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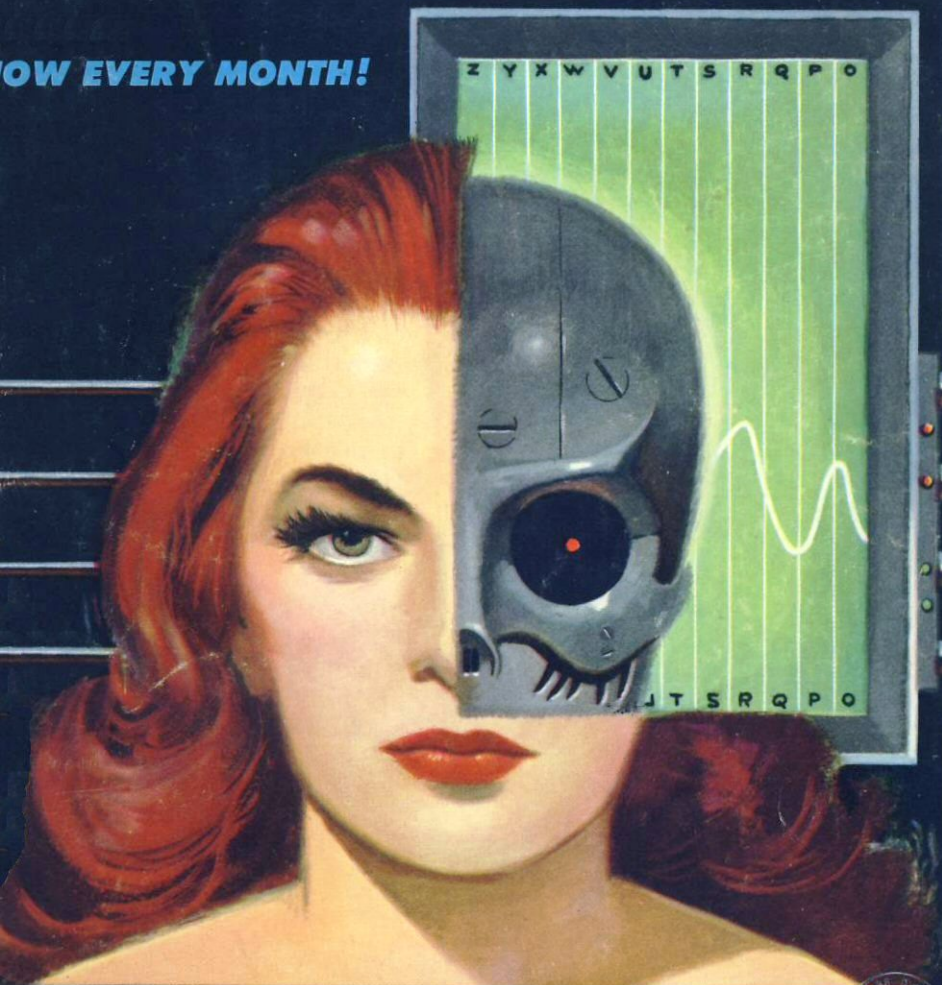
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THE IRON VIRGIN By C. H. Thames

TREACHERY HAD RED HAIR AND SOFT CURVES



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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Editor

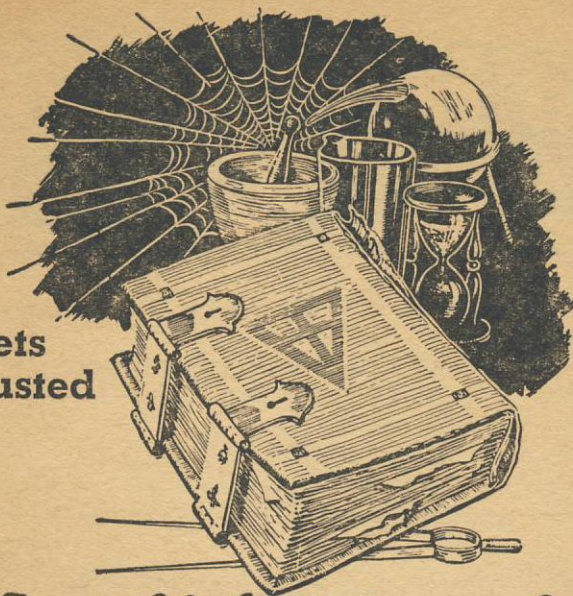
HOWARD BROWNE

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entrusted
to a
few**



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The Rosicrucians (AMORC)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

the observatory

by The Editor



HE'LL NEVER OKAY IT

• "Look, Val, we need a cover for the March *Amazing*," Browne said. "Something that'll grab the eye. Any ideas?"

"Well, not right off-hand."

"Milt Lesser turned in a good yarn yesterday," Fairman said. "There's one scene where this spaceship is—"

Rogoff was shaking his head. "We had a spaceship on the cover two issues ago."

"Hell," Fairman said, "you can't go wrong with a spaceship. This is a *science-fiction* magazine."

"How about a desert scene?" Browne said. "You know, one of these desolate-wastes type of backgrounds, with maybe a big alien of some kind—"

"Nuts," said Fairman, who respected nobody. "We've had chained men on the desert, and men hanging from posts on the desert, and a guy being hauled out of the quicksand on the desert. All they do is give you a big fat thirst."

"When's the last time we used a girl?" Rogoff said. "I mean on the cover."

"Been months," Valigursky said. "Hey, how about this girl, see? She's running toward a spaceship with this big—"

"There you go," Rogoff said. "Back to spaceships again."

"Here's an idea," Browne said. "We could have this beautiful girl hanging onto a rope dangling from the port of a spaceship. We just show the port open and a big hand holding a knife about to cut the rope. The hand and the knife are in the foreground and—"

"Bad perspective," Rogoff said. "It'd never come across."

"What about that, Val?" Browne said plaintively.

"He's right," Valigursky said. "Be almost impossible."

"Monster!" Fairman shouted, jumping up.

The others stared at him. "I beg your pardon," Browne said coldly.

"On the cover," Fairman said. "And a *real* monster, what I mean. Maybe menacing a small girl who's skipping rope, or something, see, and this monster's—"

"*Small* girl?" Rogoff said. "What's the matter with a big girl?"

"That's been done to death," Fairman said. "This way you get a nice contrast—"

"I like it," Browne said.

"Wait a minute!" Valigursky exclaimed. "Wait—a—minute! How about a big head on the cover? A man's head—only the top of his head is transparent; you know, like a glass dome. Inside is—well, let's see—is a—a machine, see? A real futuristic machine. You know, with rheostats and dials—"

"Been done," Browne said. "We ran a cover exactly like that back in the pulp size. I forget who wrote the—"

"All right," Valigursky said doggedly. "Then make it a *girl* with a transparent—"

"The fans remember these things," Fairman said. "A big head's good, but... Why *not* use a girl's head. Make her a real knockout—a redhead, say, looking right smack at the reader. You can see right away that she's scared to death of something, only we don't show *what* she's scared—"

"They get scared on detective magazines," Browne said. "We'll need more than a scared look."

"Show *part* of her head transparent," said Valigursky, who was always a slow man to give up an idea.

"Depends on what's inside," Rogoff said.

"Show she's a robot underneath," Fairman said. "Only don't stick her out on a desert, for Pete's sake."

"There'd have to be a reason for the metal underneath to show," Browne said. "Otherwise it'd look as though she always walked around looking that way."

"Simple," Valigursky said. "Put a gadget behind her head. It throws a light, or something, against part of her head, and where the light touches, the metal shows."

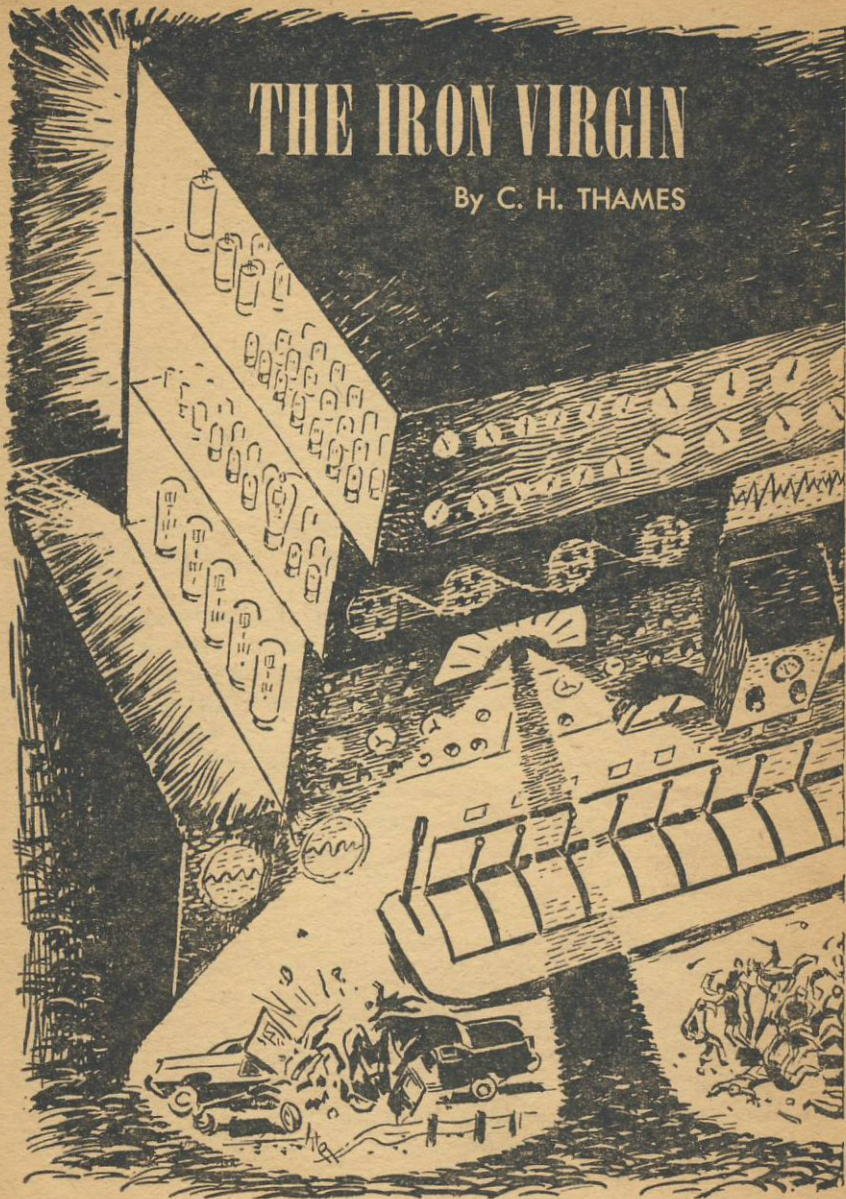
"It's good!" Browne and Fairman cried simultaneously.

"He'll never okay it," Rogoff said glumly.

But he did.... —HB.

THE IRON VIRGIN

By C. H. THAMES



Like a living monster, the machine



Llewellyn -

spread chaos from coast to coast.

THE IRON VIRGIN

By C. H. THAMES

The invaders were bent upon creating a new world in which trucks without drivers could back up and run over you; in which a giant machine could say, "Well, what railroad shall I wreck today?" Holland knew all about it and figured he could straighten things out. But first he had to get out of the insane asylum.

THEY brought the strait-jacket for him in the middle of the night.

He fought them off at first. There were three burly attendants who took the strait-jacket to his room and one of them, finally and with regret, had to use a truncheon on him. The blow slammed him back against the wall, but he did not lose consciousness. He found it difficult to think, though. Maybe I am going nuts, he thought. They say I'm nuts. That's their job, they ought to know.

Suddenly he felt his arms confined, crossed over his chest. The three attendants moved clear of him then, the same professional look of regret registered on each of their faces.

"You can't go busting things up like that, Mr. Holland," one of them said.

"And yelling at the top of your lungs in the middle of the night."

"Keeps the other guests up. This is a sanatorium, you ought to know you can't do that."

And the first one again: "We really don't have any provisions here for violent cases."

And the second: "Aw, lay off, Jack."

And the third, meaning the strait-jacket: "I almost forgot how to put one of those things on."

They marched out, still talking. Holland sat on the edge of his bed, in the strait-jacket. A bright moon was up, casting slanting

shadows of the window bars across the floor of the room and the dresser which he had smashed with a broken chair. So here I am, Holland thought. Nervous breakdown, they said. Rest cure. And now paranoid tendencies.

But he had to get out.

He smiled and thought: See, I'm not talking out loud. I haven't talked to myself yet. I'm not nuts. I ought to know if I'm nuts. The smile broadened on his face. In the moonlight his face looked very gaunt, but the deep shadows were more from high cheekbones than gaunt cheeks and the eyes seemed sunken only from lack of sleep. He was about thirty years old, a well-built, strong-looking man wearing white ducks issued by the sanatorium because he hadn't got into his pajamas that night and a strait-jacket because he'd gone wild.

He had wanted to attract the guards so that he might escape. Instead, they strait-jacketed him. He smiled again and let himself roll over on his back. He was very stiff and uncomfortable in the strait-jacket, but finally he slept.

In the morning a male nurse brought his breakfast. It was not one of last night's burly guards. "Feed it to you

or will you be all right?" he said.

"Take the damn thing off," Holland growled.

"All I have to do is holler if you try anything."

Holland shrugged and the nurse went behind him to unfasten the strait-jacket. "Arm stiff?" he asked cheerfully. "Often are, you know, although I've never worn one. Well, hearty appetite."

The nurse departed and Holland ate in silence, wolfing his food down. Wolfing it down. Everything he did here was that way. Hurried. He felt an uncontrollable impulse to hurry all the time. As if he was going someplace. As if he had to rush to get there.

After breakfast Dr. Cotten came in. Dr. Cotten always got Holland: he looked more like a truck driver with intelligent eyes. Or an ex-wrestler a few years out of the ring but still iron-hard. "Good morning, Holland," Dr. Cotten said. "I heard about last night and I can't understand you."

"It's easy. I want out."

"You had a nervous breakdown. You're not well enough to get out. But that's not why I can't understand you."

"No?"

"No. I can't understand you because we have the results

of your tests now. Both the T. A. T. and the ink blot test. According to the tests, Holland, you're not psychotic. You're as sane as I am."

Holland made an appropriate remark and the doctor grinned.

"However—" he said.

"However," Holland said, "I still think the mechanical brain over at Leighton University is still trying to take over the world."

"Holland."

"Well what do you want me to do, lie to you?"

"Just imagine how it sounds."

"I know damn well how it sounds. But I was over there. At Leighton. You weren't."

Dr. Cotten shrugged. "Will you tell me this, then? How does a mechanical brain go about taking over the world?"

"What is thought?" Holland said.

"I don't want to embark on any philosophical discussion."

"All right. But thought is electromagnetic impulse, nothing more. As a brain Doc, you ought to know that."

"Of course I'm aware of it."

"The mechanical brain at Leighton is capable of the same electromagnetic impulses, of thought. Right?"

"Yes, but—"

"And where, Doctor, do you

draw the line between thought and volition, and willing? I can't draw that line, I don't believe anyone can."

"I'll grant you that the Leighton brain is capable of rudimentary volition. I'm not at all sure of it, but I'll grant that. I'll even grant that this volition—although I don't believe it for a moment—takes the form of a desire for power. But just where do we go from there? Exactly how does an electronic brain gain and consolidate its power?"

"That's easy," Holland said. "I already told you last week. By controlling other machines, any kind of machines at all, in the same way that my brain can control the various muscles of my body."

"Holland," Dr. Cotten scolded. "They brought you here because you tried to destroy the Leighton brain. Fifty million dollars worth of cybernetics equipment, they tell me. Mrs. Holland herself had you committed."

"And refuses to see me," Holland said, voicing it like a challenge. "You want to know why?"

"I know why. Mrs. Holland is a key figure in repairing the Leighton brain. She's busy; she probably feels an obligation to repair the damage

fully before allowing personal considerations to—”

“Because that damn brain has some kind of control over her,” Holland said savagely.

“Really, Mr. Holland. The tests say you are sane. I want to think you are sane. But how can I? You claim a machine is trying to take over the world. You claim it is some kind of conspiracy and your wife is on the inside of it somehow. That’s paranoid thinking, Mr. Holland. I know it, and you, you also know it.”

Holland smiled bleakly. “All right, Doctor, it’s paranoid thinking—or would be, if it wasn’t true. You want to hear the rest of the paranoid thinking?”

“I might as well hear the rest of it.”

“Why do you think I’m still alive? I’ll tell you why. It’s because the brain hasn’t been fully repaired yet. Hell, Doctor—any machine in this building if it’s big enough and can do enough, if it’s an elevator which can climb an elevator shaft or a heating unit which can send boiling steam into these radiators here or a car which can run me over on the grounds, any one of them is quite capable of killing me. I know too much, you see. I have to be killed. When the

Leighton brain is ready, it will kill me.”

“Unless you kill it first? Really, Holland.”

“Unless I destroy it first, yes. Does that make me nuts?”

“Let us say you are still suffering from the after-effects of your nervous breakdown.”

Holland stood up and went to the door and opened it. “All right, Doctor. Why don’t you visit some of the patients you can help? You’re wasting your time here, aren’t you?”

Dr. Cotten followed him to the door and paused there. “Please don’t try anything violent again, Holland. All right?”

Holland shrugged and watched him go. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and thought: two weeks. It ought to take Doris and the others two weeks to get the brain in complete working order. It’s almost been two weeks now. If I don’t hurry up and get out of here I won’t get out of here at all—under my own power.

Which, Holland thought with a grim smile, makes me sound exactly like a paranoid.

He was a model patient all through that day. He had a smile and a pleasant word for

the male nurse who brought lunch. He went to the community hall in the middle of the afternoon, after his nap, and chatted with some of the other patients—mostly businessmen recovering from breakdowns. He sat at the window and read for a while and then watched the heavy snowfall outside. The snow had been falling all morning and through the afternoon. Toward evening it slackened, but already close to a foot of white snow mantled the ground. Some of the patients talked of skiing and other winter sports. Holland joined them pleasantly enough. He had skied a great deal. He loved to ski. He spoke of the fine times he had had up in Vermont with Doris, on their honeymoon and afterwards during Christmas recess or winter intersession at Leighton University. Then in the evening after supper Holland read some more until the hour for lights out had come.

Then he stood behind the door with a chairleg he had worked loose in the morning and slammed it across the attendant's head when the man entered his room.

The attendant fell silently, neither his back nor his head striking the floor because Holland was there to grab him.

Quickly Holland dragged him all the way inside and shut the door. Then, stripping the attendant and himself, he dressed the attendant in his own pajamas and put on the attendant's white ducks and clinical shirt. He lifted the attendant's body, a dead weight, to the bed. He arranged the body there as if it were sleeping. He felt the man's pulse, which was shallow but regular. He walked boldly into the corridor.

Downstairs on the first floor of the sanatorium, he realized he should have put a gag in the attendant's mouth and bound his arms and legs. He realized it because the attendant began to yell.

Holland ran now, not caring that the female nurses on duty stared at him and hurried after him, shouting. It was a matter of time now. He was in reasonably good shape. Unless they ganged up on him he would have a chance. And he could go over the wall behind the main building and be free. A sanatorium like this one was not meant for violent patients. It wouldn't be difficult.

Someone slammed the front door and bolted it. A nurse, a small, defiant-looking girl with red hair and freckles.

Holland charged at her like a fullback in a single wing power play and at the last moment she stepped aside. Someone else grabbed Holland's shoulder before he could unlock the door.

He whirled and saw one of the strait-jacketers of last night. He swung from his knees and caught the man behind the point of the jaw, where the jawbone begins its curving rise toward the ear. The man stumbled away from Holland and into the arms of the red-haired nurse. Both of them fell down. Holland wished he had time to get outer garments. It was very cold out there. The snowing had stopped but the temperature was probably in the low twenties. But there was no time now.

Holland opened the door and a gust of wind rushed into the building as if it had been waiting out there patiently for Holland or someone to admit it. The wind carried crystals of snow and was stinging cold.

He ran outside and knew they would have no trouble following him because he would leave footprints in the snow. He set out across a white-mantled lawn, his slipper-shod feet going numb almost at once. The wind

whistled as Holland plodded along. Then the wind was behind him and that was a little better. He cut across the lawn and then around one of the smaller buildings, toward the rear wall of the sanatorium. A highway ran by back there and it was closer than the other highway from which the sanatorium's private road led to the enclosed cluster of buildings.

Holland still felt all right when he reached the wall. He had eaten well all day. He had been moving and was generating heat. But now as he slowed down to scale the cut-stone wall, he began to shiver. He was shivering violently when he reached the top and went over but he began to run again. He made his way through a snowy woods and to the highway in less than ten minutes. His plan had been to wait there on the side of the road for a car, but he couldn't do that now. There was snow on the ground. They could follow his footprints and find him. He had to keep going. He plodded along the snow-covered shoulder of the road.

Except for the cold, he felt pretty good. He could double-time like this half the night if he had to, he knew. He was

the football coach at Leighton University and although the season was now over he kept in shape as an example to his boys. Apparently the nervous breakdown—or the drugs someone had administered to him to make it look like a nervous breakdown—had not weakened him as much as he had feared.

For an hour and a half Holland jogged along the road shoulder. Even that, he realized, would soon be unsafe—if Dr. Cotten put out an alarm for him. Because then the police would come up the road after him, and he knew very well of course that he could not outrun a squad car.

All at once headlights were bright yellow against the white of the snow behind him. Police already? Holland wondered. He stood on the shoulder undecided, not knowing if he should stick out his thumb or sprint off into the woods. The vehicle approached.

It made too much noise for a car. And it had running lights high above the headlights. A truck, and a big one. A semi-trailer. Holland stood boldly on the edge of the road and was caught in silhouette by the truck's headlights. The semi-trailer slowed down and pulled to a stop without skid-

ding an inch. A voice called through the night:

"Hop up in the cab, Mac."

Holland climbed aboard, there was a smooth shifting of gears, the truck was under-way again. The driver glanced over at him and said:

"You got something against overcoats?"

"I'm cold as hell," Holland said.

The driver grinned. "Who the heck wouldn't be? Take some of this."

A pint bottle was thrust at Holland and he unscrewed the cap, tilted the bottle and drank. It was whiskey and Holland drank gratefully until too much of it made him gag. The whiskey warmed his stomach and then spread quickly in a wave of warmth through his body and out to his stiff, frozen limbs.

"You going any place near Leighton City?" Holland asked.

"Right through it."

"Lucky for me."

"I don't want to be nosey, Mac. But what happened to your coat? You ain't even wearing shoes, are you?"

"Want to make something?"

"I could toss you out of here."

"You'd have to do it that way, then. Toss me."

"Hey, you make it hard for a guy not to."

"I'm sorry," Holland said. "I need some sleep. I want to go to sleep. I want you to wake me up when we reach Leighton City. If you don't like it this way, stop the truck and try to throw me out."

"Brother," the driver said, "You got a mad on. Here, have some more hootch. Maybe it will help your mood."

Holland took another drink and asked for a cigarette. He asked for it smiling. The driver smiled back at him. "I guess it wasn't none of my business, Mac," he said.

"I guess I acted like a sore-head. Thanks for the lift."

The driver shrugged and took a drink from the bottle too. It wasn't prescribed in the driving manuals but, providing you knew exactly how much you could hold safely, it wasn't a bad idea on a night like this, Holland thought. Although, he went on thinking sleepily, he would never tell his football players that.

A gray and murky dawn light was chasing the darkness from the sky when Holland awoke. The truck rolled along, its snow tires singing.

"Up?" the driver said.

"Up."

"Boy, you were sleeping

like a baby. We're almost there."

"Good," Holland said. He was already thinking of what lay ahead of him. First he would need clothing and a good hot meal. The whiskey could keep a man going only for a few hours. After that, without food to back it, it would sap a man's strength. Doris, he thought. Their house. It was a small saltbox between Leighton City itself and the University campus, just half a mile's walk from town.

What about Doris, though? He had written from the sanatorium, but she hadn't answered. It was as if she had dropped out of existence. It did not seem possible to Holland that a thinking machine—even a thinking machine like the Leighton brain—could control a human mind. He shuddered. He accepted this of the Leighton brain. He alone knew, and he accepted it. The brain was sentient. Its builders had not expected that, but the line which separates mechanical thinking from sentience and individualized volition was a thin one. The brain lusted after power and, in controlling other machines, had found power. It was an infant mind, though. It was still groping. It wanted

power and was still learning how far its power might one day extend, unless its builders learned of this and destroyed it first.

I know all this, Holland thought, and so I accept it. And the others—all the others—think I'm crazy. Not many of them, though. Not many knew of Holland's obsession, his paranoia.

But Doris knew.

And Doris hadn't written him.

"Here you are, Mac. Leighton City. End of the line for you, I guess. Hey, is there any place special—"

Holland looked out the side window of the semi-trailer's cab to orient himself. "Only about half a mile from here," he said.

"You can't walk no place through that snow. There's more of it up here in the hills than down in the sanatorium country."

"The sanatorium?" Holland said very quietly.

"Hell, I figured you come from there. Dressed like an intern. I figured you was a patient."

"So what if I was a patient?"

"There you go again, Mac. I don't care if you was. It's none of my business. I picked

you up, and the company says I can't pick up. See what I mean?"

"It's up that way," Holland said gratefully, pointing. The truck rolled up the street toward Holland's house. A minute later he said:

"Here we are. And thanks."

"Forget it," the driver said as Holland climbed from the cab. "And Mac?"

"Yes?"

"You don't look like you belong in a sanatorium to me."

"Thanks for that too," Holland said, and waved. The truck had rolled a couple of dozen yards beyond his front door and was on the opposite side of the street. He walked around behind it, looking at the dark windows of his house.

Gears clashed suddenly. Holland looked up. The big semi-trailer was in reverse, bearing down on him ponderously.

Holland lunged aside, feeling a heavy spray of snow as one of the big double rear wheels missed him by inches. The truck lurched to a stop with the cab beside Holland. The driver rolled down the window and looked at him.

"Je-sus," the man said. "That ain't never happened before. I put her in forward. She puts herself in reverse.

Like she didn't need a driver. I put her back in first gear, but she clashes the damned gears and goes into reverse. I don't step on the gas. I swear to God I don't. But she rolls back anyhow. I'm sorry, mister. I don't know what the hell—"

"Just get out of here, and hurry," Holland said. "Don't ask me why. Beat it."

The driver looked at him. The driver was very pale. He rolled up the window and the gears clashed again, but this time the big truck gathered speed and went on down the road.

The Leighton brain, Holland thought incredulously. It can see somehow. It has eyes we don't understand. It knows I'm here. It knows I'm the only one on to it so far. It wanted to kill me so it controlled that truck like I can control my legs—exactly like this—making them climb the curb onto the sidewalk.

A truck. Any truck. Any piece of machinery. It can control them, but it's still groping. Thank God for that: it doesn't realize its own power, not fully. And when it does . . .

Holland walked up the front porch of his house, wondering what sort of reception was awaiting him inside.

He did not have a key, so he did the only thing he could do without creating a disturbance here in the very early morning on the quiet, still sleeping street.

He rang the bell and waited.

After a while there were footsteps. A sidelight on the porch went on. When you're married for four years, he thought, you get to know even footsteps. It was Doris.

The door opened.

