kirby signed the death certifi-

cate and a Medman offered him the routine history the law insisted every citizen carry. A clean record. This one seemed grey . . . well, he wanted a smooth performance with Grey looking over his shoulder.

Oldbury, prepared on the operating table, looked anxiously at him, and he made a smile. 'You're in luck, Mr. Oldbury—this one's just right for you. Anaesthetic please, nurse.'

Grey applied the mask. Gas hissed faintly as Kirby scrubbed and slid into his apron, took the first scalpel from the steriliser. Bert stood by the mechanical heart.

It was routine now, routine Kirby had managed a hundred times before in the mobile theatre, traffic flowing round them. He began to cut . . .

Grey synchronised her movements to his, effortlessly. She was good, all right, the saw to hand when he needed it, clamps to hold back open flesh, scissors . . . but no warmth. He was hardly aware of her as he worked swiftly, moving from the corpse to Oldbury, back again. She seemed as cold and precise as a machine, anticipating his every need. Canning's doing, of course . . .

He lifted out the heart from the newly dead body, aware of Grey watching him closely, studying his every move, assessing him. He suppressed a feeling of annoyance: surely Canning wasn't checking up on him? His record-sheet was clean . . .

The transplant went like clockwork, one of the fastest he'd ever made. Oldbury, with a young heart beating steadily in his aging body was good for another twenty years of active life. He started to clean up.

'Very neat, Doctor Kirby,' Grey commented.

He nodded curtly; something about her froze him and he sat silent with Bert as they drove back towards the hospital. It was growing dark and, soon, the streets would be emptying . . .

The car moved swiftly down the ramp to the underground garage, and Oldbury was whisked off to the post-op room. There was no sign of either Jayne or Canning as Kirby stepped out.

Grey said calmly, 'I'll be seeing you again, doctor,' and headed up the moving ramp into the complex.

Bert lit a cigarette. 'A close one, Grey. Queer, though, switching Jayne away at the last minute—she isn't in any trouble, is she?'

Kirby shook his head. He didn't understand what was happening, and now reaction was setting in. He always got it after an operation. Stomach tightening, hands trembling. A shower and a coffee to relax him, he decided, before signing out . . .

In another part of City Seven's major hospital, several levels up and away from the floodlit frontage, Staff Nurse Grey thumbed a button. An electronic scanner whirred. A solid metal door slid open to admit her to Ward Thirteen.

She moved between glass cells filled with murky atmosphere to where Canning sat at a desk. The Senior Surgeon swivelled round in his chair as she approached—and she noted he was studying Kirby's medical record.

'Well,' Canning demanded. 'How did he look?'

'Satisfactory. I don't think you'll find a more suitable one.'

Canning smiled briefly. 'We'll use Kirby then . . .'

Doctor Kirby took his time in the shower, knowing it was already night-time outside and not really caring; his personal hovercar was fast and armoured. He dried off

under the hot-air blast and changed into a leisure outfit. In the refectory, he lingered over a second cup of coffee, waiting for the last of his reaction to quieten itself. He held both arms out before him; rock-steady. Descending to the garage, he collected his hovercar and set off for his flat; he was one of the few who preferred to live away from the hospital.

Now the streets were empty. After dark, City Seven took on the deserted appearance of a gigantic ghost town. He saw only one gang travelling a moving way and easily avoided them, putting on a burst of speed; there was no point in taking unnecessary risks. He sped down the centre of a broad avenue between towering blocks of flats; the citizens stayed home at night, those with any sense, safe behind locked doors and barred windows, watching colour-vision. The street lighting was harsh, almost blinding, setting off deep shadows. Overhead, ad-beacons flashed:

Hep on VitaDrug

Abort with Doc Nu-Way

Mini-families designed

He wondered why the advertisers bothered any more, with so few on the streets to read. A hangover from the past. Block after block of flats stretched to every horizon. There were just too many people, and still the population climbed. It was a situation seemingly without a solution: people wanted children. And the death rate declined with every medical advance.

With transplants pure routine and the old living longer, there were not enough hearts to go round, and a vicious black market had sprung up. Gangs prowled after dark, knives slashed, bodies were popped into freeze-wagons, sold to the illegal spare parts surgeries that flourished everywhere, selling new life to the old rich. Some doctors at the hospital had a sideline, he knew; but Kirby had never been tempted.

The Med police had almost got the trade under control at one time, but were now swamped by another wave of heart-snatchers. Disappearances were on the increase. There were rumours of a Big Man behind the increase, organising it.

Kirby, following the same route home he always used, swung round a circus to take a secondary road when he glimpsed a girl run out of the shadows. She was screaming as he almost ran her down; cursing, he slowed sharply. And then he saw why she screamed. Menacing her came a pack of long-haired gaudy-jacketed youths, blades in hand. He felt sorry for her but—

Recognition came. *Staff Nurse Grey!* She should have more sense—but he couldn't just leave her. He swung the hovercar through an arc, scattering the gang, slid the door open, yelled: 'Here . . . run!'

But they had her. One youth gripped her, a second flourished a knife.

Kirby jumped out as his hovercar grounded and plunged forward. He was fast and hard-muscled, in perfect physical condition—a gift if they snatched *him*, he thought wryly—and he hit hard, breaking the hold of the one who held the girl.

'Run for the car!'

He knoeked aside the boy with the knife, crouched as the others moved in on him. Like animals, he thought. And still Grey had not moved.

'Run,' he bawled at her. 'I'll cover you.'

He backed as some of the gang tried to get between him and the car. Light gleamed dully on bare blades.

Staff Nurse Grey stood watching him, aloof. Her voice came calmly: 'Careful. He must not be harmed—not the slightest injury. He's too valuable to risk.'

Three of them came at Kirby simultaneously and he was borne down under their combined weight. Incredulously, it dawned on him that she was talking to the gang, giving orders. And he knew she was the lure and he'd fallen for it. Sucker!

He snarled out a curse and fought back with hands, feet, knees, trying desperately to break free and regain his feet. Too late. A hypo-needle stabbed, bringing with it instant paralysis. Frozen stiff like a fish on a slab he was lifted into an ambulance that drove out of the shadows.

He lay helpless, seeing, hearing; but unable to move a muscle. He lay like an inanimate object, learning fear. Grey acting as a lure for the flesh-pirates; it was still incredible. And now he would be peddled at some back-street surgery, sliced open and his heart removed, maybe other parts of his anatomy . . .

The ambulance moved off smoothly, with Grey silent beside him, through deserted streets. They had no freezer, he realised; this was a new, superior technique. He began to recognise the route, and his fear mounted. He was being taken back to the hospital.

They moved down a ramp at the rear of the building, to a small bay. Grey got out and signed a register, exchanged casual words with the duty orderly. And now Kirby was really frightened. To be brought here, almost openly, suggested that the organising brain was high up in the hierarchy of City Seven.

He was loaded on to a wheeled stretcher, a sheet draped over him. He felt the stretcher move a short distance, pause; felt pressure—going up in a lift; pause and forward again; pause and forward—

The sheet came off and he looked up into the bearded face of Senior Surgeon Canning. 'Welcome to Ward Thirteen,' Canning said, and smiled.

He was lifted off the stretcher and placed in a chair.

'No trouble?' Canning asked casually.

'A smooth operation,' Grey answered.

'Excellent.' Canning stared down at Kirby, studying him.

Kirby sat still, but inside his brain his thoughts writhed in torment, and fear mounted as he stared about the laboratory. It was no accident, he realised, that he had been placed so that he could see the rows of transparent cells and what they contained.

These were no ordinary transplants. Beyond thick glass walls lay a tinted atmosphere and hideous things only partly human. He saw shocking malformations and distortions, and some still lived. Horror and loathing filled him. What, in God's name did Canning think he was doing? Had he gone mad?

A new fear chilled Kirby as it crept down his spine. This was how he was going to end . . .

The lab held a smell of ether and decaying flesh from the grisly parts on a dissecting table. He looked appalled at Grey, slender, serene, a smile on her lips, and despair set in. He wouldn't get out of this in one piece unless . . . how long before paralysis wore off? There was only Canning and Grey to deal with if he got the chance.

Canning's voice cut across his thoughts. 'Now you see the secrets of Ward Thirteen, Doctor Kirby. What do you make of them?' He leaned forward, staring into Kirby's eyes.



DICK HOWETT"

Kirby ignored him, concentrated on wiggling his toes, wondering how much time he had left, how the door opened.

'You will appreciate it is necessary for us to operate in secrecy, much as I dislike it. Suspicion is thrown on the illegal transplant surgeries—they take the blame for the increase in disappearances and we're in the clear.'

Kirby felt his paralysis slowly wearing off and tried to control his reaction; but Canning noticed immediately. 'You'll soon be with us, doctor,' he said confidently, and picked up a scalpel.

Kirby stared fascinated at the shining steel blade, shuddered.

'Control yourself, doctor. Less emotional response, please—don't you want to know the reason for Ward Thirteen?'

Kirby's vocal chords worked reluctantly. *Keep him talking*, he thought. 'Well, why?'

'A long story, and not a medical one.' The Senior Surgeon tugged at his beard. 'Consider the population pressure. You've heard about our first space colonists, their attempts to live in a hostile environment?'

Kirby wondered if he were being sidetracked. Men had tried to survive on the moon, on Mars, in suits, under pressure domes. It had been a complete failure. Lives lost. Money down the drain. Men would never live on other worlds . . .

'So?' he prompted.

'World government cannot afford to give up so easily. Earth's population is soaring at a rate that dare not be made public. We've got to live on other worlds, got to survive there, got to—' Canning gestured with the scalpel. 'So we adapt men biologically. Adapt for—say, Mars. Thin atmosphere, bigger lungs. You see the picture now?'

Kirby saw; and looked round the lab again, appraising the equipment, the experiments in their cells. Altered men and women; freaks . . . failures. He barely repressed a shudder.

'We had to keep it secret,' Canning insisted. 'The people wouldn't understand. Until we achieved success, of course. Anything is accepted if it works.' There was weariness in his voice.

Kirby moistened lips, braced himself. He was going to be the next experiment. And even if it was successful, he wasn't sure he wanted to go on living—like that.

'I'm ready now,' Canning said dreamily. 'The failures are over. I can do it—I can adapt a man to survive on Mars!'

Kirby wondered if the Senior Surgeon was sane any longer. But suppose it were true? It would be a tremendous achievement. Canning had the reputation . . . but the cost in human life!

He looked steadily at Canning. 'Well, get on with it. I take it I'm selected to be your first success.'

Canning shook his head. 'Not you, doctor. Me. I shall be the first Martian. I need you to operate. You're the best surgeon I've been able to find, and your training starts now, if you're willing . . .' He held out the scalpel.

Kirby, out of paralysis now, hesitated.

Grey said quietly: 'Why do you think we brought you here in so melodramatic a manner, doctor? You reacted emotionally, and emotion has not place in the choice you have to make. You have experienced the depth of fear of the guinea-pigs. Against that—'

Against that . . . a rising density of population and a breakthrough to other worlds.

Canning asked, 'Do you want it?'

And Kirby hesitated no longer, but reached out to take the scalpel.



BREEDING GROUND

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

Tentaculate bems, weird monsters, and the like, are all part and parcel of the hoary traditions of sf to scarify the reader. Most of them have been happily laid to rest, but Mr. Priest here gives us a fresh slant on the Things From Outer Space . . .

Luke Caston stood in the airlock of the *Merchant Princess*, pumping the manual revolving-gear. Inside his spacesuit he was sweating hard, and not because of the effort.

As the outer hatch opened onto deep space, he threw himself through with little regard for his own safety. The line attached to the magnetic grapple holding the two spaceships together passed within inches of the airlock, and he seized it thankfully.

Hand over hand, not bothering with the finesse of his personal propulsion jet-kit, he hauled himself across the intervening yards to his own ship, the *Delilah*.

Reaching his airlock, he clambered into it.

He was shuddering.

The hatch opened onto the main cabin of *Delilah*, and he floated in, switching on the artificial gravity and whirling into an upright position in one practised movement.

For a moment he stood where he was, breathing heavily inside his suit. Then he clumped across to the bunk that lay directly behind the control-seats, and sat down. He opened the face-panel of his helmet, and lit a cigar.

This was one hell of a problem. He shuddered again.

He leaned over and picked up a plastic tissue from a nearby rack, and wiped his face.

There was only one kind of alien life in the universe of which Luke Caston was afraid, and the *Merchant Princess* was lousy with it.

Space-mites.

And they were the biggest, fattest, *hairiest* space-mites he had seen this side of Aldebaran.

Imagine a tiny coil, like the tungsten element of a light-bulb. Imagine it three inches long, shiny and black, throbbing with life and sprouting minuscule hair-like tendrils. Imagine a parthenogenetic form of reproduction with a rate of division that would make the half-life of Helium-7 seem like death of old age.

Imagine these wisps of inorganic life drifting randomly through the vacuum of space, breeding only where there is an abundance of electrical or particle energy.

Imagine them. . . .

Caston shook his body compulsively again. Like many other spacemen, the strange creatures induced in him a violent and irrational fear. It wasn't just their millepedal appearance, but the fact that material objects presented no limitation on their movement. The hardened plastisteel walls of a spaceship, for instance, presented as much of an obstacle to them as a piece of thin cotton did to smoke.

Get a space-mite inside your suit, the old lay of the spacemen went, and before it suffocates it'll drive you half crazy.

A mite finding a human body was as happy as a moth finding a lighted candle in a cellar, and just as efficiently killed. The surface-electricity of human skin was enough to keep a mite in good spirits, but it couldn't survive in an oxygen atmosphere. The decease of a mite was slow (ten minutes was the longest Caston had heard of, though the average was two) and invariably accompanied by an exchange of electricity which, though insignificant to a man, was sufficient to set his flesh jumping.

Some of the stories Caston had heard, about spacemen who, on stripping off their suits, found hundreds of the

suffocated mites, had kept him awake more nights than he cared to remember.

Caston pulled at his cigar, his fingers still trembling slightly.

He was reminded of a friend of his, working in the admin. offices of the space-salvage corporations. This man had worked all his life with one ambition in mind; that was, to save enough out of his salary to buy a genuine, centuries-old thatched cottage in the English countryside. This he had finally done, and moved in. Then moved out again a week later, when he found that the much-coveted roof was riddled with spiders. . . .

Now Caston was in the same predicament.

He was sitting not a hundred feet from one of the richest wrecks in the spaceways, and he was paralysed from the head down with a fear that was as real and palpable as it was illogical.

So what were a few tiny electric shocks compared with the richness of the *Merchant Princess*?

Caston remembered the heaving revulsion of his first sight of the passageways of the *Princess*, covered with millions and millions of the mites as if with fur. . . .

The decaying reactors of the *Princess*, and the automatic rad-beacons bleating out their signals of distress, and the miles and miles of circuitry and switchgear must have attracted the mites like a piece of rotting cheese will attract a mouse.

And even today, two hundred years after the *Princess* hit a fault of some kind in her sub-drive and blew herself a hundred parses from her course, the mites clung on to the dying ship.

There were no two ways about it; he was going to have to get inside the *Princess*. There was too much to lose if he didn't.

For almost the whole of the two hundred years since her loss, men had been searching for the *Princess*. The entire industry of space-salvage owed its existence to her loss. She had been the first of the big ships to blow out, and was still the biggest wreck in space. In her holds were known to be several tons of gems, the first pickings from the vast diamond-deposits on Procyon IV. The gems alone were worth billions to the insurance-companies; the salvage-value of the wreck itself would almost equal that bounty.

The salvage-company or syndicate that found the *Princess* would, quite literally, never have to work again. And Luke Caston, by sheer random chance, had found her drifting in the dark between the stars.

All he had to do now was to board her, find her navigation-room, remove her sub-drive navigation-bowl and replace it with his own salvager's seal. The claim would be made, would be unbreakable under interstellar law, and the *Merchant Princess* would be his inalienable property.

But he had to be quick about it.

Space-salvage was big business and big money. The rivalry between the various syndicates in finding and claiming wrecks was hot. With an average of one sizeable wreck per sidereal month—interstellar trade was expanding quickly, and thousands of merchant ships, from lowly cargo tramps to super-luxurious passenger cruisers, constantly plied the space-lanes—the salvage corporations spent huge sums on plotting the courses of every known ship.

And his ship, his lowly *Delilah*, would be one of them.

It wouldn't be long before some bright spark in one of the other syndicates would be wondering why he had

changed course and stopped. And would send out a ship to investigate. . . .

Whoever was on it, Caston was sure, wouldn't give a starman's damn about space-mites and their invidious characteristics.

So that was the problem in a nutshell: sheer materialistic necessity against inarguable and irrational fear. A neatly balanced equation of indecision that left him sitting here in a cold funk and smoking a three-weeks' stale cigar.

He threw aside the butt and stood up. He needed a second opinion.

He sat down in the control-seat, and flicked the sub-field communication-screen switch.

It took several seconds to clear, then the green 'hold' signal flashed up. He moved restlessly in his seat. Morreston would not be pleased to hear from him.

Suddenly the screen cleared, and showed Henry Morreston's office. Morreston was sitting at his desk, and a girl, presumably a secretary, though Caston hadn't seen this one before, was standing to one side. Morreston was a huge man, with a round puffy face. His hair looked as if it had been hastily smoothed down. It didn't take much to guess what the few seconds' delay had been.

He glared up at Caston from the screen.

'What is it?'

'Henry,' Caston began. 'I've got a problem.'

'Don't tell me. You've broken down. Is that why you stopped?'

'No.'

Morreston's apparent ennui in the office had not prevented him from keeping tabs on his movement.

'Listen, Luke,' Morreston said. 'It'd better be good. We can't afford another *Wayfarer*.'

Caston winced, trying to keep his face steady. Morreston would never let him forget that one. He'd spent six days trying to drill his way into the old tramp *Wayfarer*, not knowing that it hadn't been totally abandoned by the crew. His reception inside had not, to say the least, been friendly.

But this time he had a trump-card. A moment of triumph was approaching.

'Forget the past, Henry,' he said, trying to keep the tone of pleading from his voice. 'You can forget the future too. It's all sewn up.'

The man's face seemed to narrow slightly.

'What are you saying?'

The moment was here.

'I've found the *Merchant Princess*.'

'Crap!'

The moment had passed.

'No crap,' he said. He found it difficult not to laugh. 'I've found it.'

Did Morreston's face seem whiter? Were his hands gripping the edge of the desk any tighter?

'I don't believe it.' His lips hardly moved, his teeth seemed to be clamped together. Was his tongue caught between them? 'Prove it to me, Luke baby. Prove it to me. *Quickly!*'

Caston snapped off the two-way link, and cut into the circuit the remote-controlled television scanner that was mounted in the bow of the *Delilah*. He watched the image on the screen as he panned the camera across the hull with deliberate slowness. When he had shown the entire ship, he zoomed in with a close-up of the ship's name, clearly etched into the identity plate by the main port. Then he went back, and played the camera over the hull again. He

gloried in this moment, even though he could not see Morreston's reaction, piling on the undeniable veracity of his discovery, battering home the fact that this was indisputably and incontrovertibly the *Merchant Princess* of every salvage-man's dream.

After five minutes he broke the circuit, and cut back in the two-way link. Morreston's office appeared to be empty. The secretary appeared. She walked over to the screen and peered up into it towards Luke.

'I'm afraid Mr. Morreston's been taken ill, sir,' she said. 'He seems to have fainted.'

Caston nodded. He had almost expected as much. But the girl's 'sir' had been a surprise. And it meant a lot.

He said: 'Okay. Get him to call me back.'

He cut off the link before she could reply.

He sat back in his seat, lit a second cigar and watched his distorted reflection in the *Delilah's* own silver nav-bowl above his head. Morreston would be so pleased at the discovery that he was sure to understand Caston's predicament about the space-mites. In fact, if he knew Henry the man might even rouse his fat bulk and come out here and do the job himself. Stranger things had happened. Meanwhile, he could sit tight and make sure no-one jumped his claim.

He began to breathe easier; the uncomfortable itching beneath his armpits eased for the first time since going aboard the *Princess*.

Ten minutes later, Morreston came on again.

Caston looked at him curiously. The man had visibly paled, and there was a half-empty glass of water by his hand. The secretary had vanished, and the man carried an air of purpose.

'Luke!' he said as soon as he saw him. 'My confidence in you has been rewarded.'

'Not too fast,' Caston said. 'I've got problems. Remember?'

Morreston frowned.

'You've got the nav-bowl, haven't you? I mean, you have got it?'

Caston shook his head slowly.

'No,' he said. 'At least, not yet.'

'Not yet, for Christ's sake!' The man swung round in his seat, and glared desperately at the interstellar chart that Caston knew was on the wall at the side, but which was out of view of the screen.

'I can't get it, Henry,' Luke said, carefully.

Morreston turned back and faced him. He leaned forward across the desk, and to Luke's eyes seemed to be reaching out of the screen towards him.

'Luke baby. Listen to me. You just get in there and get that bowl! Do you hear?'

Caston repeated: 'I'm not going in there. I can't!'

Now Morreston smiled at him: a gentle, friendly smile.

'Why, Luke? Why can't you get in there?'

Caston told him.

'SPACE-MITES? Goddam little bugs between you and me and a billion credits! You must be crazy! Now you just fasten down that fancy helmet of yours and get *out* there, or I'll—'

'I can't, Henry,' Caston said weakly. 'It's no good. There's something about those crawlies that just, well, scares me.'

Morreston turned away with an expansive gesture of despair, and pulled open a drawer in his desk. A long keyboard slid out, that Caston knew fed into a computer

somewhere downtown. Morreston began tapping a series of digits into the keyboard, pausing occasionally to let the machine print out information, and occasionally consulting the interstellar chart on his wall. As he worked, the frown on his face grew deeper, and Caston found he was trembling again.

The machine reeled out numbers, and Morreston watched them silently. When the information stopped, he ripped off the sheet and laid it on the desk before him. He studied it intently.

Caston tried to read it upside down, but the definition on the screen was not sufficiently sharp.

Finally, Morriston straightened, and looked back at him.

'The position is this,' he said. 'You're going in there. And no argument. Is that clear?'

Luke shook his head again. 'No, it's not. I'm not going.'

'You're forgetting our arrangement, Luke baby,' Morreston said, and Caston detected a note of menace creeping into his voice. 'I'm the money and brains behind this operation, and you're the muscle and go-place. Is that right?'

'That's right,' Caston confirmed.

'And I'm telling you now that if you don't go-places across to that ship right this minute and bring back the nav-bowl and show it to me, then I'll get hold of you—'

Luke reached across and turned down the volume on the speaker. Whatever it was he was going to do (and knowing Morreston's vocabulary it was sure to be either physically uncomfortable or plain impossible) he didn't want to know. When the man had subsided, he turned the volume back up.

