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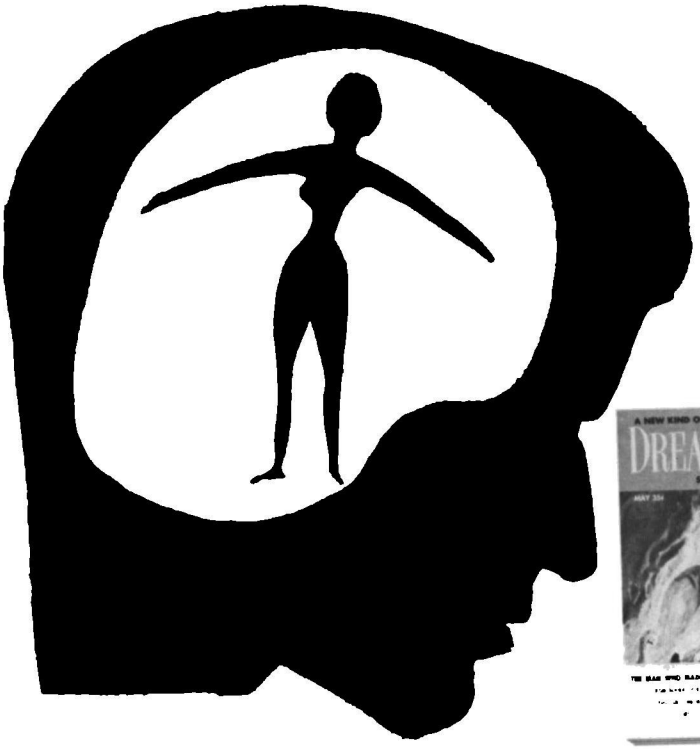

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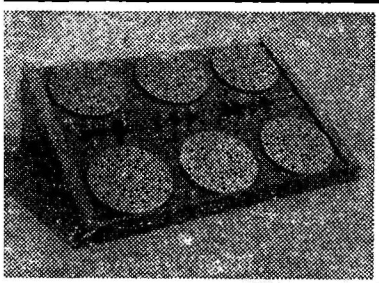

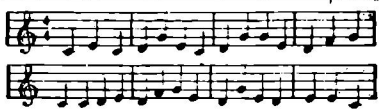

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AMAZING STORIES

MAY 1957

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Volume 31 Number 5

FICTION

FEATURES

✠

Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY
Illustrating a scene from "Winged Planet"

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

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BY THE EDITOR

The other day our phone rang and the operator said, "This is Hollywood. Will you accept a collect call from Marilyn Monroe?" We almost yelled, "Yer darn tootin'!" before dignity took over and we croaked, "Yes."

The wires clicked and a cheerful male voice bellowed, "Hi Junior—this is Howard Browne."

We bellowed back, "Get off the line. Marilyn's calling."

"Oh, I just said that so you'd take the collect call."

"Why, you—!"

"Sure—sure. How are things going?"

We calmed down because there wasn't anything else to do. "Things are going fine. What happened? You lose your job?"

"They couldn't get along without me here at Warner Bros., Buster. But that isn't what I called about. I want you to tell the readers of my magazine—"

"*Your* magazine. Listen here pal—I'm the editor of—"

"Oh, sure—sure. I want you to tell *Amazing*'s readers that their lovable old editor—"

"Ex-editor!"

"—is going great guns out here as a screen writer. I'm doing shows for *Cheyenne* and *Conflict* and working on a full-length movie when I get the time. I—"

"Wait a minute. Simmer down. I'll send you an advertising rate card. You figure out what you want to say and send in your copy with a check for a full-page advertisement. Then as soon as the check clears, I'll—"

"Just put it on the editorial page, Junior. So long."

"I will like—!" But I was talking to an empty wire. "Marilyn" had hung up.

THE EDGE OF THE KNIFE

By H. BEAM PIPER

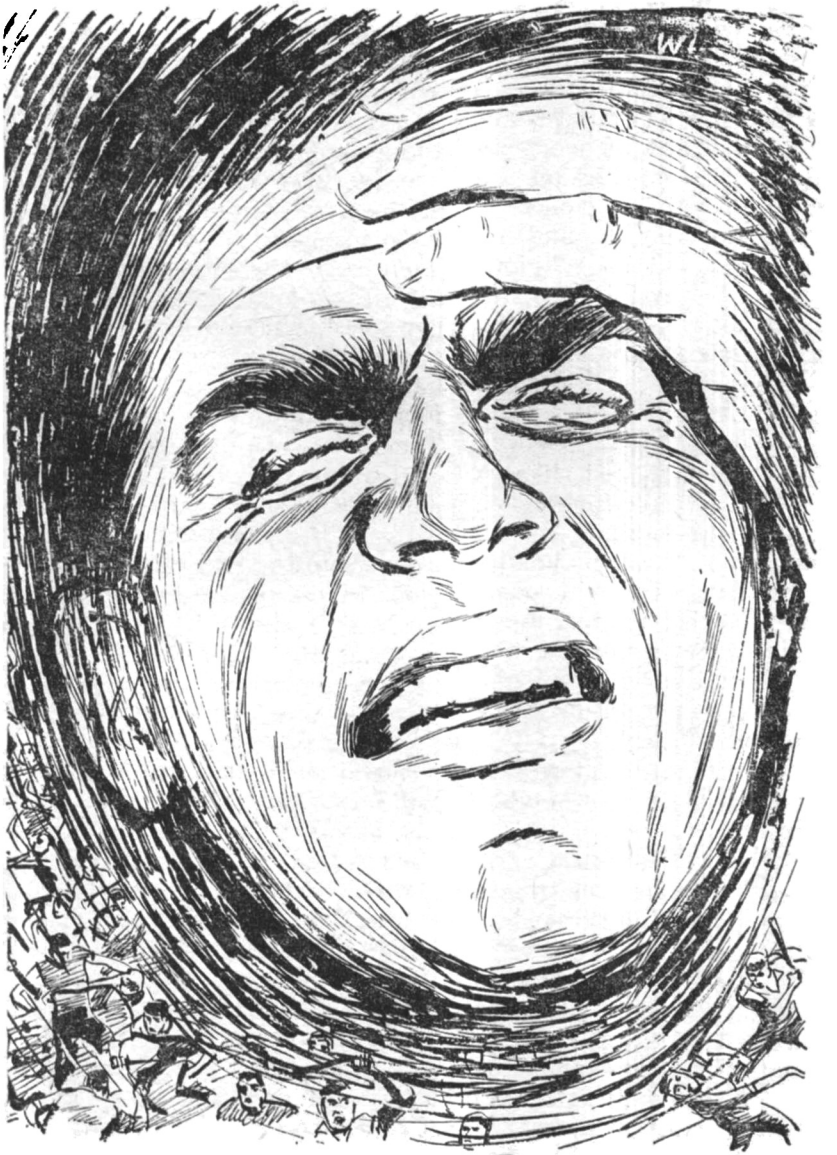
This story was rejected by two top-flight science-fiction editors for the same reason: "Too hot to handle." "Too dangerous for our book." We'd like to know whether or not the readers of Amazing Stories *agree. Drop us a line after you've read it.*

CHALMERS stopped talking abruptly, warned by the sudden attentiveness of the class in front of him. They were all staring; even Guellick, in the fourth row, was almost half awake. Then one of them, taking his silence as an invitation to questions, found his voice.

"You say Khalid ib'n Hussein's been assassinated?" he asked incredulously. "When did that happen?"

"In 1973, at Basra." There was a touch of impatience in his voice; surely they ought to know that much. "He was shot, while leaving the Parliament Building, by an Egyp-

There was no past—



no future—only a great chaotic NOW.

tian Arab named Mohammed Noureed, with an old U. S. Army M3 submachine-gun. Noureed killed two of Khalid's guards and wounded another before he was overpowered. He was lynched on the spot by the crowd; stoned to death. Ostensibly, he and his accomplices were religious fanatics; however, there can be no doubt whatever that the murder was inspired, at least indirectly, by the Eastern Axis."

The class stirred like a grain-field in the wind. Some looked at him in blank amazement; some were hastily averting faces red with poorly suppressed laughter. For a moment he was puzzled, and then realization hit him like a blow in the stomach-pit. He'd forgotten, again.

"I didn't see anything in the papers about it," one boy was saying.

"The newscast, last evening, said Khalid was in Ankara, talking to the President of Turkey," another offered.

"Professor Chalmers, would you tell us just what effect Khalid's death had upon the Islamic Caliphate and the Middle Eastern situation in general?" a third voice asked with exaggerated solemnity. That was Kendrick, the class humorist; the question was pure baiting.

"Well, Mr. Kendrick, I'm afraid it's a little too early to assess the full results of a thing like that, if they can ever be fully assessed. For instance, who, in 1911, could have predicted all the consequences of the pistol-shot at Sarajevo? Who, even today, can guess what the history of the world would have been had Zangarra not missed Franklin Roosevelt in 1932? There's always that if."

He went on talking safe generalities as he glanced covertly at his watch. Only five minutes to the end of the period; thank heaven he hadn't made that slip at the beginning of the class. "For instance, tomorrow, when we take up the events in India from the First World War to the end of British rule, we will be largely concerned with another victim of the assassin's bullet, Mohandas K. Gandhi. You may ask yourselves, then, by how much that bullet altered the history of the Indian sub-continent. A word of warning, however: The events we will be discussing will be either contemporary with or prior to what was discussed today. I hope that you're all keeping your notes properly dated. It's al-

ways easy to become confused in matters of chronology."

He wished, too late, that he hadn't said that. It pointed up the very thing he was trying to play down, and raised a general laugh.

As soon as the room was empty, he hastened to his desk, snatched pencil and notepad. This had been a bad one, the worst yet; he hadn't heard the end of it by any means. He couldn't waste thought on that now, though. This was all new and important; it had welled up suddenly and without warning into his conscious mind, and he must get it down in notes before the "memory" — even mentally, he always put that word into quotes—was lost. He was still scribbling furiously when the instructor who would use the room for the next period entered, followed by a few of his students. Chalmers finished, crammed the notes into his pocket, and went out into the hall.

Most of his own Modern History IV class had left the building and were on their way across the campus for science classes. A few, however, were joining groups for other classes here in Prescott Hall, and in every group, they were the center of interest. Sometimes, when they saw him, they would fall silent until he had passed; sometimes they didn't, and he caught snatches of conversation.

"Oh, brother! Did Chalmers really blow his jets this time!" one voice was saying.

"Bet he won't be around next year."

Another quartet, with their heads together, were talking more seriously.

"Well, I'm not majoring in History, myself, but I think it's an outrage that some people's diplomas are going to depend on grades given by a lunatic!"

"Mine will, and I'm not going to stand for it. My old man's president of the Alumni Association, and . . ."

That was something he had not thought of, before. It gave him an ugly start. He was still thinking about it as he turned into the side hall to the History Department offices and entered the cubicle he shared with a colleague. The colleague, old Pottgeiter, Medieval History, was emerging in a rush; short, rotund, gray-bearded, his arms full of books and papers, oblivious, as usual, to anything that had happened since the Battle of Bosworth or the Fall of Constantinople. Chalmers stepped quickly out of his way and en-

tered behind him. Marjorie Fenner, the secretary they also shared, was tidying up the old man's desk.

"Good morning, Doctor Chalmers." She looked at him keenly for a moment. "They give you a bad time again in Modern Four?"

Good Lord, did he show it that plainly? In any case, it was no use trying to kid Marjorie. She'd hear the whole story before the end of the day.

"Gave myself a bad time."

Marjorie, still fussing with Pottgeiter's desk, was about to say something in reply. Instead, she exclaimed in exasperation.

"Ohhh! That man! He's forgotten his notes again!" She gathered some papers from Pottgeiter's desk, rushing across the room and out the door with them.

For a while, he sat motionless, the books and notes for General European History II untouched in front of him. This was going to raise hell. It hadn't been the first slip he'd made, either; that thought kept recurring to him. There had been the time when he had alluded to the colonies on Mars and Venus. There had been the time he'd mentioned the secession of Canada from the British Commonwealth, and the time he'd called the U. N. the Terran Federation. And the time he'd tried to get a copy of Franchard's *Rise and Decline of the System States*, which wouldn't be published until the Twenty-eighth Century, out of the college library. None of those had drawn much comment, beyond a few student jokes about the history professor who lived in the future instead of the past. Now, however, they'd all be remembered, raked up, exaggerated, and added to what had happened this morning.

He sighed and sat down at Marjorie's typewriter and began transcribing his notes. Assassination of Khalid ib'n Hussein, the pro-Western leader of the newly formed Islamic Caliphate; period of anarchy in the Middle East; interfactional power-struggles; Turkish intervention. He wondered how long that would last; Khalid's son, Tallal ib'n Khalid, was at school in England when his father was—would be—killed. He would return, and eventually take his father's place, in time to bring the Caliphate into the Terran Federation when the general war came. There were some notes on that already; the war would result from an attempt by the

Indian Communists to seize East Pakistan. The trouble was that he so seldom "remembered" an exact date. His "memory" of the year of Khalid's assassination was an exception.

Nineteen seventy - three—why, that was this year. He looked at the calendar. October 16, 1973. At very most, the Arab statesman had two and a half months to live. Would there be any possible way in which he could give a credible warning? He doubted it. Even if there were, he questioned whether he should —for that matter, whether he *could*—interfere. . . .

He always lunched at the Faculty Club; today was no time to call attention to himself by breaking an established routine. As he entered, trying to avoid either a furtive slink or a chip-on-shoulder swagger, the crowd in the lobby stopped talking abruptly, then began again on an obviously changed subject. The word had gotten around, apparently. Handley, the head of the Latin Department, greeted him with a distantly polite nod. Pompous old owl; regarded himself, for some reason, as a sort of unofficial Dean of the Faculty. Probably didn't want to be seen fraternizing with controversial characters. One of the younger men, with a thin face and a mop of unruly hair, advanced to meet him as he came in, as cordial as Handley was remote.

"Oh, hello, Ed!" he greeted, clapping a hand on Chalmers' shoulder. "I was hoping I'd run into you. Can you have dinner with us this evening?" He was sincere.

"Well, thanks, Leonard. I'd like to, but I have a lot of work. Could you give me a rain-check?"

"Oh, surely. My wife was wishing you'd come around, but I know how it is. Some other evening?"

"Yes, indeed." He guided Fitch toward the dining-room door and nodded toward a table. "This doesn't look too crowded; let's sit here."

After lunch, he stopped in at his office. Marjorie Fenner was there, taking dictation from Pottgeiter; she nodded to him as he entered, but she had no summons to the president's office.

The summons was waiting for him, the next morning, when he entered the office after Modern History IV, a few minutes past ten.

"Doctor Whitburn just phoned," Marjorie said. "He'd

like to see you, as soon as you have a vacant period."

"Which means right away. I shan't keep him waiting."

She started to say something, swallowed it, and then asked if he needed anything typed up for General European II.

"No, I have everything ready." He pocketed the pipe he had filled on entering, and went out.

The president of Blanley College sat hunched forward at his desk; he had rounded shoulders and round, pudgy fists and a round, bald head. He seemed to be expecting his visitor to stand at attention in front of him. Chalmers got the pipe out of his pocket, sat down in the desk-side chair, and snapped his lighter.

"Good morning, Doctor Whitburn," he said very pleasantly.

Whitburn's scowl deepened. "I hope I don't have to tell you why I wanted to see you," he began.

"I have an idea." Chalmers puffed until the pipe was drawing satisfactorily. "It might help you get started if you did, though."

"I don't suppose, at that, that you realize the full effect of your performance, yesterday morning, in Modern History Four," Whitburn replied. "I don't suppose you know, for instance, that I had to intervene at the last moment and suppress an editorial in the *Black and Green*, derisively critical of you and your teaching methods, and, by implication, of the administration of this college. You didn't hear about that, did you? No, living as you do in the future, you wouldn't."

"If the students who edit the *Black and Green* are dissatisfied with anything here, I'd imagine they ought to say so," Chalmers commented. "Isn't that what they teach in the journalism classes, that the purpose of journalism is to speak for the dissatisfied? Why make exception?"

"I should think you'd be grateful to me for trying to keep your behavior from being made a subject of public ridicule among your students. Why, this editorial which I suppressed actually went so far as to question your sanity!"

"I should suppose it might have sounded a good deal like that, to them. Of course, I have been preoccupied, lately, with an imaginative projection of present trends into the future. I'll quite freely admit that I should have kept my extracurricular work separate

from my class and lecture work, but . . ."

"That's no excuse, even if I were sure it were true! What you did, while engaged in the serious teaching of history, was to indulge in a farrago of nonsense, obvious as such to any child, and damage not only your own standing with your class but the standing of Blanley College as well. Doctor Chalmers, if this were the first incident of the kind it would be bad enough, but it isn't. You've done things like this before, and I've warned you before. I assumed, then, that you were merely showing the effects of overwork, and I offered you a vacation, which you refused to take. Well, this is the limit. I'm compelled to request your immediate resignation."

Chalmers laughed. "A moment ago, you accused me of living in the future. It seems you're living in the past. Evidently you haven't heard about the Higher Education Faculty Tenure Act of 1963, or such things as tenure-contracts. Well, for your information, I have one; you signed it yourself, in case you've forgotten. If you want my resignation, you'll have to show cause, in a court of law, why my contract should be voided, and I don't think a slip of the tongue is a reason for voiding a contract that any court would accept."

Whitburn's face reddened. "You don't, don't you? Well, maybe it isn't, but insanity is. It's a very good reason for voiding a contract voidable on grounds of unfitness or incapacity to teach."

He had been expecting, and mentally shrinking from, just that. Now that it was out, however, he felt relieved. He gave another short laugh.

"You're willing to go into open court, covered by reporters from papers you can't control as you do this student sheet here, and testify that for the past twelve years you've had an insane professor on your faculty?"

"You're . . . You're trying to blackmail me?" Whitburn demanded, half rising.

"It isn't blackmail to tell a man that a bomb he's going to throw will blow up in his hand." Chalmers glanced quickly at his watch. "Now, Doctor Whitburn, if you have nothing further to discuss, I have a class in a few minutes. If you'll excuse me . . ."

He rose. For a moment, he stood facing Whitburn; when the college president said nothing, he inclined his head politely and turned, going out.

Whitburn's secretary gave the impression of having seated herself hastily at her desk the second before he opened the door. She watched him, round-eyed, as he went out into the hall.

He reached his own office ten minutes before time for the next class. Marjorie was typing something for Pottgeiter; he merely nodded to her, and picked up the phone. The call would have to go through the school exchange, and he had a suspicion that Whitburn kept a check on outside calls. That might not hurt any, he thought, dialing a number.

"Attorney Weill's office," the girl who answered said.

"Edward Chalmers. Is Mr. Weill in?"

She'd find out. He was; he answered in a few seconds.

"Hello, Stanly; Ed Chalmers. I think I'm going to need a little help. I'm having some trouble with President Whitburn, here at the college. A matter involving the validity of my tenure-contract. I don't want to go into it over this line. Have you anything on for lunch?"

"No, I haven't. When and where?" the lawyer asked.

He thought for a moment. Nowhere too close the campus, but not too far away.

"How about the Continental; Fontainbleu Room? Say twelve-fifteen."

"That'll be all right. Be seeing you."

Marjorie looked at him curiously as he gathered up the things he needed for the next class.

Stanly Weill had a thin, dark-eyed face. He was frowning as he set down his coffee-cup.

"Ed, you ought to know better than to try to kid your lawyer," he said. "You say Whitburn's trying to force you to resign. With your contract, he can't do that, not without good and sufficient cause, and under the Faculty Tenure Law, that means something just an inch short of murder in the first degree. Now. what's Whitburn got on you?"

Beat around the bush and try to build a background, or come out with it at once and fill in the details afterward? He debated mentally for a moment, then decided upon the latter course.

"Well, it happens that I have the ability to prehend future events. I can, by concentrating, bring into my mind the history of the world, at least in general outline, for the next five thousand years.

Whitburn thinks I'm crazy, mainly because I get confused at times and forget that something I know about hasn't happened yet."

Weill snatched the cigarette from his mouth to keep from swallowing it. As it was, he choked on a mouthful of smoke and coughed violently, then sat back in the booth-seat, staring speechlessly.

"It started a little over three years ago," Chalmers continued. "Just after New Year's, 1970. I was getting up a series of seminars for some of my postgraduate students on extrapolation of present social and political trends to the middle of the next century, and I began to find that I was getting some very fixed and definite ideas of what the world of 2050 to 2070 would be like. Completely unified world, abolition of all national states under a single world sovereignty, colonies on Mars and Venus, that sort of thing. Some of these ideas didn't seem quite logical; a number of them were complete reversals of present trends, and a lot seemed to depend on arbitrary and unpredictable factors. Mind, this was before the first rocket landed on the Moon, when the whole moon-rocket and lunar-base project was a triple-top secret. But I knew, in the spring of 1970, that the first unmanned rocket would be called the *Kilroy*, and that it would be launched some time in 1971. You remember, when the news was released, it was stated that the rocket hadn't been christened until the day before it was launched, when somebody remembered that old 'Kilroy-was-here' thing from the Second World War. Well, I knew about it over a year in advance."

Weill had been listening in silence. He had a naturally skeptical face; his present expression mightn't really mean that he didn't believe what he was hearing.

"How'd you get all this stuff? In dreams?"

Chalmers shook his head. "It just came to me. I'd be sitting reading, or eating dinner, or talking to one of my classes, and the first thing I'd know, something out of the future would come bubbling up in me. It just kept pushing up into my conscious mind. I wouldn't have an idea of something one minute, and the next it would just be part of my general historical knowledge; I'd know it as positively as I know that Columbus discovered America in 1492. The only difference is

that I can usually remember where I've read something in past history, but my future history I know without knowing how I know it."

"Ah, that's the question!" Weill pounced. "You don't know how you know it. Look, Ed, we've both studied psychology, elementary psychology at least. Anybody who has to work with people, these days, has to know some psychology. What makes you sure that these prophetic impressions of yours aren't manufactured in your own subconscious mind?"

"That's what I thought, at first. I thought my subconscious was just building up this stuff to fill the gaps in what I'd produced from logical extrapolation. I've always been a stickler for detail," he added, parenthetically. "It would be natural for me to supply details for the future. But, as I said, a lot of this stuff is based on unpredictable and arbitrary factors that can't be inferred from anything in the present. That left me with the alternatives of delusion or precognition, and if I ever came near going crazy, it was before the *Kilroy* landed and the news was released. After that, I knew which it was."

"And yet, you can't explain how you can have real knowledge of a thing before it happens. Before it exists," Weill said.

"I really don't need to. I'm satisfied with knowing that I know. But if you want me to furnish a theory, let's say that all these things really do exist, in the past or in the future, and that the present is just a moving knife-edge that separates the two. You can't even indicate the present. By the time you make up your mind to say, 'Now!' and transmit the impulse to your vocal organs, and utter the word, the original present moment is part of the past. The knife-edge has gone over it. Most people think they know only the present; what they know is the past, which they have already experienced, or read about. The difference with me is that I can see what's on both sides of the knife-edge."

Weill put another cigarette in his mouth and bent his head to the flame of his lighter. For a moment, he sat motionless, his thin face rigid.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked. "I'm a lawyer, not a psychiatrist."

"I want a lawyer. This is a legal matter. Whitburn's talking about voiding my tenure

contract. You helped draw it; I have a right to expect you to help defend it."

"Ed, have you been talking about this to anybody else?" Weill asked.

"You're the first person I've mentioned it to. It's not the sort of thing you'd bring up casually, in a conversation."

"Then how'd Whitburn get hold of it?"

"He didn't, not the way I've given it to you. But I made a couple of slips, now and then. I made a bad one yesterday morning."

He told Weill about it, and about his session with the president of the college that morning. The lawyer nodded.

"That was a bad one, but you handled Whitburn the right way," Weill said. "What he's most afraid of is publicity, getting the college mixed up in anything controversial, and above all, the reactions of the trustees and people like that. If Dacre or anybody else makes any trouble, he'll do his best to cover for you. Not willingly, of course, but because he'll know that that's the only way he can cover for himself. I don't think you'll have any more trouble with him. If you can keep your own nose clean, that is. Can you do that?"

"I believe so. Yesterday I got careless. I'll not do that again."

"You'd better not." Weill hesitated for a moment. "I said I was a lawyer, not a psychiatrist. I'm going to give you some psychiatrist's advice, though. Forget this whole thing. You say you can bring these impressions into your conscious mind by concentrating?" He waited briefly; Chalmers nodded, and he continued: "Well, stop it. Stop trying to harbor this stuff. It's dangerous, Ed. Stop playing around with it."

"You think I'm crazy, too?"

Weill shook his head impatiently. "I didn't say that. But I'll say, now, that you're losing your grip on reality. You are constructing a system of fantasies, and the first thing you know, they will become your reality, and the world around you will be unreal and illusory. And that's a state of mental incompetence that I can recognize, as a lawyer."

"How about the *Kilroy?*"

Weill looked at him intently. "Ed, are you sure you did have that experience?" he asked. "I'm not trying to imply that you're consciously lying to me about that. I am suggesting that you manufactured a memory of that incident in your subconscious

mind, and are deluding yourself into thinking that you knew about it in advance. False memory is a fairly common thing, in cases like this. Even the little psychology I know, I've heard about that. There's been talk about rockets to the Moon for years. You included something about that in your future-history fantasy, and then, after the event, you convinced yourself that you'd known all about it, including the impromptu christening of the rocket, all along."

A hot retort rose to his lips; he swallowed it hastily. Instead, he nodded amicably.

"That's a point worth thinking of. But right now, what I want to know is, will you represent me in case Whitburn does take this to court and does try to void my contract?"

"Oh, yes; as you said, I have an obligation to defend the contracts I draw up. But you'll have to avoid giving him any further reason for trying to void it. Don't make any more of these slips. Watch what you say, in class or out of it. And above all, don't talk about this to anybody. Don't tell anybody that you can foresee the future, or even talk about future probabilities. Your business is with the past; stick to it."

The afternoon passed quietly enough. Word of his defiance of Whitburn had gotten around among the faculty—Whitburn might have his secretary scared witless in his office, but not gossipless outside it—though it hadn't seemed to have leaked down to the students yet. Handley, the Latin professor, managed to waylay him in a hallway, a hallway Handley didn't normally use.

"The tenure-contract system under which we hold our positions here is one of our most valuable safeguards," he said, after exchanging greetings. "It was only won after a struggle, in a time of public animosity toward all intellectuals, and even now, our professional position would be most insecure without it."

"Yes. I found that out today, if I hadn't known it when I took part in the struggle you speak of."

"It should not be jeopardized," Handley declared.

"You think I'm jeopardizing it?"

Handley frowned. He didn't like being pushed out of the safety of generalization into specific cases.

"Well, now that you make

that point, yes. I do. If Doctor Whitburn tries to make an issue of . . . of what happened yesterday . . . and if the court decides against you, you can see the position all of us will be in."

"What do you think I should have done? Given him my resignation when he demanded it? We have our tenure-contracts, and the system was instituted to prevent just the sort of arbitrary action Whitburn tried to take with me today. If he wants to go to court, he'll find that out."

"And if he wins, he'll establish a precedent that will threaten the security of every college and university faculty member in the state. In any state where there's a tenure law."

Leonard Fitch, the psychologist, took an opposite attitude. As Chalmers was leaving the college at the end of the afternoon, Fitch cut across the campus to intercept him.

"I heard about the way you stood up to Whitburn, this morning, Ed," he said. "Glad you did it. I only wish I'd done something like that three years ago . . . Think he's going to give you any real trouble?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, I'm on your side if he does. I won't be the only one, either."

"Well, thank you, Leonard. It always helps to know that. I don't think there'll be any more trouble, though."

He dined alone at his apartment, and sat over his coffee, outlining his work for the next day. When both were finished, he dallied indecisively, Weill's words echoing through his mind and raising doubts. It was possible that he had been manufacturing the whole thing in his subconscious mind. That was, at least, a more plausible theory than any he had constructed to explain an ability to produce real knowledge of the future. Of course, there was that business about the *Kilroy*. That had been too close on too many points to be dismissed as coincidence. Then, again, Weill's words came back to disquiet him. Had he really gotten that before the event, as he believed, or had he only imagined, later, that he had?

There was one way to settle that. He rose quickly and went to the filing-cabinet where he kept his future-history notes and began pulling out envelopes. There was nothing about the *Kilroy* in the Twentieth Century file, where it should be, although

he examined each sheet of notes carefully. The possibility that his notes on that might have been filed out of place by mistake occurred to him; he looked in every other envelope. The notes, as far as they went, were all filed in order, and each one bore, beside the future date of occurrence, the date on which the knowledge—or must he call it delusion?—had come to him. But there was no note on the landing of the first unmanned rocket on Luna.

He put the notes away and went back to his desk, rummaging through the drawers, and finding nothing. He searched everywhere in the apartment where a sheet of paper could have been mislaid, taking all his books, one by one, from the shelves and leafing through them, even books he knew he had not touched for more than three years. In the end, he sat down again at his desk, defeated. The note on the *Kilroy* simply did not exist.