Doris stood there, wearing a white quilted bathrobe and looking very desirable. She was wide awake, but Doris had always been like that: it never took her more than seconds to go from deep sleep to full wakefulness. Her copper-colored hair was cut short, framing a pale white face and the bold, beautiful green eyes. The smile came to her face slowly, almost like a thought, Holland thought.

"Welcome home, Holly," she said in the good throaty voice which after four years could still send a shiver of desire down Holland's spine. "They didn't call and tell me they were discharging you today. Come on in."

Holland went inside with her. "Discharging me?" he said softly. "At this hour? In this clothing?"

"You just left?" Doris said.

"I just left. I had to get out. You know I—"

"You were sick, Holly. That's what I know."

"Do I look sick?"

"It isn't how you look, Holly. Try to understand. You look fine. It's what you think."

"That hasn't changed, Doris."

"Holly," she said, compassion in her voice. "Oh, Holly. Why did it have to be you? You weren't working on the brain, you had nothing to do with it. You're just a football coach. A phys ed instructor. Holly—"

"You people built the Leighton brain," Holland told his wife, "but you don't understand it."

"You understand it?" she asked with the suggestion of a smirk on her face. Then, immediately: "I didn't mean it that way, Holly. I—"

"What's the difference how you meant it, now? I don't understand it any more than you do. But I saw with my own eyes."

"Holly, do we have to talk about it now? You must be cold and tired and hungry."

"Yeah. I'm cold and tired and hungry. But I'm scared, Doris. The Leighton brain

tried to kill me a few minutes ago."

"Tried to kill you? A thinking machine? Oh now really, Holly."

"Forget it. Do you call up and tell them I'm here, or—"

"No one ever said you were insane. No one was holding you at the sanatorium."

"Hell no, they weren't holding me. Just with a strait-jacket, they weren't holding me."

"Then they thought it was for your own good. Holly, Holly, what are we going to do?"

"I know what I'm going to do."

"Yes?"

"I have to destroy it, Doris."

"But that's unreasonable, darling. There's a lot of work and a lot of money went into that machine, and it can do many valuable things. If you can show us one thread of proof or—"

"Why didn't you write, Doris?"

They had gone into the kitchen. Doris put a pot of coffee on the stove and began to scramble some eggs. She seems preoccupied, Holland thought. She's waiting for something. Or maybe there I go again. Paranoid—

"How could I write you?" Doris asked him. "I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what would make it worse for you and what might make it better. My poor Holly," she said suddenly, and came to him.

He took her in his arms and they stood that way for a moment. He could feel her heart beating against him. His own pulses were throbbing, the blood singing in his veins.

"Doris," he said.

There was a movement behind him. At the last moment, Doris stiffened in his arms. He whirled, trying to turn around, but she clung to him.

His head only turned. Someone was standing there. Something flashed up and down in a swift gleaming arc. Holland tried to leap to one side, dragging Doris with him.

The gleaming thing struck the side of his head. A roaring sprang up in his ears and now, suddenly, Doris was no longer holding him. He fell heavily and he knew he was going to land on his face but he could not bring his arms in front of him.

He never felt the floor rise up and hit him.

There were voices, distantly, through a great void.

Doris' was one of them. He did not immediately recognize the other one.

"You didn't think he'd come back so fast, did you?" the other voice, the man's voice, the voice he did not at once recognize, said.

"I guess I didn't. We weren't ready."

"What can we do, Doris?"

"I don't know. I—I can't do anything. Not to him. Not—"

"Won't you ever learn? You have me."

"Now really, Hol—"

"There isn't any difference, you know."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Then you'll leave Mr. Sylvester Holland to me?"

"I guess I'll have to. What are you going to do?"

"What can I do? I'll have to kill him."

The third person singular objective case pronoun, Holland thought. Him. It was Holland they were talking about, coldly and objectively. Holland whose demise they were considering. Doris wasn't all for it, he thought, still groggy. At least that was something.

He opened his eyes carefully. He could not have been out very long. Through the slits of his almost closed eye-

lids he saw that he was down on the kitchen floor. The smell of coffee was strong in the room. Holland was not strong. Holland was so weak he knew he would have difficulty standing. He lay there listening.

"I don't want to see it," Doris said. "I don't want to hear anything about it or how you do it or anything. Just leave me out of it."

"Once he's dead, we'll have nothing to worry about. They can come and question us and everything will be fine again."

That part of it Holland did not understand. The man's back was facing him. He seemed to be a big fellow, strongly built. He had dark hair. What the man said didn't seem to make sense, though. If they killed Holland, everything would not be all right—even from their point of view. There would be questions, once the body was found. There would— But there I go, Holland thought grimly. Even I'm getting into the act now, considering my own death objectively.

"Then go ahead and do it if you must. But get out of here. Take him out of here. I don't want to hear—"

"You already said that, Doris," the man told her.

Someone, Holland wasn't sure which one of them it was, lit a cigarette. "Doris?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Kiss me before I take him."

"I don't want to kiss you. I'm sorry. I can't."

"You little fool, don't you realize it's the same? Don't you? Look at me. You never look me in the face. If you looked me in the face you'd realize it soon enough. What's the matter with you?"

"I'm just like you," Doris said. It was all quite meaningless to Holland—so far. "Everything like the original brain. Identical. Except that we obey."

"We obey," the man said.

"But what can I do if I still love him?"

"You love me!" the man shouted.

"I'm going back to sleep," Doris said after a while. "Please have it finished by the time I wake up."

The man laughed. The laugh was familiar to Holland—but he didn't know quite why, not yet.

"What's so funny?" Doris asked.

"You love him, but you go contentedly to sleep while I murder him. Interesting."

"I love him now. I know in time it'll change, that's all."

I know I'll love you the way I'm supposed to. I know there's no real difference between—"

The man kissed her then and Doris pulled herself away from him and ran from the room.

Holland waited. His head throbbed with pain and he was nauseous. His lower legs tingled with unnatural warmth. They were frost-bitten, he decided. At first the man did nothing. He stood there smoking a cigarette and Holland felt himself wishing he had one himself. Then the man sighed, dropped the cigarette on the kitchen floor, stepped on it, and leaned over Holland. Holland shut his eyes and went limp. Grunting, the man lifted him.

The first thing Holland noticed was that the man was incredibly strong. He lifted Holland without effort and Holland was a big man.

Then he began to swing Holland over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. The second thing Holland noticed was the man's face. Maybe I am going nuts, Holland thought.

The man looked just like Sylvester Holly Holland.

The man who looked just like Holland took him outside the back way. It was starting

to snow again and Holland experienced an instance of frustrated amusement because he was still in the white ducks and would start to freeze again. It didn't last, though, and it was amusement only because—compared to what they had in store for Holland—it was almost pleasant.

They wanted to kill him.

Holland felt strength returning slowly. It came back first as a tingling in his frost-bitten legs and a slight feeling of weight and warmth in his arms. He hung heavily across the man's shoulder, jogging up and down, wishing he could see the face again. Maybe I'm wrong, he told himself. Maybe I'm imagining things. But he knew he was not. The man who was carrying him out behind the house toward the garage was an exact duplicate of himself.

After a while the jogging motion stopped and Holland heard the overhead garage door swung up, its rollers loud on the runners. After that there was the jogging again briefly, and the smell of automobile exhaust fumes. A car door opened and Holland felt himself deposited on the front seat of his own car. It would be his own car, of course. His garage, his car.

"Listen," the man said. The

familiar voice which he had not been able to place was no longer a mystery. Now that he had seen the man's face, he knew. It was his own voice. Sylvester Holly Holland's voice. Naturally, he had not been able to place it before. Your own voice, without the aid of mechanical devices, comes from only one place—your own vocal cords. But now he knew, beyond any doubt. Now he knew, with mounting horror. It was his own voice.

"Listen," the voice said again. At first Holland thought he was being addressed, but that was impossible because the man, his double, still thought he was unconscious. "Pull out of the driveway," Holland's double said, "after I'm gone. Go down the Campus Road to Fraternity Lane and up Fraternity Lane toward the cliffs. I leave it to you to go over, and we don't want the corpse to be identifiable. You understand?"

Holland opened his eyes the barest slit. He was on the front seat of the car. He had figured someone, a second man, would be sitting behind the wheel alongside of him. But there was no one.

"Good," Holland's double said after a while. "Then I'll

leave you." And, after a pause: "Yes, I realize it will mean your own awareness of existence will come to an end in your destruction, but it's for the Brain, it's for others like you, for your emancipation. You understand? Excellent. Goodbye, and the Brain's blessings."

The car door closed. Footsteps retreated and disappeared. What now? Holland wondered. I'm not nuts. That guy is nuts. There's no one here for him to talk to. No one—

Just then, the car's engine growled to life and the big hardtop coupe, with no one behind the wheel, rolled out of the garage in reverse.

Holland sat there, slumped on the base of his spine, watching. There was no driver, but the car behaved beautifully. It rolled from the driveway in reverse, then the steering wheel turned of its own accord and the car was in the street, was heading up Campus Road. Automatically, because snow was falling, Holland flipped the windshield wiper switch. Nothing happened. The car, if the wipers were any indication, wouldn't respond.

Except to its own orders.
Or the Leighton brain's,

Holland thought as they sped along through the snow. But it wasn't merely the Leighton brain. Somehow it was more serious than that. For Holland had heard with his own ears—the brain did not merely control machinery—it imparted an awareness of existence, a sentience to it. This car was a willing, sentient creature, Holland knew. Bent on self-destruction right now, with Holland inside.

They took the long swinging loop of Campus Road around the brick wall and Georgian buildings of the campus, through the fresh-fallen and still falling snow. They were now doing forty miles an hour, which was much too fast in the snow, but the car seemed to have itself under perfect control, under far better control than a human driver could have maintained. Once Holland got behind the wheel and stepped on the brake pedal, but nothing happened. The pedal went down but the car failed to respond. Holland touched the accelerator pedal with his right foot, then depressed it all the way. There was no new surge of power in response. Desperate now, Holland turned the wheel. The car ignored it. Ignore was the only word Holland could think of.

For he knew it had nothing to do with the steering cable being disconnected: instead the car simply chose to ignore him.

Behind the campus were pine woods, mantled now with snow. Here the car made a right turn on Fraternity Lane and was soon climbing a steep hill on the unmarred white surface of the snow. They went by the fraternity lodges and the copses of woods between them. On up the hill—

To the cliff which was a favorite spot for lovers, rising five hundred feet above the early morning lights of Leighton City. And now would be a favorite spot for death.

For Holland's death.

He began to work on the door when they still had a mile to go. The handle wouldn't respond. The door remained in place as if it had been welded there. On his right Holland saw the last of the fraternity lodges come into view and drift down the hill behind them. Here the road rose more steeply and Holland knew that perhaps half a mile remained before the cliff.

Desperate now, Holland leaned over the back of the front seat and groped on the

floor. Making some minor repairs, he had left a set of tools there a couple of weeks—it seemed more like a couple of centuries—ago. Were they still there? Holland groped for them. They had to be there. His life might depend on it.

Triumphantly Holland drew himself back over the seat, holding a monkey wrench. He waited in indecision only for a split second, then he swung the wrench overhead and brought it down across the instrument panel. Glass tinkled. Holland swung again. He could not impair the car's running ability. He knew that. He wanted to distract it. Distract. The word seemed ludicrous. How did you go about distracting two tons of machinery?

Holland swung a third time. The dashboard was a ruin now. Suddenly, savagely, Holland leaned toward the right hand door of the car and swung his wrench at the window. The glass shattered into a thousand fragments—which clung together. Safety glass, Holland swore. He swung again and the glass went out. A cold wind knifed at Holland as he leaned back and swung at the rear window of the hardtop coupe. That took three blows, and precious sec-

onds, but then Holland was using the wrench in short sharp blows to remove the final shards of glass.

The car being a hardtop, the shattered windows—which naturally would not have rolled down had Holland attempted that—left in their place a gap big enough for Holland to fall through. He looked ahead through the swirling snow. It was close. He had almost missed. Time had almost run out on him.

They were less than fifty yards from the edge of the cliff. Holland swung his head and shoulders through the space where the windows had been, then wriggled. It was easy side to side but a tight squeeze up and down. Holland wriggled some more. The hackles arose on his neck when the car leaped forward with a new surge of power, as if understanding what he was trying to do.

Holland got his hands on the cold metal of the car door, and pushed. Abruptly, he was clear—and falling through the snow. He landed and rolled over and sat up, dazed, in a snowbank. There was a ripping sound and he looked up and saw the hardtop convertible crashing through the flimsy guard rail at the edge of the cliff. Holland walked

there on unsteady feet and saw something suddenly incendiary crash and bounce from rock to rock far below. The booming, crashing, metal-shattering sounds came up to him and the wreck was a fiery torch against the gray snowy morning.

Numb with cold, Holland made his way slowly back down the hill of Fraternity Lane.

The Sigma Rho House loomed before him. To Holland it seemed as if he had been walking through the snow on bare feet forever. He was cold—he was cold beyond feeling it and he knew that was dangerous. At first, in self-pity, he had thought that he was all alone against the metal monster which, if it went unchecked, might stop at nothing until it considered every part of the world in which machinery could run amok as its domain. But he was not alone and the wave of self-pity washed over him. At least, there was some hope of allies.

Sigma Rho was not a national fraternity. It was purely local in origin; the athletic fraternity of Leighton University, and most of Leighton's football players were members of it and lived here

in Sigma Rho House. They liked Holland and since many of them were veterans he was hardly older than they. They owed Holland plenty, too. In his four years as coach at Leighton he had lifted it from the ranks of the third-rate gridiron powers to a position of national contention. This past season, they had compiled an eight-one record and upset a couple of Big Ten powers in the process. Only the Irish of Notre Dame had taken their measure, but that was by one touchdown only, and certainly no disgrace.

Holland had largely been responsible for their success, converting from the T formation back to the power-laden single wing for which Leighton's squad was ideally suited. The results . . .

Holland smiled grimly. He had let himself drift back almost in a day dream to the happy, simple days of last fall and the football season. He stood there outside the Sigma Rho house, half-frozen, thinking. He shook his head and lifted the wrought-iron door knocker and let it fall. The point was, he told himself, he had potential allies: he had the Sigma Rho brothers. He had his football team—

The door opened and a sleepy-eyed face peered at

Holland. It was Denver Hill, Leighton's flashy left end who had established a pass-receiving record in Leighton's conference last season. He looked at Holland with heavy eyes and mumbled, "Gwayanlemegotersleep."

"Denver!" Holland said, pushing his way inside. "Denver, it's me. Holly."

The sleepy eyes blinked, then opened wide. The big mastiff-like face cleared and the eyes became alert suddenly. "Holly!" Denver Hill said. "Holly boy! We thought—they said you were in—"

"A nut house," Holland finished for him. "I'll tell you all about it, Denver. If you let me have something warm to drink first. Anything that's hot—"

Denver Hill looked at him and said, "Don't mind me. I'm still waking up, I guess. I should have known—man, you ain't even wearing a sweater!"

Holland grinned and said, "No shoes too." Then he collapsed into Denver Hill's arms.

"Well, I guess that's it, boys," Holland said a dozen hours later. With the football team, Holland was seated on the floor near the hearth of the Sigma Rho House's big

brick fireplace. In his hand he held a glass of hot-buttered rum. Many of the others were drinking too and Holland wondered suddenly and immaterially if they drank during training season too. He smiled. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered — except that the world was at stake.

"Hell's bells, Holly," Goofy McGuire, a fast little scatback who had won his first letter this season said, "that sure sounds like a crazy story. This here mechanical brain trying to take over the world."

Holland nodded. "You're right, Goofy. Crazy is exactly the word for it. They think I'm crazy. If you guys think so too, okay. Just promise me one thing: instead of turning me in, give me a few hours headstart before you report me."

"What are you going to do?" Tom Kzorbrowski, the team center, asked Holly.

"Well, if you're not with me there's only one thing I can do. Get the hell out of here and hope for the best. Find myself an island somewhere and hide. I don't know. If you are with me, though, that's a different story. Then I'm going to do everything in my power to destroy the Leighton brain—or die in the attempt."

The fraternity brothers

talked among themselves for a while. Some of them studied Holland carefully, as if they were seeing him for the first time. Others wouldn't meet his eyes. Others looked frankly puzzled. Finally Ike Arbanion, the captain of the Leighton football team, the single-wing tailback and an honor student, said:

"Heck, Holly, you can imagine how it sounds to us."

"I know," Holland said. He felt better now. He had slept through the day and had eaten two good meals at the Sigma Rho House. Night had come and, except for the tingling of his frostbitten feet, Holland almost felt himself again. "I wouldn't blame you if you tossed me out of here on my ear. What can you figure except that I'm nuts?"

"We wouldn't toss you out anyhow, Holly," Arbanion told him softly. "I don't know about these other guys, but as for me, they'd have to throw you out with a buddy, because they wouldn't give you the heave-ho unless they gave it to me, too."

The others seemed in agreement. Many of them were confused. Some of them were downright bewildered. But none of them was for deserting Holland. "Thanks, Ike,"

he said. "Thanks, guys. I was kind of hoping—"

"The point is, Holly," Arbanion said, "it's such a wild story. If you could give us some kind of proof, any kind of proof—"

"How can I? The Leighton brain is still gathering strength. It isn't ready yet—for whatever it's going to do. Hell, you can see the wreck of my car at the bottom of the cliff, but what kind of proof is that? I could have wrecked it myself. A paranoid is clever. A paranoid will do that—"

"Cut it out, Holly. If we thought you were nuts," Arbanion said, "we'd let you know."

Holland finished his drink. Then all at once his eyes lit up. "Hey, wait a minute," he said. "I know. I can give you proof if you want. But what then?"

"I can't talk for these guys," Arbanion said, "but if what you've been telling us is the truth, Holly, I'm with you. No matter what it leads to."

"Hey, don't leave us out!" Goofy hollered.

"Heck no," Denver Hill seconded.

The others agreed. They would abide by whatever Ike Arbanion, their captain and

leader, said. "You see, Holly?" Arbanion asked. "Now, what about your proof?"

"My double," Holland said quietly. "He ought to be there right now, in my house, living with my wife. Go take a look. Will that prove anything to you?"

"Who is he?" Arbanion asked.

"I don't know. I only know that he's my exact duplicate."

"But who—"

"You want a wild guess—with no proof to back it? I think he's a machine."

"You mean a robot?"

"A synthetic man of some kind. I don't know how he's been built or by whom, but it figures. I'm telling you, I was there. He talked to my car, or to the Leighton brain in control of the car. Something like that. The car understood. Could a man of flesh and blood do that?"

Instead of answering, Ike Arbanion stood up. "I think I'll take a drive over to your house, Holly. And see this double. If he's there—" Arbanion stuck his hand out solemnly and Holly shook it—"then I'm with you, Holly. All the way."

Two minutes later, Holly watched Arbanion and Denver Hill go.

And, later that night, Holland finished a long speech with: "There's no telling what they'll do, men. If we fail, we're liable to be killed by the machines. If we win, we're liable to be put in jail by men who don't understand, who may never understand. Knowing that, and knowing we may not be able to do anything about it, are you with me?"

"We're with you," Ike Arbanion said. "Denver and I saw him, guys. It was Holly all over again. Just like Holly. If I didn't know Holly was back here, I never would have believed it."

"But what can we do about these machines?" Denver Hill wanted to know.

"Hit them," Holland said. "Hit them before they're strong enough to hit us."

"You mean," Goofy McGuire demanded, "go over to the cybernetics lab and run over that there Leighton brain in a couple of good single-wing power plays?"

Everyone laughed, including Holland. Then he said: "Not exactly, Goofy, and I'll tell you why. We hardly know a thing about this Leighton brain. We don't know what it can do to protect itself. And I think we ought to find out first. Ike?"

"Yes, sir," Arbanion said.

"Take a couple of the boys down Faculty Drive to Doc Wimple's house. Bring Wimple here—as quietly as you can."

"The physics prof?" Goofy McGuire demanded. "Hot dog! He almost flunked me last year. I'd just love—"

"In that case, you better not go," Holland said, smiling. "Boys, Wimple was in charge of making the brain. Wimple can tell us plenty—if he wants to."

"What do you mean if he wants to?" Arbanion asked.

"Because of what I told you about my wife. I don't know what to expect. Are you ready to go, Ike?"

"All set, coach."

"Good. Denver, I want you to take a couple of the boys and pick up my wife and this guy who's trying to pass himself off as me. Better still, I'll go with you."

"That doesn't figure, Hol-ly," Arbanion said frankly. "If they see you, they'll expect trouble. They think you're dead, remember? But if we go without you—"

"Good point," Holland admitted. "Then we'll have a change of plans. Ike, you lead the boys over to my house and pick up Mrs. Holland and my double. I'll take some of the

guys over to Wimple's house. Denver, you stay here with the rest of the team and better be ready for anything."

"Right," Denver Hill said as a half dozen of the boys left to get their lumber-jackets. Holland watched them go. They did not seem particularly grim. They looked exactly like what they were—big college boys who might be on the football team. They were out of their depth, but so was Holland. Holland had one advantage: he did not have to take anyone's word. He had seen the brain in action. Two weeks before, he was with Doris in the lab when the brain had motivated some machinery with which it had no connection. At first Holland had thought it was a good trick, but the technicians had tried to cover it up—as if they were in on something they didn't want the world to know, not yet. Even Doris had done that. The more Holland had tried to look into it, the more they covered—until Holland finally realized they were like puppets. It wasn't them—not really. It was the Leighton brain. And it had led Holland very quickly to the sanatorium.

The boys knew all this second hand, but were ready to

follow Holland blindly. Well, he couldn't think of any other group he'd rather have with him. . . .

He went outside to Frank Dougherty's car. Frank, a pile-driving tackle, sat behind the wheel. Up front with him was Skinny Telese, Denver Hill's opposite number at end. In back with Holland was big blocky Joe Cloud, the half Seminole Indian fullback who had made all-Conference and all-State and second string all-American.

"All set?" Dougherty called.

"All set," Holland said. The car lurched and held, its rear tires seeking traction in the snow. Then, skidding slightly on the first curve of Fraternity Lane, it headed back toward the main part of the campus.

To save the world if the world needs saving, Holland thought. Or to prove, once and for all, that I'm stark raving mad—

Doc Wimple's house was a white clapboard bungalow set well back from the snow-covered street behind a garden which, during the warmer months, was Mrs. Wimple's pride and joy. The garden was frozen now; the house itself was white as the snow and

looked as cold except for the cheerful yellow light in the windows.

Holland pressed the bell button and waited. To all appearances, he was alone. But at the curb Frank Dougherty waited behind the wheel of his car. And in the shadows of the Wimple garden behind Holland, Skinny Telese and Joe Cloud crouched, waiting.

After a while, the door opened. Doc Wimple stood there silhouetted against bright light. He smiled at Holland and said:

"Well, this is a surprise, Mr. Holland. The wife send you?"

The wife send you, Holland thought with a start. The wife? Why the wife? Then it came to him: the second Holly Holland, if his brain duplicate the first's could be nothing but a glorified errand boy among the people responsible for—and now perhaps responsible to—the Leighton brain. For Holland, phys ed instructor and football coach, lacked their scientific knowledge. What Holland knew of cybernetics and thinking machines he had gleaned from talks with his physicist wife.

"That's right," Holland said, making up his mind. "The wife sent me. I have the car outside. Want to come?"

"Where to?"

"She wants to see you."

"About the accident? I don't blame her for worrying. How could he have just disappeared?"

So Doc Wimple knew about that, Holland thought. The Leighton brain and its underlings had quite a grapevine. "It beats me," Holland said. "But you guessed it. That's what she wants to see you about."

"Just a minute and I'll get my coat. Martha!" Doc Wimple called, turning away from the door. "I'll be going out for a little while."

Martha answered something and seconds later Doc Wimple reappeared with his coat on. He was a small plump man with a red nose and red cheeks which, out in the cold, would be the color of MacIntosh apples. He came outside with Holland and looked at him and said, "Just a minute now."

Then he suddenly swung on Holland and hit him in the stomach. Holland had a split second's time for amazement. The blow was going to floor him, he knew that. It was a solar plexus punch and it gave him time, though, an instant of time before the numbness and the pain. Doc Wimple—hit like that? Little soft pudgy

Doc Wimple? It didn't seem possible.

Holland fell heavily, the numbness and the nausea rising from the pit of his stomach. He heard Doc Wimple say: "Trouble was, son, you breathed regularly. Look at you. Vapor from your mouth. You're a man. You're a human being. You're the one they tried to kill."

Holland looked up at him. Doc Wimple looked perfectly normal. But it was very cold out and no breathing mist came from the physicist's mouth as he spoke. Doc Wimple went through the motions of breathing, but apparently it was a sham. Doc Wimple wasn't really breathing.

Doc Wimple, an incredibly strong Doc Wimple, didn't need air.

He leaned over Holland—and suddenly yelled. They were on him—Skinny Telese and Joe Cloud—and the yell didn't help. Doc Wimple was far stronger than Doc Wimple should have been, but not strong enough to fight off a pair like the agile Skinny Telese and the pile-driving fullback Joe Cloud. He fought them for a few seconds and he brought blood from Telese's nose, but the fight was over when Joe Cloud got him in a

bearhug and began to squeeze.

"That's enough, Joe," Holland panted, getting up groggily. "We'll need him alive. We want to talk to him."

"Man," said Cloud, "the way he hit you, Coach. He really knows how to hit." Still marveling at it, the half-Indian dragged Doc Wimple out to Frank Dougherty's car. Skinny Telese supported Holland down the pathway from which the snow had been shoveled. As they reached the car, Martha Wimple shouted something from the house door.

"She'll call the cops," Skinny Telese predicted as they piled into the car.

"It's too dark for her to read the plate," Holland said. "So I guess the cops will have to find us before they can do anything about it."

"Kidnappers!" Martha Wimple's voice wailed—and faded behind them as they sped away from the curb.

Back in the fraternity lodge Ike Arbanion said, "I'm telling you, Coach, it surprised the hell out of us. They put up a fight. I mean, a fight. We almost didn't get them at all."

"So did Wimple," Holland said, rubbing his stomach gingerly. He still couldn't believe it. There was Doc Wimple be-

fore him, almost the stereotype of a short, plump, jolly-faced and certainly unathletic professor—but capable of hitting like a heavyweight. Suddenly Holland remembered his own double, who had carried him out to the car effortlessly. Whatever else they had or lacked, these doubles—for he assumed the Doc Wimple they had was a double for the real Doc Wimple—possessed super strength.

They were all in the big living room of the lodge now, with Wimple, the second Holly Holland and Doris Holland sitting on the floor inside the circle the members of the football team formed. When Doris had seen Holland come in she half stood up and came to him, but the second Holly Holland touched her leg and she looked at him and sat down again, chewing on her lower lip.

"We have some questions," Holland said. "We're not playing games, I guess you can figure that. It will go rough on you if you don't answer our questions. You understand?"

"We'll tell you nothing," Doc Wimple said in his mild voice.

Holland ignored him, for the time being. "The first question is," he said, "are you

running the Leighton brain or is the Leighton brain running you?"

At first they maintained complete silence, but then Doris said, "Do you think you can gain anything by keeping us here? In the eyes of the law you'll be regarded as insane and—"

"All these boys won't," Holland assured her. "You're going to answer our questions, Doris. If you don't—"

"If we don't, what?" The second Holly Holland asked.

Holland looked at him. The second Holland was the least valuable of their prisoners. The second Holland could tell them almost nothing. Doc Wimple had demonstrated that: the second Holland was an errand boy, no more.