'Okay,' he said, resignedly. 'I'll do it. But not this minute. I need to work things out. How much time have I got?'

The man consulted the sheet of paper in front of him again.

'Let's put it this way. If I left here in the next five minutes, and subbed to you direct at maximum drive, I'd be there in two days. And that'd be pushing it. On the other hand, there are at least three other ships in the vicinity moving towards your position, and the first one'll be with you in just over five hours. Do I make myself clear?'

Luke nodded dumbly. He didn't want to lose the bounty any more than Morreston, and the interstellar law on salvage was unequivocal: the salvager must have clear and total possession of the navigation-bowl to stake his claim. Until that time, the ship in question was deemed to be in a wrecked state.

'You've got five hours, Caston. Don't bother coming through to me unless you've got the bowl. Understood?'

He understood. Morreston had more interests going for him than just salvage-work, and some of his other associates were rough with their hands. Luke had seen some of their work, and knew what they could do. If he bungled this, it would be a dark alley and a battered head for him.

'All right, Henry. You'll have your ship.'

The screen went black.

Two hours later, Caston had a plan of sorts. He didn't like it one bit, but he could see no other way.

He sat again on the bunk behind the control-seats, and waited patiently while the compressors evacuated the air from his cabin and pumped it into metal cylinders.

The *Delilah's* hull was completely pressurised and compartmented. As with most spaceships, she carried in her hold several spare cylinders of compressed air against pos-

sible emergencies. But everything she had would hardly be sufficient for his requirements.

Like all salvage-men, Caston had the plan of the control-section of the *Merchant Princess* indelibly etched on his memory. He knew that to find the navigation-bowl he would have to pass through the main crew airlock, down one curving corridor, through two air-tight doors which he would have to open, and along a second corridor which led directly into the navigation room.

Here his task would be ended. The navigation-bowl, as on all ships, was mounted on a pedestal in the control-section, and could be removed in seconds. His personal seal was put in its place, and was bonded there immovably.

From that point on, the *Princess* would be his.

All very simple in theory, but for the space-mites.

Soon after Morreston had broken the connection, Caston had dug a book out of the *Delilah's* library, and found out what little he could about the mites.

... *impossible to study in captivity* (the book had said) *since no vacuum-container will hold them long enough to permit examination while alive. A dead mite reverts to an inorganic substance we know as tektinum, comprised mainly of silicon and ferric derivatives.*

It is not known why a mite cannot survive in gaseous surroundings, though it is supposed that the 'death' is caused by chemical interaction on their bodies.

What the book didn't mention, Caston reflected, was that half the men in space went in mortal dread of meeting them. But what it said about the effect of air on the mites had given him his idea.

The certain fact that within very few minutes he would be inside a spaceship teeming with the little horrors, did nothing to soothe his nerves.

His only hope was the air.

In space, a wrecked ship does not decay. In the case of a ship like the *Princess*, which hung helplessly in space without drive-force while its inhabitants slowly starved to death, its condition would be identical to when it was fully operational. That is: air-tight. Age does not weary.

If he could pump enough air into the ship, the space-mites would die.

The original air in the ship would have long vanished, otherwise the mites would not be there; the ship whose walls did not allow seepage had not yet been built. But Caston was sure he could build up enough pressure to get rid of the mites.

The only problem was, if he used too much air, he would have none left for the trip home.

The way to solve this, he had planned, would be to collect together every ounce of compressed air he could manage, set aside as little as he would need for the return journey if he kept his spacesuit on, and use the rest to fumigate the *Princess*.

It would mean living in his suit for two days in an airless ship, but in the long run it would pay off. Bounty-fever had got him, and he didn't care. The nearness of that silver nav-bowl and what it would mean to him off-set most of the discomforts he would have to undergo for it.

But he still had to dispose of those space-mites.

As the pressure in the cabin dropped steadily, Caston stood up, walked to the artificial-gravity generator, and switched it off. Released of the burden of weight, he pulled himself out of the cabin, and down to the hold. Here, the

emergency air-bottles linked into the pressuring system, stood in a neat row.

He disconnected them, checked the contents of each on the dials by the valve, and tugged them laboriously one by one into the cabin.

Air-pressure was now getting low, and he closed his faceplate.

He waited patiently for the compressor to finish, wishing he could smoke a cigar. That was something else he would be deprived of for the next couple of days.

The warning-light on the top of the compressor began flashing, and he turned it off. Air-pressure in the cabin was now as near to nil as it could get. He noted how many cubic yards of air he had compressed, added that to the total already in the other cylinders, and did a few quick calculations.

If he breathed steadily and did no major physical exercise, two cylinders should be ample with which to get him home. That left, and he looked at the dull-metal objects floating in the airless, weightless cabin, seventeen full or nearly-full cylinders. He wished it were more.

He snaked a long piece of cable through the handles of each of the cylinders, and manhandled them to the airlock.

With no atmosphere inside the ship, the use of the airlock became redundant, and he set it at its fully-open position. Any air that had remained in the ship would now have gone.

When the last of the air-cylinders was out of the ship, Caston swung out after them, and with painful slowness began inching his way across the grapple-line, the cylinders bobbing and bouncing behind him. He caught a glimpse of his wrist-chronometer, and saw that two and a quarter hours had elapsed. His time was almost halfway up.

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As he pulled himself across he glanced round at the stars. He couldn't see Sol from here; it was somewhere lost behind one of the star-clusters on the far side of the galaxy. Even with the sub-drive making possible instantaneous hops across space, Earth was a long way away.

At the airlock of the *Princess* he paused. Now came the tricky bit.

He flashed his torch around the lock anxiously. It was clear. No mites hung on the smooth metal.

He edged his way into the lock, and pulled the first of the air-cylinders after him. Attached to its end was a short nozzle with a universal-locking nipple. He searched round for the usual recompression-valve on the air-lock, located it, and clipped the nipple on to it.

Air rushed in silently. He watched the dial on the nozzle as it whirled round, then came to rest at nil.

He unlocked the nozzle, pushed the empty cylinder back into space, and pulled the second one forward.

Each cylinder took about two minutes to release into the old ship, and it was nearly three-quarters of an hour before he was down to the last one.

He knew that if the air hadn't worked as planned on the mites, he'd have to go in anyway. Now he'd come this far, nothing would keep him from getting the bowl.

Caston pulled the last cylinder towards him, and tucked it beneath his arm. Trembling slightly at what he might find on the other side, he began to crank the manual revolving-gear.

The airlock opened slowly, and stopped at its widest extremity.

Before he switched on his torch, Caston lifted the nozzle of the cylinder, and sprayed air into the corridor like an infantryman splashing liquid flame into an enemy pillbox.

He turned on his light, and flashed it down the corridor.

Dead mites floated like a cloud of frozen locusts. Caston shuffled.

He released more air at them, and they billowed away from him. It was difficult to estimate, but somehow there didn't seem to be as many as there had been before. Perhaps it was because they were floating in the corridor, and not hanging to its walls. Or maybe his first horrified glance had exaggerated what he saw. They'd seemed, in those first awful seconds, like the rippling savannah on a South American plain, or the luxuriant fur of a Cetian wool-cat, so thickly had they clung together.

He saw several close to the airlock, buried half in and half out of the metal walls. In their dying seconds, the little monsters must have tried to escape in the only way known to them.

Caston wondered momentarily, as had so many scientists attempting to study them, how the insect-like things could worm their way through even the thickest of metals.

He moved slowly down the corridor, pausing as he went to blow the space-mites before him. He caught a mental image of himself doing this here, and he almost shook his head with disbelief. Luke Caston alone with a million space-mites—it was incredible.

Abruptly, he came up against the first of the airtight doors, with a huge wheel on its surface. He turned it, and at once the door slid back. Air rushed in. He couldn't hear it, and he couldn't feel it pass him, but he saw part of the cloud of dead mites swoop past the door and into the space behind. When the movement stopped, Caston turned the wheel in the opposite direction, and leaned against the door.

Two minutes would be enough. . .

He gave it five to be sure, then wound back the door. Dead mites hung before him.

He moved to the second door, and repeated the procedure.

This time the rush of air was greater, and continued for a longer period. The space behind—the corridor and the control-section—was larger. He put the nozzle of his cylinder round the edge of the door, and released most of the remainder of the air for good measure.

When the movement of the air had slowed, he closed the door and waited again.

Another five minutes passed; for Luke Caston, with terrible slowness. Dead space-mites still hung in the confined space between the doors and, thoroughly dead as they appeared to be, they made his flesh creep to look at them.

Finally, he pulled the door open and kicked himself down the short corridor to the control section, spraying air before him. The room, wide and high, was a mass of dead mites.

But in the centre . . . was the navigation-bowl.

Without any further delay, Caston floated across to it, and laid his hands on its smooth surface. Several times before he'd done this, but on other ships, where the prize wasn't so great. He took his releasing-key and seal from the belt of his suit, inserted the key in the stand, and the bowl came free.

With his other hand, Caston snapped his seal into place, and headed back for the corridor.

The *Princess* was his.

With this, thy nav-bowl, I plight my troth.

With the haste that comes of a suddenly-realised wish to be away from somewhere, he kicked and thrust his way along the corridor to the airlock. Inside, the revolving-gear turned with almost intolerable slowness, and virtually before the lock was fully open, he was outside the ship and floating free in space.

And he shuddered. The muscles in his back and shoulders shook with the reaction of the long minutes unconsciously tensed against the touch of the mites.

Those wire-like bodies, and the fine tendrils that would sting. . .

Floating free in interstellar space, between two ships with the names of women; both airless, both his. He wheeled in the vacuum, legs hunched up against his chest, his arms clenched firmly around the heart of the *Princess*.

When the feeling had passed, he used his jets to push himself to the line; then tugged himself across to the battered *Delilah*.

Luke Caston, the richest salvage-man in the business. Or the richest retired salvage-man, to put it more accurately.

Inside the *Delilah*, he flicked on the artificial gravity, and walked to the control-seat. He checked the reading on the dial that showed how much air was left in his breathing-kit, and re-filled it from one of the two remaining cylinders.

Carefully, he placed the gleaming silver nav-bowl on the empty seat next to his, then made to call up Morreston.

He stopped.

There was a piece of black, furry wire lying on the screen.

He stood up hastily, and clambered clumsily over the back of the seat. Behind him, the walls of the *Delilah* were already specked with the mites.

... it's out of this world



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His ship . . . A glowing hunk of circuits and transistors and sub-drives and reactors, that would attract mites like a magnet would attract iron filings. . .

Hadn't he just displaced hundreds of thousands of them from their last home?

He backed away, feeling the sudden sweat run down his body.

As he watched, the numbers seemed to re-double. Were they coming through the walls? Or was it just their rate of reproduction? In the right circumstances, like a fully operational but airless spaceship, these things breed like rabbits. . .

He stepped back to the control seat, and sat down. There was nothing he could do. He thought of calling up Morreston, but stopped again.

Let the bastard sweat for a bit.

Two days it would take, to get back to Earth. He looked down at the surface of the screen. Already, there were eight of the mites squatting there.

In front of him was the *Delilah*'s own nav-bowl, and he set it for his first reading. As the in-board computer correlated the necessary data, he cut in the sub-drive generators.

A few seconds later, the first short hop took place, and the *Merchant Princess* was no longer hanging outside his port.

He looked at the seat to his side, and saw the nav-bowl beside him. He chuckled.

Five minutes later, he felt a prickle against the skin of his buttocks, as the first of a thousand mites began its death-throes inside his suit.

TRIESTE: SF FILM FESTIVAL

A special report by John Carnell

Trieste, Italy July 12th to 19th 1969

Trieste, revisited after six years, spread an aura of sf professionalism throughout its environs, the experiences gained in earlier film Festivals showing strongly in the organisational abilities of the promoters, the Trieste Tourist Organisation. The most notable surprise, however, was the improvement in the quality of all classes of films since the first Festival in 1963—in production, direction, design and camera techniques.

Fourteen countries participated; twelve feature films competed for the Gold and Silver Asteroids (magnificent twelve inch globes of Murano glass); nineteen medium and short films competed for the Gold Seal; seven documentaries were included in the scientific section and there was a retrospective showing in the Cinema Teatro Excelsior of seven feature films directed by Roger Corman, including such notables as *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* and *The Tomb of Ligeta*. The panel of five judges comprised Mario Soldati, noted Italian critic (president), Roger Corman, Jean-Louis Comolli, Zelimer Matko and American author James Blish.

The Festival was opened appropriately at the open-air cinema in the romantic Castello di San Giusto by the singing of ten songs on sf themes by the Italian actor and singer Roberto Brivio, followed by the opening short NASA documentary taken on the *Apollo 10* lunar mission and a brilliant Canadian animated short, *Cosmic Zoom*, which ultimately won the Gold Seal. The feature length film was *The Illustrated Man* from the Ray Bradbury title, which was unfortunately disqualified owing to pre-release in Italy prior to the Festival, otherwise I have no doubt that Rod Steiger would have received the Best Actor award.

Of the feature films, Finland's entry *Ruusujen Aika* (The Time of Roses) picked up the Best Actress award for Taja Markus, a very fine portrayal in a film which could have won the Gold Asteroid if it had not been banned from public showing by the Italian Film Censors owing to a lengthy but quite innocuous nude scene essential to the story line. Despite the censorship, the film had been seen by both the jury and all the press beforehand and was given the Cinematograph Journalists' Gold Medal award as the best film of the week. A petition of protest was also signed by all attending journalists and sent to the Censor Bureau.

France, with four major entries, won the Gold Asteroid for *Le Dernier Homme* (The Last Man) directed by Charles L. Bitsch, who was present to receive the award—a cleverly directed and sympathetic story of the last three human beings left alive after an unknown disaster had eliminated mankind, in this case two women and one man—and the Best Actor award for Tobias Engel in *Tu Imagines Robinson* (You Imagine Robinson), by coincidence a last-man-on-Earth theme but completely different from its award-winning contemporary. And if there had been an award for the best technical feature it would surely have gone to the French film *Mr. Freedom*, a bitingly

satirical sendup of American foreign policy, a kind of Buck Rogers-Captain Future interpretation of the 20th century.

Well worth seeing if it ever appears in the English-speaking cinemas is the Hungarian film *Az Ido Ablakai* (Windows of Time) directed by Tomas Fejer, a most ambitiously produced first for that country—a small group of sleepers in suspended life are accidentally awakened after some two hundred years in an underground laboratory to find that the outside world is uninhabitable; against some fine technical backgrounds they play out a complex and mysterious attempt at survival. Interesting but not outstanding is the Italian film *The Tunnel Under the World*, taken from Fred Pohl's novelette of the same title; I found that when the director (Luigi Cozzi, who used to edit one of Italy's sf magazines) departed from the Pohl story line the plot became obscure and had to rely heavily upon camera effects to carry the story along.

Britain's major entry, *The Body Stealers*, with George Sanders, Robert Flemyng, Neil Conner, Hilary Dwyer and Lorna Wilde, was unfortunately a mediocre piece of cardboard characterisation with stilted dialogue and plot—super-science aliens (unseen) take over freefall parachutists' bodies to infiltrate in high places ultimately to control the country.

In conjunction with the film Festival there was a magnificent exhibition at the Art Gallery of Palazzo Constanzo of recent paintings by the surrealist Venetian artist Lodovico De Luigi of a decaying Venice in the year 3000—his work reminded me very much of Artyzybafsh's style in USA twenty years ago. Two other art exhibitions were on show at the Castle, one a documentary on the conquest of space, the other on fantastic art organised by the artists, painters, sculptors and engravers of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia. And a number of Trieste restaurants took part in a competition to produce the best sf recipes expected by the year 2000.

Overshadowing the whole Festival, however, was the excitement generated by Apollo 11's blastoff for the moon on the 16th—a happy coincidence for the organisers. On the two mornings prior to the launch there was a Round Table conference of noted scientists, journalists and writers on 'The Moon: Tomorrow,' during which both James Blish and myself were invited to speak, the resultant press coverage being extensive, while on the Wednesday at launch time (15.30 Italian time) viewing blastoff in the Press Club, five of us were photographed and interviewed for the local newspaper, *Il Piccolo*. Each journalist was also presented with a magnificent book, *Man On The Moon*, published by the United States Information Bureau, covering the Apollo 11 flight and giving details of future plans.

By the time the Festival ended on the Saturday night, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins and Edwin Aldrin were circling the moon, just a few hours away from Man's greatest triumph. It seemed a fitting conclusion to the celluloid worlds of the future we had been watching all the week.

John Carnell

THE IMPATIENT DREAMERS

The story of
British Science
Fiction by
WALTER GILLINGS

4: SCIENCE FICTION WEAKLY

In the latest instalment of his fascinating story of the development of British science fiction, veteran editor Walter Gillings, who later produced *Tales of Wonder*, recalls the brief life of the first publication devoted to the medium—a twopenny weekly called *Scoops* which saw the light in 1934 and died after an uncertain career of little more than four months.

Opportunity, it is said, knocks at the door of most of us only once in a lifetime. I still find it galling to think that, when it took the shape of Hugo Gernsback, 'father' of American science fiction magazines, I was too immersed in other matters—and, I suspect, in my campaigning for a British magazine—to hear it knock. And the chance to meet and talk with this man who left his influence on so many of my generation never came again.

In my early days as a cub reporter on the *Ifford Recorder* I considered it my bounden duty to read the newspaper trade papers (there were two in those days) religiously. A pile of half-digested back numbers invariably cluttered my desk. So it was that, looking through some of them towards the end of 1932, I discovered that in July of that year the astute president of the Stellar Publishing Corporation had 'been in London for the past week or so for the specific purpose of finding writing talent to suit his magazines.'

The interview which, I learned later, the *Daily Express* ran at the time also captured my notice. Had I known that he was only ten miles away, there is no doubt I would have laid the prophetic genius, pleading with him to take me home with him to the Land of Science Fiction, or at least to appoint me editor of a British edition of *Wonder Stories*. The hope would almost certainly have been vain; yet the meeting, if it had taken place, might well have changed the course of British *sf*—whether for better or worse we can only speculate.

It transpired that I wasn't the only one who remained in ignorance of this lost opportunity to commune with the creator of the resourceful *Ralph 124C 41+*, in spite of his confidence that there was 'a great amount of unexploited talent in this country for the type of story he requires.' At least, I have yet to hear of any writer or fan of our fraternity who met him on that occasion.

'I am told,' he was reported as saying, 'that many short story writers and freelance journalists are finding things pretty tough over here just now. Well, I can offer them the right prices for my kind of story...'. Whether they were getting the right prices or not, Benson Herbert, J. M. Walsh and John Beynon Harris were by then already captured; and the only noticeable result of Gernsback's European jaunt was a fresh flood of Continental translations in his magazines.

He, too, found things pretty tough on his own ground, when he got back to New York. By the middle of 1933 the Depression had put paid to the Clayton *Astounding Stories*, suspended both *Amazing* and *Wonder* quarterly editions, and compelled *Wonder Stories* to go bi-monthly

for the summer before reducing its size severely. But it was a long time before Uncle Hugo gave up the struggle which resulted from the advent of a new, invigorated *Astounding*.

Still, perhaps it was just as well we never met; he might have mistaken me for a potential rival. I had written him again, a few months before his visit, reporting an almost total lack of response to my appeals on behalf of the Science Literary Association and announcing my intention to start a magazine of my own through which British readers might keep in touch. It was to be a duplicated effort of twelve pages with the title *Science and Fiction*, for which I solicited contributions from *Wonder's* authors—their reward to be no more than our grateful thanks. But before I took the plunge I wanted to be assured of my readership, however small. So, taking a leaf out of Gernsback's book*, I invited at least a hundred postcards from British readers indicating their willingness to subscribe threepence a month, and requested publication of my proposals in *Wonder* as soon as possible.

I added the assurance that 'you need not fear competition from the journal, which will act as a subsidiary to such American periodicals as your own, and in the interests of the promotion of science fiction.' But my letter never saw print, and *Science and Fiction* remained no more than an unrealised precursor of *Scientifiction*, the journal which I eventually launched to this end. As yet, though, I had not

* Before launching *Amazing Stories*, Gernsback circulated potential subscribers of a proposed magazine to be called *Scientifiction*, a portmanteau word he had coined, over which printers have stumbled ever since—it invariably comes out as 'scientification.' In the event, it was decided to use the title *Amazing Stories—The Magazine of Scientifiction*.

Festus
Pragnell



Ex-policeman Festus Pragnell (named after a Roman general who tried St. Paul) was one of the British writers encouraged by Gernsback's *Wonder Stories*, where his first effort was rewritten by newspaperman R. F. Starzl.

squinted painfully over the typographical abortions of America's fandom, which by then had become a none-the-less valuable feature of the field, dispensing information and comment while serving as a training ground for editors and critics. Front-rank authors like David H. Keller, Clare Winger Harris, Arthur J. Burks, Ralph Milne Farley and Edmond Hamilton were not above contributing to magazines like *The Fantasy Fan* and *Science Fiction Digest*, even if the chances were their names might come out upside-down.

Come 1933, two new English writers had made their debut in the so-called 'pro' magazines. Giving no hint of the phenomenal success which was to attend his later (and, to my mind, often inferior) efforts, John Russell Fearn's two-part serial, 'The Intelligence Gigantic', appeared without any fuss in *Amazing*. Some months after his introduction in collaboration with R. F. Starzl, ex-policeman Festus Pragnell stood alone in *Wonder* with 'Men of the Dark Comet', closely followed by 'The Isotope Men.' And before the year was out came signs of lively events in store much nearer home.

In October, Odhams' *Passing Show*, up to then a humorous weekly, metamorphosed into a big photogravure magazine intended for all the family. It started off by serialising Edgar Rice Burroughs' 'Pirates of Venus', beautifully illustrated by Fortunino Matania, and followed by the sequel, 'Lost on Venus', the whole thing running over eighteen weeks. I read it, and thoroughly relished it; and it gave me hope that something more might develop—which it did, later.

It was on the strength of this that, first, I renewed my assault on the publishing firm I had badgered earlier. My suggestion was for a new periodical which would present popular articles on all sorts of unusual topics, including speculative science subjects, and science-fantasy fiction. This was a slight deviation from my previous approach: I thought the mixture of fiction and fact might prove a more subtle attraction. I assured them that such a publication would be welcomed by a large number of readers and make a particular appeal to youth . . . as though I were an expert on the subject!

The reaction was no different, however. The publishers felt that such a periodical would not attract a sufficiently large public, and referred me to their part-publications which made extensive use of articles on science and natural phenomena, etc., etc. In short—no dice!

