A New Novel - **THE MAN WHO HAD NO BRAINS**

Amazing stories

Fact and Science Fiction

AUGUST

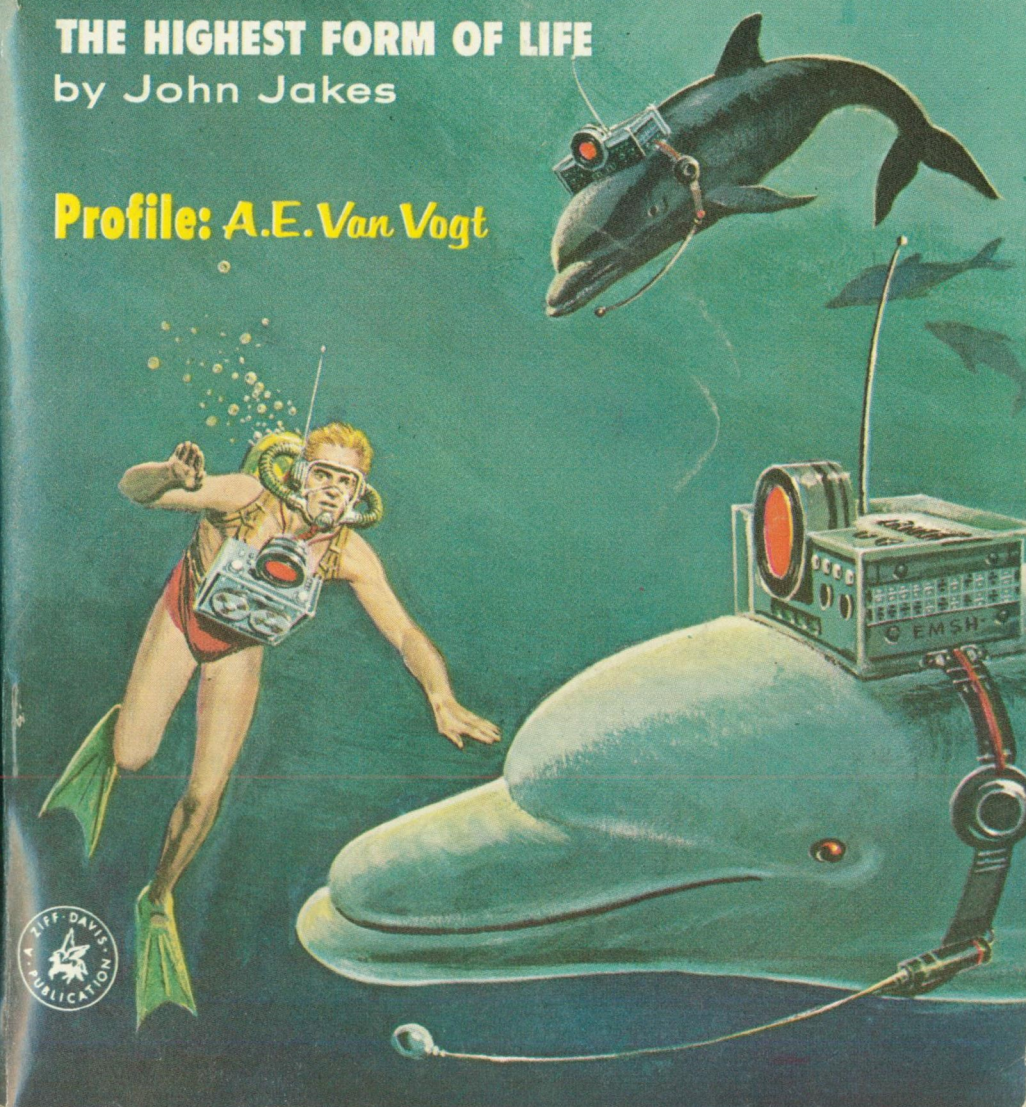
35¢

MAC 8

THE HIGHEST FORM OF LIFE

by John Jakes

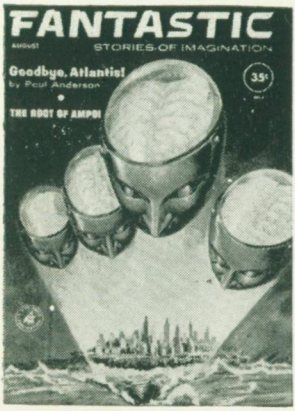
Profile: A.E. Van Vogt



A ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLICATION

featured in August **FANTASTIC**

GODS OR DEMONS?



In the crystal tower of the Holy, the ancient rituals were performed. And then—with the wind of Their passage roaring louder than a bursting mountain, They came—four naked brains housed in heads of bronze. And whether They were Gods or Demons, man would never know.

Poul Anderson writes a vibrant tale of ancient adventure, and provides a new mythos for the end of Atlantis. You can't afford to miss this shocking story: GOODBYE, ATLANTIS!

Also in this issue—*The Root of Ampoi,* one of the great fantasy stories of all time, by Clark Ashton Smith. Another in the new series of Classic Fantasy Reprints.

BE SURE TO GET AUGUST FANTASTIC!

ON SALE JULY 18TH—ONLY 35¢!

AMAZING STORIES Fact and Science Fiction, Vol. 35, No. 8, August, 1961, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953) at 434 South Wabash Ave., Chicago 5, Ill. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Ill., and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada $3.50 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries $4.00; all other foreign countries $4.50.

Amazing
Fact and Science Fiction Stories

AUGUST, 1961 Vol. 35, No. 8

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

"FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926"

SHORT STORIES

VIGNETTE

SERIAL

FEATURES

Cover: ED EMSHWILLER

Publisher
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Editorial Director
NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING Co., One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and General Manager; M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President and Business Manager; Charles Housman, Financial Vice President; Richard Kislik, Treasurer.

EDITORIAL

THINGS run in cycles, which is not a particularly novel observation, but it is an encouraging one; you can always figure that if you are way *out* this year, you will be way *in* next year. Or vice versa. Science fiction has not been immune to cyclical trends. There have been spurts of stories about entire populaces traveling in starships and developing their own "universe." Then there were the robot cycle and the "slan" cycle and the "psi" cycle. The point of this essay is to call to your attention the beginnings of what this trend-spotter spots as the start of a new trend—or, cycle. It is now perhaps only a cloud on the horizon, no larger than a fish. But—what a fish!

We are speaking, to come to the point, of dolphins, any of several mammals of the whale family, with a break-like snout and teeth in the upper jaw. If this sounds as an unlikely description of a new culture-hero in science-fiction, you are simply way out, and will have to sit back and wait for the next cycle.

Some months back a Dr. Lilly, of the U.S. Navy, reported his experiments with dolphins showed them to be of extreme intelligence; with a brain capacity larger than man's, with a system of communication, and with what seems to be a sociological structure.

Well, we thought we were pretty hep when we asked John Jakes to do a story about these speculations; and, you will also note, the cover of this issue sports an excellent illustration of dolphin geniuses by Emsh. But what gives credence to the cycle theory is the appearance of a new book by the eminent atomic scientist and biophysicist, Dr. Leo Szilard, titled *"The Voice of the Dolphins,"* and published by Simon & Schuster. Prof. Szilard is one of the great men

in the field of atomic science. The first American patent in that field was issued jointly to him and Enrico Fermi, and in 1959 Szilard was a co-winner of the Atoms for Peace Award. It is difficult—but, I think, just—to say that Szilard is not a writer. His book (which contains several other short stories in addition to the title tale) contains ideas which are s-f stereotypes; the characterizations are wooden, the plots non-existent, and the writing dull.* The most ingenious is "The Voice of the Dolphins," which is actually a satirical political story dealing with a solution of the atomic stalemate between America and Russia. It is not giving the story away (for the punch-line is obvious almost from the beginning) to report that the scientists who dream up the scheme which saves the world always made believe that the ideas were those of a group of particularly intelligent dolphins. Szilard is saying, in effect, that if scientists put forth a political theory, woe betide it! But the world—which takes to wonders more easily than not—will go along with anything they think the dolphins have said!

The moral of the story could be: if you wish in this world to advance, get yourself a dolphin for a front man.

Do not think we here at AMAZING are being cavalier about dolphins. Far from it. We are prepared to say right now that dolphins are probably the next ruling species. Dolphins are pleasant fish, friendly to castaways and children, and always ready to flip through a hoop at Marineland (above) for the delectation of the paying customers.

There is one other thought we'll leave with you. The word dolphin comes from the Greek *delphis*—and who knows whether the oracle of Delphi did not speak with "the voice of a dolphin." At the same time, *Delphinus* (a variation on *delphis*) is the astronomical name of a constellation west of Pegasus. Perhaps the brilliant dolphin is an extra-terrestrial life-form, concealing the teeth in his beak-like snout while he cases the joint before the ultimate take-over.

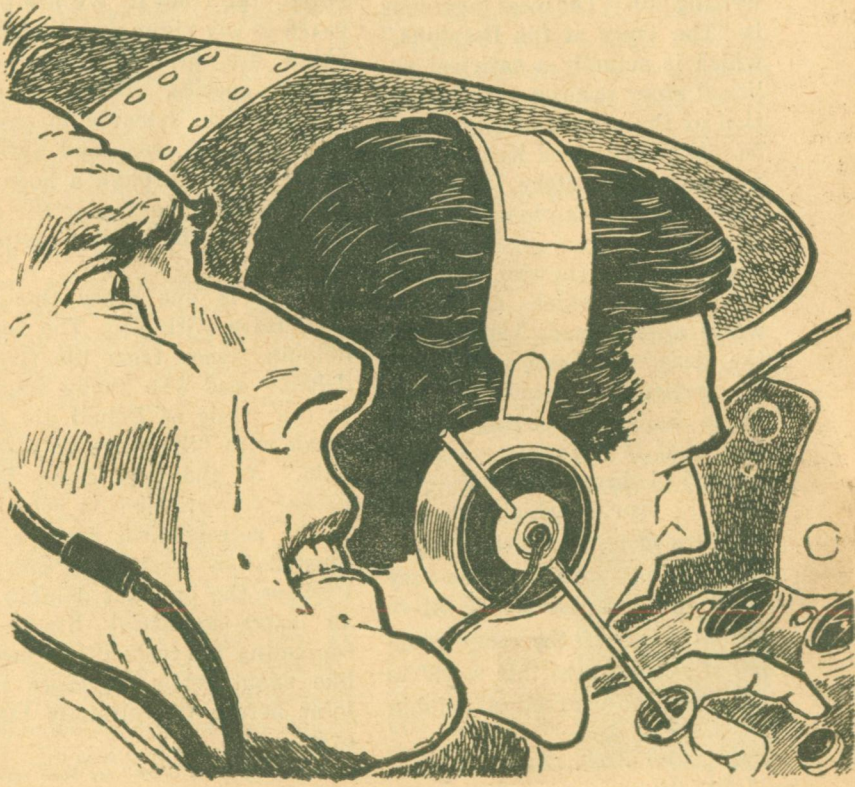
—NL

** For proof that differences of opinion run rampant even in "The Shop," see book review on page 133.*

The HIGHEST Form

By JOHN JAKES

U.S. Navy scientific tests show that dolphins have a larger brain than man, a language, and a social organization. The next question, logically, is: What do the dolphin experiments reveal about man?



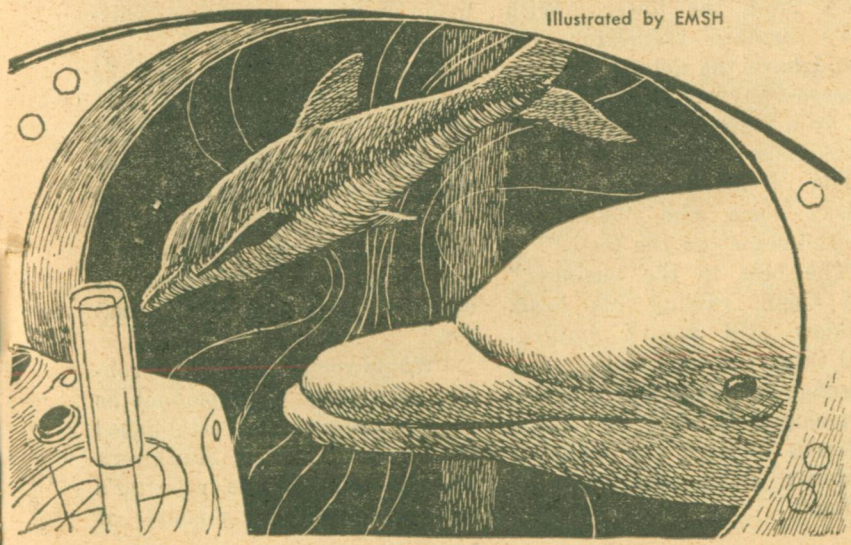
# of LIFE

IN the lives of most men there are a very few, certain days on which they not only sense their purpose but know that a fraction of it may be accomplished. So it was with Dr. Robert Conn, when the alarm went off in the cottage in the hot Florida dawn. His mind said, *14 April,* and even his own breathing had a sound of music.

All the light had a crystal reality as he dressed in the uniform thoughtfully provided by Lt. Commander Spiegelglass, and ate all the breakfast his nerves could stand—three cups of chicory coffee. His wife and his two little boys were like sunlit ghosts. He could not reach or touch them in his excitement. Spinning the Volkswagen out of the drive for the ten mile run to the cobalt water of the Florida coast, he hoped that they understood.

He exceeded the speed limit all the way, roared through the checkstations with impossibly witty quips for each bored seaman at each check box, and braked with a stamp of his foot alongside the nuclear submarine *U. S. S. Sharkbait.* On the tower Sig Spiegelglass and Don Maddow were watching him. Neither man smiled or waved.

Illustrated by EMSH



Conn wondered about the lack of smiles only for a moment. He found himself caught in the middle of a half dozen reporters.

"Is it true you're going to communicate with a fish this morning, Dr. Conn?"

"Not fish." Conn smiled and polished his glasses. *"Tursiops truncatus."*

"The press release says that means porpoise," said a grating female voice.

"I'm afraid the press release writer didn't look up the difference between the bottle-nose dolphin and the common porpoise," Conn replied, hoping he didn't sound too stuffy.

"You really think communication will be possible?"

Conn gestured to russet-haired Dr. Maddow watching impassively from the tower. "With Don's impulse translator—you should have the details in those releases—anyway, it was worked out by a team of engineers and philologists at Randco—"

Over a moving ballpoint a whisky voice said, "Maddow's the philologist on the team?"

"The best in the business," said Conn, raising his head. Maddow still wasn't smiling. "We think the combination of a language specialist and a neurophysiologist is ideal for trying to break through and translate whatever Bottle-nose may be saying."

EVEN as he spoke, Conn realized they couldn't possibly be as excited about it as he, because they reached excitement by different means. Special press runs, maybe. Names announced at a Pulitzer dinner. But for Conn it was impossible to ignore the sense of immeasurable awe, of reverence, which filled him whenever he thought of the small wonders the impulse translator might work before the sun went down over the green coast tonight. Patiently and lovingly Conn repeated most of the information in the press release: the cell count in dolphin brains; the forty percent greater brain size; the precocity shown by the biggest of the creatures in the learning experience; the unmistakeable twenty sounds which made up their squawking, whistling alphabet.

Since the cell counts are the same as the human brain per cubic centimeter," Conn said, "and the brains are bigger, and they have a language, we think we can communicate—make a first bridge between mammalian forms, as it were. It's taken us six years to perfect the translator."

"Would you consider this problem as difficult or important as the communication established last month by the Southwerk Mirror with—" The reporter's voice hesitated and a couple of

heads looked skyward. "—whatever is out there?"

Conn winced, enviously. Southwerk had scored a jump on the oceanographic team. Rather stiffly he said, "That was a marvelous achievement—the definite establishment of communication with a being or beings not of our Earth who have orderly, organized speech. Of course," he couldn't help adding, "Southwerk hasn't yet translated."

"Is that a case of interservice rivalry, Doctor?" someone asked in a barbed way.

Conn laughed. "I think I'd better get aboard." Amid Thank Yous, up he went, up the ladder, triumphant, up the steel sides toward the hot morning sky where the heads of Spiegelglass and Don Maddow floated like balloons. For an instant Conn felt totally like a god. Then he climbed into place beside them. He noticed that Maddow was staring emptily out over the gantry skeletons far across the yard.

READY to take her out, Sig?" Conn said.

"Why bother?" Maddow snarled. "We've been had."

"What's this?" Conn laughed nervously. "You guys trying to bug me?"

Sig Spiegelglass studied the cigar he was unwrapping. "I wish we were, Bob. Last night, around seven, Coast Detection picked up a sub out there."

"Then beam Washington and have it clear out," Conn said, a little irritated.

"Beam Red Square, you mean," said Maddow sourly.

Now the matchless, empty blue heavens had invisible clouds in them. Conn felt a chill wind through his blouse. "One of the regular line jobs?"

"Uh-uh." Maddow shook his head. "When the profile tape was developed it showed an unusual configuration. In fact they have only one like it."

"Oh, hell."

Conn seized the steel rail and stared down at the reporters drifting off. A tug hooted off the Florida coast in the lost cobalt distances, a dirty sound. Conn said:

"The *Nikolai Fernoyon?*"

Neither Maddow nor Sig answered when Conn pronounced the name of the almost legendary oceanographic vessel which carried three times the crew of the *Sharkbait*. For a long moment Conn hoped either of the men would answer in the negative. Neither did. Conn indulged himself in sixty seconds of the foulest language he knew.

Then he said, "I wish I had a knife. I wish I had a knife to castrate the dumb block-head in Washington who classifies Wash-

ington's birthday and lets our preliminary papers in every damn Sunday supplement in the country."

"We're wasting time," Maddow said dispiritedly. "The *Fernoyon* has an instantaneous press transmitter. If they've made contact, they'll wait until we go out in the torpedo, and then Tass'll break the story they've already got set in type."

"Maybe they don't have a translator," Spiegelglass said hopefully.

"So maybe they'll tap in on us," Maddow snapped back. "And before we can transmit, they'll have the message in their sheets and how are we going to prove them liars?"

"If they don't have the dingus," Sig said, "you could foul them up by not putting out in the torpedo."

Even though he had a sick, wasted feeling in his stomach, Robert Conn shook his head. "No, we have to go out. I don't care if they do tap us. I don't care whether some crummy witch doctor in Africa thinks the *Fernoyon* did it and we didn't just so long as I'm there, just so long as I know." Conn's pale face burned like a coin hit by the sun. Spiegelglass picked up the tube and talked around his cigar:

"You gentlemen down there stand by. We are about to participate in another in the series of ever-popular U. S. propaganda defeats."

OF ALL the lousy, crapping luck," Maddow said harshly. He spun on Conn. "And you stand there saying it doesn't matter."

"It doesn't," Conn said, trying to convince himself. "Once you get over acting like a six year old and realize that we aren't supermen in this country—that what we're doing, we're doing for everybody—" He seized Maddow's shoulders. Deep below the two men a faint fury from the reactors tingled up through the soles of shoes. "We've made contact with something in space and now we're making contact with another mammalian life form, real contact, intelligible—"

"We think," Maddow sneered. "Bottle-nose probably speaks Ukrainian."

Conn was getting a little hysterical: "It's the human race doing it, man himself, Don. Don't you see, it's—"

"Unless you gentlemen would like to float to Jacksonville," Spiegelglass said around his cigar, "I suggest we go below."

Maddow ducked down, preparatory to obeying, but could not resist a last thrust at Conn as his russet head vanished down into the artificial gloom: "Sorry, Bob, but I can't see it. I'm funny that way."

"If you don't want any part of an experiment like this," Conn shouted furiously, starting down the ladder after him, "You should have put on your American Legion cap and gone home a long time a—"

"Please get off my tower," said Sig Spiegelglass. "We're already forty-two seconds overdue."

Thus, with Conn and Maddow sulking on either side of the twenty-foot cylinder they called their torpedo, the *U. S. S. Sharkbait* moved slowly out between the gantries into the mercurial blue swell of the sea.

The intricate ritual of command, the soft blink of colored lights went on around them. Conn gazed furiously at the russet-haired Maddow, wondering why Maddow couldn't see the triumph of it, regardless of who won the propaganda advantage. Besides, the presence of the gigantic Russian oceanographic sub might be sheerest bluff.

Then, with a start, Conn recalled the intense personal feeling he had experienced upon waking that morning. What had happened to it? This was *his* mystery and miracle, his and Don's. Gradually the hastily-assumed attitude of the tower grew less strong.

A SIMILAR process was apparently taking place in Maddow's mind. After all, they were grown men. Before too many minutes had elapsed, they were speaking, though not laughing. For Conn, the personal mystery of it would not return, knowing as he did that he might not be alone in the victory now. All that was left for him, and for Maddow too, it seemed, was a kind of defeated gray calm, and a desperate clinging to the expressions of "doing it for all men" which Conn had so suddenly espoused in the heat of argument. But they were friends again.

On the color television a green hairline showed the Florida coast far behind.

"Take her down, please, Mr. Olufson," said Spiegelglass.

Then came the sensation of incredible power, the nonexistent yet palpably real surge and tingle that got inside Conn's bones when he watched the watery line sweep up and obliterate the sky on the screen. Cobalt shaded to emerald. And from out of a lucite panel on four stanchions, strange echoes began to bounce and sing. There was a low note and several higher ones. Every face in the mixed lighting—red, green and a bit of blue—showed that the low note was wrong.

"That's *Fernoyon*," said the conner, adjusting his earphones.

"Right in the middle of the school?" Maddow asked.

"Center, and not moving."

Maddow's face was the color

of the sea outside. "So we do their work for them, Robert?"

"It is their work, in a way," Conn said, but the words felt hollow on his tongue.

"Philosophers I got to have," Spiegelglass said, his head floating blue in the half-lit maze of pipes and lights and bouncing eerie echoes. "Stop being such big social brains and climb into the torpedo. I'm carrying orders, you know. We're shooting you in twelve minutes. If something sticks out, it's not my fault."

The *Sharkbait* pulsed quietly, moving outward and downward through the plankton and the great pastel anemones, downward through whirling darts of phosphorescence brighter than stars in a liquefied cosmos of achingly beautiful green. As if to emphasize the importance of the coming contact, Spiegelglass activated all the annunciators throughout the sub. While Conn and Maddow peeled their uniforms and squeezed into the flexible black skin suits, there was not a sound on the entire submarine except for the low note counterpointing the steadily noisier higher ones that signalled the dolphin school.

Through the sealed plastic soles of the suit Conn felt the reactors under the plates like his own heartbeat intensified. Maddow, all business, slid back the double-hinged cover of the torpedo. Just under the curving forward plate in the narrow miniature sub, a row of green eyes like six eyes in a line gleamed on the ultra-simplified dials of the translator control. Maddow raise his hand in an Alphonse-and-Gaston gesture.

Conn's face, haloed in black plastic, shone with sweat. "I don't want to go."

"The Kremlin got you buffaloed, sport?"

"It's such a rotten shame, after so long—"

Maddow laughed. "I sang that chorus in the last set."

"I know, but—" Conn wiped his face, feeling faint. "All of a sudden—"

"'It's man,' you said."

"No." Conn shook his head. "It's me, first."

"I suppose it's probably some of both," Maddow said, his voice surprisingly soft. "And that's probably why we make so many rotten mistakes. If—"

THE annunciator squawked with the voice of Spiegelglass: "Will you both please cut out the penny philosophy and haul yourselves inside that thing? Four minutes." So there was no more time for Conn to wonder why he felt both triumphant and defeated, when nothing at all had happened.

He crawled up over the torpedo and wriggled out prone on the

port side, facing the plate and the six green eyes in a line. Maddow came in after. On his back he took care of the gasketing while Conn snapped controls that closed the cover. With much cursing Maddow wriggled over on his belly. Beneath them an oiled track moved. Ahead of the plate a black hole opened like an iris to swallow them. Conn had never felt more afraid in his life.

"The talker," Maddow hissed in the humid, sweating dark.

Their only companion for the next two minutes was the voice of Sig Spiegelglass, counting steadily and tonelessly. The last whisper of his one-count was drowned in a whoosh and roar. The black burst open and became green, white-streaked and furious, and they were launched in the deeps.

As the torpedo began to lose speed Maddow asked, "See anything?"

"Up ahead, I think," Conn replied. "But don't use the light. I wouldn't want to frighten them if we can help it."

"The vanes, at least."

Maddow raised on his elbows, his head jammed against the ceiling, and manipulated two of three rods with lucite handlegrips. The nose of the torpedo dropped a degree. Over the hiss of his own breathing Conn heard the light bubbling of the tiny reactor and the whispers of the controlled air system. He stared out into the miraculous green gloom of the undersea until he thought his eyeballs would burst. An instant before the image came permanently into his brain, his nerves felt it:

"There they are. Cut everything but the stabilization."

The bubbling stopped. Maddow sighed. "They're beautiful."

And they were. Conn counted two dozen before giving up, long graceful shadows, some almost inky, others grayer, but all ghostly on their underbellies and the under-sides of their jaws. Among them were giants Conn estimated to be well over the twelve foot average for the species. Some of them moved lazily, in a random pattern. Others, racing up for the surface, created a sort of basketweave effect, lacing in and out among the big females swimming belly up for courtship. One flashed near. Conn thought he saw an eye gleam. At least he knew that the eye could be watching him, because the eye could see better than fifty feet, and if inside that bottle-shaped head lodged a brain that could interpret—

ALL of a sudden Conn remembered the *Nikolai Fernoyon.* But there was no sign of it. Of course there wouldn't be.

Maddow raised a tentative hand to the six green eyes.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

All Conn could think of saying was an inane, "Now or never."

Maddow threw on a switch. The circuits under the deck warmed for a millisecond. Then came the first faint sound, a mixture between a squeak and a drawn-out whistle.

It made Conn's spine crawl, transmitted as it was so perfectly through the exposed sound dishes on the torpedo's surface. In another second, as half a dozen of the huge creatures shot past their little craft, Conn heard the gabble intensify. He and Maddow were caught in the center of an underwater cocktail party, a kaffee klatch from unearthly voice boxes. Conn found himself reaching out for the switch which would activate the translator. His hand shook. He looked over at Maddow.

"You do it."

"Let's not be cornball," Maddow said, but his eyes were huge with wonder.

"All right. Count five."

"Five," said Maddow.

"We won't get anything," said Conn.

"Three," said Maddow.

"But if we do. Don—God—all my life—"

"One," said Maddow.

Before Conn's finger could hit the control a new sound blasted the speaker.

Conn's belly twisted within him. "What's that? The Russian sub?"

"I—don't know." Maddow sounded like a small boy, frightened.

They both listened for a full minute. An eerie, spiralling wail came down, it seemed, from above. Maddow switched off all the sound dishes except the dorsal and verified it.

"But the *Fernoyon* should be below us," he insisted, "and we're getting this from up above."

There was a dull thump. One of the dolphins had lashed itself against the torpedo. The whole school was moving, diving and shooting up in a senseless frenzy. Maddow cursed.

"They want to louse it up for us. They've done something in the sub—"

"That doesn't come from any sub," said Conn, pointing.

THROUGH the plate they both saw it, an unbelievably bright and round column of bluish radiance which lanced down from overhead, straight through the school of dolphins, illuminating their slick darting bodies like a searchlight. The water began to churn and grow violent as the agitation of the school increased.

"The translator," Maddow said furiously. "Get it on, fast."

Helpless with confusion, Conn manipulated the controls automatically. A guttural, crackling

sound came harshly into the tight confines of the torpedo. "That isn't Bottle-nose."

"Then what is it?"

Conn indicated the blue beam which remained steady as it vanished downward to the impenetrable bottoms of the ocean floor.

"That."

Now the dolphin school had quieted. The huge mammals seemed to be circling the light in orderly, layered circles, four and then four above and then four more, on up toward the surface out of sight, each circle moving opposite of the one directly below and above. Conn imagined he was watching a ballet performed by human beings in elaborate costumes and wondered whether he was experiencing some unique underwater phenomenon never before mentioned in the texts on reaction and hallucination.

Abruptly impotent fury twisted Maddow's face. His hands flew on the lucite-handled levers. The torpedo nosedived, the bubbling grew louder.

Conn tore at his friend's arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to ram hell out of those creeps on the *Fernoyon.*"

"Why?"

"Because this is their foul-up, damn it, it's—"

The torpedo struck the shaft of bluish light and a huge indentation was hammered into the ceiling. Lazily the vehicle spun end over end, impossibly off course, impossibly out of control. Maddow and Conn tumbled like squirrels in a revolving cage. At last their frantic hands on the vane levers righted the craft. Now Conn felt overwhelming terror and confusion.

"We hit that light," he said. "No light on earth can—"

Both men looked at one another.

At last Conn swallowed, painfully. "Where's Bottle-nose?"