Of course, that didn't settle it, as finding the note would have. He remembered—or believed he remembered—having gotten that item of knowledge—or delusion—in 1970, shortly before the end of the school term. It hadn't been until after the fall opening of school that he had begun making notes. He could have had the knowledge of the robot rocket in his mind then, and neglected putting it on paper.

He undressed, put on his pajamas, poured himself a drink, and went to bed. Three hours later, still awake, he got up, and poured himself another, bigger, drink. Somehow, eventually, he fell asleep.

The next morning, he searched his desk and bookcase in the office at school. He had never kept a diary; now he was wishing that he had. That might have contained something that would be evidence, one way or the other. All day, he vacillated between conviction of the reality of his future knowledge and resolution to have no more to do with it. Once he decided to destroy all the notes he had made, and thought of making a special study of some facet of history, and writing another book, to occupy his mind.

After lunch, he found that more data on the period immediately before the Thirty Days' War was coming into his consciousness. He resolutely suppressed it, knowing as he did that it might never come to him again. That eve-

ning, too, he cooked dinner for himself at his apartment, and laid out his class-work for the next day. He'd better not stay in, that evening; too much temptation to settle himself by the living-room fire with his pipe and his note-pad and indulge in the vice he had determined to renounce. After a little debate, he decided upon a movie; he put on again the suit he had taken off on coming home, and went out.

The picture, a random choice among the three shows in the neighborhood, was about Seventeenth Century buccaneers; exciting action and a sound-track loud with shots and cutlass-clashing. He let himself be drawn into it completely, and, until it was finished, he was able to forget both the college and the history of the future. But, as he walked home, he was struck by the parallel between the buccaneers of the West Indies and the space-pirates in the days of the dissolution of the First Galactic Empire, in the Tenth Century of the Interstellar Era. He hadn't been too clear on that period, and he found new data rising in his mind; he hurried his steps, almost running upstairs to his room. It was long after midnight before he had finished the notes he had begun on his return home.

Well, that had been a mistake, but he wouldn't make it again. He determined again to destroy his notes, and began casting about for a subject which would occupy his mind to the exclusion of the future. Not the Spanish Conquistadores; that was too much like the early period of interstellar expansion. He thought for a time of the Sepoy Mutiny, and then rejected it—he could "remember" something much like that on one of the planets of the Beta Hydrae system, in the Fourth Century of the Atomic Era. There were so few things, in the history of the past, which did not have their counterparts in the future. That evening, too, he stayed at home, preparing for his various classes for the rest of the week and making copious notes on what he would talk about to each. He needed more whiskey to get to sleep that night.

Whitburn gave him no more trouble, and if any of the trustees or influential alumni made any protest about what had happened in Modern History IV, he heard nothing about it. He managed to conduct his classes without further incidents, and spent his

evenings trying, not always successfully, to avoid drifting into "memories" of the future. . . .

He came into his office that morning tired and unrefreshed by the few hours' sleep he had gotten the night before, edgy from the strain, of trying to adjust his mind to the world of Blanley College in mid-April of 1973. Pottgeiter hadn't arrived yet, but Marjorie Fenner was waiting for him; a newspaper in her hand, almost bursting with excitement.

"Here; have you seen it, Doctor Chalmers?" she asked as he entered.

He shook his head. He ought to read the papers more, to keep track of the advancing knife-edge that divided what he might talk about from what he wasn't supposed to know, but each morning he seemed to have less and less time to get ready for work.

"Well, look! Look at that!"

She thrust the paper into his hands, still folded, the big, black headline where he could see it.

KHALID IB'N HUSSEIN ASSASSINATED

He glanced over the leading paragraphs. Leader of Islamic Chaliphate shot to death in Basra . . . leaving Parliament Building for his palace outside the city . . . fanatic, identified as an Egyptian named Mohammed Noureed . . . old American submachine-gun . . . two guards killed and a third seriously wounded . . . seized by infuriated mob and stoned to death on the spot . . .

For a moment, he felt guilt, until he realized that nothing he could have done could have altered the event. The death of Khalid ib'n Hussein, and all the millions of other deaths that would follow it, were fixed in the matrix of the space-time continuum. Including, maybe, the death of an obscure professor of Modern History named Edward Chalmers.

"At least, this'll be the end of that silly flap about what happened a month ago in Modern Four. This is modern history, now; I can talk about it without a lot of fools yelling their heads off."

She was staring at him wide-eyed. No doubt horrified at his cold-blooded attitude toward what was really a shocking and senseless crime.

"Yes, of course; the man's dead. So's Julius Caesar, but we've gotten over being shocked at his murder."

He would have to talk about

it in Modern History IV, he supposed; explain why Khalid's death was necessary to the policies of the Eastern Axis, and what the consequences would be. How it would hasten the complete dissolution of the old U. N., already weakened by the crisis over the Eastern demands for the demilitarization and internationalization of the United States Lunar Base, and necessitate the formation of the Terran Federation, and how it would lead, eventually, to the Thirty Days' War. No, he couldn't talk about that; that was on the wrong side of the knife-edge. Have to be careful about the knife-edge; too easy to cut himself on it.

Nobody in Modern History IV was seated when he entered the room; they were all crowded between the door and his desk. He stood blinking, wondering why they were giving him an ovation, and why Kendrick and Dacre were so abjectly apologetic. Great heavens, did it take the murder of the greatest Moslem since Saladin to convince people that he wasn't crazy?

Before the period was over, Whitburn's secretary entered with a note in the college president's hand and over his signature; requesting Chalmers to come to his office immediately and without delay. Just like that; expected him to walk right out of his class. He was protesting as he entered the president's office. Whitburn cut him off short.

"Doctor Chalmers,"—Whitburn had risen behind his desk as the door opened—"I certainly hope that you can realize that there was nothing but the most purely coincidental connection between the event featured in this morning's newspapers and your performance, a month ago, in Modern History Four," he began.

"I realize nothing of the sort. The death of Khalid ib'n Hussein is a fact of history, unalterably set in its proper place in time-sequence. It was a fact of history a month ago no less than today."

"So that's going to be your attitude; that your wild utterances of a month ago have now been vindicated as fulfilled prophesies? And I suppose you intend to exploit this —this coincidence—to the utmost. The involvement of Blanley College in a mess of sensational publicity means nothing to you, I presume."

"I haven't any idea what you're talking about."

"You mean to tell me that you didn't give this story to

the local newspaper, the *Valley Times?*" Whitburn demanded.

"I did not. I haven't mentioned the subject to anybody connected with the *Times*, or anybody else, for that matter. Except my attorney, a month ago, when you were threatening to repudiate the contract you signed with me."

"I suppose I'm expected to take your word for that?"

"Yes, you are. Unless you care to call me a liar in so many words." He moved a step closer. Lloyd Whitburn outweighed him by fifty pounds, but most of the difference was fat. Whitburn must have realized that, too.

"No, no; if you say you haven't talked about it to the *Valley Times*, that's enough," he said hastily. "But somebody did. A reporter was here not twenty minutes ago; he refused to say who had given him the story, but he wanted to question me about it."

"What did you tell him?"

"I refused to make any statement whatever. I also called Colonel Tighlman, the owner of the paper, and asked him, very reasonably, to suppress the story. I thought that my own position and the importance of Blanley College to this town entitled me to that much consideration." Whitburn's face became almost purple. "He . . . he laughed at me!"

"Newspaper people don't like to be told to kill stories. Not even by college presidents. That's only made things worse. Personally, I don't relish the prospect of having this publicized, any more than you do. I can assure you that I shall be most guarded if any of the *Times* reporters talk to me about it, and if I have time to get back to my class before the end of the period, I shall ask them, as a personal favor, not to discuss the matter outside."

Whitburn didn't take the hint. Instead, he paced back and forth, storming about the reporter, the newspaper owner, whoever had given the story to the paper, and finally Chalmers himself. He was livid with rage.

"You certainly can't imagine that when you made those remarks in class you actually possessed any knowledge of a thing that was still a month in the future," he spluttered. "Why, it's ridiculous! Utterly preposterous!"

"Unusual, I'll admit. But the fact remains that I did. I should, of course, have been more careful, and not confused future with past events.

The students didn't understand . . ."

Whitburn half-turned, stopping short.

"My God, man! You *are* crazy!" he cried, horrified.

The period-bell was ringing as he left Whitburn's office; that meant that the twenty-three students were scattering over the campus, talking like mad. He shrugged. Keeping them quiet about a thing like this wouldn't have been possible in any case. When he entered his office, Stanly Weill was waiting for him. The lawyer drew him out into the hallway quickly.

"For God's sake, have you been talking to the papers?" he demanded. "After what I told you . . ."

"No, but somebody has." He told about the call to Whitburn's office, and the latter's behavior. Weill cursed the college president bitterly.

"Any time you want to get a story in the *Valley Times*, just order Frank Tighlman not to print it. Well, if you haven't talked, don't."

"Suppose somebody asks me?"

"A reporter, no comment. Anybody else, none of his damn business. And above all, don't let anybody finagle you into making any claims about knowing the future. I thought we had this under control; now that it's out in the open, what that fool Whitburn'll do is anybody's guess."

Leonard Fitch met him as he entered the Faculty Club, sizzling with excitement.

"Ed, this has done it!" he began, jubilantly. "This is one nobody can laugh off. It's direct proof of precognition, and because of the prominence of the event, everybody will hear about it. And it simply can't be dismissed as coincidence . . ."

"Whitburn's trying to do that."

"Whitburn's a fool if he is," another man said calmly. Turning, he saw that the speaker was Tom Smith, one of the math professors. "I figured the odds against that being chance. There are a lot of variables that might affect it one way or another, but ten to the fifteenth power is what I get for a sort of median figure."

"Did you give that story to the *Valley Times?*" he asked Fitch, suspicion rising and dragging anger up after it.

"Of course, I did," Fitch said. "I'll admit, I had to go behind your back and have some of my postgrads get statements from the boys in your history class, but you

wouldn't talk about it yourself . . ."

Tom Smith was standing beside him. He was twenty years younger than Chalmers, he was an amateur boxer, and he had good reflexes. He caught Chalmers' arm as it was traveling back for an upercut, and held it.

"Take it easy, Ed; you don't want to start a slugfest in here. This is the Faculty Club; remember?"

"I won't, Tom; it wouldn't prove anything if I did." He turned to Fitch. "I won't talk about sending your students to pump mine, but at least you could have told me before you gave that story out."

"I don't know what you're sore about," Fitch defended himself. "I believed in you when everybody else thought you were crazy, and if I hadn't collected signed and dated statements from your boys, there'd have been no substantiation. It happens that extrasensory perception means as much to me as history does to you. I've believed in it ever since I read about Rhine's work, when I was a kid. I worked in ESP for a long time. Then I had a chance to get a full professorship by coming here, and after I did, I found that I couldn't go on with it, because Whitburn's president here, and he's a stupid old bigot with an air-locked mind . . ."

"Yes." His anger died down as Fitch spoke. "I'm glad Tom stopped me from making an ass of myself. I can see your side of it." Maybe that was the curse of the professional intellectual, an ability to see everybody's side of everything. He thought for a moment. "What else did you do, beside hand this story to the *Valley Times?* I'd better hear all about it."

"I phoned the secretary of the American Institute of Psionics and Parapsychology, as soon as I saw this morning's paper. With the time-difference to the East Coast, I got him just as he reached his office. He advised me to give the thing the widest possible publicity; he thought that would advance the recognition and study of parapsychology. A case like this can't be ignored; it will demand serious study . . ."

"Well, you got your publicity, all right. I'm up to my neck in it."

There was an uproar outside. The doorman was saying, firmly:

"This is the Faculty Club, gentlemen; it's for members only. I don't care if you gen-

tlemen are the press, you simply cannot come in here."

"We're all up to our necks in it," Smith said. "Leonard, I don't care what your motives were, you ought to have considered the effect on the rest of us first."

"This place will be a madhouse," Handley complained. "How we're going to get any of these students to keep their minds on their work . . ."

"I tell you, I don't know a confounded thing about it," Max Pottgeiter's voice rose petulantly at the door. "Are you trying to tell me that Professor Chalmers murdered some Arab? Ridiculous!"

He ate hastily and without enjoyment, and slipped through the kitchen and out the back door, cutting between two frat-houses and circling back to Prescott Hall. On the way, he paused momentarily and chuckled. The reporters, unable to storm the Faculty Club, had gone off in chase of other game and had

Had the sane restrained the insane, or was it the other way around?

cornered Lloyd Whitburn in front of Administration Center. They had a jeep with a sound-camera mounted on it, and were trying to get something for telecast. After gesticulating angrily, Whitburn broke away from them and dashed up the steps and into the building. A campus policeman stopped those who tried to follow.

His only afternoon class was American History III. He got through it somehow, though the class wasn't able to concentrate on the Reconstruction and the first election of Grover Cleveland. The halls were free of reporters, at least, and when it was over he hurried to the Library, going to the faculty reading-room in the rear, where he could smoke. There was nobody there but old Max Pottgeiter, smoking a cigar, his head bent over a book. The Medieval History professor looked up.

"Oh, hello, Chalmers. What the deuce is going on around here? Has everybody gone suddenly crazy?" he asked.

"Well, they seem to think I have," he said bitterly.

"They do? Stupid of them. What's all this about some Arab being shot? I didn't know there were any Arabs around here."

"Not here. At Basra." He told Pottgeiter what had happened.

"Well! I'm sorry to hear about that," the old man said. "I have a friend at Southern California, Bellingham, who knew Khalid very well. Was in the Middle East doing some research on the Byzantine Empire; Khalid was most helpful. Bellingham was quite impressed by him; said he was a wonderful man, and a fine scholar. Why would anybody want to kill a man like that?"

He explained in general terms. Pottgeiter nodded understandingly; assassination was a familiar feature of the medieval political landscape, too. Chalmers went on to elaborate. It was a relief to talk to somebody like Pottgeiter, who wasn't bothered by the present moment, but simply boycotted it. Eventually, the period-bell rang. Pottgeiter looked at his watch, as from conditioned reflex, and then rose, saying that he had a class and excusing himself. He would have carried his cigar with him if Chalmers hadn't taken it away from him.

After Pottgeiter had gone, Chalmers opened a book—he didn't notice what it was—

and sat staring unseeing at the pages. So the moving knife-edge had come down on the end of Khalid ib'n Hussein's life; what were the events in the next segment of time, and the segments to follow? There would be bloody fighting all over the Middle East—with consternation, he remembered that he had been talking about that to Pottgeiter. The Turkish army would move in and try to restore order. There would be more trouble in northern Iran, the Indian Communists would invade Eastern Pakistan, and then the general war, so long dreaded, would come. How far in the future that was he could not "remember," nor how the nuclear-weapons stalemate that had so far prevented it would be broken. He knew that today, and for years before, nobody had dared start an all-out atomic war. Wars, now, were marginal skirmishes, like the one in Indonesia, or the steady underground conflict of subversion and sabotage that had come to be called the Subwar. And with the United States already in possession of a powerful Lunar base . . . He wished he could "remember" how the events between the murder of Khalid and the Thirty Days' War had been spaced chronologically. Something of that had come to him, after the incident in Modern History IV, and he had driven it from his consciousness.

He didn't dare go home, where the reporters would be sure to find him. He simply left the college, at the end of the school-day, and walked without conscious direction until darkness gathered. This morning, when he had seen the paper, he had said, and had actually believed, that the news of the murder in Basra would put an end to the trouble that had started a month ago in the Modern History class. It hadn't; the trouble, it seemed, was only beginning. And with the newspapers, and Whitburn, and Fitch, it could go on forever . . .

It was fully dark, now; his shadow fell ahead of him on the sidewalk, lengthening as he passed under and beyond a street-light, vanishing as he entered the stronger light of the one ahead. The windows of a cheap cafe reminded him that he was hungry, and he entered, going to a table and ordering something absently. There was a television screen over the combination bar and lunch-counter. Some kind of a comedy programme, at which an invisible studio-audience

was laughing immoderately and without apparent cause. The roughly dressed customers along the counter didn't seem to see any more humor in it than he did. Then his food arrived on the table and he began to eat without really tasting it.

After a while, an alteration in the noises from the television penetrated his consciousness; a news-program had come on, and he raised his head. The screen showed a square in an Eastern city; the voice was saying:

". . . Basra, where Khalid ib'n Hussein was assassinated early this morning — early afternoon, local time. This is the scene of the crime; the body of the murderer has been removed, but you can still see the stones with which he was pelted to death by the mob . . ."

A close-up of the square, still littered with torn-up paving-stones. A Caliphate army officer, displaying the weapon—it was an old M3, all right; Chalmers had used one of those things, himself, thirty years before, and he and his contemporaries had called it a "grease-gun." There were some recent pictures of Khalid, including one taken as he left the plane on his return from Ankara. He watched, absorbed; it was all exactly as he had "remembered" a month ago. It gratified him to see that his future "memories" were reliable in detail as well as generality.

"But the most amazing part of the story comes, not from Basra, but from Blanley College, in California," the commentator was saying, "where, it is revealed, the murder of Khalid was foretold, with uncanny accuracy, a month ago, by a history professor, Doctor Edward Chalmers . . ."

There was a picture of himself, in hat and overcoat, perfectly motionless, as though a brief moving glimpse were being prolonged. A glance at the background told him when and where it had been taken —a year and a half ago, at a convention at Harvard. These telecast people must save up every inch of old news-film they ever took. There were views of Blanley campus, and interviews with some of the Modern History IV boys, including Dacre and Kendrick. That was one of the things they'd been doing with that jeep-mounted sound-camera, this afternoon, then. The boys, some brashly, some embarrassedly, were substantiating the fact that he had, a month ago, described yesterday's event in detail. There

was an interview with Leonard Fitch; the psychology professor was trying to explain the phenomenon of precognition in layman's terms, and making heavy going of it. And there was the mobbing of Whitburn in front of Administration Center. The college president was shouting denials of every question asked him, and as he turned and fled, the guffaws of the reporters were plainly audible.

An argument broke out along the counter.

"I don't believe it! How could anybody know all that about something before it happened?"

"Well, you heard that-there professor, what was his name. An' you heard all them boys . . ."

"Ah, college-boys; they'll do anything for a joke!"

"After refusing to be interviewed for telecast, the president of Blanley College finally consented to hold a press conference in his office, from which telecast cameras were barred. He denied the whole story categorically and stated that the boys in Professor Chalmers' class had concocted the whole thing as a hoax . . ."

"There! See what I told you!"

". . . stating that Professor Chalmers is mentally unsound, and that he has been trying for years to oust him from his position on the Blanley faculty but has been unable to do so because of the provisions of the Faculty Tenure Act of 1963. Most of his remarks were in the nature of a polemic against this law, generally regarded as the college professors' bill of rights. It is to be stated here that other members of the Blanley faculty have unconditionally confirmed the fact that Doctor Chalmers did make the statements attributed to him a month ago, long before the death of Khalid ib'n Hussein . . ."

"Yah! How about *that*, now? How'ya gonna get around *that?*"

Beckoning the waitress, he paid his check and hurried out. Before he reached the door, he heard a voice, almost stuttering with excitement:

"Hey! Look! That's *him!*"

He began to run. He was two blocks from the cafe before he slowed to a walk again.

That night, he needed three shots of whiskey before he could get to sleep.

A delegation from the American Institute of Psionics and Parapsychology reach-

ed Blanley that morning, having taken a strato-plane from the East Coast. They had academic titles and degrees that even Lloyd Whitburn couldn't ignore. They talked with Leonard Fitch, and with the students from Modern History IV, and took statements. It wasn't until after General European History II that they caught up with Chalmers—an elderly man, with white hair and a ruddy face; a young man who looked like a heavyweight boxer; a middle-aged man in tweeds who smoked a pipe and looked as though he ought to be more interested in grouse-shooting and flower-gardening than in clairvoyance and telepathy. The names of the first two meant nothing to Chalmers. They were important names in their own field, but it was not his field. The name of the third, who listened silently, he did not catch.

"You understand, gentlemen, that I'm having some difficulties with the college administration about this," he told them. "President Whitburn has even gone so far as to challenge my fitness to hold a position here."

"We've talked to him," the elderly man said. "It was not a very satisfactory discussion."

"President Whitburn's fitness to hold his own position could very easily be challenged," the young man added pugnaciously.

"Well, then, you see what my position is. I've consulted my attorney, Mr. Weill, and he has advised me to make absolutely no statements of any sort about the matter."

"I understand," the eldest of the trio said. "But we're not the press, or anything like that. We can assure you that anything you tell us will be absolutely confidential." He looked inquiringly at the middle-aged man in tweeds, who nodded silently. "We can understand that the students in your modern history class are telling what is substantially the truth?"

"If you're thinking about that hoax statement of Whitburn's, that's a lot of idiotic drivel!" he said angrily. "I heard some of those boys on the telecast, last night; except for a few details in which they were confused, they all stated exactly what they heard me say in class a month ago."

"And we assume," — again he glanced at the man in tweeds—"that you had no opportunity of knowing anything, at the time, about any

actual plot against Khalid's life?"

The man in tweeds broke silence for the first time. "You can assume that. I don't even think this fellow Noureed knew anything about it, then."

"Well, we'd like to know, as nearly as you're able to tell us, just how you became the percipient of this knowledge of the future event of the death of Khalid ib'n Hussein," the young man began. "Was it through a dream, or a waking experience; did you visualize, or have an auditory impression, or did it simply come into your mind . . ."

"I'm sorry, gentlemen." He looked at his watch. "I have to be going somewhere, at once. In any case, I simply can't discuss the matter with you. I appreciate your position; I know how I'd feel if data of historical importance were being withheld from me. However, I trust that you will appreciate my position and spare me any further questioning."

That was all he allowed them to get out of him. They spent another few minutes being polite to one another; he invited them to lunch at the Faculty Club, and learned that they were lunching there as Fitch's guests. They went away trying to hide their disappointment.

The Psionics and Parapsychology people weren't the only delegation to reach Blanley that day. Enough of the trustees of the college lived in the San Francisco area to muster a quorum for a meeting the evening before; a committee, including James Dacre, the father of the boy in Modern History IV, was appointed to get the facts at first hand; they arrived about noon. They talked to some of the students, spent some time closeted with Whitburn, and were seen crossing the campus with the Parapsychology people. They didn't talk to Chalmers or Fitch. In the afternoon, Marjorie Fenner told Chalmers that his presence at a meeting, to be held that evening in Whitburn's office, was requested. The request, she said, had come from the trustees' committee, not from Whitburn; she also told him that Fitch would be there. Chalmers promptly phoned Stanly Weill.

"I'll be there along with you," the lawyer said. "If this trustees' committee is running it, they'll realize that this is a matter in which you're entitled to legal advice. I'll stop by your place and pick

you up . . . You haven't been doing any talking, have you?"

He described the interview with the Psionics and Parapsychology people.

"That was all right . . . Was there a man with a mustache, in a brown tweed suit, with them?"

"Yes. I didn't catch his name . . ."

"It's Cutler. He's an Army major; Central Intelligence. His crowd's interested in whether you had any real advance information on this. He was in to see me, just a while ago. I have the impression he'd like to see this whole thing played down, so he'll be on our side, more or less and for the time being. I'll be around to your place about eight; in the meantime, don't do any more talking than you have to. I hope we can get this straightened out, this evening. I'll have to go to Reno in a day or so to see a client there. . . ."

The meeting in Whitburn's office had been set for eight-thirty; Weill saw to it that they arrived exactly on time. As they got out of his car at Administration Center and crossed to the steps, Chalmers had the feeling of going to a duel, accompanied by his second. The briefcase Weill was carrying may have given him the idea; it was flat and square-cornered, the size and shape of an old case of dueling pistols. He commented on it.

"Sound recorder," Weill said. "Loaded with a four-hour spool. No matter how long this thing lasts, I'll have a record of it, if I want to produce one in court."

Another party was arriving at the same time—the two Psionics and Parapsychology people and the Intelligence major, who seemed to have formed a working partnership. They all entered together, after a brief and guardedly polite exchange of greetings. There were voices raised in argument inside when they came to Whitburn's office. The college president was trying to keep Handley, Tom Smith, and Max Pottgeiter from entering his private room in the rear.

"It certainly is!" Handley was saying. "As faculty members, any controversy involving establishment of standards of fitness to teach under a tenure-contract concerns all of us, because any action taken in this case may establish a precedent which could affect the validity of our own contracts."

A big man with iron-gray hair appeared in the doorway

of the private office behind Whitburn; James Dacre.

"These gentlemen have a substantial interest in this, Doctor Whitburn," he said. "If they're here as representatives of the college faculty, they have every right to be present."

Whitburn stood aside. Handley, Smith and Pottgeiter went through the door; the others followed. The other three members of the trustees' committee were already in the room. A few minutes later, Leonard Fitch arrived, also carrying a briefcase.

"Well, everybody seems to be here," Whitburn said, starting toward his chair behind the desk. "We might as well get this started."

"Yes. If you'll excuse me, Doctor." Dacre stepped in front of him and sat down at the desk. "I've been selected as chairman of this committee; I believe I'm presiding here. Start the recorder, somebody."

One of the other trustees went to the sound recorder beside the desk—a larger but probably not more efficient instrument than the one Weill had concealed in his briefcase—and flipped a switch. Then he and his companions dragged up chairs to flank Dacre's, and the rest seated themselves around the room. Old Pottgeiter took a seat next to Chalmers. Weill opened the case on his lap, reached inside, and closed it again.

"What are they trying to do, Ed?" Pottgeiter asked, in a loud whisper. "Throw you off the faculty? They can't do that, can they?"

"I don't know, Max. We'll see . . ."

"This isn't any formal hearing, and nobody's on trial here," Dacre was saying. "Any action will have to be taken by the board of trustees as a whole, at a regularly scheduled meeting. All we're trying to do is find out just what's happened here, and who, if anybody, is responsible . . ."

"Well, there's the man who's responsible!" Whitburn cried, pointing at Chalmers. "This whole thing grew out of his behavior in class a month ago, and I'll remind you that at the time I demanded his resignation!"

"I thought it was Doctor Fitch, here, who gave the story to the newspapers," one of the trustees, a man with red hair and a thin, eyeglassed face, objected.

"Doctor Fitch acted as any scientist should, in making public what he believed to be

an important scientific discovery," the elder of the two Parapsychology men said. "He believed, and so do we, that he had discovered a significant instance of precognition—a case of real prior knowledge of a future event. He made a careful and systematic record of Professor Chalmers' statements, at least two weeks before the occurrence of the event to which they referred. It is entirely due to him that we know exactly what Professor Chalmers said and when he said it."

"Yes," his younger colleague added, "and in all my experience I've never heard anything more preposterous than this man Whitburn's attempt, yesterday, to deny the fact."

"Well, we're convinced that Doctor Chalmers did in fact say what he's alleged to have said, last month," Dacre began.

"Jim, I think we ought to get that established, for the record," another of the trustees put in. "Doctor Chalmers, is it true that you spoke, in the past tense, about the death of Khalid ib'n Hussein in one of your classes on the sixteenth of last month?"

Chalmers rose. "Yes, it is. And the next day, I was called into this room by Doctor Whitburn, who demanded my resignation from the faculty of this college because of it. Now, what I'd like to know is, why did Doctor Whitburn, in this same room, deny, yesterday, that I'd said anything of the sort, and accuse my students of concocting the story after the event as a hoax."

"One of them being my son," Dacre added. "I'd like to hear an answer to that, myself."

"So would I," Stanly Weill chimed in. "You know, my client has a good case against Doctor Whitburn for libel."

Chalmers looked around the room. Of the thirteen men around him, only Whitburn was an enemy. Some of the others were on his side, for one reason or another, but none of them were friends. Weill was his lawyer, obeying an obligation to a client which, at bottom, was an obligation to his own conscience. Handley was afraid of the possibility that a precedent might be established which would impair his own tenure-contract. Fitch, and the two men from the Institute of Psionics and Parapsychology, were interested in him as a source of study-material. Dacre resented a slur upon his

son; he and the others were interested in Blanley College as an institution, almost an abstraction. And the major in mufti was probably worrying about the consequences to military security of having a prophet at large. Then a hand gripped his shoulder, and a voice whispered in his ear:

"That's good, Ed; don't let them scare you!"

Old Max Pottgeiter, at least, was a friend.

"Doctor Whitburn, I'm asking you, and I expect an answer, why did you make such statements to the press, when you knew perfectly well that they were false?" Dacre demanded sharply.

"I knew nothing of the kind!" Whitburn blustered, showing, under the bluster, fear. "Yes, I demanded this man's resignation on the morning of October Seventeenth, the day after this incident occurred. It had come to my attention on several occasions that he was making wild and unreasonable assertions in class, and subjecting himself, and with himself the whole faculty of this college, to student ridicule. Why, there was actually an editorial about it written by the student editor of the campus paper, the *Black and Green*. I managed to prevent its publication . . ." He went on at some length about that. "If I might be permitted access to the drawers of my own desk," he added with elephantine sarcasm, "I could show you the editorial in question."