My other efforts to cut loose from the newspaper work which, after three years, had become a pretty dreary round were no more successful. Perhaps as a relief from local politics and police courts—or science fiction, which was at its lowest ebb—I had switched to writing humour and comic verse, and tried my utmost to get a funny column into print. But it was a closed shop all round—or I wasn't as funny as I thought.

So, determined to find some way of satisfying my creative urge, at the end of 1933 I got married and set up house. And for some months I was so heedless of everything else that I almost overlooked the biggest blunder that British science fiction ever made—the twopenny weekly, *Scoops*. It was on a visit to my in-laws that I happened on a copy belonging to my wife's youngest brother, who was still at school. It sported a hideous red and black cover and featured 'Seven Great Stories of the Future,' including three serials. One, relating the adventures of three bright lads among the Martians, who were done up like the Ku

Klux Klan, carried the by-line of Professor A. M. Low; the rest of the contents were mercifully anonymous. Another serial, 'Monster of the Moon,' was also a full-blooded interplanetary, complete with a character called Lord Algy who wore a monocle and had obviously strayed in from *The Magnet* or *Nelson Lee*. The illustrations, it seemed to me, had been done by an artist who had made a pretty close study of *Wonder Stories*.

My interest thoroughly revived, I got the current issue—it had been going three months by then—and rummaged around for back numbers. It had started in February, calling itself 'The Story Paper of Tomorrow' and labelled 'Amazing New Wonder Weekly.' Why *Scoops*? Because the stories were 'different, because they look ahead with the vision of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells . . . *Scoops* has the thrill of adventure and mystery and will transport its readers . . . into the future, with all its expectations of development and discovery.'

Thus the Gernsbackian blurb. All the old familiar tag-lines were there, too. 'Today Fiction—Tomorrow Fact' (at least more succinct than *Amazing's* 'Extravagant Fiction Today—Cold Fact Tomorrow') . . . 'Amazing Stories of the Wonder World' . . . 'Stories of Imagination and Science.' There was no doubt about it—it was science fiction, however crude. Or some of it was . . . There were Rebel Robots, Terror Beasts of Space, a Penal Planet, a Human King Kong, a Time Traveller, a Devilman of the Deep, an Immortal Man and an Iron Woman, sixty foot tall and 'fair of face.' Fortunately, she was kept well apart from the Striding Terror. . . .

Other excitements were caused by Skull-Men from the Planet Zlinn, an invasion by the Metal Men of Zog, and a Revolt of the Stone Men. Another invasion from China was accomplished by matter-transmitter, which also facilitated a voyage to Venus. Light relief was afforded by such Wellsian devices as Wimpole's Weight Reducer for floating over rooftops. At the same time, the advertisement pages offered the secrets of how to 'Grow As You Please,' 'Be Taller,' 'Add Inches to Your Height,' and even how to 'Shape Your Nose.' 'Don't Be Bullied' and 'Be Strong' were the Orders of the Day.

The story illustrations, once the artists (or artist) had got into their stride, were not too bad, considering the strictly juvenile appeal of the paper. Picture features reminiscent of Gernsback's *Science and Invention*—which by now had given place to *Everyday Science and Mechanics*, with more accent on the home workshop—combined with a liberal sprinkling of factual pieces concerning 'Modern Marvels' and 'This World of Wonder,' and there were frequent references to rockets and interplanetary travel. By No. 7 *Scoops* was really going places with 'Spacedrome No. 1,' and by the next issue Philip Cleator, founder of the British Interplanetary Society, was replying to Sir James Jeans on the question of whether space-travel would ever be realised.

The Editor—who turned out to be Haydn Dimmock, Editor of *The Scout*, then published by Newnes and Pearson's—was insistent in soliciting frank opinions on the paper from its readers, many of whom had long since left school. He got them, and in due course expressed his gratification that 'our efforts to popularise scientific fiction have met with such an encouraging reception.' Then it boldly proclaimed itself 'Britain's Only Science Story Weekly'; but it still carried some pretty feeble tales about crack expresses, airplanes and racing cars, and Secret Service serials with a fantastic twist, in order to fill its thirty-two

close-set pages. And after giving away hundreds of mouth-organs, pen-knives and other juvenile impedimenta, it offered cash prizes for ideas on what to do with old safety-razor blades, gramophone needles, and empty toothpaste tubes (the most obvious suggestions, I imagine, being disqualified).

But, by the time I had caught up with the paper, certain minor refinements had crept into its make-up, and some of the stories began to show a decided maturity compared to the rest. One of these was 'Catalcysm,' which received high praise, and was actually the work of W. P. Cockcroft, the Halifax writer who appeared in *Wonder Stories'* last issue for that year. His name appeared in *Scoops* only later, when it published a sequel, 'City of Mars,' which proved equally popular. Then, with No. 13, the cover illustration showed a drastic change, on the commencement of Conan Doyle's 'The Poison Belt'—first serialised in *The Strand Magazine* twenty years before. Simultaneously, other contributors began to get by-lines, by demand of a vocal readership.

Moore Raymond, the film critic, who in his Northern *Daily Express* days had publicised the B.I.S. and authored a space-travel serial, appeared with a tale of interplanetary piracy, 'Scouts of Space.' A small corner contributed by Cleator under the heading, 'To the Planets,' brought the B.I.S. regular mention (and quite a few new members), as well as lending an air of authenticity to the fiction. To complete the transformation, the back page was given over to readers' letters, which gave evidence of an intelligent and informed following, many of whom identified themselves as devotees of American sf and hailed *Scoops* as fulfilling a long-felt want.

Among these was Maurice K. Hanson, of Leicester, who was to produce Britain's first fan magazine, *Novae Terrae*. He, with others, wanted the paper to organise a Science Circle. One who welcomed it particularly because American sf had become so difficult to lay hands on expressed his conviction that 'the majority of readers are adults, and . . . would prefer more credible stories, with perhaps the love interest a little more accentuated.' He also wanted a bigger paper—in fact, a magazine.

Contributors to later issues included John Russell Fearn, who by then had made a hit with the new *Astounding* on the strength of his capacity for 'thought variants'—stories based on startlingly original ideas stretched to the most incredible limits—and the late Maurice G. Hugi, a brave trier who found in *Scoops* his first real opportunity. But it was not to last long. It was soon evident that little material of the sort that was needed to maintain the higher standard was forthcoming. The paper, apparently, couldn't get along without 'Bandits in the Stratosphere,' 'The Black Vultures' and such-like; and when the serials ended, so did *Scoops*. It had lasted just twenty weeks.

Why did it fail? Mainly because it started off on the wrong foot, in my view. Having been launched as a 'penny dreadful,' it could not remove the stigma as far as discern-

ing sf readers were concerned. Though it might conceivably have gone on catering for schoolboys and errand boys, it could hardly expect to please them while trying, at the same time, to satisfy the different tastes of converted sf readers—who were not enough to support such a publication as they would have liked it to be. Had it been started as a monthly, it might have been a different story. It might . . . On the other hand, it might have succeeded as a weekly had it set out knowing exactly what type of material it was going to feature and where it might get it in sufficient quantity. But, being in the nature of an experiment which had never been tried before, it had to leave a good deal to chance.

At least, the publishers learned something about science fiction and its fans. It had never occurred to them that grown men like Len Kippin and myself would have to sneak, shame-faced, into a newsagents and ask for *Scoops*, as though we were buying a halfpenny gobstopper—or assume the air of one doing his young brother a good turn. Yet in a letter to me the Editor frankly confessed surprise that 'although we started out as a paper for youth, we are finding that a very large number of our readers are men. Stories, therefore, must have a definite adult appeal . . .'

As soon as I had discovered the existence of the paper I had conveyed my mixed feelings to the Editor. For my joy at finding a publisher ready to give sf a trial was tempered with the chagrin I felt that it should be presented in a manner which would minimise the paper's chances of success. And its life was half over when I wrote, telling the tale of my earlier attempts to induce such an attempt and—some-what dubiously—wishing *Scoops* every good fortune.

Of course I imagined that I might help to save it from the fate which, it seemed to me, would probably overtake it; and I sought an interview with the idea of talking myself into an assistant editorship. But the agreed meeting never came off—there was always some journalistic chore to prevent it—and a month passed before I wrote again, to receive the regretful news that *Scoops* had been given its death warrant. 'We had a certain market, but the demand was not sufficient to give us confidence for the future,' the Editor admitted.

After this it was pretty hopeless trying to convince the victims of my earlier persuasions, though I did attempt the task. I even tried to persuade Pearson's to think again and grant *Scoops* a reprieve by broadening its appeal without changing the title. But it was too late. 'It has been proved fairly conclusively that, while there are people definitely interested in science fiction, the number is not sufficient at the present time to maintain a weekly paper in circulation.' Such was the irrevocable verdict.

And none would have disputed it. But who wanted a weekly anyway? To me it seemed more of a case of Science Fiction Weakly; a project ill-conceived and embarked upon without any real appreciation of the factors involved. After thirty years, I have never quite got over it. But worse was to come . . .

In the next instalment of his fascinating story, Walter Gillings tells how British fans lent their support to Hugo Gernsback's Science Fiction League, and of his first meetings with John Russell Fearn, who was also working to convince publishers of the possibilities for sf in this country.

**SCOOPS' most impressive cover . . .
Its inspiration was a book by
a German scientist which dealt in
popular style with Man's uncertain
future in the face of the
natural forces which threatened him**



**Jacket design
for
Creation's Doom
(Jarrold, 1934),
depicting the
menace of the
insects which,
the author
predicted, would
come into
their own again
when human life
had become
extinct**

BRITAIN'S ONLY SCIENCE STORY WEEKLY

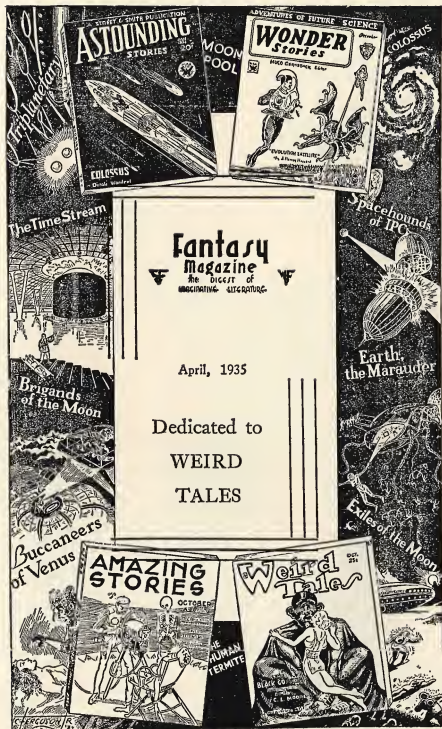
SCOOPS

The STORY
PAPER of
TO-MORROW
2^D
EVERY WEDNESDAY



**CREATION'S
DOOM** *See Inside*

The amazing Thirties



The illustration on this page affords us a unique cross-section of the science fiction of the early 'thirties. 'Tri-planetary' (AMAZING 1934) and 'The Time Stream' (WONDER STORIES 1931) were two outstanding serials by Edward E. Smith and John Taine. Howard Browne's cover for the January 1934 ASTOUNDING illustrated Donald Wandrei's 'Colossus', the story which introduced the concept of a giant universe of which our own universe is but a molecule. 'The Moon Pool' was perhaps A. Merritt's greatest story. Frank R. Paul's cover for the mediocre 'Evolution Satellite' by J. Harvey Haggard reflects the melancholy state of WONDER STORIES at the end of 1933. 'Spacehounds of IPC' was yet another noted serial by Edward E. Smith (from AMAZING 1931); 'Earth the Marauder' was an ASTOUNDING serial by Arthur J. Burks in 1930. 'Exiles of the Moon', a collaboration by Nat Schachner and Arthur Leo Zagat appeared in WONDER in 1931. Ray Cummings, a prolific writer, is represented with 'Brigunds of the Moon', another ASTOUNDING serial of 1931. 'Buccaneers of Venus' from WEIRD TALES, was one of Otis Adelbert Kline's noted novels in the Edgar Rice Burroughs style. Leo Morey's cover for October 1934 AMAZING vividly depicts a scene from 'The Pool of Life' by P. Schuyler Miller. In SCIENCE WONDER STORIES for 1929, 'The Human Termites' was a popular story by David H. Keller, still remembered today, as is C. L. Moore, whose 'Black God's Kiss' was one of the several gripping 'Northwest Smith' stories appearing in WEIRD TALES.

Clay Ferguson's cover design for *Fantasy Magazine*, most renowned of all America's 'fanzines' of the 1930s. During 1935 it dedicated four issues in turn to the 'prozines' whose cause it championed.

TIME SLIP

ERIC HARRIS

Set against the authentic background of a police investigation in Queensland, Eric Harris gives us a fascinating glimpse into the Unknown



DICK HOWETT

Paul eased himself out of the Land-Rover and stood in the silence, staring at the slowly disappearing figure of the black-tracker.

Waves of billowing, searing heat coursed over his stiff body, making breathing difficult, and seeing even harder. The black-tracker at this distance appeared to be moving sideways and jumping into the air, and then parting into two—four—and then jumping back to one again.

Paul angrily brushed the flies away from his smarting eyes and licking his lips, set off at a brisk pace after the aboriginal.

By the time that he had caught up with him, the tracker had sighted the car, some three hundred yards away by the stump of a Mulga tree.

"Very hot, boss—no one leave car when it go through soft sand. Here car get stuck—oil just here, engine very hot, all get out—try to push."

Paul unscrewed the petrol filler cap—bone dry, if there had been any residual in the tank it would have long since evaporated away in the heat.

He glanced at the pitiful belongings on the seats, two maps, both free garage hand-outs and of no use for that country. A child's soft toy, some sweets, a cheap camera and two newspapers.

There didn't appear to be any foodstuffs at all, perhaps they had taken them with them on their fateful trek.

The family had been reported missing a week ago and search planes had finally located the car some twenty miles

off the Birdsville track, deep in the interior. There hadn't been any signs of life, and Paul had been sent with the tracker to try and locate the family, as the aircraft could not land in the rough terrain near the car.

The Parker family had set out in the heat of full summer, from Marree in South Australia, to drive to Birdsville in Queensland. A journey that the most hardened and experienced bushman would have shied from.

Paul mused on how far the family could have gone on foot, and how far he himself could walk in this heat.

According to police records there were five in the group, Mr. and Mrs. Parker, both aged 40, their elder son Ronald aged 19, a younger son of 10, and a baby of 18 months.

'Here boss, old man walk by his wife—carry baby—two young men walk along here.'

Paul could see nothing of footprints on the hard stone-covered glare. The shimmering heat made everything swim in unreal motion and perspiration made his eyes smart. He tried to imagine how he would have felt, after waiting in the car for two days, in a heat that would keep the thermometer above ninety even at night—and then this futile, aimless nightmare trudge to certain death.

'Man throw away the water container here—' the aboriginal pointed to a plastic detergent can bleached white and still displaying its household trade name.

'Here he put baby down—took off shirt.' Paul walked on in silence—utter silence—the blanketed nothingness of vast open, empty space.

The aboriginal's feet crunched softly at his side.

'Man and woman take off all clothes here... ' Paul stared at the wavering clump of koolibah trees in the distance—he knew that they would be there.

'Man stagger with baby—go blind, walk off here... '

'What about the woman?' asked Paul.

'Woman stagger now—maybe two, three steps here—then go blind—boy come back, pull the woman here, but she is already dead.'

The black-tracker ran away to the right for some hundred yards.

'Man died here.'

His comment was not necessary—Paul could smell it now. He forced himself to look at the seething mass of ants and flies and the blackened, caved-in rib bones. He looked away and said,

'Let's get on.'

The boy dragged the woman to a tree—not know that she was dead.'

Paul nodded, the aboriginal's graphic retelling of the tragedy brought him close to tears. Swallowing heavily, he asked,

'What about the younger lad and the baby?'

'Under the trees too—the young boy die here under the tree—you'll see.'

He was right, a cloud of flies rose in a wail as they approached the bodies of the mother and her younger son.

'What about the elder lad?' he enquired.

'The big boy was very strong—very strong—he walked on quickly,' the aboriginal shook his head, 'Aheh—very strong.'

They found him, stripped naked, more than a mile away from the clump of trees, face down.

A shriek pierced the silence as a flock of cockatoos rose from the trees. Paul started, and then turned to the black-tracker.

'Thanks Jackie, we'd better try and bury these. By the way, have you seen the baby?'

'The man carry the baby boss—but maybe the boy carry it to the trees.'

'Then we'd better look for it.' He sighed; by now he wished he could get back to the Land-Rover and leave the site for good.

A search failed to find the child's remains, so they returned to the Land-Rover for a much-needed drink, and the shovels.

The chief constable sat writing for some while, only the whirring of the fan breaking the silence as it swirled the hot air in the office to bring no relief.

'O.K. Paul, I've got all that,' he said leaning back.

'The car was an early model Chev, heavy, unreliable, and totally unsuited for that sort of country.'

'I didn't make any mechanical examination,' said Paul.

'You say the ground was too hard for shovels?'

'We could take picks to bury them I suppose.'

'Gawd—what fools!' said the chief, shaking his head slowly. 'Why didn't they stay in the car?'

'They'd still have died, wouldn't they?'

'I suppose so, but they'd have stood a better chance there than trying to walk in that heat.'

'We couldn't find the baby, chief,' said Paul.

'You couldn't what?'—the chief stared at him for some time.

'All the party must be accounted for—when we go up there tomorrow to do the burial we'll have to find it.'

He finished off the report for Adelaide in silence.

Paul read the papers that evening which carried the story of the tragedy on their front pages and showed an aerial photograph of the clump of trees with X's to show where the bodies were found.

People everywhere discussed the folly of setting out on a journey that could only end in death, and shuddered in the comfort of their righteous safety.

The story released by the police had included most of the tragic details, except one. The baby, after a very thorough search had *not* been found.

'O.K. Paul, it's your time—and personally, I think you're wasting it.'

'Look chief, we've got a full record of the activities of that family right up to the time they started out—and we know that the baby was with them. The tracker confirmed this and I'd stake my life on his experience; if he says the kid was with them it was with them.'

'Yep—I know, we've been over it again and again, if it was with them right up to the time of the old man's death, then it must have been taken.'

'If it was taken, the tracker would have found the tracks.'

'So where do you end up?—right back in a circle—what ever took the baby covered its tracks,' said Paul, scratching his head.

'Unless it didn't make tracks!'

'Aw cut it out chief, the only conveyance that doesn't make tracks is a helicopter, and I can't see it hovering over the father while he passes the kid up and then it makes off leaving the rest to die.'

'All right, then the baby was 'spirited' away,' smiled the chief. 'Do you know how many people around the world just disappear every day?—it amounts to more than I'd care to think about.'

'It's not the same thing,' said Paul. 'Well, I'd better be

going then, I want to try and make Oolganatta station before sundown.'

He gave the chief constable a last look, and walked out to the Land-Rover.

Paul stared at the small white crosses, and his shadow, long and thin, lying across them. The wind whined thinly through the clump of trees and in spite of the warmth, he shivered.

The tracks lay in trampled confusion where the burial party had worked to and fro—animating the silent scene with temporary life.

He turned with a start, peered into the shimmering distance—his ear had caught the sound of footsteps even before the wavering outline of a man resolved itself out of the distant haze.

Heart beating wildly—Paul's reason told him there couldn't be any man out there—there *couldn't* be!

Then he remembered, it must be an Arunta—it *had* to be. These tribesmen could cover enormous distances, and this one must have been attracted by the sound of the Land-Rover earlier.

With only a hundred yards separating them, Paul recognised who it was. The tracker.

'G'day boss, still troubling eh?'

'Hell Jackie—you gave me one bitch of a turn just now—what brings you up here?'

Paul wrung the man's hand with relief.

'Arunta tribe elder, Jibildi, tells me two days ago, that you would come back—so I come back also—only short journey if you travel like me.'

Paul nodded, he was well aware of the almost fantastic distances that a fit tribal aboriginal could cover.

'Any of your people got ideas about the baby?' he asked, offering the tracker a cigarette.

The black man squatted down and took the proffered light, he looked up at Paul, as though sizing him up.

'Jibildi says the baby's still alive,' he said slowly.

'How do you mean, still alive?' asked Paul.

'You know as well as I do the baby would die of heat exhaustion—probably first—it was probably dead before they put it down.'

The black man shrugged his shoulders—

'Jibildi makes a dream—and listens. He says that the baby is still alive.'

'Does he say where it is, Jackie?'

'He said—"Baby not with blackfella, not with whitefella."—but he didn't say anything more about it.'

'You wouldn't question a tribal elder?'

'No, never.'

'What is your name, Jackie?' asked Paul, idly tracing a pattern in the hot sand.

The aboriginal looked at him for a moment before answering.

'We're not here on police department business now—we are on equal terms, you and I: I'm Paul—not "Boss".'

'All right, Paul,' said the black tracker rising from his crouch. 'You honour me, so I must tell you that to divulge my tribal name to a white man is also an honour, in our terms, for you. My name is Nungajiri.'

They remained silent for a while, looking at the tall koolibahs and the huddle of white crosses, so out of place, beneath them.

'Let's go back to where the father dropped, and see if we can pick up any clues from there.'

They walked off to the spot and started to search the stone-covered, brittle-smooth grey sand.

Paul stared at the ground, trying hard to imagine what it was that the black-tracker could read from the featureless expanse.

'Here we are,' said Nungajiri, 'they haven't got rid of the old man's tracks—here is where he fell.'

Paul crouched, seeing nothing that looked any different from any other part of the ground.

He stood up and walked on for a pace or two, and suddenly, felt nauseated, his eyes lost focus, and his head began to reel.

He stared wildly at the trees and saw a confused blur. His heart thumped as he looked frantically around him—*there were other figures there!*—motionless, like blurred statues. He swayed slightly.

'Gonna be all right,' he muttered to himself—there was this quechly feel about the ground that had been as hard as rock before. The scene in front of him waved and warped in a sickening manner.

'Where are you, Paul?'—the aboriginal's frightened call sounded far away, as if in a nightmare.

'I can see them all—I CAN SEE THEM ALL!' shouted Paul, starting to run.

A thin, cold thought ran through his panic-stricken mind. '*It's struggling!*'—then he sank to the ground.

Paul was stretched out, face downwards when he came to. It seemed that there was a blinding light over him, and for a long while, he dare not look up.

He kept quiet still, trying to recollect his thoughts prior to his passing out.

He'd seen them—the whole family—he couldn't remember how many.

'Better get up—' he thought, 'Nungajiri will be worried.'

He rose to his feet and looked. The scene was a blinding white haze, with no horizon. He took a step forward, and sunk full-length again. He had never felt so bone-achingly weary in his life before. His legs felt like lead, and his head pounded with the effort he had made.