"Not talking," Maddow said, as though he had wandered drunk and dirty into a church during an Easter service, and had wakened to find himself retching before the altar. "Not talking. *Listening.*"

STILL the guttural crackling continued Maddow suggested trying other frequencies. Like a madman Conn operated the controls. He caught a syllable, shouted aloud, lost the syllable in a too-hasty twist of the primary dial, regained it a moment later. The voice the two men heard was oddly slowed, like a one-hundred r.p.m. disc being played at sixteen. The accents could not be identified because they did not exist: it was a metal voice, an impulse funnelled through their translator and unscrambled into the sound-code their own minds could understand:

"*—picked up Southwerk. Wish*

no contact." A sharp, jittery whine of interference, followed by the words: "*—egocentric—pitiably brutal—*"

"There goes *Fernoyon,*" Maddow shouted suddenly.

Rising up on foaming columns a great black bulk lurched surfaceward on the far side of the blue light. Now the dolphins had circled closer to the beam. More interference—the translation of the guttural voice was lost. As if linked together telepathically, Conn and Maddow began to work furiously over their instruments. The underwater world became a kaleidoscope of darting, spiralling dolphin shapes whirling upward near the beam. The torpedo broke surface.

Maddow hammered at the gasketing devices like a man possessed. He and Conn scrambled up and inflated their airpacks as the torpedo began to fill, forgotten. The sun blinded Conn, but he distinctly heard the squawk-and-buzz of the school before the amplifier submerged, and the squawk-and-buzz of the school had been translated to words, and the words were:

"*—we are the highest—you are the highest—we seek you—*"

THE *U. S. S. Sharkbait* was surfacing thunderously. The *Nikolai Fernoyon* was already up, men in underwear pouring out of its tower, one, with a blond Georgian beard, waving his starred cap at the two men bobbing on the torpedo. Conn and Maddow clung, Conn with salt water and gall in his mouth. His face was so wet with the swell he could not taste his own tears.

He choked through mouthfuls of water: "They—neither—they don't—" He swallowed more water, gagging. "—want us."

And indeed the dolphins did not, lancing up from the surface. They spiralled like beautiful glistening machines, around and around the blue beam of light, high toward the clouds, dots in the blueness of the sky now, riding the blue ladder of light, hundreds of them, a thousand of them from the floor of the ocean, riding up and rising toward the sun-hot circular blur of silver light that was the ship from beyond waiting to greet them.

THE END

The 19th World Science Fiction Convention, sponsored this year by the Seattle Science Fiction Club, will take place September 2, 3 & 4, 1961, at the recently completed Hyatt House. Robert A. Heinlein will be the Guest of Honor. Advance convention memberships are $2 per person, with an additional $1 registration fee to be collected at the Convention. Send inquiries to Seattle Science Fiction Club, Box 1365, Broadway Branch, Seattle 2, Washington.

The GREAT IMPLICATION

By STANLEY R. LEE

Illustrated by FINLAY

Pendelton outlined an experiment to test the existence of the God-idea. The question then became obviously: was the experiment Pendelton's idea — or God's?

WAS there something contagious about ignorance? Pendelton wondered aloud that day. Was it inevitable, was it in the air the same as ideas were? He thought that might be the answer because what else could explain the fact that a couple of accomplished physicists were about to fall into a time-honored trap that was already gorged with old, rancid science fiction writers; and not only rancid, but crooked: they accepted pay for writing about a subject they knew nothing of and wasn't that stealing?

Pendelton wasn't actully *trying* to be obnoxious. In fact he liked to make good impressions. He smiled a lot, for instance. And he kept his hands in his pockets so he wouldn't point. He had a peculiar blunt-subtle mind, half of which could split hairs with a Jesuit while the other half couldn't distinguish between a pat on the back and a punch in the jaw.

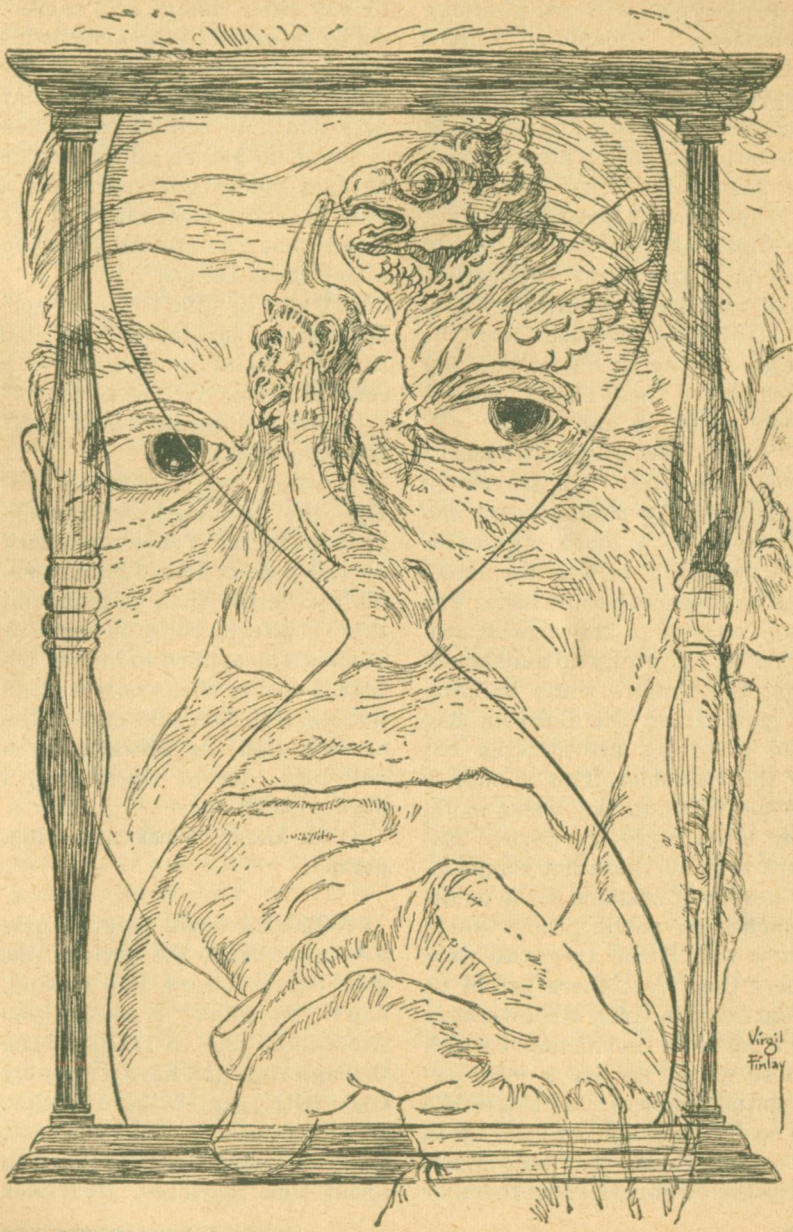
He rolled right along, smiling and telling them they knew nothing about time travel. *Nothing.* They were babes in the temporal woods! Having a time machine under construction meant that they were in the possesion of what he referred to as mathematical conceptuosity plus above

average hardware skills. But that didn't necessarily raise them above the level of the science fiction writers when it came to applications. Or the editors. The readers too, for that matter, all blithely playing their cosy little after-the-fact parts in a fantastic world-wide conspiracy of ignorance.

Blackburn and Shaheen, of course, thought he was out of his mind. They'd only agreed to listen to him because he had a letter from the Humanities department head, that and a wild, intense expression on his face which made them think it would be easier to hear him out than throw him out, so they sat at their back-to-back desks glancing at each other occasionally while Pendelton rambled on about the Great Implication and how it was one day going to separate the logical men from the paradoxical boys—and after about twenty minutes of this they were actually listening to him.

So that six months later Blackburn and Shaheen got into a violent argument in the office of the university president, Dr. Freylinghuysen, the two mathematical-physicists completely unable to agree on the color of a girl's dress, a girl they'd not only never seen in their lives before ten that morning, but one who subsequently leveled charges of assault and malicious mischief and attempted rape at the university along with a civil suit for $50,000. Although it had to be said in Pendelton's defense that it wasn't his fault. It was Chaplain Rowan who sprinted across Voltaire Mall and attempted to strip Miss Ethel Chattinger, purely in the interest of science of course but the young lady couldn't quite see it that way, especially since Rowan, the university chaplain, had gotten away with quite a swatch, a large jagged piece of knit woolen dress which he later on triumphantly deposited on Dr. Freylinghuysen's desk, only to find that he hadn't really proved anything at all other than that perhaps Miss Chattinger—otherwise known as the either/or proposition—was not a quick change artist and the Humanities department's 35-year-old prodigy of an air conditioner repairman Leopold Pendelton wasn't a practical joker.

THE first thing," Pendelton said that first day, "is for you to forget about paradox. Paradox *has nothing to do with time travel. Nothing.* It's a monkeying around with words for purposes of profit and it has no place in the office of two experimental physicists. Anyone who answers an honest question with a paradox is a guaranteed shifty character and the chances are he's writing on the sly."


Virgil
Finlay

Preoccupied with not sounding obnoxious, Pendelton missed Blackburn's ostentatiously bored expression, didn't notice the enormous sarcastic attention that Shaheen was giving him. Instead, he remarked: "Feel free to interrupt me with questions. I want to finish off paradox so we can get on to the Great Implication. Will that be a satisfactory procedure?" He hovered over the desks staring at them with big eyes until they slowly nodded their heads up and down.

"Okay. Now. A man travels in time," he said. "He travels in time and fifty million years ago he steps on a moth. *Fantastic.* You wouldn't believe the effect one humble moth could have! The man returns to the present and finds to his guilty astonishment that the Empire State building is now flying the Bolivian flag and gargoyles are sticking out of the 79th floor. This is cute so be careful of it. Boy meets moth, boy loses moth—gargoyles! Except that all those not completely devoid of common sense or debauched by poetic license would know that if the gargoyles were there they were there before he went back in time. His own body is a part of a continuum of which those gargoyles are a prior sequential segment; his entire life is so inextricably wrapped up in those gargoyles that he couldn't possibly be surprised by them, or by any other change he'd caused. As he returned to the present his memory would *alter*. To take any other view of this—to close your eyes and hide behind paradox—is going to get us all in trouble because you've got yourselves a real time traveler now and it's about time you started *thinking* about these things."

("Well why didn't you say so," Blackburn murmured. "Be glad to think about it, give it *every* consideration. We'll be in touch."

"I don't think he heard you," Shaheen said.)

"I won't even bother discussing the suicide-by-killing-old-grandpa myth," Pendelton buzzed on with a great deal of imperturbability, "other than to point out there is no such thing as negative feedback as applied to human beings. I realize that's only a small nuance. But then, take care of the nuances and the breakthroughs will take care of themselves, I always say."

("Oh Lord," Blackburn whispered).

ANOTHER small point. I hate to verbalize the obvious like this but it clears the ground, don't you think? I realize you two might like to traipse back through time and have a friendly chat with, say, Mike Faraday. But that's exactly what you can't do. You know a *little* too much about time machines. He'd pick

your brains in half an afternoon and beat you back to your own office. As I say that's only a nuance. It's a nuance that eliminates 75% of all time travel science fiction ever written but that's still only a nuance, wait till I get to the Great Implication."

It was a curious word for him to have used—nuance—because six months later in Dr. Freylinghuysen's office Blackburn and Shaheen were to tangle over the nuance of blue versus green, a matter of observation which compared in subtlety to apples versus bananas, Shaheen saying heatedly: "The dress was blue. I'm not color blind and I have twenty-twenty vision. I'll stake my reputation as an experimental physicist on it." Blue! *And this was a lucid well defined statement of his position, a statement rivaled in lucidity only by that of Blackburn who had in all sincerity to insist that the dress* was *blue—but only 10:31 that morning at which time it turned* green; *and if that wasn't bad enough a panting red faced chaplain Rowan had to dash in, carefully locking the door behind him and taking out a huge swatch of dress which he plunked down on the desk shouting: "Green, green, green! Green as the envious devils of hell! Green I say! Green before, green after, green for eternity!"*

"I think, in spite of all," Blackburn remarked, "you've managed to find a way."

"No, but that's interesting," Shaheen said. "Semantically, anyway. *I will did.* Curious."

"A grammatical revolution!" Pendelton was telling them that first day. "I do, I did do, I will do. I have done, I will have done. "I do, I did do, I will do. I have done, I will have done, I should have done, I will did! They're all the same now! So you see, I'm not really wasting your time. The future and the past are now united in a fantastic tenseless embrace. At some time in the future I can in the past save Caesar's life. Thus, there being no more future and past, how can I be wasting your time?"

"More than curious," Pendelton replied. "Practical. The Greeks as you may know thought that no man could be sure he had a happy life until it was over. I on the other hand assert that Caesar's assassination is still in doubt because of the future-past equivalence, that he has not yet successfully crossed the Rubicon, that he is still swimming to the Alexandrian lighthouse, that he is not yet emperor of a Rome that has not yet fallen! Not emperor and yet . . . emperor. Not yet fallen and yet . . . fallen and gone like-what? The wind? No, not even the wind. Nothing is gone, it's all still there moiling

and seething around in temporal abeyance. Waiting to be resolved! Give me a time machine and I can mold every second of Caesar's existence and, incidentally, by extension, my own. The Greeks therefore were wrong. A man can no longer be sure he was happy even when he's dead!"

BLACKBURN leaned back in his chair and inquired blandly: "Did we get to the great implication yet?"

"If you were listening we did," Pendelton answered. "Elementary theology: if man's fate is determined there must of necessity be a Determiner whom we will call for the sake of convention, God. Determinism without a God, needless to say, is eighteenth century mechanistic twaddle. But suppose now that a man can determine his own fate? Run it through your machine again and again until he gets it down the way he wants it with all degrees of freedom and irrespective of his merit or karma or sinlessness or however our cosmic report cards are supposed to be made out? In that case man becomes his own determiner, the individual conscious mind becomes the deity and that which we have heretofore referred to as God becomes what is known as an outdated archetype."

"Good God," Shaheen said.

"But spelled with a small g," Pendelton replied. "That is the Great Implication."

"You mean to say he was proposing to disprove God's existence?" Dr. Freylinghuysen said to them that day. "And with university equipment? Don't you gentlemen realize I have trouble enough with the trustees as it is?" And Chaplain Rowan, who had long since lost the ability to react spontaneously—slipping back and forth almost on schedule between catatonia and St. Vitus dance—said: "Why are you sitting there doing nothing? Why isn't the city being scoured? If that dress isn't proof enough for you, that man is loose somewhere with colored motion pictures of the whole thing. What more do you want?" "A little illumination is all," Freylinghuysen replied. "All I've heard so far is some rather loose discussion about free will and determinism and it wasn't very convincing. Didn't anyone bother to point out to this Leopold Pendelton that you can't prove or disprove anything about your own determined existence since the proof or disproof itself could be determined?" "Yes," Blackburn answered.

BLACKBURN had thought over the Great Implication for about two seconds. "You *have* been wasting our time," he said. "You cannot actively disprove de-

terminism because the disproof —the experiment itself—could be a part of your own determined existence, arranged by your Determiner. God might, for instance, allow the experiment to be successful merely to test your faith in Him, the same way he allowed you to get the idea in the first place."

An odd smile crossed Pendelton's face. "You really think so?" he asked. "You figure He'd try and cross me up like that? Let's go back and take this a step at a time. Specifically, why can't I play God with Caesar's life?"

"Wouldn't prove anything," Shaheen said. "God could have determined you in the selection of Caesar's name. The change would therefore be His doing, not yours, it would still be old God playing God with Caesar's fortunes."

"But it doesn't have to be Caesar. That was only an example, it could be anyone. Control anyone's destiny, *anyone at all*, and you've proven the point. We could select our man by means of a computer, by random sampling over which only the physical laws of the universe had control, thus eliminating determinacy in the selection."

"But God could alter the laws of chance. After all, they are His laws. A second-rate miracle would force you into selecting His man."

"You mean," Pendelton asked, "that if I selected a name every morning at 10:04½ God would do a miracle at the same time?"

"Ye-es," Shaheen answered.

"But if one morning I changed my mind and waited until a quarter past two to select the name, He'd hold off and wait for me, wouldn't He?"

There was rather a long silence.

"He couldn't very well perform His miracle until I'd picked my name, could He?"

"Hmmmmm," Shaheen said.

"And if I decided to wait until 3:15, *He'd* have to wait too. And if I decided not to pick a name we'd do *without* a miracle that day. The fact is, *I'd* be telling *Him* what to do. Put me in the possession of a random sampling computer and a time machine and I, Leopold Pendelton, would be the bigger God!"

"And the point was well taken," Shaheen had to admit, pouring off some of Dr. Freylinghuysen's ice water. "We could for example use a computer to select at random any one of all the phone books in the United States, then a page in that one book, then a line. That one name would then truly be randomly selected." "Assuming of course," Blackburn said, "that you had first used the computer to randomly select the country whose phone books were to be used." "And also the par-

ticular year's edition," Freylinghuysen murmured. "It was fairly ingenious," Shaheen said, "especially when you consider that knowing how to do it meant you didn't have to bother. It was enough just to know we could. The only point that needed experimental verification was: could we in fact alter the past? Change something, anything at all and everything else followed, including the death of God." "You mean the death of the concept of God," Blackburn added. "Ah yes," Shaheen answered, glancing guiltily at Chaplain Rowan. "The question was, what were we going to change and how were we going to know it changed?"

CHAPLAIN Rowan had been Shaheen's idea.

It had occurred to him one day as he and Blackburn were crossing the campus and he had observed to his colleague that things were looking bad for God. "It's every man for Himself," Blackburn and replied. "If I'm not mistaken that's one of His own laws. After all, who invented survival of the fittest?"

"Seriously," Shaheen said. "A, we've got a time machine. B, having A, there's no reason that I can see why we can't change the past. And C, if we do, well, they'll be using cathedrals for bowling alleys."

"Maybe now we'll see what kind of a loser *He* makes."

"Look here Blackburn, you needn't parade your atheism so ostentatiously. I'm well aware of it. In fact that's what's bothering me. You're an atheist whereas I . . . well, I never did make up my mind about God. That's not very astute of me, I suppose, but I haven't, I'm betwixt and between, and so I was wondering if it wouldn't be only fair to have a representative of the other side in on this."

For a few seconds there was only the sound of their shoes on the bluestone walk that threaded across the stunted fall grass of the campus.

"Fair? You're using the word *fair* in connection with a scientific experiment?"

"Only because its outcome seems so obvious to us. We have strong preconceptions and because of them we're liable to overlook possibilities. I think we should have someone with us who expects the experiment to work out differently, someone who believes implicitly in His existence."

Blackburn thought about it as they rose in the Physics building elevator. "Well why not," he said, smiling in his peculiar catastrophic fashion. "You and I have an aggregate of 70 years experience in the laboratory, why *not* bring in a clergyman to check

our techniques, be in keeping with the general tone of this whole thing. Hell, yes!"

LATER that day Brokley L. Rowan listened with a frozen serious face as they declared their intentions to him. A young and conscientious man who spent a great deal of time telling budding undergraduate physicists that God was every bit as ubiquitious as Planck's constant, he listened without one word of complaint, not protesting that they'd put him in a theologically impossible position, a position in which the only two alternatives were to either refuse to look after His interests or else participate in a piece of sacreligion the purpose of which was to demonstrate that the first alternative was not a valid one. And when he met Pendelton a week later in the Physics building. Pendelton told him: "You and I'll get along fine. I want it to be clearly understood that I have *nothing* against the church."

Chaplain Rowan took his glasses off and began cleaning them.

"And there's absolutely nothing for you to worry about. Even if we do disprove Him there'll always be doubters. You *count* on a certain percentage of people who won't believe our evidence. You'll get all the skeptics showing up on Sunday morning as usual."

Shaheen spoke with compensating soberness. "What I thought we'd do," he said, "is hold daily discussions on strategy. That way you can question any assumptions we make, check our logic, object as you see fit."

"What we're trying to be about this thing is fair," Blackburn said.

"Of course," Rowan replied.

"Now the first point I wish to raise," Shaheen said, "is in regard to the gargoyles. They're very important, the gargoyles."

Chaplain Rowan sat down on the window sill.

"If the gargoyles are a product of the past-change," Blackburn put in, anticipating the problem, "how are we going to know it? How are we going to perceive the change? That the question?"

"Aren't you going to ask what gargoyles have to do with this?" Pendelton said to Chaplain Rowan.

"I don't believe I will," Rowan replied, lighting up his pipe.

"The answer," Blackburn said, "is this: the experimental observer, *not* the one who takes the time trip, must be standing in plain view of the building. He must be *expecting* gargoyles to appear. When they do, he will not be tempted to call the phenomenon a miracle. When the gargoyles suddenly pop out—in apparent defiance of various physical laws—he can intelli-

gently conclude that a specific time experiment has been performed and that a change in the past has in fact occurred, a conclusion that will restore the appearance of the gargoyles to the realm of non-miraculous events."

"Then the change we make must be so specific, must have such easily deducible consequences, that we'll be able to anticipate our equivalent of the gargoyles."

"Sort of like an either/or proposition," Blackburn said. "Find an event that can go only one of only two ways. Switch this event from its already proceeding alternative to the bypassed, the not-used, the temporally-no-longer-existing possibility. The independent observer, watching the one disappear and the other take its place, will then know that the past has changed. It will prove the principle that man can determine his fate and is therefore alone."

Rowan nodded, chewing on his pipe. "I'll wait'll it's over, though," he said.

PRESIDENT Freylinghuysen filled a glass with ice water.

" 'You cannot take God's photograph,' " he said. "Surrealism. Sheer surrealism. Was he smiling when he said it?"

"Of course he was smiling," Blackburn replied bleakly. "He's always smiling."

"After making man's first trip through time," Freylinghuysen said, "he stepped out of the physics building to find your either/or proposition yelling its head off and Rowan here standing in the center of Voltaire Mall with half a dress in his hand. So I'm surprised he was smiling. But what was he *talking* about?"

"And why," Shaheen said, "did he push Blackburn into the shrubbery and run off with the camera? I don't understand *that* at all." He turned away. "Oh, I suppose there's plenty I don't understand."

"What about on the trip," Freylinghuysen offered. "Could something have happened—"

"What?" Blackburn replied. "He went back in time exactly one hour. He was to walk to Ethel Chattinger's apartment. ("That fabulous woman," Freylinghuysen murmured.) All he had to do was spill india ink over one of the two new dresses she'd bought. Apparently, the most trying problem of her recent existence was to decide which of the two to wear to her Spanish coach this morning. But he'd be ruining the dress he'd already seen her wearing an hour later on the Mall."

"And that's as subtle a way of getting a girl's dress off as you're likely to find," Freylinghuysen remarked. "Although tearing them off has its points too," he

added, looking at the ceiling.

"Then what could have gone wrong?" Blackburn asked.

"As far as I can see," Freylinghuysen answered, "the only flaw in this experiment was the scientists themselves. Your observations positively reek with subjectivity. To Rowan, the dress was green, always green. This just *happens* to prove Rowan's original belief, namely that the past can't be altered and therefore He exists. The atheist on the other hand," he glanced at Blackburn, "has seen what looks like a miracle—a material object changing a basic physical quality right before his eyes. Strangely enough this miracle goes to prove that there are no such things as miracles. Blackburn's case is also proven. You saw what you wanted to. Take Shaheen here. He was positive the dress was blue all the time—until he saw Rowan's experimenter's sample—and so now he's back at his old stand: the fence."

THERE was an embarrassed silence, since two scientists had quietly to own up to the crime of subjectivity in the laboratory while the theologian had to somehow dispose of a piece of spurious rationality that might be forgiven but would never be forgotten.

And then the door opened and a smiling face appeared.

"What'd everyone run away for?" Pendelton said.

The president was the first to recover.

"Everyone will please remain seated and calm," he said to the others.

"Calm be damned!" Blackburn answered. "This one has a punch in the nose coming—and where the devil's my camera?"

"Should have told me you were going to take pictures," Pendelton said, gingerly handing it over. "Would have saved us a lot of trouble. And if you're interested in facts it wasn't me that snatched it, it was a law student. I guess he figured it might have some legal use. There's some interesting footage in it starring Chaplain Rowan and a disturbing young creature named Ethel." He tossed a yellow box on the desk. "You see chaplain, I'm not anti-clerical after all."

Rowan's eyes flicked from Pendelton to the box and back again. "That's the film?" he said.

Pendelton nodded.

Shaheen wet his lips. "You develop it?" he said.

"Yep."

"He's playing with us," Freylinghuysen said. "Well, I can't say I blame him. After all, how many times in a man's life does he get a scoop like this? Look," he said, turning to Pendelton, "there seems to have been some disagreement about what hap-

pened on the Mall this morning. We've got eyewitnesses proving anything you want. You've seen the film, maybe you'd like to tell us." He thumbed the desk top, trying to thing of a decorous way to phrase it. "Oh hell, is He or isn't He?"

Pendelton pursed his lips and thought a moment.

"I'm not in a position to say at this time," he said.

Four of the five men sat frowning because, in conversations with the fifth, time had continually to be allowed for recovering. Then Rowan's eyes brightened and he jumped up.

"I take it you mean by that the dress was green all the time," he said, giving a rhetorical answer.

"But don't start ringing bells over it," Pendelton said, smiling. "I ought to explain that it had to be green. Not because there's a God, but because it had to. Couldn't be anything else. Except always blue, of course. Always blue, always green, but nothing in between. It rhymes." He shrugged his shoulders. "Because when you change the past, why then you change the past and that includes cameras and film which are often also a part of the past."

"Green all the time," Rowan said, looking around at the others. "*Green.*"

"Green and immaterial!" Pendelton replied. "Green and irrelevant, green and so what! We took the wrong approach. I didn't realize it until I saw Blackburn getting it down on film. Film is part of the past, so it changes. But our *heads* are also a part of the past. They change too." There was a flash of white teeth against his flushed face as he said: "Depressing, isn't it?"

"WAIT a minute," Shaheen said.

"But it's true. The man watching the gargoyles pop out of the Empire State Building *would not have noticed anything.* Quite suddenly the gargoyles would *always* have been there. The human mind can be toyed with as though it were a piece of film, a coating of silver nitrate crystals on celluloid. It's positively degrading!"

"Wait a minute," Shaheen said, pressing his head between his fists. "Something's wrong. You spilled ink on one of that girl's dresses. The blue one apparently."

"I spilled ink on a co-temporally-earlier edition of the dress the girl was wearing on Voltaire Mall," Pendelton said, "but can you guarantee she wasn't wearing the green dress to begin with? You can't. Now I'll say this slowly. If you change the past then you can have no memory of what it was before you changed it and therefore you can

never prove that you *have* changed it." He sighed and sat down. "I'd like that to be known as Pendelton's Exclusion Principle."

"It's a shame really," Rowan remarked, "you went to an awful lot of trouble."

"Well," the president said slowly, "I don't know but that it might be better to keep physics and metaphysics apart after this. Like church and state. Metaphysical questions, after all, are those that don't have answers."

A frown passed briefly over Pendelton's countenance. "Wait a minute," he said. "As I recall it, I said something about the wrong approach, I don't remember saying the jig was up. As far as I'm concerned, we've only tried the past so far, we haven't *scratched* the future.

"Take the year 2068 for example," Pendelton said, smiling at them, trying not to sound obnoxious. "If existence is really determined the events of that year are already written down . . . sort of."

He suddenly whirled on Rowan. "There is no question of God changing his mind between now and then since there is nothing that could possibly happen between now and then that would surprise Him, give Him a reason for changing His mind, because if He did He would be violating His own definition which includes absolute knowledge of all events past and future."

ROWAN, immovable, stared back at him.

"But we need *two* time machines," Pendelton resumed. "I know, these things are expensive but if you're really interested you'll ram it past the trustees."

"Stop!" Freylinghuysen said. "No, go ahead. *Damn!*"

"I won't go through this again," Rowan shouted, rising. "All he's going to do is play more tricks with words!"

"Won't hurt to *listen* to him," Freylinghuysen replied.

"Now we send one time machine back to 1868 by means of the other. Then one of us travels to 2068 from 1868 while another goes to that allegedly *same* year 2068 from the present, from 1968. See what I'm getting at?"

Shaheen slowly nodded his head and then closed one eye.

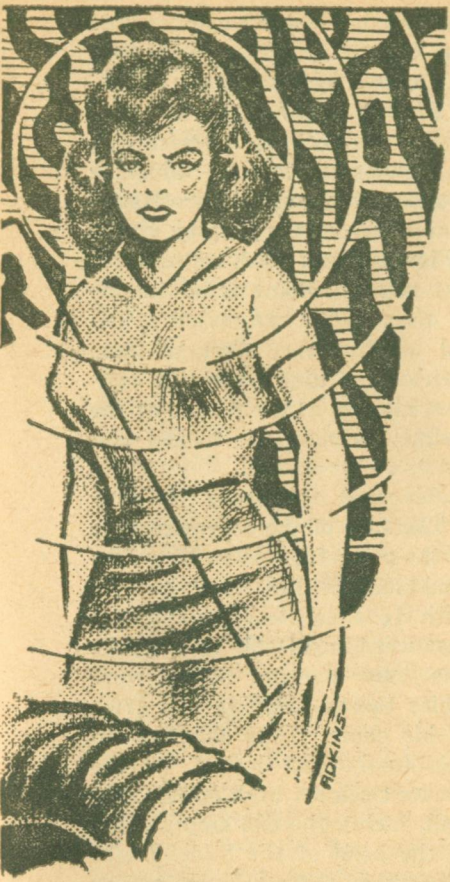
"If there's free will," Blackburn mumbled, "they won't meet."