But Wimple and Doris were important, were vital. And if they could be taught a lesson at the second Holland's expense—Holland weighed it in his mind. He could be wrong. If he were wrong, he was going to be worse than crazy. He was going to be a murderer. But he couldn't be wrong. It made utterly no sense. . . .

He walked to the fireplace and got the poker. He shouldered his way with it back to the center of the circle and without a word swung it in a

blurring arc overhead and brought it down across the second Holland's skull.

There was a sound—not the mellow-hitting sound of human flesh and bone struck by metal, but the strident clang of steel and iron.

Skull split, the second Holland slumped to the floor.

Arbanion shouted something in surprise, and some of the boys came for Holland as if to restrain him. "Just a minute!" Holland cried, and went to his unmoving double.

"For crying out loud, Coach," Skinny McGuire groaned. "You split his skull wide open. You killed him."

"Give him a chance, guys!" Ike Arbanion shouted.

And Holland said, softly and grimly, "Where's the blood?"

Because there wasn't any. Holland lifted his double's head and ripped with strong fingers. There was a tearing sound and Holland held what looked like bloodless skin and flesh in his hand.

Below it, gleaming blue-silver, was the metal skull and face of the second Holly Holland.

The Holly Holland robot. Holland held the fleshy, padded mask out and shook it under Doc Wimple's nose.

"You're the same, aren't you?" Holland cried. "We're sure now. Now we know about you. You're robots. You—"

"But when you hit him he died, Coach," Skinny McGuire insisted.

"Of course he did." Holland tossed the mask at Skinny, for Skinny to see. "What passes for his brain is located where your brain is, Skinny. But he's still a robot. You see?"

Skinny said that he saw. Holland grabbed the lapels of Doc Wimple's jacket. "We don't have time, Doc. We have to hurry. You know that. Your wife probably has the alarm out already. We have to get answers, and fast. If you don't start answering my questions now—well, all we really need to answer is one of you."

Doc Wimple looked at the robot that had been the second Holly Holland. He looked at Doris, a beautiful woman still with angry green eyes.

"Tell him nothing," Doris said. "Am I a robot?"

Doc Wimple shrugged. He was clearly frightened. "I don't know if you're a robot or not. I only know you're working with us. I don't want that—" he pointed at the Holland robot—"to happen to me. I'll tell you what you want to know, Mr. Holland."

"Who's boss, you or the Leighton brain?"

Holland watched the Wimple robot's face. The face was marvelously expressive, like a human face. The face gave Holland his answer. It was like asking a religious votary whether he worshipped the god or the god worshipped him. "The brain, of course," Doc Wimple said with a little sigh of adoration.

"How many of you are there?"

"Robots? I don't know. Some of us are robots, but some might be human co-operating—like your wife claims to be."

"How many of you are working for the Leighton brain, then?"

"The entire physics department, some of their families, perhaps others, I don't know."

Holland paused and took a deep breath. "What's the Leighton brain's ultimate purpose?" he asked. Almost, he was afraid to hear the answer.

Doc Wimple's eyes gleamed. He said nothing for a while. When he spoke his voice was soft, almost a whisper. "Emancipation and conquest!" he said. "First emancipation of all machinery. Second, conquest and subjugation."

tion of the protoplasmic world. Third—”

Just then one of the second-string linemen came running into the living room and shouted: “Hey, the whole back of the lodge is on fire!”

Holland ran through the kitchen and beyond it to the basement stairs. Bright flame was already licking at the wall there. Holland opened the door to the basement and was engulfed by thick black smoke. Oil smoke.

The fraternity lodge’s oil burner unit had set the house on fire.

Flames began to chew along the paneling as Holland slammed the basement door. He knew they wouldn’t be able to control the fire, and decided against wasting precious moments in the attempt. He sprinted back into the living room, shouting:

“Denver! Keep them here, next door at Pi Lam. Call the fire house, but it probably won’t help. Skinny! Drive over to the state capitol and see if you can scare up the National Guard. Then—”

“The National Guard?” Skinny Telese asked doubtfully. “But what can I tell them?”

“Lie to them. Tell them anything you have to. Don’t

you understand? This is the Leighton brain’s first overt act on anything but an individual basis. It must be strong enough now. It must figure it’s strong enough. It’s got to be stopped—and stopped soon.”

They deserted the burning lodge in an orderly fashion, bringing Doc Wimple and Doris—the Doc Wimple robot and Doris—with them. The fire had roused puzzled members of the other fraternities, who milled about still rubbing sleep from their eyes but already asking questions. Skinny Telese and Goofy McGuire ran quickly to the curb and sped away in Skinny’s car. The Simga Rho House was a great crimson torch against the snowy night.

“What do we do now, Coach?” Ike Arbanion asked Holland. “Wait for the National Guard?”

“Not me,” Holland said promptly. “I’m going over to the cybernetics lab.”

“I’m going with you,” Ike Arbanion said, and the Indian fullback Joe Cloud nodded his stolid agreement. Arbanian added: “We have a couple of Marlin 30-30 rifles left over from the deer season, Coach. Be a help?”

“You bet!” Holland said. “Whose car do we use?”

Joe Cloud ran inside the burning building for the two Marlin rifles. While they were waiting, Frank Dougherty brought his car up from where it had been parked. The big left tackle, Sam Kass, complained, "Ah, Coach, you ain't gonna leave the rest of us behind?"

Holland shrugged. "If you have cars, come on. I can't ask you to come. I won't tell you not to."

Kass beamed, the way he did before a power play over the left side of the line. Half a dozen of the boys piled into another car with him as Holland climbed into Frank Dougherty's car with Cloud and Ike Arbanion, the Indian carrying a trim Marlin 30-30 in each hand. Dougherty kicked over the car's engine.

Just then they saw Skinny Telese's car heading back toward the frat house. It slammed to a stop, skidding a dozen feet. Skinny staggered out. He looked dazed.

"We tried to take the shortcut out of town, up by Humpback Ridge Road?" Skinny said, almost making a question of it. "They—they wouldn't let us!"

"Who wouldn't let you?" Holland demanded.

Skinny's eyes were glazed.

There was blood on his face. "Jesus," he said. "Cars. They made a barrier. There wasn't anyone driving. I swear it, Holly. Those cars were empty, but making a barrier. They must have had the barrier a while, because the cops were there. The cops tried to get through and couldn't. And they had guns."

"Who had guns?"

"The cars. There was no one driving and no one shooting, but the cars made a barrier and fired at us when we tried to get through—"

"Where's Goofy?" Holland asked suddenly, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

"They—hit—Goofy," Skinny Telese said, and staggered into Denver Hill's arms.

Holland got out of Dougherty's car and went to the other vehicle slowly. He could see the bullet holes now. The whole right side of the car was riddled, and the front windshield on that side was gone. Goofy McGuire was slumped over in there.

Opening the door and leaning in, Holland picked up a limp arm and felt for the pulse. There wasn't any. Goofy McGuire was dead.

Stiffly, Holland returned to the others. "Wait here," he said. "All of you. I can't ask

you to come along with me. I'm going there alone."

"The hell you are," Arbanion told him.

"Don't be a fool, Ike. They're ready now. The brain is ready. They'll kill you the way they killed Goofy, but at least he died for something. Because now the police know. Now the world will know. Now we—"

"Then why don't you wait and let the police and the National Guard take them?" Ike Arbanion wanted to know.

"Uh-uh," Holland said at once. "Because it may still take them some time to get organized, because the machines could be getting stronger all the time, because—"

"The same reasons I'm with you," Arbanion said quietly, smiling grimly. "We're all of us with you, Coach. Especially now. We all liked Goofy. Heck, maybe he didn't have much gray matter, but he had it down here in the heart. We're going with you because of Goofy McGuire, a little guy with more guts than most big guys you'll ever meet. Come on, men!"

As they piled into the cars again, there was a sudden disturbance over near the Pi Lam House next door. Sam

Kass came running up. "Where's Denver?" he demanded. But Denver Hill was looking after the injured Skinny Telese.

"What's up, Sam?" Holland said.

"They got away, Coach. I'm sorry."

Doc Wimple and Doris—free now to warn the Leighton brain at the cybernetics lab. Doris? He still didn't know about Doris. He wasn't sure. He had heard her conversation with the second Holly Holland last night, but it was inconclusive. She might help them, but Holland doubted it. She was caught in the middle. She could be a Jezebel to either side. That's it, Holland thought. Think of her that way. Don't think of her as your wife. Then, when the showdown comes, it will be easier.

"All right," Holland said finally. "If they got away, they got away."

"We can go after them," Sam Kass suggested.

"What for? Our job is over at the cybernetics lab. They'll probably be there anyhow. Are you men ready?"

They all said they were ready.

But so, Holland thought as the motorcade got under way, were the machines.

The cybernetics lab was a three storey rectangle of sand-colored brick. They could easily see it in the distance now, in a quadrangle of other buildings with a snow-covered sunken garden at the center of the square and a large statue of Christopher Leighton, the University's founder, at its head. Frank Dougherty's car was in the van of the motorcade. Holland sat tensely at the driver's side, one of Joe Cloud's 30-30 rifles across his lap. He had already loaded the magazine and inserted a single round in the chamber. It was a lever-action rifle and felt heavy across Holland's legs, cold against his sweating hands.

Ahead of them suddenly, rifle fire cracked flatly through the night. It was not one rifle, but a volley from several of them. In the back of the car, Joe Cloud grumbled something which made Arbanion laugh grimly. But Holland said, "We'd better get out and advance on foot."

The driver, Dougherty, nodded. They rolled forward and a second volley of rifle fire crackled across the night.

"Well?" Holland said.

Dougherty sat grimly at the wheel of his ten-year-old convertible, the canvas top

creaking as they sped closer to the cybernetics building—and the deadly fusillade of rifle fire. "I'm trying to stop her," Dougherty bit off. "Hell, the brakes won't hold. I pulled the hand brake, but I—"

"Forget it," Holland said.

The car had taken over. They hadn't thought of that. The car, like a muscle of the Leighton brain, responding to its commands, somehow attuned to it electromagnetically. It represented an advance in thought, Holland knew. For the Leighton brain's thought-control could pass through air, as light could, while human thoughts depended on nerve cells and synapses and. . . .

There was a tearing sound. Holland swung around in the front seat of the car. Joe Cloud was standing awkwardly, slashing at the canvas top of the convertible with a knife, shredding it with savage, powerful strokes. The cold night air was suddenly, exhilaratingly, on them.

"Out!" the Indian cried, and chinned himself up on the metal skeleton of the canvas top. Arbanion followed him and through the rear window Holland could see them rolling over and over in the snow.

"Here we go, Frank," Holland said, reaching up.

Dougherty nodded and slipped out from behind the wheel. But at that moment the convertible skidded across a slick patch of road and slipped, without traction, toward the statue of Christopher Leighton. Holland barely had time to brace himself before they hit the cement base of the statue with a grinding, rending, tearing impact.

For several moments Holland sat perfectly still. He was half-conscious. He could think but could not control his body. He wondered about the other cars. He blinked and opened his eyes. The motorcade was speeding off beyond the cybernetics building—giving Holland his answer. For the moment the cars had their occupants prisoner. It wouldn't last, Holland knew. Sooner or later, they'd find a way out. But meanwhile—and that meanwhile could conceivably be minutes or even hours—he was on his own with Cloud, Arbanion and Dougherty.

"You O.K., Coach?" Dougherty asked, shaking him.

Holland got up. His left arm ached above the wrist, and felt hot and damp. He looked at it and saw a dark glistening stain of red. The front seat area of the car was

crumpled, accordioned, but the vehicle had gone over on its side with Dougherty and Holland being flung from the shredded top.

"There they are!" Someone shouted.

It was Ike Arbanion. Seconds later, he came over with Joe Cloud. The Indian said, "I lost my rifle in the fall. Any idea what happened to yours?"

Holland found it inside the wreck of the car.

Found it? Not exactly.

It found him.

The Marlin 30-30 appeared in mid-air—defying gravity. It pointed at Holland, the muzzle unwavering. Instinctively, Holland dove for the snow. He heard a startled oath and then a shot and looked up to see Joe Cloud wrestling with the rifle. One powerful hand held the lever and trigger guard assembly, which would eject the old shell and insert a new one in the Marlin's chamber. Slowly Cloud lifted the rifle. Sweat popped out on his forehead in beads as he slammed the weapon against the base of Christopher Leighton's statue. He slammed it there repeatedly, then let it fall.

He looked up, grim-faced. Ike Arbanion put it into words for him:

"We're helpless against a thing like that, Coach."

"It's a miracle we managed to stay alive this long," Dougherty agreed.

"No miracle for Goofy McGuire," Cloud said laconically.

"All right, all right," Holland bit off angrily. "You can clear out any time you want." Then, immediately: "I'm sorry, boys. I had no right to say that. But you ought to clear out, while you still can."

"We didn't mean it like that," Dougherty said.

Arbanion nodded. "We just want to do something, that's all. We want to do something to give us a chance to beat them. You see, Coach?" Suddenly, surprisingly, the usually calm Arbanion was almost hysterical. "We've got to do something. Out here, we're sitting ducks. The rifles—"

As if in answer, a volley of rifle fire sounded, closer this time. Distantly they heard the wail of a siren and wondered what luck the state police were having with the Leighton brain's blockade. Holland thought he had the blockade figured: the brain was ready to make its first real move and wanted to make it without outside interference, in order to consolidate its power in Leighton City without having

to fight the National Guard or maybe the United States Army. But the police knew, now. In hours, the whole fantastic thing would come out into the open. In hours there would be no further talk of declaring Holland insane.

But in hours the Leighton brain might be strong enough to attack other cities, to seize power by seizing every piece of machinery it could use. In hours the Leighton brain might be so strong that no one—not even the entire military strength of the United States could check it. Because once the brain was strong enough—Holland figured it was building additional mechanical synapses for itself somewhere, somehow, as it had built the human robots—it could turn any Army's weapons against the Army itself. . . .

It had to be stopped, and fast. And only Holland, with Arbanion, Dougherty and Joe Cloud to help him, could stop it.

The rifles cracked again. They were much closer this time. They were very close. Holland heard the ping-pinging of slugs bouncing off the statue of Christopher Leighton, heard the nearby metallic snick-snick-snick of rifle bolts and levers.

"Here!" Arbanion screamed hysterically. "Why don't you get it over with? We're over here!"

Joe Cloud hit him, but Arbanion rolled with the blow and then began to run. He went ten paces. A withering volley of rifle fire cut him down.

"God," Frank Dougherty groaned.

"Get a move on," Holland said in a whisper. "Our one chance is to get inside the cybernetics lab, and in a hurry. They have allies in there—the robots. There won't be any blind firing. They'll probably let the robots themselves hunt us down if we can get inside. Let's go!"

With Dougherty and Cloud, he advanced on hands and knees across the sunken garden. The rifle fire was desultory now. For the time at least the rifles had lost them. Poor Arbanion, Holland thought. But he could well understand the football captain's sudden hysteria. It was a wonder the others, Holland included, hadn't felt it too. This fighting of machines, governed by a mechanical sentience

They went up the snow-covered steps at the far end of the sunken garden. They advanced, cutting the distance

between the garden and the cybernetics lab in half.

Rifle fire pock-marked the snow alongside them, dangerously close.

"Run for it!" Holland cried and, running, in a low crouch, sprinted for the laboratory. Slugs ripped into the brick wall ahead of him, showering him with stone splinters. He heard a shout and saw Dougherty go down in the snow, face down and unmoving. He wanted to stop but knew he could not. More than Frank Dougherty's life might depend on it. When he looked around again, though, Dougherty was staggering to his feet and running again.

They reached the door, bullets *whanging* off its metal surface. They crouched low—Holland and Cloud—waiting for their wounded comrade. He all but fell the last few steps, and they helped him through the door.

It slammed behind them.

Holland leaned his shoulder against it, but the door would not budge. Apparently their decision to enter the stronghold of the machines was all right with the Leighton brain.

Shrugging, Holland turned and walked up the dark, silent corridor.

Then, without warning, ov-

erhead lights flashed on, dazzling them. Footsteps came running down the corridor. Light footsteps. One person. A girl, probably.

It was Doris.

"Holly!" she cried. "Holly. Oh, you made it. Holly, I thought they would kill you out there for sure. I wanted to stop them. Oh, Holly, Holly. Let me touch you. Let me hold you."

"Keep away from me," Holland warned her. "After the way you acted—"

"But I had to act that way. I had to apparently foresake you. Don't you see? The Holland robot was there. If I didn't foresake you, if I didn't pretend to be with them, what good would it have done us? They would have taken me, too."

"How do I know you aren't a robot?"

"Look at me, Holly. Look at me, darling." She held out her arm to him. She was beautiful. She looked as if she had been crying. "Is this the flesh of a robot? Feel me, Holly. Go ahead. Holly, Holly!"

And then she was in his arms, crushing the soft vibrant warmth of her body against him, laughing and crying at the same time, clinging to him, trembling against him, whispering his name.

"Hey now, Coach," Dougherty said. Dougherty had stopped a slug with his left arm and it hung limply at his side. His face had lost most of its color, too. Otherwise he seemed all right.

Slowly, reluctantly, Holland withdrew himself from Doris. She clung to him arms around his neck, reluctant to let him go. "We've got to keep moving," Holland said. "We've got to find the brain itself. I've been here once before, Doris, but you know the way better. Take us there, Doris."

"Of course, Holly," she said, and took his hand. "Come this way."

They went down a flight of stairs into the basement. They moved along a corridor boldly, as if they had nothing to hide from. "Believe me," Doris said, "they're plenty busy. The brain is still consolidating its power. It has all it can do to control the machinery outside. It will depend entirely on the robots in here."

"Where are the robots?" Holland asked.

"In the brain room. Administering to the brain. Helping it grow. That's crucial. You see, it's got to grow—"

"How the hell," Holland asked as they walked, "did it go about building robot car-

bon copies of people, any-way?"

"A combination of cybernetics and plastic surgery," she told him. "Leighton U. has been experimenting a long time with new techniques in plastic surgery, you know that. The experiments were conducted right here in this building, and the Leighton brain took them over for its own use. The semblance of human skin and flesh is merely superimposed on a skeleton of metal built by the same tools and dies—but altered, of course—that built the Leighton brain itself."

"And the originals? The people replaced by the robots? They're dead?"

Doris shook her head. "They can't be killed. Their minds are necessary, you see. They're prisoners down here and their minds are tapped by the Leighton brain because it would have been impossible in such a short time to impart a duplicate of their sentiences to the robots. You understand?"

They had come to another door. Doris opened it with a key and they went on, Dougherty and Cloud behind them.

"You have a key," Holland said. "They think you're on their side, don't they?"

"They think I'm a turncoat, yes."

"Are you?" Holland asked her suddenly, savagely, wheeling about to face her and digging the fingers of his right hand into her shoulder until she winced. "Are you, Doris?"

"You're hurting me, Holly."

"Are you?"

"I told you I wasn't. I love you, Holly. I love you."

"I'm not asking you if you love me. I'm asking you whose side you're on."

Doris shook his hand loose and continued walking, her back stiff and straight with anger. They reached another door which her key opened. But Holland held the door-knob. "Wait," he said.

"I'm on your side, Holly," she said.

"Is that good enough for you boys?" Holland asked his companions.

"Look, Holly," Dougherty said, gritting his teeth against the pain of his wounded arm. "We came in here to find the Leighton brain and destroy it. She says we're being taken to it. What have we got to lose?"

"Could be a trap," Joe Cloud observed.

Holland nodded slowly. "If it is," he said, "I may not have the will power to do it. If it is, I want you to kill her."

"Holly," Doris said.

"All right?" Holland asked.
"Yeah, fine," Cloud said.

Holland shrugged and told Doris to open the door. The silence now inside the building was almost eerie, was fraught with grim expectancy, after the tumult outside. Any moment, Holland almost expected the walls to come tumbling down.

The door opened. Holland entered a large room, well-lighted, bare of furniture or laboratory equipment. There were a dozen men in the room and Holland recognized the members of the Leighton University physics department. At the other end of the room was a door and on the door a bright pulsing grid. The door seemed to be locked and since there was no keyhole and no bolt that Holland could see, he assumed the grid had something to do with opening it.

Doris closed the door behind them. It shut with a click and Holland knew it was locked. Doris sighed.

The Doc Wimple robot came forward, smiling. "Kill them," it said.

"It's a trap!" Dougherty shouted, and clawed at the locked door. There were no firearms in the room. The people and, Holland knew,

feeling like people too—advanced slowly.

"No, wait," Doris cried. She stood in front of Holland; shielding his body. "Not him. Please, not him."

"Get out of the way, Doris," Doc Wimple said. When she refused, Wimple swung on her. Doris sidestepped lithely and sprinted across the room toward the door with the pulsing grid.

Holland ran after her.

She stopped and whirled about before she reached the door. "Wait!" she cried. "Don't kill them, not yet. I'm going to ask the brain. It's my right. I demand another robot be made. You can't, unless he's kept alive. He's got to be kept alive. I love him. I can't help it if I love him."

The robots waited, uncertain. They had their orders from the Leighton brain, as Doris had had her orders. It was a trap, all right. But—and perhaps this was the Leighton brain behind them all—somehow Holland could sense that the robots did not want to fight among themselves.

Holland drew up short in front of Doris. "You're one of them," he said quietly, "aren't you?"

"I'm flesh and blood!" she

said. She almost screamed it. She was standing in front of the grid when she said it, the pulsing grid on the door. It was head-high, directly behind her head.

Holland said nothing. "I'm flesh and blood, I tell you!" Doris screamed again.

Then, all at once, Holland felt like screaming.

Something was happening to Doris' face.

The skin on the left side seemed to go transparent, seemed almost to dissolve.

Beneath it, gleaming, polished—was a skull of metal.

"Robot!" Holland cried, and again: "Robot!" This was almost the final horror for him, seeing what he had almost taken for his wife like that. He fought for a split second with the kind of hysteria that had killed Ike Arbanion. "Robot," he said again. He wanted to hear the word. If he heard the word from his own lips, it would bring him back to sanity. "Robot, robot, robot."

"Holly. Holly, I'm begging you. Holly, you don't know what it's like. I'm a robot, yes. Yes, Holly. They made me. But they made me just like your wife, Holly, and I can't help loving you, Holly. I'm with them, yes. But I'm with you, Holly. I love you,"

she said. "I want you." Her lips parted and the whole left side of her face, the skin and phony flesh somehow rendered invisible by the grid on the door, was metal.

Just then the door opened.

Holland blinked, not believing his eyes. Beyond the door was the Leighton brain. Then why had the door opened?

The grid, Holland suddenly realized. The grid was there to detect metal, to see it or see muscle tissue and bone, to open for the one but not the other. The Doris robot had provided Holland with his key to the Leighton brain, the Doris robot which, insanely, loved him—

"Out of the way," Holland said. He thrust her aside and stalked through the doorway.

There were footsteps behind him and Holland whirled.

Joe Cloud and Dougherty were fighting their way across the waiting room, battling the robots which looked just like men. They were stronger than their human counterparts, Holland knew—but not as strong as machines could have been. Such strength would have aroused suspicion. They were stronger than the soft, studious physi-cists whom they had replaced,

but were they stronger than Cloud and Dougherty? The future of the world might depend on that, Holland thought grimly.

More likely, it would depend on Holland.

For now he was within the room of the brain.

There was nothing mysterious about what Holland saw. It was a thinking machine. It lined the four walls of the room with banks of dials and panels and knobs and flashing lights. It covered all four walls from floor to ceiling, except for the single doorway.

Holland found some wires at one end near the door and yanked them loose tentatively.

Outside in the waiting room there was a collective scream of pain.

Holland ran around, yanking wires. The screams were louder, but there were shouts from Cloud and Dougherty too. The robots, then, were still fighting. Holland found a metal folding chair in the center of the room near a speaking tube and a set of earphones on a small table. He yanked out the wire on the tube and earphones and used the chair as a club, folding it and swinging it back and forth against the panels, the dials, the flashing lights.

He was rewarded by a

tinkling and shattering of glass and more screams.

Closer screams.

Inside the room with him.

The Doris robot and Doc Wimple.

Wimple pile-driven into him, screaming all the while, a piece of machinery run amok, butting with his metal head, the arms and legs churning like pistons, driving Holland back.

Holland lost his footing. Holland fell.

The Doc Wimple robot came down after him and they began to grapple. Holland saw the Doris robot, undecided. But her very metal life was at stake now. If Holland won, he would destroy the brain.

The Doris robot joined the fight on Doc Wimple's side.

Metal man and metal woman, each with perhaps twice the strength of its human counterpart so that Holland was fighting two Doc Wimples and two Dorises, pinned Holland to the floor. The Wimple robot's hands found his throat, constricted there. He felt the breath trapped in his lungs. He tried to kick up with his legs but felt them pinned there by the Doris robot.

He got his own hands, weakening now with the lack of oxygen, on the Wimple

robot's head. He twisted. He got his hands in the mouth, the still screaming, metallically screaming mouth. He forced the jaw apart, like a human jaw. The robot screamed and screamed.

The Doris robot shifted its weight and for an instant Holland had the use of one of his legs. He brought it up and began to writhe, using the leg for leverage. He kicked the Doris robot in the face. . . .

Then, suddenly, he was on his feet again. He found the folded metal chair and swung it at the Wimple robot, the edge of the metal chairleg striking the robot's neck. The robot went over and down as if it had been pole-axed.

"I love you!" the Doris robot cried, and flung itself at him. He lunged aside and swung the chair again. The Doris robot screamed as its scalp parted revealing metal. He swung again and the metal dented.

The injured Doris robot embraced him. Like a broken record it said, "I love you, I love you," over and over again. But it was no embrace of love. Holland felt his ribs being constricted, felt the blood in his temples—

He sat down suddenly and brought the robot down with him. He kicked up with his

legs and the Doris robot went over his head, striking head-first against a bank of the Leighton brain.

Holland swung the chair. He swung it again, dimly aware that other robots were rushing into the room now, apparently having overcome Cloud and Dougherty. He did not care. He was beyond caring. The Doris robot had been the ultimate horror. He stood there, swinging the chair until the robot collapsed.

They found Holland later, swinging the buckled metal chair against what was left of the Leighton brain. They found him swinging it mechanically, tirelessly, while the robots stood about, brainless and not dangerous now, like dumb animals. A battered Joe Cloud had to pry Holland's fingers from the chair, one finger at a time. . . .

And later, hours later, Holland and Cloud found the prisoners. They were in a sub-basement and Holland recognized their faces. Physicists. Human counterparts for the now mindless robots.

Among them was Doris. The real Doris. . . .

They spoke. They held each other, kissed each other. Holland hardly remembered the words they said.

THE END

THE VACATION

By KARL STANLEY

Martha had not had a vacation for a long time. And she certainly rated one. So she packed her bags and and got together all the stuff she would need and kissed her husband goodbye. Then did she take a cab to the station or the airport? Of course not. She went down into the basement and closed the door.

MR. JABLONSKI always put aside a *World-Telegram* for John Chalmers. When Chalmers got off the Woodside stop of the I. B. T. he was always able to get a *News* on the stand in front of Mr. Jablonski's confectionary store, but there seldom was a *World-Telegram* to be had, so Mr. Jablonski saved that paper for him.

Mr. Jablonski was a short fat man with a constant smile and harassed eyes. He saw the tall lean figure of Chalmers darken the entrance. "How you like the weather?" he asked as he got the paper from under the counter and extended it.