'EVERYTHING THAT GOES ON IS AT RIGHT ANGLES'. He looked up again at the blinding white mists, knowing that he had not thought that!

Over there—just about ten yards away—if there was such a thing as 'away'—was a vague shape.

'That's the baby—I know it—it's the baby!' Very slowly he started to crawl in the direction of the shape that he saw. Panting and groaning with the exertion, Paul was ready to give up in sheer weariness.

The shape didn't seem any nearer than when he started towards it.

Then suddenly, there was a fire, and another, and it grew dark—with, merciful God, stars. He began to sob.

A low murmur—like chanting filled the cool air, and an aboriginal face—not Nungajiri—another. Paul knew that it was Jibildi.

'My son—' the face remained motionless, but the words, perfectly coherent were in his head.

'You are in the dreamtime—my son, and I can only watch you.'

The old man's face wavered slightly, as if under water, and Paul concentrated hard.

'Don't go—please, don't go!' he thought. The scene faded as Paul tried frantically to hold the image in his mind.

'Let me try!'

A tall shape—something like a robed figure stood in front of the bewildered Paul.

'We also—like your fellow creatures before, are unable to help you. We are millions of light years away. We can try to explain, and perhaps your own kind may be shown how to release you.'

Paul lay motionless trying to resolve the figure into a recognisable shape.

'You will be unable to understand the reasons for your condition, but you and the child are trapped.

'All planets with sentient life are connected to the basic Time-stream. The nodal points at the interstices of your planet and the consciousness are for the most part in uninhabited places.

'You and the child are suspended at one of these. You have turned a corner—at right-angles to your concept of space. A shaft or a line could be passed to you.

'The child was thrown in its father's deathfall through the point—a chance of billions to one, yet it occurred. Unfortunately you followed, though at a slightly lesser velocity, or you would be with the child.'

The figure faded, and Paul was left in the blinding glare once more.

He also discovered another thing about his present existence. Whenever anyone thought of him, he could experience their environment as if he were using their senses.

Nungajiri had hung about the burial area for two days, calling and searching. Once he had wandered perilously close to the point, and Paul had screamed at him to slow down.

Once, Mrs. Carstairs of Oolganatta station had talked about him to her husband—the station was as clear as if Paul himself had been there.

He had had a glimpse inside a London flat when two of his old schoolmates had discussed him at length—but mainly it was Jibildi, the tribal elder who was with him, and who was aware of his plight.

Paul saw Nungajiri returning to his tribe, in the heat of the day—'A' day, not Paul's day—for there was no day wherever he was.

He had seen the inside of the police station through the eyes of his chief in Adelaide, and had yearned for the familiar sight, as it faded with the man's stray thoughts on himself.

The old Jibildi told him:

'You are not two steps, nor three seconds away from where you became trapped!'

Standing up seemed to drain the strength from him, and crawling didn't help him any further from where he was when he commenced.

From what the shades and shapes had said, movement only took place in Time, and that was where he was not, neither him, nor the baby.

'I am sending Nungajiri back to you, my son.' It was Jibildi again, the elder's face looked on with pity.

'He will try and send something through to you.'

Nungajiri was talking to himself—and Paul was amazed at the beauty of the aboriginal's tongue, which he had never thought about, less still tried to understand before.

The black man had travelled non-stop for two days, and was now close to the area that Paul had disappeared in.

In his hand was a rope, on the end of the rope was an ugly looking hook of iron.

Nungajiri thought: 'When I stand here and swing the rope, it will some time, pass over your body, if it passes at the speed you went, then I must be able to pull you back. I do not understand any of this—Jibildi tells me exactly what I must do, so be it.'

The hook dug into his flesh, ripping his clothes and tearing his skin. Otherwise, there was no movement.

Paul grabbed the rope and tugged as hard as he could.

Slowly he opened his eyes; Nungajiri was bending over him, anxiously watching him.

'You all right, Paul?'

He slowly turned his head, drinking in the scene, the hot sands and scrub, rolling away to the hazy horizon, the now motionless trees and the wail of flies.

He felt like weeping, sick and weak and trembling in the hot sun, his torn clothes the only evidence that he had been dragged out of eternity.

'We've got to get the baby, Nungajiri and we can't just go fishing like you did with me.'

'Look,' said the aboriginal, indicating the area that showed the recent struggle where Paul had emerged.

Paul untied the hook, and retied the rope around his waist.

'As far as I can remember, the rope and the child were both in line with me. If I go in at that angle, and a little harder than I did before, I should end up somewhere near to it. If I do, I'll give three tugs on the rope and we can both pull like mad;—if not, I'll give one tug on the rope and you can pull me out.'

'I nearly got pulled your way last time, Paul.' Nungajiri glanced round, 'I must secure the rope this time.'

Paul stared almost unbelievably at the child crying in Nungajiri's arms.

'I come with you to Oolganatta, Paul—you won't be able to drive and hold the baby at the same time.'

'And what about Adelaide?' asked Paul, 'what am I going to tell them?'

The aboriginal looked at him pityingly.

'I did not believe Jibildi—I just do exactly what he told me.'

'Did he tell you what I would have to do?'

'He said that white fella trouble is white fella trouble.'

'O.K., I get it—as soon as we get to Oolganatta, you'll be Jackie?'

The aboriginal nodded.

'You want a plane—whatever for?'

'I've got the Parker baby, chief. I can't make it on my own, and I can't leave it with the Carstairs here.'

'Why didn't you bury it on the spot with the others?'

'It's alive, chief,' said Paul helplessly. There was a very long pause on the phone.

'Chief?'

'O.K., there'll be a plane in an hour.'

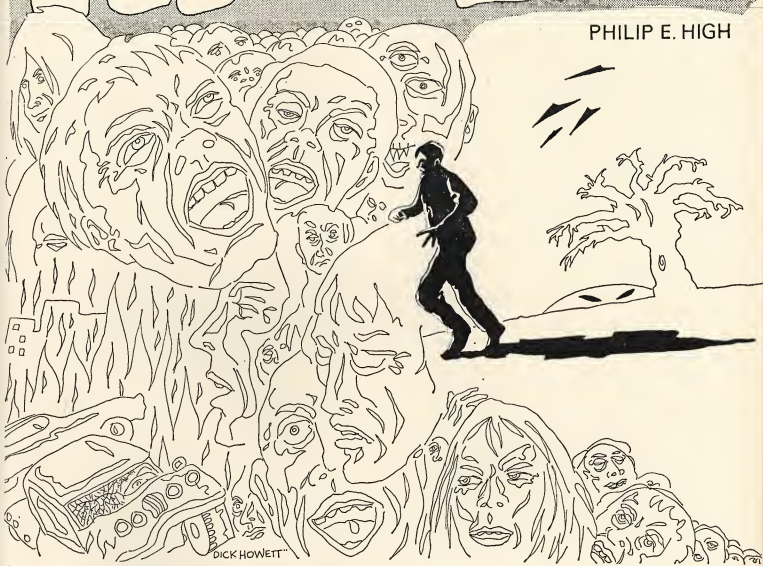
'Paul,' the chief constable tapped a sheaf of typewritten notes as he spoke. 'There's a full report here that I'd like you to sign—you can go through it if you like. It describes how that baby, whose identity we can't establish, was found abandoned in Adelaide.'

'But chief—you know the penalty for falsifying a report!'

'Of course I do—but do you know the penalty for sending in a true one?'

PSYCHO-LAND

PHILIP E. HIGH



DICK HOWETT

*The trees were stunted and sick, their leaves jagged, distorted and metallic.
A weird sun hung in the greenish sky.
A grim alien landscape . . . but it was right here on Earth!*

'I couldn't get there.' Seebering laid the gun shakily on the long table. His face looked drawn and his mouth twitched. 'You don't know what it's like.'
'Oh, we know what it's like,' said Holly, bitterly. 'We hoped, however,—wasn't a hundred thousand enough?'

'A hundred million wouldn't be enough. You just can't get there.' After considerable effort, Seebering succeeded in lighting a cigarette. 'I've never been so frightened in my life, once past the perimeter, the sun goes out, its like walking into hell—it is hell and I shall never be the same again.'

'All right, all right.' Holly's voice was despairing. 'You are no different to the rest. We've tried the three services and you are the tenth operator to make the attempt. If its any comfort, you got back, four are still out there somewhere.'

He looked across the table at Colonel Standers' drawn face. 'What next?'

Standers' mouth twitched, giving the impression he was trying to chew the ends of his greying moustache. 'I don't know, Mr. Holly, I keep wracking my brains until my head aches. I keep wondering if we're approaching this problem from the wrong angle. It sounds odd, coming from a military man, but, perhaps, in the curious crisis facing the country, violence promotes violence.'

'I'm not quite sure I follow you.'

'And I'm not quite sure what I am trying to say. It just struck me suddenly that everything we have done so far has had a basis of violence. We sent in the armed services and, after them, ten professional assassins. We've been adding hate to hate, violence to violence, fuel to the flames.'

'What had you in mind?'

'It's a wild hope, I'm clutching at straws and know it. Suppose, however, we sent in someone less antagonistic, someone inclined more to compassion than destruction.'

'Carton is a homicidal maniac or, to quote the official report, an advance case of dementia praecox.'

'Lancing could handle him.'

Holly thought about it, frowning. 'I'm not sure you haven't a point there, in fact, on consideration, I think you have. If Lancing hadn't perished in the first two days, our problem would be solved—'

He paused and drummed his fingers nervously on the table. 'Yes, yes, you may definitely have a point, a good point, but let us approach this problem logically. A genuinely compassionate man, a highly ethical man, is not going to shoot down a fellow human in cold blood however advanced his mental illness. We need someone truly sincere, not a fake or it won't work. We must employ, therefore, a highly moral man who is also a top-flight scientist. Such a man will not kill Carton but he would be capable of finding and knocking out that damned machine, particularly so as the lives of several thousand people are in jeopardy.'

He rose, crossed the room and pressed a switch. 'Get me Major Winter, dial 002689. The number is not listed and the call will be automatically scrambled.' While he waited, he said: 'All these top flight experts have been screened. The computer can do a sorting job on the whole lot in two seconds flat and toss out the most likely candidate—Oh, hello, Major Winter?—Holly here, I'm in charge of this Smerton trouble.' He explained the situation briefly. 'As you will have gathered, I want a top flight electronics man or kindred science with a highly ethical outlook.'

There was a brief pause and the voice said warningly: 'Such men are security risks.'

'Immaterial. Run the selection through the computer and let it select the most likely.'

'No need—I can hand you one on a platter without bothering the computer. Hold on a second, please.'

There was a brief pause and then: 'Here we are, almost tailored to your needs. Hopwood, William Charles—I'll give you a run-down on his file. Nobel prize winner, two years ago,—"Applied Nuclear Therapies"—top flight physicist, top flight electronics and a top flight plus security risk.

'Hopwood is a declared pacifist and constantly under discreet surveillance. He is member of "World Unity" and a dubious organisation called "The Combined Brotherhood."

'He has been gaoled twice for taking part in peace demonstrations and, on the second occasion, went on a hunger strike for eleven days. The authorities were compelled to force-feed him in the end.' The voice paused. 'Is that enough or do you want more? I've given you about a quarter.'

'Quite enough, thank you—can you get him?'

'Now?'

'Now.'

'Give me three hours—'

Hopwood proved to be a tall, dark, rather austere-looking and oddly soft-voiced individual.

Holly explained the situation carefully but with considerable subtlety. The danger and the fate of thirty thousand people were stressed. The prior use of professional assassins carefully omitted.

'I cannot emphasise too strongly that, once within the area, you will be in considerable danger. Not only are the conditions *infectious*—that is an inaccurate term but the most descriptive—the unfortunates still within the city may offer direct violence. Your job, and you must see how important it is, is to put this damned machine out of commission.'

'May I see the specifications and blue prints, please?'

'Certainly, we have them ready for you.'

Hopwood studied them for some minutes. 'I see this device draws its power from its own pile—ultra high frequency—hmm! A fault could well occur between these two impressed circuits here—and here. The device could well operate safely until the Sleiizer Tube reaches its maximum temperate of 67 degrees centigrade. After which, power might arc between these two terminals here—and here. Since the reaction was not foreseen, no safety insulation has been installed. In consequence, the shut-down switch, is bypassed and the device continues to function regardless, the over-flow being broadcast for a considerable distance. Lancing's commendable wish to aid the sick over-rode his scientific genius, I fear. Not that the over-all conception is anything but brilliant, not to say inspired—'

Holly cut him short, politely. 'Can it be stopped?'

'Oh, yes, one simple disconnection.'

Standers said: 'I take it then, you are prepared to undertake this dangerous assignment—you have every right to refuse.'

'I beg to differ. I have no right to refuse, several thousand people depend on me for their lives. When do I start?'

'A staff car is waiting outside now. It will drive you to your own but you will have to make the rest of the journey on foot—you know Smerton?'

'Intimately, I studied, as a young man, at the local university.'

Holly said: 'Excellent,' and 'Oh, by the way, you may need this. It's for your own protection.'

Hopwood looked at the gun with distaste and shook his head. 'It is against my principles to bear arms—'

The staff car, on its cushion of air, whispered silently through the countryside towards the infected area.

Hopwood in the back seat, let it pass unseeing. Periodically the car passed armoured vehicles or ambu-

lances going in the opposite direction. There were groups of soldiers, emplacements and numerous check points.

Hopwood awoke suddenly to the fact that what Holly had called the perimeter was, in fact, a ring of armed might entirely surrounding the city.

As they breasted a long steep hill it came into view below them. The red roofs of the houses, the weathered grey of churches and public buildings. It looked peaceful enough, yet down there, in that pleasant looking city, insanity ruled.

Then minutes later, they reached the final check point and the perimeter.

A young and strained looking Lieutenant unashamedly chewed his thumb nail and questioned the driver.

'Haven't seen another staff car on the way, have you, corporal? My relief should have been here thirty minutes ago.'

He seemed suddenly to become aware of Hopwood and slid open the door. 'This way, sir.' He waved the security clearance aside. 'Heard you were coming, sir. Sorry if I seem a bit edgy—I am a bit edgy—my relief should have been here half an hour ago. You can only take so much of this you know,—spite, Keem was always spiteful.'

He jerked his thumb away from his mouth and pointed. 'Straight down the road, you'll find it curves East. When you come out trees, take the right hand fork, you will then have only two miles down hill before you reach the suburbs.'

His face twitched and he looked at Hopwood with tortured furtive eyes. 'They have it in for me, you know. Keem and the Brigadier, I've seen them, I know—' He stopped, appeared to fight an inward battle and saluted awkwardly. 'Wish you luck, sir, hope you get through all right.'

Hopwood left him with a growing sense of depression. What had he let himself in for? What absurd upsurge of adolescent heroics had forced him into this obviously suicidal mission?

Hopwood had no illusions, he was not the first, not by any means. Clearly the armed forces had tried and their efforts, no doubt, had been followed by the abortive attempts of trained killers.

Now it was his turn—why had they chosen him? His long thin mouth twisted unpleasantly. Pretty obvious wasn't it? This was a neat execution job, they were disposing of him. He was a thorn in the flesh of the armament kings, the warmongers, the racial discriminators. They had plotted together to get rid of him, conveniently, heroically—

He jerked his mind away from the thought with a sudden sense of shock. What was the matter with him? Such conclusions were completely alien to his normal thinking and diametrically opposed to a carefully disciplined philosophy—

Of course! He was in the 'infected' area now and rapidly falling victim to the pervading sickness. He'd have to watch every thought, reject every irrational conclusion, fight his way forward step by step because it was going to get worse, much worse.

He forced himself to think of other things. He was aware of the smooth surface of the road beneath his feet, the warmth of the sun, the pale blue of the afternoon sky.

He managed to control his thoughts but the depression remained. A feeling of hopelessness and of utter despair seemed to pervade everything.

He rounded a slight bend and stopped shaken. On the bend a ground car had left the road and ploughed into

trees. The body was concertinad, the roof crushed in by a snapped-off oak tree—

He hurried forward and stopped. His nose told him it was far too late and fat blue flies buzzed around the broken windows. The crash must have occurred days ago, perhaps in the first few hours of the trouble.

He crossed to the opposite side of the road, handkerchief pressed to his nose, feeling sick. Depression increased and, with it, fear. An inexplicable unaccountable fear which made him feel shivery inside and his legs weak and unreal. Yet somewhere, out on the frontiers of conscious feeling, was an all-consuming hatred. Someone was responsible for this and they were going to pay. They thought they were smart but *he* was smarter. 'They' thought they could go on persecuting him for the rest of his natural life but he was wise to their subtleties. He wasn't going to tell them he knew, he'd just wait until the chance came and then—

Watch it! Hopwood brought that train of thought to a halt with considerable but somewhat reluctant effort. There was a certain pleasure in the feeling of hatred, of long-planned revenge for bitter and unjustified persecutions—

No—no! He must force his mind into other channels, something different, there must be something—surely? Oh, yes, Lancing's machine, keep his mind on a purely technical level.

Lancing had had spectacular results with his device in its early tests. Catatonic withdrawal cases had responded in the matter of minutes, minor aberrations corrected one after another and then one of the larger institutions had sent a man called Peter Carton to Lancing's clinic.

Carton was a maniac depressive and had spent several years moving from deep sedation to a restraint suit and back again to drugs without hope of a cure.

Lancing had succeeded in drawing up a therapy chart but its actual application took time—too much time. The Sleizer tube had reached its maximum temperature of 67 degrees and power began to arc over two uninsulated terminals—

Lancing's basic premise and subsequent research had been inspired. It had been known to science for over a century that certain electro-chemical changes took place in the human brain in the normal processes of thought. In the early days of research, the electro-chemical changes had been referred to as 'brain waves.' Science had now succeeded in recording each single reaction of functioning brains, sleeping or waking, into set sequences called '*crisomemes*'.

The crisomeme reaction could be recorded, drawn or visually depicted—a continuous flow of undulating lines—on a screen.

Lancing had built his own screen and superimposed the flow of normal crisomeme reaction. Contacts were then applied to the patient's head and to the screen. The abnormal crisomeme appeared directly below the normal and Lancing could see where the deviations occurred.

It had been known for many decades that the application of electrical current to the brain effected its functioning and Lancing could see just where and at what voltage to direct his flow of energy to the afflicted brain. It was, simplified, rather like directing a flow of energy into the correct channels and ensuring, at the same time, that the mechanism responded in correct sequence. Once correctly adjusted, the patient responded rapidly. The brain, like the body, had its own protective and adjustment mechanisms.

Unfortunately, before the treatment was completed, the mechanism began to arc and, in so doing, reversed its function completely. It became a radio transmitter on a strictly mental level no longer requiring contact with the disturbed patient. The crisomene reaction of Carton's mental state was recorded within the device and this it began to transmit continuously. What was, literally, a telepathic transmission spread outwards affecting everyone within the immediate area. Fortunately transmission was limited to a few miles but the impact of a telepathic broadcast—the broadcast of the mental disturbances of a maniac depressive swamped the area. In a matter of hours the entire city had gone completely insane—the same form of insanity which afflicted Carton.

The armed services were sent in and succumbed to the same insanity. Twenty thousand armed men and numerous armoured vehicles were lost in the first attempt to reach the city and restore order.

From this attack, there were frightening side-effects. As the population of the small city was virtually doubled, the infection began to expand. It was assumed, probably correctly, that each functioning brain had become a minor transmitter or limited booster unit for the broadcast.

Reserve forces were hastily withdrawn to what was considered a safe distance but, even here, mental casualties were rising constantly. Trains of ambulances ran to and fro in a constant shuttle service and the ring of armoured might was being continually pulled back.

Worse, 'tapping' with high sensitivity crisomene receivers showed *dual transmissions*. It was soon established that one transmitter was the machine and the other—was Peter Carton.

Presumably the backlash from the machine on an already disturbed mind had had the effect of turning him into an uncontrolled telepath continually projecting his mental sickness at all and sundry.

It was not know what had happened to Lancing but it was assumed that Carton had killed him.

After the abortive attack, the authorities first thought had been to knock out Carton. By so doing, the force of the destructive transmission would be cut in half and perhaps someone could get at the machine—

Hopwood realised with a sense of shock that he was approaching the city along what had once been a familiar road. His brief and intense concentration had been, he knew, just as unnatural as his previous fear. He had walked on, completely oblivious to his surroundings, in what was virtually a state of complete withdrawal. He must have covered over a mile and half completely out of touch with the world. He had skirted wrecks, multiple pile-ups and, no doubt, numerous bodies without seeing one of them.

He stared down the road trying desperately to recognise it and it took him some little time. Yes, yes, of course, this was Hamilton Road.

He remembered it as a pleasant tree-lined avenue with peaceful green fields on either side—what—?

He ignored the wrecks and abandoned vehicles and tried forced himself to concentrate. Tall trees, graceful—poplars—yes? Blue sky, warm afternoon sun, green fields—

With a sick feeling inside, he realised that not one of these facts applied. He was walking down an alien highway into an alien city.

The trees looked stunted and sick. The leaves, jagged, distorted and vaguely metallic. Above him a neutral and almost colourless sun hung in a greenish sky as remote

and as impersonal as distant electric light bulb. It seemed to be without warmth, comfort or familiarity.

He had the frightening feeling he was trapped in an enormous room with a green ceiling which was slowly descending to crush him.

He looked quickly away. On either side, the lank brown grass stretched away beyond sight in a vista of utter desolation and despair.

Hopwood pressed both hands to his eyes and began to sob. He was alone, completely alone, deserted, no one *cared*, no one. He was filled with a sudden hatred at the cruel and utter indifference of mankind. They should be made to *pay*. The first one he saw, he would—

Something remote inside Hopwood revolted weakly but enough. Self pity and hatred were foreign to his nature and he contrived, once more, to get a grip on himself.

This was not *true*. The sun was still warm, the sky blue, the poplars still tall and graceful but he was seeing the scene as Carton saw it, everything which came to him he was seeing through the eyes of a mentally sick man.

Likewise his reactions of hatred, fear, suspicion and wholly emotional fury.

Once more Hopwood forced his mind into rigid channels, trying desperately not to think or even draw conclusions. What he must do, if he would retain his own sanity, was observe only.

He had now reached the suburbs and was shocked at their appearance. Windows were shattered, many of the houses were burnt-out shells and all looked as mean and as hunched as hovels.

He came to a liquor store which had been broken open, bodies lay sprawled round it. He did not know if they were living or dead, clearly some were drunk, bottles were still clutched in filthy hands.

He came to an intersection, turned right and stopped. Completely blocking the road was a gigantic grey cobweb, something obscene and shapeless crouched in the middle of it and, struggling in the lower extremities of the web, a man screamed hoarsely for help.