"Let's look for exclusion principles," Freylinghuysen commented, putting the balls of his fingers together and staring at the ceiling.

Rowan, ignored, watched them for a few seconds and sat down again. After a while he began to wonder how many experiments it would take before Pendelton found the proof he was looking for.

THE END

Illustrated by ADKINS



(First of two parts)

CHAPTER 1

BEN YARGO, 90th Prime Thinker of the Empire of Earth, broke the fateful news to the World Council of Six at the planet capital in Sydney, Australia, on 26 November, 2449 A.D.—

An atomic conspiracy had been discovered.

History does not record the reactions of the individual Council members. However, such a conspiracy directly violated the First Law of Mankind—*There shall be no atomic research*—as decreed by Edward Crozener, who founded the Empire of Earth some 450 years earlier, in 1999 A.D., resurrecting it from the remnants of human civilization which survived the day-long Atomic War of 4 July 1970. Crozener's decree, intended to prevent another such holocaust, had been the Empire's most rigidly enforced law. Such a con-

In a world of geniuses the only one who could save the Empire from total destruction was . . . .

The Man who had NO BRAINS

By JEFF SUTTON

spiracy, at the time, was unthinkable. Yet the Council did not order a sweeping investigation.

Curiously, a single agent was assigned to look into the incident . . .

Blak Roko's
Post-Atomic Earthman.

KIM LEE Wong was last to enter.

He came through the tall gold-embossed doors of the Council Chamber hiding his nervousness behind a mask of calm. The other members of the World Council of Six already had gathered—statue-like and silent, waiting around the long polished table. Enigmatic. By the wall he saw the ascetic, arrogant face of Ivan Shevach, World Manager, and wondered why he was there. Council meetings were usually secret, restricted to members and, of course, the Prime Thinker, who ruled the planet.

An emergency?

The thought frightened him. He nodded deferentially while he took his seat, conscious again that his official intelligence (IQ 208) placed him as the body's junior member. Eve Mallon (IQ 213), mathematician and only woman on the council, inclined her head. The others didn't acknowledge him, nor did he expect it. He returned her greeting almost gratefully (she represented North America) before flicking his almond eyes around the table.

Taussig of Europe . . .
Lincoln of Africa . . .
Serrano of South America . . .

Sociologist, lawyer, educator—faces of power and prestige—power won at the polls by virtue of intelligence. Each represented the most brilliant mind in one of the world's six major political subdivisions. Around them swirled the angry tides of politics, lapping at the throne of the Prime Thinker. He looked last at . . .

Kingman of Anzaca . . .

The face of the representative of the powerful Austra-New Zealand bloc was thin, harsh, veined, with tight bloodless lips and eyes that were implacable black pools. His long narrow hands were white talons gripping the arms of his chair. Wong shivered involuntarily and looked at the ornate clock set high on the rear wall, facing the one empty chair at the head of the table. Eight fifty-seven, three minutes before the Council would come to order. More precisely, it would open with the arrival of Ben Yargo, the Prime Thinker, for he was as punctual as the clock itself. A revolving scale below the center of the dial face showed the date: 11:26:2449.

At exactly 8:58 a.m., the tall doors opened—opened and closed behind Ben Yargo, who crossed

the wide expanse of floor with the easy steps of a man who ruled a planet. The Council and the Manager rose with one accord. Wong watched covertly.

Yargo was middle-height, stocky, with short-cropped iron-gray hair, undersized ears pinned tight to his skull and a face of hewn granite in which the sculptor had not learned the art of polish. The skin was swarthy and rough, the nose crooked, the lips full and sensuous. But it was the eyes Wong saw—chill, ice-blue, hard as diamonds, nestled deep under jutting orbital ridges and, for some reason, he thought of a panther staring out from the dark places of a cavern. His apparel, knee-length green shorts with matching short-sleeved shirt under the flowing purple cape of office, revealed heavily muscled arms and legs. Little in his appearance suggested his background—philosopher and ecologist—nor the fact he was, by official test, earth's greatest intellect. He had won office with an astounding IQ 219 the last two terms.

THE Council members watched him with varying expressions: Eve Mallon's eyes were tender, Taussig's appreciative, Kingman's vindictive; Lincoln and Serrano appeared vaguely puzzled. Wong cast a side-long look at the Manager; Shevach's arrogant face held undisguised hostility. He wondered again at the powerful forces swirling around the planet's ruler, and thought: Only the Prime Thinker stood between the Manager and supreme power. Yargo was chief world executive, Shevach its manager and, as such, subject to executive power. Shevach was a whip, but Yargo was the arm that wielded it.

Yargo nodded curtly to the Council and fitted himself into the well-cushioned chair set on a slightly-raised dais. The members resumed their places and waited expectantly. The clock struck nine, a muffled beat in the huge chamber; it died away and Ben Yargo said:

"Council is in session."

He paused, looking slowly around the circle of faces before resuming: "I wish to apologize for calling this extraordinary session, especially"—he smiled at the Chinese biochemist—"just as Wong was starting his vacation. I hope I haven't caused too much inconvenience."

"It's an honor," Wong murmured politely.

"Hardly that," Yargo countered gravely, "but an extraordinary emergency has arisen." He paused to let his words sink in: Lincoln, the dusky-skinned lawyer, looked faintly perturbed; Kenneth Kingman, the engineer,

curled his lips in a slight sneer and Taussig, the sociologist, raised his eyes inquisitively. Yargo caught Ivan Shevach's bemused look and said slowly:

"There is evidence of atomic research."

"No!" Surprising, he thought, it was Lincoln who denied the statement. He looked inquiringly at him; the lawyer recognized the invitation to speak.

"Perhaps I should apologize for the expletive." He bowed politely. "But the fact is, I was merely surprised—still am." He shook his head incredulously. "I can't imagine that anyone . . . anyone would break the First Law." His words carried a denial meant to reinforce his belief.

"But someone has," Yargo countered softly.

"The proof?" Kingman interjected harshly.

"Damning." Yargo scanned the intent faces. "A man was found dead in a Sidney hotel room yesterday—dead of radiation burns."

Someone gasped and Serrano asked sharply: "Who?"

"Identity has just been made, only moments before this meeting. The victim's name was"—Yargo watched the ring of faces carefully—"William Bixby Butterfield." There was no change of expressions; no change, either, in Ivan Shevach's black eyes, nor his slightly sardonic expression.

"Who was Butterfield?" Serrano pursued. He licked his lips nervously.

"A physics professor on the faculty of the University of Palmerston North . . . before he disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Some five years ago, the fall of 2444," Yargo supplied.

"Could the burns have occurred any other way, perhaps excessive X-ray treatment?" Lincoln asked dubiously.

"Not in this case."

"Why?"

"Expert medical opinion," Yargo replied bluntly.

Lincoln shook his head hopelessly. "It's bad."

Taussig broke the following silence. "The point is, what are we going to do about it? Or what can we do? If the news became public . . ." He left the words dangling, watching the Prime Thinker curiously.

"The news won't . . . can't be made public," Yargo declared emphatically. "The coroner is bound to absolute secrecy." He added: "So are all persons present."

"The public would be highly disturbed," Eve Mallon said.

"But we must investigate—immediately," Lincoln insisted.

"Of course, that's why I called this session. The Council is—after all—advisory in such matters."

Kingman tersely said: "I suggest an immediate all-out investigation; that the Prime Thinker order the full resources of the Government's agents of police to pursue that end."

Yargo remained poker-faced. "Any other suggestions."

"The suggestion has merit," Wong ventured.

Yargo nodded. "Any others?"

Lincoln pronounced with great solemnity: "What alternative do we have? Atomic research means world destruction. We can't risk that, gentlemen."

"Lincoln's right," Kingman agreed. He shifted his head, caught Shevach's eye and continued: "I realize it's irregular but I'd like the Manager to express his views . . . if any."

"Certainly." Yargo's voice was tinged with annoyance. "Would the Manager have any comments?"

THE Manager would," Shevach promptly replied. He rose, a slim elegant man of middle-age with a high-domed forehead and sharp pale features. He was the only non-elective official present, an appointee of Yargo's predecessor. As such, he could be removed from office only by the Prime Thinker with unanimous Council assent, a move Kingman had repeatedly blocked. He spoke easily without taking his eyes from Yargo.

"As world Manager, I am naturally concerned with public reaction. No one needs reminding that the ban against atomic research is our First Law; nor does anyone have to be told of the unrest—if not riots—that might occur if the information we have becomes public. Still, I heartily endorse the views expressed—an immediate, thorough investigation." He smiled thinly and continued:

"With the Prime Thinker's permission, I would be happy to launch such an investigation immediately." He let the words fall and sat down. Silence.

Yargo studied each person in turn; he looked last at Eve Mallon and his eyelid drooped, just a trifle. There was a bustle and she rose from her seat, a slender, gracious woman in the late thirties, gowned in a golden-colored semi-transparent tunic that showed the lines of her body in sharp relief. Her blond hair, lacquered in a high bun, sparked with jewels. She spoke with assurance.

"With the Prime Thinker's permission?"

"Certainly." Kingman's lips curled as Yargo half-rose in a courtly bow. She was reputed to be his mistress.

"First, we can assume a conspiracy, or at least the beginnings of one. Atomic research isn't a one-man operation. But

even so, I must oppose the proposed plan." Her voice was a gentle ring, soft but incisive. "I can give at least three reasons."

"Name them," Kingman snapped irritably.

"An all-out investigation would alert the conspirators, assuming such a conspiracy exists. It could in that case drive them underground—I believe that's the historical phrase for going into hiding. Secondly, we can't have an all-out investigation without alarming the public." She half-turned and smiled at Ivan Shevach. "After all, that is one of the Manager's prime concerns, isn't it?"

Kingman demanded: "What else?"

"If there is a conspiracy, we don't know who—or how many—are involved," she said quietly. "Perhaps persons high up . . ."

Kingman sprang up. "I can't see the argument; but I can give an excellent reason for an immediate full-scale investigation regardless of public reaction."

Yargo said softly: "Give it."

"Espers!" He snapped the word. "This has all the earmarks of an esper conspiracy—one that we've got to root out and crush before we wake up and find the damned peepers ruling the world."

WONG gave an audible gasp. Yargo smiled faintly. The esper problem was Kingman's pet whipping post. Since the Sawbo Fang affair he'd used it on innumerable occasions in attempts to ram through pet legislation. The quiet voice of Taussig with its soft inflection broke in.

"There are only a few thousand espers in the world. With exception of a few hidden cases, all are on public record. While they have, shall we say, full privileges of citizenship, the possibility of danger is recognized; they are watched carefully." He hesitated, then continued:

"I don't believe it's any state secret that esper activities are closely monitored, even to the extent of tapping their homes and businesses. Then, too, we have the . . . searchers." He seemed to hesitate over the last word. "The Manager can testify to that," he concluded.

"That is correct." Shevach rose languidly. "However, that in itself means nothing."

"Explain that," Taussig demanded.

"Certainly." Shevach's face took on a condescending look. "What do we really know about the espers?"

"Plenty."

"We know they possess the power of telepathy, the ability to read minds, but we are prone to forget they are mutants . . ."

"What has that got to do with it?" Taussig challenged.

"The psychmasters point out the ability to read minds is just one facet—the beginning phase —of their eventual evolution. How about Sawbo Fang? How do we know where the rest of the espers stand on the evolutionary ladder? What of clairvoyance . . . psychokinesis?" He asked the questions in rapid sequence. "I say they're dangerous."

"Poppycock," Taussig snorted indignantly. Mass peoples and cultures were his business and he clearly didn't like Shevach's venture into his field. He faced the Manager and spoke tolerantly.

"Telepathy is a confirmed fact, yes, but the Sawbo Fang affair was mass hysteria, born of ignorance." Kingman started to interrupt but he waved him to silence. "Sawbo Fang was a Burmese boy of eight. A rumor started that he had wild talents . . . could lift stones by mental powers, stir trees, even keep his body suspended in air; but we've got to remember his background. The boy lived in a small mountain village whose people were ridden with superstitions and beliefs in black magic . . ."

"And died," Kingman sneered.

"But not because of Sawbo Fang," Taussig said pointedly. "An earthquake leveled the village; he was blamed, killed by a mob, but that didn't make him a psychokinetic."

"Then why the searchers?" Kingman cut in.

"You know the answer as well as I do," Taussig replied. "The affair created a public clamor that started witch hunts; thirty legal espers were stoned, burned, shot. The world was in an uproar demanding action, so we acted. We created secret agents . . . searchers . . . to comb the world, searching for hypothetical pk's. That satisfied the public. Personally, I'd like to remind my fellow council members that the witches of pre-atomic Salem weren't really witches, but they were burned." He smiled bemusedly and sat down.

Kingman said angrily: "Reputable psychmasters have testified that Sawbo Fang was a psychokinetic . . ."

"We're getting off the track," Yargo broke in. "We're here to discuss a possible atomic conspiracy, not espers."

"I say it's the same thing," Kingman half-shouted. A vein in his neck throbbed visibly.

"Rubbish," Taussig said, "there's never been a clairvoyant or pk outside of TV science fiction." The Prime Thinker broke the strained silence that followed.

"I believe the arguments in favor of an all-out investigation have merit. However, I have decided against such action on the grounds offered by Council mem-

ber Mallon. I believe a covert investigation would serve better."

"I take it you intend to direct the investigation yourself?" Kingman challenged.

"That is correct."

"But irregular."

"Irregular?"

"Investigation is a police function."

Yargo waited.

"The police function under the administration of the Manager," Kingman continued belligerently.

"Yes, for the purpose of administration," Yargo corrected, "but the Prime Thinker may, at his discretion, assume full direction of the police agency. For any reason whatever," he added.

Kingman half-turned and looked inquiringly at the lawyer. Lincoln's dark face was forcedly thoughtful and it was a moment before he spoke.

"Prime Thinker Yargo is correct. The Archon ruled in favor of Joseph Zwolinski, the sixty-third Prime Thinker, when he took direction of the agents during the worker rebellion in the submerged city of Molokai in the early part of the last century."

"One other point," Kingman persisted.

"Name it," Yargo snapped. He leaned forward in his chair without any effort to conceal his cordial dislike of the Anzaca representative.

"It seems unwise for the Prime Thinker to embark on an investigation which he may not be able to finish." He spoke the words with a faint sneer. Yargo contemplated him coldly—he knew very well what the engineer meant. Elections were less than three weeks away and, this time, he faced formidable opposition in Ivan Shevach who, at IQ 217, was considered his leading contender. The Manager was not only brilliant but seemed to possess an uncanny ability to assess political situations. His hand was everywhere, at exactly the right time, and he had surrounded himself with a hard corps of fanatically loyal lieutenants. Now he was making a stab to rule the planet. In a short time they would face each other at the polls in a battle of intelligence, a battle Yargo couldn't afford to lose. UPOP, the Universal Public Opinion Poll, gave the Manager as his strongest competition. The faces around the table watched him, assessing his thoughts. Yargo spoke succinctly:

"In event of a change in office, I would naturally acquaint my successor with all the facts in the case. I can't see any problem there." He looked slowly at each person in turn; only Kingman was openly hostile. Shevach, in the background, smirked.

"Any other questions?" Si-

lence—broken only by the faint sound of Wong shuffling his feet under the table.

"Council is adjourned."

The Council of Six rose as a body. Ben Yargo gripped the edge of the table with strong, stubby hands and pushed himself back with a quick glance around, then left as he had entered—with easy steps, looking straight ahead, apparently already forgetful of the session just closed.

CHAPTER 2

MAX KRULL languorously moved his arms in a slow breast stroke, feeling the pressure of the cool water against his flesh with almost sensuous pleasure. Above him the rays of the tropic sun struck the lagoon in dawn-slanted blows, giving the water a delicate shade of green. It darkened, becoming a deeper forest color in the shadowy depths where grotesque sculptured coral heads jutted from the ocean floor like calcerous ghosts. A school of small fish, with oddly bulging eyes and narrow orange fins high on their saucer-shaped bodies, swam past his faceplate and disappeared in a canyon of twisted rock.

He zoomed deeper, swimming between ledges of white coral and fronds that swayed with the passage of his body until he reached a small amphitheater formed of rock and fronds. He entered it and let his body drift, studying the familiar forms of bottom life, now just feet below his faceplate: small red crabs poised on shell-studded rocks, the black beads of their eyes unmoving; large spider crabs that scuttled past with an odd sideways motion; hordes of shell creatures of all shapes and colors. It was a world he loved—had loved since his assignment to Waimea-Roa three years before. He knew every foot of Abiang Lagoon, named for the chain's principal atoll, just as he knew every sandy cove of the twenty-two mile-long L-shaped string of atolls which formed the Waimea-Roa group. They lay on the breast of the South Pacific like a carelessly-flung string of pearls, except that their pearl-luster sands were dotted with waving cocoanut palms and the lesser foliage of fern, pandanus, mulberry and breadfruit. He knew its beaches and villages and people, knew them and loved them and devoutly hoped he would never be transferred. Not that it was likely with his IQ rating.

He rolled on his back and lay for a long while watching the silvery bubbles of expired air shoot toward the paler surface waters. Finally he pulled his waterwatch close to his face and sighed. Seven a.m.—time for

work. He twisted around and swam leisurely, breaking surface close to the shore, pausing to admire the beauty of the sun-drenched lagoon. Tall wind-bent cocoanut palms shaded beaches which gleamed like ropes of coral sand. On the opposite side, by the low-lying barrier reef, the ragged yellow sails of Paha Jon's outrigger lay idle in the still air.

He contemplated the scene with quiet satisfaction. Waimea-Roa was a peaceful oasis in a turbulent yet strangely stagnant world, where the future seemed but a mirror-reflection of the past. The centuries had passed it by. The atolls remained much as they had been at time of the Atomic War, nearly 500 years before. And how many centuries before that? Elsewhere men were mining and farming the sea-bottoms, building domed cities on the ocean floors—living in crowded mainland communities, packed so close together that, for the workers, all semblance of privacy had long-since vanished. Elsewhere people were rigidly separated according to caste—LIQ's and MIQ's and HIQ's, the low, middle and high IQ's; a man's standing was determined by his brain or, more correctly, the IQ rating that was as much a part of his ego as his name. But not here. Waimea-Roa seemed almost forgotten by the bustling outside. It was the backwash of the world.

HE raised his eyes. Several miles beyond the reef Black Chimney Rock jutted high above the sea. The morning light gave it a brilliant sheen, more like a man-made artifact than anything created by random nature. It was, he knew, the hard core of a small volcanic mountain whose softer shell had eroded away. A black dot moved reefward from the rock, splitting the combers like a playful dolphin until, finally, it vanished beneath the waves. August Cominger riding his torp, returning from one of his frequent explorations of the sea-bottom, he thought. Cominger was a hermit who had appeared in the atolls years before, building a small house on the bluffs of Te-Tai, a miniature atoll adjoining Abiang. He had sought neither friends nor acquaintances and, in time, had become almost a legend. Krull felt a tinge of envy. Torps were costly. The hermit owned the only one in the atolls. He was free to scour the seas, adventures Krull could but dream of. Maybe, perhaps, he'd have a torp someday; but it didn't appear likely on his salary.

He remembered the time, sighed and swam the remaining few strokes to the beach, removed his gear and started along

a well-worn path leading inland through the dense foliage. The greenery abruptly thinned and he came to Abiang's central village, a scattering of native huts and plastic houses along the atoll's single road, which ended in a central square.

Krull's house—a standard green plastic portable model, as befitted his station as an agent of police—stood at one end of the square immediately adjacent to a cubical concrete and plastoglass building whose entrance bore the legend: Headquarters, Agency of Police, Territory of Waimea-Roa. A smaller sign under it read: Martin Jonquil, Inspector-Agent in Charge.

He entered his small bachelor quarters, stripped and ducked under a shower. His strong slim body was burned to the mahogany color of a native, a far cry from the comparative whiteness of his skin when he had lived along the wind-swept shores of Cook Strait, in his native New Zealand. His thoughts were mellow. To an aspiring young agent the atolls represented the end of the line, the end of promotions, the end of everything. He grinned ruefully. There was no question why he'd drawn the atolls. He had stood at the foot of his class, IQ 113 on SPIM, the Standard Police Intelligence Measure. His classmates had drawn Greater London, New Berlin, Tokio Two, Nome, Sydney, the massive California, all the large centers of population—and intrigue; and he had been sent to Waimea-Roa. He was glad.

He dried himself and slipped into a pair of thigh-length tan trousers and matching short-sleeved shirt, put on a sun helmet and sandals. Finally—it was a regulation requirement—he donned a shoulder holster containing his snubbed service revolver and flinging the black cape of office around his shoulder walked next door to the station.

MORNING, Derek." A small wizened halfbreed of indeterminate age and a perpetually-cheery smile returned the greeting.

"The old man's waiting for you."

"Thanks." He flung Derek a mock salute and crossed the small room, knocking lightly on the Inspector's door.

"Come in."

He entered, idly wondering what was in his superior's mind. "Good morning, Martin."

"Morning, Max." Jonquil briefly glanced up from a paper he was studying. "Sit down—be with you in a second."

"Thanks." Krull slid into a battered chair and idly studied his superior, a middle-aged stocky man with slivers of silver

coursing through his black hair. His nose was prominent, beaked, his lips full and square chin cleft. His fingers drummed restlessly on the desk while he read, a sign he was disturbed. Krull's thoughts were pleasant. There had been a deep friendship between them from the start. In a way, it was a father-son relationship, yet more comradely. They swam the lagoon, dived, fished, drank together, and shared a mutual hobby, art. Krull rated himself as fair, excelling in figure sketches; he rated the quiet Jonquil as tops. The Inspector's forte was seascapes executed in sweeping strokes. Jonquil rated unusually high for an agent: IQ 172. He could have been almost anything, Krull thought. But he had chosen the police; ironically, he had been shanghaied to Waimea-Roa.

The Inspector finished, pushed the paper aside and contemplated the younger man a moment before speaking, his dark eyes grave and brooding. Krull grew uneasy.

"Max, you're going to leave the atolls . . . for a while."

"Why?" Krull asked, startled.

"Orders." He indicated the paper on his desk.

The younger agent breathed deeply. "I suppose it had to come some day," he said simply, "but I won't like it. I'd always hoped to stay here."

"It's just a job—a special job. You'll return when it's over," Jonquil encouraged.

"That's something," Krull said, relieved. "Where to?"

"Sydney."

"Sydney?"

"The House of the Prime Thinker."

"What!"

"You'll report to him direct." His eyes met and held Krull's. "It's a confidential job."

He sat back and stared at the Inspector. No, Jonquil wasn't joking; he meant it—every word. A minor police agent from the backwaters of the South Pacific was ordered to report to Ben Yargo—in person!—the most powerful man on the face of the globe. It didn't make sense. It was a moment before he could put his disbelief into words.

"There must be some mistake."

"There's no mistake."

"Look, Martin"—he leaned forward and spoke with tumbling words—"I'm a plain agent, IQ 113, with all my duty in the atolls. There's got to be a mistake."

"No mistake," Jonquil reiterated.

"But . . ."

Jonquil cut him off with a shake of his head. Krull looked reproachful. "Okay, there's no mistake, but explain it," he implored. "It doesn't make sense."

Jonquil leaned back and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling while he fished a cigaret from his pocket, lit it, and blew a cloud of smoke upward.

"I'm not informed of the details," he said. "You know how orders are—pieces of paper with times and dates and destinations. But I can surmise. I suppose the Prime Thinker has some sort of investigation in which he can't use local police. Perhaps the police are the subject of it; I don't know. Perhaps it's a job that requires an outsider, someone not committed to local politics. Those are my surmises."

"But why me? I'm IQ 113. Why not a high-rated agent?"

"IQ 113's not bad," Jonquil reproved.

"Don't sell me, I'm not sensitive on the score." Krull grinned weakly. "Besides, it's a matter of public record—and 113's not enough to solve a rape in a cage with two rabbits."

"I don't know what the job is, but you can handle it," Jonquil replied confidently. "The Prime Thinker wouldn't tab you without reviewing your record."

"What record—tossing a wife-beater in the cage for the night?"

"You can handle it."

"Okay, so I can handle it. When do I leave?" A tremor ran through his body, and he tried to suppress it.

"Tomorrow morning."

"So soon?" Krull asked.

"On the nine o'clock carrier. Reservations are made." Jonquil smiled briefly. "Why not take the day off, rest up."

"Thanks." Krull answered bleakly. He urgently needed to escape. "Think I'll go swimming."

KRULL managed to keep his composure as he left the station. He nodded casually to Derek, remarking he wouldn't be back for the day and returned to his house. He stood for a while with his hand still on the doorknob, looking at a sketch of Paha Jon's granddaughter, Rea. She had large almond eyes above a straight nose, a heart-shaped mouth. Her hair was long, straight, and wisps fell over one shoulder. She wore a provocative smile—and little else. He knew the meaning of the smile—knew it well. He sighed and donned his trunks, then picked up his swim gear and headed for the lagoon.

The cool green water felt good again, particularly after the session he'd just been through. He swam beneath the surface until he reached a particular coral head he knew—he and Rea sometimes played tag there—and allowed his body to relax and drift. It was clean down under the lagoon, clean and quiet, a place where a man could think.

He thought and felt the tension come. Tension and fear, It nibbled at his mind, tugged at his nerves, ran through his brain and gave birth to the beginning of panic; he banished it with effort. Years ago he had learned to live with the fear; then, in the quiet backwaters of Waimea-Roa, it had vanished, replaced with peace and security. Now it was on him again.

Esper. He was an esper. Worse, a hidden esper. If they caught him now he'd have to undergo surgery, have the mind power removed. Not that he would mind that—he very seldom used it—but it would cost him his job, place him under a social stigma, make him an outcast. Paha Jon's granddaughter —no woman—would have him. Not an esper!

He looked across the years, resurrecting fragments of memory, his first knowledge of what an esper was—what it meant. He had been playing games with his mother. What games? He forgot now; but suddenly she had looked strangely at him. He could see her eyes (they were brown) grow strange, then fearful. He remembered his parents' whispers far into the night, their odd behavior. There were more games, guessing games.

His mother had appeared unnaturally constrained; her smile was a mask of sorrow.

What am I thinking of, Max?

A big ship. You're thinking of a big ship, Mama.

Now what?

Mr. Krinker's toy store. He's standing in the doorway.

Now who?

He didn't know. The pictures, never sharp, had faded away again as they so often did; but his mother persisted. He remembered his parents' looks, the tears in his mother's eyes. Finally they told him, explaining what a mutant telepath was in the simple kind words parents use when they try to explain htings to children. Esper—he was different.

There had been countless admonitions.

Don't tell anyone.

Don't play guessing games.

She reminded him before school, questioned him every evening. Cautioned him.

Don't put down what the teacher is thinking on tests. Don't . . . don't . . . don't.

Little Max didn't. He had understood the meaning of some of the tests from the teacher's thoughts. So he grew, silent, alone, shunning his playmates until his mother warned him it was dangerous.

Don't be different.

HE decided early in life he couldn't shield his talent forever. If he erected a mind-

shield—a simple thing for an esper, he later learned—the shield was the give-away. If he didn't, the risk was equally great. Sooner or later he would encounter a legal esper; and legal espers shunned their hidden cousins, perhaps through envy of the greater freedom they enjoyed. Greater freedom? No, it was a hunt, a constant hunt, a life of fear. In the end he hid another thing—his IQ. At an early age he figured that the smart kids would be placed with smart kids—greater danger. But if he were just a dumb kid . . . No matter, he hid his IQ as carefully as he hid his wild talent (the term they used). He tried to push the knowledge he was an esper from his mind, deny it by never using it. In time he scarcely realized he was any different from his playmates. Most of his school tests were ridiculously easy, but he seldom managed more than a passing mark. It was fun, in a way, the careful calculations to determine the range of scores he should make —the balancing to keep in the safe level of low-normals.

He made one more decision while still a boy: he would be a police agent. Police agents were mainly low MIQs, low middle IQ's; a few—like those at the top—were superior. But he wouldn't be at the top, or anywhere near it. He made his decision for just one reason: the safest place to escape detection would be among the agents—he thought. And so he applied for admission to the World Police Academy.

Well, he was an agent now. But he was stepping into Ben Yargo's house, working under the eyes of the most brilliant mind on the planet. How long could he escape detection? How long? The question drummed through his brain.

CHAPTER 3

EDWARD CROZENER, founder of the Empire of Earth, made Sydney, Australia, the planet Capital in 1999 A.D. (The old name *Australia* refers to the largest land mass in the world state of Anzaca, which includes the former New Zealand and adjacent South Pacific islands).

It was the logical choice.

Like other Anzaca metropoli, it escaped the severest blows of the Atomic War due to downpole winds which held back radiation-polluted air. In the dark decades following the war (1970-2000 A.D.), it became the largest citadel of civilization—a beacon in a shattered world. Crozener decreed the Capital should never be moved. He wrote:

It shall remain as a symbol of human triumph over the madness of the atom.