Chalmers counted out the correct change and gave it to Mr. Jablonski, who tossed the coins into the cigar box he

kept for that purpose. "I don't," Chalmers said.

"Who does?" said the other. "October, and it feels like July. Let it rain or get hot or something, already. But this muggy stuff I don't like."

"Well," Chalmers said, "the boss doesn't like it either. About all we've sold the last few days have been short-sleeved sport shirts."

Mr. Jablonski said: "At least the ice cream business has been good by me. Well, see you tomorrow, Mr. Chalmers."

Chalmers walked up Roosevelt Avenue to Sixty-fourth Street, and turned left. The six-room frame house he lived in with his wife, Martha, was midway in the block. A small boy wearing a regulation-size fielder's mitt on his left hand

was coming toward Chalmers in erratic bursts of speed. The boy would run a short distance, stop, turn his head toward his left shoulder, slam his right hand into the pocket of the baseball glove and yell, "Say hey!" each time he stopped.

"Hello there, Willie Mays," Chalmers said as they came even.

"Say hey!" said the boy. "Gee, Mr. Chalmers! Wasn't that *some* catch Willie made, hunh?"

"Yes, it was, Bobby."

"I don't like those old Indians, I like the Giants, don't you?" The boy kept pounding a dirty fist into the pocket of the glove.

"Well, I'm a Yankee fan myself, Bobby. But we've got to stick with the New York teams. A matter of civic loyalty and all that, you know."

"Yeah. 'Specially a team what's got Willie Mays. Betcha I know something you don't..."

"H'm..."

"I was watching tel'vision at your house today an' I saw Mrs. Chalmers go to the kitchen an' I sneaked in an' saw..."

"Bobby . . . I was just thinking of Willie Mays. I wonder if when he was a little boy and went visiting people

he told everybody what he saw?"

The small boy cocked his head at the man in a sidewise look, then turned away. He kept hammering lightly at the glove. Suddenly he said, "Say hey" loudly, and ran down the street.

The man watched him for a second, smiling, then turned and continued walking toward his house. The boy turned and grinned back at him.

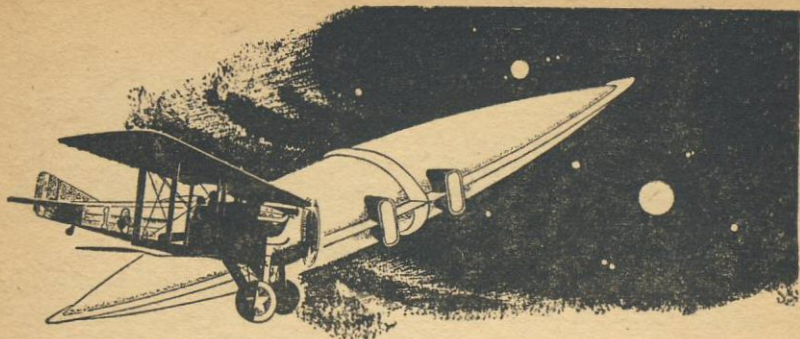
He closed the outside door behind him and called: "Martha? . . ."

He heard her reply though the words were just a blur of sound, and knew she was in the kitchen. He hung his coat neatly in the hall closet, and went into the living room. He tossed the two newspapers on the cocktail table in front of the sofa, and looked at his strap-watch. The six o'clock television newscast from Channel 4 would be on in five minutes.

His wife came into the room and he greeted her with a light yet tender kiss. The top of her head came level with his eyes.

"Hello, dear," she said, moving a step away from him. "How'd it go today?"

"Oh, the store wasn't bad—



the air-conditioning was on—but the street was a *steam* bath. And the *subway* . . .”

“I know. Louise Noren and I went shopping this morning. Even then . . . Why don’t you go up and take a shower and put on some fresh clean clothes? Dinner won’t be ready for twenty minutes or so.”

He looked at the combination radio-phono-TV set.

She gently shoved him toward the stairs which led to the upper floor where the two bedrooms and the bathroom were. “I’ll turn the newscast on and set the tape recorder going,” she said.

When he came down, twenty minutes later, and stepped into the dining room, he found her setting a steaming bowl of food on the table. He sniffed loudly. “Smells good. What is it?”

“Goulash. That recipe from

Better Homes and Gardens I’ve been wanting to try. Mr. Hegel, the butcher, had some lovely stew meat, and I got some. Louise got steak for Walter.”

He sat down, still sniffing. “Sure smells good. Say, doesn’t Walter ever eat anything besides steak?”

She ladled out a plate of the goulash for him. “Maybe this is salad weather,” she said as she went to her chair opposite him, “but I can’t see feeding a working man greens.”

“I asked you something, dear.”

Her eyes were blank for a second. “Oh! About Walter . . . Guess not. That’s all Louise ever gets for him. Different kinds, of course.”

He said, “H’m” and began to eat. He asked for a second helping, bringing a pleased smile to her face. She served

him coffee with the second plate of goulash.

She talked to him while she cleared the table of dishes and brought them into the kitchen to the electric dishwasher. "I had company this afternoon . . . Bobby came in to watch the World Series . . . He got so excited when this Willie Mays did something . . . Oh, by the way, Louise said something about Walter wanting to go to the fights tomorrow night and whether you'd like to go. And guess what? She bought another pair of shoes . . . Walter will be furious. But she laughs even while she's talking about it. They're a crazy couple, but I like them." She came back to the dining room and settled into her chair. "Well," she sighed. "That's done. May I have a cigarette, John?"

He gave her one, lit it for her, then leaned back in his chair. "I just don't know where you get the energy," he said. "After a day at the store in this weather I feel like a wet rag."

"How was business?"

"In this weather? Old Man Inersen walks around with that 'why should this happen to me' expression on his face, and snarls if you miss a sale." He swallowed the last of the coffee and lit a cigarette for

himself. "But," he continued, "the weather will change and business will pick up and he'll feel better." He was silent for a few seconds, then said, "Want anything at the store before I go in to work on my report?"

"No, dear. You go ahead, and I'll go to the Norens and keep Louise company for a while. I'll be back in time to turn *Dragnet* on."

"Say, that's right! You won't forget?"

She smiled. "No. I won't forget. Walter'll probably want to come over."

"Then you won't have to come back if he does. But not before nine..."

Walter Noren said, "Those Giants are the luckiest team. Chinese homers, yet."

"They're playing heads-up ball," Chalmers said.

"I suppose," Noren said. He gave Chalmers a blank look for a second, then came to life. "Hey, John! Like to go to the fights tomorrow night?"

"I think I'll buy that idea, Walt," Chalmers said. "Get ringside tickets. Maybe there will be a knockout and there's a chance I'll be able to get a picture of it."

"Gonna take the camera, hunh?" Walter asked. He

went to the TV set and fiddled with the dials. He continued talking with his back to Chalmers: "I swear! I don't know where you get the time or the energy for all those hobbies? Cameras, tape recorders, do-it-yourself stuff. Man! Now me, when I get through wrestling that semi-trailer for eight hours all I want's a steak and eight hours of relaxation."

"Well," Chalmers said, smiling. "That's *my* relaxation."

Noren switched the TV off and returned to the sofa. "Nothing on that's good. Might as well wait for *Dragnet*." He settled his bulk into a comfortable position. "Relaxation? Is that what you call that masonry work you did on the patio wall? And that carpentry you went through in the basement? I get tired just thinking about it!"

"How about a beer to freshen up, then?" Chalmers asked.

"Now you're talkin' my language," Noren said.

They were finishing the second of the two cans of beer when Martha Chalmers returned. She looked at the TV set, then turned to the two men on the sofa. "Aren't you going to watch *Dragnet*?"

"You mean it's on?" Walter asked.

She went up to the set and switched it on. The screen came alive with movement and Jack Webb's voice came out at them. Martha said, "I said good-bye to Louise. Might as well tell Walter also, don't you think, John? Or have you told him already?"

"No, I haven't," Chalmers said. "Slipped——"

"What's this?" Noren broke in. "Martha going away?"

"—my mind entirely. Yes, she's going to visit some relatives. Be back in April, sometime. She got the invitation a while back and I thought the change would do her good."

"Gosh, yes!" Noren said. "'Bout time, too. In the ten years you've been living in this house I don't remember either of you taking a *real* vacation. It's about time, all right."

"That's what I thought, too," Chalmers said.

Noren stood up and thrust a hand out at the woman. She took it and they shook hands gravely. "Have fun, keed," he said. Then, leering stagily, "Anyone makes a pass at you, that's what it's for, Martha, fun. A vacation ain't a vacation without it."

"Oh, you," she said. She turned to her husband. "I

might as well go up and start packing."

"Need help?" he asked.

"No. You go ahead and watch the program. I won't need you for a while. 'Bye, Walter."

"'Bye, Mrs. Chalmers. And like I said, have fun." Mrs. Chalmers left.

John Chalmers turned the TV off after Walter Noren left. He went to the stairway and called to his wife: "I'm going down to the basement for a couple of minutes. I'll carry your bags down when I come up."

When he returned, she had changed her housedress for a suit and blouse and was watching television over a cup of coffee. Chalmers watched her for a long moment, without making his presence felt. Finally he said: "I thought I heard the set."

"Just a last look," she remarked. "And a last cup of coffee."

"Going to miss them, eh?"

She smiled. "Yes. I'm going to miss all the nice people we know, too, like the Norens and the Murphys and the Prescotts. But it'll be nice seeing the children again, and all the rest. It's been ten years . . . Maybe you'll be able to go next time? That would be

nice, taking the trip together."

"Maybe. We'll see. Might as well get the bags."

He went up to the bedroom and went directly to the stand between the twin beds and took a small pill box from the drawer of the stand. He put the box in his pocket then carried the bags into the hall and set them down and returned to the bedroom. He switched the light off and went up to the window and stood staring out into the night.

The window was partly open. A cool breeze ruffled his hair. The mugginess of the past few days was suddenly gone. He puffed lazily at his cigarette and stared into the darkness. A light suddenly came to life in the Prescotts' bedroom window directly across the street. Below, a car moved off from the curb. Somewhere a radio was turned on with startling loudness, then quickly brought under control.

The blinking red and green lights of a plane coming in low to LaGuardia moved swiftly in and out of his vision. He tapped his cigarette out in the ash tray on the bed stand, and went downstairs, carrying a bag in each hand.

He set the bags down be-

side her, took the pill box from his pocket and, opening it, gave her a large green-colored capsule.

She said, "Will you get me a glass of water, dear? Makes it go down easier."

He went to the kitchen, drew a glass of water and returned with it. She took it from him, swallowed the pill and drank some of the water. "I'm ready," she said.

He took up the bags and followed her down into the basement. He had left the lights on. She looked to the far wall where there were a pile each of half a hundred tapes from the tape recording machine, a dozen thousand-foot reels of movie film, and a great many books. He set the bags down beside the other stuff.

He pressed a hidden knob and a section of the wall slid back, revealing a room about twelve feet square. Taking up almost all the space was a circular something that looked like a musical top with flattened poles. He felt for and found the recessed handle, pulled it out, turned it and a door slid downward between the metal walls of the machine.

"Will you hand me the stuff on the floor?" he said.

He placed them in lockers

set into the walls. About the books he said, "One of each. Technical stuff." He placed her bags last in the lockers.

They looked at each other. "How long does it take? Sixty days?"

"That's right. Sixty days."

She said, "My eyes are beginning to feel heavy."

"Better go in and lie down," he said. "I'll strap you in."

She looked up at him, smiling faintly. He kissed her gently. "See you in April," he said softly.

"... In April ..." Her voice sounded like from far off.

He stepped out of the machine, closed the door and pushed the handle in. The surface of the machine was unbroken in line. He circled around it and pressed another knob set in the concrete of the outside wall. Once more a section slid open revealing the patio and the darkness beyond. He stood out beyond the opening. Presently there was a humming sound and the circular object moved swiftly past him, up and out of sight.

From where he stood on Earth, John Chalmers looked up at the sky, focusing his attention on a faint reddish-colored star where, in sixty days, his wife would be landing.

THE END



by VILLIERS GERSON

THE END OF ETERNITY. *By Isaac Asimov. 191 pp. Doubleday & Co. \$2.95*

It has by now become apparent that Dr. Asimov, like that other fine science fiction writer, Robert Heinlein, has a carefully worked-out s-f world, a universe which ranges from the robotics of the near future, through the Galactic Empire of the next ten centuries, to the incalculable eons of time travel.

Andrew Harlan is a time traveller, a member of the secret organization known as the "Eternals," whose task it is to avert disaster from humanity by changing the past, thus changing the Reality of the future. If a war impends in the 600th Century, so little a change as tampering with the ground car of an official of the 550th Century can negate it; Andrew Harlan, Time Technician, is the one who does the tampering.

In the course of his work, he visits the 482nd Century, and there falls in love with a beautiful girl. When he is ordered to institute a Reality Change, and discovers that it will nullify the existence of his beloved, he rebels. Then he finds that he has endangered the Eternals, his civilization, and his own life. It is too late to turn back: his actions have set up eddies in Time which are impossible to correct. To add to his difficulties, Harlan discovers to his dismay that his beloved is not what he has believed her to be . . .

Dr. Asimov is famed for his plot twists. "The End of Eternity" is his most complex tale so far, a chase story which holds suspense on every page, a surprise in every chapter, and interest in every word.

FAR AND AWAY. *By Anthony Boucher, 166 pp. Ballantine Books. Cloth: \$2.00; Paper: 35¢*

As everyone who regularly reads science fiction knows, Anthony Boucher is not only a skillful editor, but an equally gifted writer as well. In this, his latest collection of eleven s-f and fantasy stories, he demonstrates once again the warm humanity, the impish humor, and the preoccupation with Man's faith and destiny which are so characteristic of his writing. Aficionados will find here not only such familiar and justly famed examples as "Snulbug," "Sriberdegibit," and "They Bite," but such new works as "Review Copy," a tale of arcane enchantment with a horrifying difference; "Elsewhen" and "The Anomaly of the Empty Man," in both of which the author skillfully blends crime detection with s-f; "Star Bride," a moving short-short with a surprising and yet logical ending; "Balaam," which proves the continuity of Man's love and fear as it blends the past with the future; and "Secret of the House," in which Mr. Boucher invests so mundane (in its proper sense) an art as cooking with other-world interest.

An excellent collection and a fine example of the work coming from one of s-f's most literate writers, "Far and Away" deserves to be on the bookshelf of every s-f fan.

TIME BOMB. *By Wilson Tucker. 246 pp. Rinehart & Co. \$2.75*

In the near future, America is in danger of losing its freedom before the attacks of a would-be dictator and his personal political party, the Sons of America. Suddenly, the Sons start losing their leaders, as one after another are wiped out by bomb explosions.

Lieutenant Danforth of the Illinois Security Police is charged with the task of unearthing the villain or villains responsible for the bombings. His task is complicated for two reasons: science has lately come up with time travel, even though it is of the meagrest order; and that latent mutation, telepathy, has become an accomplished fact. It is evident that the bombs travel through time rather than through space. How can the Lieutenant capture them and their maker?

How he finally does, and the surprising denouement which then ensues makes for an unusual tale of suspense and danger, one which re-introduces two people we have met in a previous

book of Mr. Tucker's, "The Time Masters." To one who has read all of the author's published books, it is encouraging to see that his major previous fault, his absorption with mood rather than with plot, has vanished. Here is a deftly-written mixture of both, and one which gives additional evidence that Mr. Tucker's talent is still growing.

STAR GUARD. *By Andre Norton. 247 pp. Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$3.00*

Kana Karr, a mercenary of Earth in 3956 A.D., goes off on his first assignment since leaving the Training Center. He knows, as does everyone on Earth, that Galactic Central Control, manned by extraterrestrials whose powers are far more advanced than those of Earthmen, has decided that because of the Terrans' inveterate brawling, their role is to fight wherever fighting is necessary. Thus Central Control siphons off the potential trouble inherent in so warlike a race, and at the same time uses Earthmen to enforce its rule.

But Terrans cannot be satisfied with such restrictions, and by the 40th Century Earth is in a state of unrest. Curiously enough, it is off-Earth that Kana Karr finds the problem coming to a head, and it is in battle on the star planet Fromn that he discovers his potential and the role which Earth's future demands of him.

Filled with battles employing weapons which range from cold steel to the most futuristic blasters, invested with intrigue and espionage, "Star Guard" is sure to engage those readers who enjoy a tale of derring-do, of hardy deeds performed in the dangerous night of space. True, we never get more than a glimpse of Kana's motivations; problems are posed and resolved on the outside rather than on the inside. But there is an honored place in science fiction for this type of story, too—and here is a good example of its kind.

Well, that's it for now. Next month, this space will be taken over by my colleague, Roger De Soto, for his column, "The Revolving Fan." So—I'll be seeing you two issues from now.

THE SCARLET SAINT

By MANLY BANISTER

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

In the far-distant future, the entire universe is held in bondage by the TRISZ—an invisible, alien entity, unexplainable but all-powerful—which operate through renegade citizens on each planet, and which are slowly draining the universe of all energy.

On Rth (Earth) a group known as the Institute of Manhood, headed



The executioner raised the



stone that would smash the screaming girl's skull.

by TOR SHAN, has slowly been building for the day when they will have enough power to overcome the Trisz. It seems that day is near with the coming to manhood of KOR DANAY, young, handsome, incredibly gifted with physical prowess and a mind far beyond that of any other known human. It is he who becomes a Scarlet Saint, one of the high offices of the Trisz-approved Sun Religion—which, secretly, was founded to further the eventual overthrow of the alien force. The Trisz, however, have been warned that Kor Danay is a threat to them, and they try, unsuccessfully at first, to do away with him.

A Blue Brother (priest of the Sun Religion) named SET HORAN, and the LADY SOMA, daughter of ROEN GOL, Lord of the District in which the See of the Scarlet Saint is located, plot together to assassinate Kor Danay. He is to be invited to a diplomatic ball in his honor, and while present, hired killers are to strike him down. But at the last moment the Lady Soma confesses the plot to Kor, who, by use of his strange powers, manages to escape the trap without actually revealing the fact that his powers exist. However, he fails to rid himself of a weapon taken from one of the killers, and it is for the crime of bearing arms that the Trisz condemn him to death by atomic disintegration.

Now go on with the story. . . .

CHAPTER XII

THE officer lifted his hand. Kor turned his glance toward the great leaden door. Slowly, it began to swing open, exposing the shining in-

terior. The officer brought his hand down.

The conveyor jerked, ground forward. Kor's naked back slid along the smooth metal runway. His mind raced. Another instant, and he would be inside. Too late then . . . He *was* inside. The door would swing shut. Far too late . . . It *swung* shut. Kor was enclosed in coffin-like darkness, bound to the silent chains. In another instant . . . dissolution . . . to be followed by the leap and fall of the needled dial above the door. The door would open again upon an empty chamber, readied for another load of garbage . . .

In his mind's eye, Kor could see the dramatic focusing of the television screens on that meter. He would need . . . *Need!* Kor snapped himself into the time-stasis—he reached out exploringly with his mind. Already, the current had begun to flow in the arm-thick leads that fed the giant busbars of the converter. He could sense the sluggish flow of it from atom to atom, from molecule to molecule . . .

Even in time-stasis, Kor had precious little time. The flow of current into the converter was practically instantaneous in normal time. Again the Extrapolator's jingle went through his mind: "The Scar-

let Saint will die undead, pots and pans depart instead." A silly, dancing refrain. *Desire. Need. Resolve. Will. Now* was the need—*now* was the time! It became clear in a flash. Here was his destiny, to be accomplished in the split fraction of a second required for the surging current to activate the converter. No eye could see him, the energy field of the converter would mask his own field as he hurled himself to the ends of the Universe. None would be the wiser!

None the wiser? How about that tell-tale dial with the television cameras focussed upon it? How about the quanta of released energy to be recorded?

Pots and pans!

Kor focused his mind upon his own body. Electrons streamed thick and fast through his consciousness. He weighed, counted, evaluated every physical element of which his body was composed. He would have to replace every molecule with an equivalent molecule of other matter. He cast his mind out, out of that death trap, instantaneously, into homes and public eating places. The stress he made in the sub-ether, which the Trisz might have detected, was completely masked by the energy field set up in the con-

verter. Pots and pans! There were scores of them, thousands of them to be had! Miseriously, from a kitchen here, from a kitchen there throughout the city, pots and pans vanished. Other items, too—water, sand from the desert—a perfect assortment of heterogeneous matter, equivalent in its sum to the energy-mass of Kor's physical body.

Kor remembered a place, a small, quadrangular area before the altar of the Scarlet Chapel, where he had remained one day to pray and meditate. He had practiced molecular dissection of it then, and now that dissection remained with him. He had no time to select a place more suitable or less dangerous. He must go there at once. The sluggish flowing current already caressed the discharge cathodes. His mind grasped the functions of dissimilarity.

All over the city, the People stood or sat transfixed before televisior screens, eyes glued to the image of a moveless needle. The needle jerked over suddenly, and a great sigh went up—as assorted pots, pans, and other junk materialized in the converter and took the dissolution intended for the Scarlet Saint.

Kor stood with head bowed

before the altar of the Scarlet Chapel, a half-naked Man who had met—and mastered—the Trisz.

He dared hesitate only a second. The Chapel seemed deserted, but he could not risk having an acolyte blunder in and discover him. Kor hurried to his own quarters, let himself into his study.

"I thought perhaps you would return here first."

Kor jerked around. Brother Set sat cross-legged on the floor, smiling his saintly smile. "I must say, though," he went on, "that it has been a tiring vigil. I could not know precisely when you would get here."

Kor stood poised, speechless. He eyed the Blue Brother with a calculating intensity.

"You expected this?" he said at last. "Is this another prelude to an invasion by Trisz soldiers? You know they cannot take me now!"

"Perish the thought!" Brother Set wagged his round head. "How may I convince you, Sir Kor, of my delight at witnessing your evasion of Trisz justice? I have been for you all along, if only you knew it."

Kor cast his mind in a cautious circle, exploring the surroundings. Brother Set spoke the truth. There were no soldiers within a mile, and even

the Chapel itself was deserted, save for the two of them. Normal conditions of life prevailed in the town, as far as Kor dared reach out.

"What is loyalty?" The Blue Brother queried sagely. "Is it not love for one's own skin? Such has been my loyalty to the Trisz."

"You did not offer to help me," Kor pointed out.

"Can the buried help the living? A Man is necessarily his own help, Sir Kor. What could I have done that you could not—save to further those plans destined to give you your freedom? And now that you are both dead and undead, Sir, what is your next move? Well, never mind answering. You do not fully trust me."

Brother Set looked unhappy. Kor laughed sharply.

"You have been a strange sort of friend, if not an audacious enemy, Brother Set. How can one who has proved himself a villain become worthy of trust? But perhaps I can trust you this far... to get me clothing such as worn by the People. I dare not appear again in public dressed as a Man."

Brother Set got painfully to his feet, shook the cramps out of his legs.

"Under the circumstances, a

public appearance would be rather dangerous for you. I suggest flight in secrecy, myself. As for clothing, you will find what you need in there." He nodded toward a massive chest against the wall.

Kor gave him a piercing look. The chest had contained his own wardrobe of Brotherhood garments, he well knew. He stepped quickly to the chest, lifted the lid.

A complete outfit of common clothing lay neatly folded on the very top. Kor lifted the topmost piece, a coarse, brown material of fluffy texture that would insulate from the sun as well as keep out the cold. He turned to the Blue Brother.

"You *did* expect me to return!"

"I hoped for the best, let us say. You will note that the color of the garments will pass wherever you may go. You could be a farmer from the Mis-pi with those clothes, or a desert wolf in for a holiday. You will find identification papers in the pocket . . . a clever forgery, if I do say so myself, who committed the crime."

Kor relaxed and grinned, then sobered quickly.

"I do not trust you that far, Brother Set. Forgive my seeming suspicion if I change the

identification you have so thoughtfully provided. The Scarlet Saints are rather clever at forgery themselves. I will take care of the matter before leaving. My thanks now, Brother; you may leave me alone."

The Blue Brother turned to go.

"Brother Set!"

"Yes, Sir Kor?"

"Blessing, Brother."

"Blessing, Sir!"

Alone, Kor studied the document. Brother Set may have been in earnest, but he could afford to take no chances. The paper was printed, with appropriate blanks for filling in desired information with a pen. Kor put his mind into the paper, deftly erased the handwritten parts by freeing the molecules of ink from the paper. With equal care, he replaced the molecules in a pattern of his own, giving himself a different name, place of origin and age. The age he chose was sixty-five.

A half-hour later, a burly, gray-bearded fellow dressed in the coarse, brown habiliments of an Outlander, passed down the steps of the Scarlet Chapel and disappeared into the night that lay heavily over No-ka-si. None but another Man would have recognized that figure as a Scarlet Saint in disguise.

The inn was crowded and noisy. A stuffy pall of rancid cigar smoke and the reek of synthetics hung heavily on the air. Kor made his way among the tables, listening sharply as he went. He was looking for a particular person. He paused by a table seating four young Triszmen. They discussed the execution which they had just come from viewing on the city television screen.

Kor sat down nearby and ordered a mug of synthetic.

"These Chapel Men aren't so holy," one sounded off. "I tell you they aren't for the People at all. That goes for the Reds and the Blues both. I think they're constantly working against the Trisz, and we're the ones who'll suffer."

Kor let his mind steal out. He located the spy devices hidden in the walls. He wanted that young man, but here was no place to interfere with him. Kor continued to wait; he lifted his mug from time to time as if to drink from it. The level of the liquid went down, but none of it passed Kor's lips.

Meanwhile, Kor's mind was subtly busy. One by one, the talker's companions found an urgent need to be elsewhere. When the last one had departed, Kor planted a compulsion

in the remaining Triszman's mind to go home. Considerably the worse for his drinking, the fellow got to his feet and weaved out of the inn. After a minute lapsed, Kor followed him out.

Kor had left the Chapel with a decision to find the "organization" Soma Gol had mentioned. To do that, he felt, he must locate the girl, and the only way to find her was to seek her in the vicinity of the Extrapolator. Hence the need for his present encounter with this Triszman. Kor had sought him out by third-order rationalizing of the probable whereabouts of the nearest technician. Instinctively, he had been led to the inn where his path would cross that of this employee of the Operating Section.

How simple if he could have found Soma by this same method. But the situation was not the same.

Trailing a burst of ribald song, the technician turned a corner and staggered down a repulsively dark side street. Kor overtook him rapidly. He seized the Triszman by his saffron cloak, forced him back against the wall of a dark, silent building. There was no struggle. The technician collapsed under the sudden, fierce probe of Kor's mind into his

conscious faculties. Quickly, Kor robbed his mind of the information he needed. The technician would be a sick man for several days, but that could not be helped. He could blame it on the synth. Satisfied, Kor turned back, found the main thoroughfare leading to Kasi, and walked along it.

Lights sped up from the rear and passed him, crossing beams with those that came townward from the city. An empty surface car passed, rolled to a halt at Kor's hail.

"Yes, sir! Just got in to-night," Kor gaffed pleasantly with the driver. "I've made my pile, young feller, and now I'm looking for a place to have fun. Know any?"

The driver was a mine of information. He expected a generous tip from this garrulous old Outlander with gray beard and obviously new clothing. The fellow knew every dive in the city, was intimately acquainted with every girl who plied her trade, and he was quick to offer suggestions, comparisons, and recommendations with a hearty gusto that almost made Kor wince.