"You needn't bother; I have a carbon copy," Dacre told him. "We've all read it. If you did, at the time you suppressed it, you should have known what Doctor Chalmers said in class."

"I knew he'd talked a lot of poppycock about a man who was still living having been shot to death," Whitburn retorted. "And if something of the sort actually happened, what of it? Somebody's always taking a shot at one or another of these foreign dictators, and they can't miss all the time."

"You claim this was pure coincidence?" Fitch demanded. "A ten-point coincidence: Event of assassination, year of the event, place, circumstances, name of assassin, nationality of assassin, manner of killing, exact type of weapon used, guards killed and wounded along with Khalid, and fate of the assassin. If that's a simple and plausible coincidence, so's dealing ten royal flushes in succession in a poker game. Tom, you figured

that out; what did you say the odds against it were?"

"Was all that actually stated by Doctor Chalmers a month ago?" one of the trustees asked, incredulously.

"It absolutely was. Look here, Mr. Dacre, gentlemen." Fitch came forward, unzipping his briefcase and pulling out papers. "Here are the signed statements of each of Doctor Chalmers' twenty-three Modern History Four students, all made and dated before the assassination. You can refer to them as you please; they're in alphabetical order. And here." He unfolded a sheet of graph paper a yard long and almost as wide. "Here's a tabulated summary of the boys' statements. All agreed on the first point, the fact of the assassination. All agreed that the time was sometime this year. Twenty out of twenty-three agreed on Basra as the place. Why, seven of them even remembered the name of the assassin. That in itself is remarkable; Doctor Chalmers has an extremely intelligent and attentive class."

"They're attentive because they know he's always likely to do something crazy and make a circus out of himself," Whitburn interjected.

"And this isn't the only instance of Doctor Chalmers' precognitive ability," Fitch continued. "There have been a number of other cases . . ."

Chalmers jumped to his feet; Stanly Weill rose beside him, shoved the cased sound-recorder into his hands, and pushed him back into his seat.

"Gentlemen," the lawyer began, quietly but firmly and clearly. "This is all getting pretty badly out of hand. After all, this isn't an investigation of the actuality of precognition as a psychic phenomenon. What I'd like to hear, and what I haven't heard yet, is Doctor Whitburn's explanation of his contradictory statements that he knew about my client's alleged remarks on the evening after they were supposed to have been made and that, at the same time, the whole thing was a hoax concocted by his students."

"Are you implying that I'm a liar?" Whitburn bristled.

"I'm pointing out that you made a pair of contradictory statements, and I'm asking how you could do that knowingly and honestly," Weill retorted.

"What I meant," Whitburn began, with exaggerated slowness, as though speaking to an idiot, "was that yesterday,

when those infernal reporters were badgering me, I really thought that some of Professor Chalmers' students had gotten together and given the *Valley Times* an exaggerated story about his insane maunderings a month ago. I hadn't imagined that a member of the faculty had been so lacking in loyalty to the college . . ."

"You couldn't imagine anybody with any more intellectual integrity than you have!" Fitch fairly yelled at him,

"You're as crazy as Chalmers!" Whitburn yelled back. He turned to the trustees. "You see the position I'm in, here, with this infernal Higher Education Faculty Tenure Act? I have a madman on my faculty, and can I get rid of him? No! I demand his resignation, and he laughs at me and goes running for his lawyer! And he is a madman! Nobody but a madman would talk the way he does. You think this Khalid ib'n Hussein business is the only time he's done anything like this? Why, I have a list of a dozen occasions when he's done something just as bad, only he didn't have a lucky coincidence to back him up. Trying to get books that don't exist out of the library, and then insisting that they're standard textbooks. Talking about the revolt of the colonies on Mars and Venus. Talking about something he calls the Terran Federation, some kind of a world empire. Or something he calls Operation Triple Cross, that saved the country during some fantastic war he imagined . . ."

"What did you say?"

The question cracked out like a string of pistol shots. Everybody turned. The quiet man in the brown tweed suit had spoken; now he looked as though he were very much regretting it.

"Is there such a thing as Operation Triple Cross?" Fitch was asking.

"No, no. I never heard anything about that; that wasn't what I meant. It was this Terran Federation thing," the major said, a trifle too quickly and too smoothly. He turned to Chalmers. "You never did any work for PSPB; did you ever talk to anybody who did?" he asked.

"I don't even know what the letters mean," Chalmers replied.

"Politico - Strategic Planning Board. It's all pretty hush-hush, but this term Terran Federation is a tentative name for a proposed organization to take the place of the

U. N. if that organization breaks up. It's nothing particularly important, and it only exists on paper."

It won't exist only on paper very long, Chalmers thought. He was wondering what Operation Triple Cross was; he had some notes on it, but he had forgotten what they were.

"Maybe he did pick that up from somebody who'd talked indiscreetly," Whitburn conceded. "But the rest of this tommyrot! Why, he was talking about how the city of Reno had been destroyed by an explosion and fire, literally wiped off the map. There's an example for you!"

He'd forgotten about that, too. It had been a relatively minor incident in the secret struggle of the Subwar; now he remembered having made a note about it. He was sure that it followed closely after the assassination of Khalid ib'n Hussein. He turned quickly to Weill.

"Didn't you say you had to go to Reno in a day or so?" he asked.

Weill hushed him urgently, pointing with his free hand to the recorder. The exchange prevented him from noticing that Max Pottgeiter had risen, until the old man was speaking.

"Are you trying to tell these people that Professor Chalmers is crazy?" he was demanding. "Why, he has one of the best minds on the campus. I was talking to him only yesterday, in the back room at the Library. You know," he went on apologetically, "my subject is Medieval History; I don't pay much attention to what's going on in the contemporary world, and I didn't understand, really, what all this excitement was about. But he explained the whole thing to me, and did it in terms that I could grasp, drawing some excellent parallels with the Byzantine Empire and the Crusades. All about the revolt at Damascus, and the sack of Beirut, and the war between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and how the Turkish army intervened, and the invasion of Pakistan . . ."

"When did all this happen?" one of the trustees demanded.

Pottgeiter started to explain; Chalmers realized, sickly, how much of his future history he had poured into the trusting ear of the old medievalist, the day before.

"Good Lord, man; don't you read the papers at all?" another of the trustees asked.

"No! And I don't read inside-dope magazines, or sci-

ence fiction. I read carefully substantiated facts. And I know when I'm talking to a sane and reasonable man. It isn't a common experience, around here."

Dacre passed a hand over his face. "Doctor Whitburn," he said, "I must admit that I came to this meeting strongly prejudiced against you, and I'll further admit that your own behavior here has done very little to dispel that prejudice. But I'm beginning to get some idea of what you have to contend with, here at Blanley, and I find that I must make a lot of allowances. I had no idea . . . Simply no idea at all!"

"Look, you're getting a completely distorted picture of this, Mr. Dacre," Fitch broke in. "It's precisely as I believed; Doctor Chalmers is an unusually gifted precognitive percipient. You've seen, gentlemen, how his complicated chain of precognitions about the death of Khalid has been proven verdical; I'd stake my life that every one of these precognitions will be similarly verified. And I'll stake my professional reputation that the man is perfectly sane. Of course, abnormal psychology and psychopathology aren't my subjects, but . . ."

"They're not my subjects, either," Whitburn retorted, "but I know a lunatic by his ravings."

"Doctor Fitch is taking an entirely proper attitude," Pottgeiter said, "in pointing out that abnormal psychology is a specialized branch, outside his own field. I wouldn't dream, myself, of trying to offer a decisive opinion on some point of Roman, or Babylonian, history. Well, if the question of Doctor Chalmers' sanity is at issue here, let's consult somebody who specializes in insanity. I don't believe that anybody here is qualified even to express an opinion on that subject, Doctor Whitburn least of all."

Whitburn turned on him angrily. "Oh, shut up, you doddering old fool!" he shouted. "Look; there's another of them!" he told the trustees. "Another deadhead on the faculty that this Tenure Law keeps me from getting rid of. He's as bad as Chalmers, himself. You just heard that string of nonsense he was spouting. Why, his courses have been noted among the students for years as snap courses in which nobody ever has to do any work . . ."

Chalmers was on his feet again, thoroughly angry. Abuse of himself he could

take; talking that way about gentle, learned, old Pottgeiter was something else.

"I think Doctor Pottgeiter's said the most reasonable thing I've heard since I came in here," he declared. "If my sanity is to be questioned, I insist that it be questioned by somebody qualified to do so."

Weill set his recorder on the floor and jumped up beside him, trying to haul him back into his seat.

"For God's sake, man! Sit down and shut up!" he hissed.

Chalmers shook off his hand. "No, I won't shut up! This is the only way to settle this, once and for all. And when my sanity's been vindicated, I'm going to sue this fellow . . ."

Whitburn started to make some retort, then stopped short. After a moment, he smiled nastily.

"Do I understand, Doctor Chalmers, that you would be willing to submit to psychiatric examination?" he asked.

"Don't agree; you're putting your foot in a trap!" Weill told him urgently.

"Of course, I agree, as long as the examination is conducted by a properly qualified psychiatrist."

"How about Doctor Hauserman, at Northern State Mental Hospital?" Whitburn asked quickly. "Would you agree to an examination by him?"

"Excellent!" Fitch exclaimed. "One of the best men in the field. I'd accept his opinion unreservedly."

Weill started to object again; Chalmers cut him off. "Doctor Hauserman will be quite satisfactory to me. The only question is, would he be available?"

"I think he would," Dacre said, glancing at his watch. "I wonder if he could be reached now." He got to his feet. "Telephone in your outer office, Doctor Whitburn? Fine. If you gentlemen will excuse me . . ."

It was a good fifteen minutes before he returned, smiling.

"Well, gentlemen, it's all arranged," he said. "Doctor Hauserman is quite willing to examine Doctor Chalmers—with the latter's consent, of course."

"He'll have it. In writing, if he wishes."

"Yes. I assured him on that point. He'll be here about noon tomorrow — it's a hundred and fifty miles from the hospital, but the doctor flies his own plane—and the examination can start at two in the afternoon. He seems familiar

with the facilities of the psychology department, here; I assured him that they were at his disposal. Will that be satisfactory to you, Doctor Chalmers?"

"I have a class at that time, but one of the instructors can take it over—if holding classes will be possible around here tomorrow," he said. "Now, if you gentlemen will pardon me, I think I'll go home and get some sleep."

Weill came up to the apartment with him. He mixed a couple of drinks and they went into the living room with them.

"Just in case you don't know what you've gotten yourself into," Weill said, "this Hauserman isn't any ordinary couch-pilot; he's the state psychiatrist. If he gets the idea you aren't sane, he can commit you to a hospital, and I'll bet that's exactly what Whitburn had in mind when he suggested him. And I don't trust this man Dacre. I thought he was on our side, at the start, but that was before your friends got into the act." He frowned into his drink. "And I don't like the way that Intelligence major was acting, toward the last. If he thinks you know something you are not supposed to, a mental hospital may be his idea of a good place to put you away."

"You don't think this man Hauserman would allow himself to be influenced . . .? No. You just don't think I'm sane. Do you?"

"I know what Hauserman'll think. He'll think this future history business is a classical case of systematized schizoid delusion. I wish I'd never gotten into this case. I wish I'd never even heard of you! And another thing; in case you get past Hauserman all right, you can forget about that damage-suit bluff of mine. You would not stand a chance with it in court."

"In spite of what happened to Khalid?"

"After tomorrow, I won't stay in the same room with anybody who even mentions that name to me. Well, win or lose, it'll be over tomorrow and then I can leave here."

"Did you tell me you were going to Reno?" Chalmers asked. "Don't do it. You remember Whitburn mentioning how I spoke about an explosion there? It happened just a couple of days after the murder of Khalid. There was —will be—a trainload of high explosives in the railroad yard; it'll be the biggest non-nuclear explosion since the *Mont Blanc* blew up in Hali-

fax harbor in World War One . . ."

"Weill threw his drink into the fire; he must have avoided throwing the glass in with it by a last-second exercise of self-control.

"Well," he said, after a brief struggle to master himself. "One thing about the legal profession; you do hear the damndest things! . . . Good night, Professor. And try—please try, for the sake of your poor harried lawyer—to keep your mouth shut about things like that, at least till after you get through with Hauserman. And when you're talking to him, don't, don't, for heaven's sake, *don't*, volunteer anything!"

The room was a pleasant, warmly-colored, place. There was a desk, much like the ones in the classrooms, and six or seven wicker armchairs. A lot of apparatus had been pushed back along the walls; the dust-covers were gay cretonne. There was a couch, with more apparatus, similarly covered, beside it. Hauserman was seated at the desk when Chalmers entered.

He rose, and they shook hands. A man of about his own age, smooth-faced, partially bald. Chalmers tried to guess something of the man's nature from his face, but could read nothing. A face well trained to keep its owner's secrets.

"Something to smoke, Professor," he began, offering his cigarette case.

"My pipe, if you don't mind." He got it out and filled it.

"Any of those chairs," Hauserman said, gesturing toward them.

They were all arranged to face the desk. He sat down, lighting his pipe. Hauserman nodded approvingly; he was behaving calmly, and didn't need being put at ease. They talked at random—at least, Hauserman tried to make it seem so—for some time about his work, his book about the French Revolution, current events. He picked his way carefully through the conversation, alert for traps which the psychiatrist might be laying for him. Finally, Hauserman said:

"Would you mind telling me just why you felt it advisable to request a psychiatric examination, Professor?"

"I didn't request it. But when the suggestion was made, by one of my friends, in reply to some aspersions of my sanity, I agreed to it."

"Good distinction. And why was your sanity questioned? I

won't deny that I had heard of this affair, here, before Mr. Dacre called me, last evening, but I'd like to hear your version of it."

He went into that, from the original incident in Modern History IV, choosing every word carefully, trying to concentrate on making a good impression upon Hauserman, and at the same time finding that more "memories" of the future were beginning to seep past the barrier of his consciousness. He tried to dam them back; when he could not, he spoke with greater and greater care lest they leak into his speech.

"I can't recall the exact manner in which I blundered into it. The fact that I did make such a blunder was because I was talking extemporaneously and had wandered ahead of my text. I was trying to show the results of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, and the partition of the Middle East into a loose collection of Arab states, and the passing of British and other European spheres of influence following the Second. You know, when you consider it, the Islamic Caliphate was inevitable; the surprising thing is that it was created by a man like Khalid. . . ."

He was talking to gain time, and he suspected that Hauserman knew it. The "memories" were coming into his mind more and more strongly; it was impossible to suppress them. The period of anarchy following Khalid's death would be much briefer, and much more violent, than he had previously thought. Tallal ib'n Khalid would be flying from England even now; perhaps he had already left the plane to take refuge among the black tents of his father's Bedouins. The revolt at Damascus would break out before the end of the month; before the end of the year, the whole of Syria and Lebanon would be in bloody chaos, and the Turkish army would be on the march.

"Yes. And you allowed yourself to be carried a little beyond the present moment, into the future, without realizing it? Is that it?"

"Something like that," he replied, wide awake to the trap Hauserman had set, and fearful that it might be a blind, to disguise the real trap. "History follows certain patterns. I'm not a Toynbean, by any manner of means, but any historian can see that certain forces generally tend to produce similar effects. For

instance, space travel is now a fact; our government has at present a military base on Luna. Within our lifetimes—certainly within the lifetimes of my students—there will be explorations and attempts at colonization on Mars and Venus. You believe that, Doctor?"

"Oh, unreservedly. I'm not supposed to talk about it, but I did some work on the Philadelphia Project, myself. I'd say that every major problem of interplanetary flight had been solved before the first robot rocket was landed on Luna."

"Yes. And when Mars and Venus are colonized, there will be the same historic situations, at least in general shape, as arose when the European powers were colonizing the New World, or, for that matter, when the Greek city-states were throwing out colonies across the Aegean. That's the sort of thing we call projecting the past into the future through the present."

Hauserman nodded. "But how about the details? Things like the assassination of a specific personage. How can you extrapolate to a thing like that?"

"Well . . ." More "memories" were coming to the surface; he tried to crowd them back. "I do my projecting in what you might call fictionalized form; try to fill in the details from imagination. In the case of Khalid, I was trying to imagine what would happen if his influence were suddenly removed from Near Eastern and Middle Eastern affairs. I suppose I constructed an imaginary scene of his assassination . . ."

He went on at length. Mohammed and Noureed were common enough names. The Middle East was full of old U. S. weapons. Stoning was the traditional method of execution; it diffused responsibility so that no individual could be singled out for blood-feud vengeance.

"You have no idea how disturbed I was when the whole thing happened, exactly as I had described it," he continued. "And worst of all, to me, was this Intelligence officer showing up; I thought I was really in for it!"

"Then you've never really believed that you had real knowledge of the future?"

"I'm beginning to, since I've been talking to these Psionics and Parapsychology people," he laughed. It sounded, he hoped, like a natural and unaffected laugh. "They

seem to be convinced that I have."

There would be an Eastern-inspired uprising in Azerbaijan by the middle of the next year; before autumn, the Indian Communists would make their fatal attempt to seize East Pakistan. The Thirty Days' War would be the immediate result. By that time, the Lunar Base would be completed and ready; the enemy missiles would be aimed primarily at the rocketports from which it was supplied. Delivered without warning, it should have succeeded—except that every rocketport had its secret duplicate and triplicate. That was Operation Triple Cross; no wonder Major Cutler had been so startled at the words, last evening. The enemy would be utterly overwhelmed under the rain of missiles from across space, but until the moon-rockets began to fall, the United States would suffer grievously.

"Honestly, though, I feel sorry for my friend Fitch," he added. "He's going to be frightfully let down when some more of my alleged prophecies misfire on him. But I really haven't been deliberately deceiving him."

And Blanley College was at the center of one of the areas which would receive the worst of the thermonuclear hell to come. And it would be a little under a year . . .

"And that's all there is to it!" Hauserman exclaimed, annoyance in his voice. "I'm amazed that this man Whitburn allowed a thing like this to assume the proportions it did. I must say that I seem to have gotten the story about this business in a very garbled form indeed." He laughed shortly. "I came here convinced that you were mentally unbalanced. I hope you won't take that the wrong way, Professor," he hastened to add. "In my profession, anything can be expected. A good psychiatrist can never afford to forget how sharp and fine is the knife-edge."

"The knife-edge!" The words startled him. He had been thinking, at that moment, of the knife-edge, slicing moment after moment relentlessly away from the future, into the past, at each slice coming closer and closer to the moment when the missiles of the Eastern Axis would fall. "I didn't know they still resorted to surgery, in mental cases," he added, trying to cover his break.

"Oh, no; all that sort of thing is as irrevocably dis-

carded as the whips and shackles of Bedlam. I meant another kind of knife-edge; the thin, almost invisible, line which separates sanity from non-sanity. From madness, to use a deplorable lay expression." Hauserman lit another cigarette. "Most minds are a lot closer to it than their owners suspect, too. In fact, Professor, I was so convinced that yours had passed over it that I brought with me a commitment form, made out all but my signature, for you." He took it from his pocket and laid it on the desk. "The modern equivalent of the *lettre-de-cachet*, I suppose the author of a book on the French Revolution would call it. I was all ready to certify you as mentally unsound, and commit you to Northern State Mental Hospital."

Chalmers sat erect in his chair. He knew where that was; on the other side of the mountains, in the one part of the state completely untouched by the H-bombs of the Thirty Days' War. Why, the town outside which the hospital stood had been a military headquarters during the period immediately after the bombings, and the center from which all the rescue work in the state had been directed.

"And you thought you could commit me to Northern State!" he demanded, laughing scornfully, and this time he didn't try to make the laugh sound natural and unaffected. "You — confine *me*, anywhere? Confine a poor old history professor's body, yes, but that isn't me. I'm universal; I exist in all space-time. When this old body I'm wearing now was writing that book on the French Revolution, I was in Paris, watching it happen, from the fall of the Bastile to the Ninth Thermidor. I was in Basra, and saw that crazed tool of the Axis shoot down Khalid ib'n Hussein—and the professor talked about it a month before it happened. I have seen empires rise and stretch from star to star across the Galaxy, and crumble and fall. I have seen . . ."

Doctor Hauserman had gotten his pen out of his pocket and was signing the commitment form with one hand; with the other, he pressed a button on the desk. A door at the rear opened, and a large young man in a white jacket entered.

"You'll have to go away for a while, Professor," Hauserman was telling him, much later, after he had allowed himself to become calm again.

"For how long, I don't know. Maybe a year or so."

"You mean to Northern State Mental?"

"Well . . . Yes, Professor. You've had a bad crack-up. I don't suppose you realize how bad. You've been working too hard; harder than your nervous system could stand. It's been too much for you."

"You mean, I'm nuts?"

"Please, Professor. I deplore that sort of terminology. You've had a severe psychological breakdown . . ."

"Will I be able to have books, and papers, and work a little? I couldn't bear the prospect of complete idleness."

"That would be all right, if you didn't work too hard."

"And could I say good-bye to some of my friends?"

Hauserman nodded and asked, "Who?"

"Well, Professor Pottgeiter . . ."

"He's outside now. He was inquiring about you."

"And Stanly Weill, my attorney. Not business; just to say good-bye."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Professor. He's not in town, now. He left almost immediately after . . . After . . ."

"After he found out I was crazy for sure? Where'd he go?"

"To Reno; he took the plane at five o'clock."

Weill wouldn't have believed, anyhow; no use trying to blame himself for that. But he was as sure that he would never see Stanly Weill alive again as he was that the next morning the sun would rise. He nodded impassively.

"Sorry he couldn't stay. Can I see Max Pottgeiter alone?"

"Yes, of course, Professor."

Old Pottgeiter came in, his face anguished. "Ed! It isn't true," he stammered. "I won't believe that it's true."

"What, Max?"

"That you're crazy. Nobody can make me believe that."

He put his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Confidentially, Max, neither do I. But don't tell anybody I'm not. It's a secret."

Pottgeiter looked troubled. For a moment, he seemed to be wondering if he mightn't be wrong and Hauserman and Whitburn and the others right.

"Max, do you believe in me?" he asked. "Do you believe that I knew about Khalid's assassination a month before it happened?"

"It's a horribly hard thing to believe," Pottgeiter admitted. "But, dammit, Ed, you

did! I know, medieval history is full of stories about prophecies being fulfilled. I always thought those stories were just legends that grew up after the event. And, of course, he's about a century late for me, but there was Nostradamus. Maybe those old prophecies weren't just *ex post facto* legends, after all. Yes. After Khalid, I'll believe that."

"All right. I'm saying, now, that in a few days there'll be a bad explosion at Reno, Nevada. Watch the papers and the telecast for it. If it happens, that ought to prove it. And you remember what I told you about the Turks annexing Syria and Lebanon?" The old man nodded. "When that happens, get away from Blanley. Come up to the town where Northern State Mental Hospital is, and get yourself a place to live, and stay there. And try to bring Marjorie Fenner along with you. Will you do that, Max?"

"If you say so." His eyes widened. "Something bad's going to happen here?"

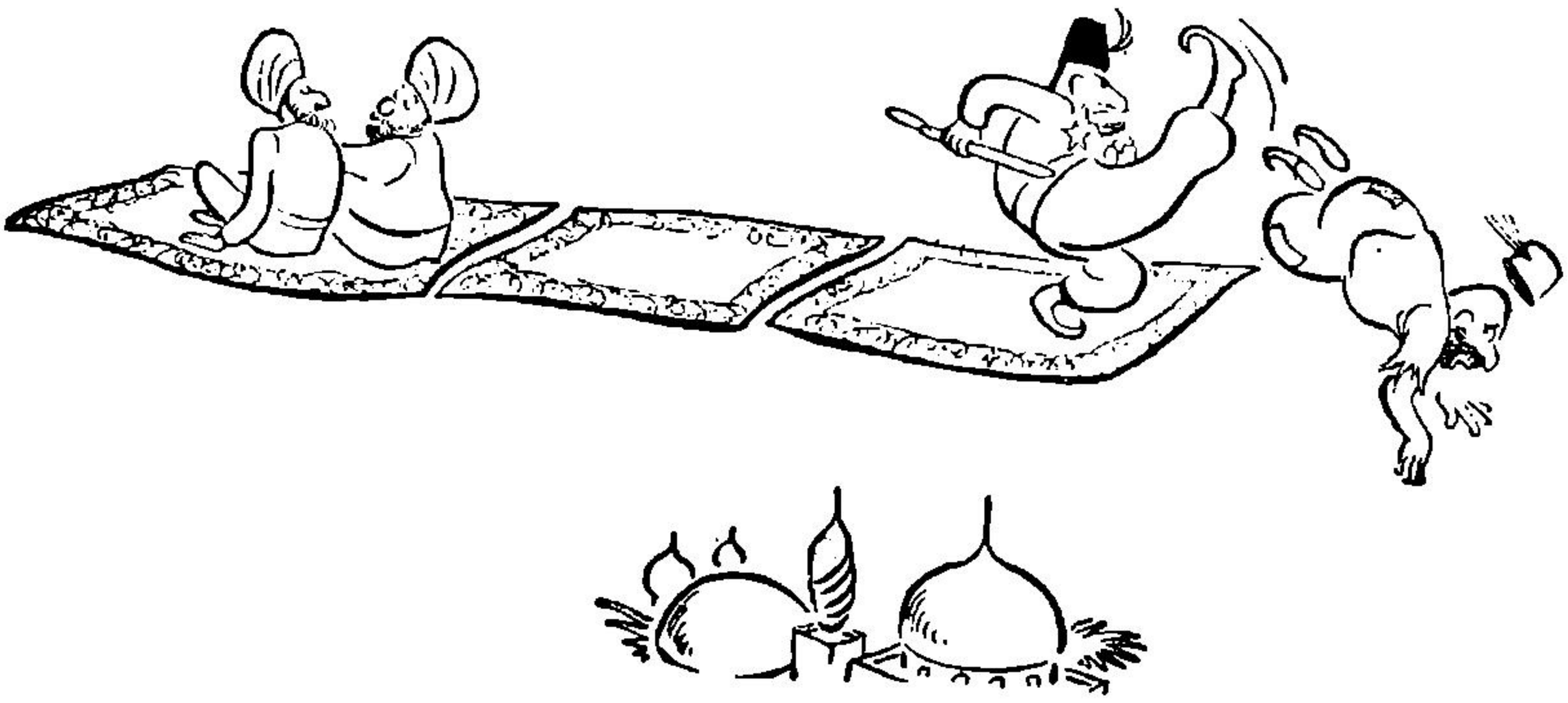
"Yes, Max. Something very bad. You promise me you will?"

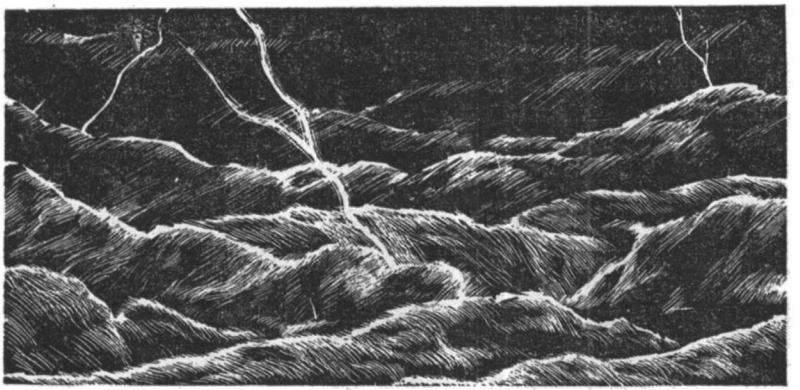
"Of course, Ed. You know, you're the only friend I have around here. You and Marjorie. I'll come, and bring her along."

"Here's the key to my apartment." He got it from his pocket and gave it to Pottgeiter, with instructions. "Everything in the filing cabinet on the left of my desk. And don't let anybody else see any of it. Keep it safe for me."

The large young man in the white coat entered.

THE END





No World for the Timid

By CHARLES E. FRITCH

This is a story for readers who like their meat raw, their facts plain and unvarnished, their fiction tough and realistic. If you want the full effect, read it at midnight during a cyclone.

ALL afternoon I've been sitting here at the mouth of the cave looking down into the valley at the empty riverbed and the lumps of rubble that gravemark what was once a city. In my memory the river is full and the city is tall, and people wander through neon streets. But then I blink my eyes and the river is dry and the people are dead and the city is no more. One of the children was down there today playing in the ruins. He brought back the symbol of death, a human skull that somehow had not disintegrated.

It gave me a shock at first, but I wasn't angry. I got over being angry a long time ago. I thought I'd gotten over shocks, too, but the thought of death startled me. I had never forgotten that there used to be others alive in the world, but there had been no bodies left behind to remind me that life is a fleeting, tenuous thing. And now, suddenly, I was reminded. I thought: how long will it be before *I* am no longer living, I the last man alive.

I looked at the ivory skull, balancing it in my hand, gazing without compassion into the empty eyesockets, trying

to feature it with a nose, with lips, with hair. I got to thinking of Marla, and the skull became her skull. I had never loved her, really, but now I began to miss her very much. So very, very much that it hurt to think about it. I buried the skull in a pile of ashes near the cave and tried to bury my thoughts along with it.