Crozener's Second Law of Mankind—*The world shall be governed by intellect*—shaped planet government. Under his plan a Prime Thinker, who competed for office in publicly-administered machine-scored intelligence tests, headed the planet. A Council of Six, elected in similar manner, with each member representing one of the planet's six major political subdivisions served as the advisory arm.

Under Crozerian principles the peoples of the world gradually fell into three classes determined solely by genetics—the low, middle and high IQ's (commonly called the LIQ's, MIQ's and HIQ's). Crozener's famous "60-35-5 proclamation" existed for generations: sixty per cent manual laborers (LIQ's), thirty-five per cent professional workers (MIQ's), and five per cent representing the higher sciences, arts, administration and upper-government levels (HIQ's).

His edicts remained supreme, for centuries.

Blak Roko's
Post-Atomic Earthman.

THE great bluffs of the Sydney Heads—sheer sandstone cliffs towering over the sea—wheeled toward him below the seaplane carrier. Sydney Basin, enclosed on three sides by flat highlands, spun into view; the city was below. Wharves, jetties, beaches, factories, the neat geometric patterns of colored houses reaching to the far horizon whirled by; the harbor was alive with the ballooning spinnakers of sailing yachts. A long train of ore ships, their decks awash, threaded in through the narrow channel from the sea, towed by a powerful subtug. Their cargo, Krull knew, would be manganese, cobalt, iron and nickel ores from the ocean-bottom mines off Melville Deeps, a submerged city off the coast of Brisbane. He watched curiously. It was headed toward the southern side of the port, a section of the city which housed both the larger industrial plants and the residences of the LIQs, mainly laborers of less than 100 IQ. It was a sprawling, dirty, crowded dark area, quite unlike the clean tree-shaded northern part of the city where the intellectual elite lived. The vastness of the city awed him. Fifteen million people. He smiled. There had been less than four thousand in Waimea-Roa. The stewardess' voice broke into his thoughts.

"Fasten your seat belts, please."

The plane banked, dropped toward the harbor, straightened and raced over a thin channel of water lined with docks; the pontoons touched down with a slight jolt and they taxied toward a

float based at the bottom of a wide gangplank leading to street level. Krull loosened his safety strap and waited until the cabin was empty before picking up his bag and leaving. He stood for a moment among the milling people, trying to orient himself by the City's skyline. He would be met by an agent named Cranston ("Don't seek him out, let him find you."); his hotel quarters had been reserved; he would be escorted to the House of the Prime Thinker; he wouldn't wear police garb; he would be provided with essential papers. Just like that, all neat and wrapped up. He felt a trifle bitter. The details were too elaborate for Jonquil to know as little as he had proclaimed. Still . . .

"Mr. Krull." A hand tapped his elbow and it wasn't a question—it was a statement. He turned, staring at a short, rotund man wearing a wide smile that amply exhibited his dentures. His eyes were sky-blue, jovial, and although he wore a weave hat Krull guessed he was bald—it was that kind of face and figure.

"I'm Cranston." Krull gripped the almost dainty hand—it felt moist—and he winced. "Come along, I'll show you to your quarters."

Krull followed him up the gangplank. Cranston drove through a crowded thoroughfare, past pastel-tinted stores jammed by early afternoon shoppers. Krull was curious. He had almost forgotten the LIQ section with its dirty narrow streets, jammed shops and noise. Most of the people wore the somber grays or browns of workers, the men in sandals, shorts and open shirts and the women in simple tunics. Here and there he caught the flash of scarlets, emerald greens and lavenders, clothes which marked their wearers as middle or high IQ's. Not that dress was a matter of law, but few LIQ's could afford the luxury of color. Occasional huge photographs plastered on buildings reminded him that election was only two weeks away. He studied them curiously. Yargo . . . Shevach . . . Harshberg . . . Sherif: the faces of the candidates for Prime Thinker stared out over the crowd in black-and-white, color, and a few were animated for sound.

Sherif's face intrigued him. It was a peasant face, hard, square and dark, but even in the photographs the eyes seemed alive. He remembered hearing he was anti-Crozener, a man who wanted to rebuild society and erase all class differences. (A dangerous trait!). He had been stoned, berated, but refused to budge from his principles. Krull found himself liking the man's looks. A huge cube suspended over one

intersection displayed Yargo's face on each facet. The lips moved and a voice intoned:

Good government for all the people . . . Good government for all the people . . .

A monorail slid by, momentarily drowning the voice. Noisy street hawkers peddled their wares from plastic handcarts, competing with small dark shops that clung to the edges of the street like rows of kennels, each distinguishable only by its signs and displays of wares on outside racks. They came to another talkie photo of Yargo promising good government.

Supposing he loses Krull thought. The possibility momentarily startled him. What then?

THEY came to an area where the stores were spacious, well-lighted, almost stately in appearance. The streets were broad, lined with graceful eucalyptus trees and free of the numerous public TV screens found in the LIQ quarters. The crowds had vanished, the noisy hawkers gone, replaced by a scattering of unhurried shoppers. The men wore pastel-colored shorts, open shirts and sheer capes that seemed to serve no purpose other than to testify to the affluence of the wearers. The women wore sheer clinging tunics (yellows and pinks were in vogue) designed to reveal more than conceal, and elaborate lacquered hair-styles—knots, buns and conical designs sprinkled with gems. All wore colored sandals. Sleek white bubble-topped Capricorns and luxurious Regals lined the curbs while uniformed chauffeurs passed the time watching dashboard TV's. Most of the buildings were topped with copter landings and a number of the small craft were darting between the building-formed canyons. Even the air seemed cleaner, as if it had been magically filtered.

Cranston kept up a steady line of chatter, pointing out the highlights as if Krull were a complete stranger to the world capital. The wide thoroughfare narrowed, the trees vanished and they entered a busy area that seemed a curious mixture of LIQ and MIQ, with businesses of all varieties. Cranston turned abruptly down a ramp leading to a subterranean garage.

"The Edward Crozener Hotel, not fancy but comfortable." He turned the car over to an attendant and led Krull to a lift. The room assigned him proved light and airy, with a view overlooking St. George Avenue. It contained beside the few pieces of furniture a small private bath, the inevitable wall TV and a movie box with portable screen. Cranston caught his glance.

"Any kind of pix you want,

from pornos to classics. Just ask the desk." He casually inspected the room. "Take it easy for the afternoon. I'll pick you up at nine tonight—sharp." He tossed the keys to Krull, gave a toothy smile and departed.

That's that, Krull thought, everything according to schedule, including a night visit with the ruler of the world. Personally he'd rather be swimming the waters of Abiang lagoon with Paha Jon's granddaughter. Or something. He sprawled in a chair to think things over. Something told him he'd better think straight.

After a while he turned on the TV. The screen glowed to life—a cream-faced man who looked like a cross between a mortician and an educator was making a pitch for distinctive clothing. He idly listened to the purring voice:

"Zarkman's clothes of distinction are the mark of high IQ. Look about you. When you see a man dressed in Zarkman's super togs, chances are he's IQ 150 or above. Remember, Zarkman's clothes come in all pastel shades —darker if desired—and are tailored to fit all occasions. Zarkman's clothes mean high IQ . . . Zarkman's clothes mean high IQ . . . Zarkman's clothes mean . . ."

He reached over disgustedly and snapped off the set, looking ruefully at his own dress. He didn't think they gave the impression of IQ 150.

THE knock came at the door at precisely 9:00 p.m., followed by the single spoken word: "Cranston." Krull opened it and the fat man beamed at him. "Ready?"

He nodded, closed the door behind him and followed Cranston to the car. They drove slowly through traffic, then faster as they reached the outskirts of the city where the crowded noisy streets gave way to wide tree-lined avenues and large well-lighted homes set beyond park-like lawns. He turned onto a tree-lined lane spiraling upward toward a massive house, its lights agleam against the starry sky. He stopped at a sentry box, nodded genially without producing credentials and drove up the hill, parking under a portico. Nodding familiarly to a guard, he led Krull directly into the house. He had no time to look around; the agent made directly for the stairs.

I'm here. The thought startled him. Somehow he was there without being prepared for it. Did Yargo keep a peeper agent? Inwardly he was shaken. He had heard such rumors. He suppressed a touch of panic. Watch yourself . . . be on guard, every second. He had to keep un-

bidden thoughts from his mind.

No mind shields, no mind shields. Don't think the word esper.

Think of the lagoon, he told himself. Think of formless swirling waters, fish schools, sea fronds and coral. No, that was no good. It wasn't natural. An esper would recognize such thoughts in a place like this as an evasion, a deliberate effort to mass tangible symbols.

Don't think of espers.

Cranston started up the stairs with Krull at his heels. He felt sweaty, nervous and anxious, all at the same time; fearful he would make a slip.

No mind shields.

Think of Rea Jon—that day on the beach—how you tried to capture her provocative smile in a sketch. They were halfway up when a woman appeared above them and started down the stairs. Krull had the impression of youth, vitality, a well-formed body.

No mind shield. Think of Rea Jon.

Cranston nodded familiarly to her, then she was past. Krull heard the tattoo of her sandals suddenly cease, had the feeling she had stopped, turned—was watching him!

No mind shields.

The thought popped unbidden into his mind and he desperately tried to concentrate on Rea Jon as Cranston led him through a door.

A square man with dark—was there some silver?—hair rose from a desk at the far side of the room and the agent halted.

"The Prime Thinker . . . Agent Krull." Cranston wheeled and left, with as little ceremony as that, leaving Krull to stare at the solid figure advancing toward him. For an instant he was speechless.

YARGO extended a hand and smiled. Krull grasped it feeling bewildered. He looked so natural, so friendly—not at all like the stern visage so often seen on the TVs; not like the world's number one brain. What was it? IQ 219. Yargo indicated a seat across from his desk saying something about being happy he had consented to the assignment. Consented? He answered automatically:

"It's an honor, Sir."

His eyes dropped to the desk and he saw a thick volume with the name Alexander embossed in gold across the cover. Yargo caught his look and smoothly swept the book to one side without appearing to do so, then went through the formalities, went through them nicely, Krull thought. He asked a few questions about the atolls, hoped Krull would enjoy his present assignment—stated he had chosen

him on the basis of his record. All very smooth. The name Alexander popped into his mind while Yargo talked. Alexander—who was Alexander? Alexander the Great was an obscure figure in pre-atomic history; it must be some other Alexander. He dismissed the thought and returned his attention to the square face with the pale blue eyes.

Yargo offered him a cigaret, which he accepted, extending a light in return. The older man leaned back and took a few puffs.

No mind shields.

The thought popped into his mind and he tried to banish it by concentrating on the figure opposite him.

Don't think it . . . Don't think it: No mind shield.

There, he had thought it and Yargo hadn't batted an eye. Concentrate, don't think that word. *Esper*—the word formed in his brain and he concentrated harder on the features of the man sitting opposite him: thick neck, heavy shoulders, small ears, squat . . .

Yargo's expression altered, became serious and Krull tried to follow his words, feeling all at once easier. Of course Yargo wasn't an esper. He had nothing to worry about. Unless Yargo kept an esper guard. The Prime Thinker was saying he had chosen him because he needed an agent with no local ties—Jonquil's words!—either with the police or other government officials. Krull felt his tensions melt. The Prime Thinker paused, then added:

"Before I describe your present assignment I would like to caution you on the need for absolute secrecy."

"I understand."

Yargo hesitated, then said slowly: "It's an investigation into the possibility of illegal atomic research."

Krull started imperceptibly, but Yargo didn't appear to notice. He related the evidence, and Krull made a mental note of the name, William Bixby Butterfield, the radiation victim, thinking it might provide a starting point.

"There are a few points you might consider," Yargo pointed out. "The police intelligence appears to know nothing of the situation. Assuming that's true, and assuming there is some sort of conspiracy involving atomic research, it must be small. Also, for obvious reasons, it must be centered in a fairly remote place. Finally, it must be restricted to the research phase because of the obvious impossibility of building an actual reactor without the knowledge leaking out." He finished speaking and studied the agent casually, but Krull had the distinct impression he was being dissected atom by atom.

"In other words, the Prime

Thinker doesn't believe the danger is . . . perhaps . . . critical?" he asked, after an interval of silence.

"Any atomic research is dangerous," Yargo replied. "If it exists, I don't believe it has reached an advanced state. But that's why you're here—to keep that from happening." He hesitated, and described the reaction of each Council member to the proposed investigation. "That's so you'll get a clear mental picture," he added.

Krull nodded and he continued:

"One other thing. I realize it'll make your task much more difficult but you'll have to mask your activities. We can't afford to alarm either the conspirators—if they exist—or the public. No one must know what you're looking for. No one but myself, and of course the Manager and the Council."

Krull readily saw his point but remembering his supposed IQ managed to retain a blank look. Yargo waited, expectantly, and when he didn't speak, said softly:

"Dope—you'll be investigating a supposed dope ring. You're working for me because the ring may involve members of my Government. But don't give any explanations unless you have to." There was a note of pity in his voice—the pity a genius might feel for a moron, Krull thought. He allowed a look of comprehension to cross his face and exclaimed:

"Dope, of course, I'm glad you thought of it. A perfect cover." He hesitated, as if momentarily confused. "What kind of dope?"

"Heroin," Yargo snapped impatiently.

"Yes, heroin," Krull echoed slowly. The interview closed with Yargo's repeated caution to maintain secrecy; he rose, pumped Krull's hand again and escorted him to the top of the stairs. Cranston was waiting at the bottom. Krull started down. *No mind shield.* He began hurrying, as if anxious to return to the cover of night.

THE door had scarcely closed behind him before the girl he had passed on the stairs started toward the library with rapid steps. She knocked at the door and opened it without waiting for an answer. Yargo looked up inquiringly and his face softened; in the eight years since his wife had died his daughter had become his whole world. Or almost.

"Father, who was that man who just left?"

"Why?" He looked curiously at her. Jan seldom bothered with his visitors and was even less seldom disturbed; now she was visibly agitated.

"He's an esper," she announced.

"What?" Yargo rose from his chair, incredulous.

"Yes, he's an esper." Jan repeated calmly. "I saw it in his mind when I passed him on the stairs."

He looked alarmed. "Do you think he . . .?"

"No," she cut in, "he wasn't paying attention to me."

Yargo gave an audible sigh of relief. Jan was a telepath. Fortunately, he had discovered it when she was little more than a babe, had tutored her so well that no one had ever suspected. Now, that her mother was dead, only he knew. Not that it was a crime to be an esper. Still . . .

"Is it bad?" she asked worriedly. Yargo brought his thoughts back to the present.

"Yes, it's bad," he said simply. "Tell me exactly what you saw—or should I say read?" He smiled faintly.

"He was scared—tried to keep thinking about mind shields."

"What else?"

"He was trying to mask his thoughts, keep them innocuous—tried to resurrect strong memories in an effort to over-ride the word *mind shield.*"

"What thoughts?"

She hesitated. "The information may be important," Yargo said sharply.

"A polynesian girl on a beach—a naked girl."

"Oh." Yargo masked a smile. "At least our esper appears normal."

"Can I be of any help?" she asked tentatively.

"You stay out of this," Yargo observed quietly. "You can't take any chances now."

"I wouldn't be," she replied. "I know how to use mind shields even if your visitor doesn't."

"Maybe," he relented, "we'll see."

He watched her leave engrossed in thought. No, it wasn't a crime to be an esper, but it carried a heavy social stigma. Hidden espers when discovered were subject to surgery to remove the mind power, the penalty of their deception. Fear of the mutant's talent was strong, tenacious. He thanked God she had learned to use mind shields.

HE finally stirred, reached into a desk drawer for a dossier and began scanning it, information he had already digested. But there might be a clue. His eyes flashed down the sheet. Max Krull, IQ 113, graduate of the World Police Academy, Sydney Campus, class of 2446 a.d., 5'10", 170 pounds, dark short-cropped hair, muscular, small mole on lobe of left ear. He dropped his eyes: Unimaginative, steady, loyal, dependable, unsophisticated; no highly placed friends or relatives, no political affiliations;

normal sex life, friendly, unobtrusive . . . only talent appears to lie in art—a good hand at sketches; excellent memory for detail. He read to the last line. *Capable of only limited mental work.* The dossier was signed:

Martin Jonquil,

Inspector-Agent of Police,

Territory of Waimea-Roa.

He thoughtfully tucked it back into the drawer. So, Max Krull, IQ 113, was an esper—a hidden esper. No doubt the IQ rating was as false as his talent was real. He cursed softly. He had gone to great pains to pick the exact man for the job. Now he was committed—Krull knew the details. And Krull was an esper! The over-riding fact burned in his mind: the investigation was of first magnitude importance. The future of mankind, perhaps, hung on the agent's performance; what he did, whom he saw, what he said . . . *what he found.* He had needed just the right man, one whose every move was predictable. And he had got Krull. Only Krull was a fake, a man traveling under a mask, a man who wasn't what he was supposed to be.

The fate of the world hung on an esper.

He held his hand out and studied it curiously. Steady. Strange, it should be shaking. He forced Krull from his mind and picked up the thick volume he had been reading before the agent's arrival. Its archaic cover proclaimed it a pre-atomic publication: Alexander. He read far into the night. Alexander the Great.

He had use for Alexander.

CHAPTER 4

IVAN SHEVACH, World Manager, thoughtfully pursed his lips while scanning a photostatic copy of a dossier on his desk. His face, pale under the indirect lighting, was vaguely puzzled, as if some obvious fact were eluding him. He reached the end of the record and backtracked, picking out isolated bits of information of particular interest. Max Krull, Agent of Police, Territory of Waimea-Roa, had, it seemed, an IQ 113. Then there was the end notation: *Capable of only limited work.* It didn't jibe with his idea of the kind of agent needed for such a job. After a while he looked up. Jordan Gullfin, his chief of special agents, was watching stolidly. The Manager contemplated his flat face, smashed nose and heavy sensuous lips before murmuring:

"Interesting—very interesting."

"That's what I thought." Gullfin's voice was a husky horn in the small office. Shevach continued his musing as if he hadn't heard him.

"Why did Yargo pick an IQ

113 agent? And why one from Waimea-Roa?" He raised his voice. "Why that particular man?"

"Maybe he didn't want someone too bright. This guy sounds like a fishbrain."

"I can understand a use for that kind of agent."

Gullfin failed to detect the sarcasm. "He's a fishbrain," he repeated.

"That's the whole point." Shevach looked up sharply. "You're keeping him under constant surveillance?"

"Not around the clock. I didn't think it was that important."

"I do. From now on it's around the clock—and let me do the thinking. I want to know every move he makes, everything he learns, every contact—and the reason for the contact. It's important, Gullfin." He smiled narrowly. "It could make the difference whether or not you become Chief of World Agents."

"You'll get it," Gullfin promised quickly. "He won't get a second of privacy."

"Are his rooms bugged?"

"They will be."

"Cameras?"

"We'll even have them in the bathroom."

"You're keeping Yargo covered?"

"Every move," Gullfin boasted. "We got Saxon, his confidential secretary, in the bin."

"You can trust him?" he asked.

Gullfin grinned evilly. "With those pleasure palace photos we got of him, we sure can. He'll come through, all right, and he's got Yargo's complete confidence . . ."

"Excellent," Shevach cut in. "I want to know every development, immediately, and that applies to all of Yargo's contacts."

"You'll get 'em." Gullfin rose to go, then stood with a faintly puzzled look in his eyes. "Personally, I think this guy Yargo is loose upstairs, at least according to Saxon."

Shevach became instantly alert. "How so?"

"Hell, he goes to sleep nights reading about some stiff that's been dead a century, at least."

"Oh . . .?" The Manager looked curious. "Who?"

"Alexander—some bird named Alexander."

"Alexander the Great?"

"Yeah, that's the guy. Like I said, he's been dead a long time."

Shevach watched his lieutenant depart, engrossed with his last bit of information. "Alexander the Great." He thoughtfully snapped on the intercom.

"Gelda, get me all the books and tapes available on Alexander the Great—biographies, histories, everything." He cut the connection and sat musing. After a while he got up, walked across the room and opened an inlaid

paneled door, staring for a moment at the array of dials exposed. He moved a switch, punched a button, and a counter began spinning. Behind the panel a selector moved across tables of random numbers and finally stopped: the number 11234 appeared in a glass window. He moved his hand to another circular dial and spun the number on the indicator reading. Something whirred inside the machine and a small booklet popped into a slot at the base of the console.

He picked it up and eyed it curiously: CLOIM, the Crail-Levy-Osman Intelligence Measure. He returned to his desk, read the instructions on the first page, slid out the answer sheet, glanced at his desk clock and went to work. He finished with three minutes left to go, sighed with satisfaction, then returned to the machine and inserted the answer sheet in another slot. A mechanism hummed to life as electronic scanners scored the paper. Within seconds a red light blinked above another window and the number 216 appeared. IQ 216 on a randomly selected subject wasn't too bad, he thought. Still, he had to do better than that at the polls. He closed the panel and returned to the desk.

HABIT was stronger than comfort. Krull awoke at dawn despite the fact the city still slept, elated with realization he was on his own. It was his second full day in Sydney. He had spent the first getting acquainted with the city again and, incidentally, learning the names of leading government officials he might have occasion to contact. Yeah, he was on his own. He had a job to do—clear cut—and no one to tell him how to do it. Not even Yargo. The Prime Thinker had done little more than suggest, had appeared content to let him steer his own course.

He relived the interview over morning coffee. There were things he liked—and didn't like. But he definitely liked the feel of freedom. Cranston's last act (Who was Cranston, by the way?) had been to deliver his official credentials, together with a short speech. He couldn't forget the speech. Summed up it gave him full freedom of action —to go where he wanted, see who he wanted, request assistance and a lot more. The credentials witnessed the fact the roly-poly Cranston hadn't exaggerated. They gave him the full stamp of authority; they also bore the Prime Thinker's official seal and counter-signature. All that was good. Against it rested the fact he knew virtually nothing of the task confronting him; only that a man had died of radiation, an

atomic conspiracy might exist—somewhere in the world. That could mean Antarctica, Tibet, the upper Amazon, Sydney, or one of the floating or subsea cities. It could be anywhere. Yet Yargo must have realized the magnitude of the task. *But why had he picked an IQ 113 agent?* He'd probably find out, he thought ruefully.

Krull was at the door of the Bureau of Public Records at 8:00 a.m. sharp, much to the annoyance of the LIQ clerk, a gaunt middle-aged woman with a tired face. She reluctantly contemplated her steaming cup of coffee before deciding in his favor.

"Good morning," He smiled cheerfully. "I'd like to see the autopsy report on the death of William Bixby Butterfield." He gave the place and date of death and watched her disappear between two ceiling-high rows of ledgers. He noticed a picture of Shevach tacked to one wall underscored by the words:

I promise government reform.

The reminder of the coming election caused him to grimace. He wasn't certain he wanted to be in Sydney when the event occurred, or in any large city for that matter. The election of the Prime Thinker was a world holiday for all except skeletal maintenance, police and public utility crews. It was a day when all laws except those governing felonies were suspended, when revelry and debauchery reigned. It was the one day of every five years when all class distinction was cast aside—when LIQ's and MIQ's and HIQ's intermingled indiscriminately in public and private celebration to hail the new ruler; a time when the elite HIQ's of both sexes demonstrated their democracy by seeking LIQ partners for the night. There would be brawls, riots, jubilant merriment, and a lot of headaches the next day. He wasn't at all certain he was prepared for it, especially after the quiet of the atolls. He saw the clerk returning with a puzzled look.

"Mind repeating that name?"

"Butterfield—William Bixby Butterfield."

"That's what I thought you said." Her face wrinkled in thought followed by startled comprehension. "Just a moment." She briskly turned away and headed for an office at the far end of the room. He watched her curiously. The name had clicked—had set some wheels in motion in the gaunt clerk's head. He was pondering it when she emerged from the office followed by a man he thought must be her boss.

Her boss?

He took a second look and decided against the conjecture. The fellow accompanying the clerk

was tall, thin; a lantern-shaped face with a beaked nose and livid slash across one cheek giving it the impression of a perpetual sneer. His eyes were black beady gimlets, his ears small and close-cropped. A hard face, Krull decided. He took a second look. A LIQ or MIQ who lived for the semblance of authority he enjoyed over his fellow men, he thought. An agent. He instinctively noted the man's clothes—tan tropic shorts and open-necked shirt with a light brown cape clasped at the neck. He wore sandals and his knees were knobby; but the clothes didn't fit the face. They reached the counter and the clerk stepped deferentially aside. Her companion fixed Krull with gimlet eyes and rasped:

"You the fellow asking about Butterfield?"

"That's right." Krull didn't like his tone.

"Why?"

"That's my business. It's a public record."

Hardface's lips wreathed in a sneer. "Maybe it's my business, too." He reached up and moved his cape back, displaying an agent's badge—and a small automatic in an underarm holster. He looked at Krull as if expecting him to flinch.

"Okay, so you're an agent," Krull said calmly. "Now just trot out the ledger like a nice fellow."

"Maybe you don't know it but you've got some questions to answer," Hardface barked.

KRULL sighed and reached toward his pocket—Hardface's body stiffened. His hand came back with his credentials and he shoved them under the agent's eyes.

"Okay, there they are," he said. "Now let's get the files, like a good public servant."

Hardface glanced at the credentials, took a longer second look, then squinted at Krull. "Don't mean a thing to me. I don't work for the gent."

Krull was taken aback. He hadn't expected that. "Okay, gimme your boss," he snapped. "Maybe he's heard of Ben Yargo."

"Maybe," the agent said, and added: "I work for Jordan Gullfin." He stared at Krull as if the name should have brought awed recognition, and appeared disappointed when it didn't. "He's the Manager's special agent," he added.

"The Manager works for my boss," Krull said drily.

"He won't—after this month." Hardface spun on his heel and moved toward a phone. So, that's it, Krull thought, the Manager's boys are already savoring victory. Hardface dialed, spoke briefly into the instrument, cupping the mouthpiece with his hand. He finished and came back.

"Gullfin says okay." He gave Krull a malignant look, nodded toward the clerk and vanished back into the office.

The file on William Butterfield was interesting. William Bixby Butterfield, age 52, had checked into the New Empire Hotel at 7:00 p.m. on November 23—the last he was seen alive. A curious maid found him dead in bed. Reason for the death: Coronary occlusion. Well, the doc, whoever it was, had had the sense to falsify the record and contact Yargo immediately. But if the real reason for his death was secret, why Hardface? It was obvious the Manager didn't intend to keep the file secret. He merely wanted to ascertain who might be curious about it—and why.

Krull picked up the details: identification, physical description, IQ, occupation, and all the facts that survive a man who departs the world via the coroner route. Further down: survived by George Henry Butterfield, IQ 138, public works engineer. His address was listed as Number 27, Cell A-15, Benbow Deep, which he knew was a submerged city lying below the shallow waters of the Pacific west of the Mala Take Atolls. So, William Bixby Butterfield had a living brother. He whistled. Yargo hadn't mentioned that. He studied the notation carefully. It was made in a slightly different hand and there were faint differences in the intensity of stroke and color of ink. Might not mean a thing, he reasoned. The information might not have been available at time the original record was made. He made a few pertinent notes, slid the ledger back across the counter, smiled at the clerk's suspicious look and departed.

His next stop was the Bureau of Missing Persons. He didn't expect it to yield much—it only included local disappearances—but it was a start. The Bureau turned out to be under the charge of a beetle-browed agent with heavy jowls and a cigar shoved deep into his mouth. As in the case at the Bureau of Public Records, his request was passed from the clerk to the heavy-faced man now staring at him. The latter eyed him suspiciously while he gave his request: a look at the files of persons who had dropped from sight during the fall of 2444. The agent looked incredulous.

"That runs into the hundreds." He spoke with the tone of a man humoring a child.

"I know."

"What's your reason?"

"Do I have to have one to look at a public record?"

"You do—in this case." Hard piggish eyes weighed him warily.

Krull sighed and produced his

credentials. The agent stared at them, then back at Krull. His eyes were cold and hostile. "Your reason?"

"An investigation," Krull snapped.

"Of what?"

"That's my business."

The agent dropped his eyes to the credentials again and a look of fear suffused his face. Why? Krull took a chance and did something he had seldom done before: he peeped him.

Fear, formless chaotic fear mingled with hate, a kaleidoscopic pattern of shifting emotions without clear form or content; fear and hate and suspicion, welded together and reaching out to engulf Krull. A name flashed into the mental pattern, blinking on and off like a neon sign: Gullfin . . . Gullfin . . . Gullfin. The thought-pattern jelled and the name was accompanied by the imagery of a bullet-skulled man with mean black eyes, a smashed nose and a forehead that reminded him of pictures he had seen of ancient cavemen. His mouth was heavy-lipped, sensuous, his skin swarthy, splotched and unhealthy.

Gullfin!

THE name screamed in the brain of the agent sitting opposite him. Krull felt his hands grow sweaty and recoiled involuntarily, quickly withdrawing from the hateful mind. It was like suddenly returning to consciousness again—he became aware of the agent staring oddly at him. Momentarily he felt scared. Risky . . . penetrating another person's mind. He wouldn't try that again; not until he learned more about the esper talent he had so seldom used—not until he learned the tricks. But he had learned something: Gullfin had his slimy fingers in a lot of pies. Gullfin—or his master, the Manager?