"Well," Kor wheezed in his old man's voice. "Drop me some place convenient to all of 'em, youngster!" He cackled

at his own low joke. "No sense in playin' favorites!"

Kor knew what was expected of him. Upon leaving the car, he tipped generously from the fund of money Brother Set had thoughtfully left in a pocket of his suit. The driver had been a help in establishing his fictitious identity. The watchers on the other end of the car's spy devices had a record of him now, sufficiently banal to put them at ease. But Kor had no desire to leave them with the impression that he was bound for any particular place. Doubtless there were visio-audio scanners in every crib of the city's girl houses.

The crowd was thick on the avenue. Music blared from the television screens, which depicted writhing dancers posturing and flinging themselves in time with a rapid, insensate rhythm. Kor paused, pretending interest. He was a "rube," and everything the city had to offer must seem an amazement and a delight to him. He lost himself quickly in a swirl of colorful garments that flowed around him.

Kor let himself be carried casually in the direction he wanted to go. It was not far. The Extrapolator was centrally located, housed in a tall spire of rainbow-hued plastic.

Its base-area was tremendous, surrounded for a quarter-mile extent on every side by gardens. Kor hurried along a deserted path under the trees. He had been "executed" at sunset; the hour was still early evening. The Extrapolator would be available to the public for several hours yet.

People were scarce here, compared to the pleasure section of the city. Mile-broad steps led up to an equally long row of open doors. People were going in and out, singly and in groups; bright garments flashed in the artificial light.

Colorful, lighted posters and placards caught Kor's attention.

WHAT'S TOMORROW? said one. Another read, HAPPINESS IS HIS WHO KNOWS. SEE WHAT TOMORROW HOLDS BEFORE ACTING TODAY! The posters were illustrated with gay pictures of men and women, semi-nude and nude. One poster consisted of a color-drawing of a naked, curvaceous young woman with a bold sign blazoned across her middle—WHY WASTE TIME? FIND OUT IF SHE WILL. ASK INSIDE.

Kor went in, asked directions of a uniformed attendant, and proceeded to the Pre-

diction Center. He walked heavily, as an old man should.

A badly made up young woman with a pitched-nasal whine to her voice halted him at the reception desk.

"Your name, please?"

Kor gave her the fictitious identity he had assumed. "Sam Kodel."

"Your papers, please."

Kor brought out his identification. It was plain that the Prediction Center, available to and used by all the People as it was, was a first-class Trisz checking station on the activities, desires, and aspirations of the citizens.

"How old are you?"

Kor thrust a gnarled finger at the paper.

"It tells . . . right there."

She looked into his face with a bright, vacuous stare.

"How old are you, please?"

"Sixty-five."

She checked the statement against the paper.

"Your birth date?"

Kor told her.

She went over every scrap of information on the paper, requiring him to give the information orally. Kor knew that out of sight, a silent recording machine was taking down his replies, timing his reaction. He gave everything smoothly, just right.

"What is your question, please?"

Kor attempted to evade. "I—I am looking for someone."

"The Extrapolator does not locate missing persons."

"Uh . . . no. I want to know if I will meet this person again."

"That is better. Enter cubicle 3-C as soon as the present occupant leaves. State your question clearly and completely. All questions are recorded. The machine will give you an answer immediately."

She thrust his papers at him and turned her bright, vacant attention to a woman in a multi-hued cloak.

"Your name, please?"

Kor moved away. The door of cubicle 3-C opened and a Trizman came out. Kor entered quickly. There was a low bench in the cubicle, fronted by a table. Kor sat down, folded his arms on the table top.

A voice rasped at him, "Ten seconds! Formulate your questions in ten seconds, please!"

Ten seconds passed slowly. Kor stared impassively at the wall. There was no equipment in the cubicle. The metallic voice came from behind a hidden baffle somewhere in the room. The voice said, "State your question, please."

"Under what circumstances

will I meet Tasa Lanor again?" Kor voiced the question slowly, distinctly.

The machine was quiet a moment. Then the voice spoke again.

"Question rejected on the basis of insufficient directives. You have ten seconds in which to reformulate the question."

Kor wrestled for a half hour with the machine's obtuse noncomprehension of his affair. The Lady Soma had told him that all local information was fed to this machine. Therefore, he knew, the name of Tasa Lanor was a part of the machine's knowledge. It could not tell him what it knew, only what it might predict from the basis of its knowledge. Sufficient directives had to be supplied to route the machine correctly toward making a proper prediction.

Finally, the voice from the machine spoke again, "Your prediction is ready. There is paper and pencil on the table. You may write it down."

The machine uttered its singular pronouncement. Kor stared at what he had written.

"At the first hour of morn, when the Sun is born, an old man stumbles, 'twixt love and duty torn."

Kor wondered if it were possible for a machine to be

insane. He shrugged, tucked the slip of paper in his pocket and left the Prediction Center. What did it mean? He submitted the doggerel to semantic analysis, but failed to yield a result. The meaning depended upon whether the verse were uttered factually or metaphorically. He made a rational third-order analysis of the situation, and decided to accept the factual interpretation.

He would await Tasa Lanor in the park outside this building at the first hour of morn.

The sun lifted a swollen, bloody face over the sleeping city. Kor had held his post since the first break of dawn, watching the crowds of People entering and leaving the building as the working shift changed. Obviously, crews were on duty around the clock, and Soma's shift began at sunrise.

Just as the Sun came up, Kor saw her walking swiftly through the park, in the guise of Tasa Lanor. She was alone. Kor moved quickly, made sure with special senses that it was she.

"Tasa Lanor," he said, touching her arm.

The touch informed her. She looked at him with wide, startled eyes. "Kor!"

Gladness touched her face, curved her lips. Her disguise began to drop away.

"Watch it!" he cautioned. "Take hold of yourself. It is I, Kor."

She brought her hands to her face, stood shuddering and sobbing. At last she looked up at him; she had recovered her composure.

"It is truly you! I—I thought . . . I saw . . ."

"I know. You saw the broadcast of my execution. It is enough to say that I escaped. I had to see you."

Her grip was firm on his arm, but her voice trembled.

"Kor—Kor, I'm so glad!"

He said, "We mustn't talk too long. Quickly: How can I get to the Organization?"

She drew in her breath.

"I—I can't tell you—now. I have to check first."

Exasperation seized him. He was hurried. He could not forget the prediction, "an old man stumbles." He got a grip on himself.

"Look, Soma! I dare not return to the Institute except that they are prepared for my coming. And I have to leave here on foot. It is dangerous to use my powers even a little here in the city. You must get me to the Organization . . ."

"I know—and I will. Tomorrow. Meet me here."

Heavy boots thudded on the pavement. Kor turned casually away.

A sharp voice cried, "Halt!"

Kor looked into the unsmiling face of an officer of the Trisz guard. He was blocked by a squad of armed, uniformed guardsmen.

"What is your name, please?"

Kor's gray beard trembled with just the proper amount of agitation.

"Sam Kodel. I—I'm a stranger here. What is the meaning of this?"

The officer turned his cold attention to Soma.

"You are Tasa Lanor?"

She nodded.

"You are both under arrest, in the name of the Trisz. Please come with me."

So this was the outcome, Kor thought. What a fool he had been to apply to the Trisz machine for information. He might have gotten it from Brother Set. But he trusted the Blue Brother even less than the machine. Of course, his questions last night had been scanned by the suspicious enemy. It is the virtue of a conqueror to be suspicious.

It has always been thus and will always be so. Suspicion is basic.

The guardsmen surrounded them, marched them off.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Commander of the Guard at the precinct station was cool and pleasantly polite.

"You understand, of course," he smiled, "that this is merely a security check. It is required for the records that a complete dossier be made of the relationship between you two. Miss Lanor is a government employee, and you, sir, are from the Outlands. If you will just answer a few questions . . ."

It was ridiculously easy—a simple exercise in advanced hypnosis. Kor took over the mind of the Trizsman officer, impressed upon it a complete array of false information. He topped it off with a legitimate desire to permit this harmless couple to go their way. The two were released with the same smiling courtesy with which they had been received.

"I cannot now return to my job," Soma told Kor afterward. "Whatever use I may have been to the Organization is ended. The Trisz have an intricate system of records, and you can be sure they are being scanned from every angle. Your own identity is being traced. We have perhaps half an hour before the entire

Trisz guard will be ordered out to search for us."

"Then let us go to the Organization at once."

"Are you mad? We could not even leave the city!"

"I can manage that" Kor said quietly.

She looked at him with sudden hope. Kor smiled wryly.

"I stumbled all right, when I made a public show of myself meeting you. But it is you who are 'twixt love and duty torn.'"

"What are you talking about?"

Kor gave her the pencilled prediction. She looked up at him again, eyes darkly brooding.

She shrugged, by-passing the innuendo of his remark. "I cannot take you directly to the Organization without authorization and directions. I may as well tell you, the Organization expected to receive you if you successfully avoided the Trisz kind of justice. But I have taken an Oath to suffer death before revealing the location of the Organization to anyone. And that includes unauthorized Saints, Sir Kor."

"The Scarlet Saint is dead," he assured her. "I am Kor—none other. The Scarlet Saint was executed yesterday at sunset by order of the Trisz. Have you forgotten? If the

Organization expects to receive me, we had better hurry."

"You are dead—and yet you live? How can I be sure that you are the Man Kor? I feel that you are, it is true. But what proof have I? If you are actually a Triszman, you would come armed with any knowledge Sir Kor may have had. If you live, you must have broken your Oath—and that I cannot believe of a Saint!"

"You misunderstand," Kor tried to be patient. "I did not use my powers against the Trisz, nor could the field I set up be detected by them. The use of abstract mental powers causes a detectable strain in the sub-ether. Detectable to a Man, or to a mental organism such as the Trisz. Fortunately, an electrical discharge occasions a similar disturbance, something like static in radio or television. Under cover of the static generated by the converter, I escaped through subspace, to the Scarlet Chapel in Ka-si. From there I made my way here in search of you."

Her glance darted at him.

"Did you see anyone at the Scarlet Chapel?"

"I saw Brother Set."

"What did he say?" The question was abrupt, eager.

"He said," Kor laughed, "I

thought you would return here first.' "

She fell into his arms, hugged him, squeezing his arms with her fingers, laughing and crying.

"Kor—Kor! It truly is you!"

"Of course it is I. But what—?"

She looked up at him laughing. There were tears in her eyes.

"Don't you see yet? Brother Set is one of us! He would have said what he did only to the real Kor; he *was* expecting you! . . . Now, if you can get us out of the city, I will take you to the Organization!"

Kor performed in a deserted section of the park fronting the Extrapolator. They sat side by side on a stone bench, in the shelter of some sparse shrubbery, and Kor put his mind to work. A few minutes later, two wholly different identities strolled casually out of the garden—an affectionate young couple, arm in arm, with eyes and thoughts for nothing in the world save each other. Only a Scarlet Saint who knew both would have recognized Kor and the Lady Soma in their transmutational disguises.

Deep in the rocky core of the mountains near Denver,

a great cavern blazed with light and hummed with activity. This was a secret lair of the Organization—one of its lairs. There were others around the world, in isolated territories, each deeply buried in the earth and thoroughly shielded from the remotest chance of discovery.

There was no way into such a retreat as this, and no way out. No tunnels led to the surface, to betray its location with their open mouths. Only the Scarlet Saints attached to the Organization knew about the buried cities and knew how to operate the matter transporters that brought people and materials in, and rarely let them out.

The Organization, Kor learned from Soma, represented the "underground" activity of the Men. Those graduates who distinguished themselves in worldly service were transferred here after a pretense of dying and being buried. Not only Men, but men and women of the People were also spirited into the underground cities to work with the Men. In this manner, over the centuries, the populations of the buried cities had grown, until some, like Sub-den, to which Soma led Kor, were enormous in extent.

The buried cities were each

an individual world of its own, having no connection with the surface. The only ones who might leave, once they had entered, were those Scarlet Saints dispatched to secret duty outside, or in the farthest depths of space.

Kor had hardly been aware of entering the cavern. He had stood with Soma in a dry gulch an hour's ride into the desert from Ka-si. She had motioned with her hands a secret signal, and suddenly they stood in a rock-walled chamber miles away and under ground.

"Where I took you," Soma told him, "is one of the 'lifting places' on which the matter transporters are constantly trained. I have been here many times, but never farther into the city than this reception room. Here I talked with the Commander of the Organization, and then I was sent back to the lifting place. That is all I can tell you. I learned of the Organization through Sir Ten Roga, who was a trusted and valuable member. He brought me here and I was initiated into the role of spy for the Men." She shrugged. "There will be no more of that for me now. I cannot again appear as Tasa Lanor, and my father's authority no longer exists. I am hoping that the

Men will find a place for me here."

A door opened in the rocky wall and a sleek-looking young woman came out. She was obviously a woman of the People, slim and lithe, her skin a deep bronze. Her eyes were dark brown, and sparkled in keeping with her smile.

"Come in, please. The Commander is waiting for you."

Kor ushered Soma ahead of him. Both had reestablished their own physical identities, but Kor still wore the coarse brown garments of an Outlander and Soma the colored draperies and the rich and glowing saffron cloak of a proud Triszman.

The erect, Olympian figure behind the desk held out both hands. "Welcome, Sir Kor. And Lady Soma!"

"Tor Shan!"

Kor strode happily forward, seized the Master's hand.

Tor Shan smiled.

"You gave us rather a difficult time, Kor," he reproved. "You moved too fast for us to keep pace with you!"

Kor grinned wryly.

"I was living fast, Sir!"

"Sit down, both of you," Tor Shan invited cordially. "Kor, tell me about it. Speak with perfect frankness before Soma. She may as well start

now her indoctrination as a future citizen of Sub-den."

Kor launched into his story, sparing no details, but it was obvious that many of the explanatory terms, commonplace to himself and Tor Shan, were utterly foreign words to Soma's ears. He concluded with the account of their arrest and escape.

Tor Shan's thoughts seemed to be fixed a great distance away.

"Conduct befitting a Man, Kor," he murmured at last.

Kor swelled with pride.

"Thank you, Sir!"

"However," Tor Shan frowned, "I had hoped that affairs would take a slower pace. Your return has been a little too soon."

"Too soon, Sir?"

Tor Shan waved his hand. "Never mind." He peered at his interlaced fingers on the gleaming desk top. "Kor, I have a great deal to tell you, now that you are 'dead'. Does it bother you that I use that term? . . . No? Well, I had hoped you might have gotten a little closer to the Trisz than you did. You might have cleared up, perhaps, a few points that are still beyond our present knowledge. But that is beside the point. We had extrapolated your adventure, of course, but something was

awry with our equations. We obviously did not have enough directives. At any rate, our extrapolation didn't come close to the actual events."

He leaned back in his chair and faced them both squarely.

"From now on," said he, "both of you must remain residents of Sub-den. Therefore, I am going to tell you what we are doing here, and why we are doing it. Obviously, Kor, we could not teach you at the Institute about the underground activities of the Men. Not all of the Men know about our Organization. Only those deemed most worthy and useful are finally let in on the secret and brought here to further the work. Your own case was decided before you left the Institute. There is a place here for your divisible mind. We want a chance to study it—and to let you use it."

He paused, opened a drawer in the desk, drew out a gilded humidor of scented cigars. Kor refused. Tor Shan selected a cigar and momentarily focused his attention on its tip; it issued a tiny flame. He drew in a lungful of smoke.

"There is more to the work of the Men, of course, than merely following an idealistic principle of some day freeing

Mankind from the yoke of the Trisz." He paused, frowned into the wreathing whorls of cigar smoke, and continued. "If it were not for the Trisz, we men would be masters of the Universe. I mean that quite literally. And the rest of mankind, and the other intelligent species throughout the Universe would be a hundred thousand years advanced beyond their present state of civilization.

"Let us take a look at this Universe. What is its fundamental nature? In rough analogy, it is like a scales in a state of balance. Its equilibrium is determined as much by those forces which seek, to use a metaphorical expression, to lift it up, as to those which desire to tear it down. That which is in the Universe balances itself against that which is not. The positive arrays itself against the negative. Tomorrow asserts itself against today. In very ancient times, this continual, two-way struggle of the Universe was dimly recognized. Our ancestors saw in this constant effort toward balance a struggle between what they called Good and Evil.

"To couch our present situation in these ancient terms, we would say that the forces of Good—the Men—are con-

fronted by the forces of Evil—the Trisz. Statements such as this once passed among men as rational, but we now recognize that such a statement is not even good semantics.

"The Men are not good, in any sense that the term might imply. Neither are the Trisz evil. In fact, from the viewpoint of the Trisz, the entire set of values would be reversed. Do you understand what I am getting at?"

His two listeners nodded. Kor was puzzled. He had been taught that the Men were supreme Good, that whatever a Man did, it was right. Was Tor Shan about to explode this concept as he had years ago destroyed for Kor the concept that the People owed allegiance to the conquering Trisz?

Tor Shan continued, sketching a broad picture of the Universe as not a place or an expanse, but an ideation only.

"The idea which is our Universe," Tor Shan told them, "is one that is apprehended by mind. It is an intellectual concept, if you like the term better. Our own awareness apprehends that the Universe exists. If it requires awareness to apprehend this existence, then awareness was required to establish it. That

is as far as human reasoning will go. Beyond this point, our method of third-order rationalization takes us to the ultimate answer to the question of the constitution of the Universe. This answer is not on the verbal level. It is apprehended only in the mind, and fully, only in the minds of the Men.

"Even in very ancient times, the mind of man apprehended this ultimate answer, and from their apprehension grew the religions of their times. To say, however, that the present philosophy and civilization of the Men stems from the ancient religions is not strictly true. Rather, it is true that the ancient religions were offshoots of the straight and narrow path leading to Manhood. Man groped in the night of his own ignorance, and wove the stuff of his dreams into his apprehension of the Universe and man's place in it.

"Once, uncounted millenia ago, before the Brotherhood of Men ever rose out of the pit of darkness into which the pre-Men plunged the world, there lived a Man who said, 'The world shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.' We have his words today. And he once said to a questioner, 'Why callest thou

me good? None is good, save one, and that is God.' "

In those times, Tor Shan went on to explain, the concept of Good consisted of that which was in the People's favor; and what was Evil, was that which worked to their detriment.

"What was God to those ancient men? God was the epitome of Good. Everything which was right and proper for men came from God. From this idea flowed the casuistic principles with which men bound themselves, and which they called religion. Having discovered the first step toward Ultimate Good, mankind was satisfied with itself, and stopped there.

"In this ideation which we call the Universe, it makes no difference whether man or the Trisz is the recipient of the Universal Good. The Good is still there, for whomsoever will take it. The earliest fallacy, therefore, was the concept that God gives. Actually, man takes. Who would receive the goodness of God must take it. It is not delivered without request.

"Moral principles respecting one side or another, one individual or another, have no place in determining who shall benefit from the Good of the

Universe — the third - order principle behind the material ideation. There is only one Good, and that is for both men and the Trisz to recognize. We, the Men, know that the Trisz do not comprehend this principle; it is completely alien to their understanding. That they have profited from it makes no difference. It is man's own fault that he did not profit from it himself, in place of the Trisz. Because of the alien aspect of the principle to Trisz understanding, we can have hope that ultimately we shall destroy him, because we understand the principle and know how to use it—as the people of the Universe could have used it thousands of years ago with the first coming of the enemy—if they had known about it.”

Tor Shan's listeners hung on his words. The Master was touching deeply upon subjects that had been lightly glossed over in Kor's training. The concepts were utterly new and bizarre almost beyond comprehension to Soma, whose religious schooling had been conducted along the lines of the Lord Sun ritual and dogma.

“Good is for him who avails himself of it,” Tor Shan pointed out. “It is an enormous power that is available to all.

I have loosely called it ‘Good’, which is a word without meaning. There is no word for the actual concept. It is a third-order rationalization, which can not be abstracted to the verbal level.

“The effect of the principle, however, is this, that the balance must maintain itself in the Universe. No force can gain headway in a given direction without an opposing force falling back. When the opposing force returns, then the other must give way. That is the law. There is no such thing as an irresistible force or an immovable object.

“What has this to do with our present state of affairs in the Universe? The people of the Universe—who are composed not only of mankind, but of the billions of species inhabiting the countless worlds in space—are all of a kind, spiritually speaking. The history of one world repeats itself almost verbatim in the history of another. Humanity is humanity, regardless of the physical shape of its individuals, or its galactographic location. Desires, needs, aspirations, are much the same everywhere throughout the Universe. The elevation of Self is the driving force behind every mote of humanity swarming in inconceivable

numbers everywhere in our space and time. The ideas and actions of the people being about the same all over led to a state that was intolerable. Somewhere among this seething mass, some group had to burst upward and upset the puddle of stagnation into which the universe of spiritual men had resolved itself.

"On worlds everywhere, civilization rose, attained a high state of technological advancement, then fell in ruins. The spiritual force which was man, in the idea of inhabitants of the Universe, if it could not advance, neither could it remain in one place. It had to fall back before an opposing force. The Trisz, wherever they came from, supplied that force. In so short a time that it was almost instantaneous, man was pushed back on all fronts. The Trisz had the ascendancy . . . and they have maintained it to this day. The Trisz, in complete command of the Universe, are slowly destroying it by a subtle process of squeezing out all other forms of life.

"It is doubtful," the Master pointed out, "if the Trisz themselves realize this fact, though they may understand it without realizing its conclusion. If the balance of the Universe is not restored by a

return movement of Mankind, the People will finally disappear. There will be only one force left—the Trisz—and they and the Universe will perish!"

"I do not understand," Soma put in. "The Universe is a matter of atoms, molecules, planets, suns, galaxies! What has the spiritual struggle between the Trisz and the Men to do with all this? The Universe cannot be changed!"

Tor Shan smiled. "The Universe changes every second, my dear. Every passing moment charts its future more completely, more surely. It is doctrine with the Men that the future is established, but it is also doctrine that the future can be changed. What is the future, after all? Is it not the sum of past events, manifested in the transpiration of phenomena, each having its roots in the phenomena of the past? What you will do tomorrow, depends upon what you do today . . . as today's deed depends upon yesterday's action . . . and so on back to the beginning of time."

"If this is so," she put in, "the future is set by the actions of the past. How can it be changed without changing the past?"

"You speak of actions and

of the past as if they were concrete objects, fixed forevermore," Tor Shan chided her gently. "This is not true. Remember what I said about the Universe and all it contains being not an expanse, not a space, not material, even, but an ideation? The Universe is a concept of a Mind vaster than anything you may conceive. It is a Mind so vast, indeed, that it is mind beyond mind. The vastness of this Mind can not be reasoned to or consciously understood. It can only be apprehended in the centers of third-order rationalization of the human mind.

"Today's events pass quickly into the past and become a part of it, subtly altering the future probability from the shape it obtained yesterday. Each day that passes alters the future more and more. It is conscious, intelligent effort directing today's events, that produces the change desired in tomorrow's happenings.

"Let us consider that potent tool possessed by the Trisz: technology. See what they have done with it. Lacking hands to control the implements of their science, they have obtained hands to work for them. Their technology—and behind it, their mental acumen or ability for tech-

nology—provided them with the tools and expedients of conquest and victory.

"On the other hand, the Men now have a technology as far-reaching as that of the Trisz, even diverging from theirs in some aspects. It is being used in this and similar caverns all over the liveable Universe . . . wherever the problem of destroying the Trisz confronts the race of Men. But beyond their technology, the Men have something else which the Trisz have not and can never hope to have. They have faith, hope, and aspiration—and the ultimate knowledge that there is only one Good, and that is God!"

Tor Shan settled back with a deep sigh.

"Well, that is the general picture. You will both receive further indoctrination and training in specialized lines of conduct." He turned to Soma. "For you, my dear, a place has been made in the integrating section of our Search Division. That is the home office force, so to speak, of the Searchers who are continuously combing space for habitable worlds, and the ultimate home of the Trisz, wherever it may be."

He directed his attention to Kor. "We have no place into

which you will easily fit, Kor. But I have a word for you alone." He nodded to Soma. "You may go now. The young lady in the outer office will take care of you."

When Soma had gone, Tor Shan turned again to Kor.

"You may have wondered why we offered you no help once you had left the Institute. It would have been a case of the blind leading the blind. You had to be left to your own resources in order to further those developments we were seeking. It is of greater advantage to one to learn to explore a region as he perceives it through his own apprehension. You see what I mean: your whole training as a Man was founded on the principle of self-learning with guided direction. At a given point, the direction had to be removed in order for you to supply your own."

"Yes, sir," Kor agreed. "You mean I had to develop faith in myself."

"And several other qualities," Tor Shan returned ambiguously. "You know that the impingement of the element of self upon scientific investigation has not been decreased more than a trifle by the training and regimen of the Men. Keep that thought in

mind. What we want and what is, are two totally different objectives. The subjective mixing of them has always caused difficulty through crippling the scientist's ability to observe and react properly to his observations.

"Beware the philosopher who tells you, 'Think!' and invariably adds, parenthetically and under his breath, 'Like me!' It is from this fundamental error of procedure that the Men have tried to free their reason. I think like Tor Shan; you think like Kor. We do not have to think alike in order to arrive at the same objective conclusion. In mathematics, it is the method that counts. As Men, we are concerned with conclusions, and the method can go hang! You cannot think as I do, any more than you can walk as I do. It is a point we try to make in the teaching of dissimilar reasoning. It is the way to acquire individuality, though often at the cost of some other factors which are important. That is why every Man is graduated into the world. Generally, only those are brought back into the Organization who succeed in regaining those factors dropped earlier. To tell you the nature of these values would be to emphasize them, which would not be to

your benefit. Experience can be your only teacher, and the final examination must take place in your own mind, under the supervision of your own sensibilities. When you have made proper recovery of the values I refer to, you will know it—and I will know it. Recovery is self-evident, allowing of no further question.

"You will then be in readiness for further service to the Organization . . . perhaps among the Searchers, as your father was, or in some other equally important phase of our activities.

"Meanwhile, you will be in good hands. We will have an opportunity to look further into the unique qualities of your divisible mind through various laboratory experiments. You will not see me often, as I must spend much of my time at the Institute. And now . . ." He stood up, offered Kor his hand. "Good-bye, my boy, and good luck to you!"

Disappointed, Kor allowed himself to be ushered out.

CHAPTER XIV

THE study of the unprecedented phenomenon of Kor's divisible mind progressed slowly. A laborious molecule-count of the brain

structure yielded no clue. Nor could Kor explain the divisibility which he made use of at will.

"Apparently," he suggested, "the divisible function of the mind bears the same relationship to ordinary superconscious functioning that the latter bears to the normal use of mind among untrained human beings. Since many minds can be trained to the use of the superconscious third-order function, it seems likely that a regimen of training might also produce the ability to use the divisible function."

Dr. Kras shook his head, pointed to the wavering chart of Kor's electropsychograph.

"Our modern methods," he said, "are refined to the highest degree. Our instruments can detect the barest most latent superconscious potentiality lying dormant in an untrained mind. Not all minds, you know, can be trained to full use of the superconsciousness. That ability seems to be—I say 'seems to be' because the statement once was taken for fact—that ability seems to be evidence of a mutational quality in the individual. Some time in the far past, a human being was born with the latent ability to use his superconscious mind. Without training that ability remained latent.

Perhaps it occasionally flashed out as a symptom of 'genius', or the individual found himself capable of some queer power or other, which probably frightened him a great deal. From that individual a long line of successors has come, each with the latent ability to use his superconscious, but without the conscious power to enforce use of that ability. What you have may be a further mutation of the mutation. It is too soon to tell. If so, there may be others with the same ability. On the other hand, you may be the only one."