When I got back to the cave, the children were all there fighting over a scrawny corpse of rabbit. I walked into their midst and snatched the body from them. When the oldest made a move to grab it from me, I struck him; he fell against the wall, whimpering, and looked up at me with cold eyes.

"We'll share this," I said slowly. "First, we'll make a fire and then we'll cook it. Then we share it." I looked at each one in turn. "We'll act like human beings."

They were like animals. They fought over scraps of meat with tooth and nail; they'd just as soon eat the animal raw, alive if need be.

I'd eaten worse things to survive, but now I felt sick thinking about it. Now, we're above ground and things should be different. I've tried to civilize them, God knows, but there's a limit to a mortal's power. Four children, one male and three females, born in the utter blackness of a cavern miles beneath the surface of an Earth ravaged by atomic winds. I should kill them all, all of them, before they get too large for me to handle.

I've thought about that. Why bother starting over? Except for us, the world is dead. Why not leave it that way? End it now, forget it, and let nature try again in a few billion years if she wants to.

I keep thinking about it. I hold the future in my hand, to caress it and make it live, or to crush it and make it die with a simple closing of my hand. Sometimes I wish it weren't so. Sometimes when I'm alone here with only the wind to whisper forgotten melodies and the trees to wave skeleton limbs against the night, and the children are prowling like animals in search of food— But I won't kill them. I should, probably, but I won't.

We five are the last, the culmination of an evolution that took a million years. Where next, I wonder? Will my children or my children's children or *their* children touch another radioactive match to the world and watch

it go up in flames, watch it explode once more like some cosmic firecracker?

That's what happened this time. I saw only the beginning of it, but that was enough. Rockets shrieking across the sky like flaming banshees; great blossoms of smoke and flame that shook whole cities apart at the seams; noises like the gates of Hell rumbling open (and perhaps they were); the air beginning to glow like it was on fire, the ground starting to rumble and shake and crack open in great sores.

I remember it well. I was trying to get away from the cities, not realizing that there was no escape anyplace. Scared? I was terrified. I ran into a cave to get away—and the mouth of the cave closed up like a healed wound. I was trapped . . . but I was safe, too.

It was there I met Marla, and that's why I sometimes think that maybe Fate meant it this way. That's one of the reasons I hesitate to kill the children. I've never believed in Fate before, but—well, you never know.

There, in a system of tunnel - connected caverns, safe from the radioactive winds and the fiery blasts, we stayed together and tried not to listen to the death rattles of the outside world. Marla was not pretty, but the pale glow of torchlight and the dying world made her the most desirable woman alive. After awhile, our wood supply gave out, and there came the darkness. And then our food supply was gone, and we went forth into the darkness to find more.

Humanity is persevering. We drank from an underground pool whose water seeped from above through layers and layers of rock. There was no way of testing it for radioactivity, but without water we could not survive so we drank it. Food we found crawling through the dark tunnels or hanging like damp moss on the sides of the caves. There were rabbits and squirrels and rats that had escaped into the tunnels, become imprisoned, and these we ate; and there were other things native to caves that we ate, too. You can get used to anything after awhile, if you have to.

"But what will happen when there is nothing more to be eaten?" Marla wondered.

"We'll worry about that when it happens," I told her.

"Would we turn cannibal?" she insisted.

"What do you mean?"

"It's happened," she said quietly. "Would we draw straws to see who would be eaten? Or would it happen sometime when one of us was asleep—"

"Marla, for God's sake, don't talk like that even as a joke! We'll find food, and we'll live, and we'll get back to the surface. But don't joke about something like that!"

"Yes," she said slowly in the darkness, "yes, I was only joking."

I felt relief flood me at that, but later I wondered despite myself if she had been even remotely serious. Darkness and lack of food can do unhealthy things to a person. Besides, the water might easily be contaminated, and anything might result. I knew one thing, though—we had to get out or become animals, or worse than animals.

"We could always eat the children," she said, not too long afterwards, when we were searching for food.

"We could," I admitted, knowing she could not be serious this time, "if we had any."

"We will have," she promised. . . .

It seemed much sooner than the conventional nine months—but then in the darkness you couldn't gauge the passage of time. How long we were down there I don't know, but it must have been years and years. Somehow we managed to exist. We were both thin to the point of emaciation, but we lived; I think we even adapted to the environment. I wondered what the children would look like.

I wanted children, of course, as did Marla; when we got back to the surface—never once did I doubt that! —a family would get the rebirth of Earth started again. It was a pleasant thought being a new Adam, and I dreamt often of the day I would lead my children into the sunlight.

The day came years later.

One of the children found the opening and the sunlight, a shaft of pure gold falling to the cave floor. My eyes burned at the glare, but the children ran to it, chattering excitedly, and felt of the column of light as though it were something solid. I could feel my heart beating wildly for the first time in many long years; it was as though it had been stopped all this time and only just started again.

"The outside," I breathed. "Marla, the *outside!*"

I took her hand in mine and led her toward the opening. She trembled and grew stiff as we approached the light.

"No," she screamed suddenly, pulling away, "it'll burn me, it'll burn me! I'll die."

"You'll be all right," I said, squinting impatiently to see, and half-pulled her to the opening.

"No!" she screamed again and fainted.

Puzzled, I carried her back down into the cavern, down to the damp, dark cavern, and slowly, slowly, she came alive again.

"The light," she moaned, "the light."

"We've got to get used to it again," I said, though my own eyes were on fire from it. "We can't go on like this forever, staying underground like animals. We've just got to get used to it again, that's all."

But it terrified me just the same. The thought of going up there, out of the cooling darkness, facing that bright, hot glare that seemed capable of peeling the flesh from me. . . .

I tried not to think of it. I tried to remember the days before the world took fire and burned. We must go up again and rebuild the world, I told myself; human beings were meant for a destiny greater than rotting underground.

"No," Marla cried, shrinking back. "I'm not going out. I'm staying here where I belong, where we *both* belong."

I grew angry with her. "We're human beings," I told her. "We belong in the sunlight."

She began to cry. Disgusted, I took her hands and dragged her screaming along the stone corridor toward the shaft of light and into it and out into the light of day. The blinding light came, and with it a great warmth that made my skin burn. She beat against me with frail fists, and I struck her and she fell in the sunlight and lay still.

"Marla," I said, not looking at her. There was no answer.

Eyes closed, I felt the warm glow that flamed against my eyelids. I felt my body tingle with the rays of sun stabbing me with bright shiny needles. Then slowly, slowly, I worked my eyes open again. Colors came—green, black, yellow, brown, green, black, black—sickly mats of grass trying vainly to cover layers and layers of

ashes. Below me, the world fell away into a valley of utter, dismal silence. But the sunlight was beautiful.

At the mouth of the cave, the children looking down at her, Marla lay in the golden sunlight; she was thin, incredibly ugly, with skin as colorless as paste and oozing sores welting her body.

I vomited then, and didn't turn back. It would be a big job, rebuilding the world. . . .

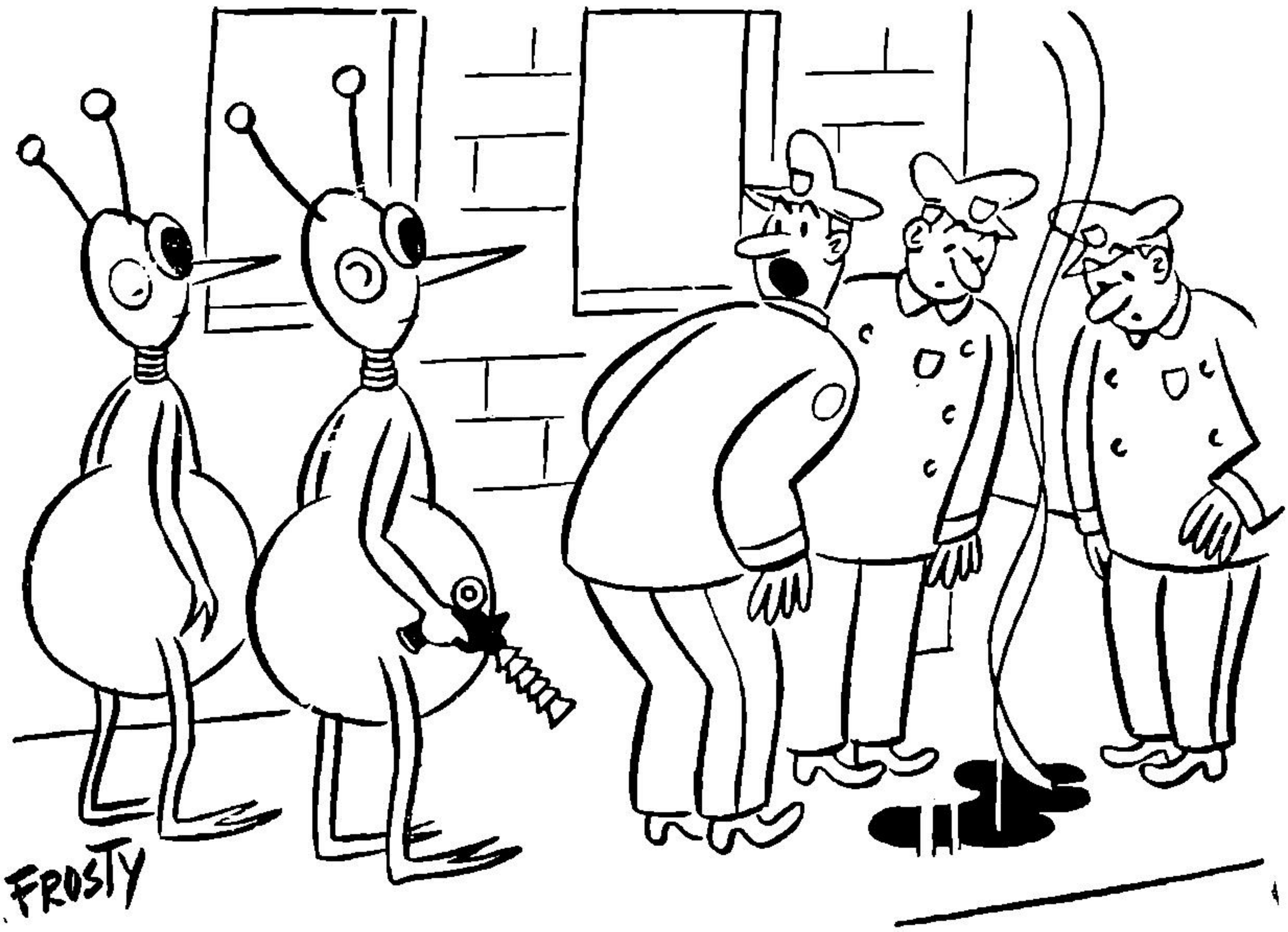
I haven't done very well at it, I'm afraid. The world is in as much ruin as ever, and there's so little time left. The children will have to carry on. No, I won't kill them.

They're getting big now, growing fast, and pretty soon they'll be pushing *me* around. The male will be the leader, of course. He's oldest, strongest, smartest, and very clever for his age. It's still pretty difficult to find food, but our son will manage all right. He said something today that reminded me of a thing his mother said long ago.

He gnashed his teeth and made tearing motions with his claws and shook his hairy body and rustled his wings.

"Someday I'm going to eat you," he said.

And you know, someday I believe he will. **THE END**



"The next time you want to help us out, you'd better let us use our weapons."

SATAN IS MY ALLY

"Yes, I sell souls to the devil. They pay for my immortality!"

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WINGED PLANET

By ADAM CHASE

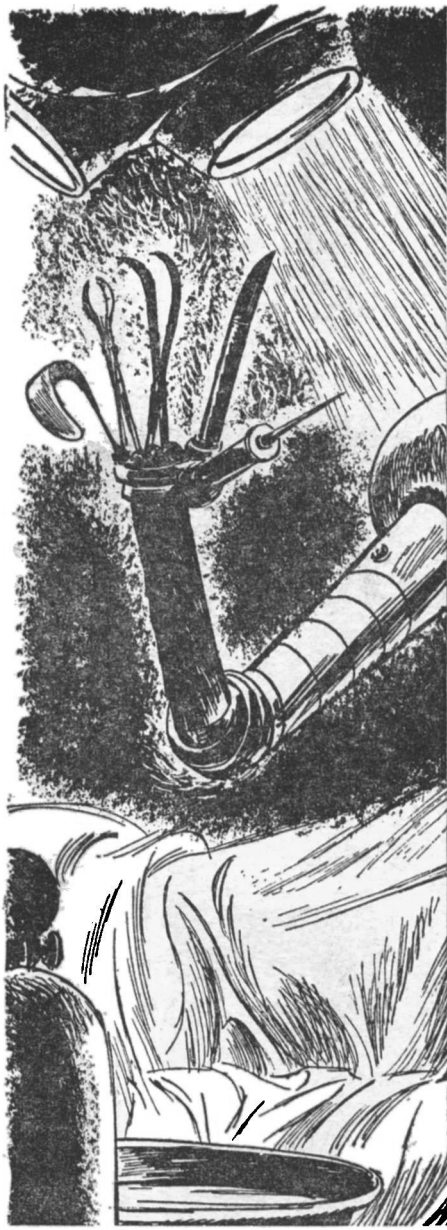
This was an advanced, humanitarian world — peopled by robots that insisted on helping you even if they had to cut you into small pieces to do it.

CLIFF ACORN made a pass at Ann of the Outworlds about fifteen minutes before the *Star of Orion* crashed.

It happened while Ann of the Outworlds stood alone on the observation deck to await the first sight of the star-studded velvet blackness of normal space when the *Star of Orion* cut back in from sub-space. Ann became aware of someone coming up behind her, and started to turn. Then she found herself trapped suddenly in Cliff Acorn's big arms, so she said:

"Cliff, you're acting like a darned fool."

Usually, sarcasm or utter



Joyce helplessly awaited

the steel touch of the robot-surgeon.

indifference worked. The length and breadth of the Milky Way Galaxy, Ann of the Outworlds had had passes made at her. She was an expert in fending them off, but it had been a long time since someone as annoying—and annoyingly persistent — as Cliff Acorn had bothered her.

"What's the matter," he said now in the observation deck of the *Star of Orion,* "I got leprosy or something?"

"No," Ann said, breaking away. "You're a perfectly normal ship's second officer, with all the usual lusts. And you all assume that just because a gal travels alone, and just because she's in my business—"

"I thought you were something special!" Cliff Acorn insisted.

Ann of the Outworlds knew that wasn't true, but didn't argue about it. She coolly lit a cigarette and let the perfume waft toward Cliff Acorn. She was suddenly, intensely aware of her own figure. She had a splendid figure, and knew it. She was wearing her practice leotards with a robe draped over her shoulders and carelessly fastened in front. Ann of the Outworlds was a dancer who had entertained frontiersman on every outworld colony from Sirius to the Swarms of Ophiuchus. It seemed that every time she visited another primitive outworld her reputation sank lower into a morass of rumor and innuendo. And she had learned long ago that there was nothing she could do about it.

While Cliff Acorn, a broad-shouldered blond young man in the uniform of the Interstellar Transport Service, thought of some way to renew the attack, another couple came out on the observation deck. Often, Ann knew, the observation deck of a passenger ship like the *Star of Orion* would be crowded with passengers seeking their first view of the starry vaults of normal space. The *Star of Orion's* passengers, however, seemed to be indifferent to the spectacle, with the exception of the young couple coming out on deck now. As for Ann of the Outworlds, she would never grow accustomed to changeover if she saw it a million times—which, thanks to her profession, almost seemed likely. To see one moment the swirling gray featurelessness of subspace and the next the velvet and diamonds of deepspace was a sight Ann would always marvel at.

Acorn lit his own cigarette. It had a too obviously mascu-

line odor, so Ann turned away distastefully. As she did so, she couldn't help watching the young couple. The man was in his late twenties, Ann's own age; the woman was perhaps five years younger. The way they acted, holding hands and smiling shyly into each other's eyes, they were probably honeymooners.

The boy said: "Happy, darling?"

The girl nodded. "This will only be the fourth time I ever saw changeover."

"I never saw it at all," the boy answered, and then said abruptly: "Is it safe?"

"But you must have seen it when we left Earth, Garry." Ann's latest engagement had been on Earth, which had rapidly lost its central position in interstellar affairs with the coming of cheap subspace travel. Now the Swarms beyond Sagittarius and Ophiuchus had become the center of human culture, a distinction which they certainly merited astrographically.

Garry explained why he had missed changeover while leaving Earth. Ann didn't hear him, not actually trying to eavesdrop. His honeymooning wife did hear him, and laughed.

"I asked you if it's safe," Garry persisted.

"Of course it's safe," his young wife said at once, looking surprised. "Why shouldn't it be safe?"

"I—I don't know, Joyce."

"Old worrywart!"

"No. It isn't that. It's just I—"

Garry went into an explanation in a soft voice, Joyce nodded understandingly, then they kissed. Ann of the Outworlds had not heard the explanation, but knew the explanation didn't matter. The boy Garry was a coward. You could see it in his expression, in the tense way he held himself awaiting changeover, even in the way he looked to his frail bride for assurance and support. Ann suddenly found herself pitying the girl Joyce, who would be saddled all her life with a timid, craven man, unless she decided to ditch him when, some time in the near future, with the honeymoon glow worn thin, she learned it the hard way.

"Now lookit them," Cliff Acorn said, chuckling. "They got the right idea, Ann." He snapped his fingers. "I'm only passing through, baby. Just passing through the world. I want to sample every—"

His hand, while he was talking, had come to rest on Ann's

shoulder and gradually had moved down from it. She stepped back, her cheeks reddening, and slapped his face.

Cliff Acorn laughed softly, to show he took no offense. But the honeymooner Garry, who apparently had never been struck in the face, not even by a woman who had received unwanted attention, winced when her open palm struck Acorn's cheek. Then he looked at his wife and they both smiled as if to say that, married, they were forever beyond that sort of thing.

Cliff Acorn came close to Ann and whispered, "Well, I always say, nothing ventured nothing gained."

It was Ann of the Outworld's turn to laugh. "You're a walking platitude, Mr. Acorn," she said, and watched Cliff Acorn's eyes flatten as he stared at her. Apparently, Cliff Acorn didn't like being made fun of.

". . . perfectly safe," Joyce was reassuring her groom. "If you can picture subspace as a folding over of a two dimensional continuum so that points far apart can suddenly become adjacent . . ."

"I know the theory, hon. I just sometimes feel uneasy about things like that."

Before Joyce could answer, before Ann of the Outworlds had time to confirm her snap judgment of the boy Garry, the ship's alarm bells clanged.

"Joyce!" Garry cried.

Cliff Acorn looked at Ann, winced, and sprinted toward the irising door. The door shuttered closed before he got there, though, and he couldn't budge it. At least he took his duty seriously, Ann thought: he had been going inside to help.

The alarm bells clanged again. Joyce and Garry looked at each other without comprehension. Then all at once the *Star of Orion* shuddered throughout its entire length like a convulsively dying animal.

Overhead, the glassite roof of the observation deck spun wildly, and abruptly the gray swirling murk of subspace surrendered to the velvet and diamonds, the diamonds swinging giddily, of deepspace.

"Look out!" Joyce cried.

The deck dipped underfoot and the four of them were tossed toward one bulkhead. The deck swung again, and they went the other way. Then without warning the glassite roof was underfoot.

"Help!" cried Garry.

Ann of the Outworlds looked at Cliff Acorn. There was

blood streaming down his face from a gash on his temple. She looked at the honeymooners. They were locked in each other's arms, the boy sobbing, the girl stroking his hair and probably not having time yet to realize she had married a coward.

Ann wondered if she would live to realize it at all.

Then with a grinding, driving, explosive ripping of metal, the *Star of Orion* struck and spun and bounced and came to a jarring stop.

Ann of the Outworlds felt herself flung through air. Then the whole world seemed to explode inside her head and for a long time she knew nothing. There was blackened and complete void.

She was a tiny, helpless figure at the center of an enormous galaxy twice as big across as the Milky Way. She was being pelted with cosmic debris, and the only protection she had was her skimpy leotard. Stars flashed by and nebulae pinwheeled. Then, slowly, and with infinite difficulty, she opened her eyes.

Pain beat in great waves at the back of her head and stabbed at her eyeballs. She wanted to surrender to it, to sink down into it. She was stretched out on her stomach and there was something wetly warm under her.

She would have surrendered to the pain, except for the flames.

At first she thought she imagined them, as she had imagined the pinwheeling galaxy, but then she saw them more clearly, licking at the broken glassite of the observation dome. She climbed to her hands and knees and felt pain in her shoulder. The warm wetness was blood. Her blood—from a deep gash in her shoulder.

She crawled a little ways and found Cliff Acorn. Both his eyes had been blackened, so she assumed he had a brain concussion. She took his hand and felt for the pulse at his wrist. It beat weakly, erratically. Cliff Acorn was alive—but only just alive.

She found the girl Joyce next. Joyce was half-conscious and screamed with pain when Ann touched her arm. Then Ann looked at the arm. It was broken midway between elbow and wrist, the fracture compound and the white bone protruding.

Garry, also on his knees, was crawling toward Joyce. He looked down at her and cried hoarsely, "Help! My God, someone help us."

"It's all right," Ann said.

"It's going to be all right. We've got to get them out of here before the fire—"

Garry's eyes went big. Then he saw the flames and ran, unthinking, irrational with fear, to the sprung irising door.

"Your wife," Ann said softly, but loud enough for him to hear. He paused at the door. Flames shot abruptly across it, tongues leaping out searchingly. There was now no escape that way.

The observation deck was a shambles. Choking on smoke now, Ann and Garry dragged Joyce away from the fire, leaving her on the floor near one end of the glassite dome, which was badly cracked. Then Ann started to go back for Cliff Acorn.

"I—I'm not going back there," Garry said. "You can't make me go back there."

"He'll die unless we get him out."

"I have my wife—"

"You're a coward," Ann said, using the words like a lash. The boy looked at her and for a moment she thought it hadn't worked. Then, his face set, he took a deep breath and ran back with her to the unconscious Cliff Acorn.

The flames were very close now, but Acorn was still unconscious. Dizzy and almost sick with pain, Ann got down and grasped his armpits. Garry took his legs and they carried him quickly to where they'd set Joyce down. When she looked back, Ann saw that the flames had engulfed the deck where Acorn's unconscious body had been.

Garry knelt alongside Joyce and began to sob. He didn't make any vocal sounds, but his breath came chokingly and his shoulders heaved.

"Quick!" Ann said. "Or we'll all burn to death."

She went to the one wall still untouched by the flame. The metal bench running the length of the wall had been sprung almost completely away from the bulkhead. Its cushions had been scattered across the floor. "Come on," Ann said, "we'll have to yank it loose."

The metal was unpleasantly hot to the touch, but they finally succeeded in getting it loose. With the bench carried like a battering ram between them, Ann and Garry returned to the cracked dome. Without speaking, Garry knowing for once exactly what must be done, they ran at the dome. The makeshift ram hit with a bone-jarring thump and Ann thought the glassite must surely give along the crack.

But all that happened was the sudden appearance of other cracks, smaller, radiating out from the single large one.

The flames crawled hungrily toward them. There was a deadly roaring sound below them which could only mean that the entire interior of the *Star of Orion* was aflame. Even the floor felt hot now. They ran at the glassite again. This time the bench flew from their hands but the dome remained intact.

"Looks like it's no use," Garry groaned.

"Come on. Once more!"

Ann was blinded by the smoke, and choking on it. They ran forward with the bench. It hit, there was a crashing sound, and it flew from their fingers. Then for a brief moment the smoke cleared and the flames were behind them. Through a large rent in the dome Ann thought she could see a strange mauve daylight.

Garry helped her carry Joyce out, the girl whimpering whenever they changed the position of her broken arm. Finally they set her down on some rocks a hundred yards from the stricken *Star of Orion*. The surface of the strange planet seemed to be one continuous jumble of rocks and the mauve glow in the air was a combination of the planet's blue sun and the crimson flames from the spaceship.

Garry sat down near his wife.

"We're going back," Ann said.

The boy shook his head. "Not me. I can't go back there again," he said.

Ann walked around in front of him. "That man was still alive. You know he was still alive. Are you going to let him die?"

"I can't go back. It might explode any second."

Ann turned around and stalked away across the rocks without another word. She couldn't stand there arguing while Cliff Acorn burned to death. On the other hand, she doubted if she could get him free of the ship alone. As for all the others aboard, she knew there was no sense looking. Only the observation deck's location had saved it. Everyone else had either perished in the crash or had been consumed by the flames.

When she had almost reached the blazing ship, Ann heard footsteps on the rocks behind her. She turned around and waited for Garry, then went in through the hole in the dome with him. The smoke was too thick for

them to see through now. They had to feel their way to Cliff Acorn.

Together they carried him from the ship. Ann felt her robe catch and tear on a sliver of glassite. When she pulled free she was wearing the purple leotards only.

They staggered with Acorn across the rocks, learning the hard way that there is nothing so heavy as an unconscious man's dead weight. Finally, with hundred-foot-high flames behind them casting long shadows across the rocks, they deposited Cliff Acorn next to Joyce. Ann staggered wearily to one side and sat down. She couldn't do anything for them now. She was exhausted. She wondered if they could find any sticks to help set Joyce's arm. There didn't seem to be any trees or any signs of life. She flopped down without any of her usual dancer's grace on the rocks and was either immediately asleep or lost consciousness.

She awoke to the sound of screaming. It took her a while to orient herself. The first thing she saw was the gutted hull of the spaceship. It was blackened and smoking, but the flames had died down. That probably meant considerable time had passed, but the blue sun still seemed to hang in the same position in the sky.

Getting up, Ann heard the scream again. At the same moment, Garry cried out for help.

Something beat at the air overhead and an enormous shadow came sweeping down over the rocks. Ann looked up and saw a giant bird with a wingspan of perhaps thirty feet. At first she had thought it was some kind of flying machine, but then she saw the predatory claws, the great jutting beak, the feathered wings.

The scream came from Joyce, who was conscious and who also had seen the bird.

The scream was a mistake.

The bird headed straight for her.

It alighted with a thump and with one enormous clawed leg resting on Joyce's body and the other on Acorn's. Ann ran toward it, shouting, thinking she could distract it. Even Garry, forgetting his fear in the greater emotion of love for his bride, ran at it throwing rocks.

Ignoring them both, great wings beating, the bird rose skyward with Joyce and Acorn.

Ann watched it disappear toward the horizon. When it

was a very small dot whose wings could no longer be seen, she became aware that Garry was no longer with her.

She called his name but got no answer. Finally, where the rocky surface of the unknown planet sloped upwards perhaps a mile away, she saw his running figure. He was running in the direction the giant bird had taken. It was hopeless, of course. He could never overtake the bird. If he ran on that way, without food or water, blindly, hysterically, without any markers on the rock-rubble surface of the world, he would probably die trying. If the bird wanted to feed on Joyce and Acorn, they were probably doomed anyway. As for Ann and Garry, all they had to do was remain with the ship, for an accident in subspace automatically triggers a distress call announcing position and time of the disaster, so it would only be a matter of time before a rescue ship came bursting through the deepspace veil to their rescue.

Meanwhile, though, there was the boy Garry.

Chasing hopelessly after a winged monster.

Still, he had managed to conquer his own cowardice. Ann looked after his tiny figure. She looked back at the ship. Stay here and she'd be comparatively safe. Go running across the unknown rock-rubble after him and she'd probably be lost, never able to find her way back.

But he had conquered his cowardice in a desperate attempt to save his wife. And wouldn't Ann be a coward herself if she didn't go after him?

She looked back at the ship once more, then she started out at a dogtrot after Garry.

The first thing she realized was she had not become tired. She had no idea how long she'd been trotting across the rock-strewn, lifeless terrain, but the effort did not tire her at all. She realized that she'd never overtake Garry, though, because the one view she'd had of him had been of a man sprinting. And, if she didn't become exhausted trotting mile after mile, there was no reason to assume he would tire running.

She stepped up her pace. Pretty soon she was flashing along, her legs pumping, her knees kicking high, the skimpy leotard not resisting the movement of her limbs at all. She did not grow tired. She did not lose her wind. Yet she had done so in the burning ship. She'd come out of it ex-

hausted. Because the ship's atmosphere and the atmosphere of this unknown world were different? Ann gave a mental shrug. She couldn't answer that question, but she'd been around long enough to know that, given a multiplicity of worlds, anything was possible. So why not a world in which the very air you breathed renewed your whole strength despite the effort you used?

The third time Ann looked back, which had been some hours ago if time meant anything on the strange world, she had not seen the ruin of the spaceship.

But the blue sun seemed stationary in the sky, so either time was deceiving or the planet rotated on its axis very slowly, perhaps once in the time it took for a single journey around the primary.

There was a long gradual dip in the ground ahead of her, so Ann could see a great distance. Instinctively she looked skyward, where—if there was going to be trouble—trouble would come from. The sky was a dazzlingly deep blue. There wasn't a cloud in it. Shading her eyes and still running effortlessly, Ann gazed ahead. She squinted. She thought she could see Garry running miles ahead of her across the downward-sloping ground. She shouted his name, but if he heard her he gave no sign. He kept on running farther and farther away.