"All right," the agent snarled. Suddenly he stopped. He was staring past Krull's shoulder with a look of half fear, half respect. He started to say something but couldn't seem to get the words out.

"Mr. Krull?"

He turned at the well-modulated voice and looked at an extremely tall thin man with a lean, almost skeletal face, framed by shaggy locks of gray hair. He topped Krull by a good six or eight inches.

"I'm Peter Merryweather." He stuck out a large bony hand, smiling pleasantly. Krull shook it automatically.

"Let's step into a private office and have a chat." Krull started to ask why and bit the question off. Merryweather's face was open, honest, clearly devoid of any guile. Almost too forthright!

He felt an instinctive liking and trust of the man, yet tinged with doubt. He nodded and followed him into a room marked Albert Skoda, Captain-Inspector of Agents. A short burly man rose at their entrance, his face immediately respectful.

"Mind if we use your office a moment, Al?"

"Not a bit, Mr. Merryweather." The agent's deferential tone told him his host was a person of standing. As the agent slipped out the door, Merryweather motioned to a chair and sat down behind the desk.

"You're probably curious, Mr. Krull." His eyes twinkled. "Gullfin reported your encounter with Agent Cathecart at the BuPub-Records. I thought you'd probably show up here so I came over."

Krull made a mental note of Hardface's name. He asked:

"You are . . . ?"

"An assistant to the Manager, sort of public relations function. At least that's one of my jobs." His lips wrinkled pleasantly. "By Crozener's ghost, work for the government and they pile the jobs on until you really don't know what you're doing. But I don't think I can complain."

Krull masked his surprise.

"I know what you're thinking: What the hell am I doing in the act?"

"Something like that."

"When Gullfin told me about your credentials, I figured Cathecart probably gave you a rough time. Thought I'd better step in and smooth the path."

"Why?" Krull challenged. Merryweather seemed too smooth.

"Public relations," he explained. "If you've got a job to do, I'm here to help, not hinder. Just let me know how I can be of aid."

"Sounds good," Krull admitted. "How about . . . Gullfin?"

"To hell with Gullfin." He continued amiably. "He's playing politics—thinks Shevach's due to win the election and he's trying to butter himself up for the post of Chief of World Agents." He caught the surprised look on Krull's face and smiled.

"I serve the Manager, too," he said slowly, "but I'm honest and try to do a conscientious job. Shevach's not really a bad sort when you get to know him. If he seems hard, it's because he's got a tough job. You can't penalize a man for being ambitious."

"No—I suppose not."

"Anyway, the doors are open. If you need anything—or run into any obstacles—just give me a buzz. You can catch me at this number." He tore a sheet off the desk pad, scribbled briefly on it and shoved it across the desk, then rose. Krull pocketed the paper and scrambled to his feet,

trying to assess Merryweather's role. His ready admission that the Manager was his master was in his favor. Only something was wrong. The tall man was too genial, too ready to help. Help? Well, he'd see . . .

"We'll start in by clearing the way for you to get access to all the records—every damn one." Merryweather promised. "Follow me." He led the way to the outer reception desk, gave brief orders to the beetle-browed agent in charge and waved toward the files.

"They're all yours. Webster here will be glad to help you." He shook hands with him and left. Krull turned to face the scowling agent.

He quickly found Webster had been right. People seemed to be disappearing by the scores—for the most part, harassed, debt-ridden fathers who just gave up the struggle; to a lesser extent, drunks, the unstable and ill. In the end he wearily closed the file, thinking he would check again when he had more time. Just now the lead on Butterfield seemed too hot to let hang.

KRULL got off the monorail from Tonga surface station and looked curiously around the main station of Benbow Deep. He had never been to a submerged city before, although he had seen them often enough on TV. He felt momentarily uneasy. For one thing, he could look up through the cell's plastitex ceiling—the monorail station was located in cell T-12—into the ocean. It was a darker shade than the clear bottom waters of Abiang Lagoon but, he thought, the city was built on a sea bottom plateau at the hundred meter level. The long reds and yellows of the spectrum had been filtered out, leaving only the deepened blues. He searched the ceiling carefully until he caught movement. It was true, then, you could see the marine life from the city streets. He had heard that. He recalled that the first subsea city had been made of opaque materials and mass claustrophobia had resulted. Since then transparent materials had been used. Everyone was happier —so the psychmasters claimed —but he wasn't so sure. The idea of three hundred feet of ocean pressing down on him wasn't exactly reassuring.

He studied his surroundings curiously. The cell had a long rectangular shape beneath its cylindrical roof and narrowed abruptly at either end where it joined adjacent cells. The narrow street running down the center of the cell was lined with businesses on one side—extremely crowded by surface standards —while the monorail station occupied the other. In case of dis-

aster, each cell could be isolated by electrically-controlled doors fitted in slots below street level where the cells adjoined. The entire system was monitored at a central station where watchmen scanned the city's warning devices around the clock. If he were asked to describe the general topography of Benbow Deep, he would liken it to a string of sausages, he decided. The cell was illuminated by soft indirect lighting; the temperature was pleasantly cool and the filtered air clean and fresh. Life under the seas had its benefits as well as dangers. For one, there was perfect control of the environment. Weather, to the dwellers of the deep, was an almost forgotten topic. A cab drew up.

"Transport, sir?"

"Yes, thanks." The rear door slid open and he sank into a deep foam cushion, noting the small vehicle was equipped with a panel which, if desired, could be raised to afford complete privacy.

"Where to?"

He gave Butterfield's address and settled back as the vehicle jerked into motion. He watched the passing cells with interest. Each was dedicated to a specialized activity—seafarm products processing, commercial business, a mining cell where great trains of carriers traveling on sea-bottom rails came through the locks bearing manganese, cobalt and nickel ores from the depths beyond the city. They passed through a clinical cell containing a hospital and small mental ward and, adjacent to it, an educational cell which housed the city's schools at all levels. Most of the buildings were of plastic materials in various pastel shades; a few were ornamented in solid brick, coral block, and synthetic stone and wood. His interest picked up when they reached the recreation cells. One was devoted to swimming and aquatic sports; another to gymnastics and games; a third, constructed of pink plastitex, was illuminated by indirect rose lighting.

"Pleasure cell," the driver informed him. "Want to stop?"

"Maybe later." Krull grinned. "Just now I'm a working man."

"What's your tastes?"

"What do you have to offer? Krull countered.

"Everything," the driver said pridefully. "There's nothing in the world we haven't got right here in Benbow Deep. Nothing." He smirked over his shoulder. "Cell R-22 is a good one—a girlie cell."

"I'm just a looker," Krull laughed.

"Then you'll like R-22. It's called peep heaven." Krull didn't reply. They entered the residential cells. The houses were much like any others except for the

scale; miniaturization was the rule. The cab abruptly slowed down in front of a small plastic house that was distinguishable from the others only by its number. He dropped a bill in the driver's hand, got out without waiting for change, and headed for the door.

GEORGE HENRY Butterfield was prim, slender, with a narrow face, pointed jaw and thin lips. A fringe of gray hair circled a shiny pate and, together with face lines, added up to about fifty years. He looked inquiringly at Krull, his body braced against the partially open door. Krull stated his mission, clearly, everything but his real reason. He finished and waited expectantly.

"You came all the way from Sydney to ask about my brother?" Butterfield asked incredulously.

Krull nodded cheerfully. "It's not far."

"Why?"

"Because we need answers," Krull stated calmly.

Butterfield hesitated. "What do you want to know?"

"All about him—his life, hobbies, friends, what he did and said and believed; any letters you might have."

"I can't see the reason for all that," the face in the door said indignantly. "My brother's dead. It seems . . . an unwarranted invasion of privacy." He started to close the door but Krull's foot was in the way.

"I assure you, it's not." He adopted a conciliatory tone. "Let me explain, Mr. Butterfield." The watching eyes remained suspicious, hostile.

"Your brother was well-known, respected, then he vanished—inexplicably. Five years later he was found dead. Don't you think it logical we try to establish the facts concerning his whereabouts during the years he was lost to sight?"

"Who are you?" Butterfield's face took on a look of resentment. Krull displayed his credentials. The little man's mouth fell open and he managed to say: "Won't you come in, Mr. Krull?" He stepped to one side and the agent entered, trying to conceal a faint smile. His host's awe was quite a contrast to Hardface's reactions when confronted with the same credentials. Butterfield retreated and indicated a soft chair in one corner of the room, then sat facing him. He fussed at getting comfortable before he managed to say:

"It must be quite important if the Prime Thinker is concerned."

"Very important," Krull said gravely. "Now Mr. Butterfield . . ."

Butterfield talked, talked in a barely audible voice with Krull

occasionally interrupting with a question. He continually shifted his eyes and his fingers intertwined nervously. He told of his brother's boyhood, school life, friends (he had few)—his love of math, electronics, physics, his flights into fantasy and his dreams, little odds and ends concerning his likes and dislikes. Despite his nervousness and low-pitched voice he made his brother live again, until Krull felt almost a personal relationship with the mysterious professor who had, somehow, tampered with the atom—and died.

George Henry Butterfield narrated his brother's life up to the moment he had accepted the position on the faculty of the University of Palmerston North—and abruptly stopped. Krull waited for him to continue. Butterfield flicked his eyes nervously around the room, averting the agent's face. Nervous, Krull thought. Unduly nervous—like a man sitting on a bomb. He encouraged:

"What then?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I didn't hear from him again."

"Not at all—ever?"

"After he disappeared there were a few inquiries from the police. That's all." Butterfield sucked his lip.

"But nothing from your brother?"

"Nothing." He looked a trifle defiant. "The only thing I heard was . . . about his death. They informed me, just a few days ago."

Krull nodded sympathetically and asked more questions. He drew blanks. As far as his brother was concerned, William Bixby Butterfield had been born in Benbow Deeps, educated, had shunned girls, loved the physical sciences, had taken a job in New Zealand—had vanished. Krull tried a new line of questioning with the same result. No go.

"It's no use," Butterfield finally said. "I guess I just can't help you, Mr. Krull. I wouldn't keep any secrets—not from the Prime Thinker. I wouldn't do that." He spoke the denial in a burst, twisting his fingers furiously. Deciding there was nothing more to be gained, Krull rose, thanked him, and started toward the door; the engineer followed him. As he started to leave Butterfield blurted:

"This must be awfully important."

"It is." A note of regret seeped into Krull's voice.

"The Prime Thinker really sent you?"

"That's right, Mr. Butterfield, and I'm afraid he'll be terribly disappointed."

"Oh . . ." The little man hesitated as if torn with indecision, then drew his shoulders up

sharply and looked at the agent with brave resolution. "Mr. Krull, there is one other thing."

"Yes . . . ?" Krull felt an odd surge of hope.

"William had a secret . . ."

"Go on," Krull prompted.

"He . . . he was a hidden esper."

CHAPTER 5

BEFORE he'd taken a dozen steps from Butterfield's door, Krull knew he'd had it. The little man's words had given the investigation an ominous twist.

Espers!

He momentarily clutched at the hope that William Bixby Butterfield only incidentally was an esper, that no real relationship existed between that fact and his toying with the atom. But he knew better—knew it absolutely. He cursed softly. He couldn't enter their lonely world without revealing his own talents. The first telepath he encountered would read the secret in his mind or sense his mind shield—catastrophe.

He took the tube to Tonga and made connections with the Sydney carrier, glad of the few solitary hours the trip afforded. He had to think. Plan. Anticipate the contingencies which might arise when he moved into the shadow land of the espers, for he had no doubt that was exactly where he was headed. He shuddered at the thought of the first contact. Should he reveal his kinship and hope they would keep his secret? Or should he erect mind shields and say to hell with them? He decided on one thing: he'd be prepared. He'd read the esper tapes, the psychmaster studies, learn their organizations—determine his own powers. Up till now he'd hidden his talents, avoided using them. Okay, he'd test them, develop them, and the hell with consequences.

He reached Sydney and strolled toward the hotel with a pleased feeling. The decision to draw out his talent—use it—was almost a physical release, a sense of power. He peeped several passing pedestrians, catching odd fragments of thought; none were very clear and he wondered if it were because they had been picked out of context. Well, he would learn. If only he didn't encounter an esper in the process!

He entered the lobby of the hotel, absently peeping, and was startled by a thought of such vivid clarity that he stopped abruptly, staring at a young woman entering the lobby. She clutched the arm of a middle-aged man whose clothing proclaimed him a MIQ. He peeped again, fascinated, then withdrew from her mind and saw her clearly for the first time. She had a

serene open face with candid blue eyes, which could be termed either vacuous or innocent. She appeared over-dressed in a pale blue semi-transparent tunic, matching sandals, and elaborate freshly lacquered top-knot hair-do. He watched the couple stroll toward the lift and grinned, deciding he had learned two things: one was about innocent faces; the second was the reason espers were shunned and feared.

He had scarcely entered his room when the phone rang—he debated answering it. The ringing persisted. Cranston, he thought. What the hell does he want? After a moment he lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Krull?" He didn't recognize the voice.

"I have a message for you . . . " The voice paused.

"Well . . .?"

"Are you interested in knowing the whereabouts of William Bixby Butterfield before he died?"

Krull was startled. "Who is this?"

"Just answer the question."

"I am," he snapped.

"Meet me in front of the Edward Crozener statue in Crozener Park at twelve midnight—tonight. And come alone."

"Who is this?" Krull demanded.

"Remember, come alone—if you want the information." The phone clicked in his ear. He looked thoughtfully at the instrument, glanced at the clock, debating if he should call Cranston. He decided against it.

KRULL reached the park with an hour to spare and strolled around its borders once to get his bearings. Crozener's statue was located in a small plaza boxed in by shrubbery and overhanging trees. He walked to the far end of the park and, certain he wasn't observed, stepped into the shrubbery and backtracked toward the plaza keeping in the shadows of the tree. He halted at the border of the clearing, spread the bushes carefully apart and peered out.

The square was empty.

He looked around until he found a tree that afforded a good view of the clearing and silently climbed it. He looked at his watch, 11:15, and almost immediately heard low voices. A couple strolled into view talking and laughing in intimate tones. He peeped them, got a few details and grinned. There was a long period before the next passerby came, a lone man who paused to light a pipe. His mind was pleasant, mellow. Krull grew uncomfortable. The tree limb pressed sharply against his stomach and his muscles ached from the unaccustomed position. He tried to shift to a more comfortable posi-

tion. An old couple airing a dog passed him.

Midnight.

He started to shift his body again when he caught movement in the bushes on the opposite side of the square and froze. Illusion? It had been just a flash of black against black. No, there it was again, someone crouching . . . waiting. He smiled grimly and played it safe by slipping his gun from its holster, holding it in one hand while he steadied himself with the other. He tried to peep the shadow but there was no answering thought, no imagery, and he wondered if telepathy were limited to having the subject in close visual range. He'd have to determine that.

The shadow ceased moving and he decided the watcher had settled down to wait. After a while one leg began to cramp and he cautiously moved it, aware that the pain was spreading up his thigh. Hours seemed to pass. Still he waited, silently moving to ease the muscle. At twelve-thirty the black shadow opposite him moved again; a figure stepped out onto the edge of the square and looked up and down the walk. Krull strained to see, simultaneously trying to peep him—no results. He was trying to ease his cramp when the limb supporting him cracked. The shadow came to life, leaped to one side and three slugs ripped up through the tree. Krull cursed, fired twice, released his hold and dropped to the ground just as another slug whammed past his ear. He fired twice more; his attacker half spun and dropped heavily. There were shouts in the distance. He ran to the side of the fallen man and flipped the body over.

Cranston's dead face stared up at him.

HE released his hold and fled, keeping in the shadows until he was several blocks from the park. Sirens screamed as he neared the hotel and he smiled grimly. Cranston's troubles were over now—the roly-poly little man with the cheerful voice had smiled his last smile. For him the conspiracy was ended; but, he thought, his own troubles had just started. He entered the hotel through the garage and got to his room without being observed, pausing to peep the interior before entering. Not that he expected to read the mind of any chance intruder—he had failed to read the mind of the shadow that had been Cranston—but he did suspect he could discern the presence of another mind, even though it might come through as a patchwork of formless imagery. He locked the door behind him, conscious that he was breathing hard. He studied his hands—they were sweaty,

shaking. He half-expected to see blood on them, but there was none. Cranston was the first; something told him he wouldn't be the last. After a while his breathing eased and he debated his next move.

Cranston's attempt to kill him left him standing at the fork of a road. Either Yargo had ordered his murder—or the conspiracy extended into the Prime Thinker's household. Which? He weighed the possibilities. It wasn't logical that Yargo would assign him to the investigation and almost as quickly decide to have him killed. Certainly the world's top leader wouldn't chance implication in the murder of a lowly agent. That was more Hardface's speed. It was more likely Cranston was linked to Hardface—(What was his name?—Cathecart, that was it) —or Gullfin. Or the Manager. He made his decision.

At one a.m. he picked up the phone and called the Prime Thinker's secret number.

Yargo answered on the second ring. That was suspicious; almost as if he had been waiting for the call. Confirmation from Cranston? But Yargo probably worked three-fourths of the way around the clock. No, it wasn't unreasonable for him to be at his desk. He thought about it while making his request—an immediate audience.

"Is it that important?" There was an edge of doubt in Yargo's voice.

"It is," Krull said firmly.

"Where are you now?"

"My room—at the Edward Crozener."

"There'll be a car to meet you at the garage in fifteen minutes." The phone clicked; he replaced the receiver in the cradle thoughtfully. He didn't particularly like the idea of being whisked away in the dead of night by Yargo's men. It seemed like leaving himself wide open, but it all depended upon whether he had guessed right about Cranston's loyalties. When there were three minutes left to go, he checked his gun and headed for the garage. At exactly one-fifteen a white Capricorn rolled down the ramp and stopped. He approached it from the rear, one hand gripping his gun, and stopped, bewildered. The driver was a woman. For a moment he thought he had made a mistake and started to retreat when she called after him:

MR. KRULL?" He hesitated, cautiously returned to the side of the car. She smiled.

"If you'll get in . . ."

For an instant he struggled to remember where he had seen her before, but gave up and went around to the opposite side and slipped in beside her. She pushed

the car into gear, reached the thoroughfare and turned in the direction of the House of the Prime Thinker. She finally broke the awkward silence:

"You seem surprised."

He grinned sheepishly. "To be frank, I wasn't expecting a woman."

"I was pressed into service. I happened to be with dad when your call came."

"Dad?"

"I'm Jan Yargo."

"Oh, I didn't know." He shifted in his seat until he could see her face in profile. Her eyes were large—blue, he guessed—and her nose was a straight line above a well-formed mouth. Her hair was piled high in the elaborate lacquered hairdo currently the style among HIQs; it dazzled with jewels. She was more than pretty, he decided, and placed her age in the early to middle twenties. The conversation died down. After a while she turned into a lane leading to the House of the Prime Thinker and a sentry waved her through. She parked under a portico and said:

"Please follow me."

She led him upstairs to the library and knocked lightly before entering. Ben Yargo was busy at his desk. He rose and came around to the center of the room, extended his hand and smiled briefly. "Good evening, Krull. Or should I say, good morning?"

"I'll be saying goodnight," Jan said.

Krull turned toward her. "Thank you very much, Miss Yargo."

"I'm glad to have been of help." She smiled at him and withdrew; he turned back to face the Prime Thinker.

"It is late—I'm sorry," Krull said. He saw that Yargo was wearing an open dressing gown thrown over a pair of tropic shorts, and sandals; his face was drawn and tired, all but the eyes. They were bright, alive and disconcertingly penetrating. He released Krull's hand and indicated a chair opposite his desk. Krull sat down and waited until Yargo was settled before he spoke:

"I wouldn't have bothered you at this time if something important hadn't come up."

"I'm sure of that." (A touch of irony?)

"Someone tried to murder me tonight." He paused . . . waited. The eyes watching him were unmoving.

"Well . . . ?" Yargo uttered the single word. Krull blinked—he had expected amazement, possibly incredulity. The immobile eyes watched him impassively. For an instant he wondered if he dared peep the mind of the man opposite him and as quickly discarded the idea. Too dangerous. Yargo was too sharp, too alert,

would sense the act. Instead he said:

"The assassin was your man —Cranston."

Yargo didn't change expression. "What happened?"

"I killed him," Krull said brutally.

"Good, I'm glad you came through all right. Anything else?"

Krull was momentarily shaken. Yargo's calm, in view of the implication, seemed unnatural. He hesitated, groping for words and said:

"Yes, there is." For a few moments the room was so still he could hear the ticking of the clock on the opposite wall. He said audaciously: "Either Cranston acted under your orders or he was a traitor to your cause."

"I had already considered the implication from your point of view." Yargo leaned forward and rested his arms on the desk. "The conspiracy has reached to high places," he said quietly. "Cranston was a traitor."

HE leaned back and contemplated Krull for a long moment. His face was a mask and when he finally spoke his voice was crisp.

"As an agent of the State I expect you to go on with the investigation. As far as I am concerned, nothing has changed. Agents—by the nature of their work—are expected to face intrigue and death."

Krull flushed at the reprimand and started to protest when Yargo smiled. "So are Prime Thinkers."

"I would like your permission to investigate Cranston's connections."

Yargo shrugged. "If you're convinced it's related to the Butterfield case—yes. I usually don't try to tell an agent how to do his job. To that extent, I won't dictate your actions, as long as you don't deviate from the original intent of the investigation—to determine whether or not there is an atomic conspiracy; and if there is—the persons involved."

"I won't deviate," Krull informed him.

"No, I'm sure you won't." Yargo got up as if to terminate the meeting.

"One other thing . . ."

Yargo looked expectant.

"William Bixby Butterfield was an esper."

"Oh!" He sat down again.

CHAPTER 6

THE first mutant telepath (esper), a boy named George Gollar, was discovered in Wellington in 2010 A.D., forty years after the Atomic War. It was disclosed that his grandparents had been among the few survivors of Greater London.

Gollar was declared a freak, a mutant spawned by radiation-altered genes. Soon after, other mutant telepaths were detected. They were few in number, at first. Freaks . . . mutants . . . telepaths. Peepers! In time the words took on an ominous note. Whispers grew, were fanned into fears and, in the end, open hostility.

Public demands led to the rigid "Esper Control Laws" of 2036, promulgated by Paul Bertocci (IQ 207), the Eighth Prime Thinker. These required the screening of school children for telepathic taints, the registration of all adult telepaths, and their prohibition from holding any public office. Severe penalties were imposed on "hidden espers," defined as "persons not registered under the laws governing mutants and found to have telepathic traits."

Despite public unease, the esper problem did not flare into public prominence until the "Sawbo Fang affair."

The Searchers were established soon after . . .

Blak Roko's
Post-Atomic Earthman.

AN alarm bell rang in his brain.

Krull froze by the door of his room with the key half-inserted in the lock, feeling his heart thump against his chest walls while he tried to discern the cause. The warning in his brain had subsided, but he had the distinct feeling of another presence, as if someone were standing next to him. He looked swiftly along the halls. Empty. Someone must be inside. He hesitated, assessing his reaction. No, it hadn't really been a danger signal; it had been more the sensation of a *presence.* An awareness of someone nearby.

He deliberately finished turning the key, stepped aside and pushed the door ajar. A shaft of light came from the room. He caught his breath. There was a moment of stark silence followed by a feminine voice.

"Please come in, Mr. Krull."

He started involuntarily. The voice was low, pleasant. He tried to peep the room. There was no returning thought; neither was there any hint of danger. To the contrary . . .

He threw caution to the winds and stepped quickly through the door. A young woman was sitting in the room's one soft chair by the lamp watching him with bemused eyes. She was slim, dark, with unlacquered black hair and lashes, and a slightly almond cast to her eyes that reminded him of Rea Jon except for a strange wistfulness of expression. He took in her figure with a swift glance: the soft lavender, semi-transparent dress

she wore emphasized the clean lines of her body. Her legs were long, slender and bare, and her simple sandals matched the yellow sash at her waist. He pegged her for a MIQ by her colored dress and simple hairdo.

"Do I meet with your approval, Mr. Krull?"

He reddened and finally found his voice: "Who are you?"

"Anna." The single word was uttered with an almost musical quality.

"Anna who?"

"Just Anna."

"Well, Miss Anna whoever-you-are, you're in the wrong room."

"No . . . I'm not."

"What do you want?" He said roughly.

"To help you."

He thought of the help Cranston had tried to give and smiled grimly. "No thanks."

The girl arose with a single graceful movement and took a few steps toward him. Her face was appealing, devoid of guile, but the lithe lines of her body, visible through the dress, disconcerted him. He caught the fragrance of a delicate perfume.

"Are you afraid, Mr. Krull?"

His lips pulled into a sardonic smile. "Frankly, yes."

"Of what?"

"Of getting murdered."

"Do I look like a murderer—or should I say murderess?"

"No—but you might lead me to someone who is."

"Oh, no." She appeared aghast at the thought. "I don't represent violence. I'm only here to help you; or, rather, take you to someone who can help you." Again he caught the fragrance of perfume and was stirred by the softness of her voice.

"What kind of help?"

"Information . . . just information?"

"From who?"

"Mr. . . . Mr. Bowman." She seemed to hesitate before uttering the name.

"And who is Bowman?"

"The person who wants to help you."

He couldn't suppress a grin. "That's a nice round-about explanation. You'll have to do better than that . . . Anna." He deliberately let her name drop from his lips.

DON'T I look trustworthy, Mr. Krull?" There was reproach in her words, just the right amount, he thought. He tried to peep her again while appearing to think. If he had expected a clear thought pattern he was disappointed. He had the momentary sensation of standing in a light and airy garden, cool with soft breezes, fragrant with the scent of flowers. He half-expected to hear the trill of birds but the garden was silent. The

pleasant sensation changed subtly; there was the beginning of imagery, the jelling of color and form into recognizable geometric patterns. A face emerged from the pattern, that of an old, old man, pale and drawn, with live bright eyes set under thinning wisps of snow-white hair. (Pictures instead of pure thought!) He tried to focus on the details and caught the pallor of the skin, thin nets of blue veins traversing the temples, giving the face an almost ethereal quality. There were no discordant lines, no harshness—only complete harmony and tranquility as if the face were the mirror of a saint's soul. He didn't know how long he held the vision before it began to fade, vanishing in a formless pattern of color. The lively brown eyes were the last thing he saw; then he was looking into a gray field. He became aware that he was standing stiff-legged, staring at the lovely face of the girl who called herself Anna. It was expectant.

"Who is Bowman, again?" He asked the question to give himself time to think. He was scarcely aware of her answer, gripped with the elation of having accomplished a successful mind probe.

The second since peeping the girl in the lobby.

But Anna's thoughts had come through so clear and vivid he had been able to discern the most minute details of the face in her mind; he had no doubt it was Bowman. And Bowman didn't look like a murderer. He stalled a moment longer.

"Exactly why does Mr. Bowman want to see me?"

She smiled faintly. "To give you information about atomic research, Mr. Krull."

THE car zoomed west along the freeway leading from South Sydney. It was a small, two-passenger Tropics-6 with a tan finish and bubble-canopy to allow full vision in all directions. The girl drove silently, swiftly, skirting the end of the harbor and heading toward North Sydney, the major residential area of the City where, he knew, large new apartment developments constructed of plastics and lightweight block housed the MIQs, mainly middle class workers. The seat was narrow and Krull occasionally felt the pressure of her thigh but she didn't appear to notice; indeed, she seemed completely oblivious of his presence.

He tried to piece the puzzle together. To the best of his knowledge only Yargo, the members of the Council of Six, the Manager and, yes, the coroner knew the real secret behind William Bixby Butterfield's death. Now, Mr. Bowman and the girl beside him.

That made, not counting himself, eleven people who knew that William Butterfield had died tampering with the atom, for it seemed almost certain Anna and the man called Bowman must know the whole story. He wouldn't be a bit surprised, he thought, to read it in the headlines of the Anzaca Press.

The girl turned off the freeway onto a narrow road and began climbing toward the crest of one of the low hills. Off to one side the lights of the city fell away to the bay, a dark expanse broken by the occasional running lights of ships and smaller craft. The new Sydney Harbor Bridge was a lighted arc against the night, connecting the north and south sides of the harbor. The red and green running lights of cargo copters moved high above the span. He turned in his seat. The multicolored lights and flashing neons of South Sydney had been swallowed in a light haze, leaving only a bright hue in the sky. He made mental note of street names so he could find the place again. The car abruptly slowed, and swung into a driveway in front of one of the newer apartments. The girl turned off the engine and lights.

"We're here."

He followed her to the door of one of the ground-level units. She opened it—the interior was softly lit.

He hesitated before entering.

She turned, her face only inches from his. He saw that a slightly uneven front tooth added to her attractiveness.

"Still worried, Mr. Krull?"

"Puzzled." She laughed lightly and entered the room. He grinned sheepishly and followed, closing the door behind him, wondering what would happen if there were no Mr. Bowman. He followed her over to the fireplace, and for the first time saw the frail figure sitting in a deep chair next to the hearth. It was the man he had seen in her mind.