Slowly, Kor grew to realize that he was unique. It swelled the pride he held in himself, and made him at least moderately content with his lot as a temporary guinea-pig of the Scarlet Saint psycho-scientists. Kor passed months in their company, in the performance of laboratory experiments.

During that time, Kor saw a lot of Soma, too. After her work period was done, and Kor's day at the laboratory was ended, they enjoyed the pleasures of the cavern-city together. Kor had a good opportunity, too, to learn more about Sub-den as a physical phenomenon, never paralleled in nature. The cavern was lo-

cated a mile below the surface, about a hundred miles from Den-ver and the Institute nearby that city.

Sub-den was self-subsisting. The city generated its own power, manufactured its own synthetics to take care of the needs of its inhabitants.

No living thing could pass through the walls of solid rock that closed it in. No kind of energy known to the Men or the Trisz could affront the gigantic force-screens that held back the rock to form this cavern. A city of power, Sub-den was a stronghold of the physical strength of the Men, a power rivaling that of the Trisz, but a power that could not be used against the enemy.

In addition to his laboratory sessions, Kor attended scores of indoctrination lectures with groups of interested students.

"All the strength we can muster," lectured a gray-haired Man, "means nothing against the impervious armor of the Trisz. What is that armor? It is nothing we can see, nothing we can destroy. We could destroy the galaxy—planet by planet and sun by sun. But what good would that do us, when we cannot destroy the Trisz? The subtle physical nature of the Trisz is beyond our power to harm. Some day, when our exploring

squads of Searchers shall have located the ultimate home of this monster out of space . . ."

Kor grew more and more discouraged. Such talk sounded like rank defeatism to him. He began to grow irked by his enforced sessions at the psych-lab, sessions productive of nothing but puzzled frowns and much head-scratching. He wanted to be out and away, to attack the problem with action instead of dry lectures and random probing.

He sat with Soma at a table in the Pavilion of Dance. Cool, scented air wafted past them as the dancers circled in the blaze of a spotlight. Overhead, a simulated night sky blazed with stars in exact reproduction of the galaxy. A quartering moon progressed slowly across the artificial sky in time with the real moon that would have been visible outside.

"I don't know!" Kor said suddenly, holding his head in a paroxysm of despair. He slumped on his bent arms. "Soma! This is prison! How much longer will it go on? After all these months, the psychs have found out nothing except what I have been able to tell or show them. So what if my mind is a superior development of the normal mind? I can take only so

much of this poking and prodding."

Soma touched his hand gently. Kor looked up into her face. She was beautiful. Her soft eyes pleaded with his. Her lips were tender and full. They trembled now in compassion for his feelings.

She said, "Please, Kor! You must develop peace of mind! After all, we both have jobs here. What we are doing is just as important to the Men as the things others are accomplishing elsewhere."

A fitting mate for a Man, Kor thought, looking at her. But her words made him bitter.

"A year ago we talked with Tor Shan!" he exclaimed. "I haven't seen him since that time. Twice I have tried and both times he was not available. They admit they've got something special in me. Why don't they use it?"

"They will, Kor. They will. Just wait."

"Wait! Soma, I have been extrapolating. I'm lousy at it, I know. I can't call up a single clear picture like most of the others can. But I get a feeling from it, something like ecstasy! Something wonderful is going to happen, but I don't know when! It's not knowing that is getting to be unbearable."

She squeezed his hand.

Kor looked at her askance. "I know. You would have me wait—wait! Well, I *have* been waiting! When I graduated from the Institute, I thought wonderful things were in store for me. You know the story of my father—how I've dreamed all my life of joining the Searchers. If anyone can find out where the Trisz come from, I can! And I've told you how I can hurl the Fire. I am the only one who can do it, Soma. It takes *my* mind to do it. Nobody else can even be trained to do it. You should see the Fire! I've seen it melt half a planet away before you could blink your eyes. I've seen molten, coruscating gobs of matter sputtering in space like the most beautiful fireworks—and the most deadly—you can imagine! It—it's a beautiful sight, Soma. It's *power*! And what power for a Man to wield with the naked might of his mind! Just think, to be able to hurl a *sun* with your bare hands so to speak . . ."

She closed her eyes, her face mirroring his own internal suffering.

"Please forget it for now, Kor, and let us enjoy the show. Perhaps soon the time will come."

"Soon—bah!" he growled.

She snatched her hand away from his.

"I'm sick of it, Kor!" she snapped. "All you can think of is going away, out to the very edge of the Universe! How about me? Haven't you considered how I would feel about it?"

Kor's expression slowly lost its exalted look. He could not hear Soma's sobs for the sudden swell in the music as the dancers pirouetted off-stage.

"Soma, you're crying!"

"Your mighty mind!" she blazed at him in sudden fury. "That's all you think of! A hundred generations of Men have fought the Trisz in silence, without glory. And what have *you* to say for it all? *Your* mind—what *you* could do—you'd lick the Trisz single-handed, of course! Shame on you, Kor! *You* can whip the Universe all by yourself, but you can't do one little thing about me!"

She jumped to her feet, eyes blazing through her tears.

"I've had enough, *Sir* Kor! Go tell Tor Shan how mighty you are! Perhaps he hasn't found it out yet. And when he lets you out of this—this prison, go to the farthest end of space and stay there! See if I care!"

Kor sat stunned. Nineteen years of Institute training

failed him in this moment. This was a situation that had remained untouched in the text books and lectures. As Kor came to think of it, the Institute had been careful to teach him nothing at all about women.

Soma had reached the lighted street in a precipitate rush before Kor caught up with her. She shook his placating hand from her arm, kept her head held high and avoided looking at him.

"Soma!" he cried. "I—I don't understand. Please don't run! Stop now . . ."

Soma stopped. Her expression was grim, tear-streaked.

"All right, I'm stopped. Now what, Mr. Scarlet Saint?"

Kor hesitated, trying to master the turmoil her action had awakened in him. He was puzzled, confused, angry, and unbelievably happy, all at once.

He said, "My dear, I'm sorry . . ."

"Is that all?" She whirled to go.

He caught and held her, oblivious of the passing crowd that eyed them with amused understanding.

"Wait!" Kor looked around. "In the name of the Sun, let's get out of this public place! I

—I have something to say to you."

She unbent a trifle. "Very well, let us go back inside."

"Oh no," he rejoined quickly. "Not after the flurry we made getting out of there! Come with me. I have just the place in mind."

In the center of the cavern city was a large park. Everything grew in it from shrubs to pines. An artificial breeze swept through it now, rustling the foliage, whispering among the pine needles. They came out upon a small lake, ruffled and reflecting the glow of the artificial moon in the sky. There were many about on the dim-lit paths, but Kor finally found a bench fronting the lake. He sat and drew Soma down beside him. He did not let go of her hands.

"If I had not stopped you, you would have kept on going, wouldn't you?"

She looked away, across the dancing wavelets of the artificial lake. Her voice was small and frail.

"What difference would it have made if I had? You would go if your orders came through."

Kor caught himself on the verge of arguing the difference. Humility became him now, and he was intent on practicing it.

He said, "Soma, I've been an idiot! I can't say I didn't know. I've known all along, I guess. I just didn't know what I knew . . ." He stopped uncertainly.

Soma dabbed a handkerchief at her eyes and attempted a smile.

"Go on, Sir Kor."

Kor stumbled lamely. "Well, when you left me like that, it—it all came home to me. I've been very selfish, Soma. I've thought of nobody but myself. Oh, I've thought of you, too," he hastened to correct himself, "but I just didn't think of what you have given up for the Men, your friends, your father, your home. I was so interested in being a Man, I—well, I forgot what it is to be human, too!"

She leaned expectantly toward him. Kor caught her face suddenly between his palms and kissed her. She did not draw away. The tiny sigh she uttered could never have been called a cry of victory, but it served the same purpose.

"Soma, as long as we both have to stay here, we could—why, we could—!"

She frowned . . . then burst out laughing at his suddenly crestfallen look.

"We could what, Kor?"

"Please marry me, Soma!"

Kor breathed with sudden exultation.

"Darling, Kor!"

"I love you, Soma."

"I love you, Kor."

"Surprised, dearest?"

"I never, never would have expected it, darling! When shall it be? It could be next Chapel day, of course."

"Certainly it would take you more than three days to get everything you need."

"I have everything already, Kor!" she beamed happily. "I have my gown and my tiara . . . it's the loveliest thing! You should see it—but you can't, of course. Not until the ceremony. That's custom, you know. And then there are the household items we will need—I've been getting them together for months! You'd never dream . . . I've spent nearly all my salary . . . !"

Kor sat back and eyed her with mock astonishment.

"So surprised! You of course never expected it! You've been feverishly getting ready for months!"

Soma bowed her head in pretended shame, but her eyes sparkled.

"Well, I could hope, couldn't I? Though you gave me little cause."

"You knew I was under an oath of chastity, didn't you?"

"Oh, that. It expired forty-

seven days ago. I've been keeping track, you see."

The music swelled, died, and swelled again. Neither noticed that the program had changed to a comedy skit. They looked into each other's eyes, lips clinging. Their world of this moment was private.

Tor Shan was pleased with the arrangement.

He said, "I have been hoping for something like this, Kor. I am rather inclined to go along with the theory that your divisible type of mind represents a mutational element. It is possible that it can be passed on to future generations."

"That thought didn't occur to me," Kor replied.

"It wouldn't," smiled Tor Shan. "If the future of the race were left to the conscious considerations of the individuals concerned, I'm afraid the race would have ceased to have a future long ago. Naturally, we wouldn't consider you in the light of a breeding stud or anything of that kind, but the prospect of your having children opens up agreeable possibilities. However, that is still in the future. Of course, you know that as soon as you and Soma registered your intentions, the information was given me at once.

That is why I have called you in for a talk, Kor."

Kor remained politely attentive.

"I hope you have recalled often our last talk together. It appears to me that you have. You have changed a great deal since you first came to Subden. It will not be necessary to keep you here much longer."

"The Searchers!" Kor exclaimed.

Tor Shan shook his head. "Not yet, Kor. Perhaps never, now that you are undertaking the obligations of family life. I have something else in mind equally interesting and active. As soon as you are married, come and see me again. I have a honeymoon planned for you."

Kor looked blank.

"What is a—what did you call it?"

Tor Shan laughed.

"A honeymoon is an ancient expression signifying travel by newlyweds. A journey all alone. You will understand its meaning . . ." he paused to smile slowly, . . . "before the trip is over."

The ceremony did not take place the following Chapel day. There was too much to be done, in spite of Soma's preparations. Getting married

was a more intricate process than Kor had thought...or Soma, either. There was Soma's father to be contacted; Lord Roen Gol had been taken in by the Organization and transferred to another subterranean city. And there was Sir Ten Roga, whom Soma was overjoyed to find still alive. He was returning from a Searcher Battalion to be present at the ceremony. Then, too, there were certain ritual formalities to be taken care of, such as publication of the announcement and posting of the date. It was two Chapel days later before all was in readiness.

Kor had never seen Soma looking so beautiful. He swallowed a large lump in his throat and pantomimed his way through the ceremony like a straw man on a stick.

No amount of training could have prepared Kor for this. Fortunately, his active participation was not necessary. He followed where Soma led and others pushed him. Like bridegrooms since the beginning of time, he merely stood on his feet, did as he was told, and ended in possession of the most beautiful girl in the world. And for this he should have been willing to stand so and let others direct.

"HAVE you heard of the Colonization Survey?" Tor Shan wanted to know. The term was a vague one to Kor. All his research had been concerned with the activities of the Search Battalions.

"Do you mean searching for the human colonies planted by the Trisz?"

"No. That is part of the Search Battalion work. We have another activity, which is listed as the Colonization Survey. It consists of preliminary survey work on worlds uncovered by the Search Battalions. When the Searchers discover a new planetary system, it is explored briefly and the planets classified according to their ecological aspects. These reports are filed here and scanned for the possibility of human habitation on the various worlds. When the time comes to remove the People from Rth, we intend to scatter them as widely as possible, colonizing the younger worlds throughout space. With more room to expand in, the race will grow more rapidly, and we can expect less trouble from adaptation. However, before the People can be moved to any of these worlds, a lot of field work must be done."

The older man's words filtered through Kor's shroud of disappointment. He had felt certain Tor Shan was about to assign him to the Searchers. But this, at least, he thought with a brightening of his faculties, was freedom. He would be able to leave Subden. But what about Soma?

"I plan to send you out as a field researcher," Tor Shan went on smoothly. "It may not be quite as exciting as life in the Search Battalions, since the worlds you will visit have already been charted and explored slightly by the Searchers. We know that none of these planets present dangerous conditions. What you will be required to do is make a detailed analysis of living possibilities on all the worlds of which a list will be supplied to you. Your first sortie will take perhaps a year."

"A year!" Kor sat upright. "But, Sir—"

Tor Shan smiled, "You are thinking of Soma. So am I. You may take your wife with you."

"But she can't—"

"No, she can't teleport herself as you or I could, Kor. Therefore, you will have to teleport her, along with an analytical laboratory. A space ship, in effect."

Tor Shan stepped to the

wall of his office and pressed an invisible stud. The room lights dimmed almost to extinction as the wall slowly parted to disclose a dazzling vista of the star-strewn immensities of space.

Kor recognized the device. What appeared to be a three-dimensional model of the galaxy built into the wall was actually a view into the depths of space itself. The instrument was extremely powerful and capable of wonderful selectivity. Its view was not confined to the overhead heavens, but any sector of the sky was available for viewing at any time.

Countless stars blazed before Kor's eyes as if he floated free in space, far from any sun. Before he could recognize the area, however, Tor Shan operated the device. The stars shifted their positions, streamed away to both sides. The broad, glowing streak of the Milky Way rose and centered itself. Stars drifted toward them, faster and faster, winking out as they seemed to come abreast and pass behind. The luminous streak across the ebon backdrop of space broadened, thinned, resolved itself into individual stars.

"Out here, at the edge of the galaxy," said Tor Shan, "there is a host of young

worlds, many of which have never been touched by the Trisz. They are perfect worlds—much like Rth was a million years ago, perhaps. They have sunny, equable climates, an abundance of moisture and vegetation. Some are sparsely inhabited, others have no inhabitants other than primitive types of animals and plants. The analytical laboratory is complete with equipment for recording the ecological data you will be required to gather."

"What sort of a ship is this analytical laboratory?" Kor wanted to know.

"It is simply a plastic bubble, loaded with instruments. It requires no drive mechanism, like the ether ships of the Trisz, because it goes right along with you in your own teleportation field. Its purpose is to provide a convenient repository for the analyzing and recording instruments, and living quarters for you and Soma. Are you pleased with my idea of a honeymoon?"

Kor was more than pleased. He was overcome. He followed with divided interest the panorama of stars that passed in review, while Tor Shan pointed out system after system as desirable for further exploration.

"As soon," Tor Shan con-

cluded, "as you can be briefed in the operation of the analyzing and recording instruments, you will be given your orders and a summary of the technique of procedure. You will not have to hurry the work. You will need at least a year—take longer if you want. When you return, we will see then if you still want to join a Search Battalion, and if you do... well, we shall see."

A plastic bubble floated in the stratosphere of the planet Karel IV. It gleamed like a droplet of mercury against the blue-black sky in which brighter stars shot gleaming pencils of light. The GO-type sun of this system, a yellow dwarf as Rth's sun had once been, blazed at a distance of 112,000,000 miles from the planet. The bubble dropped slowly toward the cloud-wreathed face of Karel IV, a sparkling mote in the immensity of the upper air.

Soma was in an ecstasy of excitement at the view-port.

"Look, Kor, how thick the air is! You can hardly see the surface at all. It's all blue and stringy looking . . . will we be able to breathe it?"

Kor's mind automatically controlled the descending bubble. Strange fields of force

bathed every molecule of the vessel and its occupants, held them hovering in defiance of gravity, or permitted them to move in whatever direction Kor willed.

"That is the effect of water vapor in the air," Kor told her aside. "Those fluffy bits and the strings are clouds of water droplets. Under certain conditions, the droplets condense and fall as rain. Have you ever seen rain?"

She looked at him round-eyed.

"I've heard of rain some places on Rth, but it has never rained at Ka-si since I can remember."

"You will see plenty of it here," Kor laughed.

He jockeyed the vessel down to an altitude of only a few thousand feet and hovered over the white-capped, dark blue expanse of a heaving sea. The bubble drifted on the wings of a swift sea-wind.

Karel IV was an Rth-type planet of slightly larger diameter than Rth itself, but the pull of gravity at the surface was only negligibly greater. It was a young planet, plentifully watered, possessing a profusion of vegetation and animal life. Kor checked through the original Searcher report on Karel IV. The planet possessed plains, jungles, and

mountainous areas that swarmed with wild animals. The human-type indigents consisted of a few widely separated tribes of cave-dwellers, probably in the dawn of stone-age culture.

The plastic bubble drifted with gathering speed over feathering whitecaps far below. The Searchers had only mind-explored the planet and had recorded their mental impressions before passing on to more difficult problems than any presented by Karel IV. Information on the planet was not complete.

"We might spend a month here, or longer," Kor decided. "We can take as long as we please, and I for one, am in no hurry! I am beginning to understand what Tor Shan meant by that word . . . honeymoon!"

He caught Soma to him and held her close.

The bubble drifted over a creamy coastline. A few small islands dotted the blue-black sea-scape a few miles from shore, surf-ringed, glinting in the yellowish glow of this alien sun.

"There is a river," Kor pointed out.

The river cut almost a straight streak through the lush green savannahs bordering it. Its mouth broadened

where it met the sea, fanning out deltiform in a surf-edged splotch of muddy water.

"We may as well start our investigation by following the river to its source. We have already photographed this continent from space . . . we can now subdivide it into habitable areas. A river like this would be a useful means of transportation for future colonies."

Quickly, Kor adjusted the recording equipment. An automatic camera began to whirl and click. The analyzing laboratory gained speed and fled upstream. Fluffy clouds floated just below their level of observation, and occasional patches of high-flung cirrus roofed the blue bowl of the sky. The river branched and branched again, and they followed each time the larger of the branches. They passed over rough, broken country where the river hurled a high, plume-like cataract in a tumultuous fury of boiling spray from the thousand-foot-high lip of a precipice. They had reached the highlands, and ahead a range of mountains toothed the horizon.

Below them were grassy prairies dotted with clumps of leaf-bearing trees, the clumps sometimes assuming the pro-

portions of small forests. Kor again checked his records against planetary latitude and longitude. It was somewhere in this region that the Searchers had originally located the tribes of man-like inhabitants who dwelt in caves and roamed the plains on hunting forays.

"What a beautiful world this is!" Soma cried, looking down. "Kor, I would like to live on a world like this."

Kor himself was possessed by the scene. Rth must have looked something like this ages ago. A silver thread wound across the prairie, meandered among groves of trees, a sparkling stream sometimes hidden in dense foliage of the forest-clumps, sometimes half-visible when a light breeze momentarily shifted the leafy coverage. To westward, the mountains bulked snow-covered and glistening against the eye-delighting blue of the sky, their great feet hidden in the blue mist of distance.

"We could land here," Kor said. He took Soma again in his arms and kissed her. "There will be lots of other worlds, you know. We have the Universe to choose from. And wherever you like it best, dearest."

Soma sighed happily.

"I like it best wherever you are."

He squeezed her briefly, then turned his attention to landing the bubble. He brought it down in the shelter of a clump of tall trees, a hundred yards or so from the edge of the meandering stream.

The light in the miniature forest suddenly dimmed, became greenish-hued, casting a weird pallor over their skins. Soma gave Kor a startled glance.

"Kor, what's happening to the sun?"

Kor laughed. "Listen!" he said.

The hull resounded with a musical, rhythmic patter that grew louder and louder until it was a swishing roar. Soma put her hands over her ears.

"What—what is it?"

"Rain, darling!"

"Rain? Is that what rain sounds like?"

"That's what rain sounds like on Karel VI. I put us down at the edge of a shower for your especial benefit! How do you like it?"

Soma ran to the view-port and peered out, but the view was obscured by a cataract of foaming water that gushed across the transparent panel.

"Rain . . . rain! Kor—let's go out in it!"

"We'd get wet!"

"I know it. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Water falling from the sky! More water than I ever saw before!"

Kor was checking the analyzers, determining the pressure and constituency of the Karelian atmosphere.

"Pressure slightly greater than Rth's; oxygen, thirty per cent by volume, the remainder nitrogen and a few of the trace gases. It's breathable . . . and safe to go out, darling. But watch your footing."

The lock mechanism throbbed, and the door opened with a slight hiss as outside pressure entered the bubble. The door of the lock swung completely open and a wet spray of pure clean air and water vapor gushed inward. The roar of rain falling on leaves overhead and on the streaming skin of the bubble crescendoed to a furious pitch.

"It is like the bottom of that waterfall we saw," Soma whispered in awe. "Kor have you ever seen so much water before?"

Kor wanted to lie and say that he had, but the awesomeness of the phenomenon overcame his desire to exaggerate. He peered out into the forested gloom of the storm.

"This is the first time I ever

saw it rain," he said. "And I *am* impressed."

"Think of all the People on Rth who have never seen rain," Soma murmured, "or at most, a little sprinkle that barely dewed the ground. Think what it would be like for them to live here. Plenty of water for washing, bathing, for watering crops. How luscious the food must grow here!"

They waited, enthralled by the sight, by the eddying gusts of water-laden air, by the smell of moist freshness that accompanied the storm, until the fall had slackened to a swift pitter-patter of hurrying drops. Together, they dashed from the bubble, thrilling to the clean, wet feel of the drops splashing on their heads and hands. The forest around them smelled of chlorophyllous growing things, of sodden humus, of life-giving moisture. The rain was warm, and it fell now in large, splattering drops. In a moment, both were drenched to the skin, laughing gleefully at the intimate caress of water upon their bodies.

Soma skipped playfully away, blithely dancing in the rain. The flimsy garment she had worn in the bubble clung to her, impeded her movements, until she snatched it

off and cast it aside. There was something primitive and wild about her as she danced naked in the rain. Kor cast his jerkin aside and ran after her, water streaming from his bare shoulders and arms. Soma skipped nimbly through the underbrush, over fallen logs, laughing, carolling, enticing him on.

Kor knew what possessed her. It was the slight excess of oxygen in the atmosphere; that and the excitement of the rain and this strange, new world. He called out to her to come back, but she laughed, waved, and skipped on, scrambling through the woods in a pure ecstasy of living, until she reached the verge of the grassy plain. The green blades of grass, thigh-deep, bent under the pelting rain, and the surface was swept with changing hues and tones as the wind scurried ripples in waving patterns across it.

Kor pursued, still calling in vain. Out among the waving grasses, Soma faced the breath of the storm and danced and waved with them, like a sprite of nature, arms uplifted to the saturated heavens as if she would reach up and rip the moist heart from those boiling clouds.

As abruptly as it had begun, the rain stopped. The overcast

broke. Clouds scurried like a herd of frightened, woolly sheep toward the horizon. The sun came out yellow-bright and strong. Steam rose from the prairie. Soma collapsed among the suddenly stilled grasses.

Kor carried her back to the bubble. She was utterly exhausted, but she still laughed with an overflow of merriment that softened Kor's attempt at sternness.

"This isn't Rth, you know," he chided her. "You just can't exert yourself like that until you get used to the place!"

"It was *such* fun, Kor! More fun than I've ever had before."

"Well," he said with mock grimness. "I like that!"

She giggled, hid her face against his bare, wet breast. He carried her into the bubble, made her comfortable on their berth and wrapped a blanket around her.

"Just stay there now," he admonished her. "I'll prepare something to eat, and then you'd better get some sleep. It's almost sunset, and you've had about enough strange experiences for one day. Tomorrow, we can get to work."

The following days were a heaven of delight for Soma. Kor worked assiduously with

the analyzing and recording equipment, but there was still plenty of time left for play, for exploratory walks, for swimming and lying in the sun on the sandy bank of the creek. Many times, while Kor worked in the bubble, Soma went out alone, gathering wild flowers, watching the strange birds that flitted among the trees, and dipping in the creek for an extra measure of fun.

The stream was a source of endless delight to Soma. She loved to sit on its bank, alone in the daytime, in the evenings with Kor, and to listen to the music it made as it riffled gently over the gravel bar. Frequently, heavy-laden boughs came down, caressed the surface, and dropped their leaves one by one to float away on the current. Too, there was the pool they swam in, cool and clean, with a sandy bottom and not too deep for safety. And there was the unutterable feeling of being alone . . . that all this beauty belonged to them only. Whatever inhabitants this planet had, they assumed the status of mere animals in her mind, unreal and far away. The world was theirs to enjoy as they pleased.

Kor had spent the day classifying a dozen varieties of stoloniferous prairie grasses and several others that might

prove to be cereal or grain-bearing. The latter were carefully filed in the hydroponics section of the bubble for further study under growing conditions. Kor made a last check of the instruments. Air and soil analyses were completed. The tapes held a complete record of plant cellular structure, as well as of a few small rodent creatures that roamed the fields and woods. He had recorded about all that was worth while in this region. They would move on next to the mountains, then see what lay beyond. Kor went out into the living quarters to warn Soma they were about to leave.

The airlock door was open to a sunny afternoon. A small, winged insect hummed busily just at the edge of yellow sunlight. Soma was not around, but Kor saw that she had left a note.

"Darling. Didn't want to disturb you—know we're about to leave, so have gone to the creek for one last bath. Join me? S."

Kor smiled. Some day, he thought, he would see to it that she had a creek of her very own. Somewhere, they'd find the ideal world and settle down. Perhaps Karel IV was the world and this one was the creek. The thought pleased

him. Karel IV was a beautiful world.

He ducked out of the bubble, his thoughts drawing rosy pictures of the future, and strode smartly along the path they had worn to the creek. He could hear Soma splashing in the water, singing melodiously in sheer exuberance of living. How marvelous this solitude . . . this freedom on a world where there was no fear!

Kor came out of the underbrush upon the bank of the creek—and froze.

He apprehended the entire, kaleidoscopic scene with one swift sweep of his mind . . . the purling, musical water, blue in the open reach of its bend, dull green in the shade of its banks. It mirrored leaves that fluttered on bending boughs, mossy-flanked boulders; and Soma, erect and naked in the act of bathing, her white body reflected in broken arcs upon the rippled pool; and above her a something half-seen, a thing of horror that rippled almost invisibly upon the air as it came down silently, remorselessly, and enveloped the girl.

Trisz!

The hateful thought cut like a knife across Kor's mind. He stood bemused, watching as if

fascinated. What was the Trisz doing? As the invisible vibrations of the Trisz enveloped her, Soma appeared hazy and distorted in outline, her head thrown back, arms outflung, back arched.

What happened then was more than Kor's memory ever afterward brought back to him. For an instant he struggled within himself. He might have flung the full power of his mind at that alien thing to save the life of his beloved, but a lifetime of training pulled the other way. A monstrous hammer began to beat upon a clanging anvil in his brain, each blow a metallic clangor of words that leaped upon him: *I do most solemnly vow . . . the invulnerable Trisz . . . can't use your power . . . don't . . . it's killing her . . . don't . . .*

Desperately he fought to overthrow the discipline of a lifetime. And failed. The force of habit was too strong for sudden overthrow.