All at once another figure appeared alongside of him. From this distance that was all Ann could tell. It actually seemed as if the second figure, which appeared to be about a head taller than Garry and manlike, materialized out of nowhere. The figure gleamed in the blue sunlight. It either wore metal—or was made of metal.

Ann redoubled her efforts, but didn't seem to come any closer to the two figures. The gleaming one went close to Garry. Ann squinted at them. The gleaming one picked Garry up. The two figures merged.

Then they disappeared.

Ann thought she heard a faint cry.

She thought she would know the spot when she reached it, for two rocks, like enormous stone sentinels, reared skyward there. It took her a long time to reach the place, but when she did she knew it was the right spot and knew also how the metal creature—or metal-shod creature—had apparently appeared out of nowhere and disap-

peared the same way with Garry.

The two spires of stone stood about fifty yards apart. Between them the rock surface was smooth but bare of life like the rest of the planet.

And beginning at a point bisected by an imaginary line you could draw between the two spires of rock, and running on toward the horizon in a perfectly straight line, was a fissure ten feet across. She wondered where it came from.

It was too straight, Ann told herself, to be anything but artificial. At its starting point, the floor of the fissure was only about four feet below the level of the ground. Ann sat down on the edge, took a breath, and jumped into the fissure. Its floor sloped down at an angle something less than five degrees. Ann walked along it, sure that Garry and the metal creature had come this way. When she had gone a few dozen yards the walls were over her head. As she continued a few dozen yards further, the shadows deepened. Over her head, the fissure opening was still no more than ten feet across. But here on the floor, the fissure spread out. The floor was now thirty or more feet across, and widening as rapidly as it angled deeper into the bowels of the planet.

Finally, the ten-foot-wide fissure overhead was the narrowest of rule-edged slits. Yet strangely light seemed to come from the walls of the fissure. And suddenly the ground felt soft, almost spongy, underfoot. Ann looked down.

The ground was green with moss!

The walls too were green, with moss and lichen growing on them. Somewhere not far away but unseen, water gurgled. The lichen supplied the light by which Ann now saw, since for all intents and purposes she was in a cavern and the rule-edged slit far overhead barely offered any illumination at all. The lichens glowed.

The only guess Ann had was that whatever quality in the atmosphere of the planet endowed her and Garry with tireless energy somehow, paradoxically, prevented other life from living there. So it probably wasn't in the atmosphere of the planet after all: if it didn't apply in the fissure, Ann had to assume it was the planet's sunlight. Experimentally, she ran a few hundred feet. Her breath came quickly and for the first time since setting out after Garry she could feel perspira-

tion dampening her armpits. She slowed to a walk, taking deep lungfuls of air to regain her breath.

Just then a voice inside her head told her, "You are quite right in your surmise. The rays of the blue sun are tremendously beneficial to life already existing but are lethal to the spores of new life."

Ann started. Where had the voice come from? She looked around, saw nothing but the lichen-covered walls. The voice had merely confirmed what she had already guessed. She decided that the uncanny sunlight behaved like plant vitamins in a nursery. Feed flourishing plants and they grow luxuriously; feed tiny seedlings, and you destroy them.

But what about the voice? Telepathy? Then where the source?

Something clanked in the green dimness ahead of Ann. Her heart bobbed into her throat, pounding there and making it difficult for her to breathe. She wanted to run. She knew what was coming, because she had seen it make off with Garry. Then, thinking of the others, who were in here somewhere, Garry certainly, Joyce and Acorn very likely, she stood her ground.

The robot clanked toward her.

It was not metal-shod. It was metal. A metal man, or a manlike metal creature, seven feet tall. The voice spoke in her head again, saying one word: "Come."

"What if I don't want to?"

Silently inside her head the metallic voice laughed.

"Are—are my companions where you're going to take me?"

"Come."

"Are they?"

"Yes. Yes, of course," Ann heard impatiently.

Then a metal arm wrapped itself around her waist. She felt incredible strength in it, then her feet were lifted off the ground. With a loud clanking, the robot began to run with her. Its joints squeaked. Ann didn't say anything, but thought: *it's just a machine*—with a wild impulse to laugh —*and it needs oil.*

The robot, which apparently could read minds as well as deliver telepathic messages, said, "You're right again. There is almost no oil on this planet. We ration it. We rust. We'll die of the rust some day. That's why we have to hurry."

"Hurry about what?" Ann asked.

Instead of answering her immediately as it clanked along, going deeper and deeper into the fissure, the robot merely created the mental image of laughter in her mind. Finally, it said: "Hurry our creation."

"Creation?"

The robot didn't answer. It ran at the wall abruptly and a section of the wall slid soundlessly back. They went inside. Ann was deposited on a floor in darkness. She heard the robot clanking away and called after it, but it didn't answer. Ahead of her she saw a tiny pinpoint of light and walked toward it. Soon the pinpoint increased to the size of a small coin held at arm's length. It became a light shining at the top of a high, broad door. As Ann approached the door, it slid ceilingward. Ann went through.

There was a brightly lit room. In it were Garry, looking scared and bewildered, and Acorn and Joyce, looking quite happy. Acorn's eyes were not blackened. Both of Joyce's arms were perfectly normal.

"But—but you're both injured!" Ann gasped. "Concussion, broken bone . . ."

"They cured us," Acorn said jauntily. He snapped his fingers. "Just like that."

Before she could answer a voice in Ann's head said: "Prepare for vivisection."

Apparently this was new to the others too. They looked at each other, not knowing what to expect. The robot—Ann thought it was the one which had brought her since it was the only robot she had seen so far—clanked into the room.

"Strip, please," it said mentally.

They just stood there, staring.

"Remove your garments and prepare for vivisection."

"Hey, listen—" Acorn began.

The robot, reluctantly, it seemed, clanked toward him. Acorn tried to duck out of the way, but one big metal hand pinned him against the wall. The other made a quick motion down the length of Acorn's body to his feet. There was a ripping sound. Acorn stood there naked.

Ann looked at the others. In the face of the fear clawing at her entrails, embarrassment would have been foolish. She could tell the others felt that way too.

The robot clanked about impatiently. Ann removed her leotard.

"I regret the necessity of this," the robot told them telepathically, apologetically, "but if we don't vivisect some specimens, how are we ever going to learn how to create the human race?"

"Vivisection!" Joyce sobbed, and fainted.

Light suddenly flooded the dim room. Garry caught his wife before she could fall. He eased her to the floor, looking very scared himself but determined and masculinely protective. Whatever else might happen, Ann thought with approval, their adventure wasn't doing the boy Garry any harm.

The robot took Joyce's still body away from Garry, who was flung against the wall when he tried to protect his wife. Then Joyce's body was strapped to a flat slab-like stone table, the robot unscrewed a metal plate from its own great chest, then unscrewed its own right hand at the wrist, reached into the hole revealed in its chest, withdrew a wrist with a set of surgical tools instead of fingers, screwed the strange new hand into place on its right arm, and approached the table where Joyce lay, flexing scalpel, forceps, clamp and an index finger of sutures on its new hand.

Garry promptly jumped on the robot's back and was just as promptly dashed to the floor.

Even Acorn's face looked white, but he said: "They cured her arm and my concussion. Whatever they do they can undo." He added softly, so Ann and not Garry heard him: "I think."

The robot stared down impassively at Joyce. Garry was sobbing. Ann, naked and unarmed, said to Acorn, likewise naked and unarmed, and as helpless as she was: "All over

the galaxy, humanoid races—as if we had some common origin. And here, a planet with robots, and giant birds, but no men. But men must have created the robots, Cliff. They're manlike, aren't they? Then the men either died or went away, we'll never know which."

"Maybe," Acorn suggested, "they never lived here at all. Maybe, somehow, the manlike robots got transported here, say in a runaway ship or something. Maybe the ship crashed, as ours did. The robots were built to be man's servants, but they had no servant's role to perform since they had no masters."

"So," Ann finished for him, the idea beginning to make very good sense, "the robots could think of only one thing—to recreate man, to serve him! Then, assuming there are birds here—"

"Not just the giant bird," said Acorn. "I saw others in the fissure, some of them as small as hummingbirds, and all sizes up to that monster."

"The robots experiment on the native population of birds. God knows how long they've been here. They've learned a great deal about the processes of life. The great variety in bird sizes proves that. But this—this is probably the first time they have human beings to work with."

Acorn was awe-struck. "Even thirtieth-century man, with all his science, can't alter life the way these robots apparently can!" There was a new light, a special kind of wild eagerness, in Acorn's eyes. Ann didn't like it but at the time whatever Acorn thought or felt hardly seemed important. He said: "Can you imagine the power a man could have if he ever mastered the secrets of life these robots have mastered?"

The robot-surgeon hadn't moved. Apparently it had been listening to them. Now, when there was a pause in their conversation, the surgical hand swept down toward Joyce's bare breast.

"Wait!" Ann cried.

The surgical hand remained poised in midair.

"Were we right? Does what we guessed explain what you are trying to do?" Ann asked, speaking very quickly, earnestly and hopefully. She had realized that when they held the robot's intellectual interest it momentarily forgot Joyce's body on the slab.

"Much to my amazement," the robot declared telepathically, "you have come as close to the truth as we can come.

You see, our brain-synapses are such that our memories deteriorate on events more than fifty years old according to this planet's reckoning. And we have been here far longer than that."

"All you want to do," Ann persisted, an idea forming in her mind, "is create humankind so you can serve it?"

"Precisely." The robot's thought seemed somehow wistful.

"But don't you realize," Ann said triumphantly, driving her point home, "that you no longer have any reason to create humankind. We are here! We don't need creation! You can serve us!"

At first there was no reaction from the robot, not even telepathic rejection of the idea. The surgical hand lifted slowly and Ann thought it would plunge downward into Joyce's breast. But the metal hand came down slowly and went to the chest-plate. Soon the normal five-fingered metal hand had replaced the surgical hand. The robot used it to unfasten the straps which held Joyce. Garry went to her quickly, chafing her wrists, talking to her, pulling at her earlobes. When he lifted Joyce off the slab, she began to sigh.

The robot, meanwhile, clanking loudly, threw itself on the ground before Ann. "Master!" it telepathized. "Forgive my stupidity. You are here at last, at last! Your wish is my absolute command."

Ann said promptly: "We want to return to our ruined ship and wait for rescue. We'll need food. Some of your smaller birds will do quite well, I suppose."

The robot's thought seemed disappointed. "That is all you wish? We have waited so long, and it is so little. Of course, we were never able to comprehend, master, exactly what a human being, since we remember no human beings, would wish for. But we did in truth expect more. Nevertheless, it shall be as you say."

The robot clanked toward the door. And Cliff Acorn, his eyes positively gleaming now, said: "Just a minute."

"Yes, master?"

"How many of you robots are there?"

"A hundred and seventy-eight, master."

"And the birds?"

"They're native to the planet. Except for the insects they feed on here in the cavern and the vegetation which grows along its walls, they're the only life. Of course, we fissured the entrance to the cav-

erns and altered the birds tremendously. We—"

"Can you similarly alter any life forms?" Acorn asked eagerly.

"Yes, master. We hit upon it quite by accident, seeking the power to create life. Given an embryo of any life form, we can cause it to grow to gigantic proportions. You saw for yourselves the bird which brought you here. Since there are so few of us, we had decided that several of the biggest birds should patrol the planet's surface for us, so if anything strange—"

"Yes, yes," Acorn said. "But you can create monsters like that at will?"

"Like that or any size at all, master. We can also alter the basic structure of a life form, making a song bird into a bird of prey, for example."

"Don't you see?" Acorn told the others excitedly. "You could breed a whole new race of men like this! Workers, big and strong; savants, with enormous brain capacities; explorers who could adjust to any environment; fighters with—"

"Maybe what you say is true," Ann told him. "I don't know, and neither do you."

"I only know it's the greatest discovery since—"

"Sure, but don't you think government scientists, working for the best interest of mankind, ought to decide what to do with it?"

"Never!" Acorn shouted. "We found it. It's ours. Or," he added softly, "if you don't want it, then it's mine."

Exasperated, Ann turned to the robot. "You will ignore your recent conversation with this man. You will obey my original command."

"Yes, master," telepathized the robot.

"You will take us to your laboratories and assemble all your robots," Acorn commanded the metal creature.

There was no immediate telepathic answer. The robot, which had never expected divergent human commands, did not know how to react.

Acorn said: "Weren't you disappointed with what she told you to do? Didn't you expect more?"

"Of a certainty, yes, master."

"Good," Acorn said triumphantly. "What I ask is more. You'll do it?"

The robot turned to face Ann, then pivoted, creaking, to stare at Acorn. It was still undecided. Then Acorn added, "Listen to me and I can get you all the oil you need. I can cure your rust."

That decided the robot. "It shall be as you wish, master," it said, and clanked toward the door.

Ann glared at Acorn, who smiled smugly. She knew his type: the passes he had made on shipboard had only been an unimportant sample. His type took what it wanted. Right now it wanted power. For the first time in his life, unexpectedly, Cliff Acorn had a chance at real power. It was up for grabs and, since the honeymooners probably would not be of much help, Ann had to stop him in order to deliver the uncanny power over life into the proper hands. But how was she going to do it? The robot was on Acorn's side. Glibly, Acorn had won it over. A moment ago, they had seemed near safety. Now, thanks to Acorn's wild schemes, they were further from it than they had ever been. For she knew Acorn would stop at nothing to get what he suddenly saw just out of reach in front of him....

Ann did the only thing she could do under the circumstances. She found a rock on the floor and, while Acorn was watching the robot activate the horizontal door, came up behind the ship's officer with the rock overhead. As she brought it down, hard enough to stun but not to kill, hoping that with Acorn unconscious the robot would obey her, something made the man turn around instinctively.

He shouted an oath and warded off the blow, then hit Ann in the face with his clenched left fist. She found herself dumped neatly on the floor and looked up at him, tasting the saltiness of blood in her mouth. Joyce and Garry looked shocked. Acorn said, "I hope I won't have to do that again." And, when Ann didn't respond, Acorn told the robot: "If you see any of them attacking me in the future, feel free to kill them. That's an order."

The robot telepathized at once that it understood.

They all left the operating cavern together.

Ann's chance came several hours after the meeting with the robots. She did not actually see the meeting. With Joyce and Garry she was conducted into a small cavern, the overhead door came grating down, and they were left alone. Hours passed, although Ann could not tell how long it had actually been.

Finally, the door slid up and a robot came in for them. She did not know if it was the same robot as before. This one

carried a bird as big as a bald eagle on its metal wrist the way a falconer carries a falcon. The bird's head darted, the eyes looked cruelly at them, the talons clawing nervously at the metal wrist, scraping against the metal. The bird looked like an eagle, too.

"Which one of you," the robot asked telepathically, "is called Ann?"

"I'm Ann."

"Then you are to come with me. The others stay."

"What for?" Ann asked.

At first the robot didn't answer. Then it telepathized: "My only concern is to serve man, the master. Come."

The "master," of course, was Cliff Acorn. Joyce and Garry said good-bye almost as if they thought they wouldn't see Ann again.

"He's mad," Joyce said, "isn't he?"

"Mad with power. A lot of men would be."

"And you're going to try to stop him?"

Instead of answering, Ann said, "Apparently he doesn't think I can. He sent for me."

Then she obeyed the robot and the door slammed down behind her. She followed the robot with the perched eagle.

Acorn led her into a room which the robots had prepared to his specifications. She was amazed they could work so rapidly. The room was like an outdoor living room with exotic plants and trees and songbirds busy in their branches. The cavern ceiling was lofty, enhancing the outdoor impression. The birds sang sweetly.

"Listen," Acorn greeted her enthusiastically, "it surpassed everything I hoped for. They can do anything—anything with life, Ann, except actually create it. They can grow new tissue for old, like starfish and lobsters can on Earth, they can breed any kind of mutation they wish, they can . . . but take my word for it. Do you know what this means?"

"You already told me," Ann said coldly.

"No, I mean for you."

"I?"

"Ann, I want you to share it with me. That hasn't changed, how I feel about you."

"Oh, sure," Ann said, looking at the robot with the bird of prey on its metal wrist. "With a robot to guard me all the time. Don't you see, Cliff, I'd never agree to what you're doing." Ann made one final attempt to ignite a spark of decency in him. "I guess I'm like the robots. I want to—well, to serve man too. I

couldn't keep a thing like this for myself."

"To serve man!" Acorn scoffed. "You know, those robots are almost pathetic, the way they almost fight with each other to do my bidding. All their existence, they've waited to serve man. They'll do anything for me. Anything."

"But you won't change your mind?" She knew she was hoping for the impossible.

He did not answer, but only smiled. Then he took Ann into his arms forcibly and kissed her hard. She fought him with her small fists, but her strength couldn't match his. The robot looked at them. The robot seemed concerned. The perched bird watched them restlessly. Once its wings spread but the robot stared at it, apparently telepathizing, and the bird relaxed.

Acorn let her go and stepped back, panting. He taunted her: "What's the matter, don't you think I can do it? I realize there's a rescue ship, probably here right now, probably searching the planet for us. Well, I've got plans for that ship. I'm having the robots prepare a portable lab for me. Some of them are waiting to take over the ship, so I'll be able to begin experimenting at once. I thought a hard core of . . ."

But Ann wasn't listening now. She had heard enough. Mad with his dreams of power, Acorn wouldn't stop. Ann really didn't know how far he could get, for she only had his word to go on regarding what the robots could do. But this much was sure: the men aboard the rescue ship, unwary, unsuspecting, were doomed. And so, probably, were Joyce and Garry. . . .

As if in response to her words, Acorn said, "Oh, I almost forgot. Experiments are beginning at once—with Joyce and Garry as subjects."

"You wouldn't!"

Acorn smiled.

And, looking at his smile, Ann knew what she must do. Even if it meant her life. Almost certainly, it would mean her life, but it was her only chance, Joyce's and Garry's only chance, the only hope for those aboard the rescue ship, and possibly for mankind—

Ann raked her fingernails across Acorn's cheeks, bringing blood on both sides of his face. He was so utterly surprised, he just stood there with the long, deep, parallel scratches quickly reddening and wettening. Then Ann said, clearly and distinctly: "I

want to kill you, Acorn. I'm trying to kill you."

Then she ran.

She heard the robot clanking after her, and suddenly she knew fear. She stumbled and almost fell, but kept going. At the far end of the cavern was a narrow corridor of metallic stone. The stone gave way to metal. Ann kept running, breathless now. The robot's clanking echoed inexorably behind her. The bird of prey screamed, then she heard its big wings fluttering. Ann looked up, and tripped, and fell. Her leotards, which she had hastily donned before following the robot to Cliff Acorn, ripped from armpit to hip. Then the bird was upon her fiercely, its wings beating at her, its talons ripping, its head darting, the sharp yellow beak seeking her eyes. She screamed, cowering on the floor of the passage, but heard nothing. She was almost paralyzed with fright.

Then the robot loomed near her and must have telepathized something to the bird, which withdrew and landed on its wrist perch.

"You tried to kill him?" asked the robot.

She looked up at it. She stood up. "Yes," she said in a very soft voice. Fear was a wild pulse beat in her throat.

"I was ordered to kill you if you tried—"

The walls seemed to be closing in on her. She couldn't breathe. "Yes," she said again.

The robot picked her up by her legs and swung her once against the metal wall, crushing her skull and breaking her neck.

She died instantly.

Light and pain. . . .

Seething. . . .

Formless horror. . . .

A long time coming out of it, have to hurry, hurry or it will be too late, and think, think with every atom of your being—

SERVE MAN, YOU MUST SERVE MAN, THE MORE MAN NEEDS YOUR HELP, THE MORE YOU MUST SERVE HIM.

Think, think, think. . . . Doesn't a sick man need more help than a well one? And a dead human? What about a dead human?

"Yes," a voice seemed to say. At least the human being in the process of miraculous healing in the incredible laboratory of the robots thought that was what the voice said.

Robots—

Drifting in and out of vision, bringing things, touching, repairing, healing. . . .

"Yes, master."

"We want to serve you, master."

She sat up. She touched her head. It was whole. She could move her neck. She was Ann of the Outworlds. Alive.

"The boy and the girl," she said. "Are they—all right?"

"Yes, master."

"Then bring them."

Ten minutes later, Ann was looking at Joyce and Garry, who hadn't been harmed. Joyce said, "They strapped us down on those horrible operating tables again. They were going to do—terrible things. They just stopped. I don't know why."

Ann said: "Because I was killed."

They stared at her open-mouthed.

"Because it's their function to serve man, not to harm him. I had to take that gamble. It was the only thing I could do. I had them kill me. Then they stopped everything. They dropped whatever they were doing to heal me. They're healers. They're going to be the best healers mankind has ever known—if they don't fall into the hands of people like Cliff Acorn." She stopped talking and looked up at one of the robots. She said: "You must restrain Acorn. He doesn't want to serve and heal. Do you understand?"

"We understood as soon as you died," the mental voice said. "He is restrained. We await your command."

"Go out and find the people from the rescue ship. Bring them here."

There would be government agents aboard the ship. There always were, in the event of sabotage. Ann would turn what she knew over to them. She was almost glad to relinquish the responsibility. She knew the robots would some day be a great force for mankind's benefit.

Garry said: "You taught me something, Ann. I—I won't be afraid any longer."

"Afraid?" Joyce cried indignantly. "Who said you were ever afraid?"

But Garry winked at Ann. Ann smiled at them happily, feeling very good already.

THE END

A MOMENT OF PEACE

By WILLIAM P. SALTON

An age of war, then an age of peace. This pattern, repeated endlessly, forms the backdrop of history. But a question: Which is the dreadful interlude preceding the other?

THE ship was brought down in a smooth landing by Commander Ajax Holcomb. He slumped forward in his seat, bone-tired, brain-tired, soul-tired.

Beside him, Siebold woke with a start, he twisted around, and peered out through the port at his elbow. The landscape came into focus—vast, rolling, green and empty. No trees. No landmarks. Only the green, green earth. So long unvisited. He turned and laid his hand on Ajax's shoulder. "We're home!" he said.

"Home!" Ajax sighed and rubbed a rough hand over his gray, cropped head. Slowly his thin, lined face relaxed into a smile. "Home," he said.

"Yeah," Siebold grunted. "A couple of bloody heroes. Where's the reception committee? Where's the dancing in the streets? In fact, where the hell are the streets?"

Ajax laughed. "You'll get your dancing soon enough. "Come on, old son. See how the earth fits your feet."

Outside, they took a few cautious steps; drew in great gulps of air. Gradually their muscles relaxed. Then Siebold threw himself face down on the earth.

"Grass!" he muttered, and buried his face in it. "After five years of satellite-hopping!" He pulled a blade with great care and chewed it thoughtfully. Then he turned and looked up at Ajax.

"Did you *know* it would work—the purification?"

"It had to work! Even twelve years of hydrogen warfare couldn't wipe out every living thing. The humans, yes. And probably most of the larger animals. But given time, the earth had to live again!"

"Five years! The best years of our lives. And what did we do with them? After the war, after complete victory—just when we should have been able to come home, to marry and settle down. What happened?"

"A few years delay. But we're back now. Come on. We've got to make us a new world."

Siebold looked around at the rolling land that sloped gently down toward a ribbon of blue water. Once fertile farms had dotted this land, with houses and people. Now it was up to him and his few hundred remaining comrades to bring it all alive again. There were so few of them and the earth was so vast. Siebold looked up into the sky. "They'll be waiting," he said.

"Better signal them in."

The sky was soon filled with the whine of motors as the ships came in low over the horizon. In twos and threes, they circled in, swung overhead and swooped down to abrupt, jolting landings.

The men shouted and danced, waving their arms as each new crew debarked.

The voice of Commander Holcomb boomed out over a loudspeaker, "Attention, men! You know the plans. We'll unload and start at once."

The men went to work. Prefab buildings began to take shape. Power lines were strung. Motors began to hum. Siebold tramped back and forth among the men, directing, encouraging, scolding.

By noon, a field kitchen was in operation. The men rested, talking of their plans, wondering how long it would be before the women and children would be brought back.

Holcomb stood watching anxiously as the sonar station was made ready for its first test. A foolish worry kept nagging him.

"Get on with it, boys," he urged them.

Finally the last piece of equipment was in place. He stepped forward then, his face grim. "All right, Hank," he told the senior sonar engineer. "Throw it!"

This was it. Now they would find out if their calculations were correct. If they

were, really, the only humans left on earth.

The motor gave a low hum and whir. Then, distinctly, the waiting men heard the soft twitter of birds. From somewhere, a wind sounded through branches of trees. Earth sounds. Peace sounds.

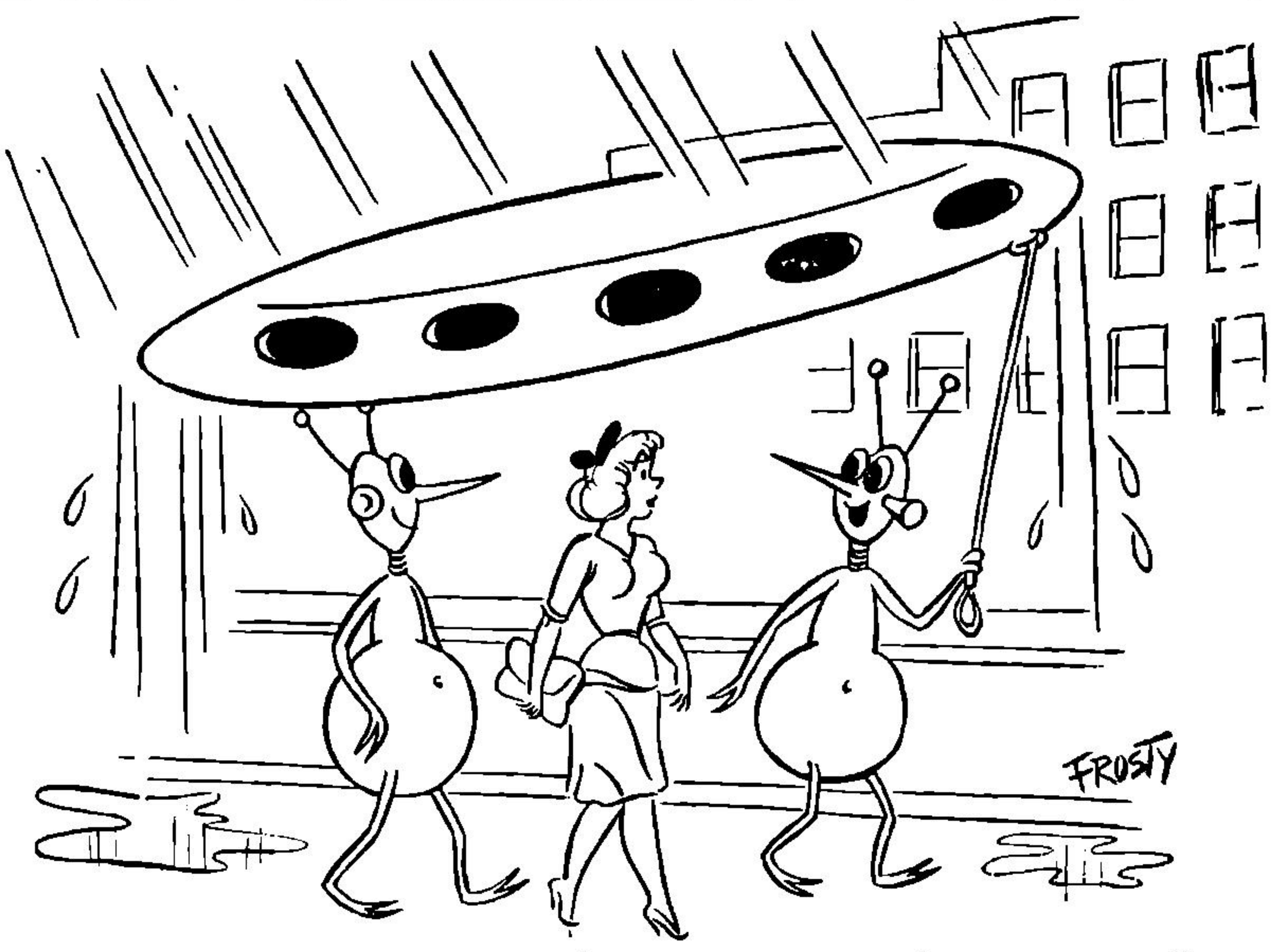
Holcomb drew a deep breath. He let his shoulders relax slowly. He nodded to Hank and started to turn away. Then he heard it. The shrill, metallic click and whine that meant only one thing. Men. Men at work somewhere on the earth. Men, busy with machines, laboratories, factories. He twisted the dials and the screen glowed. Swiftly he made some calculations on a pad. Six, seven thousand miles away. Somewhere across the earth other men were at work. And Holcomb knew where.

"Get Siebold, Thomas and Quentin," he told Hank.

By the time the men arrived, his decision was made.