MR. BOWMAN, this is Mr. Krull," Anna said.

"Ah . . . yes, I know." The old man smiled gently and extended a bloodless hand, cold to Krull's touch. "Anna, get a chair for our guest."

Krull placed the chair so he could see both Bowman and the door.

"I'll be in the next room," Anna said. She smiled and left. Bowman was smiling gently.

"Thank you for coming."

Krull debated. "I have some questions to ask," he said finally.

"Certainly—feel free."

"You appear to have certain knowledge that could get you into serious trouble." He continued briskly, "I should warn you, I'm an Agent of Police."

"Yes, Agent Max Krull, Terri-

tory of Waimea-Roa, graduate of the Sydney Branch of the World Police Academy, class of 2446 A. D. with an IQ 113 rating. I know all that, Mr. Krull, and the fact you're conducting the Prime Thinker's investigation into circumstances surrounding William Bixby Butterfield's death as result of radiation burns."

"You know too much, Mr. Bowman. You could be considered dangerous."

"Nonsense, how can a man of eighty-seven be dangerous?"

"The knowledge you have is dangerous," Krull corrected.

"No—I don't believe so," Bowman said gently.

"How do you know of Butterfield's activities."

"That's not important."

"I consider it important," Krull said stiffly. "Are you a member of the conspiracy?"

"Do I look like a conspirator?" Krull detected a note of mockery in his voice.

"Let's start over," he said woodenly. "Why did you bring me here?"

"To ask you not to try and unmask the conspiracy."

"If there is one . . . and if I find it," Krull said acidly.

"There is one—and you'll find it."

"You sound certain."

"I am certain."

He was momentarily nonplussed. The frail man opposite him spoke with absolute conviction. More, he had the audacity to ask him to break his oath. He watched the aged face. "Then you are a conspirator."

"No." It was a gentle denial.

"But you speak in their behalf."

"Yes."

"With their consent?"

"No."

"Then—why?"

"Because the objective of the conspiracy is essential."

"What objective—the destruction of the world?"

"No, Mr. Krull, the conquest of the solar system, then the stars—the fulfillment of human destiny."

"Fantastic . . ." He snapped the word out and stopped, leaving the sentence unfinished. It struck him that the old man was talking about achievements that would take decades of development, even with atomic power. He momentarily wondered if he were dealing with a madman, a feeling dispelled by Bowman's eyes. They were mild, but sane. "They'll never get the power for that," he finished.

"They have the power," Bowman observed quietly.

"Atomic power?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's where Butterfield got burned."

"It was unfortunate."

"You speak as if the conspirators were already to hop off," Krull said derisively.

"Yes, soon," the old man replied imperturbably, "at least on the first exploratory ventures."

"Fantastic," Krull repeated.

The ancient eyes contemplated him serenely. "Yes, perhaps in this age of denial of reason, of mental and cultural stagnation; but it wasn't fantastic once. Men were poised, on the verge . . ."

"And almost destroyed the world," Krull interjected.

"Not in trying to get to the stars," Bowman reminded. His eyes seemed to look into vast distances and it was a moment before he resumed: "No, we have denied our heritage through fear. The shadow of the Atomic War has never lifted. Now we live only for today, afraid to plan or think of the morrow . . ."

"You might explain that," Krull said ruffled. "I don't regard Edward Crozener as stupid, yet you propose violation of his first law—the First Law of Mankind."

"EDWARD CROZENER was a great man," Bowman agreed. "I have studied his life intensively. But he was a man of a certain age, a certain social pattern, dealing with circumstances of his day. I'm sure he didn't intend his law as a perpetual ban, but only as a stopgap precaution until humanity learned to direct its destiny. No, with all due respects to Crozener, I am acting on philosophical motives I am sure he would approve were he here today."

"What philosophical motives?" Krull spoke harshly. He felt the interview was getting into deep water.

"Philosophical and ecological," Bowman corrected. "Philosophical because man would be destitute were his future limited to this . . . clod. It would be tantamount to racial death, for man can only survive while he can progress. Stop progress and you stop evolution—and all else dies. The spirit can't survive in a stagnant state, Mr. Krull."

"I don't see that."

"You've never really thought about it," Bowman countered, "but the seeds of stagnation have already set in. Look about you: over half the world are the drones we smugly call LIQ's. For them there is no tomorrow. But even the MIQ's and HIQ's are stopped, for there is no progress. We drive virtually the same cars, live in virtually the same houses and pursue the same sort of life as the pre-bomb man. In short time, as race history is charted, man would be at the end of his road. Ecologically, the earth is limited in the size population it can support."

His eyes fastened on Krull and

he said softly: "If the saturation limit were reached, either man would perish in a world battle for individual survival or—worse—he would adapt to his environment, with all the limitations it would impose. That would end his upward climb. He'd be just a bigger ant culture."

"We have the sea-bottoms, surface seas and lands yet untouched," Krull remarked drily.

"True, but I am thinking in terms of . . . ages."

"People can worry when the time comes."

"No, the time is now. We can't afford more lost centuries. That is important, Mr. Krull. There must be a continuity of knowledge."

"It's illegal."

MR. KRULL, there are people who . . . at this moment . . . are preparing for the next step, the stars. The new frontiers are very close. I'm not a conspirator"—he chuckled—"I'm much too old for that, but I do ask your aid in one respect: don't try to unmask those who are."

"I couldn't consent to that."

"I know that."

"You know it?"

"Yes."

"Then why bother to ask—why bring me here?"

"Because that's my role, my minor part in destiny, Mr. Krull. I am . . . a faint force . . . in the causal chain."

"You believe that?"

"I know it."

"You sound certain."

"I am." The ancient head nodded and the eyes closed, as if he had suddenly fallen asleep. Krull studied the lined features. He hadn't learned a thing. The old man knew . . . knew. He felt the inclination to shake him to life, demand that he speak. All at once a weariness came over him and he got to his feet.

The girl called Anna drove him back to the hotel. It was late and she drove fast, without speaking, but she didn't appear angry. He maintained silence until she reached his destination, then got out and held the door a moment.

"Thanks, Anna." He lingered over the name.

"Thank you, Mr. Krull."

"Sorry I couldn't go along with Bowman."

"He didn't expect you to." Again he caught the suggestion of sorrow in her face.

"So he said." He stepped back almost reluctantly and watched the car thread into the traffic pattern. When its tail lights merged with those of other cars he hailed a cab.

"Anzaca Press," he snapped, getting in.

"Right-o." The cab screeched around a corner, mingled with


ADKINS

traffic a few blocks and pulled to the curb in front of a squat, three-storied building topped by a gigantic public news screen. Krull dropped a coin in the driver's hand and entered the lobby. The directory said the news room was on the second floor.

HE reached it and looked around. It was late, close to midnight, but there was still the stir of life amid endless empty desks. On one wall a huge screen flashed news scenes from other parts of the world while beneath it a machine cranked out radio pictures.

He spotted an elderly graying man sitting off to one side with a limp cigar drooping from his lips. His feet were propped on a desk and he was reading a copy of *After Dark*. He didn't bother to look up at Krull's approach.

Krull glanced around, found several pieces of copy paper, and sat at an empty desk and began sketching. Anna's face came to life under his pencil but, several times, he caught himself confusing her features with Rea's. He finished, studied the sketch critically, then slimmed the cheeks slightly and added a touch of shadow to the eyes. Anna's face stared back at him.

Bowman's face was easier to do. The details were vivid in his mind and he translated them to paper easily and quickly. He thinned the eyebrows and added the suggestion of veins to the temples. Satisfied, he approached the elderly man.

"Are you one of the newsmen?"

"You might say so."

"Mind if I trouble you a moment?"

"You already have." The tired eyes looked questioningly at him. "I'm a stranger in Sydney and there's a couple of people I'm trying to locate." Krull tried a smile. "I've always heard a newspaperman knows everyone, so I thought you might be able to help."

"Maybe." He grunted noncommittedly.

"Ever see that face before?" Krull slid the sketch of Anna across the desk. The tired eyes studied it a moment.

"No, but I can see your interest. She looks pretty smooth."

"Right," Krull rejoined. "How about this fellow?" He dropped the sketch of Bowman on the desk. The man's eyes flicked down, then fastened curiously on him.

"You pick strange friends."

"Oh . . ." Krull felt elated. "You know him?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Who is he?" Krull asked impatiently.

"I don't know what your interest is but your friend here"—he tapped Bowman's face with a

pencil stub—"is Herman Bok."

"Bok . . ." Krull stood frozen. The world spun and for an instant the room was deathly still.

"Herman Bok," the voice was saying, "President of the World Council of Espers."

CHAPTER 7

KRULL got nabbed that evening.

He had spent the day trying to piece together bits of information about the world esper organization headed by the frail aged man named Herman Bok, who paraded under the pseudonym of "Mr. Bowman," and who seemed to know more about his job than he did himself. Bok's entrance into the case scared him. The king peeper. He had to watch out. Had the old man discovered he was an esper? The thought made him jittery.

He had quickly found himself against a blank wall; Bok seemed shrouded in complete anonymity. He was a name, world-known; but he was also a shadow, a man without substance. It was easy to find his name on public records—but few facts. In desperation he turned to Peter Merryweather.

Shevach's assistant turned out to have an office on the top floor of PAB, the Planet Administration Building. It was finished in decorative plastics and adorned with exotic tropic plants and an inch-thick rug. Krull paused to admire a painting on the wall—an original by Surrey depicting the launching of the weather satellite Atea-Rangi—before taking a chair across from Merryweather's expansive desk.

"Like it?" Merryweather inclined his head toward the painting.

"Beautiful," Krull said. "I've never seen a Surrey original before."

"They're not too plentiful," the gaunt man modestly admitted. "Interested in art?"

"I like to sketch."

"I try." Merryweather sighed and leaned back. "Always wanted to be an artist but I can't seem to get past the beginner stage."

He chuckled. "But I don't think you came to talk about that."

"No, I came to talk about . . . Herman Bok." He watched the thin man carefully as he dropped the name. Merryweather's expression didn't change.

"I take it you can't find out much about him," he said drily.

"Practically nothing," Krull cheerfully admitted.

"That's not surprising. Bok's pretty much of a mystery despite the fact that he's the world's number one esper. However, like I said, I'm here to help."

He flicked a switch and spoke

into an intercom: "Chen, get me all the tapes we have on Herman Bok." He cut the connection and looked interestedly at Krull.

"Must be some case you're on," he observed quietly. Krull was glad he didn't press the point. He had the feeling it would be hard to lie to Merryweather, even if he were Shevach's strong right hand.

As it turned out, there wasn't much to go on. The official name of the organization headed by Bok was the World Council of Espers; it seemed to be largely a social group tied together through the exchange of tapes, films and letters. There was a world convention once every five years to elect officers. He didn't think it amounted to much: Bok, alias Mr. Bowman, was serving his eighth consecutive term as president. But he did learn one thing: the king esper had a confidential secretary named Anna Malroon who lived at the address where he had met Bok the previous evening. Bok's official residence was called the House of Espers, a mansion sprawled atop a hill in the HIQ section of northwest Sydney. It was the property of the esper organization but the old man seemed to have made it a monopoly. At least that was Krull's observation. There was a lot more, but nothing that really told anything. Like Merryweather remarked—Bok was a shadow.

HE left the hotel at dusk. The street lights were blinking on, yellow in a light ground haze, and the air was heavy with harbor scents. The raucus horns of tugs and the deeper voice of a freighter spoke from the waterfront. He had scarcely left the hotel before he sensed someone fall into step behind him. His scalp prickled, a warning flashed in his brain and he started to whirl when a harsh voice gritted:

"Keep walking . . . slow. Don't turn or I'll burn you."

The voice wasn't joking. Krull kept his pace steady, feeling his tensions ebb. This was the kind of action he understood. A man with a gun was real, something that could be tackled—like Cranston. He tried to peep his shadow. No good. He got the impression of savage brutality, hate, but no coherent thought pattern. He grinned wryly. For an esper he was something less than third class. He drew near the end of the block just as a black car slid alongside the curb and stopped.

His shadow said: "Okay, this is it. Get in."

He turned toward the car and someone inside opened the rear door. He tensed, then relaxed, thinking he wouldn't have a chance with the cannon poking his back. He got in and a gun jabbed his ribs.

"Sit back, relax and don't try anything funny."

"Sure, relax," Krull grunted. The man sitting next to him dug the weapon into his ribs and he winced. His captor climbed in next to the driver and the car swung into the stream of traffic. His captor had a bullet-shaped head with close-cropped dark hair and undersized ears pinned close to the skull. He turned and Krull started involuntarily. Gullfin—the Manager's chief of special agents. The flat face with the smashed nose and pig eyes grinned evilly.

"So, Yargo's pet got himself snarled."

"Have a good time while you can," Krull replied complacently. "You'll play hell trying to hold me."

"Think so—killer!" Gullfin spat the word in his face. "Not even Yargo can pull you out of this one."

"That remains to be seen." Krull added: "Who am I supposed to have murdered?"

"Ha, a comedian," Gullfin snarled.

"Comedian?" Krull sounded puzzled. "What was his name?"

Gullfin swore. "You'll remember when I get the rubber hose working."

KRULL didn't reply. He had little doubt the Manager's chief of special agents was right. Gullfin looked like a sadist and a sadist with a rubber hose was an unbeatable combination in the gentle art of persuasion. There was no further conversation until the car turned down a ramp and stopped in an underground garage. Gullfin emerged first, made motions of patting his shoulder holster and rasped:

"Out."

A gun prodded Krull's ribs and he obeyed; his companion in the back seat followed, a short heavy man with odd yellow eyes.

"Take killer boy to the reception room." Gullfin leered at Krull. "Make him comfortable until I get there."

"Right." Yellow Eyes hefted his weapon. "Straight ahead."

Krull sighed and started in the direction indicated, thinking he wasn't going to like the next few hours. He contemplated tackling Yellow Eyes but decided against it when he heard the driver following a few steps behind. He was directed down a flight of stairs to a passage ending at a steel-barred door. The driver waited half a dozen paces behind while Yellow Eyes pushed past Krull and opened it, then stepped aside.

"In," he said briefly.

"Looks comfortable," Krull murmured. He paused on the threshold. "I suppose you know it's illegal to toss a man in the cage without booking him."

"I know," Yellow Eyes said sympathetically. His voice changed to a strident snarl. "Get in there and quit stalling."

Krull shrugged and entered the cell. It contained a single metal cot, a couple of stools and little else. The door clanged shut behind him and footsteps receded down the hall. He made a few experimental peeps and drew blanks, then sat on the cot and tried to figure what next. Yeah, Gullfin—and a rubber hose.

After a while he heard the clatter of feet and the rumble of voices echoing in the stairwell; Gullfin turned into the passageway followed by his companions. True to his word, he carried a short flexible length of hose. He opened the door and entered with Yellow Eyes at his heels while another man remained outside. Gullfin grinned wickedly and slapped the hose against his thigh, nodding to Yellow Eyes.

"Stand up, killer." Krull rose from his cot; Yellow Eyes slipped behind him and applied an armlock. "Don't worry, we're not going to beat a confession out of you." Gullfin's face twisted in a brutal leer.

"We want more than that and we got scientific ways of getting it, huh, Kruper?" So, Yellow Eyes' name was Kruper. Krull tucked it in his mental file without removing his eyes from Gullfin's flat face.

"We're real scientific." The agent's small eyes glittered and Krull peeped him. The imagery came with a smashing shock—a picture of himself reeling under Gullfin's blows. A tremor shook him and he hastily removed the probe.

"All I want is to warm you up first." Gullfin spat out the words; he simultaneously raised his arm and chopped the hose down in a short hard arc that ended against Krull's shoulder.

SICKENING pain shot through his body; he felt nauseated and the sweat began to come.

"Warm-up," Gullfin said. He shifted slightly and whipped half a dozen slashing blows back and forth across Krull's arms and ended with a slashing chop against the cheek. Krull staggered and would have fallen were it not for Kruper's hold. His head was spinning. Gullfin stepped back.

"How did you like that?"

Krull raised his head and cursed him.

Gullfin responded with another series of brutal lashes before stepping back, breathing heavily. He nodded. Kruper released his hold and Krull fell to one knee feeling sick. He managed to get to his feet. His vision swam and his body was a sea of agony. He felt his cheek, dully wondering if it was still

there; his hand came away covered with blood. Gullfin laughed harshly, spun around and left the cell with Kruper at his heels. The steel door clanged and their footsteps echoed down the hall.

Krull staggered to the cot. His body was stiff, sore, and his bones felt as if they were on fire; the harsh lights burned his eyeballs. A short time later he heard voices and struggled to a sitting position. Feet clomped on the stairs and Gullfin turned into the passageway with Kruper and several more men. Krull rose, startled. Merryweather! The tall cadaverous man was shambling behind Gullfin wearing a genial smile, as if he were a host come to welcome him. They reached the cell door before he saw Merryweather's companion; the sweat began to come.

Shevach.

Ivan Shevach.

There was no mistaking the pale cruel face. He dropped back to his seat sweaty and jittery and a vein began throbbing at his temple.

"Nothing to worry about," Gullfin taunted. "I forgot the rubber hose." He roared with laughter, slapping his thigh as if it were a huge joke. Krull didn't appreciate the humor.

GULLFIN opened the door and entered with Shevach and the shambling Merryweather following while Kruper stationed himself outside. The Manager's eyes probed Krull curiously. Merryweather smiled pleasantly. The smill told Krull all he needed to know about Shevach's so-called public relations man. He was one of those people who wore a smile for all occasions, a mask he had interposed between himself and the world. It could mean . . . anything. The Manager's voice broke into his thoughts, a cold, precise voice that set Krull's already ragged nerves on edge.

"You are agent Max Krull, IQ 113, Territory of Waimea-Roa." It was a statement of fact and he didn't bother to answer. Shevach's lids half-closed and his face got a tight look.

"You are IQ 113?"

Krull felt the beginning of panic. Gullfin wore a sneer but Merryweather's expression hadn't changed.

"Silence won't help," Shevach said in a low flat voice. "We have ways of finding what we want to know—for instance, why you murdered Cranston."

Krull watched him, trying to conceal a tremor. Gullfin was brutal but Shevach was deadly, much the more dangerous of the two. He had to be on guard.

"We know you murdered him," Shevach taunted, "but why? Who ordered it? Yargo?" He rapped the questions out with gunfire rapidity, his eyes boring into

Krull's skull. He ceased speaking and the cell was absolutely still. Krull fancied he could hear his nerves vibrating. He looked at Merryweather. The smile was there, pleasant and warm, but his eyes were two drills, two slivers of ice stabbing into his brain. The beginning of a thought nibbled at Krull's mind, tantalizingly beyond his reach. It had something to do with the gaunt man. Shevach broke the tableau by stepping back.

"Now we'll get down to business," he said. "First about your supposed IQ . . ."

Krull never had a chance to discover what he was driving at. There was a commotion in the hall, several loud voices and the Manager turned with a startled look; Yargo pushed his way into the cell followed by a tall square man with silvery hair and a hard face mellowed only slightly by jovial blue eyes. The Prime Thinker glanced at Krull, Merryweather and looked last at Shevach.

"You have booked agent Krull?"

"Not yet." The Manager compressed his lips in a thin slit. "We will."

Yargo turned to his silvery-haired companion. "Grimhorn, this is illegal. Agent Krull hasn't been booked." Krull looked up with sudden interest. Joseph Grimhorn was another of those names very seldom accompanied by a face. He was Chief of World Agents.

"You will bear witness to the fact?"

"I will," Grimhorn replied softly. Krull watched the blue eyes. They were open, candid, with a tinge of laughter, yet hard. He swung his gaze to Gullfin. Shevach's chief of special agents didn't look overly perturbed. Yargo contemplated Shevach's pale features before speaking.

"ON what charge did you intend to book agent Krull?"

"Murder," Shevach snapped. "The murder of agent Oliver Cranston."

"Murder?" Yargo seemed astonished. "Since when is an act of self-defense construed as murder?"

"Self-defense?" Shevach smiled thinly. "The court might hold a different view; will, I think."

"There will be no court trial."

"You are setting yourself up as the law?" Shevach spoke defiantly. "The public would be interested to learn that."

Yargo looked musingly at him and finally said: "The matter of agent Krull's guilt will be handled by the Prime Thinker. Release him."

"Not without a trial," Shevach snapped. "I know the law . . .

even if the Prime Thinker doesn't."

"It is within the province of my office to grant pardons," Yargo reminded. He turned to the Chief of World Agents. "Grimhorn, you will bear testimony to the fact that the Prime Thinker has granted an unconditional pardon to agent Max Krull, Territory of Waimea-Rao, effective immediately."

"Certainly," Grimhorn replied. He swung toward Gullfin. "Release him."

Gullfin's flat face was venomous but the Manager had regained his composure. Disregarding Yargo, he turned to Grimhorn, compressed his lips and said softly:

"I don't believe a man can be pardoned prior to a finding of guilt by a legally constituted court. I wouldn't be surprised if Krull were arrested and tried—after the coming election. It also looks as if we might need a new Chief of World Police."

"It's possible," Grimhorn conceded. His voice grew hard. "It's also possible that the Chief of World Police might file charges against the Manager for malfeasance in office. I might remind the Manager that the law prohibits a person found guilty of such a charge from holding government office."

"Malfeasance?" Shevach arched his eyebrows questioningly.

"Yes, malfeasance," Grimhorn said, "subjecting a prisoner to a third degree without booking him. Krull was denied due process of law. That makes it malfeasance."

Shevach's face was a study in anger and frustration. He sucked his underlip, started to speak, then swung around and left the cell with Gullfin at his heels. Yargo looked at Krull's bloodied face.

FEEL up to leaving?"

"Can't be too soon for me." He grinned. "Personally, I was beginning to get jittery." Grimhorn laughed and Yargo said:

"I can understand that. Let's go." Krull nodded and followed him from the cell with Grimhorn following. They reached the street and stopped.

"Thank you for coming, Chief. You've been a big help," Yargo said.

"Glad to have had the opportunity." Grimhorn pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Sort of a revelation. Maybe my department needs an overhaul."

"The lemons are probably few," Yargo encouraged. They said goodnight and Krull followed the Prime Thinker to his private car. Yargo remained silent until the driver pulled away from the curb.

"I came as soon as I learned what had happened."

Krull was curious. "How did you find out?"

"A call over my private wire: the details of your arrest and the rubber-hose persuasion."

"Even that? I'd like to thank your tipster, whoever he was."

"Oh, he gave a name all right, but I think it was false."

"False?"

"Yes, a Mr. Bowman; just Mr. Bowman. I've heard from him before," he added wryly.

Krull concealed his amazement. The president of the World Council of Espers seemed to possess an omniscience little short of uncanny. And there was his penchant for using false names. He started to blurt Bowman's true identity and stopped. Something told him to keep the information to himself—at least until he learned more about the mysterious old man. Another thought occurred.

"How did Gullfin tie me so definitely to Cranston?"

"Bowman explained that, too," Yargo said grimly. Krull looked expectant. "It was Saxon."

"Saxon—your personal aide."

"Saxon *was* my personal aide," Yargo corrected. He didn't amplify the statement.

CHAPTER 8

YARGO'S visitor came at midnight, a tall, cadaverously thin man, egg-bald, with luminous myopic eyes tucked behind old-fashioned thick-lensed glasses. The agent who met his car had taken extreme precautions to assure his arrival—and departure—went unheralded. Even the customary guard at the entrance had been removed.

The agent led him directly to Yargo's study. The visitor followed, walking with a slight limp and appearing to be trailing his long, high-bridged nose as if it were some kind of direction finder. Despite the severe architecture of his features, he had the strangely whimsical expression of an adult watching the cavorting of playing children. His name was Karl Werner and he was Chief Psychmaster of the world. Yargo rose to meet him, smiling cordially, but waited until the agent discreetly withdrew before speaking.

"Karl, it's good to see you again."

"Good to see you, Ben." The voice was a flat, precise razor. He flicked his eyes professionally over the Prime Thinker's body. "You look good, but tired. You're working too hard."

"It's a salt mine," Yargo agreed, "but come, sit down. Care for a drink?"

"The old standby."

Yargo mixed two drinks at a wall cabinet and handed one to Werner. "Here's to your health, Karl."

"And yours, Ben." They touched glasses and drank, then Yargo sat on the edge of his desk facing the psychmaster. He said solemnly:

"I should apologize for bringing you all the way from Africa, Karl. I hope I didn't disrupt anything too important."

"You did," the psychmaster said succinctly.

"How important?" Yargo was curious.

"More important than anything you have to say."

"I doubt it, but tell me," Yargo said expectantly.

"Last month we got word of a seven-year old boy in Tanganyika who passed the Breck-Munson Intelligence Measure with an IQ 212 . . ."

Yargo whistled softly and looked thoughtful a moment before speaking. "Hidden esper?"

"Right, he was reading the testmaster's mind. But that part's not important."

Yargo became instantly alert. "Another Sawbo Fang?"

Werner nodded grimly. "I tested him, Ben. He made . . . pencils . . . move." He dropped each word, watching the Prime Thinker's face.

"A psychokinetic." Yargo's face showed excitment and anxiety. "Does he realize his talent?"

"No, he's too young. He didn't realize the nature of the tests. I made sure of that."

"But he will know . . . soon?"

"Very soon. He's just learning to handle the talent . . . can just manage to jiggle small articles by intense concentration. But give him another few years . . ." He left the thought unspoken.

"What's the full potential, Karl?" Yargo asked uneasily.

"Frankly, we don't know. But we don't think it's like dynamite."

"What do you mean?"

"The energy released by dynamite is in ratio to the amount used; psychokinesis seems more an all-or-none power. If he could shake a pencil, he could shake a mountain."

"Or the Universe . . ."

"Perhaps," Werner said grimly.

"That's three counting Sawbo Fang," Yargo mused. He seemed to be looking into a great distance, scrutinizing times and places to come. The psychmaster spoke softly:

"Yes, a pk, like Sawbo. The other, a girl of eight, is a *downthrough* . . . can read the future. And see around corners," he added.

"We're coming to a new era, Karl. *Homo Superior*. The Man of Tomorrow. The new race is coming but the world isn't prepared."

"No, it's not," the psychmaster soberly agreed.

"How about the searchers?"

"They don't know, won't know . . . can't know. We've got to save them, Ben."

"How are you handling it?"

"Playing safe, we hope. We've isolated them . . . are going to control every facet of their lives, hypnotically indoctrinate them to high moral standards and raise them to become members of the Psychmasters Guild—hope to god they use their talents for the betterment of the race."

YOU'RE wide open, Karl. The Guild, by its very nature, is always suspect. I happen to know the searchers keep it under eye."

"We know, but we have an ace in the hole. We've placed the children under the wing of a man who isn't a member of the Guild. Isn't even a psychmaster, in fact. But he's got the power to shield them."

"Oh. Is he safe?"

"Absolutely." Werner studied the question in Yargo's eyes. The Prime Thinker waited. "Hans Taussig," he added softly.

"I'll be damned."

"He's their shield against the world and I know we can trust him," Werner said absolutely.

"Yes, you can trust him," Yargo agreed. He thought of the scene in the Council Chamber when Taussig had denied such a talent was possible and smiled wryly. The sociologist was also a consummate actor.

"We can't take chances," Werner observed. Yargo nodded slowly. "But that's not what worries me, Ben."

"No?"

"It's the ones we don't detect. My god, imagine what could happen if just one slipped through and used the power for his own ends. He could control the world. Especially a pk."

"I know." Yargo smiled curiously. "Sometimes you feel inclined to favor the searchers."

"Not that," Werner exclaimed harshly. "You can't deny evolution. *Homo Superior* is around the corner, Ben, and we've got to live with the fact. More, we've got to protect them, nourish them, feed them the reins. They're the only hope of this damned stagnant mudball, the only hope that humanity will rise above the present mediocrity and make itself known in the Universe. If we let the searchers find them we're as guilty as the mob that killed Sawbo Fang."

"I didn't mean that, Karl. I fully realize the world needs new blood. That's why I summoned you." He looked at the psychmaster for a long moment and the room was deathly still.

"Would you jump if I told you that what I have to say is even more important than your new-found pk?"

"You know I certainly would."

YARGO set his glass on the desk and began talking, carefully selecting his words as if he didn't want Werner to miss a single detail. The psychmaster's face took on an initial look of astonishment, gradually replaced by absolute absorption, nor did his myopic eyes ever leave the Prime Thinker's face. Yargo finally finished and leaned back, watchful. Waiting. Werner remained silent, thoughtful.

Yargo spoke tersely: "That calls for another drink."

"Yes, I believe it does, in view of the fact you're asking me to become an arch criminal."

"You're already one," Yargo said urbanely, "hiding the new race progeny from the searchers." He kept his stare riveted on the thin man's face. Finally the corners of Werner's eyes crinkled and he chuckled.

"Before I came here I would have considered such a request unthinkable. Now . . . I'm not so sure."

Yargo slowly exhaled, visibly relieved. He went to the cabinet, speaking while he mixed drinks.

"You've got to admit this is more important than your pk, Karl."