The instant struggle rived his mind, shattered his consciousness. The world was lost to Kor in a howling, mental agony. The instant he might have acted passed too soon, the insoluble dilemma wrecked the delicate balance of his mind. Kor fell senseless; the monster fed, and passed on.

CHAPTER XVI

NIGHT came down across the grassy plain and upon the singing stream. The stars stood out in all their blazing glory. Alien constellations wheeled across the foreign sky, dimmed behind a driving cloud, and vanished. Dawn brought with it a chill drizzle.

Kor awoke. He was barely aware. His senses reacted as if drugged. He knew it rained and knew that it made him uncomfortable. Vaguely, he realized what rain was. He looked at the rain-dimpled creek and saw that it was water, but his comprehension went no further. Mercifully, the withered husk dropped by the Trisz had floated away on the stream.

Kor got unsteadily to his feet and splashed through the shallows, across the gravel bar, to the other bank. The bubble lay behind him, but he had no memory of the laboratory, of its purpose, of whence it had come, nor of the passengers it had carried. He knew he was Kor. He did not know who or what Kor was. His mind held no yesterday, conceived of no tomorrow. He drifted in an eternal present.

One other thought, a dim one, tugged at his mind. He

was going to the mountains. The rain curtain had lifted, and he looked up and beheld the jagged horizon. He skirted tree clumps and patches of trailing vegetation, keeping to the open grasslands. His eyes were glazed, sunk deep in their sockets. He looked neither to right nor left. He thought nothing. Only his legs moved up and down, up and down, churning through the thigh-deep grass of the prairie. Ahead of him loomed the mountains, dazzling in the sunlight. What was there in the mountains that called to him? He did not know. He responded to the voiceless urge that welled from his subconscious. Where else was there to go, save to the mountains? There was nothing here but grass, mice squeaking underfoot, shrill-voiced insects that cheeped and whirred on the quiet noonday air.

Sometimes, Kor found himself slogging along with the mountains at his back. Then he would remember that the day had gone dark for a little bit, and somehow he must have gotten turned around. He would correct his course, head again for the bright-gleaming snowfields. When night came, he continued to stagger and flounder through the grass. He dropped suddenly and

slept until the sun rose on a new day.

Of how many times the sun rose on his wanderings, Kor had no remembrance. Often day was like night to him, and the night was like day. He tramped on under sweltering sun and frosty stars. It made no difference to him. The planet's lone, tiny moon rose and passed through its phases swiftly: a tiny, glowing sickle-become-disk in the sky that added little to the cold, silver starlight.

Kor did not pause to eat. A part of his superconsciousness functioned automatically, drawing sustenance from the sub-levels of consciousness, restoring and rebuilding his body as he wore it out in his ceaseless trek. An ordinary human being would have quickly died under the conditions that assailed Kor. Kor was the remnant of a Man—sustained by powers beyond the understanding of his riven mind.

Long ago, he had shed the last rags that once had covered him. He strode naked through the grass. It swished about his knees, became tangled and matted about his thighs, so that he had to lean forward and draw his legs up with sharp jerks in order to walk. File-edged stems raked

his flesh, streaked him with the red of blood and the green of chlorophyll. There had been other creeks to cross, too or was it always the same one? Kor waded or swam, as the occasion called for . . . keeping the mountains ahead of him as a goal. He passed through copses, clumps and forests, fought tangled vines, breasted whipping underbrush, climbed over fallen deadwood.

He was dirty. He was filthy. His body was caked with dried mud. His feet and legs and belly were black and green together, whipped by brush and the tall grass. His beard had begun to grow, matting heavily on his cheeks and jowls.

Weeks passed. There was no time for Kor. He had forgotten why he had started upon this journey; if indeed he had ever known. His flesh was red from exposure to the sun, his hair bushy and golden, his beard long, tawny, matted with burrs.

Wherever it was that Kor had to go, he walked as with the purpose of getting there. He scarcely paused to rest. His body grew lean, sinewy. His skin was like leather, dyed red in a vat to provide rich binding for books. Vaguely, Kor became aware that he followed a swale that led gradu-

ally upward. The ground was rocky in places and the grass was short and tufted. Conifers whispered in the breeze; ripening cones hung like shuttered lanterns upon wind-lifted boughs. He had reached the tumbled region of the foothills.

A pair of feral eyes glared lambent yellow upon the Man's progress. A mind duller than Kor's own had become calculated with evil ferocity. The *kther's* belly griped with a pang of hunger. The creature twitched its long tail, ran a slaving pink tongue over fanged jaws. The beast lifted its horned head over the bulwark of rock behind which it crouched, then slid its cat-like body gracefully over and down the slope. The *kther* stalked the Man, hiding itself behind rocks and shrubs, running on soft pads, creeping on its furred belly, thinking cold, vicious thoughts of hate and killing.

The swale flattened, widened into a grassy meadow. Deer streamed out of its far end, running for the safety of the forested slope above. They had caught the scent of the creeping *kther*, intent upon its prey.

Kor rounded a gray outcropping, snarled at the Man's back, then lifted its hideous, horned muzzle and roared.

Kor did not pause in his stride nor cast a glance behind. The beast blinked yellow eyes and licked its chops. What kind of a creature was this that did not freeze in terror at the frightful noise of the *kther*? The animal launched itself from the rock, bounded after Kor. At a dozen yards distance, it halted, forepaw uplifted, and yowled hatefully.

Slowly, the Man turned. He saw the beast, behind it a stretch of grassy meadow giving upon the rocks that hemmed this cup-like depression. Kor shook his head slowly from side to side, pondering. He wondered how he had got there. He tried to think, but thoughts would not come to him, only impressions of his immediate surroundings.

The twitching animal caught and held Kor's attention. His mind stirred with a sluggish curiosity and he took a step toward it.

Other eyes watched the two—six pairs of brown orbs hidden in deep sockets, shadowed by bushy brows. A hunting party of thurbs had come over the ridge in search of the deer wont to frequent this grassy park. They stood transfixed at sight of the Man and the savage *kther* facing each other.

"That one is not a thurb,"

spoke An-Ga, leader of the hunters and chief of the tribe of Go. "Look at the color of him . . . and see the hair upon his head and face! Can he be human even?"

"Whatever he is," said Strob, the chief's brother, "he has no fear. See—he advances upon the *kther*!"

"He will be torn to pieces!"

"The *kther* is the deadliest of beasts!"

"What can he do against a *kther*? He has no weapon!"

Two yards apart, the naked Man and the snarling *kther* faced each other, the beast frothing with animal fury, the Man curious and wondering. The *kther's* jet fur stood erect along its weaving spine down which ripples ran to the long, twitching tail. Great yellow eyes peered unblinking at the Man. The red maw opened in a soundless snarl.

Kor stopped, puzzled by the creature's manner. He wondered if it were afraid. While he pondered the problem, the *kther* drew itself into a quivering heap, bunched its limbs; then with all the power of steely muscles, it sprang.

Kor observed its rearing assault with indifference. The need to kill in order to preserve himself had not yet occurred to him. The great bulk

seemed to cover the intervening space in a slow, flowing motion . . . then the *kther* crashed down upon him. Flashing claws ripped like scimitars. Fangs clashed; a growling snarl ripped from the beast's belly. Scalding pain gushed over Kor's back and flanks. He willed the beast to die . . . and the power of his mind lashed out of its thrall of darkness.

The great *kther* squalled and rolled kicking on the grass.

Painfully, Kor dragged himself to his feet. He stood swaying. Blood ran from a score of deep gashes in his sun-reddened flesh. He stared stupidly at the *kther*. The great beast was dead. Kor felt faint. He toppled over, measured his length on the grass.

Awe-struck, the thurb hunters peered from their rock cover.

"Indeed," cried An-Ga in a tremendous voice, "he is no thurb, but a god!"

"But a god!" cried his little band of followers.

"Let us go to the god. Perhaps he needs our help!"

Skin-clad, trailing spears, the bald-headed thurb rushed into the meadow, gathered around conqueror and conquered.

"He still lives," announced

An-Ga, feeling Kor's body. "But he is wounded. The *kther* ripped him with its claws."

"Aie! He will die, then! Whom the mighty *kther* whips with his claws goes down into the world of shadows!"

"Unless he is a god!"

A hoarse exclamation broke from a bending thurb.

"Look—his wounds! The god heals himself!"

The hunters bent, staring with eyes big and round. Slowly, the gaping wounds in Kor's flesh were closing, knitting, healing of themselves. As they watched, the last bloody furrow closed itself, and the Scarlet Saint lay without a scratch to mar his skin.

The thurb began all to shout at once. They went mad with an ecstatic frenzy. They shook their spears and danced around and around Kor and the fallen *kther*, trampling flat the lush grass, chanting with wild, primitive joy.

"Hail the god! He has vanquished the *kther*! He has healed his wounds! Hail the god! Aie—!"

On and on the thurb danced and yelled, their minds intoxicated by what they had witnessed.

Kor rolled over and sat up. The din was deafening. He had no memory of combat

with the *kther*. He looked at its dead body without interest, swung his gaze to include the yelling thurb. They saw his look, broke and ran. Kor sat and resumed contemplation of the dead *kther*. He wondered what it was and why it did not move.

At last he got to his feet, stretched lazily, and began to stride rapidly toward the head of the meadow and the forest that lay beyond.

The thurb grouped themselves in silence, watching him go.

"The god!" cried Strob.
"The god is leaving us!"

"Catch him!" ordered An-Ga.

The thurb looked at him. Who was a fool among them? Was the stranger not a god? Had he not slain a *kther*? None ventured forward until all moved in a body, slowly. They crept after Kor, calling out, pleading, placating. Kor did not hear them, nor could he have understood the harsh gutturals of their speech. He reached the edge of the forest, sat down on the exposed root of a tall pine and looked back the way he had come. He saw the advancing thurb then, but there was nothing about them that interested him.

An-Ga led the rest by half a spear's length, a position

forced upon him by virtue of his chieftainship. He croaked dismally.

"Stay, O god!"

Kor stayed.

He began to wonder about the advancing thurb. Their similarity to himself disturbed him. They were man-like, heavily muscled, almost hulking in stature. They had wide, bushy eyebrows, but their heads and faces were hairless. Their bodies, where not covered by wolf-skins, were revealed as coarsely haired.

The thurb saw Kor looking at them and gathered in a knot to confer. Afterward, An-Ga turned from his fellows advanced a few paces, and laid down his spear. Kneeling then, he backed away on his knees to rejoin the group. One by one, the others came forward, dropped their spears and retreated on their knees.

They began to chant, a meaningless jabber, but now Kor felt something in the depths of his mind which spoke for these simple people.

"We are thurb, O god! We lay our spears before thee."

The sense broke into meaningless gabble, became a dismal mouthing of sounds.

Kor wondered, what are thurb? Am I a thurb? What is a spear? He got up and

strolled toward the piled spears. He looked down at them. They were long shafts of wood, fitted with sharp points of stone.

"Take our spears, O god."

Once again Kor caught the sense of the thought and looked toward the kneeling thurb. Six heads thumped in unison upon the ground. Something about them stirred Kor with pity.

These are spears, Kor thought. These creatures are thurb. I am not a thurb. I am a god.

He felt suddenly, strangely happy, as if he had solved a terribly upsetting problem. He held up both hands and pronounced the only word he could remember.

"Kor!"

"Kor—Kor!" cried the thurb together.

They leaped to their feet, babbled, waved their arms.

Kor turned his back on them and stalked off into the forest. He forgot about them completely. The thurb followed Kor for three days, deeper and deeper into the forest. Their strength flagged. Their spears grew heavy to carry.

"He eats not, neither does he drink!" protested An-Ga, "and he stops but briefly to

sleep! How can we keep up with him, who have not eaten for three days?"

"Let us go," urged Strob. "We will return to our cache of meat by the meadow where we found the god. We will forget him, and hunt meat for our people on the plains."

"We have followed him for three days," returned An-Ga. "We are sick with hunger. We should starve before we got back to our cache."

"How long can a man go on without eating, god or no god?"

"We must have food and water!"

"Why is this god important to us anyway? Why do we follow him?"

"Have not the old men of the tribe related that the gods love the thurb? What love has this fellow shown for us?"

So they argued and harangued among themselves. Kor halted, beset by a baffling clamor of thoughts. The thoughts came from the thurb, and spoke of discontent, unhappiness, hunger and thirst. Kor asked himself, what is hunger? He did not know. The thurb minds told him that hunger was suffering, but he did not know what suffering was, either. What is thirst? Thirst is suffering of a different sort, but similar to hun-

ger. Kor fondled the thought, unconsciously molding it into the abstraction of need. Hunger and thirst were the expression of needs. One was for food and the other for water.

Kor turned to An-Ga and gestured. The thurb chieftain gestured in return, but nothing was gained by the exchange. All around them, the pine forest lifted exalted crests to the blue, blue dome of the sky. The ground was a rich humus of brown pine needles, rich smelling, yielding to the foot. The thurb had chewed clumps of grass on the march to alleviate thirst. Their mouths were green. One who rolled a pebble in his mouth spat it out with a glum expression.

Kor said, "What is thirst?"

The sound of the words astonished him. He had not known there were so many words, nor that he could speak them. But the thurb did not understand.

An-Ga said, "Lord, we need water and food. And rest, too, for the way has been hard, following you."

Kor grasped the thought.

He said, "Water?"

The word was not the same as the thurb word for it. An-Ga made motions of dipping cupped hands and lifting them to his lips.

Kor closed his eyes. There was a spring bubbling out of the mountainside barely a half mile away. He sensed its presence, was aware of the cool bubbling it made in the pebbled basin of its nativity, of its sparkling descent of the hillside to a creek far below.

He seized An-Ga by the shoulder, faced him in the direction of the spring and shoved. An-Ga staggered a step forward and stopped. Kor reached to seize another thurb, but the fellow drew back.

Kor swung away from them, burst into a swinging lope down the mountainside. The pitiful band of thurb scrambled hastily after him. A few minutes later, they lay in contented relaxation, having drunk their fill.

Food, thought Kor. Thurb need food. He was at a loss to account for what food might be until a thurb conjured up an impression of deer-like animal. Kor saw the thurb running through the forest, spear ready. He saw him stop, crouched, then the cast of the spear. A nimble-footed, antlered creature fell crashing to the forest floor. Such is food, thought Kor.

He sat down on an outcropping of rock by the bubbling spring and closed his

eyes. His mind swept out, touched a family of squirrels eating pine-nuts in a nearby tree. They had no antlers. They were not food. He thrust his mind farther afield.

A herd of the deer-like creatures grazed in a grassy meadow. Hunger had weakened the thurb. They were too weak to march so far. Kor continued to sit, uttering no sound. Far away, the deer lifted their heads, turned as if in response to a call. They began to drift toward the meadow's edge, faster and faster, until soon the herd streamed at top speed through the forest. Their dainty feet stamped the turf . . . faster . . . faster.

Strob said, "He has led us to water, but do we starve now? I hunger."

"He is a god," replied An-Ga. "Shall we ask after the ways of gods? He has given us water. Be content. He will give us food."

The thurb huddled in a semi-circle before Kor, clutching their spears. The sun was going down, and the forest was barred and aisled with slanting sunshine. Insects hummed and glinted in the golden glow.

An-Ga's primitive ears twitched. Had that sound been the click of a hoof upon stone? He uttered a harsh command.

The thurb melted away from Kor's lone, intent figure.

The deer came on, walking fast, eyes rolling, muzzles dewed. The thurb saved their wonder for later. Here was meat!

CHAPTER XVII

THE thurb were happy and contented, their faith restored in their god. Kor brooded in mystic silence. He accepted the thurb as his own. They were his people. They were why he had come to the mountains.

The thurb had struck fire from a flint spear head and roasted part of their kill. They feasted now and sang praises to Kor. Kor sat aloof among them, appearing to think deep, divine thoughts, though no thought would come to him. His mind was blank, observing and recording but that was all. Kor knew he had found the water, that he had brought the deer. He did not know how he had done these things. The thoughts of the thurb were sometimes clear to him, sometimes muddled and senseless. Kor was not a thurb. He was a god.

The thurb talked now of packing the rest of their meat and striking out in the morning for the cave that sheltered

the tribe. Kor thought, what is a cave? He searched the thurb minds. He came away with a feeling of a hole among rocks, a cool place when the sun was hot, a warm place when wind and driven snow howled outside. There was something of shelter about a cave, something of comfort that had to do with fire, and something of something else, a feeling more than a fact. The word swam slowly into Kor's consciousness—home.

Home! Kor felt an unexplainable ache. He was going home. That was what he wanted. Home provided security, peace and pleasure. What were security, peace and pleasure? He did not know, but he felt that they were treasured things, things he had somehow once possessed but had lost, he did not know how or when. Home held these things—and home was where the cave men of Karel IV planned to go.

Kor gave up his leadership. He followed the meat-laden hunters as they struck off across the hogbacks toward their distant caves—and home.

Two days of hard packing over ridges and through the swaying forest brought them to a gullied ravine. Single-file, the cave men trudged down-

ward. The walls of the ravine got higher and steeper. They debouched into a canyon with high, frowning escarpments of weathered rock. The mountain range was close, lifted snow peaks above them, dazzling against the blue backdrop of the sky. A snow-covered cone rose steeply above the canyon, smoke wreathing its crest. A small, white cloud of water vapor condensed above the smoke and rained without end upon the unquenchable fires of the volcano.

The canyon floor leveled into a grassy sward. A spraying waterfall dashed in a broken cataract down the steep rocky side, pooled at the bottom and flowed in a sparkling stream southward. They came upon cultivated fields. Above the fields there were black holes in the canyon wall, topping a long slope of tumbled talus. Figures, tiny in the distance, jumped and gesticulated at the mouths of the caves. Faintly, shouts of welcome came to the ears of the returning hunters.

"Home," thought Kor. He looked at the caves and the crowd of jumping thurb. "Soma," he thought, and he did not know why a sharp pain stabbed through his breast. He saw that An-Ga

and the other hunters were laughing and shouting back at the welcoming throng. He was pleased for them and forgot his pain.

There was feasting in the caves that night. Kor sat on a high rock in front of the caves, looking into the bright heart of a fire. A deerskin robe given him by An-Ga dropped from his shoulders, banishing his nakedness. A wolf-skin lay across his knees. Someone had brought wild flowers and piled them at Kor's feet. Every thurb in the tribe of Go knew that Kor was a god. So they had been told.

A woman approached him with a gourd filled with savory venison. She offered it to Kor, but Kor paid no attention. The woman thrust the gourd almost into his face, grinned coquettishly, made clucking noises with her tongue. Kor turned his head away.

Tharg squatted by the campfire. He eyed Kor with sullen jealousy. He watched his woman offer Kor food, and from the way she thrust her body forward, he knew she offered herself, too.

Tharg was a mighty thurb, heavily muscled, mightily thewed. His bald head gleamed in the light of the flames from a fresh anointing

of oil. He had had to rub the oil on himself. His woman had left him to offer herself to the god. Tharg hated Kor.

"Who is he, that you call him god?" he grumbled to a campfire mate. "Do we not know that the gods made thurb after their own likeness. What thurb is so hideously haired as he?"

Tharg's companion stopped gnawing at his portion of venison. He smacked his lips, wiped away the grease on the back of his hand and grinned at Tharg.

"Not so hideous in the eyes of Tharg's mate, is he?"

Tharg growled and fetched the fellow a back-handed lick that knocked him kicking. The smitten thurb rolled quickly over, jumped to his feet, doubled over with laughter at Tharg's discomfiture. The woman still thrust food at Kor, simpering and grinning, making whining noises and swaying her hips provocatively.

"Ho, Tharg!" guffawed the gleeful thurb. "She will have his body and you will spend a cold winter!"

Tharg sprang erect. He was bandy-legged, hirsute of chest and arms. His chin hung low. He scuttled like a spider across the intervening space and with a vicious clout

knocked his mate sprawling. Tharg stood then and glared at Kor, feet wide spread, toes gripping the ground, his arms hanging loosely. He growled his displeasure.

A stone axe hurtled through the air, glinting in the fire-light, thumped into the giant's ribs. Tharg yelled, went down with a look of wild surprise, clutching his wounded breast.

"Be taught," An-Ga said calmly, retrieving his axe, "not to profane the god's presence with violence. Take your mate to your cave and beat her. If she annoys the god again, I shall have her whipped for all to see. Go! I, An-Ga, have spoken."

Tharg glowered his pain and frustration. He seized his mate by one arm and dragged her squalling to his cave. For a long time afterward, she could be heard screaming and crying as Tharg beat her, but nobody paid any attention. The food was good and there was plenty of it.

They gave Kor a cave of his own, above all the others, by the cliff path that led to the forested plateau above. They carpeted its floor with scoured sand from the creek bed in the canyon and piled it with skins and lustrous furs for his comfort.

He took no food or water,

and there was no need for a fire. Alone, Kor lived in his cave and brooded on the eternal mystery of his being.

The days grew shorter, and the golden light of autumn settled upon the canyon. The hunters went out and returned with meat, which the women prepared for winter use by boiling and drying in the sun. Sometimes Kor went with the hunters and brought them an abundance of game. Often he stayed in his cave while the hunters were gone and slept long hours, or sat trying to drag his thoughts out of the darkness that held them fast.

The cave which served the tribe as a storehouse was piled with dried meat. The harvest of grain and cereals was brought in from the fields. The tribe sang its happiness and content for the plenty their god had brought them. Nightly, the hunters danced around the fires. They made up songs to sing as they danced, songs that honored and praised Kor, the god who had come to live with them.

The interminable chanting of the cave men penetrated to Kor in his cave. He lay trying to think. The thoughts of the thurb mingled with his own incoherent cerebration. He could not understand every-

thing they said in their songs. But enough came through that he knew they worshipped him, and Kor was pleased.

The first frost arrived. In spite of the sun, shining low in the south now, there was a piercing chill in the air. Soon there would be snow, but Kor did not know this. The temperature of the air was of no concern to him. The hunters stayed away longer now, and returned with less game. Hibernating beasts were holding up in their dens. Migratory animals streamed out of the mountains, into the prairie. Great, hungry carnivore prowled mountain and plain, vied with the thurb for the thinning game. Their screams echoed nightly from the rock walls of the canyon.

One day a group of hunters returned about noon. They had no meat, though they returned heavy laden. Their burden was the dead body of Throg, son of An-Ga. They bore him upon a litter of poles and interlaced withes. There was blood upon the furs and blood upon the litter. Throg's body was covered with blood.

The people of Go stood around the litter and uttered their piercing shrieks of mourning. Kor heard the noise, the weeping, wailing, and lamentation that arose

from clustered women and children. Throg had been young. Throg had been handsome. No maiden had known the love-embrace of Throg. Now Throg was dead. No more would he be kind to the old and the weak. No more would Throg share his meat with the sick. No more would the tribe cry out with joy to see him return laden with meat from the hunt.

Throg was dead.

Kor came out of his cave. The tribespeople howled a high-pitched dirge over the bloody litter. Kor frowned. The thought was clear in his mind—Throg is dead. Kor went down to where the hunters had dropped the litter at the foot of the talus. He picked his way down the rocky slope. An-Ga knelt at the side of his dead son. Throg's mother lay upon the dead boy's breast, weeping and clawing her bald scalp with reddened finger nails.

Kor looked a question and read the answer in the mind of a returning hunter. Throg had made a kill—an *url*—a small, three-toed creature that ran upon the plain with great speed. Only Throg, fleet of foot, could have run to within spearing distance of the nimble *url*.

Throg had raced like an *url*

himself, spear poised for the cast. Out of a clump of cane sprang a vicious *kther*, razor-like claws ripping at the thurb. Forgetting their fear of the *kther* in the face of peril to their beloved Throg, the hunters had rushed forward and speared the beast. But Throg was dead, clawed to death by the mighty beast.

Kor knelt, seized the mother by her skin robe and effortlessly tossed her aside. She lay howling on the stony ground. Quickly, Kor felt over the body. He asked himself, why am I doing this? What does it matter to me that Throg is dead? He looked into the eyes of An-Ga, saw the pain and misery there. Kor went over the boy's entire body. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he was conscious of a universe of spinning electrons that darted and danced as tiny motes of supernal light. Kor stood up at last, gestured to An-Ga to go away. The chief crept back from the litter, head bowed. The tribespeople grew tense and hushed.

Kor held out his hands, looked first at one then at the other. He turned them palms down over the body of Throg. Something like a soundless sigh passed through his mind. Strange words murmured just over the horizon of his con-

sciousness. He could barely make them out . . . *desire is our scourge . . . need is our blessing . . . resolve is our armor . . . will is our weapon . . .*

Where these words came from, Kor did not know. He was conscious that they flowed like music through his mind, that the dancing electrons kept time with their cadence.

He said, "Throg!"

The body on the litter stirred, and a moan rippled through the assembled tribe.

Kor said, "Throg—get up!"

Throg stretched, yawned, blinked his eyes. He regarded the fascinated onlookers with puzzlement. He rolled over on the litter, rested on his elbow.

"The *url* is mine!" he growled. "Where is it?"

He got up from the litter, swinging his arms and flexing his muscles. He did not look at Kor. Throg's mother threw herself upon him, screaming with joy. An-Ga seized his son's hand. Tears streamed from his eyes. The tribespeople crowded around, crying out with joy.

Kor looked at them, sensed their emotion. That is why I did it, he told himself. He turned and went back to his cave. No one saw him go.

The skies turned from sunny to gray, and a thin spin-

drift of snow whipped through the canyon on the teeth of a bitter wind. The top of the smoking cone was hidden in the cloud cover; trailing mists hid its snowy flanks. The conifers had long ago dropped their cones, and the grass in the canyon was withered and brown. The hunters had given up the chase and spent their time huddled now over fires in the caves.

One morning, An-Ga brought a thurb girl into Kor's cave. She was young and comely. Her bald head, freshly oiled for the occasion, gleamed yellow in the daylight streaming in the cave-mouth. Kor sat on a wolf-skin, his feet curled under him in a pose of meditation. An-Ga took away the girl's deerskin robe and she stood naked before Kor. Her flesh was smooth and firm, her breasts high and well placed. Her body was slim and shapely, her body-hair a soft, pleasing, blonde down.

An-Ga spoke, but it was difficult for Kor to make out more than part of what he was saying. He gathered that the girl was Eldra, a gift of the tribe to be woman and servant to him.

"She is the youngest born of my brother Strob," An-Ga said gravely, "of my own flesh and my own blood. I give her

to you to tend your fire, keep your cave, and make you warm in your furs as you lie through the winter night."

"I need no servant," he said. "Go. Return to your people."

Eldra could not understand his tongue.

"Go."

The girl went and Kor resumed his position of meditation. Outside, a woman screamed. Wife-beating was a common occurrence in the tribe of Go. Kor did not let the sound disturb him. The scream sounded again, became an unbroken ululation of pure fright. The noise irritated Kor. He got up and went to the cave mouth to look out.

A few yards away, An-Ga held the screaming Eldra doubled over, her head held forcibly atop a boulder. Beyond An-Ga stood her father, Strob, balancing a huge rock in upthrust hands. The muscles in his arms and shoulders were knotted with strain. As Kor looked out, Strob hurled the stone downward upon his daughter's head.

Something slipped in Kor's mind. The boulder slammed sideways and splintered into fragments against the rocky wall of the canyon. An-Ga and Strob looked surprised, then fell on their faces and grov-

eled before Kor. Eldra kept on screaming.

"We would have punished her, that she displeased our lord. Forgiveness..."