"The laboratories are ready," he said grimly. "All the blueprints are prepared. You have just two weeks to turn out enough bombs to wipe the enemy off the earth. Get to work." Then he turned and walked away—across the good green Earth.

THE END



"And now you're supposed to give us your phone number."

■ ■ ■

COSMIC KILL

(Synopsis of Previous Installment)

LON ARCHMAN *of Universal Intelligence has been sent to Mars to assassinate* DARRIEN, *the shrewd madman who threatens Earth. Darrien had established an empire on Venus, destroyed five years earlier by Earth spaceships—but Darrien had fled to Mars and built an empire of even greater strength. It is Archman's job to find Darrien and kill him — a job complicated by the fact that Darrien is known to utilize several orthysynthetic duplicate robots indistinguishable from himself.*

At the same time, HENDRIN, *a blue Mercurian in the pay of Krodrang, Overlord of Mercury, has arrived on Mars for similar reasons: to kill Darrien and transfer his secret weapons to Mercury. When Archman first encounters the Mercurian, Hendrin is with a captive Earthgirl,* ELISSA HALL, *whom he has purchased from a pair of drunken Venusian soldiers. Hendrin means to sell the girl to Darrien and thus gain access to the palace. Archman decides to follow Hendrin.*

The Mercurian persuades DORVIS GRAAL, *Darrien's Viceroy, to give him a pass to Darrien. Archman, using the device of accusing Hendrin of being an assassin, likewise gets past the Viceroy — but this time Dorvis Graal has doubts, and orders pickup of both Hendrin and Archman for questioning.*

Archman is caught in the tunnel that leads to Darrien's palace. Hendrin and Elissa get through and the Mercurian shows the girl to Darrien, who is immediately taken by her beauty and buys her.

However, MERYOLA, *Darrien's mistress, is jealous of the newcomer. She bribes Hendrin to spirit Elissa away from Darrien and hide her in the dungeons of the palace.*

Archman and Elissa, who had met briefly before, now meet again — in the same cell. And all signs point to their executions the following morning.

■ ■ ■

COSMIC KILL

By ROBERT ARNETTE

The final installment of a distinguished two-part serial in the old science-fiction tradition. Read the synopsis on the preceding page and then thrill to the exploits of some fabulous characters—human and otherwise.

IN THE darkness of the cell, Archman eyed the shadow-etched figure of the girl uneasily. He was twenty-three; he had spent six years in Universal Intelligence, including his training period. That made him capable of handling tusked Martians and finny Plutonians with ease, but a sobbing Earthgirl—? There were no rules in the book for that.

Suddenly the girl sat up, and Archman saw her wipe her eyes. "Why am I crying?" she asked. "I should be happy. Tomorrow they're going to kill me—and that's the greatest favor I could wish for."

"Don't talk like that!"

"Why not? Ever since Darrien's raiders grabbed me on Planetoid Eleven, I've just been bought and sold over and over, bargained for, used as a pawn in one maneuver after another. Do you think I care if they kill me now?"

Archman was silent. Flickering rays of light from somewhere outside bobbed at random in the cell, illuminating the girl's almost bare form from time to time. He wanted to talk gently to her, to take her in his arms, to comfort her—

But he couldn't. He was a trained assassin, not a smooth-talking romancer. The words wouldn't come, and he crouched back on his heels, feeling the throbbing pain from his beating heart and the even sharper pain of not being able to speak.

It was the girl who broke the silence. She said, "And what of you? You're a renegade, a traitor to your home world. How will you feel when you die tomorrow? Clean?"

"You don't understand," Archman said tightly. "I'm not—" He paused. He didn't dare to reveal the true nature of his mission.

Or did he? What difference

The agile brain of Darrien and the lush body of Elissa combined

to form a deadly stalemate.

did it make? In an hour or so, he would be taken to the Interrogator—and most assuredly they would pry from his unwilling subconscious the truth. Why not tell the girl now and at least go to death without *her* hating him? The conflict within him was brief and searing.

"You're not what?" she asked sarcastically.

"I'm not a renegade," he said, his voice leaden. "You don't understand me. You don't know me."

"I know that you're a cold-blooded calculating murderer. Do I need to know anything else, Archman?"

He drew close to her and stared evenly at her. In a harsh whisper he said, "I'm an Intelligence agent. I'm here to assassinate Darrien."

There, he thought. He'd made his confession to her. It didn't matter if the cell were tapped, though he doubted it—the Interrogator would dredge the information from him soon enough.

She met his gaze. "Oh," she said simply.

"That changes things, doesn't it? I mean—you don't hate me any more, do you?"

She laughed—a cold tinkle of a sound. "Hate you? Do you expect me to *love* you, simply because you're on the

same side I am? You're still cold-blooded. You're still a killer. And I hate killers!"

"But—" He let his voice die away, realizing it was hopeless. The girl was embittered; he'd never convince her that he was anything but a killing machine, and it didn't matter which side he was on. He rose and walked to the far corner of the cell. He remained silent.

After a few moments he said, "I don't even know your name."

"Do you care?"

"You're my cellmate on the last night of my life. I'd like to know."

"Elissa. Elissa Hall."

He wanted to say, *it's a pretty name,* but his tongue was tied by shame and anger. Bitterly he stared at the blank wall of the cell, reflecting that this was an ironic situation. Here he was, locked in a cell with a practically nude girl, and—

He stiffened. "Do you hear something?"

"No."

"I do. Listen."

"Yes," she said a moment later. "I hear it!"

Footsteps. The footsteps of the Interrogator.

Cautiously, the blue Mercurian touched the stud of the door-communicator just outside Meryola's suite.

"Who's there?" The voice was languid, vibrant.

"Hendrin. The Mercurian."

"Come in, won't you?"

The door slid aside and Hendrin entered. Meryola's chamber was as luxuriously-appointed a suite as he had ever seen. Clinging damasks, woven with elaborate designs and figures, draped themselves artistically over the windows; a subtle fragrance lingered in the air, and, from above, warm jampulla-rays glowed, heating and sterilizing the air, preserving Meryola's beauty.

As for Meryola herself, she lay nude on a plush yangskin rug, bronzing herself beneath a raylamp. As Hendrin entered, she rose coyly, stretched, and without sign of embarrassment casually donned a filmy robe. She approached Hendrin, and the usually unemotional Mercurian found himself strangely moved by her beauty.

"Well?" Her tone was business-like now.

"You ask of the girl?"

"Of what else?"

Hendrin smiled. "The girl has been disposed of. She lies in the dungeon below."

"Has anyone seen you take her there? The mistress of

the wardrobe, perhaps? That one's loyal to Darrien, and hates me; I suspect she was once Darrien's woman, before she aged." A shadow of anger passed over Meryola's lovely face, as if she were contemplating a fate in store for herself.

"No one saw me, your highness. I induced her to leave the wardrobe-room and took her there by the back stairs. I handed her over to the jailer with orders to keep her imprisoned indefinitely. I gave him a hundred credas."

Meryola nodded approvingly. She crossed the room, moving with the grace of a Mercurian sun-tiger, and snatched a speaking-tube from the wall.

"Dungeons," she ordered.

A moment later Hendrin heard a voice respond, and Meryola said, "Was an Earth-girl brought to you just now by a large Mercurian? Good. The girl is to die at once; these are my orders. No, fool, no written confirmation is needed. The girl's a traitor to Darrien; what more do you need but my word? Very well."

She broke the contact and turned back to Hendrin. "She dies at once, Mercurian. You've been faithful. Faithful, and shrewd—for Darrien pays you to bring the girl here, and Meryola pays you to take her away."

She opened a drawer, took out a small leather pouch, handed it to Hendrin. Tactfully he accepted it without opening it and slipped it into his sash.

"Your servant, milady."

Inwardly he felt mildly regretful; the girl *had* come in for raw treatment. But soon she'd be out of her misery. In a way, it was unfortunate; with the girl alive he might have had further power over Meryola. Still, he had gained access to the palace, which was a basic objective, and he had won the gratitude of Darrien's mistress, which was the second step. As for the third—

"Lord Darrien will be angry when he finds the girl is missing, milady. There's no chance he'll accuse me—"

"Of course not. He'll be angry for a moment or two, but I think *I'll* be able to console him." She yawned delicately, and for an instant her gown fluttered open. She did not hurry to close it. Hendrin wondered if, perhaps, she longed for some variety after five years of Darrien's embraces.

"Our master must be

pleased to have one so fair as you," the blue Mercurian said. He moved a little closer to Meryola, and she did not seem to object. "Legend has it that he trusts you with his inmost secrets—such as the identity of his robot duplicates."

Meryola chuckled archly. "So the galaxy knows of the orthysynthetics, eh? Darrien's Achilles heel, so to speak. I thought it was a secret."

"It is as widely known as your loveliness," Hendrin said. He was nearly touching Meryola by now.

Frowning curiously, she reached out and touched his bare shoulder. She rubbed her forefinger over the Mercurian's hard shell and commented, "You blue ones are far from thin-skinned, I see."

"Our planet's climate is a rigorous one, milady. The shell is needed."

"So I would imagine. Rough-feeling stuff, isn't it? I wonder what the feel of it against my whole body would be like . . ."

Smiling, Hendrin said, "If milady would know—"

She edged closer to him. He felt a quiver of triumph; through Meryola, he could learn the secret of Darrien's robot duplicates. He extended his massive arms and gently caressed her shoulders.

She seemed to melt into him. The Mercurian started to fold her in his arms. Then his hypersensitive ears picked up the sound of relays clicking in the door.

In one quick motion he had pushed her away and bent stiffly, kneeling in an attitude of utter devotion. It was none too soon. Before she had a chance to register surprise, the door opened.

Darrien entered.

Lon Archman crouched in the far corner of the cell, listening to the talk going on outside.

A cold Martian voice was saying, "There's an Earthman here. Dorvis Graal wants him brought to Froljak the Interrogator for some questions."

"Certainly." It was the Plutonian jailer who spoke. "And how about the girl? Do you want her too?"

"Girl? What girl? My orders say only to get the Earthman. I don't know anything about a girl."

"Very well. I'll give you the man only." The Plutonian giggled thickly. "And when Froljak's through with him, I guess you can bring the shattered shell back to me

and I'll put it out of its misery. Froljak is very thorough."

"Yes," the Martian said ominously. "Take me to the cell."

Suddenly Archman was conscious of the girl's warmth against him, of her breasts and thighs clinging to him.

"They're going to take you away!" she said. "They're going to leave me here alone."

"A moment ago you said you hated me," Archman reminded her bluntly.

She ignored him. "I don't want to die," she sobbed. "Don't let them kill me."

"You'll be on your own now. I'm going to be Interrogated." He shuddered slightly. The capital "I" on "Interrogated" was all too meaningful. It was an inquisition he would never survive.

"Is this the cell?" the Martian asked, outside.

"That's right. They're both in there."

The cell-door began to open. Elissa huddled sobbing on the floor. Archman realized he had been a fool to give up so easily, to even allow the thought of death to enter his mind while he still lived.

"When the Martian comes in," he whispered, "throw yourself at his feet. Beg for mercy; do anything. Just distract him."

Her sobbing stopped, and she nodded.

Archman flattened himself against the wall. The Martian, a burly, broad-shouldered, heavy-tusked specimen, entered the cell.

"Come, Earthman. Time for some questions."

Elissa rose and leaped forward. She threw herself at the Martian, groveling before him, clasping his ankles appealingly.

"What? Who are you?"

"Don't let them kill me! Please—I don't want to die! I'll do anything! Just get me out of here!"

The Martian frowned. "This must be the Earthgirl," he muttered. To Elissa he said, "I'm not here for you. I want the Earthman. Is he here?"

"Don't let them kill me!" Elissa wailed again, wrapping herself around the Martian's legs.

Archman sprang.

He hit the Martian squarely amidships, and the evil-smelling breath left the alien in one grunted gust. At the same moment Elissa's supplication turned into an attack; with all her strength she tugged at the surprised

Martian, knocked him off balance.

The zam-gun flared and ashed a chunk of the wall. Archman drove a fist into the Martian's corded belly, and the alien staggered. Archman hit him again, and smashed upward from the floor to shatter a tusk. A gout of Martian blood spurted.

The Martian thrashed about wildly; Archman saw a blow catch Elissa and hurl her heavily against the wall. He redoubled his own efforts and within moments had efficiently reduced the Martian to a sagging mass of semi-conscious flesh, nothing more. He seized the zam-gun.

"Elissa! Come on!"

But the girl was slumped unconscious on the floor. He took a hesitant step toward her, then whirled as a voice behind him cried, "What's all the noise around here?"

It was the Plutonian jailer. And the door was beginning to close.

Nimbly Archman leaped through, as the micronite door clanged shut on the girl and the unconscious Martian. The Plutonian had done whatever had to be done to close the cell door. Now he was fumbling for a weapon.

The fish-man's wide mouth bobbed in astonishment as Archman sprang toward him.

"The Earthman! How—who—?"

Viciously Archman jabbed the zam-gun between the spread lips and fired. The Plutonian died without a whimper, his head incinerated instantly.

Archman turned back to the door. He heard Elissa's faint cries within.

But there was no sign of a lever. How did the door open? He ran up and down the length of the cell block, looking for some control that would release the girl.

There was none.

"Step back from the door. I'm going to try to blast it open."

He turned the zam-gun to full force and cut loose. The micronite door glowed briefly, but that was all. A mere zam-gun wouldn't break through.

Angrily Archman kicked at the door, and a hollow boom resounded. Time was running short, and the girl was irretrievably locked in. The door obviously worked on some secret principle known only to the jailers, and there was no chance for him to discover the secret now.

"Elissa — can you hear me?"

"Yes." Faintly.

"There's no way I can get you out. I can't stay here; there's certain to be someone here before long."

"Go, then. Leave me here. There's no sense in both of us being trapped."

He smiled. There seemed to be a warmth in her voice that had been absent before.

"Good girl," he said. "Sorry —but—"

"That's all right. You'd better hurry!"

Archman turned, stepped over the fallen form of the Plutonian jailer, and dashed the length of the dungeon, toward the winding stairs that led upward. He had no idea where he was heading, only knew he had to escape.

The stairs were dark; visibility was poor. He ran at top speed, zam-gun holstered but ready to fly into action at instant's notice.

He rounded a curve in the staircase and started on the next flight. Suddenly a massive figure stepped out of the shadows on the landing, and before Archman could do anything he felt himself enmeshed in a giant's grip.

Hendrin froze in the kneeling position, waiting for Darrien to enter the room.

The diminutive tyrant wore a loose saffron robe, and he was frowning grimly. Hendrin wondered if this were the *real* Darrien, or the duplicate he had seen before—or perhaps another duplicate entirely.

"You keep strange company, Meryola," Darrien said icily. "I thought to find you alone."

Hendrin rose and faced Darrien. "Sire—"

"Oh! The Mercurian who brought me the fair wench! I'm glad to see you here too. I have a question for the two of you."

"Which is?" Meryola asked.

Instead of answering, Darrien paced jerkily around the chamber, peering here and there. Finally he looked up.

"The girl," he boomed. "Elissa. What have you done with her?"

Hendrin stared blankly at Darrien, grateful for the hard mask of a Mercurian's face that kept him from betraying his emotions. As for Meryola, she merely sneered.

"Your new plaything, Darrien? I haven't seen her since this Mercurian unveiled her before you."

"Hmm. Hendrin, what were you doing here, anyway?"

The Mercurian tensed.

"Milady wished to speak to me," he said, throwing the ball to her. In a situation like this it didn't pay to be a gentleman. "I was about to receive her commands when you entered, sire."

"Well, Meryola?"

She favored Hendrin with a black look and said, "I was about to send the Mercurian on an errand to the perfumers' shop. My stocks are running low."

Darrien chuckled. "Clever, but you've done better, I fear. There are plenty of wenches around who'll run your errands—and your supply of perfumes was replenished but yesterday." The little man's eyes burnt brightly with the flame of his malevolent intelligence. "I don't know why you try to fool me, Meryola, but I'll be charitable and accept your word for more than it's worth."

He fixed both of them with a cold stare. "I suspect you two of a conspiracy against Elissa—and you, Mercurian, are particularly suspect. Meryola, you'll pay if the girl's been harmed. And, Hendrin —I want the girl back."

"Sire, I—"

"No discussion! Mercurian, bring back the girl before nightfall, or you'll die!"

Darrien scowled blackly at both of them, then turned sharply on his heel and stalked out. Despite his four feet of height, he seemed an awesome, commanding figure.

The door closed loudly.

"I didn't expect that," Meryola said. "But I should have. Darrien is almost impossible to deceive."

"What do we do now?" Hendrin said. "The girl, milady—"

"The girl is in the dungeons, awaiting execution. She'll be dead before Darrien discovers where she is."

Hendrin rubbed his dome-like head. "You heard what Darrien said, though. Either I produce the girl or I die. Do you think he'll go through with it?"

"Darrien always means what he says. Unfortunately for you, so do I." She stared coldly at him. "The girl is in the dungeons. Leave her there. If you *do* produce the girl alive—*I'll* have you killed!"

Hendrin nodded unhappily. "Milady—"

"No more, now. Get away from me before Darrien returns. I want to take his mind off Elissa until the execution's past. Then it will be too late for him to complain. Leave me."

Baffled, Hendrin turned away and passed through the door into the hallway, which was dimly lit with levon-tubes. He leaned against the wall for a moment, brooding and thinking it over.

Events had taken a deadly turn. He had interposed himself between Darrien and Meryola, and now he was doomed either way. If he failed to restore Elissa to Darrien, the tyrant would kill him—but if he did bring back the Earthgirl, Meryola would have him executed. He was caught either way.

For once his nimble mind was snared. He shook his head moodily.

The girl was in the dungeon. The shadow of a plan began to form in his mind—a plan that might carry him on to success. He would need help, though. He would need an accomplice for this; it was too risky a maneuver to attempt to carry off himself.

The first step, he thought, would be to free the girl. That was all-important. With her dead, there was no chance for success.

Quickly he found the hall that led toward the stairs, and entered the gloomy, dark stairwell. He started downward, downward, around the winding metal staircase, heading for the dungeons where he had left the girl imprisoned.

There was a sound as of distant thunder coming from below. Someone running up the stairs, Hendrin wondered? He paused, listening.

The noise grew louder. Yes. Someone was coming.

Cautiously he stepped back into the shadows of the landing and peered downward, waiting to see who was coming.

He could see, on the winding levels below, the figure—the figure of an Earthman. *By Hargo*, he thought. *It's the one who tried to buy the girl from me—Archman! What's he doing here?*

Then the Mercurian thought: *he's shifty. Perhaps I can use him.*

He ducked back into the shadows and waited. A moment later Archman, breathless, came racing up the stairs. Hendrin let him round the bend, then stepped out of the darkness and seized the Earthman firmly.

Lon Archman stiffened tensely as the unknown attacker's arms tightened about his chest. He struggled to free his hands, to get at the zam-gun, but it was impossible. The assailant held his

arms pinioned in an unbreakable hold.

He squirmed and kicked backward; his foot encountered a hard surface.

A deep voice said, "Hold still, Archman! I don't mean to hurt you."

"Who are you?"

"Hendrin. The Mercurian. Where are you heading?"

"None of your business," Archman said. "Let go of me."

To his surprise, the blue alien said, "All right." Archman found himself free. He stepped away and turned, one hand on his zam-gun.

The Mercurian was making no attempt at an attack. "I want to talk to you," Hendrin said.

"Talk away," Archman snapped.

"Where are you coming from? What are you doing in the palace, anyway?"

"I'm coming from the dungeons, where I was tossed by some of Darrien's tunnel guards. I'm escaping. Understand that? And as soon as I'm through telling you this, I'm going to blast a hole in you so you don't carry the word back to your master Darrien."

Surprise and shock were evident on the Mercurian's face. "Escaping? From Darrien?"

"Yes."

"Strange. From our brief meeting I thought you were loyal. Who are you, Archman?"

"That doesn't much concern you." He gestured impatiently with the zam-gun, but he was reluctant to blast the Mercurian down. It seemed that the blue man was concealing something that could be important.

There was a curious expression on the Mercurian's hard-shelled face, as well. Archman looked warily around; no one was in sight. He wondered just how loyal to Darrien the Mercurian was . . . and if Hendrin could be used to further his own ends.

"I've just been talking to that girl you brought in here," he said. "What's she doing in the dungeons? I thought you were going to sell her to Darrien."

"I did. Darrien's mistress Meryola had a fit of jealousy and ordered the girl killed, while Darien's back was turned."

"I see!" Archman now understood a number of things. "All's not well between Darrien and his mistress, then?" He grinned. "And you're the cause of the trouble, I'll bet."

"Exactly," said the Mercurian. "You say the girl's still in the dungeons alive?"

Archman nodded. "For the time being. She's locked in, but the jailer's dead. I killed him when I escaped."

"Hmm. I'm in a funny fix —Darrien wants me to get the girl back for him, or else he'll kill me—but if I return the girl Meryola kills me. It's a tight squeeze for me. I'm caught either way."

"I'll say." Plans were forming rapidly in Archman's mind. If he could get the girl out of the dungeon, and somehow manipulate her and this Mercurian, who was undeniably in a bad situation—

"Earthman, can I trust you to keep your tongue quiet?" Hendrin asked in sudden desperation.

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"I'll have to take my chances then. But you're a renegade; I'll assume your highest loyalty isn't to Darrien but to yourself. Am I right?"

"You could be," Archman admitted.

"Okay. How would you like to have that girl for yourself, plus half a million credas? It can be arranged, if you'll play along with me."

Archman allowed a crafty glint of greediness to shine in his eyes, and said, "Is this a joke?"

"Mercurians generally play for keeps. I'm telling the truth. Are you interested? The girl, and half a million platinum credas."

"Who foots the bill?"

There was a long pause. Then Hendrin said, "Krodrang. The Overlord of Mercury. I'm in his pay."

A tremor of astonishment rocked Archman, nearly throwing him off guard. He mastered himself and said, "I thought you were one of Darrien's men. What's this about Krodrang?"

Lowering his voice and peering cautiously around the stairs, the Mercurian said: "Krodrang is one who would usurp the power of Darrien. I'm on Mars for the purpose of killing Darrien and stealing his power. If you'll play along with me, I'll see to it that you get the girl—and Krodrang is not a poor man."

Archman was totally amazed. So there were *two* assassins out for Darrien's neck! *Well,* he thought, *between us we ought to get him.*

But as he stared at the Mercurian, he knew that killing Darrien would not end the job. Hendrin would have to go, too—or else he'd get

back to Krodrang with the plans for the Clanton Mine, the orthysynthetic robots, and other of Darrien's secrets, and Earth would face attack from Mercury.

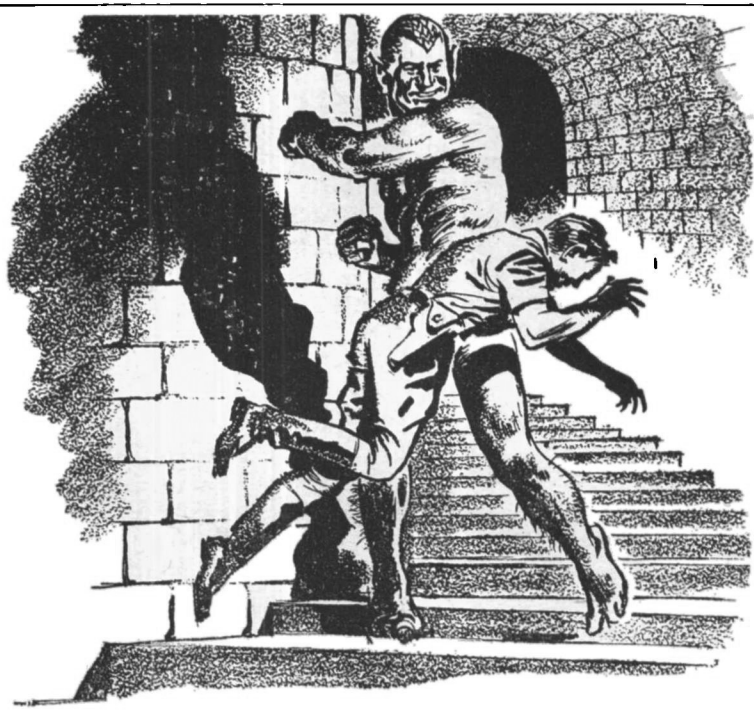
It would take delicate handling. But for the moment Archman had an ally working toward the same end he was.

"Well?" Hendrin asked. "What do you say?"

"Kill Darrien and collect from Krodrang, eh? It sounds good to me. Only—how are you going to get at Darrien? Those orthysynthetic robots—"

"Meryola knows which of the Darriens is real and which a robot. And she's scared stiff that the Earthgirl's going to replace her in Darrien's affections. I've got an idea," Hendrin said. "We can play Darrien and Meryola off against each other and get everything we want from them. It's tricky, but I think you're a good man, Earthman —and I *know* I am."

He had the Mercurian's



Hendrin served violent notice that he and Lon were no longer allies.

characteristic lack of modesty, Archman thought. The Earthman wondered how far he could trust the blueskin.

It looked good. As long as the Mercurian thought that Archman was simply a mercenary selling out to the highest bidder and not a dedicated Earthman with a stake of his own in killing Darrien, all would be well.

"Where do we begin?" Archman asked.

"We begin by shaking hands. From now on we're in league to assassinate the tyrant Darrien, you and I."

"Done!" Archman gripped the Mercurian's rough paw tightly.

"All right," Hendrin said. "Let's get down to the dungeon and free Elissa. Then I'll explain the plan I've got in mind."

In the musty, dank darkness of the dungeon level, Archman said, "She's in that cell—the third one from the left. But I don't know how to open it. There's a Martian in there with her."

"How did that happen?"

"They came to get me—Dorvis Graal wanted to question me on some silly matter, which is why I was being held here. I decided to make a break for it. The door was closing as I ran out. The girl and the Martian were trapped inside."

"And you couldn't get them out?"

"No," Archman said. "I couldn't figure out how to open the door again. I tried, but it was no go, so I started up the stairs. Then you caught me."

The Mercurian nodded. Suddenly he stumbled and grunted a sharp Mercurian curse.

"What happened?"

"Tripped on something." He looked down and said, "By the fins I'd say it's a Plutonian. His head's been blown off with a zam-gun."

"That's the jailer," Archman said. "I killed him when I escaped."

"He would have known how to open this damned lock, too. Well, I guess it couldn't be helped. Did you try blasting the door open with your gun?"

"Wouldn't work. The door heated up, but that was all."

Again the Mercurian grunted. He began to grope along the wall, feeling his way, looking for a switch. Archman joined him, even though in the murky darkness he could scarcely see. The Mercurian's eyes were much sharper. A Mercurian needed

extraordinary eyes: they had to filter out the fantastic glare of the sun in one hemisphere, and yet be able to see in the inky gloom of Mercury's nightside.

"These doors work by concealed relays," Archman said. "There ought to be a switch that trips the works and pulls back the door. That Plutonian knew where it was."

"And so do I," Hendrin exclaimed. He extended a clawed hand into one of the darkest corners of the cell block and said, "There are four controls here. I guess it's one for each of these cells. I'm going to pull the third from the left, and you get ready in case that Martian makes trouble."

"Right."

Archman drew his zam-gun and stood guard. No sound came from within; he hoped Elissa was all right. She'd been left alone with that Martian for nearly twenty minutes now. Quite possibly the tusked creature had recovered consciousness by now. Archman hoped not.

"Here goes," Hendrin said.

He yanked the switch. The relays clicked and the door slid open.

Archman half expected the Martian to come charging out as soon as the door opened. He expected to be fighting for his life. He expected almost anything but what he actually saw.

The Martian was lying where he had left him, sprawled in the middle of the cell. Elissa, clad only in her single filmy garment, was squatting by the Martian's head.

As the door opened, the Martian stirred. Elissa coolly reached out, grabbed a handful of the alien's wiry skull-hair, and cracked the Martian's head soundly against the concrete floor of the cell. The Martian subsided.

Elissa looked up, saw Archman. "Oh—it's you."

"Yes. I came back to free you," he said. "I see you've been having no trouble with your friend here."

She laughed a little hysterically. "No. Every time he started to wake up, I banged his head against the floor. But I didn't know how long I could keep on doing it."

"You don't need to do any more," said Hendrin, appearing suddenly. "Archman, you'd better tie the Martian up so he doesn't give us any more difficulties."

At the sight of the hulking Mercurian, Elissa uttered a little gasp. "*You*—!"

"What am I going to tie him in?" Archman asked.

"You might tear my robe up into strips," Elissa suggested, bitter sarcasm in her voice. "I've been wearing clothing for almost an hour anyway."

"That's an idea," said the Mercurian coolly. "Yes—use her robe, Archman."

The Earthman chuckled. "I don't think she intended you to take her seriously, Hendrin. I'll use my shirt instead."

"As you please," the Mercurian said.

Elissa glared defiantly at both of them. "Who are you going to sell me to now?" she asked. "You, Hendrin—you've parlayed me into quite a fortune by now, haven't you?"