"Yes, but only because of its immediacy. My god, Ben, will the world pull through? The future scares me."

"It scares me, too, but I have faith in the future." He turned with a smile. "That's the good thing about the human race: it always has an ace in the hole."

"It needs a royal flush."

"I've put the cars down. What does it look like?"

"A royal flush," Werner admitted.

"Right. You can see the necessity of what I'm asking?"

"Yes, Ben, I can."

"Needless to say, I've placed myself in your hands." He returned with the drinks and placed one before the psychmaster, and again perched on the edge of the desk. "You're in a position to scuttle me, Karl. I've never trusted anyone that far before."

"I appreciate that." Werner's mouth crinkled. "Of course, if I go along with you, the shoe will be on the other foot."

"It's for humanity."

"I know that."

"I've delayed because of ethical considerations, Karl. Have I allowed enough time?"

"Just . . ."

After they finished their drinks, Yargo went to a wall safe and returned with a heavy volume, handing it to Werner. The myopic eyes glanced at the title —*Alexander*—before he slipped it into his brief case.

"Alexander rides again," he quipped.

"I hope so, Karl, I hope so.

KRULL caught the morning carrier to Waimea-Roa. He was stiff and sore and his jaw ached intolerably but his physical discomfiture seemed minor compared with his other problems. The investigation into a possible atomic conspiracy rapidly was becoming a nightmare peopled with sadists, espers and —he thought wryly—power politics. He felt like the proverbial sparrow caught in a badminton game.

He was relieved when Waimea-Roa finally crawled over the horizon and pushed his troubles aside, momentarily excited at the prospect of seeing the atolls again. And Jonquil. Jonquil knew the ropes. The Inspector had not only been around but he was IQ 172, with plenty of extra savvy thrown in. He had no doubt but that Jonquil could tell him plenty about the power politics involved, perhaps help him chart a course through the maze of intrigue in which he was snared. He might even have time to see Paha Jon's granddaughter —swim the green waters of Abiang Lagoon with her and, in the cool of evening, walk to Coral Sands Cove, the secluded beach they had claimed as their own.

There were other things he would like to do, too, such as loafing in the shade of Alba Hoyt's thatch-roofed garden and drinking beer, exploring the barrier reef in search of octopus —or lolling in the sun in Paha Jon's yellow-sailed outrigger while the old man spun tales of his ancestors, the early Polynesians who had sailed their huge twin-hulled log ships across the uncharted wastes of the Pacific centuries before the Atom War. to find and people Waimea-Roa But, he thought glumly, there would be no time. Not this trip. He'd have to wind the job up first—if someone didn't wind him up in the process. He grinned weakly. Just now he didn't seem to be doing so good.

THE atoll chain came up like a string of green-tinted pearls flung randomly on the sea, the white arcs of its coves gleaming against the pale green water on one side and the darker green interior foliage on the other. The barrier reef joining the two ends of the atoll to create the triangular-shaped Abiang Lagoon appeared like a thin rope awash in the sea. Abiang Village on the central atoll came into view, its coral-pink and emerald-green plastic houses and shops intermixed with thatched native huts, making a neat geometric pattern between ocean and lagoon. Chimney Rock was a black splotch against the sea. The larger plastic-block headquarters of the

Agency of Police hove into view, then the plane banked, dropping, and the waters of Abiang Lagoon rushed to meet it.

Krull and another passenger, who looked like a commercial salesman, were put ashore and the plane rose again, climbing into the tropic sky in a northwesterly direction. He paused on the landing to breathe the clean warm air; caught the musky fragrance of the verdure beyond the clearing. It felt good to be back. He walked from the landing to Aala Road, the village's only thoroughfare; his step quickened as he drew near his house. The friendly nods and waves of the villagers—he knew almost all of them—gave him a warm feeling and he wondered why anyone would ever want to live anywhere else.

He stopped at his place long enough to glance around and deposit his bag. Everything looked the same—the untidy bed, dirty breakfast dishes in the sink, a roughed-in sketch of Pahara Rua, one of the village elders. His eyes rested a moment on the sweeps and planes and tilts of Rea Jon's body and face, struck again by her similarity to Anna Malroon. There was one noticeable difference. Rea Jon's face was saucy, provocative, while Anna Malroon's held a note of deep sorrow. He weighed one against the other, decided he liked them both, and went next door to the Agency of Police.

"Hi, Derek."

The wizened desk clerk looked up, startled, and his face wreathed in a smile. "Glad to see you, Krull." His eyes grew curious. "I thought you were transferred?"

"Vacation," Krull said cheerfully. "Jonquil in?"

"Isn't he always?" Derek answered. Krull laughed and knocked on the Inspector's door. He went in at the answering grunt—Jonquil's face lit up with pleased surprise.

"Krull, I'm glad to see you. How come back so soon?"

"You won't be so happy when I give you my load of troubles," Krull said humorously, "but it's good to be home."

"Home is the hunter," Jonquil quoted.

"A nice kettle of fish you stuck me in." Krull grinned. "Now you're going to have to bail me out."

"Rough, eh? I thought it might be." He extended a pack of cigarets. Krull lit his and inhaled deeply before speaking:

"Advice is what I need—plenty of it." He looked intently at the Inspector. "Are you acquainted with my assignment at all?"

"No—only that they needed a good man."

"Good, hell, they needed a goat."

"I've found that to be one of the prime requirements for the force." Jonquil chuckled. "Don't be bitter."

"Not bitter—just puzzled," Krull confessed. "I've broken every other law so I might as well break another and spill the works."

"LET'S have it." The Inspector leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head as Krull began talking. He started from the first and tried to fill in all the details. He told about his discovery of Butterfield's wild talent, Cranston's attempt to kill him, Yargo's reactions and Herman Bok's strange entry into the picture. Jonquil's expression grew puzzled when he narrated his arrest by Gullfin and the Manager's attempted inquisition, but didn't interrupt. When Krull finished, he remained silent, idly watching his cigaret smoke curl upward. Finally he said:

"You really do have problems."

"Enough to strain my 113 IQ," Krull wryly commented.

The Inspector was thoughtful. "I don't know how much help I can give you," he said finally. "Frankly, I don't understand the implications any better than you do."

"It's not the assignment that has me baffled, it's the people." Krull shrugged helplessly. "I don't know enough about the background politics to make any assessment."

"Perhaps I can help there." He leaned back and puffed on his cigaret a moment before continuing. "You probably don't know that I served with the Agency of Police in Sydney for several years before I was shanghaid." His eyes met Krull's.

"I still have friends there and, of course, have maintained a certain amount of communication. I know a little about the backgrounds of some of the people you've mentioned—a great deal about several of them. I only mention this so you can assess my opinions."

"A run-down on personality profiles is just what I need," Krull affirmed. "Right now I can't pick the villains from the heroes—except in the Manager's setup," he added.

"Okay, let's start there," Jonquil suggested. "I can tell you this much: Ivan Shevach is arrogant, ambitious, ruthless—and brilliant, but his mind has a twist. I think he's capable of anything to achieve his ends which, of course, is power. He's power mad. Now, with elections so close, he'll do anything he thinks will help him—or hurt Yargo."

"That's about the way I sized him up."

"He uses people like Gullfin and discards them when their

value is lost. His tactics are both intellectual and physical, which makes him doubly dangerous. He's a mean one, Max. Don't underestimate him and try to steer clear of him. That's the best information I can give you."

"It's not a question of steering clear of him, but of eluding him. His men are birddogs."

"That could be a problem. Did anyone get off the plane with you?"

"Some guy that looked like a commercial traveler—a tall, lanky fellow lugging a sample case."

"It's my guess he'll board the plane with you again."

"A shadow?"

"I would guess so," Jonquil commented drily. "I don't think Shevach would let you out of sight a minute after what's happened."

"Okay, I'll watch him."

"Gullfin's probably a bigger danger because he's unpredictable," Jonquil offered. "He's a sadist and a killer and, unlike Shevach, has no mental brakes to control his emotions. Shevach's a logician; because of that there's a certain predictability about his actions. That doesn't hold with Gullfin. He's an out-and-out killer with no thought of consequences." He paused.

"I can't place Kruper or Cathecart, but they're probably late comers, of Gullfin's ilk."

"How about a gent named Peter Merryweather?"

THE Inspector's head jerked up, startled. "Merryweather—is he in it? You didn't mention him before."

Krull nodded. "He didn't seem to be too important." He caught Jonquil's intent look. "Or is he?"

"Tell me about him," he brusquely ordered. Krull related their meeting and the gaunt man's offers of aid. The Inspector smiled faintly when he gave Merryweather's job as public relations for the Manager. He finished and looked inquiringly at Jonquil. The latter's fingers were drumming restlessly against the desk, his eyes were closed, and he seemed lost in thought. Finally he asked:

"Max, you've heard of the searchers?"

Krull was jolted. "But they hunt hidden espers?" He bit off the words, for a moment fearful.

"And pk's and other dangerous mutants," Jonquil finished grimly. Krull squirmed uneasily without taking his eyes from the Inspector's face. His hands had become wet suddenly and he was conscious of a vein throbbing at the base of his neck. He tried to conceal his discomfiture and said:

"Merryweather—a searcher?"

"The Searchmaster," Jonquil corrected. "He heads the thing.

His agents are all over the world."

"Oh," Krull said in a small voice. The news shook him. Jonquil's face was perplexed.

"I can't figure out what he's after."

"I'll watch him," Krull supplied quickly. He felt jumpy, uneasy, and wanted to get off the subject. "How about Yargo?"

"You can trust Yargo implicitly," he flatly stated. "He's a rock of integrity."

"I would have guessed so," Krull broke on, "only several things disturbed me."

"Such as . . .?"

"His apparent disinterest in what I do, almost as if he weren't too concerned about the case . . . aside from lip service."

"Typical of him," Jonquil interjected. "That's the way he operates—confidence in the man he selects."

"What did he know about me?" Krull challenged.

"Don't make any mistake," Jonquil advised. "He studied your record exhaustively—enough so that he was completely satisfied you were the man he needed."

Krull grinned wryly. "At IQ 113?"

"Intelligence is not the only attribute," Jonquil rebuked. "Perhaps, in this case, he was more interested in loyalty, dependability and courage . . . as well as mental attributes. Knowing what I do of him I can tell you this: he made his evaluation and is willing to back it by not tying your hands."

"There's one other thing," Cranston was Yargo's man—and he tried to kill me."

"You don't know that he was his man," the Inspector pointed out. "It's more probable he cast his lot with Shevach."

"Why would Shevach want to kill me?"

"Why would Yargo?" Jonquil countered. He leaned back in his chair and gave him a fatherly look. "Max, you've got one strike against you—one thing to learn, which you couldn't be expected to know from atoll duty. A position of power is always a center of intrigue—and the office of the Prime Thinker is the biggest such center in the world. No one knows that better than Yargo, which is probably the reason your revelation didn't shake him. He's dealing with dozens of intrigues, Max, and the Cranston affair was just another twig on the blaze. You can't hold him responsible on that account. My best advice would be—trust him implicitly, but don't always try to understand him. That's just my opinion, but that's the way I'd play it," Jonquil advised.

WELL, I feel somewhat better," Krull confessed.

"Frankly, that was my own opinion, but it's nice to have it confirmed." He paused a moment. "That takes us to Bok."

"Herman Bok, President of the World Council of Espers." Jonquil spoke the words half-aloud, then his voice raised. "That's the man I can tell you most about."

"Glad to hear it—he really has me stumped."

"You and lots of other people." His eyes narrowed slightly and and when he spoke his voice was grim. "Herman Bok is an old man with the face of a saint and a voice to match. He leaves the impression of righteousness and dedication to his fellow men—just a shade short of appearing sanctimonious."

"The way he struck me," Krull admitted.

"Don't let it fool you. He's dangerous, cunning, with a lust for power that probably overshadows even Shevach's."

Krull lifted his head, surprised, and found himself echoing Bok's words: "How can a man of eighty-seven be dangerous?"

"What's age got to do with lust?" Jonquil rasped. "He's a master schemer, plotter, but too wily to pin down." He looked inquiringly at Krull. "Doesn't it strike you as strange that he's hung onto the presidency of the espers for eight consecutive terms? That's power, boy, power that's secured by harsh means."

"I did think of that," Krull confessed. For a moment his eyes avoided the Inspector's. "Of course I don't know much about the esper set-up, or about espers."

"The espers are dangerous," Jonquil said point-blank. "They believe they are some kind of super race, destined to rule the world. That's their prime objective. It's not just persecution that has led the Government to keep sharp strings on them. Give 'em half a chance and we'd be under their heel. That's why the searchers."

"I never particularly considered them dangerous, perhaps due to their small numbers," Krull said mildly.

"The ruling class is seldom large," Jonquil pointed out. "History will authenticate that fact. But there's never been a ruling class as potentially dangerous as the espers. Think, Krull, of the power that resides in the ability to read minds and, far more dangerous, mutants like Sawbo Fang." He smiled half-apologetically. "Maybe I'm a crank on the subject but that's the way I feel."

"Guess I'll have to reappraise my thinking . . ."

"Not on my say," Jonquil interrupted quietly. "I'm just telling you my viewpoint; but I

could be wrong." The tone of his voice indicated he didn't think he was.

Krull hesitated as if loath to ask the next question, but finally did: "Do you know anything about his secretary, Ann Malroon?"

"Not a thing," Jonquil replied promptly. "She is, of course, a peeper, but I never heard her name until you mentioned it." He grinned knowingly. "A man could use up a lot of secretaries in eighty-seven years."

"Yeah, I can see that," Krull said drily. They fell into a discussion of the pros and cons of Krull's position and what steps he might take next. Jonquil was of the opinion he should stick to the elusive past of William Butterfield in an effort to reconstruct the conspiracy and, secondly, to keep open the strong possibility that Herman Bok had a long finger in the case. When they finally finished, the Inspector asked:

"When will you be returning?"

"Morning carrier." Krull grinned. "I'm going to make the most of my vacation."

"Do that." Jonquil glanced at his watch. "Let's go eat."

AFTER lunch Krull returned to his quarters debating how to pass the afternoon. Merryweather was a disquieting figure in his mind. The searchmaster! There was something sinister about him. Was he suspected? He tried to think back. No, he hadn't tipped his hand—no one could know he was an esper. He tried to push Merryweather from his mind by thinking of Rea Jon. She lived on Ati-Ronga, the northernmost atoll—he decided to go swimming and see her later.

He stripped, donned a pair of trunks and sandals, got his swim gear and sheath knife and headed for the lagoon. At the beach he adjusted his oxygen equipment, donned his goggles and flippers and tucked his knife in his belt, studying the scene a moment before entering the water. There were several sails in the distance and the hulk of Paha Jon's outrigger. Beyond, Chimney Rock protruded black and shining above the sea; the base must be a fantastic jungle, he thought. If he had a torp like the hermit . . . He regretfully dismissed the conjecture and entered the water, swimming along the bottom in the direction of the reef.

He paused to explore some coral heads and investigate a niche where a giant crab had scuttled at his approach; he swam leisurely, feeling his tensions gradually melt away. This was a peaceful secure world, with its waving sea fronds and familiar bottom life. He paused occasionally, watching the bubbles


ADKINS

from his exhalation valve slide upward through the water like gleaming silver spheres. He came to a coral garden filled with odd toadstool formations, arches, and bizarre limbs reaching crookedly through the deeps, the ghost arms of a stone forest. It was a favorite spot of his, an enchanted fairyland built from the calcerous skeletons of untold eons of marine zoophytes. He knew its every turn and twist and passage from countless hours of exploration. He dived deeper, made a loop in the water and shot into a narrow tunnel, stroking toward the pale circle of light at the opposite end. As he emerged, he glimpsed movement out of the corner of his eye and automatically spun around and withdrew into the shadows.

Swimmer—another swimmer in the green depths of the lagoon! It wasn't one of the natives—somehow, he knew that with certainty. He was startled momentarily; one didn't expect to encounter anyone in such a spot. The thought flicked through his mind that the unknown swimmer was seeking him—trailing him. Absurd, he told himself, yet he wouldn't have spotted him if he hadn't turned back on his trail in the coral forest. He moved forward to get a better look; the newcomer was swimming with a slow leisurely breast stroke but moved with purpose, turning neither left nor right. Krull saw he would pass just to one side of him. His curiosity was aroused and he moved out from the shadows—the strange swimmer instantly altered his course and came toward him. Krull saw the bubbles rising from his exhalation valve and caught the impression of a long lean body, whiter than that of a native. Suddenly the newcomer stopped, kicked himself into upright position and started to fumble with something in his hands.

Spear gun!

KRULL froze, whirled, dived and began stroking furiously toward the protecting arms of coral. He reached the tunnel and cast a backward glance—the other swimmer had lowered the gun and was moving toward him with a powerful leg kick. Krull swam through the tunnel, emerged on the other side and began threading his way into the network of coral, twisting among the bizarre formations in an effort to shake his pursuer or, at worst, keep him from getting a clean shot. Halfway through the stone jungle he reached a clearing and looked back. The strange swimmer was closer than ever. He struck out again, swimming with near desperation, momentarily expecting to feel the fish spear rip through his body. He

reached the end of the stone jungle, hesitated, and headed toward the reef with powerful strokes. Just this side of it was another skeletal forest, where he could twist through to safety. He was almost there when a danger signal flamed in his mind—he automatically veered to one side and dived deeper. He felt the stir of the spear, heard it climp against the coral just inches from his body, and noted it had no line attached—a sign that his pursuer probably had a quiver of the missiles.

He breathed easier as the shadows of the coral outcrops closed around him, and twisted through the labyrinthine formations searching for a spot he knew, a natural cavern with an opening just large enough to accommodate his body. He rounded a familiar formation and saw it, a black hole couched deep in the pinkish-white rock. He cast one hurried backward look before darting into the narrow opening into a world of stygian darkness. He paused, treading water, and drew his knife, moving into a position where he was facing the opening. He waited, aware that his heart was pounding furiously. If he were trapped inside . . .

The water beyond the entrance seemed peaceful and undisturbed. A school of small fish swam past and disappeared and a large crab scuttled across the floor of the lagoon, moving between waving sea fronds. Still he waited. An odd silvery fish with bright red stripes and a hideous mouth paused to gape in front of him and suddenly darted away. He tensed, bracing his legs against the back of the shallow cave. An instant later his pursuer came into view, swimming cautiously, holding the deadly speargun ready, peering ahead and to both sides as he kicked his way along.

KRULL drew his body backward, tensed, and propelled himself violently outward just as the other passed the mouth of the cave. He crossed the swimmer's back, reached down and managed to circle his arm around his throat. A strong hand reached up and caught Krull, pulling his head violently down in an effort to break the hold. Krull brought his knife down in a short sweeping arc—once, twice, thrice. His assailant's body contorted and went limp, but he struck twice more before releasing his hold and pushing himself backward. His heart was pounding at a furious rate and he fought to control his breathing.

The pale green waters took on a pinkish tint, and he could see the ugly red against the broken flesh where he had struck. He moved forward again, got hold of

an arm and tore the goggles and oxygen mask from the dead face. The sightless eyes of the supposed commercial traveler stared blankly at him.

He shivered. His victim was tall, well-muscled, with a broad flattened nose, high cheek bones and heavy ridged brows over sunken eyes. In life the face might have been classified as tough, he thought—but now, in death, the features were loose, relaxed, giving it a slightly foolish look. He shuddered again and pulled the body through the narrow opening of the cavern, wedging it between two coral outcrops. He pushed back and grimly surveyed his work.

Mr. Mystery Man had found his niche in eternity.

TWO killings in almost as many days. He was beginning to see why Yargo had selected a low IQ agent. He felt like the executioner on a whale farm—except these were humans. Well, he'd better get used to it. He swam thoughtfully back to the beach. His victim had come fully prepared for the death struggle, had known that Krull wouldn't leave the atolls without at least one swim in the lagoon. He had intended that swim to be his last. More important, it meant that his moves were being assessed, predicted—someone was going to a lot of trouble to get him out of the way. Murder was no bar.

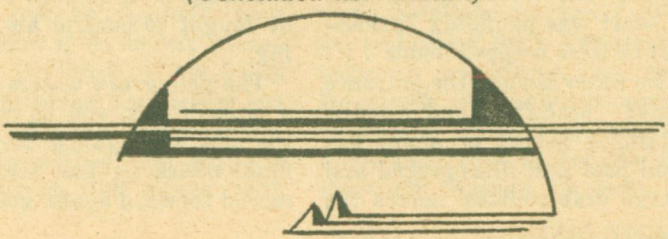
He removed his goggles and fins on the beach and started a slow search of the sands. Just yards away from where he had entered the water he found footprints and, in the nearby shrubbery, a sample case. It contained sandals and some clothes. His fingers extracted a wallet from one of the pockets and he flipped it open; there was an I.D. card and a miniature gold shield pinned to the inside flap. He studied the card curiously; it identified its owner as Winslow J. Earlywine (IQ 121), Agent of Police, Sydney District. He wasn't surprised. He returned the contents to the case, pushed it back into the bushes and started back toward the village.

Crantson.

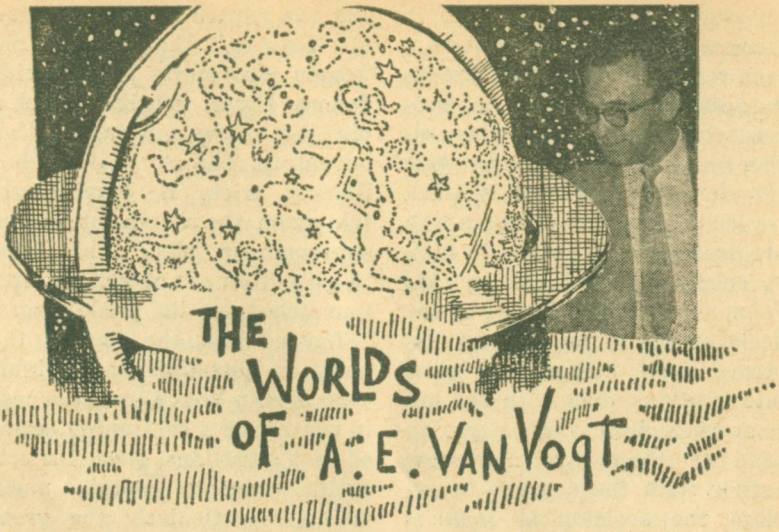
Earlywine.

Who next?

(Concluded next month)



by Sam Moskowitz



MEN have become famous because they introduced a single new word to the language. A. E. van Vogt is a prime example. His term "slan" as an appellation for a human being possessing genetically superior attributes has virtually supplanted "mutation" and "superman" in communication among science fiction readers. Like Karel Capek's play "R.U.R.," which gave us the word "robot," van Vogt's term was the title of a work of moving intensity. Its acceptance, became an affirmation of its creator's narrative power.

"Slan! That's a nonsense word now—a meaningless syllable," announced John W. Campbell, Jr. "Next month it will mean a story so powerful it's going to put a new word in the language! 'Superman' is a makeshift term —'slan' will be the designation you'll remember."

Slan first appeared in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Sept. 1940, as a four-part novel. It justified every word of the press agentry. It marked a highly original approach to the concept of the superman in science fiction and instantly rated among the classics in its category.

Science fiction had enjoyed its great superman stories before: *Gladiator* by Philip Wylie; *Seeds of Life* by John Taine; *The Hampdenshire Wonder* by J. D. Beresford; and probably the best known, *Odd John* by Olaf Stapledon.

Van Vogt's story is a natural

outgrowth of the last two. It deals with the development of a true mutation which will propagate its characteristics, but proceeds one step further than either novel. In *The Hampdenshire Wonder,* the superman is killed while still a boy by villagers who are instinctively hostile to him. A colony of supermen in *Odd John,* about to be attacked by the fleets of the major nations, destroys itself rather than come into tragic conflict with the human race. Van Vogt seems to have been the first science fiction author with the courage to explore the sociological implications of a superhuman race living in and among humans.

Slan is the story of a nine-year-old boy, Jommy Cross, who is a member of a superhuman race. His people possess both mental and physical superiority, being capable of reading minds through the aid of antenna-like tendrils in their hair; two hearts invest them with extraordinary stamina. His parents killed, Jommy Cross fights to survive in a society where organized hunts are conducted against slans by the humans and where tendrilless slans—born without the ability to read minds—are even more dangerous enemies.

The moving and dramatic detail in which van Vogt relates the perpetual persecutions of the slans by the "normal" humans and the superb characterization of "Granny," the drunken old woman who aligns herself with Jommy Cross, lift this novel a big step above ordinary action adventure. The story, through a literary trick, is convincingly told from the viewpoint of the superman or "slan." This helps to give it an air of believability unmatched by its predecessors.

Beyond this, the pace of the novel is sustained and heightened by van Vogt's inventiveness in contriving a continuing series of taut situations. Even the scientific precepts contain much validity, particularly the great emphasis and detail on the use of atomic energy five years before the explosion of the first bomb.

Slan was van Vogt's most famous and perhaps his finest story, but it was by no means his first success in science fiction.

VAN VOGT was born of Dutch parentage in Winnipeg, Canada, April 26, 1912. His childhood was spent in a rural Saskatchewan community where his father was a lawyer.

Two childhood incidents, individually trivial, scarred van Vogt emotionally for the rest of his life. The first occurred when he was eight years old. "At that time I went to the rescue of my younger brother, who was being beaten up by a kid my size," van

Vogt recalls. "Justice was on my side, but for once right did not triumph. The bully, who, as I have said, was no bigger than I, turned on me, and proceeded to give me the lambasting of my life. It was so unfair, so completely at variance with the moral teachings I had received, that I was devastated by the defeat. I who had been gregarious became a lone wolf. . . . Somewhere, at this time, I got hold of a fairy story book—and my reading began."

His reading preference was the cause of the second incident. "When I was twelve, and we had moved to a town in Manitoba," he vividly remembers, "one of my school teachers took a fairy book away from me, and ordered me out to play. 'You', she said, 'are too old for fairy stories.'

"I was profoundly sensitive to her implied criticism that I was backward. It was years before I looked at another fairy story.

"Childhood was a terrible period for me. I was like a ship without anchor being swept along through darkness in a storm. Again and again I sought shelter, only to be forced out of it by something new. I have come to the conclusion that most people are like that. They arrive at adulthood battered, shaken by the countless misunderstood passions of their bodies, and they very seldom completely recover."

The family was living in Winnipeg when the depression struck in 1929. His father lost an excellent position as Western agent of the Holland-America Line, and as a result Alfred did not get to go to college. In the gaps between stints as a farmhand, truck driver and statistical clerk, he turned to writing.

IT IS strange that van Vogt did not immediately attempt science fiction, for he became a regular read of AMAZING STORIES when he chanced upon the November, 1926, issue with the first installment of Garrett P. Serviss' epic novel, *The Second Deluge*. He secured most back issues and read the magazine regularly until 1930. But his initial literary success was from MacFadden Publications for a "true confession" story. During the next seven years he subsisted on sales of confessions, love stories, trade magazine articles, as well as occasional radio plays. When van Vogt turned to science fiction in 1939 his writing was in every sense of the word already professional.

He was inspired to write science fiction when he picked up a copy of the August, 1939, ASTOUNDING, containing John W. Campbell's *Who Goes There?* That story dealt with an alien creature capable of assuming the shape of any living thing. The

first science fiction story van Vogt wrote was *Vault of the Beast,* concerning a shapeless metallic robot that could mold itself into the image of any life. It was the agent of extra-dimensional intelligences who entrust it with the mission of inducing a master human mathematician to open the lock of an impenetrable vault on Mars in which one of their number is imprisoned. The story was sent back by Campbell for a rewrite ond he quickly received another, *Black Destroyer,* also patterned after *Who Goes There?*

Black Destroyer won the cover and first place in the voting on stories in the July, 1939, ASTOUNDING, creating an overnight reputation for van Vogt. The "Black Destroyer" was Coeurl, an immensely powerful cat-like creature who, unaided, almost conquers an earth spaceship which has landed on its planet. Possessed of advanced intelligence and the ability to change the vibrational pattern of metal so that it can dissolve walls, the beast proves a formidable foe.

In the early portions of this story, as in *Vault of the Beast,* van Vogt strives for mood as well as action by utilizing techniques of Thomas Wolfe. It is noteworthy to point out that while stylistically van Vogt and other science fiction writers of this period were influenced by the mainstream, their themes were derived from their own field.

ENCOURAGED by the tremendous reception for *Black Destroyer,* van Vogt virtually redid the story, substituting as a menace a six-limbed creature capable of walking through metal who plagues the same ship that had so much trouble ridding itself of the super-cat. *Discord in Scarlet* (ASTOUNDING, December 1939) scored another hit.

But van Vogt was having trouble coming up with anything original. While there were no complaints on the skillfully done *Vault of the Beast* (ASTOUNDING, August 1940), it was becoming evident to readers that van Vogt was a one-plot writer. He showed every evidence of repeating his monster bit as frequently as Ray Cummings had paraphrased *The Girl in the Golden Atom.*

No one was more aware of the situation than van Vogt. "I was in a very dangerous position for a writer," he admitted. "I had to break into a new type of story or go down into oblivion as many other science fiction writers have done . . . I had to have something. I thought to myself, what I need is all the alien attraction of the monster stories, but not about a monster. About this time I happened to glance through an old story for boys entitled *A Bi-*

ography of a Grizzly by Ernest Thompson Seton. That gave me the idea of what the story should be, and so the first chapters of *Slan* were written."