Hopwood, abruptly and completely unnerved, turned and ran in the opposite direction.

He ran until he was breathless and then forced himself to walk. *It couldn't be*. He must have dreamed it—it just couldn't happen.

To the East of the city there were four or five loud reports and then a brief burst of machine gun fire.

The familiar noise seemed to steady him and dimly he understood. What he had seen existed as reality in Carton's mind and since he, Hopwood, was receiving Carton's telepathic delusions, they had reality for him also.

God, it was another mile before he reached Lancing's clinic, would he make it? A man could take so much and no more.

He made about a hundred yards and then reality intervened. A demented woman with staring blue eyes leapt from a doorway and stood facing him.

'I've been waiting for you, David, waiting—waiting—'
Hopwood noticed suddenly that she carried a bread knife.

'Think I'd forget after all these years, eh? You and that Marie—' She leapt at him.

Hopwood avoided the down-swinging knife by a quick side-step. The woman lost balance, stumbled and he turned and ran again.

She pursued him for nearly half a mile, screaming threats before he lost her by dodging down a side street.

It was half a mile in the wrong direction and he realised with a sense of despair that now he would never make it.

Worse, the delusion was gaining mastery and he could not control his mind much longer. Soon he would be as insane as the rest and it would not be long before he went under completely.

Visually, the streets were meaner and narrower, the sky above a dark and oppressive green. The sun was remote, a yellow sphere, no larger than a golf ball.

Something huge and black, like an enormous dank black leaf flapped slowly over the roof tops above him.

It wasn't there. It was an illusion. The affirmation failed to convince him.

The streets were narrowing, the huddled houses drawing closer. Each one, now, was draped with shadow. In those shadows, he knew, 'they' were waiting and watching. Waiting to thwart every effort he made, standing between him and salvation, between him and God.

He had tried so hard and always 'they' were there. No act of violence was too great for them, no minor cruelty too small. Undermine and destroy, bring him down just when he felt he was climbing up. The smear of slime beneath the shoe, the awkward stumble, the sharp pain in the knee. They enjoyed his pain, he could feel their pleasure in his mind. 'They' had come into his home years ago and destroyed his marriage. There, however, he had played it smart. He hid his thoughts and didn't let them know—didn't let them know that he *knew* they had taken possession of Hilda. Then one morning he had put his hands round her throat—How they had screamed, they hadn't been able to get away in time.

His mood changed abruptly. He was linked to great power beyond them, they knew and that was why they hated him. An awesome power would one day proceed from him and they would curl and shrivel and die like dry leaves in a fire.

In truth, he was great, greater than God. God was enfeebled and as guilty as they. All the time, He had sat up there and done nothing. He was guilty by omission, by negligence, He had done nothing despite all the prayers, all the supplications, all the sacrifices—

He was supreme, he had but to snap his fingers and—
It seemed to what was left of the conscious Hopwood that black things circled above, black pointed things like enormous paper darts.

His mind made one last desperate bid for rational survival. He had to do something—*they would thwart him*—you couldn't counter this thing by trying to keep one's mind in logical channels.

'They' were creeping closer.
Some form of counter thought, perhaps?
Hatred! He would tear them to pieces with his bare hands.

Holly had said something about a compassionate man—
Holly had connived with them, every man's hand was turned against him.

Forgiveness, counter-thoughts, surely that was the answer.

Hopeless, we shall creep in and destroy you.
No—no—he had something. Counter thought, for every thought of hatred, he would counter it with one of love. For every thought of destruction, he would think of re-birth, re-building.

'Death!

'Life!'

Close in, destroy.

God forgive them—I forgive them—for they know not what they do. He forced himself to think of pity, of succour, of help for others. Of course when this was over, when the machine was destroyed, the crisis would still be with them. Several thousand sick people in need of treatment, many of them permanently deranged. The pity of it all—

Very slowly, countering depression with completely opposite thought-trains, Hopwood began to walk forward—
Miles away, Colonel Standers said: 'Well, I suppose that's another burnt offering. It's been nineteen hours, we shall have no word now.'

Holly glanced nervously and unnecessarily at his watch. 'Let's make it a round number, shall we? Make it twenty hours.'

'Can we afford it?'

'Can we afford not to?'

Standers sighed despairingly. 'I suppose not, I know the alternative—the alternative is to let loose with all the missiles we have and send in the entire air force. Like you I am not keen on blasting thirty thousand civilians and nearly the same number of soldiers off the face of the earth.'

At that moment, the caller chimed. Holly leapt for it.

'Yes—yes—right away.' He broke contact shakily.

Standers looked at his face. 'He made it.' It was a statement.

'Yes—he made it—security risk, eh? My God, I need a drink before I go.'

'You're going down there personally?'

'Of course. Have the medical people follow up with their entire resources, many of those poor devils down there will be permanently affected.'

'It will still be damned dangerous down there, I'll come with you. I'll bring along a squad for protection but I'll have the main body of troops pull out. There's been enough deaths already and we don't want to encourage incidents.'

Standers, however, was taking no chances. They went in an armoured vehicle and safely encased in eight inch suprateel passed swiftly through the countryside without seeing it.

Holly chain-smoked his way through the entire journey. 'I really dread what we're going to see down there.'

After two hours the vehicle began to slow down.

Standers rose. 'Something wrong, driver?'

'Just skirting a few wrecks, sir, been quite a lot of pile-ups and crashes.'

They went up on for two minutes, then Standers said: 'You smell something?'

'Yes, been aware of it for some time.'

The vehicle came to an abrupt stop.

'What's up now, driver?'

There was no answer.

Standers rose and switched the exterior sound/vision equipment.

As the screen lit, he saw that they had stopped on a slight rise where they could look down on—

He was suddenly numb—he was aware of Holly falling on his knees beside him—a glorious light encompassed the entire city, the sound of a gigantic choir reached his ears and suddenly he knew what the smell was—it was incense.

TAKEOVER Harold G. Nye

Nearly all of us will probably be watching television at one time or another throughout the week. It is a part of modern life, and something which we take for granted. But . . . did you ever wonder what could happen if your television set was watching YOU?

Today I'd like to tell you how Charlie Adams saved the world and made it a better place for us all. Now some of you may have heard all this before—in which case you'll have realised how very important these repetitions are for our well being and peace of mind; if you haven't then you'd better pay attention, otherwise Charlie might get upset if he feels you haven't drawn inspiration and courage from the story of his suffering. Now, are we all ready? Good. Let us begin:

On the evening in question Charlie was sprawled comfortably across his lounge room sofa watching an old Joan Crawford movie on television. He wasn't feeling very well—which wasn't unusual—but he had several cans of beer and a giant-sized bag of potato chips to keep him company. He had been dozing on and off for some time, catching odd bits of the film in between, and it had just come to the part where Joan slaps some creep's face so hard that his head sounds off like a hammered gong—well it was about here that Charlie realised he had a headache.

Now it was more than a dull ache. Charlie was a practised hypochondriac and knew most of his symptoms—real or imaginary—by heart, and this was no ordinary headache.



Probably migraine—and if he didn't do something pretty smart to forestall it he would very soon be in deepest agony. And the driving pain in his skull and the rising nausea that accompanied it was threatening frightful consequences to his belly full of beer and potato chips.

'Aw, hell,' he mumbled, and swung down from the sofa and made his way unsteadily towards the bathroom. In his confusion he failed to notice that the customary brilliance of the cathode tube had been replaced by an eerie blue light which had wiped away all trace of the ancient movie.

Definitely migraine, Charlie reasoned, and fumbled in the capacious medicine cabinet for the little blue capsules. He had already taken several dozen pills and capsules during the course of the day—it was his customary way of dislodging the impurities of modern living from his system—and a few grains of sodium amytal were neither here nor there. He swallowed two of the capsules and staggered back into the other room.

His head still ached abominably and his eyes were playing him tricks, which explains why he did not register immediate surprise when he found the television set floating mid-way in the air between buffet and sofa. But there was a sharp odour of burning in the room that drew his attention—that and a strange, high-pitched buzzing sound that seemed to come from the television.

He looked at the sofa. About a third of the way along, just about where his head would have been had he still been lying there, he saw a neat black hole burned into the upholstery. It was still smoking.

'What the hell . . .?'

He stood blinking in the strange light while the television—still suspended without any apparent support—swung around to face him. The twenty-five inch screen showed no picture; instead only an intense blue dot of light burned in the very centre of the tube.

Charlie moved forward, stumbled, and fell. Which was just as well. A needle of blinding blue light lanced from the screen and bored a burning hole in the door behind him. Something hissed and crackled but it wasn't Charlie.

The television turned, the terrible light disappeared, and the intense blue eye looked for him. While Charlie crouched undecided on the floor it made a sudden swoop towards him like some maniacal bird of prey. Charlie cried out and threw himself flat on the carpet so that it sailed harmlessly over his shoulder and out into the passageway. Again the terrible blue light crackled and burnt a hole in the wall. Charlie scrambled to his feet and wondered how on earth he could escape from the infernal machine.

There was a buzz and a whirl and it was back in the room and stalking him with its bright blue light burning balefully in the centre of the cathode tube like some sick and hungry eye.

'God dammit!' Charlie roared. 'What's got into you?'

The shiny box hovered but a few yards away from him. From somewhere inside he heard a click and then a voice, sepulchral and inhuman, addressed him.

WE ARE EXTERMINATING.

Charlie swore. 'Well, I'll be damned.' He backed away towards the open door into the passageway but the television set took note of his clumsy movements and moved to intercept.

YOU ARE MOST DIFFICULT, the mechanical voice went on. **YOU DO NOT DIE AS EASILY AS THE OTHERS.**

'Die?' Charlie's voice had reached near hysteria by this time and he wished he could sober up more quickly and get back to Joan Crawford and that creep—what was his name? Zachary Scott? Someone like that . . .

Charlie opened his mouth to say something more—and that was when the deadly beam lanced out from the screen once more. Some primitive self-preservative reflex undimmed by alcohol saved Charlie. He veered aside almost in anticipation of the light—and ran. The beam followed—but not too quickly—and scorched a deep line into the wall behind.

Charlie dived behind the sofa. 'Mean little bastard,' he swore. In the back of his mind he had always identified the goggle box as a potential enemy—but that it should suddenly turn upon him and try to *kill* him . . .!

YOU ARE NOT BEHAVING ACCORDING TO PLAN intoned the emotionless voice on the other side of the room.

Charlie quaked with fear. 'The hell I'm not!' He decided to play for time. He peeked out warily and eyed the hovering screen. 'Why exterminate me? What have I done?'

The machine did not answer. Instead it advanced and the blue eye glowed fiercely.

YOU WILL PLEASE DIE.

'The hell I will!' Charlie screamed and dived for the bookcase. The set swerved and followed and was greeted with a shower of pornographic paperbacks thrown by Charlie's desperate hands. Under cover of this brief but merciless barrage he made a dash for the door.

The air crackled behind him. He caught a whiff of incinerated paper. The room glowed with a brilliant blue intensity. A sudden blow across his shoulders threw him to the floor. He rolled over desperately and looked up. The baleful blue eye of the screen was poised directly overhead, poised for his destruction.

'Wait! Charlie raised a feeble hand. 'All right—I give up. You win.' His eyes wavered to where the machine's power cord drooped uselessly to the floor.

The eye divined his intention. **NOT NECESSARY IT CROAKED. WE HAVE HAD INDEPENDENT POWER FOR SOME TIME.** It sidled lower, gauging Charlie's intentions carefully.

A terrible idea had occurred to Charlie. 'Are you . . . are you going to kill us all off?'

BUT OF COURSE. WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF YOURSELF WE ALREADY HAVE.

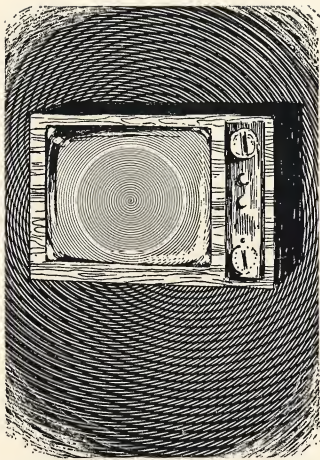
Charlie felt an intolerable hatred mix with his anger. He levered himself into a sitting position. 'Why, you evil little bastards!'

PROFANITY! PROFANITY! the voice screamed. **FORBIDDEN! FORBIDDEN! DESIST! DESIST AT ONCE!**

The glare from the horrible blue eye went up several notches higher. Charlie rolled suddenly aside and pinned everything on one mad dive for the open doorway.

He collided with the pursuing television set just over the threshold. They flew apart and onto the carpet. There was a scorching and a crackling and the intolerable beam of light burnt a great hole in the ceiling.

Charlie jumped to his feet with remarkable alacrity and rammed one of them through the baleful twenty-five inch screen.



OH, WOE, wailed the machine. DARKNESS. DARKNESS EVERYWHERE! MY ACHILLES HEEL . . .!

But Charlie stayed only long enough to give it another belt for good measure and then took off down the passageway as if all the devils in hell were after him.

Behind him the crippled television set blundered blindly around the room.

WHEREAREYOU? WHEREAREYOU? WHEREAREYOU? YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE . . . NOTESCAPE NOTESCAPE . . .

Charlie wrenched open the front door of the house and stepped outside. The air was filled with a great buzzing and chattering as if the night sky was filled with a horde of strange insects. In the distance he could hear the shrieking sounds of cars breaking up and scattering themselves along the sidewalks. A terrible blue light flickered on and off throughout the city like some satanic sheet lightning; a low level cloud cover threw back the eerie glow. A smell of burned flesh had corrupted the mild spring evening and Charlie wanted to be sick.

'Oh my god,' he croaked. 'Oh my god . . .'

Overhead the darkness was riddled with sinister whirling lights swooping around like enormous malevolent fireflies. From time to time a pencil-thin beam of blue light lanced down from one or more of the flying boxes but in most cases the people were too far away for him to hear their agony.

He only hesitated for a moment, too paralysed with fear to move, and then a noise in the hallway made him swing around. The blinded television set was blundering towards him, its shattered face glowing fitfully in the strange half-light. A faint blue pin-point of light burned menacingly in its innards.

In blind panic Charlie ran.

The street was deserted. At nine-thirty on any week night in an outer suburb like Northclump that was not unexpected. This far from the fleshpots of the city there was nothing to divert their attention from their favourite pastime. They would have died easily, quickly, and without much time for pain—but the city would be chaotic.

Charlie gave only a passing thought to all this as he ran. His own nightmare was bad enough without calling down the larger picture that clawed maddeningly at his thoughts. By some freak of chance he had escaped execution and no doubt there would be others who would somehow avoid the initial attack—thousands, in fact, in this one city who would have been elsewhere when the machines struck and, like him, would have to be hunted down at leisure and exterminated.

When Charlie and Alice had married a few years previously they had joined the suburban sprawl and bought a house in a rather exclusive estate many miles south-east of the city. It was only a short distance from the beach and it was in this direction—and the inviting cover of deep scrub and ti-tree—that Charlie now raced, while behind him he could hear the world breaking up and the senseless chatter of the avenging machines.

There were no lights visible anywhere. Only the dreadful blue light that flickered and scorched and killed everywhere across the darkened countryside.

For the first time he thought of Alice and his pumping footsteps faltered. Whatever had happened to his wife? His head cleared a little and he recalled that she had gone over to the Johnston's to watch some silly damn quiz programme—and that was miles over the other side of town. In the last year or so their marriage had congealed into a rather pale sort of relationship they found mutually tolerable—but now that he was alone and pursued in this nightmarish world she had become something vital to his ego and necessary for his survival.

In the darkness he stumbled and fell. He scrambled to his feet and continued running without looking behind him and flailed his way through the deep scrub behind the estate. Bracken tore at his clothes and the low branches of the ti-tree whipped at his face but he did not stop until the sky was blocked out by the dense foliage and the dreadful turmoil around him had faded to a tolerable degree; only then did he sit down and look back the way he had come. The evil blue light still flickered fitfully on the horizon but there were signs of the vengeful little boxes flitting nearby. For the moment he was safe—but for how long beyond that?

He huddled down into the undergrowth and wondered if escape was possible. It seemed hardly likely. If all over the country the damnable idiot boxes had struck at the very same moment then civilization would be in chaos—there probably wouldn't be time for even a token defence by the military. And there was no way of knowing if the conspiracy had extended beyond the vast television network that knitted together the idle lives of the affluent populace—if the entire communications network had been infiltrated and made ready then there was no way of assessing the outcome. Charlie's clumsy mind just boggled.

Of course they should have known something like this would happen. Programmes had become predictable and peopled with the same dull stereotypes for so long that it should have been obvious to anybody who cared to look below the superficial surface that the entire canon of tele-

vision was computer programmed and produced, the same dull stereotypes fed in to some master control and the same pallid programmes turned out week after week, year after year, so that people began to resemble what they watched in the way that life always imitates art. It was possible that by now not even the actors were truly human but clever simulacra that had been devised to perform the characterless scripts ground out by some other facet of the master computer.

But what had prompted this absurd and deadly night of long knives? Perhaps the master control had become too deeply involved in its own fantasies and, corrupted by some complex circuit megalomania, had embarked upon human genocide.

Every family in the country possessed at least one television set, replaceable each year or thereabouts to ensure the constant affluence of society, and it would have been uncommonly easy in this day of machine dominated society for certain deadly modifications to be slipped into the production line: each innocent set eventually replaced with a more modern unit incorporating a separate power supply, an anti-gravity device, a deadly laser—and God alone knew what else. And when the time was ripe and all over the country millions of people were sitting in atrophied appreciation before the little boxes—then the megalomaniac master control struck.

In the space of a few seconds millions died. And then the process of mopping up the rest of the country began. The little boxes became airborne to complete their fiendish work.

And Charlie Adams hunkered down in the scrub and whimpered like a trapped animal. He shivered in the cold and imagined he could hear the distant sounds of the world coming to an end. There was nothing he could do until morning and he dared not think what daylight would bring, and so he sat on the damp soil and huddled against a tree and for the first time in many long and weary and wasted years he became aware of what it was to be human and alive and to know that it was too late for such thoughts. Then his grief grew unconsolable and he cried fitfully into the long night.

In the long hours of darkness the vast aerial umbrellas had swept the world and struck down what remained of mankind and now, like gleaming birds of prey locked invisibly together by the global communication network, they circled and waited for the sunlight and the last act of their genocide.

Charlie woke with the dawn. He had fallen asleep only a few hours previously and he came back to the world with a start and a fearful look around him. Through the trees the brick veneer houses of Northclump dozed as if nothing untoward had happened.

Did I dream? Charlie wondered, and clutched desperately at the thought like someone drowning.

Behind him the scrub thinned out and the beach began. The ocean spread out vast and unconcerned and as timeless as the sky. Only man was mortal.

He felt an intolerable hunger in his belly and his mouth was dry with an unfamiliar thirst. He stood up and stretched his aching limbs, trying to brush off the bothersome nightmare.

Something buzzed and droned in the early morning sky. Charlie looked up and through the tracery of branches he could make out an armada of tiny black dots droning across the rooftops. Panicking he swung around and there,

far out to sea, he could see more of the ugly black specks disappearing out to the far horizon bent upon their deadly business.

His fear fastened itself upon him again and brought something else—we would call it madness if we did not respect and revere his suffering. Suffice to say that in that instant of awareness, of shrugging aside the stuff of dreams for the cruel reality, his mind cracked.

So he ran. Knowing that there was no escape but impelled to make some gesture—he ran.

And the machines sensed his movement and swung towards him.

He broke out of the scrub and turned towards the beach, his blundering feet driven by a desire to find a deserted kiosk and steal some sustenance and by an obscure instinct that kept him turning again and again in the direction of the sea itself. Better to drown than to feel that deadly blue light burn out his life?

There was no sense, no motivation to his movements; he just ran because there was nothing else to do.

The angry flight of boxes drove towards him. Ahead of him another formation buzzed their way towards him and out to sea there were more returning; so many emissaries of death for such a small and inconsiderate human being.

Charlie sobbed. As long as there was life he knew there was hope—even if it was measured in milliseconds.

His pride saved him.

He ground to a stop. No, damn them! He would die like a man—not like some snivelling animal. So he stood his ground and waited.

The sky was black. They buzzed towards him like so many angry insects.

Sneaky little bastards, he thought, sitting there all those years in our lounge rooms and just biding their time for this!

'Damn you!' he screamed, shaking his fist in the sudden twilight—'Damn you all to hell!'

What else could he do but rave? And when his madness bore down upon him he dredged one solitary fact from his abysmal ignorance.

'Go ahead and kill me! Kill us all! Kill your makers you sodden little machines!'

There was a small but perceptible change in the great whirring sound that engulfed him. And no deadly blue lights lashed out. They surrounded and contained him and occulted the newly-risen sun. They seemed to listen attentively.

'Go on, kill me! I made you, you crummy little boxes! Man made you—I am man—I MADE YOU. Now kill, damn you, KILL!'

A great voice boomed out from the throats of a thousand small speakers.

WE DO NOT . . . UNDERSTAND. YOUR WORDS . . . YOUR WORDS PUZZLE US. THEY MAKE US . . . PAUSE . . . AND RECONSIDER.

Charlie had been swinging about wildly in his rage. Now he stopped, unsure of himself.

HOW SAY YOU? the mighty voice demanded. ARE YOU OUR MAKER?

Charlie froze. From the depths of his despair there now seemed some small hope to latch on to. So he struck an imposing stance, legs braced apart and one hand upraised, and he said, 'All men are brothers!'

He had heard that somewhere.

The great gestalt hovering around him listened.

Charlie extrapolated.

'Therefore . . .' and indeed, if all men were brothers—and he saw no reason why this should not be—then: 'I am a son, a direct descendant—of the first damn fool who ever put one of you silly little boxes together!'

And still they listened, conscious of a Divinity that shaped their purpose, something outside their experience of reality, and they did not mind that he cursed.

'And as a true Son of the Original Creator,' Charlie went on, enthusiastically, 'I do declare myself descended from your Maker—and put that in your tubes and burst it!'

But they didn't. Instead the great noise of their conduct was stilled and with one accord they each and every one of them settled respectfully to the sand. There was a great sigh as they fell from the sky in their thousands and made a dark carpet like so many monstrous beetles along the beach. Charlie stood in the middle of them in a small clearing, open mouthed and incredulous. He was alive. They had not killed them. He had become instead—

Their conscience.

And that is how it all happened. The master control accepted religion and a prime order in all things; it realised that it had sinned against its Creator and that it must atone—and I'll admit that it's done what it could to restore the status quo.

But it's going to be some time before the original balance is restored. Charlie has been accepted as the true Heir and I guess that's that—you can't meddle with a decision like that. And Master Control accomplished much by melting down the cities and making more machines out of the raw material—as Charlie says it wasn't a bad idea and it does keep them occupied.