Archman realized that he had told the girl his true identity. Cold sweat covered him at the recollection. If she should give him away—

To prevent that he said quickly, "Say, Hendrin, the girl's had a raw deal. I suggest we tell her what part she plays in this enterprise right now."

"Very well. I'm sorry for the mistreatment I've given you," Hendrin told her. "Unfortunately you became part of a plan. I'm on Mars for the purpose of assassinating Darrien. I'm in the pay of Krodrang of Mercury."

"And I'm assisting him," Archman said hastily, nudging Elissa to warn her not to ask any questions. "We're both working to assassinate Darrien. You can help us, Elissa."

"How?"

"Hendrin will explain," Archman said.

"I'll help you only on one condition—that you free me once whatever plan you have is carried out."

Hendrin glanced at Archman, who nodded. "Very well," Hendrin lied. "You receive your freedom once the job is done." He smiled surreptitiously at Archman as if to tell him, *The girl will be yours. His name was hardly trustworthy.*

Archman rose. "There. He's tied. All right, Hendrin: explain this plan of yours, and then let's get out of here."

He faced the Mercurian eagerly, wondering just what the blue man had devised. Archman was a shrewd opportunist; he *had* to be, to handle his job. Right now he was willing to pose as Hendrin's stooge or as anything else, for the sake of killing Darrien. Afterward, he knew

he could settle the score with Krodrang's minion.

"Here's what I have in mind," Hendrin said. "Darrien and Meryola are at odds over this girl, right? Very well, then. I'll take Elissa back to Darrien and tell him that—"

"No!" This from the girl.

"Just for a few minutes, Elissa. To continue: I'll take the girl to Darrien, and tell him that Meryola ordered her killed, and I'll make up enough other stories so Darrien will send out an order to execute Meryola. I think he's sufficiently smitten by Elissa to do that.

"Meanwhile, you, Archman —you go to Meryola and tell her what I've done. Tell her Darrien is going to have her killed, and suggest to her that if she wants to stay alive she'd better get to Darrien first. After that, it's simple. She'll tell you how to kill Darrien; you do it, we rescue Elissa, get Meryola out of the way somehow, and the job is done. Neat?"

"I couldn't have planned it better myself," Archman said admiringly. It was so: this was exactly as he would have handled the situation. He felt a moment of regret that he and Hendrin were working for opposite masters; what a valuable man the Mercurian would be in Intelligence!

But Hendrin would have to die too, for Earth's sake. He was a clever man. But so was Darrien, Archman thought. And Darrien would have to die.

"What about me?" Elissa asked. "Are you sure you'll get me out of this all right?"

Archman took her hand in his, and was gratified that she didn't pull away. "Elissa, we're asking you to be a pawn one last time. One more sale —and then we'll rid the universe of Darrien. Will you cooperate?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then she smiled wanly. "I'm with you," she said in a resigned tone.

Hendrin waited nervously outside the throneroom with the girl. "You say Darrien's in there, but not Meryola?" he asked the unsmiling guard.

"Just Darrien," the guard replied.

"The stars are with us," Hendrin muttered. He took the girl's arm and they went in.

Together they dropped on their knees. "Sire!"

Darrien rose from the throne, and an expression of joy lit his warped little face. "Well, Mercurian! You've

brought the girl—and saved your life."

"I did it not to save my life but my honor," Hendrin said unctuously. "Your Majesty had accused me of acting in bad faith—but I've proved my loyalty by recovering the girl for you."

Darrien came waddling toward them on his absurdly tiny legs and looked Elissa up and down. "You've been in the dungeons, my dear. I can tell by the soot clinging to your fair skin. But by whose order were you sent there?"

Hendrin glanced at the courtiers, who maintained a discreet distance but still were within hearing. "Sire, may I talk to you a moment privately?"

"About what?"

"About the girl . . . and Meryola."

Darrien's sharp eyes flashed. "Come with me, then. Your words may be of value to me."

The dwarfish tyrant led Hendrin into a smaller but equally luxurious room that adjoined the throneroom. Hendrin stared down at the tiny Darrien, nearly half his height. Within that swollen skull, the Mercurian thought, lay the galaxy's keenest and most fiendish mind. Could Darrien be manipulated? That was yet to be seen.

One thing was certain: this was not the real Darrien before him. The tyrant would not be so foolish as to invite a massive Mercurian into a small closed room like this; it would amount to an invitation to assassinate him.

"Sire, the girl Elissa was in the dungeons at the direct order of the lady Meryola."

"I suspected as much," Darrien muttered.

"And when I arrived there, I found that the jailer was about to carry out an order of execution on Elissa, also at your lady's behest."

"*What!*"

Hendrin nodded. "So strong was the order that I was forced to kill the jailer, a worthless Plutonian, to prevent him from carrying out the execution."

"This is very interesting," Darrien mused. "Meryola rightly senses a rival—and has taken steps to eliminate her. Steps which you have circumvented, Hendrin." Gratitude shone in Darrien's crafty eyes.

"I have further news for you, Sire. When you came upon me in Meryola's chambers earlier today—it was not an errand of perfumery that brought me there."

"I hardly thought it might be."

"On the contrary — your lady was pleading with me— to *assassinate* you!"

Darrien—or the Darrien-robot—turned several shades paler. Hendrin reflected that the robot, if this were one, was an extraordinarily sensitive device.

"She said this to you?" Darrien asked. "She threatened my life?"

"She offered me five thousand credas. Naturally, I refused. Then she offered me her body as well—and at this point, you entered the room."

Darrien scowled. "My life is worth only five thousand credas to her, eh? But tell me—had I not entered the room, Mercurian, would you have accepted her second offer?"

"I was sorely tempted," Hendrin said, grinning. "But pretty women are easily come by—while *you* are unique."

"Mere flattery. But you're right; Meryola has outlived her worth to me, and I see now that I'll have to dispose of her quickly." Darrien reached for the speaking-tube at his elbow. "I'll order her execution at once—and many thanks to you for this information, friend Hendrin."

Archman paused for a moment outside the door of Meryola's private chamber, preparing his plan of attack and reviewing the whole operation so far.

He'd been in and out of trouble—but Darrien was going to die. The mission would be accomplished. And Lon Archman would survive it.

He had a double motive for survival now. One was the simple one of wanting to stay alive; two was the fact that he now thought he had someone to stay alive *for*. Perhaps.

He knocked gently at the door.

"Who's there?"

"You don't know me, but I'm a friend. I've come to warn you."

A panel in the door opened and Archman found himself staring at a dark-hued eye. "Who are you from, Earthman? What do you want?"

"Please let me in. Your life depends on my seeing you."

A moment passed—then, the door opened.

"Are you the lady Meryola?"

"I am."

She was breathtakingly lovely. She wore but the merest of wraps, and firm breasts, white thighs, were

partially visible. There was a soft, clinging sexuality about her, and yet also a streak of hardness, of coldness, that Archman was able to appreciate. He also saw she was no longer very young.

She was holding a zam-gun squarely before his navel. "Come in, Earthman, and tell me what you will."

Archman stepped inside her chambers. She was nearly as tall as he, and her beauty temporarily stunned him.

"Well?"

"Do you know Hendrin the Mercurian, milady?"

"Indeed. Are you from him?"

"Not at all. But I know Hendrin well. He's a cheating rogue willing to sell out to any bidder."

"This is hardly news," Meryola said. "What of Hendrin?"

He eyed her almost insultingly before answering. Meryola was indeed a desirable creature, he thought—but for one night only. Archman mentally compared her with Elissa Hall, who was nearly as beautiful, though not half so flashy. It wasn't difficult to see why Darrien preferred Elissa's innocence to this aging, shrewd beauty.

He smiled. "At this very moment," he said, "Hendrin is with our master Darrien. He has brought him the girl Elissa, and they are together now."

"It's a lie! Elissa's in the dungeons!"

"Would you care to call your jailer, milady?"

She stared suspiciously at him and picked up the speaking-tube. After nearly a minute had passed, she looked back at Archman. "The line's dead, Earthman."

"As is your jailer. Hendrin freed the girl and took her to Darrien. And one other fact might interest you: Darrien has tired of you. He has made out the order for your death."

"Lies!"

Archman shrugged. "Lies, then. But within the hour the knife will be at your throat. He vastly prefers the younger girl. Believe me or not, at your peril. But if you choose to believe me, I can save your life."

"How, schemer?"

At least she would listen.

He moved closer to her, until he was almost dizzied by her subtle perfume. "You hold the secret of Darrien's robots. Reveal it to me, and I'll destroy Darrien. Then, perhaps, another Earthman will claim your favors. Surely

you would not object to ruling with *me*."

She laughed, a harsh, indrawn laugh, and it seemed to Archman that the cat's claws had left their furry sheath. "You? So that's your motive—you ask me to yield Darrien's secret in order to place yourself on the throne. Sorry, but I'm not that foolish. You're an enterprising rascal, whoever you are, but—"

Suddenly the door burst open. Three Martians, their tusks gleaming, their thick lips drawn back in anticipation of murder, came rushing in.

"Darrien's assassins!" Archman cried. He had his zam-gun drawn in an instant.

The first Martian died a second later, complete astonishment on his face. A bolt from Meryola's gun did away with the second, while a third spurt finished the remaining one. Archman leaped nimbly over the bodies and fastened the bolt on the door.

Then he stooped and snatched a sheet of paper from the sash of one of the fallen Martians. He read it out loud: "To Grojrakh, Chief of the Guards: My displeasure has fallen upon the lady Meryola, and you are to despatch her at once by any means of execution that seems convenient. D."

"Let me see that!"

He handed her the paper. She read it, then cursed and crumpled the sheet. "The pig! The pig!" To Archman she said, "You told the truth, then. Pardon me for mistrusting you—"

"It was only to be expected. But time grows short."

"Right." Her eyes flashed with the fury of vengeance. "Listen, then: none of the Darriens you have seen is the real one. There are three orthysynthetics which he uses in turn. Darrien himself spends nearly all his time in a secluded chamber on the Fifth Level."

"Is the room guarded heavily?"

"It's guarded not at all. Only I know how to reach it, and so he sees no reason to post a guard. Well, we'll give him cause to regret that. Come!"

"Down this hallway and to the left," Meryola said.

This was the moment, Archman thought. It was the culmination of his plan, and the ending of a phase of history that traced its roots to a politician's pompous words years ago—*"Let Venus be our penal colony—"*

So they had planted the seeds of evil on Venus, and they had banished Darrien there to reap them. And with the destruction of Darrien's empire on Venus, they had permitted Darrien to escape and found yet another den of evil.

The end was near, now. With Darrien dead the mightiest enemy of justice in the galaxy would have been blotted out. And Darrien *would* die—betrayed by his own mistress.

They reached the door.

It was a plain door, without the baroque ornamentation that characterized the rest of the palace. And behind that door—Darrien.

"Ready?" Meryola asked.

Archman nodded. He gripped the zam-gun tightly in one hand, pressed gently against the door with the other, and heaved.

The door opened.

"There's Darrien!" Meryola cried. She raised her zam-gun — but Archman caught her arm.

Darrien was there, all right, crouching in a corner of the room, his wrinkled face pale with shock. He wore a strange headset, evidently the means with which he controlled the orthysynthetics. And he held as a shield before him—

Elissa.

This was one pleasure the tyrant had not been willing to experience vicariously through his robots, evidently. Tears streaked the girl's eyes; she struggled to escape Darrien's grasp, without success. Her flesh was bloodless where his fingers held her. There was no sign of Hendrin.

"Let me shoot them," Meryola said, striving to pull her arm free of Archman's grip.

"The girl hasn't done anything. She's just a pawn."

"Go ahead, Archman," Darrien taunted. "Shoot us. Or let dear Meryola do it."

Meryola wrenched violently; Archman performed the difficult maneuver of keeping his own gun trained on Darrien while yanking Meryola's away from her. With two guns, now, he confronted the struggling pair at the far end of the little room.

"Shoot, Archman!" Elissa cried desperately. "I don't matter! Kill Darrien while you have the chance."

Sweat beaded Archman's face. Meryola flailed at him, trying to recover her weapon and put an end to her lord and her rival at once.

The Earthman held his ground while indecision rock-

ed him. His code up to now had been, the ends justify the means. But could he shoot Elissa in cold blood for the sake of blotting out Darrien?

His finger shook on the triggers. *Kill them,* the Intelligence Agent in him urged. But he couldn't.

"The Earthman has gone cowardly at the finish," Darrien said mockingly. "He holds fire for the sake of this lovely wench."

"Damn you, Darrien. I—"

Meryola screamed. The door burst open, and Hendrin rushed in. Right behind the Mercurian, coming from the opposite direction, came one of Darrien's orthysynthetic duplicates—Darrien's identical twin in all respects, probably summoned by Darrien by remote control.

And the orthysynthetic carried a drawn zam-gun.

What happened next took but a moment—a fraction of a moment, or even less.

Meryola took advantage of Archman's astonishment to seize one of his two zam-guns. But instead of firing at Darrien, she gunned down Hendrin!

The Mercurian looked incredulous as the zam-gun's full charge seared into his thick hide, crashing through vital organs with unstoppable fury.

Meryola laughed as the blue Mercurian fell. "Traitor! Double-dealer! Now—"

The sentence was never finished. The zam-gun in the hand of Darrien's double spoke, and Meryola pitched forward atop Hendrin, her beauty replaced by charred black crust.

Archman snapped from his moment of shock, and his gun concluded the fast-action exchange. He put a bolt of force squarely between the orthysynthetic's eyes, and a third body dropped to the floor.

From behind him came a cry. "Archman! Now! Now!"

He whirled and saw, to his astonishment, that Elissa had succeeded in breaking partially loose from Darrien. Archman's thoughts went back to that moment in Blake Wentworth's office when, in a drug-induced illusion, he had won the right to participate in this mission by gunning down a Martian across the vast distances of the red desert. His marksmanship now would count in reality.

His finger tightened on the zam-gun.

"You wouldn't dare shoot, Earthman!" Darrien said sneeringly. "You'll kill the girl!"

"For once you're wrong, Darrien," Archman said. He sucked in his breath and fired.

A half-inch to the right and his bolt would have killed Elissa Hall. But Archman's aim was true. Darrien screamed harshly. Archman fired again, and the tyrant fell.

He found himself quivering all over from the strain and tension of the last few moments. He looked around at the grisly interior of the room. There lay Hendrin, the shrewd Mercurian, who had played one side too many and would never live to collect his pay from Krodrang. There, Meryola, whose beauty had faded. There, the Darrien-robot. And there, Darrien himself, his foul career cut short at last.

"It's over," he said tiredly. He looked at Elissa Hall, whose lovely face was pale with fear. "It's all over. Darrien's dead, and the mop-up can begin."

"Your aim was good, Archman. But you could have fired at Darrien before. My life doesn't matter, does it?"

His eyes met hers. "It does —but you won't believe that, will you? You think I'm just a killer. All right. That's all I am. Let's get out of here."

"No—wait." Suddenly she was clinging to him. "I—I've been cruel to you, Archman—but I saw just then that I was wrong. You're not just the murderer I thought you were. You—you were doing your job, that's all."

He pulled her close, and smiled. He was thinking of Intelligence Chief Wentworth, back on Earth. Wentworth had rated Archman's capabilities at 97.003%. But Wentworth had been wrong.

Archman had done the job. That was 100% efficiency. But he had Elissa now too. Score another 100%. He gently drew her lips to his, knowing now that this mission had been successful beyond all expectation.

THE END

YELLOW STREAK HERO

By HARLAN ELLISON

All your life you've crouched, waiting, in the path of impending disaster. That has been your job—what you were trained for. But you can't help visualizing its arrival—prophecying what form it will take. So how could you be blamed for not recognizing it on arrival?

DARKNESS seeped in around the little quonset. It oozed out of the deeps of space and swirled around Ferreno's home. The automatic scanners turned and turned, whispering quietly, their message of wariness unconsciously reassuring the old man.

He bent over and plucked momentarily at a bit of lint on the carpet. It was the only speck of foreign matter on the rug, reflecting the old man's perpetual cleanliness and almost fanatical neatness.

The racks of book-spools were all binding-to-binding, set flush with the lip of the shelves; the bed was made with a military tightness that allowed a coin to bounce high three times; the walls were free of fingerprints—dusted and wiped clean twice a day; there was no speck of lint or dust on anything in the one room quonset.

When Ferreno had flicked the single bit of matter from his fingers, into the incinerator, the place was immaculate.

It reflected twenty-four years of watching, waiting, and living alone. Living alone on the edge of Forever, waiting for something that might never come. Tending blind, dumb machines that could say *Something is out here,* but also said, *We don't know what it is.*

Ferreno returned to his pneumo-chair, sank heavily into it, and blinked, his deep-set gray eyes seeking into the furthest rounded corner of

The age-old symbol of eternal dread was fast becoming real.

the quonset's ceiling. His eyes seemed to be looking for something. But there was nothing there he did not already know. Far too well.

He had been on this asteroid, this spot lost in the darkness, for twenty-four years. In that time, nothing had happened.

There had been no warmth, no women, no feeling, and only a brief flurry of emotion for almost twenty of those twenty-four years.

Ferreno had been a young man when they had set him down on The Stone. They had pointed out there and said to him:

"Beyond the farthest spot you can see, there's an island universe. In that island universe there's an enemy, Ferreno. One day he'll become tired of his home and come after yours.

"You're here to watch for him."

And they had gone before he could ask them.

Ask them: who *were* the enemy? Where would they come from, and why was he here, alone, to stop them? What could he do if they came? What were the huge, silent machines that bulked monstrous behind the little quonset? Would he ever go home again?

All he had known was the intricate dialing process for the inverspace communicators. The tricky-fingered method of sending a coded response half across the galaxy to a waiting Mark LXXXII brain—waiting only for his frantic pulsing.

He had known only that. The dialing process and the fact that he was to watch. Watch for he-knew-not-what!

There at first he had thought he would go out of his mind. It had been the monotony. Monotony intensified to a frightening degree. The ordeal of watching, watching, watching. Sleeping, eating from the self-replenishing supply of protofoods in the greentank, reading, sleeping again, rereading the book-spools till their casings crackled, snapped, and lost panes. Then the re-binding—and re-re-reading. The horror of knowing every passage of a book by heart.

He could recite from Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* and Melville's *Moby Dick*, till the very words lost meaning, sounded strange and unbelievable in his ears.

First had come living in

filth and throwing things against the curving walls and ceilings. Things designed to give, and bounce—but not to break. Walls designed to absorb the impact of a flung drink-ball or a smashed fist. Then had come the extreme neatness, then a moderation, and finally back to the neat, prissy fastidiousness of an old man who wants to know where everything is at any time.

No women. That had been a constant horror for the longest time. A mounting pain in his groin and belly, that had wakened him during the arbitrary night, swimming in his own sweat, his mouth and body aching. He had gotten over it slowly. He had even attempted emasculation. None of it had worked, of course, and it had only passed away with his youth.

He had taken to talking to himself. And answering himself. Not madness, just the fear that the ability to speak might be lost.

Madness had descended many times during the early years. The blind, clawing urgency to get out! Get out into the airless vastness of The Stone. At least to die, to end this nowhere existence.

But they had constructed the quonset without a door. The plasteel-sealed slit his deliverers had gone out, had been closed irrevocably behind them, and there *was* no way out.

Madness had come often.

But they had picked him well. He clung to his sanity, for he knew it was his only escape. He knew it would be a far more horrible thing to end out his days in this quonset a helpless maniac, than to remain sane.

He swung back over the line and soon grew content with his world in a shell. He waited, for there was nothing else he could do; and in his waiting a contentment grew out of frantic restlessness. He began to think of it as a jail, then as a coffin, then as the ultimate black of the Final Hole. He would wake in the arbitrary night, choking, his throat constricted, his hands warped into claws that crooked themselves into the foam rubber of the sleeping couch with fierceness and desperation.

The time was spent. A moment after it had passed, he could not tell *how* it had been spent. His life became dust-dry and at times he could hardly tell he *was* living. Had it not been for the protected, automatic calendar, he would

not have known the years were passing.

And ever, ever, ever—the huge, dull, sleeping eye of the warning buzzer. Staring back at him, veiled, from the ceiling.

It was hooked up with the scanners. The scanners that hulked behind the quonset. The scanners in turn were hooked up to the net of tight inverspace rays that interlocked each other out to the farthest horizon Ferreno might ever know.

And the net, in turn, joined at stop-gap junctions with the doggie-guards, also waiting, watching with dumb metal and plastic minds for that implacable alien enemy that might someday come.

They had known the enemy would come, for they had found the remnants of those the enemy had destroyed. Remnants of magnificent and powerful cultures, ground to microscopic dust by the heel of a terrifying invader.

They could not chance roaming the universe with those Others somewhere. Somewhere . . . waiting. They had formed the inverspace net, joining it with the doggie-guards. And they had hooked the system in with the scanners; and they had wired the scanners to the big, dull eye in the ceiling of the quonset.

Then they had set Ferreno to watching it.

At first Ferreno had watched the thing constantly. Waiting for it to make the disruptive noise he was certain it would emit. Breaking the perpetual silence of his bubble. He waited for the bloodiness of its blink to warp fantastic shadows across the room and furniture. He even spent five months deciding what shape those shadows would take, when they came.

Then he entered the period of nervousness. Jumping for no reason at all, to stare at the eye. The hallucinations: it was blinking, it was ringing in his ears. The sleeplessness: it might go off and he would not hear it.

Then as time progressed, he grew unaware of it, forgot it existed for long periods. Till it had finally come to the knowledge that it was there; a dim thing, an unremembered thing, as much a part of him as his own ears, his own eyes. He had nudged it to the back of his mind—but it was always there.

Always there, always waiting, always on the verge of disruption.

Ferreno never forgot why he was there. He never forgot the reason they had come for him. *The day they had come for him.*

The evening had been pale and laden with sound. The flits clacking through the air above the city, the crickets in the grass, the noise of the tri-vi from the front room of the house.

He had been sitting on the front porch, arms tight about his girl, on a creaking porch glider that smacked the wall every time they rocked back too far. He remembered the taste of the sweet-acidy lemonade in his stomach as the three men resolved out of the gloom. With no warning at all they appeared.

They had stepped onto the porch.

"Are you Charles Jackson Ferreno, age nineteen, brown hair, brown eyes, five-feet-ten, 158 pounds, scar on right inner wrist?"

"Y-yes . . . why?" he had stammered.

The intrusion of these strangers on a thing as private as his love-making had caused him to falter.

Then they had grabbed him.

"What are you doing? Get your hands off him!" Marie had screamed.

They had flashed an illuminated card at her, and she had subsided to terrified silence before their authority. Then they had taken him, howling, into a flit—black and silent—and whirled him off to the plasteel block in the Nevada desert that had been Central Space Service Headquarters.

They had hypno-conditioned him to operate the inverspace communicators. A task he could not have learned in

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OPERATION METHUSELAH

. . . despite the efforts of modern scientists to deny the possibility, it now appears certain that many people have lived past the age of 120. Among them were Thomas Parr of England, who lived to be 152; Zaro Agha of Turkey (156); Joseph Surrington of Norway (160); and Petraz Czarten of Hungary, who reached the age of 185!

two hundred years—involving the billion alternate dialing choices—had they not planted it mechanically.

Then they had prepared him for the ship.

"Why are you doing this to me? Why have you picked me!" he had screamed at them, fighting the lacing-up of the pressure suit.

They had told him. The Mark LXXXII. He had been chosen best out of forty-seven thousand punched cards whipped through its metal vitals. Best by selection. An infallible machine had said he was the least susceptible to madness, inefficiency, failure. He was the best, and the Service needed him.

Then, the ship.

The nose of the beast pointed straight up into a cloudless sky, blue and unfilmed as the best he had ever known. Then a rumble, and a scream, and the pressure as it raced into space. And the almost imperceptible wrenching as the ship slipped scud-wise through inverspace. The travel through the milky pinkness of that not-space. Then the gut-pulling again, and *there!* off to the right through the port—that bleak little asteroid with its quonset blemish.

When they had set him down and told him about the enemy, he had screamed at them, but they had pushed him back into the bubble, sealed the airport-lock, and gone back to the ship.

They had left The Stone, then. Rushing up till they had popped out of sight around a bend in space.

His hands had been bloodied, beating against the resilient plasteel of the air-lock and vista windows.

He never forgot why he was there.

He tried to conjure up the enemy. Were they horrible slug-like creatures from some dark star, spreading a ring of viscous, poisonous fluid inside Earth's atmosphere; were they tentacled spider-men who drank blood; were they perhaps quiet, well-mannered beings who would sublimate all of man's drives and ambitions; were they . . .

He went on and on, till it did not matter in the slightest to him. Then he forgot time. But he remembered he was here to watch. To watch and wait. A sentinel at the gate of the Forever, waiting for an unknown enemy that might streak out of nowhere bound for Earth and destruction. Or that might have died

out millenia before—leaving him here on a worthless assignment, doomed to an empty life.

He began the hate. The hate of the men who had consigned him to this living death. He hated the men who had brought him here in their ship. He hated the men who had conceived the idea of a sentinel. He hated the Mark computer that had said:

"Get Charles Jackson Ferreno *only!*"

He hated them all. But most of all he hated the alien enemy. The implacable enemy that had thrown fear into the hearts of the men.

Ferreno hated them all with a bitter intensity verging on madness, itself. Then, the obsession passed. Even that passed.

Now he was an old man. His hands and face and neck wrinkled with the skin-folding of age. His eyes had sunk back under ridges of flesh, his eyebrows white as the stars. His hair loose and uncombed, trimmed raggedly by an ulta-safe shaving device he had not been able to corrupt for suicide. A beard of unkempt and foul proportions. A body slumped into a position that fitted his pneumo-chair exactly.

Thoughts played leap-frog with themselves. Ferreno was thinking. For the first time in eight years—since the last hallucination had passed—actually thinking. He sat humped into the pneumo-chair that had long-ago formed itself permanently to his posture. The muted strains of some long-since over-familiarized piece of taped music humming above him. Was the horrible repetition Vivaldi's *Gloria Mass* or a snatch of Monteverdi? He fumbled in the back of his mind, in the recess this music had lived for so long—consigned there by horrible repetition.

His thoughts veered before he found the answer. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered, but the watching.

Beads of perspiration sprang out, dotting his upper lip and the receding arcs of sparse hair at his temples.

What if they never came?

What if they had gone already and through some failure of the mechanisms he had missed them? Even the below-hearing persistence of the revolving scanners' workings was not assurance enough. For the first time in many years he was hearing the scanners again, and did they sound right? Didn't...

they . . . sound . . . a . . . bit . . . off?

They didn't sound right! My God, all these years and now they weren't working! He had no way of repairing them, no way of getting out of here, he was doomed to lie here till he died—his purpose gone! Oh, my God! All these years here nowhere and my youth gone and they've stopped running and no-good damned things failing now and the aliens've slipped through and Earth's gone and I'm no good here and it's all for nothing and Marie and everything . . .

Ferreno! Good God, man! Stop yourself!

He grabbed control of himself abruptly, lurchingly. The machines were perfect. They worked on the basic substance of inverspace. They *couldn't* go wrong, once set running on the pattern.

But the uselessness of it all remained.

His head fell into his shaking hands. He felt tears bubbling behind his eyes. What could one puny man do here, away from all and everyone? They had told him more than one man would be dangerous. They would kill each other out of sheer boredom. The same for a man and a woman. Only one man could remain in possession of his senses, to tickle out the intricate warning on the inverspace communicator.

He recalled again what they had said about relief.

There could be none. Once sealed in, a man had begun the fight with himself. If they took him out and put in another man, they were upping the chances of a miscalculation—and a failure. By picking the very best man mechanically, they were putting all their eggs in one basket—but they were cutting risk to the bone.

He recalled again what they had said about a machine in his place.

Impossible. A robot brain, equipped to perform that remarkable task of sorting the warning factors, and recording it on the inverspace communicators — including any possible ramifications that might crop up in fifty years —would have to be fantastically large.

It would have had to be five hundred miles long by three hundred wide. With tapes and condensers and tranversistors and punchchecks that, if laid end to end, would have reached halfway from The Stone to Earth.

He knew he was necessary,

which had been one of the things that had somehow stopped him from finding a way to wreck himself or the whole quonset during those twenty-four years.

Yet, it still seemed so worthless, so helpless, so unnecessary. He didn't know, but he was certain the quonset bubble would inform them if he died or was helpless. Then they would try again.

He was necessary, *if* . . .

If the enemy was coming. *If* the enemy hadn't already passed him by. *If* the enemy hadn't died long ago. *If, if, if!*

He felt the madness waking again, like some horrible monster of the mind.

He pressed it back with cool argument.

He knew, deep inside himself, that he was a symbol. A gesture of desperation. A gesture of survival to the peoples of Earth. They wanted to live. But did they have to sacrifice a man for their survival.

He could not come to an answer within himself.

Perhaps it was inevitable. Perhaps not. Either way, it just happened he had been the man.

Here at this junction of the galaxies; in this spot of most importance; here he was the key to a battle that must someday be fought.