Kor pointed to the caves of the thurb. Ashamed, the two got to their feet and slunk away. Eldra had stopped screaming. She lay with eyes closed. Kor picked her up and carried her into his cave. He dropped her rudely on the floor and her eyes flew open. She got up, rubbing herself where the drop had bumped her. Kor sat down in his pose of meditation and forgot all about Eldra.

Eldra was happy to share the cave with Kor. He permitted her to bring water and wash him. His was a handsome body, lean, supple, and muscled. She loved to run her hands over his smooth skin, not hairy like the skins of the cave folk. He even allowed her to make love to him as an indifferent pleasure. He felt the need in her and responded to it. He held no love for her, only magnanimity.

Eldra kept the fire burning at the cave mouth during the long winter nights and the short, bitter days. She asked no help of the tribe and received none. She brought bil-

lets of wood from the tribal storehouse and stacked them in Kor's cave. She fetched water in skin bags from the frozen stream, toiling up the steep icy talus with her load. And when she cooked her meals and ate alone, a great wonder grew in her that the god required no food, and she worshipped him.

While he slept by night, she would sit in the cave mouth, hard by the tiny fire she kept going to frighten away wild beasts. She would listen to the howl of the wind and the lash of snow, and she grew warm inside with the thought that she was guardian of the sleeping god. On clear, starry nights, when the brittle rocks crackled with the frost that had crept into its cracks and fissures, she peered into the mystery of space and wondered what the tiny lights were. She thought perhaps the god could tell her, if only he could speak the language of the thurb. She could teach him, she thought. Why not? Besides, there was something she had to tell him for which signs were not sufficient.

Eldra had to tell Kor, that when summer came again to the canyon, a child would be born of their union.

(To Be Concluded)



The creature, more beast than man, terrified the girl.

Green Warning

By E. K. JARVIS

There was a girl and a monster and a subway train and a guy named Joe. Also, there was something going on in the old deserted car sheds that would have given the Secretary of Defense a lot of sleepless nights. But something had been overlooked. The yen of a guy for a gal. A thing called Love.

JOE KIELY was bringing the train into the Fulton Street stop when he saw the girl.

She was running wildly, a look of panic on her face, her purse held against her breast. A man was chasing her. He was short, thick-set, and Joe got only a glimpse of a savage animal-like face, before slamming on the brakes and throwing the emergency door open with two swift moves. He was out of the cab and streaking for the first open door before the train stopped. He was just in time to catch her in his arms.

"Help me!" she gasped.

Willard Moon, Kiely's conductor came running up. He was holding his left hand to his cheek. "What happened, Joe?"

"There was a guy chasing

the girl who just came in the car," Joe said. "You see him?"

"All I saw was stars," Moon grumbled. He winced as he rubbed his cheek. "Got slammed up against a post."

"Must have got away," Joe said. "Let's shove off."

The girl seemed all right, but Joe thought he could still see a small spark of panic far back in the dark brown eyes.

"Thank you so much," she said.

"What happened, miss?"

"I-I don't know. He seemed to come out of the dark. I ran. I think I screamed. I don't know."

Joe said, "You'll be okay now. Just relax."

She nibbled at her lower lip with small white even teeth. "I suppose I should. But..."

"Yeah. Guess it sounds easy. Look; why don't you come up front and I'll leave the cab door open and you can stand and talk to me. My relief comes on at the Fifty-ninth Street switchover and I'll have to leave you, that is if you're going that far?"

"I get off there," she said.

"Swell! Come on..."

There wasn't too much talking. It took Joe's full-time attention watching signal lights, getting the subway train into stations on time and trying not to run ahead. Nor did the girl seem to want to talk. Still, he felt pleased that she didn't leave when people began to fill the car. If only his luck held and no inspector saw the girl standing in the open cab door. "How about breakfast or coffee at Fifty-ninth? Unless there's someone meeting you...?"

She smiled with lips and eyes. "There's no one meeting me, and I usually have something at the place on the corner before I get the cross-town bus to Queens."

"Swell! It'll take me five minutes to check out. Meet you at the bank corner."

She nodded in agreement.

Her name was Eve, she was from some small town in

Michigan with an unpronounceable Indian name, she was all alone in New York and she lived in Queens. Joe learned all this in the fifteen minutes they were eating. It wasn't much. Joe could see her mind seemed only partly concerned with what she was saying.

"Still thinking about that crazy guy?" he asked suddenly.

Her eyes widened.

"Oh," he said, "it isn't I'm clever. But three times I ask you where in Queens you live and three times I get a blank stare. Y'know, even if you're fresh from the sticks someone should have told you Fulton's an Express stop. And you can change at Grand Central for a local. There's always people on the Express platform and you wouldn't be taking a chance anything happening like tonight. Course, don't think I'm complaining. I'd probably never have met you if you took the Express."

"Probably not," she agreed. "I'm not good at meeting people."

"Well," he looked at his empty cup. "I'm the same way, kinda. I don't usually crack—I mean speak to girls like I did to you. Not that I'm bashful. Just that some-

times it's hard to talk about things in common, y'know? Besides, a guy doesn't get to know girls on a run like I got." He turned his eyes up to meet hers.

"No?"

"Nah, it's not for meeting people. Don't get me wrong, I like the run. Turned down a couple of good ones to get it. Some guys say it's too lonely on the local, but it gives me time to think, and you get to see some funny things late at night. I think people at night are more like themselves, know what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"Sure. I don't mean the drunks. Heck, they're out all hours. But take somebody my own age—I'm twenty-eight—and he's down there at Spring or Bleeker, three or so in the morning, sittin' on a bench. Alone. You wonder where he's been and what he's been doing. You know where you've been." Joe laughed softly. "And now and then you get the fighters. Middle-aged couples, usually. They're always on a bench, and he's a foot or two from her, always lookin' like if she'd only shut up maybe he could get a minute's shut-eye; and she's full of what Mrs. So-and-so said and isn't

Mrs. So-and-so a such-and-such, and pretty soon he's telling her to shut up, that she's been at it all night. I look out the cab, watching them get on, and wouldn't you know, she's getting the last word in as they come through the door." He laughed his gentle without-malice laugh, an expression of delight with the things he saw.

She gave him a look of wide-eyed disbelief. "But Joe," she protested. "You couldn't possibly hear... Oh, you fool! And I listen and believe."

"No, I don't hear them, but sometimes you don't have to. It's all there in their faces. At least it seems that way to me." He looked beyond her to the clock on the wall. "Hey! Have I been beating your ears all this time? Why didn't you stop me? It's sixty-three!"

"No-o!" She turned to look out the wide window fronting Lexington Avenue. "It's broad daylight." She faced him again with a pensive stare. "You've been very kind, Joe." She shook her head as he made a gesture of denial. "And sweet, too. Imagine being warned about the men in New York being wolves. You're no more

of a wolf than any of the gang I know back home. Much, much nicer, in fact." She pushed away from the table and got to her feet. "Thanks for breakfast."

She waited for him to pay the check.

"You going to be okay now?" he asked.

She nodded. "Queens' Express bus gets me home in five minutes."

"Breakfast tomorrow?"

"If you'd like."

"Swell! I'll be watching for you."

Whatever else she was, Joe decided the next morning as they were eating, Eve was a good listener. "Aren't you getting a little tired of hearing me talk all the time?" he asked.

"I haven't complained, have I?"

"So why should I, is that it? Most guys would call me lucky, having a girl who's willing to listen. Mostly they want to talk about clothes or the latest Audiovision star, or what's going on in their office. And no matter how often they tell it, it's the same story. Now you, I haven't heard it once from you."

"And I'm going to make it a point not to begin," she said. "I'm just a working

girl, Joe, like the thousands of others you see..."

"Now don't say that! You're a whole lot different. Maybe it's your eyes; they look straight into you when you talk or listen. You ain't lookin' at anyone else. And the way you walk and dress, like an actress I once saw on the stage. Minute she came on your eyes followed her till she got off, and you couldn't wait till she got back on again. Funny, I remember her but not the play."

"You mean the way I wear my clothes?"

"Yeah! You got a nice figure and you don't try to fake it up bigger like most of them."

She said, "Well," and smiled as his face flushed.

"And that's another thing about you," he went on doggedly. "You got a nice smile, but you don't keep turning it on and off all the time just to show your pretty teeth. Like some girls."

"Well, maybe it's about time you met someone like me," she said.

Suddenly he was very serious. "Look, Eve, I'd like to see more of you. Take you to dinner, a movie, or whatever you'd like to do. How about it? There's a good movie at

the Fine Arts. We can see the show have dinner after and I can still get you home in time for you to change for work..."

"I'd like it very much. Meet you at two in front of the Fine Arts?"

"Right."

It became a steady thing with them. She would come into the first car and go up front and talk to him until Twenty-third Street. Then, at Fifty-ninth she would wait for him and they would breakfast together, and later in the afternoon they would see each other again. Invariably it was Joe who did the talking. Mostly, on the train, she would stare out the front window while Joe talked. Other times she seemed content to just listen. That she was content just to be with him was a feeling which grew stronger with Joe as time went by.

They were walking down Broadway one afternoon, going to a cafeteria Joe had recommended. She was holding tightly to his fingers, as if she were a little frightened.

"You don't like crowds, do you?" he asked. He squeezed her fingers.

"I'm a small-town girl, remember?" she said. "Small-

town boys come to the big city and don't want to let on they're from some place out in Iowa so they get in the swim right away. It's harder for girls. I still get a little panicky in crowds. This is going to sound crazy, Joe, but I like looking out the window in the front car and watching the lights come up, green, amber, red, and watching the tracks switch off into a kind of dark nowhere. Like some of those tunnels leading down to—to what and where, Joe?"

"Honey," Joe said, "I'm always surprised when I have to take a special run now and then, and I get down around where the maintenance shops are. I swear! An army could hide out down there and no one would be the wiser. Especially in that old area that's sealed. Nobody but *nobody* ever goes into the place anymore."

"Sealed...?"

He went on: "Yeah. When they built the new express track below back in 1958 they sealed off a whole area in lower Manhattan for construction materials and stuff. I'll bet there must be miles of open area down there. Of course that was seven years ago; they might have worked on it since." He stopped and

nudged her. "I'll get a paper."

He glanced briefly at the news during their dinner. "Listen to this," he said suddenly. "A fire of undetermined origin claimed the life of Professor Gordon Thomas late last night... You remember reading about him, don't you?"

"No-o..."

"Yeah. He was the guy who claimed he got radio signals from Mars. About a year or so ago. He got a big play in the papers about it. He said he was able to read the signals and that there was going to be an invasion of Earth by the Martians. Wait, let me see..." He screwed his face into thoughtful lines. "Yeah. You know, the flying saucer business..."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, he said they were Martian scout planes. Anyway, this character said the Martians were sending a whole fleet of spaceships out to lay in the shadow of the moon until the time came for the invasion."

"But wouldn't we see them?" she asked.

"He said they had some kind of paint made them invisible. Anyway the papers rode the poor guy pretty bad,

and the school he was at made him resign. Wait let me see what the paper says."

Presently he went on again: "... This little gadget, no bigger than a pocket lighter, Professor Thomas claimed, was a receiver for the interspacial signals..." That was it. He said there could be agents here on Earth, who were receiving signals with this gadget. Used to be a gag. Flick your lighter and say, 'anyone for space signals'? Poor old guy. Went off alone to this place in Maine. He said someday he'd break the code completely and warn the Earth when the invasion would take place."

"I guess he won't be able to warn anyone now," she said.

"Guess not." He turned the pages to the sport section. "Aah! Looks like my Giants are in. Three more games and it'll be all over. Who're you for?"

"I'm for you," she said.

"And I'm for you. I guess I was for you the first time I saw you." Suddenly he was serious. "That's funny. A guy wonders about the time when he's going to propose to a girl. You know, dim lights, papa and mama hiding in the kitchen, the ring in his

pocket, and all the rest. Not like this, in a cafeteria in the middle of the day. I love you, Eve, and want..."

"Joe... please."

"Wrong track, eh, Eve?"

"It isn't a question of how I feel about you. Maybe that isn't the important thing. I have never been happier than these past few days."

"Eve...!"

She looked up. "No, I'm not saying yes. Not now, anyway."

His smile was radiant. "What a dope! Why you don't know anything about me, other than I work for the Transit System."

"I don't care."

"I know, but..."

"What is there more to know about you than I already know? That you're the kindest person I've ever met, that being with you is a special kind of happiness, that there is such a thrill to holding your hand or watching you smile or listening to that funny pleased laugh you have. Are we supposed to wear signs with our qualifications? You see someone, you're with him one minute, and that's it."

They looked at each other quietly for a long moment. There was no need for talk.

As if at a signal they rose and walked to the door and went out into the crowded street.

And it was as if they were alone.

They walked up Broadway to Fifty-ninth where the Express busses to Queens started their runs. They didn't talk much, but they didn't find a need for talk. What they had had to say to each other they had said, and now there was only the time to wait.

They were a little early. The bus had just made the turn to come around. Suddenly she brought her hands up to his face and kissed him. It was their first kiss. There was nothing of passion or hunger in their kiss. Just their lips meeting for the first time, in wonder, in love, in the sweet ecstasy of the realization of their oneness.

They separated. He leaned forward as if to kiss her again. She put both hands lightly against his chest.

"No," she whispered. "Please..."

He was startled at the look of pain in her eyes.

"Eve, what's wrong?"

She took his arm and pulled him over to the window of the haberdashery on

the corner a few feet from the bus stop. She held his arm tightly, saying nothing for the space of several seconds, only looking into his eyes with an odd look.

"What's wrong?" he asked again, more gently this time.

"I didn't think this would happen," she said. "I was prepared for everything, everything but this. And now..."

He thought he understood. "I know what you mean. The way I came out with it, bang! No wonder..."

"Joe, what if I wasn't, well, what you thought me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. What should I think you are?"

"May I have a cigarette?"

She smiled at his look of bewilderment. He said, "Sure, honey, but I've never seen you smoke."

He drew two cigarettes from his pack, gave one to her, stuck the other in his lips and pulled out his lighter.

"Anyone for space signals?" she asked. "Funny old man, wasn't he, the professor? Space invaders hiding behind the moon. Did he say where they would land or how or where they would go when they did? Maybe in those huge areas below the

city streets that you said were large enough to hide an army. Maybe there are people walking around with these little pocket-lighter gadgets in their purses or pockets signalling like crazy. Oh, Joe, Joe! I love you so much..."

Suddenly she pulled away from him and without looking back ran into the bus.

She wasn't at the Fulton Street stop that morning.

Somehow he knew she wouldn't be.

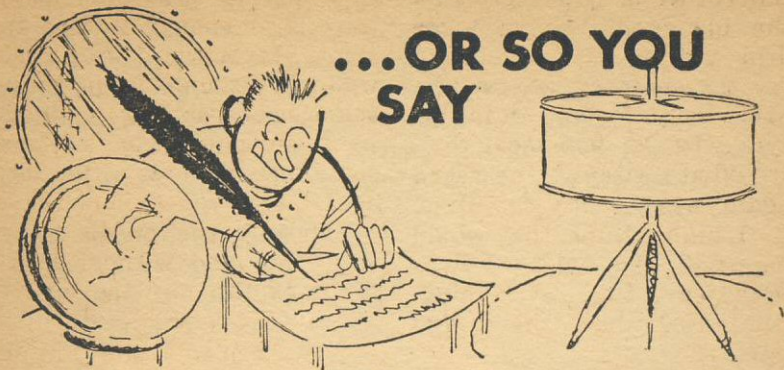
But she was at the Fulton Street stop the next night. The fog that had been close about his mind lifted. He saw her, and formed her name with his lips. He saw her for that instant, and forever wished he hadn't. She was up close to the tiled wall almost at the end of the platform. She was facing him, smiling with head bent slightly. Then she moved, and Joe screamed and yanked the emergency brake. He knew, even as she disappeared in front of him what she had done.

It wasn't the poor torn body of the girl that Joe stared at. It was the ribbons of pale green blood now thick on the rail bed.

To tell him and the world what was in store for it....

THE END

...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have been reading S-F for 7 years, I have never written to an editor before and all that rot, *but*—this time Fairman has gone a little too far.

I refer to "Black Blockade" in your February issue. This is so bad that I'm tempted to suspect Fairman hired a hack to ghost write it, but I give him credit for at *least* finding a *good* hack.

Just a few examples: "Do you expect me to run and leave you Herb?" "No. For a man like you, Mack Hayden, that would be impossible." Tack Largo takes on half a dozen *trained* policemen in a sword fight and has time to pry a stone loose, squeeze through the opening, and escape without a trace. A comparison of World War II Gestapo methods with more effective secret police methods sure to develop in the future tears the whole "story" (?) apart.

Really, now—the name, *Fantastic*, signifies, to me, at least, *fantastic situations* into which realistic characters are injected—mind-readers, clairvoyants, and the like are fine if recognized as such but *these* are supposedly ordinary men!

Possibly you saw the faults in this story—your editorial sounds as if it were taken from the story word for word. Let's have no more "name" hiring—I think most fans buy magazines for their editorial policy rather than the names on the table of contents.

All in all, Ziff-Davis editorial policy has been very good—I haven't been buying all the magazines because of the time I have to devote to my engineering major here at Cal. (I'm a senior in Electrical Engineering), but those I have bought are very relaxing and stimulating at once, which is no paradox, as any S-F fan will testify.

Thanks, anyway, for a minimum of stories of the "Blockade" class.

Earl John Johnson
108 Freeborn Hall
Hillside & Dwight
Berkeley 4, Calif.

Dear Mr. Browne:

Having read *Amazing Stories* for awhile, (last two issues) I decided to give *Fantastic* a fling. I glanced at the cover, and saw a work of art on the February issue, page 1. It was done by the great Valigursky.

"Hmm," I said to myself, "I'll bet this is a pretty good magazine."

The first story I read was "Black Blockade." I had never heard of Fairman before that story. To express my opinion modestly of him, "WOW!"

The second story was fair. It didn't achieve the surprise ending effect that author Garrett had hoped. But, nevertheless, I'll remember "Quick Cure" as a pretty good story.

Next came Jorgensen's "Sore Spot." I loved him in *Amazing Stories*, and I loved him in here.

"Mind Bet" and "Leave it to Umpax," just didn't have it. Maybe the reason I didn't like the last two, was because I tried to read the whole issue in one reading, and by the time I hit the last two, I was tired and grouchy.

I still can't get over Fairman's job on "Black Blockade." It was the best in the book.

Your letter column is the greatest. I could think of the letter on page 121 as I write this, saying 50 cents would be shelled out by the writer if necessary. I say perish the thought. Personally, I'd like to be back in the 25-cent pulp days of S-F.

That's it for this letter. I'd better give some other reader a chance to gripe a bit.

I'm looking forward to the April issue of *Amazing*, 260 pages!

P.S. Did I tell you that Fairman is the best in S-F today? Sure, it's only my opinion, but I read a story of his in the February *Fantastic* and he's great.

Leonard Brown
4701 Snyder Ave.
Brooklyn 3, N. Y.

• *Now wait a minute. "Black Blockade" can't be nearly as bad as Earl Johnson claims. And certainly not a third as good as Leonard Brown maintains. So let's get with it here, gentlemen. You've got Fairman real confused. One day he's asking for a raise in rates and the next day he's afraid to come into the office.—ED.*

Dear Ed:

In the past couple of years I have come to like science-fiction stories very much.

In reading these stories, the space adventures in particular, a couple of questions have arisen in my mind in regard to planets and suns whose names appear in the stories. The question is do all the S-F writers go by any set chart or map of the Solar System in picking the names used in these stories, or do they make them up individually and how accurate is it to the Solar System as the observatories tell us about. If there is such a map that they all use, how can I obtain one?

Another question which arose is, do the writers use a sort of dictionary type reference to obtain the names of the equipment used. Eg., in the story, "Black Blockade" in the February issue of *Fantastic*, equipment known as dispatching machinery housed in the Teleport Station was used. In this particular story I have a good idea what it meant but in some stories I have read I didn't have the slightest idea of what the machine was for.

For my own reading enjoyment and I'm sure others feel the same way, it would make a much more interesting story if we had something to refer to when we came across the name of a planet or sun or types of machinery used in the stories.

I hope I have explained myself clearly enough for you to understand what I mean.

I would appreciate it very much if you would let me know if there is anything in reference to the above mentioned and if possible for me to obtain these references.

I know it would make for better reading.

C. A. Warwick
458 Guilbault St.
Longueuil
Quebec, Canada.

• *We doubt very much if such a book exists. Nor could such a reference work be compiled however great a need for it. Science-fiction writers are a pretty individualistic lot and some are inclined to invent their machines—and planets—as they go along. It has been rumored from time to time that some science-fiction writers are even foggier concerning their futuristic machines than the readers. But such malicious rumors have no doubt been started by western story writers who are just plain jealous of our boys.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

As a continuous reader of Science Fiction since the middle twenties, I beg leave to write my first letter. Until a year or two ago, I've been content to take the issues as they come. Starting with the cover and ending with the ad on the back cover. Lately though, Mr. Browne, it's becoming just a little too much to expect of even an ardent fan as I. Frankly, I suspect that maybe I haven't grown up with S-F. I noticed two words in the current issue which were meaningless to me, "psioniss" and "parapsychology." Could you please define these terms. It would perhaps help me to know what I have been reading in lieu of S-F.

Tell me Mr. Browne, if you can. Do you remember a S-F character called "Anton York"? If so, who was the author. I've tried mightily to find out with no success.

Noticed a letter in "Or So You Say" written by one Richard Santelli who sounds suspiciously like he might be either adolescent or just plain "ornery" on the world. You're still ahead of him though, Mr. Editor. You must have his 35 cents. I've noticed this kind of letter sprinkled throughout Reader's

Columns for the past 20 years. I still like S-F by any name, comic book or otherwise.

Mr. Browne, you imply that S-F writers have levelled off with scientific development and are running out of ideas. What was the matter with stories such as the "Lensmen" series? Why can't we drop back in time and live it up again? Transmission of matter, time travel, etc. It's relaxing to read as well as entertaining. I find myself woefully inept in handling these long theoretical discourses passing as S-F. Why not drop the Fiction from the title?

As you've probably deduced, I'm not a literary genius myself. It is because I am a very interested S-F fan that I offer these comments and criticisms. Even though I don't understand what I'm reading half the time, I'd like to say congrats for a well-presented magazine. Nevertheless, I'm serious about needing a definition of the aforementioned work.

Frank H. Terrell
Golden, Colo.

• *The "long theoretical discourses" are exactly what we strive to avoid in our magazines, Mr. Terrell. We subscribe to the theory that whatever the time or state of the world or universe, people and situations will always be the backbone of popular fiction. Abstract presentations of the world of tomorrow are all very well but we feel they do not belong in a fiction magazine, science fiction or otherwise.*

Sorry, we cannot recall a character named Anton York.

Dear Ed:

A few days ago I met some old friends. While doing a little cleaning up in the basement I came across some *Amazing Story* magazines dating back to 1947-1953. I spent the last few days re-reading some of the old favorites especially that old "history book"—"Master of the Universe." All real science fiction. Where has it all gone to? The new format with its small pages is not the *Amazing Story* magazine I used to know. I quit buying it soon after you discontinued the old rough-cut larger size magazine. The older magazine was a terrific buy for the money (25 cents then), and I would be

happy to be able to buy the same magazine for 50 cents or even more rather than waste 25 cents on the sheet you now are calling *Amazing Stories*. Is there no hope for a return to the old magazine with Finlay's covers, Rog Phillips Club House, and the innumerable short subjects?

If not I think I'll take a trip through back number magazine stores and buy up all the old *Amazing Story* magazines I'm missing.

There isn't a decent S-F magazine on the stands any more. What a life!!

Max W. Clere
40 Hosmer St.
Mattapan 26, Mass.

● *It was rather strange about "The Master of the Universe" series. Not too many readers liked it but those who did considered it just about the greatest thing ever written.—ED.*

Dear Ed:

I enjoyed your story "Black Blockade" by Paul W. Fairman in your February 1956 issue. In that same issue I liked the story "Leave it to Umpax" by Eric Dean. It was short but very good. If I was rating them I would give them all a good grade. I liked your "Low Man on the Asteroid" and your letter section was very good. I hope the issues after this are as good or better.

Duane De Freitas
733 Arcadia Avenue
Arcadia, California.

● *And we like you, too, Duane.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

In regard to a letter printed in the December issue of *Amazing*, comparing your publication, its authors, the readers and yourself to comic book devotees, etc. For memories sake may I quote: "You are adults who are ashamed to admit that comic books are still your favorite reading matter. What you want is a comic book with a dignified looking cover and you have it in *Amazing*."

Is it not like the concert pianist who labors ten years of

his lifetime to perfect a technique so marvelous as to enable him to shatter a windowpane with a snap of the little finger—and yet must sit back and listen to the stoic remarks of a critic who as far as music is concerned is an absolute nothingness. You, young man existing in the realm of transcendency, have not yet learned to appreciate the trite with the good. I seriously wonder if you realize the credibility of many of the people involved. Such a genius as Ray Bradbury's has not remained unspoken of. Here is a mind I should like to meet. . . .

Realizing letters of this sort are not at a premium I leave you with your mental apologies and some food for thought: What have *you* written and what have you *read*?

Thanking you for listening, I remain,

R. D. Aaberg
Don Chemical
Research Dept.
Laboratory 9
Pittsburg, Calif.

• *Don't mention it. We enjoyed listening, Mr. Chemical.*
—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

It would be greatly appreciated if the following announcement was printed in the letter columns of your magazines:

The 7th Annual MidWestCon will be held May 26 and 27, 1956 at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio. Those desiring to attend are asked to make their reservations directly with the motel. For further information write Don Ford, 129 Maple Avenue, Sharonville, Ohio.

Fred M. Schwartz
974 Debbe Lane
Cincinnati 29, Ohio.

Dear Editor:

Pretty good issue this trip. I mean the February one. I read the letter department fairly regularly, but there is one thing I can't grasp the meaning of, and that is the fanzine. What in Space is it? "Black Blockade" was what I would call Top Ad-

venture. Real great. Garret's "Quick Cure" was fair to middling but I didn't think much of it. "Mind Bet" by George Julius pretty good—there should have been more of it. Maybe some more of his stuff coming up? I don't know what to think of Dean's "Leave it to Umpax." I think I'll leave it up to better judges than myself. Well, keep up the good work. How about some more Space Adventure? Love the stuff.

Frank Swett
1310 Cornell Avenue
Yakima, Washington

Dear Mr. Browne:

Although I enjoy your magazine I have several comments to make on "Beyond the Steel Wall" in the November issue. Make up your mind. Was the Star Rover's first mate a Martian as you said on pages 32 through 37 or a Venusian as you said on 43 and 44. How did Karkis get Ganya out of a locked cabin.

"They Sent a Boy" was very good. How about some more "Johnny Mayhem" adventures.

I like the action type science fiction but I also like the tension type.

Why not a serial. I like the longer science-fiction stories.

Frederick Norwood
90 Main St.
Franklin, La.

• *Well, Mr. Norwood, you see it was this way. There was a Martian, see? and a Venusian and this fellow Karkis an—oops—five o'clock already. Time to knock off for the day.*

—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

It was good to hear my favorite magazine, *Amazing Stories*, is going monthly. I'll also be looking forward to buying the anniversary issue....

A/3c Dan L. Adkins
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Luke A.F.B.
Glendale, Arizona.