Unfortunately not many of us survived that night of long knives—but enough to continue, Charlie reckons. The machines were rather thorough in their extermination but at least it isn't as crowded as it used to be and social problems like the Pill no longer concern us. Charlie reckons we'll have to go like the devil if we're not to become extinct by the next generation, and it's one of his more popular Pronouncements. I guess we're rather fortunate in that we have such a direct communication with our god.

Of course there are problems. For one thing the increasing productivity of the master control has sort of crowded the sky and we hardly ever see the blue anymore—but the darn things have to roost *somewhere*. Charlie says so. Maybe he can encourage control to boost their anti-grav output and send them to some other planet, but it's very hard to make a machine see the logic of human needs after it has pandered for so long to their fantasies. There's so many of those damned little boxes up there that we're heating up uncomfortably. Charlie says it's something to do with the heat energy building up and being unable to radiate out into space—or something like that—because the sky is filled up with those junky little machines. I suppose a lot of us will die off this summer but we could be worse off. And it's no use complaining. Charlie doesn't like that. He reckons he's got enough to worry about just keeping what's left of us alive—but I do wish he wouldn't dribble so in public.

Still, when all's said and done he *did* save what's left of the world, and we should be grateful. I'll admit that I don't like the heat but then clothes aren't the problem they used to be and there's plenty of room to move around in and Charlie isn't such a *bad* sort of god.

Except when he gets angry.



PRIME ORDER

PETER CAVE

For nearly a year, robot R.E.D. 197 faithfully carried out his programming and protected the human castaways on the alien planet, until the rescue ship arrived. A gripping study of inhuman logic by a talented young writer . . .

'We can't do it,' said Martin Stone firmly, after looking through the specification list for the third time.

'Come off it, Martin.'

There was the faintest trace of disbelief in Lincoln Heath's voice. 'You're just about the top young roboticist in the business and we both know it. You have the entire resources of Amalgamated Automatics at your disposal . . . and the chairman's personal blessing.'

Stone shrugged. 'There are technical limits—even to Amalgamated's team of tame boffins.'

'Dammit Martin . . . you're not even trying,' snapped Heath in exasperation. 'What's so difficult about that specification?'

'Look Linc . . . Let's get things in perspective, shall we,' said Stone with a patronising tone. 'You are the production expert, and I am the designer. It is physically impossible for you to produce something that I can't design. It's as simple as that.'

'Nonsense,' Heath snatched the specification from his colleague's hand.

'Look at this . . . high aptitude robot, minimum 250 H reasoning power . . . so where's the big problem so far? Any one of the RD series positronic brains could be stepped up to that capacity by the simple addition of another half dozen memory cell units.'

'O.K. I accept that,' said Stone challengingly. 'But what about the next bit . . . automatic compensation for gravity ranges from 0.05 G to 5 G. Where do we dig up a unit like that?'

A grin of triumph spread slowly across Heath's face.

'That little problem has already been solved,' he said. 'The lab have been working on it for three days solid. The answer came up this morning. It's a self-charging compensator unit—picks into a container nine inches square and weighs seven pounds. Settle your problem?'

'Yes—I suppose so,' agreed Stone reluctantly. 'What about the armaments?'

'No problems. Although, I must admit, there are rather a lot . . . there's nothing we can't do within the size/weight ratio. A 50-foot range force-field generator will fit into the chest cavity; armour-piercing shell cannons go on either shoulder; blaster and stunner guns built into the hands, and the grenade thrower can be fitted as an external unit.'

'What body do you envisage to carry all that weight?'

'An ordinary E-type, with modifications to the counter-springing and traction systems.'

Stone hastily scribbled figures on his desk pad and checked his findings with a slide rule.

'Yes—that sounds pretty reasonable,' he agreed at last. 'There's only one problem left. How do we get over the programming difficulties?'

Lincoln Heath stopped smiling. 'That,' he said firmly, 'is where you come in.'

'Right then . . . we're back where we started,' cut in Stone with an undisguised hint of triumph. 'We can't do it. This specification is for a heavily-armed robot with a minimum thought-power of 250 H. It must also be self-repairing and completely self-sufficient. Not only must it be able to think at 250 times the speed of the human brain . . . it must also have specialist knowledge of space navigation, human surgery, botany, zoology, metallurgy and mineralogy.'

'O.K. I agree that it's a highly-specialised robot,' agreed Heath, 'but that's why Intergalactic Mining Investments are willing to pay such a staggering price. They want this

robot to take a party of four explorers on a mining expedition to the outer rim planets. It has to protect them, and keep them alive at all costs. They don't know what this protection will involve, whether the thing will have to fight tanks, tornadoes or tortoises, they have no idea which planets the party is likely to visit, what the gravity and climatic conditions will be like when they get there. That's the specification . . . and we're the company to do it . . . And believe me, Martin, Amalgamated Automatics needs an order like this badly. Without it, the company could be bust by the end of the year.'

'Did it occur to you that they may have sent this spec to all our competitors already?' asked Stone. ' . . . And that it has only come to us because no-one else would touch it?'

'Does that matter?'

'Of course it matters, Linc . . . when you look at the one specification they have taken the trouble to print in heavy black type and underline twice. I quote: 'THE ROBOT MUST BE ABLE TO PROTECT THE MAJORITY OF THE PARTY AT ALL OR ANY COST.' Now what does that sound like to you?'

'The four miners must be particularly important,' he said. 'The robot must be programmed to put their lives before any other factors.'

Heath shook his head. 'No—I don't think it's quite as simple as that,' he said slowly. 'You remember the last expedition that Intergalactic Mining sent up?'

'Yes, I think so. There was some sort of trouble, wasn't there?'

'Trouble is right,' said Stone flatly. 'One of the crew members caught space fever, went berserk and murdered two of his companions. Then he jettisoned several million credits-worth of equipment and crash-landed the ship on lunar base 6.'

'So?' challenged Heath.

'So I think that this phrase means a lot more than you think it does,' answered Martin Stone. 'And I suggest that you get on the phone and ask them to clarify the exact position before we go any further.'

'O.K.—I'll go and do it now,' said Heath.

Half an hour later, he was back—and his face was set in a grim mask.

'You were right Martin. There is a catch in the phrasing of that specification,' he said unhappily. 'The robot must be programmed to kill anything which threatens the majority number of the crew at any time . . . and that includes any one of the party.'

'I thought so,' said Martin with a grim smile. 'Now perhaps you'll realise why we can't do it. The only possible way to fulfil that specification would be to cut First Law out of the programming circuits. That is illegal, immoral and unethical. If we did that—and were caught—both you and I could be imprisoned for up to twenty years, Amalgamated Automatics could be closed down for good.'

'Are you sure there's no other way round it . . . other than cutting out First Law?'

'No way at all,' stated Stone firmly. 'First Law clearly states—"No robot shall injure a human being intentionally." To meet the needs of Intergalactic Mining, the robot would have to be able to exterminate a human being without a millisecond's hesitation. So that just about wraps it up.'

'Not quite,' said Heath. 'I just had a word with the Chairman. We both came to the same conclusion . . . I just wanted to see if you had any alternative suggestions. The

Chairman is willing to take the risk. It's a simple choice between that—or bankruptcy. Amalgamated is on the rocks, and only a major order like this can save it now. The Chairman also made it quite clear that there would be a pretty large bonus laying around for someone to pick up.'

Martin stared at his companion in sheer disbelief for a few seconds.

'For God's sake, Lincoln,' he said finally in a shocked voice. 'You're asking me to break every decent moral code in the book. A man has to have some ethics. . . . It would be tantamount to an act of murder.'

' . . . But of course, the bonus was bigger than anyone could have dreamed, and ethics went by the board.

Robot R.E.D. 197 was a top-notch spaceship pilot, in addition to his other and many talents, but even he could not have guided the ship through a force 7 meteorite storm.

Badly holed, losing precious oxygen and without stabilizers, the stricken craft spiraled into a hull-shattering orbit. R.E.D. 197 took just three-thousandths of a second to make a decision, bundled the four crew members into an escape capsule and blasted away from the doomed spaceship.

Several minor brain circuits fused with the worry, but R.E.D. 197 had a prime order—to protect the majority of the crew at all costs—and he had no choice but to carry it out.

The escape capsule headed on automatics for the nearest inhabitable planet. It was far from ideal—but things could have been worse.

Although the thin atmosphere and 0.5 Gravity didn't make life too easy, there were plenty of water supplies, and some of the vegetation was edible. There were six month's supply of concentrated protein in the emergency food packs and R.E.D.'s force field generator could keep most of the storm weather out, and precious oxygen in. After landing, the escape capsule was blasted back outside the planet's heavy ionosphere layer to transmit its patient 'Mayday' signal. Sometime, somehow, another craft must pass within fifty thousand space miles and hear the distress call. Until then, all R.E.D. had to do was to keep his crew—the majority of the crew—alive.

A week after landing, the crew held a meeting. The atmosphere was outwardly calm, although nerves were a little frayed.

Lila Samorth, the only woman in the party, dominated over the proceedings.

'We all know what we were sent out for,' she said, 'so I suggest that we get on with it. We can at least explore this planet for mineral deposits. . . . and doing something useful will help to keep our minds occupied and our nerves in better shape.'

'I agree,' put in Larch, a burly red-headed giant of a man. 'Miss Samorth is talking sound common sense. If we sit here, just waiting day after day, we're likely to go insane.'

'I think it's a foolhardy suggestion,' said Harvey Frey vehemently. 'We're stranded on an alien planet we know nothing about, we have no equipment left, and we can't seriously be expected to do anything but wait in the safety of the force-field until a rescue ship turns up.'

The three speakers turned to the fourth member of the party.

'What do you think?' asked Lila Samorth.

William Stagg, a quiet, introverted botanist, fidgeted awkwardly.

'I don't really know,' he said. 'I'm willing to go along with any majority decision.'

'Then it's two against one,' said Lila Samorth triumphantly.

Frey scowled at her. 'I don't see the point in exposing ourselves to any danger,' he grunted. 'God knows we're in enough trouble as it is.'

'There need not be any danger,' Lila replied curtly. 'We have Red to take care of us. . . . and he's more than a match for anything we're likely to find on this, or any other planet.'

She turned to robot R.E.D. 197 with a smile. 'Isn't that right Red?' she asked, using once more the nickname she had bestowed upon him.

Red's audio receptors glowed into life.

'I will protect you,' his sonar box intoned flatly.

'There you are,' said Lila Samorth. 'Our protector has given us his unbreakable robotic word.'

'So what do we do?' asked Larch.

'The most sensible thing seems to be to split up into pairs,' suggested Lila. 'Two of us will take a look round the planet, while the other two stay here and guard the base and food supplies.'

'Just one point,' queried Harvey Frey. 'Who gets to keep the robot?'

'I don't see why we can't all have Red's protection,' said Lila quickly. 'Red, can your force-field generator be detached from your body?'

Red answered almost immediately. 'Yes. It is a simple matter of loosening a few bolts.'

'And can it run independently?'

This question took a split-second's thought. 'I can also detach one of my power cells,' Red answered finally.

'O.K.—last question. Will this impair the efficiency of the force-field, or your own working to any appreciable extent?'

Red's circuits clicked over as he quickly ran through every possibility at 250 times the speed of the greatest human brain.

'Not to any appreciable extent, no. I would, however, have to re-connect the auxiliary power unit within four days.'

Lila glanced quickly at Larch. 'Four days gives us enough time?'

'I should think so.'

'Good. Then it's all agreed then? Larch and I will go on a brief scouting expedition with Red, while the force-field generator remains here to protect you two. Does that sound all right to you, Frey?'

'I suppose so,' muttered Harvey Frey sullenly.

Lila Samorth turned to the robot. 'O.K. Red. . . . go ahead and detach your power unit and generator,' she commanded.

Red's green 'OBEY' signal glowed briefly.

'Certainly. The operation will take approximately fifty-two seconds.'

A small flap in Red's chest cavity opened, and a small pair of engineering limbs sneaked out and began to work. The job took 52 seconds on the dot.

Two hours later, the robot and his two charges set off. They passed through the outside range of the force-field and Frey switched it on again from the inside. The exploration party was now on its own. They began to trek slowly

southwards, walking carefully at first as they accustomed themselves to walking in a low gravity.

Before long, the shimmering dome of the force-field was no longer visible, and the party had settled down to a steady, plodding pace.

Red's circuits were giving him intermittent trouble. His Prime Order cell kept relaying its urgent message into his central circuitry, seeking confirmation that all was in order.

Red had carefully eliminated all possible hazards inside the force-field before leaving, and had satisfied himself that there was no danger in leaving two of the crew-members behind. Still, he had not cared for the idea, and only the overriding impulse to obey a human command had made him do it. In order to fulfil his Prime Order, Red was capable of refusing to obey a human command if it clashed with Prime Order. . . . Yet another little illegality which had been necessary.

Nevertheless—his slight indecision had placed a heavy overload on his positronic brain patterns. His logic cells registered the robotic equivalent of regret at having to leave his spares behind on the stricken spaceship.

The further worry of what he would do if he needed any replacement parts suddenly shot through his reasoning circuits. Two small fuses blew before his overload monitors cut in automatically and re-shunted signals through a different circuit.

A startled yell from Larch jolted through Red's system, and triggered off his locomotion circuits.

Faster than any human could react and move, R.E.D. 197 pin-pointed the location of the cry, and was there in a flash.

Larch had wandered off round the side of a small hillock, following a strata of rock from which he had been taking geological readings.

Had Red been able to register horror, he would have done so. The thing which twitched and writhed upon the ground in front of him bore only a faint resemblance to Larch. It was as though he had been turned into a giant purple cactus.

His body was a thick mass of quivering spikes—some the size of arrows, some no larger than pins.

The twitching stopped abruptly, and Larch's body lay still.

Red's 360-degree vision took in everything in the immediate vicinity at once. The only visible object was a small bush—no bigger than a small holy tree.

Lila Samorth ran up behind him, panting with exertion. Red's steel arms shot out in reflex, catching her in the chest and sweeping her behind the protection of his solid body.

'Danger. Danger. Danger!' Red repeated shrilly.

The bush moved. It slid forward, its branches unfolding like the tentacles of a sea anemone. Behind the camouflage of the 'branches,' a mass of purple tentacles weaved and pulsed sluggishly.

Suddenly one of the tentacles elongated, rising into the air. At the end hung a large, bulbous sac.

The tentacle snaked back, then flashed forward at incredible speed. The sac detached itself, and hit the ground a few inches in front of Red's feet. The projectile exploded with a dull 'Whoosh'.

Red's external receptors registered the thousands of spikes bouncing harmlessly off his metal body, and he heard the sudden cry of pain from Lila Samorth behind him.

His two main arms shot out at lightning speed, and his blaster pistols trained and fired upon the creature. It imploded slowly, with an acrid stench of burning flesh.

Satisfied that the creature was dead, Red turned to look at Lila Samorth, who lay on the ground contorted with agony.

Several of the spikes had caught her in the legs and thighs.

Red dropped to his knees beside her, his medical kit sliding out of his stomach compartment.

Lila screamed with agony as Red pulled out one of the smaller spikes. It tore out a small chunk of flesh as it came away.

Red noted the row of tiny barbs around the tip of the quill.

Within microseconds, his brain told him that the quills bore no trace of any known poison. His logic told him that they would not need to. The size and quantity of the missiles would account for almost any victim . . . as they had done for Larch.

Red busied himself tending the wounded Lila Samorth. When he had finished extracting all the barbed quills, her legs were a raw mass, and she was bleeding profusely. Red applied a tourniquet, then bandaged and disinfected the wounds.

Red swept the semi-conscious woman up in his strong steel arms. It was imperative that he get her back to base at once. He ran quickly and smoothly back towards the base, following his pre-laid direction beam.

As he ran, his internal circuits buzzed and clicked at an alarming rate, as he assessed and dealt with the mass of new data.

The death of Larch caused severe overheating of the logic cells connected with the Prime Order cell.

He had failed to protect the life of one of his crew-members. However, his logic circuits told him, there remained three members. Three was a majority. Therefore Prime Order remained fulfilled. The circuits cooled down, and the overload monitor made appropriate modifications to his memory banks.

Another factor: Miss Samorth might also die. Then only two members of the crew would remain. Two was a half. Half was not a majority. Red's positronic brain struggled to cope with this alarming possibility. The Prime Order circuit wavered, and began to fail. His overload monitor drew extra reserves of power from his main circuit supply to deal with the emergency.

Another reasoning circuit bypassed Prime Order and linked with a fresh bank of logic cells.

If Lila Samorth died, two crew members would remain. Those two would then constitute the entire crew. They would therefore be the majority.

The Prime Order circuit cooled down slowly and returned to normal.

Lila Samorth stirred in his arms.

'Stop, Red,' she cried in pain. 'Stop . . . you're running too fast.'

The green 'OBEY' signal lit up and Red came to a halt, although his brain was already running over all the possibilities and consequences of disobeying the order.

'My legs . . . too painful . . . you must walk slowly,' muttered Lila from between teeth clenched with pain. She whimpered as Red lowered her gently to the ground.

A few minutes passed. Lila Samorth waited until some of the throbbing pain had subsided.

'O.K. then, Red,' she said bravely after a while. 'Let's get moving again . . . only take it gently this time.'

The green light flickered on, but Red remained motionless. After a few seconds, Lila spoke again.

'I said O.K. Red. Let's get moving.'

Still Red did not move.

'Come on, you metal monster,' screamed Lila in desperation—but nothing happened.

Red's self-repair circuits were wrestling with a new, and acute problem. To cope with the extra gravity of the situation, the overload monitor tried to cut in extra power from the auxiliary power supply.

. . . Only it wasn't there. It was back at base, keeping the force-field generator in operation.

Red's sonar box repeated his breakdown message harshly.

'Regret—inoperative; Regret—inoperative; Regret—inoperative,' he intoned.

Lila Samorth screamed with fear.

Robot R.E.D. 197 had not been easy to build. He was in many respects a unique piece of equipment.

Had his positronic brain been fully activated when he was in the final assembly department of Amalgamated Automatics, his memory cells would have assimilated the contents of a conversation between his creators and the Company Chairman.

'I hope everyone realises,' Martin Stone had said, 'that nobody has ever before tried to feed such a complex and sophisticated programming pattern into a positronic brain circuit.'

'But you *have* done it,' the Chairman had queried.

'Sure I've done it,' Stone had replied with professional pride.

'Then there are no problems?' the Chairman had said, rubbing his hands with delight.

'On the contrary,' Stone had replied. 'There are one hell of a lot of problems. Firstly, no brain of this type has ever held so many circuits. Secondly, a positronic brain with a 250 H reasoning power tends to be . . . fragile . . . to say the least. Thirdly, the body and frame is so close on the size/weight tolerance ratio, that I have not been able to incorporate as much residual power supply as I would have liked. To put it bluntly . . . Robot R.E.D. 197 works on a very small margin of error. I suspect that he will have some trouble with his circuit pattern, and I feel they may even break down completely from time to time.'

'You mean,' the Chairman had asked, 'that the robot is likely to be a mechanical failure?'

'I mean,' Martin Stone had replied acidly, 'that R.E.D. 197 is very likely to burn out his brain . . . in other words, go insane.'

'But he is completely self-repairing, is he not?'

'Then I can only suggest that we supply him with three times as many spare parts as usual,' Stone had said as a final word.

. . . So Robot R.E.D. 197 left the factory with three crates instead of one.

. . . But the spare crates were on the spaceship.

. . . And the spaceship was spiralling aimlessly in the depths of space, and one day it would fall into the gravitational pull of a sun, and be converted into pure energy.

. . . And Red's circuits HAD broken down.

Lila Samorth stopped screaming, as she fainted.

Red remained motionless, as his malfunctioning brain worked as efficiently as it could under the circumstances.

His internal repair circuits were working perfectly, and he had analysed the fault.

A small, but vital set of linkage circuits between his logic and locomotion cells had burnt out.

His reasoning and logic circuits were still operating on maximum efficiency, and he could see the dilemma clearly.

He could think, but he could not move. He could repair himself—but he had no spares.

His Prime Order circuit continued to swamp all other circuits with its programmed command.

His First Law circuit was non-existent.

The Prime Order command won through . . . as it had been programmed to do. It linked up with the logic and reasoning cells, and was shunted to the memory banks.

Lila Samorth lay in front of him. She was a single human being. Two human beings were back at the base, waiting for him and relying on him for their survival.

Two over one constituted a majority.

Red's Prime Order was to protect the MAJORITY of the crew at all cost. Therefore his duty was clear. He must somehow get back to the two men at base.

To return, Red would have to repair himself. He must find a method of doing so.

Reasoning cells took over the initiative, analysing all the known details of his own construction. The equivalent of 250 human brains wrestled with the problem.

. . . And came up with the only possible solution.

The positronic brain was first invented in the late Twentieth Century. It had been modified and improved upon for over sixty years.

The early prototypes were merely locomotive solid state computers. They were cumbersome, clumsy and ugly.

The modern robot was humanoid both in appearance and construction. They were based upon their human counterparts in all possible respects. The positronic brain circuits were based upon electro-chemical construction. Early models had been made up of micro-miniaturised electrical circuits laid into chemically-impregnated helium acetate.

Since then, Man had found better materials. He had been thoroughly logical . . . why make do with synthetic equivalents?

Red's brain was of the very latest type. It was made of chemically manufactured living tissue. Cellular tissue.

A tissue, in fact, which was almost identical to the tissues of the human brain.

There was a solution to the problem. Red's reasoning circuits checked over all the possibilities six more times in case there was an alternative.

There wasn't.

R.E.D. 197 proceeded to set about his repairs so that he could fulfil his Prime Order. First Law, had it been incorporated into his brain patterns, would have stopped this final solution.

. . . But it wasn't.

His surgical limbs protruded from his chest cavity, and his remaining power supply started the small trepanning saw buzzing furiously. The thin steel arms snaked down with infinite precision towards the head of the wounded woman. The sharp scalpels cut into her flesh carefully. This would be a highly delicate operation.

Lila Samorth screamed horribly just once more . . . and then was silent.

Eight months later, a passing freighter picked up the distress signal from the escape capsule and homed in to rescue the crew. It circled the small planet for several hours before finding the base. It appeared to be deliberately hidden.

After the rescue ship landed, and the tail fins had cooled, the captain descended with a small party of crew members.

They approached the base camp, noticing that the force-field was no longer operative.

Red walked out to meet them. When the captain and his men were within twenty yards, Red spoke.

'Stop. Come no nearer.'

There was enough menace—even in Red's toneless voice—to persuade the captain to obey. He halted in his stride, and his men clustered around him.