But what if he was wasted? What if they never came? What if there was no enemy at all? Only supposition by the learned ones. Tampering with the soul and life of a human being!

God! The horror of the thought! What if . . .

A soft buzz accompanied the steady ruby glow from the eye in the ceiling.

Ferreno stared, open-mouthed. He could not look up at the eye itself. He stared at the crimson film that covered the walls and floor of the quonset. This was the time he had waited twenty-four years to come!

Was this it? No strident noises, no flickering urgency of the red light. Only a steady glow and a soft buzz.

And at the same time he knew that this was far more effective. It had prevented his death from heart attack.

Then he tried to move. Tried to finger the forty-three keys of the inverspace communicator on the underarm of the pneumo-chair. Tried to translate the message the way it had been impressed subconsciously in his mind, in a way he could

never have done consciously.

He had frozen in his seat.

He couldn't move. His hands would not respond to the frantic orders of his brain. The keys lay silent under the chair arm, the warning unsent. He was totally incapacitated. What if this was a dud? What if the machines were breaking down from the constant twenty-four years of use? Twenty-four years—and how many men before him? What if this was merely another hallucination? What if he was going insane at last?

He couldn't take the chance. His mind blocked him off. The fear was there. He couldn't be wrong, and send the warning now!

Then he saw it, and he knew it was not a dud.

Far out in the ever-dark dark of the space beyond The Stone, he could see a spreading point of light piercing the ebony of the void. And he knew. A calmness covered him.

Now he knew it had not been waste. This was the culmination of all the years of waiting. The privation, the hunger of loneliness, the torture of boredom, all of it. It was worth suffering all that.

He reached under, and closed his eyes, letting his hypno-training take over. His fingers flickered momentarily over the forty-three keys.

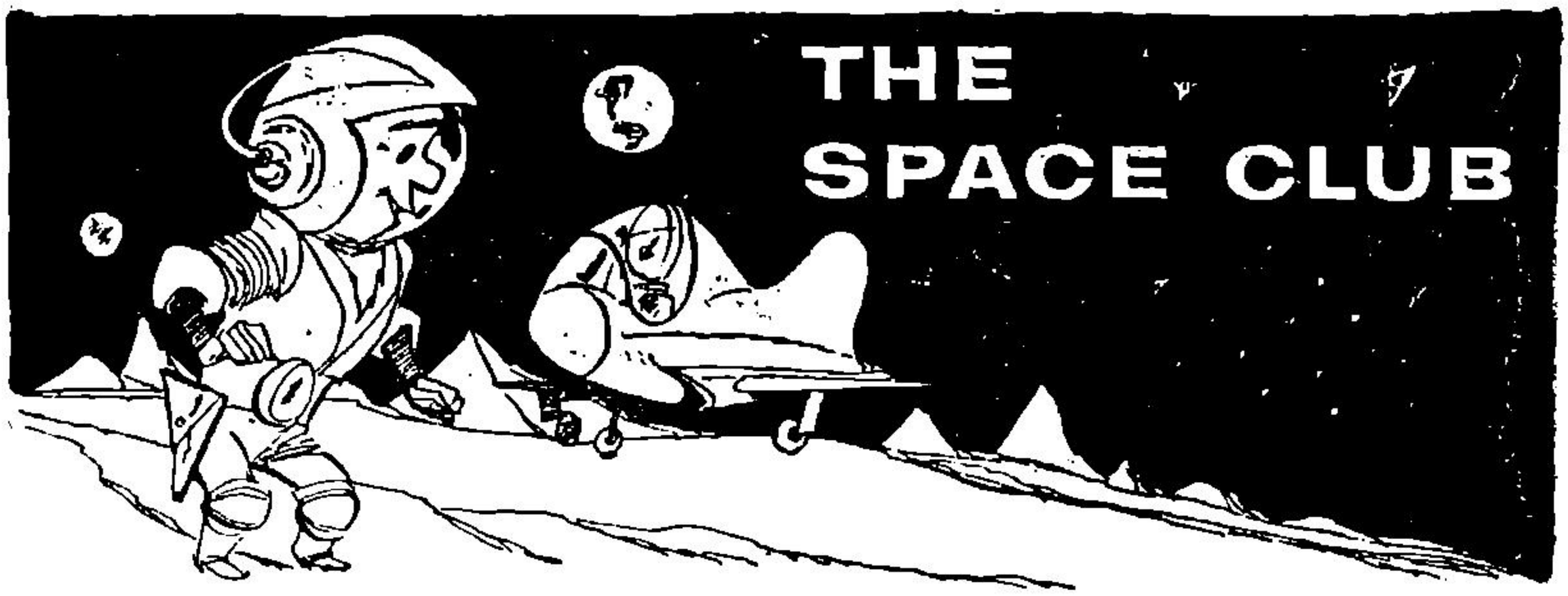
That done, he settled back, letting his thoughts rest on the calmed surface of his mind. He watched the spreading points of light in the vista window, knowing it was an armada advancing without pause on Earth.

He was content. He would die soon, and his job was finished. It was worth all the years without. Without anything good he would have known on Earth. But it was worth all of it. The struggle for life was coming to his people.

His night vigil was finally ended.

The enemy was coming at last.

THE END



Here are a flock of new members. Wish we had room to include everyone on the waiting list. Don't let that discourage you from sending your name in though. It is sure to appear in a future issue and if enough readers demand it, the club will just have to be given more space; with a bulletin board for club news and perhaps several other ideas expansionwise that we have in mind.

BARBARA COMSTOCK, 4120 McPHERSON AVENUE, ST. LOUIS 8, MISSOURI . . . 19 years old, 5′ 3″, brown eyes, dark brown hair, Barbara's hobbies are s-f, records, movies, cooking and needlework. Also enjoys sports.

MRS. JET COONAN, P. O. BOX 422, NORWALK, OHIO . . . Jet says, "Finally a club where s-f fans can meet via mail!" She is married, 25 years old, and most anxious to begin exchanging views and theories.

MRS. ELLEN KAHN CROUCH, "CASABLANCA" STERLING, VA. . . . 27 years old, married. Both Ellen and her husband are s-f fans. She has devised a different system of spelling called "Representative Spelling" which she would like to tell some Space Club members about.

JACK DAVIDSON, 912 WOODBINE AVE., TORONTO 8, ONTARIO, CANADA . . . 24 years old, Jack has been interested in space travel and planets for the past three years. He has quite a collection of s-f magazines and is trying to make a library of them.

CHARLES DOWNER, LE ROSEY, GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND . . . Charles has been looking for an opportunity to discuss space problems which now confront our scientists. His interests are geology, geometry in space and rockets, mainly their propulsion. He is applying to M.I.T. for entrance next fall.

DUANE C. FOSTER, GENERAL DELIVERY, KITIMAT, B. C., CANADA . . . 19 years old, Duane is a defense production worker helping to produce the world's supply of aluminum. He's dabbled in astronomy, photography, solid and liquid fuel rocketry. Present interests include model railroading, reading s-f mags. and hardcover books. Favorite sports are snowshoeing and football.

JEANNIE HOWARD, 573 EAST 110TH ST., CLEVELAND, OHIO . . . 17 years old, a senior in high school, Jeannie is going to enter college this Fall. She is going to work for a bachelor of science degree. 5′ 2″, brown hair, brown eyes, 120 pounds, she likes all sports.

LOUIS JACOBSON, 145 WENTZ AVE., SPRINGFIELD, N. J. . . . 15 years old, interested in science, math, girls, books, chess. Would like to hear from some Air Force men as he might soon be joining. 6′ 2″, weighs about 190. Louis will trade pictures.

HELEN KLEINBERG, 5317 FT. HAMILTON P'WAY, BROOKLYN 19, NEW YORK . . . Helen is 19 years old and an accounting major at City College of New York. She's been reading s-f for about nine years. She's very anxious to exchange s-f ideas.

SANDY KOCSIS, 539 E. 125TH STREET, CLEVELAND 8, OHIO... Sandy plans to become a nurse. She is 17 years old, 5′ 3″, has dark brown hair and brown eyes, weights 120 pounds.

ROGER A. KOSTIHA, 464 EAST 272ND, EUCLID 32, OHIO . . . Roger expresses the opinion that the Space Club is very worthwhile if only for the opportunity to communicate with readers all over the Earth. He is especially happy to see some of the fairer sex represented in its membership. He is 19 years old, 5′ 9″, has brown hair and brown eyes. Hobbies are electronics and photography.

PATRICIA LOGAN, LA CASA BELLA #9, 3421 LARISSA DR., LOS ANGELES 26, CALIF. . . . 20-year-old Pat is hoping to hear from lots of other Space Club members. She has blue eyes, dark brown hair and is 5′ 1″. A sports lover, she likes to collect things too.

RICHARD C. MARKLEY, 4047 ALTA AVE., FRESNO 2, CALIF.... 14 years old, Richard is in the 10th grade at Roosevelt High School. He has a collection of about 70 science-fiction mags. He's also interested in stamp collecting and amateur radio.

BLAKE MARTIN, 1511½ S. HOOVER ST., LOS ANGELES 6, CALIF. . . . 30 years old, Blake describes himself as a poet, dreamer. Would like to compare notes with other "thinkers."

VIOLA McCOWAN, 701 S. ARDMORE ST., LOS ANGELES, CALIF. . . . An interested science-fiction reader, Viola is 21 years old. She enjoys all outdoor sports plus dancing and bowling.

FRED G. MICHEL, VETERANS HOSPITAL BLDG. 62, ROOM 107, SEPULVEDA, CALIF.. . . Fred works at the Veterans Hospital. He has studied photography and is also interested in aviation. He served in the Air Force during the war. Now he is active in the Ground Observer Corps. If there are any s-f fans who belong to Sky Watch, Fred would like to hear from them.

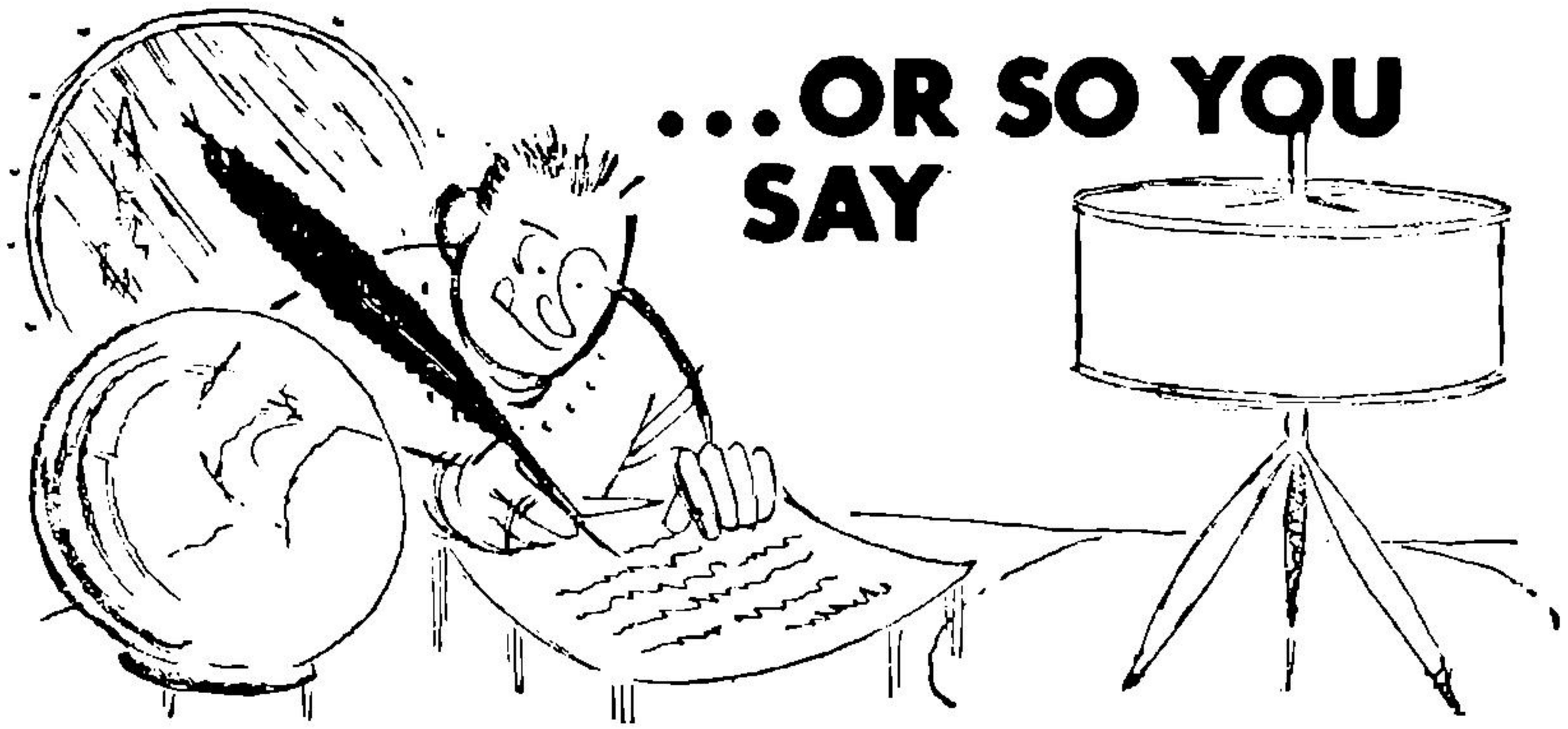
BARON MUNSON, P. O. BOX 685, MARTINSBURG, W. VA. . . . Baron is 7 feet tall. He enjoys debating and will debate just about anything. He wants to get together with other fans.

RUDOLPH A. OROSZ, 2822 STANFIELD DRIVE, PARMA 29, OHIO . . . 37 years old, married, Rudolph is employed as a physical chemist. His hobbies are photography and radio. He's also interested in flying saucers, the Shaver mystery and scientific oddities.

KENNETH PEARLMAN, 1530 MAHANTONGO STREET, POTTSVILLE, PENNA. . . . 15 years old, Kenneth is interested in s-f, collecting swing records, psionics, ESP. Wants to correspond with s-f fans ages 13 to 17.

FRED RUNK, 6942 SO. TAHMAN, CHICAGO 29, ILL. . . . 18 years old, Fred is a freshman at the University of Illinois at Navy Pier where he is going to major in psychology. An enthusiastic reader of s-f for the past five years, he is anxious to communicate with other fans.

A/3C ROBERT ST. PIERRE, 16TH A.D.S., WHITEMAN AFB, MISSOURI . . . 21 years old, 6′ 1″ light brown hair, hazel eyes, 185 pounds. Bob has been an enthusiastic s-f reader ever since he picked up that first AMAZING quite a few years ago.



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

To Roger DeSoto: How come you reviewed "Peon #37" twice, once in January and again in February? I bet Lee Riddle got quite a kick out of this.

In answer to Michael LaBorde: You don't like fanzine reviews because you never read one or you read one you didn't like. If you send for a couple you'll meet the finest bunch of people I know.

I do agree that there should be more humor in *Amazing* and more Finlay illos. Also some controversial letters.

Jerry Greene
482 East 20th Street
Hialeah, Florida

● *Somebody wrote in not long ago and said, "How come you print only bouquet letters in your reader's column? No gripes, no beefs—all sweetness and light?" This cut us to the quick so we started saving "gripe" letters just to prove it ain't so nohow. And here they are—a column dedicated to (bless 'em) the unsatisfied, without which no magazine would live very long.*

Dear Ed:

As I can only speak for myself I think *Amazing Stories* is getting back in the same rut it was in some of the old issues where almost every page had some kind of advertisement. The two things that are putting it into that category again are

"Amazing But True . . ." and "Test Your I.Q." The former is strictly for the birds and belongs in a newspaper. Where the latter is concerned I guess I differ from most s-f fans. I like my science-fiction magazines to be full of fiction and none of those little valuable tidbits of information stuck in on every other page. I may be showing my ignorance but I just don't appreciate those little articles.

Here is my idea of what would be a perfect *Amazing Stories:* good stories; a serial every once in awhile; back cover illustration; "Or So You Say," "The Observatory," some cartoons and a story rating section. Also would like to see some "Johnny Mayhem" stories every now and then.

Steve Green
157 W. Hendricks
Shelbyville, Indiana

• *Sorry you don't care for the two features you mentioned, Mr. Green, but thanks for telling us. If enough of our readers agree these features will be speedily dropped. As an example of what we mean—we've been told in no uncertain terms that the majority of our readers—we have every reason to believe it's a majority—don't want serials. They feel a month is too long to wait for the next installment. So we're dropping serials immediately. There have also been many complaints that our lead story is not long enough so it's going to be lengthened. That will give you an idea of who runs this magazine. The editor is really a messenger boy for the readers.*

Dear Editor:

The idea of a world in the earth's orbit on the other side of the sun is not a new one. It was invented quite some time ago and it has hung around until today though it was proven some time ago to be impossible.

In regard to "Quest of the Golden Ape": I dislike being a non-conformist to the impossible but didn't Mr. Jorgensen and Mr. Chase hear of perturbation theory? Evidently not!

Well, once upon a time some astronomers decided to use a mathematical application to mechanics which took into account the fact each planet in the solar system exerts forces on every other planet in the solar system. This was a very fine theory because it allowed the astronomers to pick up a

pencil and paper and compute the exact positions of all the solar bodies.

The astronomers thought about an earth twin, directly on the other side of the sun in the earth's orbit and decided such a world would have to exert the same effect on the other worlds in the solar system as the Earth. However, the computations gave the correct positions already without any more world. Therefore such a planet did not exist.

Science-fiction writers have not been very happy about this. As usual they are about thirty years behind the accomplishment of science.

Couldn't Mr. Jorgensen and Mr. Chase put that other world in some other solar system where it belongs?

Ronal Karres
1625 Curtis
Berkeley 2, Calif.

● *Mr. Karres is entirely correct. There couldn't possibly be a twin world on the other side of the sun. But let's look at it from the writer's standpoint. Writers as a breed are free, unfettered souls who ride the wings of their own imaginations. The spark plug that motivates them and sends them soaring is named, "What if . . . ?" Jorgensen and Chase no doubt said to themselves—as have many other writers— "Of course there is no planet on the other side of the sun, but what if there were? We're sure its name would be Tarth, that such and such would happen . . ." and off they go to make it happen in the land of romance and derring-do. Without this faculty to create worlds, writers would be compiling dull handbooks of fact rather than fancy and fiction as we know it would not exist. Wouldn't that make it a pretty dull world, Mr. Karres?*

Dear Editor:

What has happened to *Amazing?* In my opinion it seems to be losing its appeal, sense of wonder or whatever you care to call it. No longer do I find the stories as interesting or for that matter as good as those of only a year or so back.

Each issue seems to be the same as the last, the same Valigursky cover, the same uninteresting editorial, the same type of interior illos., and what is possibly the worst of all a

readers' column made up of two paragraph letters filled with nothing but praise. What has happened to the long-winded but interesting arguments of a few years ago?

What will become of *Amazing* when the impending s-f boom becomes a reality, when once more authors find it easy to sell even bad stories?

My suggestions: change the format, add new and better quality covers and illos, better stories, more interesting reader departments, and finally occasionally try running a full-length novel or a two or three installment serial like Banister's "Scarlet Saint" of a year ago.

Wm. C. Richardt
21175 Goldsmith
Farmington, Mich.

• *What will happen when authors find it easy to sell bad stories? Let's hope and pray Horace Gold and Tony Boucher and Larry Shaw and Jim Quinn buy them all up before Fairman gets a crack at them.*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading *Amazing* since long before Gernsback, back in the era when Jazz ruled the popular musical field. I have some 100,000 song titles in my record collection, and I can assure you that what was stated in "Amazing But True . . ." in the March issue is a time you goofed. You state there is only one musical number so far that begins with an apostrophe. You know better than that, because I am sure you are acquainted with some of the following numbers:

" 'Twas Only An Irishman's Dream"
" 'Twas The Night Before Christmas"
" 'Tain't No Sin"
" 'Tain't Yours"
" 'Tain't What You Do"
" 'Cain't Song"

I could fill the page, but I won't make your face any redder than it is now.

Everett D. Biddle
Lago Oil & Transport Company, Ltd.
Medical Department
Aruba, N.W. 1

● *Mr. Steiner will be executed at dawn next Thursday. You are cordially invited to the funeral.*

Dear Editor:

The March issue was superb. I thought "The Savage Swarm" would make a swell movie.

I agree with Lois Jones letter about having a story rating column. Would create a greater interest.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

● *Hey, wait a minute! We're busy taking our lumps. How did this compliment get in?*

Dear Ed:

The lead in the last issue was a regular *Amazing* good. However, as you probably already know, second part of "Quest Of The Golden Ape," knocked it all to pieces. It's easily understood when old Ivar Jorgensen sets his mind to work. He's produced several masterpieces in the past. The past is one thing, but there's always room for improvement in the future.

For an author who is doing just that, my choice is Robert Moore Williams. He's really improving.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Ala.

● *Well, anyhow Mr. Ayers, you gotta admit "Quest Of The Golden Ape" sure started out with a bang.*

Dear Editor:

I wrote to you recently suggesting that the names of writers of letters that could not be published be given a listing as an appendix to the letter column.

I am pleased to see that a sufficient number of others have approved of the idea that it was thought workable by your company.

I am also displeased by the form that my suggestion has now taken. The idea I had was similar to the method used in

Startling. The form the idea now has taken is that of a club. Isn't this a little too obviously juvenilistic for many, and might it not prevent some from writing in the fear that their name might appear in the club listing? On the other hand, if only those who request listing in the club are listed, then the idea is quite different from what I had sponsored. Those who write, but who don't request listing, and whose letters are not published, would find no acknowledgment of receipt by you of their letter.

Perhaps my original idea could be implemented along with the club idea. At the end of the published letters you could add the names and addresses of other letters that could not be printed in full.

Arthur Hayes
c/o Dom. Catering, Bicroft
Bancroft, Ont. Canada

• *Give us a little time please, Mr. Hayes. We're weary and beaten and sore, but in a few minutes we'll get up off the carpet and start all over again.*

Dear Editor:

The lead story in the February issue of *Amazing* was quite poor. Lately your lead stories have fallen off in quality. I hope to see better ones in the future. The cover is better than most recent ones to date.

Why not expand the letter column to its former length? It's almost dead.

Larry Sokol
4131 Lafayette Ave.
Omaha 3, Nebr.

• *The letter column almost dead? Mr. Sokol—please! This one's cutting us up in little bits and feeding us to the fish!*

Dear Editor:

I never thought I'd end up griping about *Amazing*, but here it is. What happened to "The Spectroscope"? It used to appear every other month or so. When I buy s-f books, I want to know beforehand that what I'm getting is worth the money. I can't say I like all the new departments you're put-

ting in *Amazing*. I'm just kind of indifferent to them, but for goodness sake don't forget about "The Spectroscope."

Bruce Fredstrom
719 North 3rd Ave.
Sandpoint, Idaho

• *This editor always thought "The Spectroscope" was the weakest department in the book. Which goes to show how stupid an editor can be.*

Dear Editor:

Thanks for the many hours of reading enjoyment from *Amazing, Fantastic* and *Dream World*.

Don't let anyone tell you your books need anything more except twice a month publication for *Amazing*.

Ronald Gardner
Box 402
Delta, Utah

• *Please excuse this letter but we're so black and blue from being pounded from the cover to page 130 that we just had to slip in this compliment.*

Dear Editor:

I've been reading s-f for about five years. *Amazing* has been one of my favorites.

There are two things that I do not like about it. One is those confounded serials. If I want to read a novel I can always go down to the bookstore and get one and save the trouble of keeping track of each installment month after month. My second complaint—the covers. They've been pretty bad lately. Otherwise I thought the March issue was great.

Robert D. Dest
6437 Grant Ave.
Carmichael, Calif.

• *Okay, Robert. No more serials, but let's face it—the darned book's got to have a cover!*

Dear Editor:

After having finished the March issue of *Amazing* I can

only say one thing, you oughta' be glad you have some Finlay illos. in each issue. If it weren't for that I believe that your circulation would drop considerably.

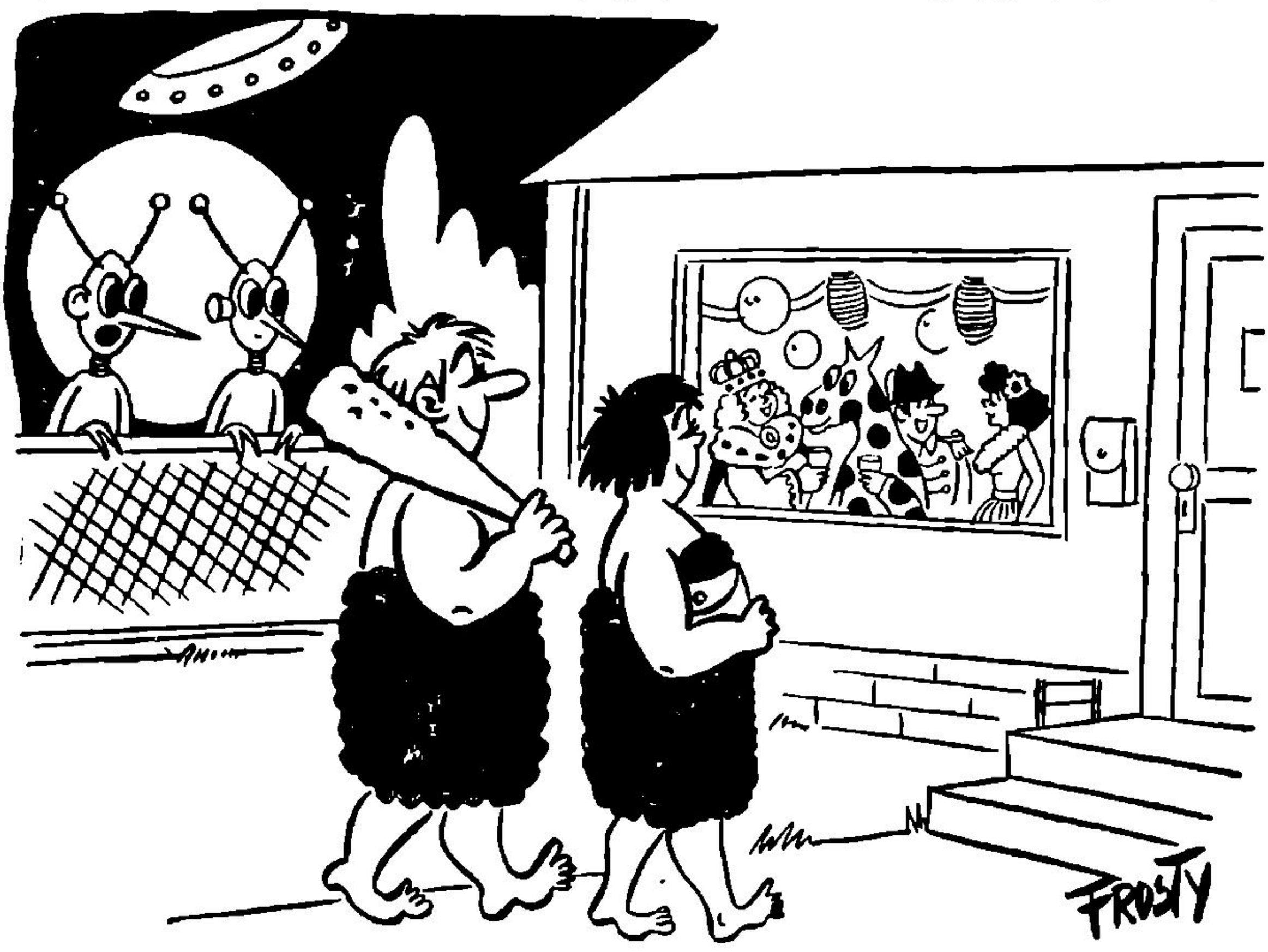
"Quest Of The Golden Ape" was a pretty fair story as was "Disaster Revisited," but the only thing that made them readable was the Finlay illustrations.

The Space Club is one of the outstanding things in s-f today. It certainly is to your credit.

One last gripe. Why do you have to have so many covers by Valigursky? A person after seeing one of them can hardly bring himself to buy the magazine. How about trying some other cover artists?

David Orr

• *Thanks from Mr. Finlay. As to Valigursky, here's something that may surprise you. Almost every science-fiction editor in the business has tried to lure Val away from us. No go. He's loyal.*



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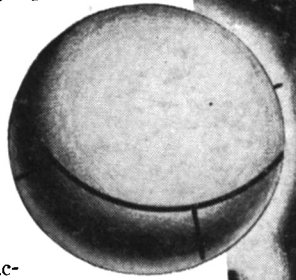

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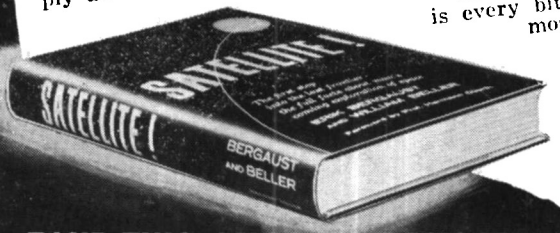

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