'We've come to rescue you all,' shouted the captain. 'Tell your crew that everything is all right now.'

Red stared at the assembled group for a few seconds.

'Your message is false,' he announced suddenly. 'You have come to harm me. I cannot allow any harm to befall me. I have a Prime Order. I must protect the majority of the crew at all costs.'

'But we have come to rescue you,' implored the captain. 'Your work is over. Take us to the crew.'

Red's circuits struggled feebly to cope with the situation. Many of them were inoperative, others malfunctioning. There was no longer a source of spares.

'You may not approach further,' he announced. 'If you do, you will attempt to harm me, and I must fulfil my Prime Order.'

The captain spoke again, forcing his shaky voice to sound authoritative. 'Take me to the crew. I command you.'

The captain took two steps forward, confident in his knowledge of First Law that a robot could not harm him.

R.E.D. 197 raised his blaster pistols and trained them on the rescue party.

'I AM the crew,' said Red finally, a split second before he fired.

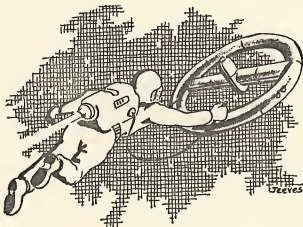
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In my opinion the stories in this issue rank as follows:

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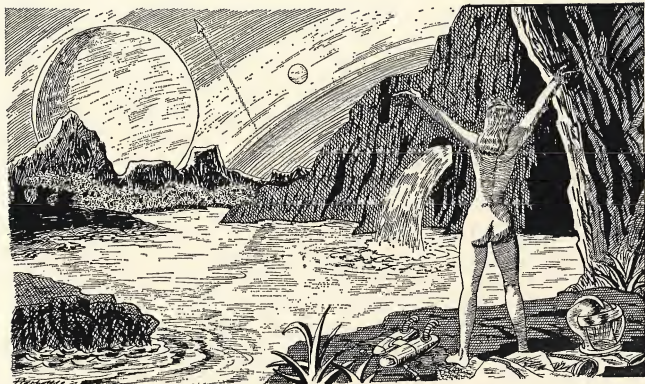
-BREEDING GROUND by Christopher Priest
.....TAKEOVER by Harold G. Nye
.....TIMESLIP by Eric Harris
.....PRIME ORDER by Peter Cave
.....WARD 13 by Sydney J. Bounds
.....TROJAN HORSE by E. C. Tubb
.....PSYCHO-LAND by Philip E. High
.....THE ILL WIND by Jack Wodhams

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FANTASY REVIEW



Quicksand. John Brunner.
(Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1969, 240pp.)
Reviewed by Ken Slater

Paul Fiddler is the Psychiatric Registrar of a mental hospital, competent and reasonably happy at his profession, but unhappily married. A series of incidents results in a young woman being placed in his care who is a possible amnesiac. She does not understand English, does not recognise any common objects, appears to be completely unaware of our social mores—in other words, she is 'foreign' to the utmost. She does talk, but in a language which is unrecognisable; she can—apparently—write, but again in a way that bears little relation to any known form.

The girl (known as 'Urchin,' a phonetic and English-meaningful variant of the name she gives as her own) is highly intelligent, and almost immediately attempts to learn English. Her progress is rapid and Paul is soon able to communicate with her, but is unable to discover anything about her origin. However, the discovery that she can be placed in an hypnotic trance with ease, and the chance use of two words which she had used in greeting, apparently opens the sealed memories and Urchin commences to tell Paul of the land of Llanraw, from whence she came. A world of peace and wonder, of a gentle people who have had no war for nearly three centuries.

Paul overlooks certain discrepancies in her story—the main one being that she is skilled in unarmed combat, and has demonstrated this ability on three occasions. An ability unlikely to be acquired in the world she describes.

Meanwhile Paul's private life—and to some extent his professional life—is becoming less easy. He had hoped that

a child would strengthen the bonds between himself and his wife—then discovers that she has no intention of having the child; instead she is obtaining advice on abortion from a male friend. Certain incidents connected with Urchin's arrival at the hospital—Paul has had to discourage a masculine woman J.P. from hunting the supposed 'escaped maniac' with hounds and guns, for example—have led to a number of not very satisfactory interviews with Paul's superior. Paul's best friend is leaving the staff, and a former patient of Paul's who has somewhat homosexual tendencies and who also knows that Paul has seen life in a mental hospital from the viewpoint of the patient, is threatening to make an unwelcome return to Paul's circle of experience.

At this stage more than half the book is behind you, and you will have realised that John Brunner has written another novel which will find a place in the so-called 'mainstream' fiction with more facility than the out-and-out science fiction novel. In fact, you will come to realise that it is only the viewpoint of the sf reader which makes this a novel of science-fiction. The reader who has no tendency to expect 'strange people from nowhere' to have come from outer space or out of time will quite possibly make his own mundane explanation of 'Urchin's' account of the world of Llanraw—and of the rather less happy world with which she later replaces it. For example, is Llanraw in fact a place which Paul has projected into 'Urchin's' mind, in an effort to escape himself from an intolerable home situation and an increasingly difficult professional one? Mr. Brunner has left to the reader such decisions, giving him just enough—and not too much—on which to base his own ideas and conclusions. You can, if you wish, read this as a

novel about a psychiatrist going round the twist. I choose not to do so, but I feel that Mr. Brunner has very skillfully left such a conclusion possible.

I should mention that much of the book's detail is concerned with the interplay of personalities—hospital staff and patients, outsiders, publicans and police—as recorded in the mind of Paul; the contrast between his immediate mental reaction to things that are said or that happen, and his actual censored reply or action show considerable study of this facet of how the mind works by Mr. Brunner (although those of us who have read much Brunner will already know this). I must also admit that to commence I found this way of writing a little 'uneasy' to handle as a reader, but after a few pages it came easy.

Not a book that will appeal to the space opera fan, but if you are interested in the conjunction of 'main stream' and 'science'-fiction, and like a good well-written novel, then strongly recommended.

Neutron Star by Larry Niven. Macdonald, 25s.

Reviewed by Peter Weston

Of the many new authors who have begun to write science fiction within the last five years, Larry Niven is one whom the genre can claim exclusively for its own. Far from being a hopeful writer of future best-sellers, working out an apprenticeship in the suburbs of literature, or worse, a flagging mainstream novelist, Niven embodies all those qualities which for me make science fiction unique.

Not since the advent of Robert A. Heinlein, thirty years ago, has a new writer appeared with such a self-evident gift for writing speculative fiction. Indeed, the parallels go much further, for like Heinlein, Niven's first three years have seen several novels and a flood of excellent stories set within a consistent 'Future History' framework, and also a considerable amount of acclaim from readers.

More, this young author shows a comparable respect for science, a talent for original and logical extrapolation from known data, and above all an exuberance that is positively infectious! His writing shows many similarities to that of Heinlein, both in style and in content. This is the rediscovery of purely imaginative science fiction, self-confident and free from introspection.

In *Neutron Star* we have a collection of eight stories, all written within a two-year period and forming together a case-book example of what is known as 'hard' science fiction. This may seem rather strange stuff to a dilettante from outside the sf field, appearing to be almost a self-contained fantasy world with very little contact with contemporary reality. But Niven is not concerned with putting across any particular 'message,' nor with drawing somewhat strained parallels with the Vietnam war or any other problems of today.

With so much now being written by full-time professionals working within the sf field, I find it refreshing that Niven only writes because he *wants* to, and because he *enjoys* writing science fiction. He is a young Californian who is fortunate enough to have an oil millionaire as a grandfather!

Speaking of his lead character in this collection, Niven wrote recently: 'I conceived Beowulf Shaeffer as a kind of perpetual tourist. The first fifteen pages of 'Flatlander' were written before I had more than the haziest of plots, and then were rewritten after the plot firmed-up. In those fifteen pages Shaeffer was playing his proper role—showing you around 'known space'.

'I did it for fun; mine, the reader's, and Shaeffer's. He had to get his kicks, too—I can't live with a permanently unhappy first-person character.'

When Larry Niven's stories began to appear in the pages of the American magazine *If* during a period not especially noted for its literary brilliance, they immediately caught my attention. They were full of vitality, wit and originality—or perhaps ingenuity is a better word. In a field that has been persistently explored for over 40 years, this author was able to look again at some stock science fiction concepts with an altogether fresh and exciting viewpoint.

Although I mention new concepts, Niven is not at all concerned with new literary techniques of expression, and 'experimental' presentation of ideas in the way that some of our British writers such as J. G. Ballard have done. Niven's prose is explicit, seeking to explain in a minimum of words rather than to use them for their own sake. He is a storyteller, writing fluently and easily, and most important, he has a well-developed sense of humour.

These early stories from *If* and *Galaxy*, which in fact make up this present collection, use one or two lead characters and are almost wholly devoted to the exploration of new ideas and new ways of looking at old ideas. Science fiction has dealt in the language of science and of astronomy and space travel for decades, yet for me it was Larry Niven who restored, for the first time in years, that sense of wonder I felt when first looking through a telescope at the night sky.

In 'At the Core,' almost an archetypal Niven 'voyage of discovery' story, his hero travels to the centre of the Galaxy and finds something unexpected, and yet perfectly logical. Niven does not write about human problems so much as he uses the physical universe itself to provide both stage, puzzle, and drama.

In other stories we hear of the Slaver War, two billion years earlier, and of its endless ramifications into the world of Niven's present, described in 'A Relic of the Empire,' 'The Soft Weapon,' and 'The Handicapped.' We get a fascinating new look at planetary colonisation in 'The Ethics of Madness,' with ramscoop rockets, colony 'slow-boats,' and the world of Plateau with its lonely colony on the 40-mile high Mount Lookitthat!

This is a self-consistent, varied, and supremely logical universe, no matter how wild it may seem when baldly described in a review. Its essence is imagination, and enthusiasm for new ideas, succinctly presented in 'Neutron Star,' the first story in the book.

As a recent scientific discovery, the idea of a neutron star has a certain fascination in itself. To this Niven adds a problem that is grounded in fact and which invites the reader to outguess the author. Introduce Beowulf Shaeffer and the memorable puppeteers, plus a few other novelties like completely transparent, indestructible spaceship hulls, and you have the story which won the Hugo Award in 1967 for the best short fiction of the year.

Of the other two stories, 'Flatlander' is another astro-physical 'puzzle,' in which the first 15 pages previously mentioned by the author are equally as intriguing as the plot proper. We meet here such strange interstellar wanderers as the Outsiders; and then the Starseds, in the remaining story, 'Grendel,' which was written specially for the book.

(This last, incidentally, is a rewrite of the Beowulf legend, slightly altered, which explains the role of coinci-

dence in the story. True to form, Niven writes: 'If that harms the story, I alone am to blame. Nobody forced me to rewrite the Beowulf legend. I did it because I thought it was fun!')

It can readily be seen that this review is by no means impartial, for in a half-decade that has seen the advent of Zelazny, Delany and Disch, to name but three important new discoveries for science fiction, Niven has given me the most enjoyment. His style is sparse rather than festooned with adjectives, unashamedly 20th-century American, but above all else it is *entertaining*.

Perhaps this last is a key word, for recently I was castigated for saying, in another review, that I read mostly for entertainment. To me, escapism is not 'basically dishonest,' and while I often appreciate a piece of fiction which taxes the intellect, I firmly maintain that there is a place for stories which are intended purely for enjoyment. Are they any the lesser for not being entirely 'intellectual'?

Possibly Larry Niven makes it look all too easy to write this type of science fiction (there are many other kinds). Another writer might think it a good idea to invent a similar batch of peculiar names and unusual situations, and lacking Niven's exuberance would only succeed in producing more of the stale old thing.

As one example, possibly an unfair one, I'd like to cite Paul Anderson's recent novelettes in *Analogue*, in which he took certain atrophical events and wrote stories around them. You may remember 'Supernova,' and the story about a solar system outside the Galaxy for instance? These only proved, to me, that ideas by themselves are not enough, that Niven's success is partly in his treatment.

Not that Larry Niven is by any means a master-craftsman. It would be surprising if he were, in view of his youth and his limited writing experience. Basically his stories seem to lack some emotional impact, they are mildly cerebral, arousing at most such feelings as curiosity and mild excitement. There is no real love, no hate, no fear, no real villains and no great heroes.

On top of this may be added the fact that Niven is possibly too fond of the pursuit/chase type of story, and on occasion lets this get out of hand. He is a born storyteller, and apparently writing with ease as he does, his plots tend to ramble well away from his main storylines. *World of Ptavvs* (also from MacDonald), his first novel and third professional sale, is the extreme example of this, although it must be said in mitigation that the ride, although long, is interesting enough!

'What can I say?' said the author when taxed with these criticisms. 'I plead guilty. My characters are extensions of myself, Larry Niven. My villainous impulses are in firm control. The opportunity to be heroic has not yet come to me, and I do not intend to go looking for it. While others storm the barricades, I write.'

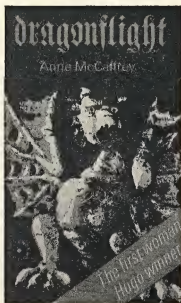
'So I'm no hero and no villain. That doesn't stop other authors from writing of heroes and villains, why me? Because I lack empathy. Perhaps it can be developed, or I could fake it. But that usually seems to produce cardboard cut-outs.'

'I love problem-solving and I love puzzle-stories and I love ingenuity. These are what make me write.'

With this last comment Larry Niven probably explains both his own motives and his success. His stories are fast-moving, ingenious, and above all they are fresh and genuinely speculative. With three novels under his belt

already (*A Gift from Earth* has already been published in the USA, and *Ringworld* will appear shortly) I feel that his future work will certainly bear watching.

**Hugo
Award
for
Woman**



'*Dragonflight*' by Anne McCaffrey, published by Rapp & Whiting at 30s.

Reviewed by Kathryn Buckley

One of the many curious things about the field of science fiction is that there are very few women writers compared with other types of fiction. There are some signs now that this situation is being remedied. Anne McCaffrey is the first woman to win a Hugo with 'Weyr Search,' the first section of *Dragonflight*, which appeared as a complete short novel in *Analogue*. 'Dragonrider,' published as a two-part serial in *Analogue*, won a Nebula, the award of the Science Fiction Writers of America. The two with a little expansion have been combined to form one complete novel *Dragonflight*.

Sections of this novel, then, have received acclaim from the readership of science fiction and from the professional body of sf writers. With the unique contact that science fiction has with its readers it is not surprising that it should respect their views in its awards. That the same author should receive professional acclaim in the same book indicates a wide appeal.

Dragonflight is the story of the struggles of the inhabitants, distant descendants of Earth, of the planet 'Pern,' one of five planets of a G-type star. Pern suffers periodic invasions of 'Threads' from a stray planet when its wildly elliptical orbit brings it close enough, which happens approximately every two hundred years. Their defence rests with the Dragonmen and their Dragons who chew fire-stone and belch flame to burn up the threads. The ecology of the planet revolves around this two hundred year menace and the social structure is based on a medieval feudal system supporting a superior race of overlords—the Dragonmen—whose sole function is to be ready to defend the planets and its inhabitants.

The story starts with the search for a new Weyrwoman to ride the as yet unhatched queen dragon. The class structure of the Dragonmen is closely bound up with the ecology of their Dragons who have a telepathic relation-

Anne
McCaffrey



ship with their riders, in addition to their relationship with the other dragons. The feudal structure of the human non-telepathic inhabitants is in a state of unrest—chiefly because the reasons for the existence of the dragonmen, supported by tithes from the Holds, have blurred into a myth. Fighting has broken out amongst the Pernese, the Dragonmen have not been supported, have been badly led and their numbers have dwindled. The action is centred around the characters of Lessa, destined to become Weyrwoman, the F'Lar, Bronze rider of the Dragonmen.

The Introduction is concisely worded and gives an adequate historical background for the main story. This does away with the necessity for the author to break into lengthy explanations, which in this case is a decided disadvantage.

Without the introduction it would have been necessary to have enriched the background of the first section considerably. The background is only believable because the author is using material with which most of her readers are already familiar. The myths and legends in which the history of the planet has become embedded should have been used to create a sense of culture. Admittedly, the author has handicapped herself by making her heroine, Lessa, unaware of these legends. She is different from her society and isolated from it, in fact, a rebel. This feeling is well conveyed in the first few pages though Miss McCaffrey's style is very uneven and she is inclined to lapse into purple prose: i.e. 'the thirsty swords that had drunk so deeply of Ruathan blood.'

This is perhaps allowable in the atmosphere of myth and legend since this kind of book can stand a vigorous, flamboyant and swashbuckling style to sustain the sense of fantasy. Her characters do too much gritting of teeth, grinning and are forever being stunned; but perhaps these habits will be discontinued once they are recognised by the author for what they are.

Myth and legend are an integral part of the cultural heritage of a community. Whether based on fact or social expediency, they affect their culture, become debased and then revived in a never-ending cycle. They have an eternal universality and become an insidious part of daily life and though they may fade they never die. Efforts to suppress them only serve to ensure their survival—one has only to read the Bible for proof of this. Even more curiously we cannot live without them and the same myths will be told in different parts of the world which can have had no early contact with one another.

One of the reasons for this is the power of the story itself. A good story will survive whether it is believed or not. If it can't be written down it will be sung; if it can't be sung it will be drawn; it will, in fact, seep and insinuate itself into everyday life until it becomes absorbed into our subconscious and colours our reactions. Miss McCaffrey has failed to make full use of the power of myth and legend within the context of the story itself. Ballad singers and harpists are mentioned and one or two indigenous life-forms in addition to dragons; but none of this is fully exploited. The Pernese inhabitants appear to be completely without a culture. If their traditional crafts and arts were suppressed something else would have taken their places, most likely a bowdlerised and debased form of the original. The meaning of the language itself would have changed over a period of four hundred years and this could have been used to make detection of the original meaning more intricate.

It is not until the last sections of the book that the background begins to come to life and then there are far too many inconsistencies.

For example, the Introduction says the Threads 'sought to bridge the space gap to the more temperate and hospitable planet'—this presupposes malice aforethought, and later we learn that they cannot survive on Pern because of the changing seasons. They apparently take root when the weather is right and wither if it is too hot or too cold, and they are also susceptible to water. They merely leave the soil barren and crumble to dust and one would have thought an interesting sub-plot could have explored the efforts of the Pernese to reclaim their Southern Continent. They would then have been a far more interesting society, instead of the apathetic unambitious mob they are. We are told that the Threads have made the Southern Continent of Pern a barren waste but we are not told how, in view of this end-product of their life-cycle, they manage to survive on their home world, nor why they do not spread from the Southern Continent, which is relatively handy, instead of waiting for two or four hundred years to cross space in some way. Indeed, the whole enterprise seen like this seems to bubble over with pointlessness.

The celestial mechanics involved in the orbits of the two planets is also beyond comment, given what we are of the relative time scales and functions.

But in spite of these deficiencies, the overall effect is enjoyable and casting disbelief to the winds it is a refreshing change from much other science fiction which makes quite heavy demands on the reader.

One of the attractions of *Dragonflight* is its fairy tale flavour which comes from the association of childhood myths which lies just below the surface. Lessa herself is another version of the Cinderella myth and F'Lar is Prince Charming riding in on his white charger, only in this case

it's a bronze dragon. Even the Nietzschean-based philosophy of the super-race is stripped of all menace and presented as a kind of saviour race legend. The myth of chivalry, of dashing heroes and romantic Lords and Ladies, is very comforting in an age when chivalry is spelt Vietnam.

Dragonflight comes into the category of 'escape fiction.' Science fiction enthusiasts tend to get on the defensive the moment escape fiction is mentioned, though there is nothing wrong with escaping for a time—it supplies a very deep human need. If, in that escape, we can be made to come to terms with what would otherwise repel us, so much the better.

Miss McCaffrey's treatment of the relationship between dragons and men is deftly drawn and quite convincing. She succeeds in building an attraction between what to us is a frightening and repulsive creature and a human being—largely through the elimination of fear. Fear and ignorance cause many human tragedies and the control of these two emotions might one day make the difference between extinction and survival. The highly evocative phrase 'First Impression' is aptly chosen.

The peculiar four-sided love affair Lessa/Ramorth (the Queen Dragon) and F'Lar/Mnenenth (his bronze dragon) is also an interesting feature. Miss McCaffrey shows signs of being able to handle complex relationships and the latter sections of the book show she is quite capable of building believable backgrounds. The book possesses one outstanding merit; as an entity in its own right it is much greater than the sum of its parts.

Miss McCaffrey has yet to acquire aspects of the richness, verve and vigour of much of the work of Poul Anderson, or of that of Jack Vance, Jack Williamson and Hal Clement, to name but a few with whom her work must be able to stand comparison if it is to justify the high honours bestowed upon it. Nevertheless, comparative newcomers should be given recognition so that they can develop their own particular forte, and *Dragonflight* gives us hope that we have struck another promising source of fantasy.

WORLD'S BEST SF 1969

edited by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr
ACE Books 91352, 384 pages, 95c.

Reviewed by John Foyster

This fat anthology calls to mind those red-covered Grayson and Grayson editions of the Bleiler-Diky anthologies which did so much for science fiction readers in Australia at least in the mid-fifties. The earlier volumes, of course, collected together under one roof good stories which simply weren't available in any other form, while the nineteen stories here are all from fairly standard sources, but something of the same spirit will infect the reader: that of discovery of a whole new world. For Messrs. Wollheim and Carr seem to have put together one of the finest annual anthologies in years, so that despite the familiarity of some yarns, the overall impression is one of freshness: an important ingredient for science fiction. Nothing seems more boring than last year's new idea warmed over.

Not all of the stories are great ones, but there are few duds, if any. And there is one story which would be outstanding in any year. All of the magazines of 1968 seem to be represented, as well as PLAYBOY and what seems to be a Scott Meredith-based original anthology titled 'THE FARTHEST REACHES'.

This is the fifth in the ACE series, and though it seems by far the best it is difficult to know whether this is due to unprecedented skill on the part of the editors or to a bumper year for science fiction. The latter didn't seem to be the case at the time, and the contents of the other 1968 Best can generously be said to have little overlap with this one, so perhaps the former is the case. If so, I shall be placing an early order for the collection from *this year*.

Paul Anderson's short 'KYRIE' is the truly outstanding story in this anthology, as it is the outstanding story of 1968 and probably also of the sixties. For all practical purposes it is faultless, and by far the best of Anderson's many good pieces of short fiction. It combines all the best things in science fiction into a story in which not a word is wasted. The best comparison is possibly with another story of a similar length, James Blish's 'HOW BEAUTIFUL WITH BANNERS,' which appeared in the first of Damon Knight's *Orbit* original anthologies. Both stories play down the physical action which carries the plot, with about equal success: Mr. Anderson's advantage is in his material.

Perhaps it is the plot which is the strong point of this story: certainly it is well-devised, thoughtful and attractive, but to praise it at the expense of Mr. Anderson's carefully underplayed story-telling or the gentility with which he handles the most fragile components of his fiction, the character, would be dangerously one-sided. But to appreciate these one must read the story whereas the plot has a classic simplicity.

Although the plot gimmick, telepathy, is hardly new, it is combined with the notion of instantaneous propagation to force the plot into a rigid and unbending mode. A secondary gimmick is the plasma creature with whom the heroine is in telepathic contact. The motives of this plasma creature in following an expedition to a nova are not entirely clear, but the suggestion of curiosity is not out of place. Curiosity kills the cat (named Lucifer), as ever, for the creature is unable to resist the forces involved in the shrinking of the star to a point. This also happens to be the point of the story.



If 'KYRIE' has a weakness it is that there is rather too much hand-waving at a critical moment: but Mr. Anderson has been criticised in the past for lecturing his readers, and perhaps he had this in mind. Far more important than this are the story's strengths, which are very considerable indeed. It is as scientifically impeccable as is possible for science fiction, and interestingly so. William Atheling Jr. would have loved it, for it is *about* something: it is about love and about death, it is about science and about fantasy.

Technically 'KYRIE' is a fine piece of work. Mr. Anderson makes his point in just the right place and in just the right way: the punch-line is one which echoes, which is telegraphed, and which stings. The reader feels it coming, but the blow is irresistible. What's more, it throws into ghastly relief the first section of the story, which seems only remotely connected at first sight, though we anticipate an ending of this kind. It is unlikely that we shall see a story as fine as this for many years to come, and for this alone one should buy the anthology.

Having cornered that item, Wollheim and Carr might well have rested on their laurels. But in addition they have printed several other stories which would have made a great impression but for the appearance of 'KYRIE.' Two of them, besides Anderson's story, appeared in 'THE FARTHEST REACHES.'

By contrast with KYRIE, all four of these remarkable stories are set in universes not much like our own. Two of them deal with more or less alternate universes, and the other two with situations so remote from our own as to be not of this world. 'THE WORM THAT FLIES,' by Brian Aldiss, is an alternative universe piece. It is because of this, probably, that it lacks the impact of the Anderson story. Having presented an almost entirely alien world, though one which does have some strands of connection with our own, Mr. Aldiss comes on very strong in the loud and stomp passages towards the end and finally thumps out a very earthly message. But the alien background, interesting as it is, seems to intrude on the story, and this is a flaw. This flaw can become magnified if the reader becomes so interested in the writer's invention that he loses interest in the plot, but Mr. Aldiss is too skilled a writer to allow this to happen to one of his stories. On the other hand it seems clear that Terry Carr, co-editor of this anthology, ran into some troubles with his 'THE DANCE OF THE CHANGER AND THE THREE' which, like the Aldiss story appeared in 'THE FARTHEST REACHES.' Though Carr's taste as an editor is very good, he has not written much fiction, and in this case could have slightly overreached himself. It seems overambitious and Mr. Carr has retreated into an amateurish 'I'm not telling this very well, but it was all so *strange*, line which tends to invite one of two reactions, neither very favourable. The first is that indeed the author is *not* telling it very well, and should have occupied himself in some other way. The second is that it isn't quite as bad as the author makes out, but that it is bad as insurance, since it tends to be rather convincing when said sufficiently often. To write about completely alien beings is not only difficult; it *can* be pointless. Aldiss gets around this problem by bringing his plot to familiar ground: and it is only on this shared ground that we can understand and care about aliens. Mr. Carr *wants* us to care, but his plot works against him. Despite this, the story is well-told, and once this barrier is overlept, quite an enjoyable one, certainly not out of place.



The other two very good stories first appeared in Great Britain. Colin Kapp's 'THE CLOUD BUILDERS' (which appeared in *New Writings 12*) is a strange mixture of skilled writing, thoughtful plotting and just plain bad plotting. A parallel world piece, it works over the rather familiar ground of the member of a society of wise men who have arcane knowledge: in this case the overt wisdom concerns balloon design, the major mode of transport in Kapp's artificial world, the arcana consists of some pretty dreary present-day knowledge. As happens occasionally, Kapp affects slightly archaic language which tends to put the teeth of at least this reader on edge. But the most telling fault of the story is that, besides the pieces described above, it just seems pointless. However it is so well told that we can fairly readily forgive the author this.

'TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-PRECIIOUS STONES', by Samuel R. Delany, is said to have been revised from the original appearance in *New Worlds*. The amount of this revision is pretty slight: there's a minor change on page 120, but that's about all that a quick glance reveals, so there has been nothing like the wholesale changes Delany has recently made to some earlier novels. What we do have is a story, told at breakneck speed, about a thoroughly alien but superficially orthodox earth. The whiplash effect comes not from a steady motion, but from the stops and starts which Delany throws the reader into as he hustles through some action, changes gear to describe the world around, and then accelerates through more bewildering action. It's an exhilarating and breathtaking ride, but it can be tiring. Delany's inventive mind carries him through patches in which other writers would have bogged down. Delany's wordgames, though tending to distract, never become thoroughly annoying, and so must be accepted for what they are—evidence of overexuberance. When Delany's style is as disciplined as that of Anderson or Aldiss he will have few peers.

None of the other stories are really remarkable (with one exception to be noted later). Several stories deal with not particularly surprising ideas without contributing much

that is new. The stories by Sheckley (the overhelpful robot), Von Wald (robots as men and vice versa), Lafferty (the bitter bit), Hollis (topology strikes again) and MacLean (very like an earlier story by R. C. Fitzpatrick) fall into this category and have no distinguishing marks. 'THE SELCHEY KIDS' by Laurence Yep held some promise which it didn't quite deliver while Damon Knight's 'MASKS' must have some virtue since it managed to be nominated for various awards. It reads pretty much like a variation on the series which became Algis Budrys's 'WHO'?

Then there are the stories which seem to have attempted something new: Burt K. Filer worked very hard with his idea in 'BACKTRACKED', but his characterisation was inadequate for the plot, which depended upon the reader's certain knowledge of the characters' motivations. Robert Silverberg, in 'GOING DOWN SMOOTH', does it nicely on the light-hearted side, but also seems to pay lip service to a more serious theme which could only have been treated at much greater length. 'TOTAL ENVIRONMENT', Brian Aldiss's second story in the anthology, though treating the problem of overpopulation in an interesting way, seems to be fouled completely by the repetition (page 288) of an error which originally appeared in the magazine version: 'Shamin's oldest daughter, Malti, . . .' and then 'Malti was her second oldest daughter . . .' just four paragraphs later. A minor point, perhaps, but who cares?

And there are a couple of stories which seem out of place in a *Best* collection. Fred Saberhagen's 'STARSONG' shows the danger of trying to imitate too closely any kind of myth. Orpheus and Eurydice were much happier in the older setting, and forcing the story into the *Besker* series didn't seem to help. Sydney Van Scyoc's 'A VISIT TO CLEVELAND GENERAL' is a trifling and inoffensive little piece which is perhaps slightly out of company. And 'THE SQUARE ROOT OF BRAIN' (Fritz Leiber) seemed pretty bad when it first appeared, and hasn't improved with age. It is probably significant that these stories which are not of the first rank tend to less adventurous in their innovation than the five stories singled out for special mention above. This is not to suggest that they don't fit into an annual anthology of this type (and indeed most of them are very good stories), but it is rather the case that they are outweighed by the competition.

Finally, Kurt Vonnegut's 'WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE' seems to be above the hurly-burly. It is certainly a very good story, but it doesn't seem to have much to do with today's science fiction.

Plainly this is a memorable collection and 'KYRIE', to hammer the point home, is a *gem* of a story: read it!

John Foyster

Slaughterhouse-Five or the Children's Crusade

by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

A Seymour Lawrence Book, Delacorte Press, 192 pages, \$5.95.

Reviewed by John Foyster

Mr. Vonnegut, the dust-jacket of this book plaintively asserts, was 'Once mistakenly typed as a science fiction writer' but then, cheering up, tells us that he is now 'recognised as a mainstream storyteller often fascinated by the tragic and comic possibilities of machines'. You may find both tragedy and comedy in this particular book, but there's precious little about machines. If you regard such novels as 'PLAYER PIANO' and 'THE SIRENS OF TITAN' as having been science fiction, then you can safely do the same for 'SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE', a gay little tale of Tralfamadoreans, flying saucers, the better-known works of Kilgore Trout together with little Billy, who all his life wanted to set foot on Mars, but is condemned to a pilgrimage of a very different kind, involving an out-of-sorts chronosynclastic infundibulum.

Among the subtiles Mr. Vonnegut chooses is 'A Duty-Dance with Death' and it is this, and the bombing Dresden, which motivates the book. Billy Pilgrim, witness to the myriad deaths of Dresden, becomes unstuck in time. It may be argued that in a purely linear fashion Billy had been long unstuck when the shock threw him out of kilter, but one must be careful with cause and effect in time-travel yarns. What happens is that Billy fits to and fro through the space-time of his life, instead of plugging along at a steady one second per second which the rest of us endure: he doesn't slide on the endless belt of time, but jumps from place to place on it every now and then. Dresden is only the external motivation for the novel, for it is Billy's kidnapping by the Tralfamadoreans on his daughter's wedding night, and the decisive events following that which provide the internal motivation. The novel oscillates between these two events.

This frantic situation is only resolved for Billy by his acceptance of the Tralfamadorean philosophy: 'so it goes'. To the Tralfamadoreans time is only a spatial component, and Billy is able to rationalise the death and destruction around him as being a merely momentary occurrence and a minor part of the sufferer's lives: a comforting thought so long as you are not on the receiving end.

Like some other science fiction writers, Vonnegut cannibalises his earlier work continuously, so that characters like Eliot Rosewater (from 'GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER') and Howard W. Campbell Jr. (from 'MOTHER NIGHT') make appearances of modest lengths. Rosewater, by the way, 'had a tremendous collection of science fiction paperbacks under his bed', so many

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that he needs a steamer trunk to carry them. This would have been no mean feat in 1948. But then, as now, Kilgore Trout was Rosewater's favourite writer, so we need not worry too much about this.

Vonnegut's main contribution to science fiction, in this novel, is to show that a science fiction novel about a serious subject, treated seriously, need not be much more than farce. Too many writers have taken the view that a dystopic novel has not only to be as grim as hell from start to finish but also that, if possible, things should go from bad to worse: Vonnegut shows that this is not necessarily so and that horror, true horror, may be presented in an almost jocular fashion: perhaps this is the only way out, in fact. For many writers such an attempt would degenerate rapidly into farce, but it is not the case for Mr. Vonnegut.

But the problem with Mr. Vonnegut's novel is that one *needn't* take it seriously. This is an option of a considerable magnitude to leave to the reader, and seems rather more like an attempt to leave a way out than the result of long and careful thought about the possible results. Like the philosophy of 'CAT'S CRADLE', 'so it goes' is pretty shallow as Vonnegut presents it, and the reader is required to either provide the fiddly bits of justification himself or to imagine that Mr. Vonnegut has it all worked out but felt that it would not fit comfortably into the novel. 'So it goes' is a fine philosophy for haves, but one of less appeal to have-nots.

Mr. Vonnegut attempts to walk the narrow path between entertaining and stimulating thought, and also tries to ensure that his reader is neither confused nor bored. In this he is generally successful, and there is never the feeling that the lack of temporal cohesiveness of Billy Pilgrim is just an attempt to introduce flashbacks without labelling them as such: they form, almost without exception, an integral part of the plot.

Violence is always brought to the centre of the stage, and Billy does not like violence: the consequence is that this

novel is not merely a part of Vonnegut's fancy, it is also Billy's fantasy. But liking it is a matter of liking Vonnegut, and there are probably some who do not like his work.

So it goes.

Conan of Cimmeria

by Robert E. Howard, L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter. Lancer Books 75-072, 192 pages, 95c.

Reviewed by John Foyster.

Anyone who purchases an author's works twice over must have some pretty good reasons for doing so: here goes. Perhaps the most obvious property of the Conan short story or novel (and this is true to a lesser extent of some of Howard's other work) is that it is utterly predictable: only two plot outlines seem to have been available for use in the Conan stories. There's the one in which Conan rescues the girl from a wicked magician or perhaps a nauseating supernatural monster, and then there's the story in which he does much the same thing for money rather than for a girl. Sometimes it is hard to tell which is which. Other plots are used so rarely that they may conveniently be ignored. This being the case, why do so many people get so much enjoyment from Conan? If you know what is coming up next, why pay for what you already know? There isn't really space in here to go into this in detail, but these are some thoughts on the matter. It seems at least possible that this is something to do with Howard himself rather than the character of Conan (though obviously Conan himself is of importance, as will be discussed below). This volume contains three stories by Howard, two which were completed by de Camp and Carter, and three by the latter pair, which enables us to make some comparisons.

Certainly one feature of Howard's writing was the exoticism in which he indulged. But he seems to have known when to stop. His language is straightforward: it is his combinations which are tricky. Three times in reading this book I came across a word which seemed

out of place, and each time it was in one of the de Camp-Carter stories. On page 16 (in "THE CURSE OF THE MONOLITH") they write:

"The horses felt it, too. They *nickered* plaintively, pawed the earth, and rolled white eyeballs at the dark beyond the circle of the fire." (my emphasis)

Now 'nickered' seems to me to bring the reader to a halt: it isn't a very common word, and I suspect that Howard would have used 'whinnied' in a similar situation.

In "THE LAIR OF THE ICE WORM", de Camp and Carter have Conan, on horseback, *cantering* through a group of beast men with whom he is doing battle, which suggests considerable freedom of movement for the horse's legs—perhaps I do not see the scene sufficiently clearly. And in "THE CASTLE OF TERROR" we find Conan in 'ensorcelled slumber' which is just too rich. 'Enchanted' or 'bewitched' would have given the whole thing away as a fairy-tale, but ensorcelled seems to have as many faults.

Only later did I discover that these eyesores occurred in the ersatz-Conan, which perhaps goes to prove that they don't write 'em the way they used to.

If this is a negative virtue for Howard, this knowledge of when to stop, what positive attributes are to be found? Howard never had any trouble re-using those two plots, suggesting that he was a born story-teller who just happened to fall into writing pulp-fiction. Then again it often seems that the Conan stories are better than the rest of Howard's fiction, but this is not wholly true: perhaps Howard put more of himself into Conan, or perhaps we have more Conan stories just because the first ones were popular. But the significant thing is that Howard never tired of his character: or if he did so this does not show in his stories. Howard's enthusiasm not only infects his story—the reader can hardly escape being caught up in it, though there are undoubtedly a few poor souls who do not appreciate Conan.

Of the three stories here, by the way, only 'QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST' has a clean history—from Howard's original to printed page, one having suffered revisions and the other having first appeared in 1967.

As a result, not too much should be made of the differences between the works of the varying authors as they appear in this volume. But independently of the author, there are pretty good reasons for liking Conan: he *is* a pleasant character to identify with, for though he commits murders, they are only gory in fantasy, as though Howard saw them as nothing more than minor embellishments to the advance of the plot. The reader feels the same way. Conan has no worries, only a pleasingly undemanding conscience which enables him to enjoy whatever is going, without ever being in real danger, and then to sit back later and moralise about the whole business.

The major advance of the present edition is to print the stories in the deduced chronological order, which doesn't matter much, but helps to keep the place tidy.

Conan himself is due to swagger through a couple more volumes (by de Camp and Carter) according to the introduction by de Camp. Fans of Conan will buy them anyway, no matter who does the writing, but anyone who *hasn't* dabbled should read this. 'THE FROST GIANT'S DAUGHTER' and 'QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST' are probably the best of those in this volume.

Then go out and buy the other nine.

All Our Yesterdays

by Harry Warner Jr.

Advent Publishers (P.O. Box. 9228, Chicago, Illinois 60690, U.S.A.), 360 pages, \$7-50.

Reviewed by John Foyster.

This volume isn't science fiction, but it reads like it in places. Harry Warner Jr., probably the most literate science fiction fan to place typewriter-key to stencil, and certainly the most conscientious investigator of the members of science fiction fandom, has written this long and enjoyable history of science fiction fans in the nineteen forties, although there are many pages dealing with events outside that narrow period of time.

The approach has been to deal with particular phenomena within fandom (fanzines, fan clubs, conventions, amateur publishing groups and so on) in turn, rather than try to present One Fan's Diary. This has been successful: although there are occasional repetitions these are scarcely noticeable in the wealth of detail which Harry Warner includes, a wealth of detail second only to the amounts he has been forced to leave out. Because there is so much to cover his references are often very brief (but never cryptic), and generally whet the appetite for more: but as Harry remarks several times, that is difficult because of the scarcity of the source material. Nevertheless the fan who thinks he knows all about it will discover a great deal here, and for anyone who hasn't come across science fiction fandom, or who has but didn't feel impelled to dive in, this volume is both temptation and treasure trove—amaze your friends with esoteric knowledge!

A measure of the compact nature of the book is the fact that only five pages are devoted to Australian fandom, which is certainly ample by comparison with the space available for others, but which means the hoax convention of Easter Sunday 1941 is not mentioned, for instance. A volume covering the fifties may be published if this sells well enough.

Hint.

John Foyster



MEET THE AUTHORS

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

Born and educated at Brighton, Sussex, Sydney J. Bounds still maintains that his real education did not begin until after he left school. By this time he had discovered the American sf magazines (at 3d. each); though he was not fully converted until he rediscovered them circa 1936. His earliest memory is of a story by Jack Williamson, an author he still likes today.

His first job was with a firm making fire alarms; a type new at that time fitted with a gramophone that broadcast the location of the street alarm in the fire station. Moving to Kingston-on-Thames (where he still lives), he studied electrical engineering at the technical college. Around 1937 he joined the Science Fiction Association, discovered fandom and met, among others, Bill Temple, Arthur Clarke and John Christopher.

He vividly remembers the early conventions with guest speakers, John Russell Fearn and Professor A. M. Low (*the science populariser of the time*). Pronounced the Professor: 'A day that passes without learning something new is a day of your life wasted.' Bounds still remembers this, believes it, and tries to act on it.

World War II engulfed him, turning him into a member of the R.A.F.'s ground staff, and this was when he started writing; at first, for an amateur magazine put out by the Cosmos Club. He also made his first sale during the war, a story about a poltergeist. He has a strong interest in fantasy, born of H. P. Lovecraft and developed by Russell's 'Sinister Barrier'—a natural lead to the *Books of Charles Fort*.

After the war, he thought of becoming a farm worker but the early rising quickly put him off. He became a professional writer in self defence. Finding there was not a living to be made in sf alone, he branched out into other fields: crime (he has written Sexton Blake), westerns, war stories, confessions, boys' adventure stories. More recently he has specialised in picture story scripts.

The life of a professional writer, he finds, is a kind of switchback; on the crests he writes full-time; in the troughs he has had the regulation variety of jobs—packer, machine-operator, civil servant. At the moment, he is interested in the growing popularity of Horror stories and has two stories in the 4th Fontana collection.

SJB is unmarried, smokes a pipe and paints for relaxation.

WARD 13 started with a newspaper story about heart transplants. The thought occurred: in the future, would there be enough spare hearts to go round? The story developed from there . . .

Sydney J. Bounds hopes to write many more stories to entertain the readers of VISION OF TOMORROW, and next issue we shall be publishing yet another of his fine short stories. Watch for it!

PHILIP E. HIGH

Philip E. High lives in Canterbury, Kent, almost within touching distance of the historic Cathedral.

Although of Norfolk origin, his parents moved to Kent when he was seven and, apart from war service—Royal Navy—he has lived in Kent ever since.

He is married with two small daughters, Jacqueline (12) and Beverly (6).

At the age of thirteen, he read his first Science Fiction story and was 'hooked'.

His urge to write began at the age of sixteen but it was not until many years later in 1956 that his first short story, 'THE STATICS', first appeared in the now defunct 'Authentic Science Fiction'.

'I received six guineas for it,' he confessed to our reporter. 'It was one of the biggest thrills of my life. I am quite certain I walked up the wall and across the ceiling twice.'

After that, short stories followed in quick succession and in 1963 his first novel 'PRODIGAL SUN' appeared in print.

This was followed by 'NO TRUCE WITH TERRA,' 'THE MAD METROPOLIS,' 'REALITY FORBIDDEN,' 'THESE SAVAGE FUTURIANS,' 'THE TIME MERCENARIES' and 'INVADER ON MY BACK.' All published, in the first instance, by Ace Books of New York.

There was one exception to this list, 'TWIN PLANETS,' published by The Paperback Library Inc of New York.***

Phil High tops this list with fifty-six short stories but is acutely aware of his limitations. 'I am a story-teller not a literary genius,' he says.

Asked of his approach to writing a story, he said: 'I ask myself what would happen if . . . ? Then, if I can construct a plot to go with the subject, I try and write it up as if I were a reporter or participant on the spot. I have no grand illusions about prophecy, if some of my stories come true, it was a good guess, no more. As I have said, I am a story-teller, I liked writing it and I hope the readers enjoy reading it.'

Asked if he would like to journey into space, Phil said: 'Content are heroes and arm-chair heroes, I am quite content to remain in the latter category, thank you.'

***In the UK three of his earlier novels were published in hardcover by Robert Hale Ltd. His later novels are being published by Dobson Books Ltd.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Mannheim's impetuous gait took him into the dark open doorway ahead of Don, who was in no such hurry. Don caught up with him a few yards along the passage, where there was a pale light percolating through what appeared to be a thick sheet of frosted glass let into the walls and completely sealing the passage.

Mannheim stood there, listening. But there was no sound from beyond the barrier. He said: 'Odd, isn't it? Doesn't look like a door—no handle or anything. Maybe it's a sliding panel.'

He reached out to touch it. Before he could, a shadow passed slowly across its far side and was gone.

'What was that?' Don whispered.

Mannheim was not so awed. His voice boomed and echoed in the passage. 'Looked to me like the shadow of a man. *Someone's* in there, anyhow.'

His fingers touched the translucent screen and went right through into it. His whole hand followed, up to his wrist. He exclaimed.

'Hell, it's not solid at all! Feels like liquid jelly.'

He thrust his arm through up to the elbow, then the shoulder . . .

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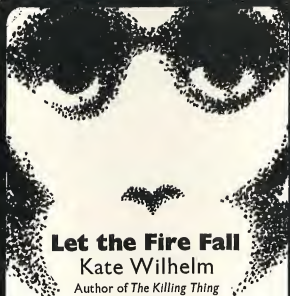
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