There was no ignoring *Slan*. By any standard it was a milestone in writing science fiction. One of the most striking features of the tale was the breathless pace at which it proceeded. Event followed event in a manner reminiscent of the old silent movie cliffhangers.

The method behind this compelling narrative flow was supplied by van Vogt in his essay *Complication in the Science Fiction Story* printed in *Of Worlds Beyond*, a symposium on "The Science of Science Fiction Writing," edited by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach and published by Fantasy Press in 1947. Therein, van Vogt confided that he plotted his stories in terms of 800-word sequences. "Every scene has a purpose," he wrote, "which is stated near the beginning, usually by the third paragraph, and that purpose is either accomplished or not accomplished by the end of the scene."

By any reasonable standard, following the publication of *Slan*, van Vogt should have instantly become the leading new author on the science fiction horizon. He didn't, simply because 1941 turned out to be one of the most phenomenal years in author maturation the science fiction field had ever seen. Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, Isaac Asimov, L. Ron Hubbard, L. Sprague de Camp, Malcolm Jameson, Clifford D. Simak, Alfred Bester, Eric Frank Russell, Leigh Brackett and Nelson S. Bond were all making their mark at this time.

DURING 1941 only two relatively minor short stories by van Vogt were published. *Not the First* (ASTOUNDING, April 1941) hearkened back to an earlier period in the magazine's history when editor F. Orlin Tremaine established the magazine as the field leader through the device of featuring as "thought variants" startling new concepts and off-beat twists. In *Not the First* a ship which has exceeded the speed of light is on a collision course with a star and unable to decelerate. It "saves" itself by backing up in time to the period just before it attained light's velocity. When time is permitted normal flow, the same sequence of events repeat themselves.

The second story, *The Seesaw*, (ASTOUNDING, July 1941) tells the remarkable saga of a man who is sent back in time before the creation of the universe. He has accumulated so much energy in transit that it is released in an immense explosion, bringing the universe into being. This

story contains the earliest use of van Vogt's memorable Weapon Shops, later to become the unifying element in one of his most successful series.

Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into World War II saw a siphoning of science fiction writers from the field. Most of them were young men and many had a scientific education. Those who did not go into the army went into research and industry.

Van Vogt, living then in Toronto, had been turned down by his draft board because of poor vision. The year of his entry into science fiction, 1939, he had met and married Edna Mayne Hull, another professional writer, so his life revolved around the written word. Both of them began writing science fiction and fantasy with increased vigor and found the welcome sign out at ASTOUNDING and UNKNOWN.

The moment was opportune for van Vogt to return and he did it impressively. *Recruiting Station,* built around the theme of men from 20,000 years in the future discreetly enlisting men from the past, was the first of his "comeback" stories and appeared complete as a short novel in ASTOUNDING, March, 1942.

THE NEXT issue of ASTOUNDING contained *Cooperate—or Else,* an immensely readable action story held together by a philosophical debate between an earthman and an alien monstrosity of high intelligence on the need to pool resources for survival. Actually, this was a switch on his old monster gambit.

Asylum, a novelette in the May, 1942 ASTOUNDING was a superb improvisation on the vampire theme in future tense. By this time it was obvious that van Vogt had developed a clear, sharp style of his own. It was virtually free of Thomas Wolfe, yet retaining emotional impact and employing astonishing adroitness. The paucity of ideas that seemed to limit him up until 1942 was now replaced by a seemingly endless stream of originality. This was particularly noticeable in the novelette *The Weapon Shops,* December, 1942 ASTOUNDING. Utilizing the idea first suggested in *The Seesaw,* he projected the most original retail chain store in fiction, the intriguing notion of shops appearing out of nowhere in dictatorial nations, selling advanced types of energy weapons. The slogan of the shops is: "The right to buy weapons is the right to be free." Operating interdimensionally and capable of moving in time, the shops are invulnerable to any force, and through thought-reading devices screen out those inimical to their existence.

The understandable enthusi-

asm which greeted this story resulted in a novel-length sequel, *The Weapon Makers*, which ran in three installments beginning in the February, 1943 ASTOUNDING. The complexity of time and spatial lore that van Vogt embroidered into the story was staggering to the imagination, but its long-range influence was the introduction of monarchies of the future, operating with a technology advanced enough to include space ships. The alacrity with which other authors seized upon this gambit was at best disconcerting. Since the heyday of, first, Heinlein and then van Vogt, the bulk of modern science fiction has visualized governments of the future as outright dictatorships, religious dictatorships, military dictatorship or unvarnished monarchies. There has been precious little utopianism, let alone liberalism.

There was no gainsaying van Vogt's emergence as an entertainer. In this role there was a certain element of purity in his approach to writing. Above and beyond everything else the story was the thing. There rarely was any propagandizing or moral message on a *conscious* level. His personal views and feelings he kept strictly in check. That he had his share of failures is an admission he has personally made, but in the worst of them he battles for reader interest in every line of the story and where his motif became too cosmic to sustain a sense of wonder, he substituted a note of mystery, which served nearly as well.

THROUGH 1943 and 1944 van Vogt produced a steady stream of stories. It was apparent that he was adept in any length from short story to novel. The most acclaimed during this period was *Far Centaurus* in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Jan., 1944, which embraced the notion (popularized by Robert A. Heinlein in *Universe*) of voyages to other star systems involving centuries of time. In this novelette, a group of men remain in suspended animation for 500 years in order to reach the nearest star Alpha Centauri. When they get there they learn that while they were in transit, faster-than-light ships were developed and a civilization hundreds of years old is waiting to welcome them.

His success as a writer prompted him to move to Los Angeles in 1944, a change that had pronounced repercussions. Los Angeles was the center of every conceivable form of scientific, religious and naturalist cult. Van Vogt's inquiring mind was receptive to most of them.

The most profound effect upon his thinking resulted from the reading of *Science and Sanity*, "an introduction to non-Aristo-

telian systems and General Semantics" by Alfred Korzybski. A Polish-born engineer, Korzybski preached that the inability of men to truly interpret one another's words, to really communicate meaning, was a major cause of the world's woes. In his book *Science and Sanity* he purported to show how one could evaluate words and facts sanely. He referred to his system as Null A or Ā, meaning non-Aristotelian. While there was some basis to Korzybski's theories, they were not original with him and the book was written in prose so ambiguous and involved that it virtually destroyed his premise. Van Vogt seized upon Korzybski's theories as a drowning man grasps at a floating spar. They became an obsession and swiftly turned up in his fiction.

His *World of Ā*, a 100,000-word novel, began in the August, 1945 ASTOUNDING. The novel relates the bewilderment of Gilbert Gosseyn, mutant with a double mind, who doesn't know who he is and spends the entire novel trying to find out. This involves walking through walls, being killed twice and a Venus verdant with plant life but with no animal or insect life for cross fertilization purposes. For these and many other mysteries van Vogt offers virtually no explanation. A fascinating literary inspiration in the form of a super computer, a "Games Machine," which selects the most advanced intellects on earth to be sent to Venus for Null A training, is scrapped early in the story. Though fast-paced, the novel is carelessly and choppily written with an alternate-chapter scene transition technique lifted shamelessly out of Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Letters of plaintive puzzlement began to pour in. Readers didn't understand what the story was all about. Campbell advised them to wait a few days; it took that long, he suggested, for the implications to sink in. The days turned into months but clarification never came. Lured by the little quotes from *Science and Sanity* which led off various chapters in *World of Ā*, readers began to investigate semantics and Korzybski. Sales of *Science and Sanity* soared. This book, which then retailed at $9.00 a copy and had seen only two small editions since 1933, prepared its first large printing. Reading *Science and Sanity* was enough to absolve van Vogt of deliberately aiming to confuse. His work was every bit as clear as its inspiration! Nevertheless, *World of Ā* created such a furore that the term "Null-A Man", as "slan", became another synonym for superman with science fiction and fan publications adopting it.

SEMANTICS failed to supply all the answers for van Vogt. Suffering from extreme myopia, he decided to try the Bates' system of eye exercises, endorsed by no less a notable than Aldous Huxley. To many, among them van Vogt, this offered the promise of disposing of glasses through a system of visual exercise and mental reorientation.

"I took off my glasses, and started the long uphill fight of training my eyes back to normal," A. E. van Vogt told an assembly at the Fourth World Science Fiction Convention, in Los Angeles on July 4, 1946. "This had a profound affect on my brain," he continued. "I could no longer write easily. In fact I could no longer write saleable material . . . I determined to fight it through regardless of the cost. I reasoned that I had affected my vision centres, and that I must develop a new flow. I decided that it was a good time to take up other trainings. For thirteen years I had typed with two fingers, another bad habit."

He taught himself to type well with the touch system, "but my writing didn't improve. During the next seven months I did not produce a story that was worth anything, as it stood . . . Just before Christmas of 1945 I began to feel a difference. I sat down and wrote—in the shortest time in which I had ever turned out a story—*A Son is Born*. Since then I have written approximately 160,000 words in spite of much sickness in the family."

A Son is Born appeared in the May, 1946, ASTOUNDING and was the first of a series based on a civilization of the future whose religion was worship of the atom with the scientists established as "priests." These were eventually published in book form as *Empire of the Atom* by Shasta Publishers, Chicago, in 1956. The Empire parallels ancient Rome with a backdrop of interplanetary travel. The central character is a radiation-caused mutation of exceptional intelligence. Individually the stories were mediocre, but collectively they made an entertaining book, distinguished by truly superior characterization.

A two-part short novel which involved the use of the Bates system of eye exercises appeared as *The Chronicler* in ASTOUNDING, October, 1946. This novel, woven about a man who had a third eye, is the most deliberately allegorical of all of van Vogt's works, with passages like: "I have got rid of all the astigmatism in my right or left eye, yet my center eye persists in being astigmatic, sometimes to the point of blindness." This followed the Bates' theory, since discredited, that eye strain is

due to "an abnormal condition of the mind."

NEW stories from van Vogt continued to appear with some regularity up through 1950. Whereas before they had been published predominantly in ASF, they now began to show up in other magazines. The quality of some of these, particularly the short stories, was exceptional. *The Monster*, published in ASTOUNDING, August, 1948, and *Enchanted Village* in OTHER WORLDS, July, 1950 are regarded among his very best. The first deals with beings who come to earth after all human life has ceased and resurrect four men of different eras, reconstructing them from the skeletal remains. The latter involves a space explorer stranded on Mars who survives by physically turning into a Martian.

Both of these were no more than fairy tales with scientific trimmings. The teacher who took the book of fairy tales from the hands of a 12-year-old van Vogt never removed them from his heart and mind. In maturity, aided by a storyteller's sense of situation and drama and a clear, pleasing, stylistic talent, he escaped again and again into a dream-world of his own making. They could take the fairy tale book from him, but not his ability to create more.

The 1947 Beowulf Poll conducted by Gerry de la Ree saw van Vogt edge out such formidable competitors as A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert A. Heinlein and Henry Kuttner to become science fiction's most popular author. When science fiction moved into its greatest boom at the end of 1949, van Vogt was still the field leader and stood to profit the most. He might have, except for the appearance of an article which dramatically changed the course of his life.

That article was *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Healing*, by L. Ron Hubbard which appeared in the May, 1950 issue of ASTOUNDING. Dianetics was a system of do-it-yourself psychoanalysis. All you needed was a copy of the book, which conveniently appeared one month after the article and swiftly rose to the top of the best-seller list. Dianetics grew from Hubbard's personal experimental treatment of psychosomatic illnesses with hypnosis. It offered the same hope as General Semantics: a means of rationalizing one's self to complete "sanity." A person who accomplished this feat was called a "clear." On the way to being a "clear" a person could be cured—according to Hubbard—of ailments ranging from cancer to dementia praecox.

Within the science fiction field this "science" found early

adherents, and, inevitably, A. E. van Vogt was among them. John W. Campbell, Jr., as treasurer of the Dianetics Research Foundation, enthusiastically encouraged such interest.

Hubbard had claimed that the first "clear" was his third wife, 25-year-old Sara Northrup Hubbard, who was therefore the only truly sane person on earth. Feature writers attributed the breakup of Dianetics to a disagreement in the ranks, but it actually was shattered on April 24, 1951, when the United Press reported that Sara Northrup Hubbard, by her husband's admission the only "clear" and completely sane women on the face of the earth, was asking for a divorce on the grounds that "competent medical advisers" had found her 40-year-old husband "hopelessly insane" and in need of "psychiatric observation."

This did not discourage van Vogt. He exuberantly set up a Los Angeles headquarters for Dianetics. Virtually all of his writing ceased except for revisions of some of his earlier short works which he cobbled together for hardcover publication. In the years that have followed, van Vogt unflaggingly has dedicated all his energies to the teaching and promotion of a "science" that has been exposed as without foundation in a dozen or more mass circulation periodicals, and which even Hubbard, its originator, has deserted in lieu of a more "advanced concept he terms "Scientology."

What is the *rationale*?

Perhaps the answer rests in the fact that A. E. van Vogt is a deeply religious man in the fullest sense of the phrase. As a child he sallied forth to protect his brother from an unfair beating by a bully and was himself beaten. The major religions of the world taught that "right makes might." Right was on his side but might had triumphed. He could not, therefore, in all conscience accept orthodox religion, for did not this incident obviously prove that one of its basic tenets was false?

Yet, here is a man, fundamentally good, whose sincere belief holds that man has within himself Godlike powers if he will only work to discover and release them. His own life has been a dedicated, if misguided, striving for self-improvement. General Semantics represented a means of cleansing himself of mental conflict through orderly thinking. The Bates system of eye exercises pointed to correction of a physical defect with the hope of concurrently clearing up negative thinking. With Dianetics he moved on to an illusory promise of higher intelligence,

elimination of mental conflict and freedom from disease.

In van Vogt's fiction, his characters follow the same course. They travel in a world of confusion sustained only by the knowledge that within them are undreamed powers they will eventually master. Jommy Cross, the mutation of *Slan*, struggles for survival in a world where all hands are turned against him, knowing that as he matures his mental and physical powers will give him the tools to attain supremecy; Gilbert Gosseyn, hero of *World of Ā*, undergoes incredible ordeals aimed at ultimately revealing to him that he is a superman with a double brain; Clare Linn, mutant of *Empire of the Atom*, who is almost condemned to death at birth, lives to discover and utilize the near-mystical powers within him; Drake, an amnesiac in *The Search* ASTOUNDING SCIENCE January, 1943), solves the amazing riddle of his background after a baffling series of incidents adding up to the fact that he is a man from the future whose purpose is to alter history so that unjust fates will not overtake the worthy.

WHAT does this indicate?

Though van Vogt honestly adheres to his role as a storyteller, he writes in religious symbols. Jommy Cross, Gilbert Gosseyn, Clare Linn and many others are Christ images with Christlike motives. His characters undergo symbolic crucifixion and resurrection so frequently as to make it possible to draw a pattern. Gilbert Gosseyn in *World of Ā* is twice killed and comes to life in other bodies. Throughout the novel Gosseyn is aware that there is an Unknown Chessplayer involved in his destiny, and the destiny of all men. Eventually Gosseyn learns that he and the Unknown Chessplayer are one and the same; theosophically interpreted, he equates himself with "The Son of God."

The Monster (which when anthologized in August Derleth's *The Other Side of the Moon* was even retitled *Resurrection*) finds four earthmen brought back from the dead, each possessed of greater powers, until the last is able to revive long-extinct human life on the planet and preserve earthmen immortal forever.

It is in the book version of *Empire of the Atom* that we find a near-final religious coalescence of van Vogt's thinking. Religion in that novel is based on the worship of the atom and the scientists fill the role of priests. Clare Linn, the mutant born into royalty, becomes a figure of Christlike morality. Here van Vogt finally resolves the mys-

teries that confound him. A tiny floating ball appears at the end of the story which "contains the entire sidereal universe . . . it looked small but that was an illusion of man's senses."

Van Vogt had reduced the entire universe to a tiny glowing sphere that floats in the room of mutation Clare Linn. *It was now something small enough to grasp.* It also consciously or unconsciously suggested Spinoza's philosophy that the entire universe is God and everything that makes it up is part of Him. The story ends with the question: "Did this mean that . . . man controlled the universe, or that the universe controlled man?"

All his life van Vogt has sought for the positive in man and the good in himself. Bewildered and bemused though he has been, his stories usually speak affirmatively: man can attain anything if he really tries. His search for the powers within himself have led him on many false paths, and may have lost him the great powers he always had: power he demonstrated every time he wrote a story like *Slan, The Weapon Makers, The Monster,* or *Enchanted Village.*

Dianetics became the "religion" that van Vogt so urgently needed; one in which he could be a high priest and personally dispense knowledge for the betterment of mankind while providing a haven for himself. He sustains the nameless god of his formless belief with the sacrifice of the literary creativity which was his birthright.

THE END

The LEGACY

By DICK HANK

Many writers have tried to capture the essence of man's nuclear fate. Here a new writer, working in what amounts to blank verse, captures our imagination in an experimental – but heart-touching vignette.

THE GREAT War ended; the land cooled; and the dawn came. The sun's red rays moved North and South, as shadows pointed West. The Eastern sky brightened white, as shadows shimmered shorter.

The last man watched the shadows move, as day began again. He saw around him rubble sent, by man in progress—ended. The remnants near, void of shape—purpose lost in flaming heat. A desert made by man's great flight—to moon, and stars —unreached.

The sun moved up, piercing haze; cloudless; blueless; quite. The brightness grew—not much at first—and wastelands showed their wares. Depression came, the last man moved, toward the peace of purpose. No friend was left, of this he knew, but man had left a *legacy*. "Oh universe; you stay in tact, and yet my earth is ruined. Earth within the solar womb—aborted now, and dying. What is there now to write on stone, when ground contains thy bones?"

The last man walked down dusty roads, bounded there by morter-brick. To his right a farmland once, no rooster crowed to wake the harvest. The house once white; with red barn near—was ground, and dust by cattle hoof. He crossed a bridge that stayed in tact, and looked below at floating flesh. Blood once red, had turned to brown—as did the once green land.

The road moved on, he followed course—remembering the beauty. Beauty then, but now it passed, as scent became a rotting

thing. The dust moved up as foot came down, and thought he did of burning. No atom left by flames intense—no atom but the dust he tread.

"Oh friends below," he spoke in passing, "pardon my traversing. I cannot see how other roads could leave me less offending—unless of course—the road I chose is dusted with thy enemy."

THE ROAD moved East, bounded there by lamp posts melted. The last man walked, his shadow pointed, on, and on to city crumbled. The building there shorter now, but that was as it should be. Not one was left, that stood above—to rule—and liter *lesser* ones. The air moved thick with activeness, the last man knew *its* purpose. Death was near, of this he knew, but *purpose* had he also. Find he would the truth of man—his *legacy of living*. Men lived here, but now *man* walked—in search of purpose written.

"Those that come," the last man spoke, "must know of man—his *greatness*."

The last man searched each crater now, for treasures saved from burning. He finished this as shadows searched; moving East in passing. The last man walked, his treasure gathered; found a bank and entered it. He walked amid the roof-less thing, shaded some by walls still standing. He reached the vault, and stepped inside, each treasure found was taken too. He placed each one by walls of steel, closed the door, and locked it tight. Man *must* have a legacy, and on the wall he wrote:

"GATHERED HERE ARE WORKS OF MAN; THAT YOU THAT COME MAY KNOW HIM. THE NAMES OF EACH; (the last man writes,) THE ITEM LAYS BENEATH IT.

"Coke Bottles; Golf Balls; Lip Stick Cases; Powder Puffs.

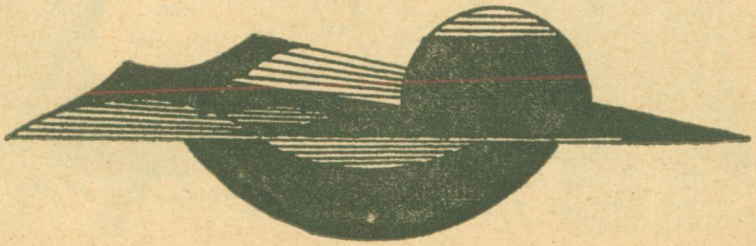
"Soda Straws; Nurses Shoes; Prophylactics; Aerosels.

"HiFi Records; Cowboy Boots; Living Bras; and *Neon Signs*."

The man in dying took one *sign*, and placed it by itself. Alone it stood—in reverence—above it were these words:

" 'JESUS SAVES,' THIS ONE SAYS, BUT FAILED TO TELL US HOW."

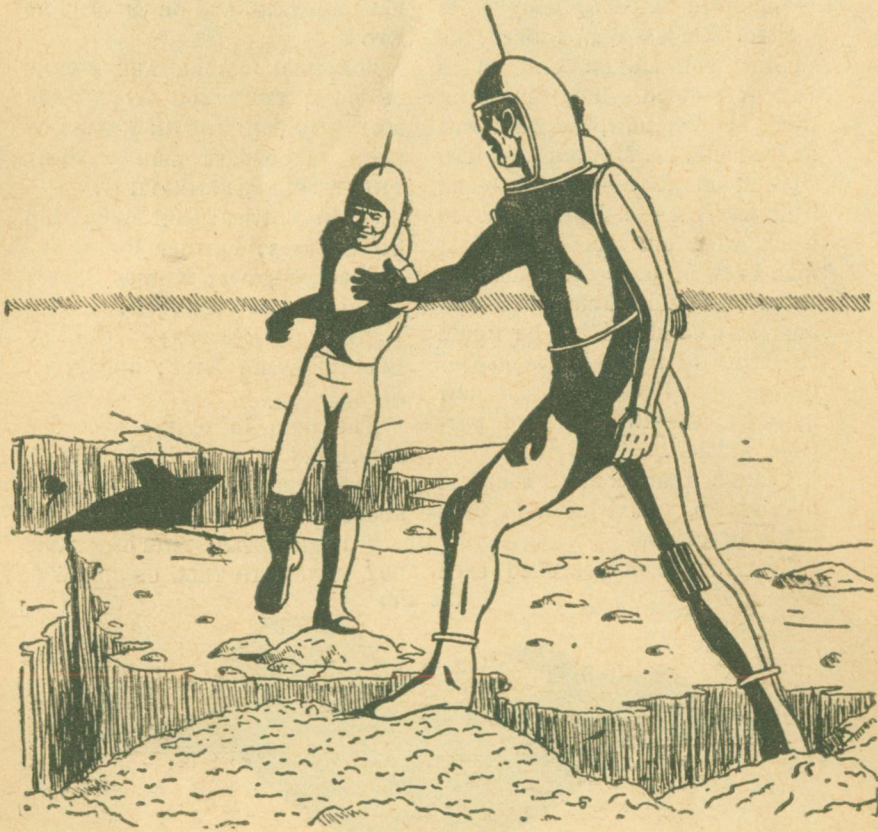
THE END



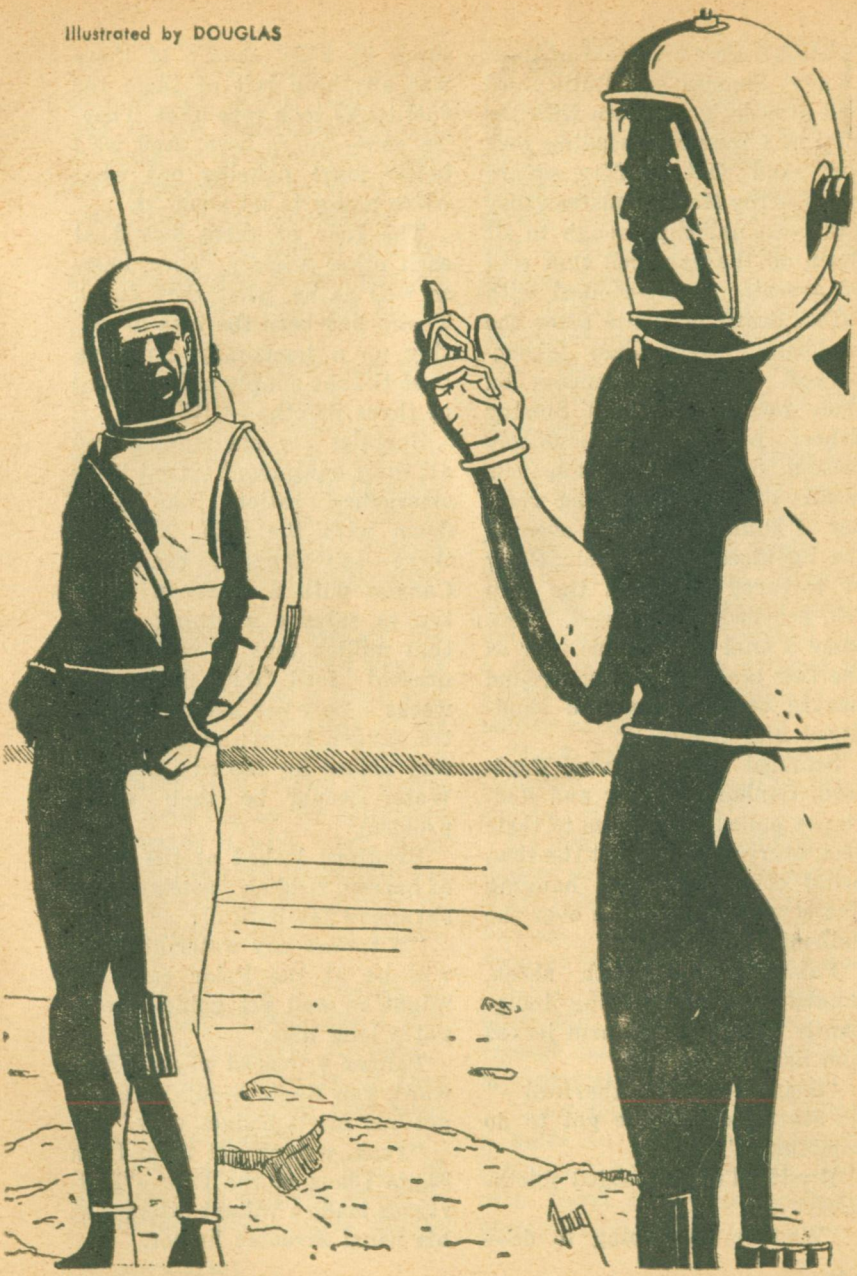
THE SURVIVORS

By T. D. HAMM

Step by gruelling step the four of them slogged their way toward a perilous safety. It was a magnificent display of the will for survival. The only question was, whose survival?



Illustrated by DOUGLAS



THERE were only four of them now. Soames and Rutherford had literally gone down with the ship in a roar of cascading rock and sand. Out of fifty square miles of the Martian plateau they had been unlucky enough to sit down on the egg-shell thin roof of a sector honey-combed with caves. Scant moments after the exploring party had disembarked, Soames' comments on their resemblance to a Sunday School picnic were suddenly broken off by a cacophonous medley of yells, the rolling thunder of sliding rock, and over all the agonized metallic shrieking of tortured metal as the ship fell, crushed and twisted. There came a final tremendous roar as the fuel tanks blew. The ground heaved convulsively, and shuddered into silence.

Stunned and deafened, Bradford, Canham, Palmer and Rodriguez pulled themselves to their feet, staring dazedly at the towering column of dust hanging like a malevolent genie over the half-mile wide chasm.

Palmer, white with shock, lunged forward, turning indignantly as Bradford's arm jerked him back.

"Soames—and Rutherford—" he stuttered. "We've got to do something!"

Bradford's lip twisted mirthlessly.

"What're you going to do—jump in after them? If there was anything left of them the fuel tanks took care of it. They're gone—we're here. And we'd better start figuring out what we're going to do about it.

The four of them looked at each other silently. They knew as well as he, what they faced. Theirs had been the task of setting up a temporary exploring base till the supply ship arrived in three months—with luck.

Supplies for six months and all their equipment except their emergency rations had gone down with the ship. No hope there—as well explore the Grand Canyon with a teaspoon as to try to salvage anything under that million tons of rock. Compressed food they had, two weeks supply per man; their extra oxygen tanks; an extra battery apiece for the suit heaters. Water would be their worst problem.

Bradford looked at the miles of barren, reddish wasteland and shrugged fatalistically.

"If there's any water at all, it will be at the Polar cap. We might as well get going—we've got a long hike."

Palmer grimaced wryly. "Forward, you Eagle Scouts. We can get our merit badges easy."

"Yeah, we can get them from Santa Claus at the Pole—"Rodriguez made a valiant attempt at his usual sardonic humor.

They piled a small cairn of the red rocks and Bradford planted the green and white flag of the Federated Nations. Encased in its protective covering he placed a note at its foot indicating their destination.

"We ought to sign it 'Kilroy,' Canham grunted as they trudged forward. "Say, how far do we have to walk?"

"Around a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles."

Their concerted whistle of dismay echoing oddly in their earphones, they set out in thoughtful silence across the red face of Mars, the hovering dust blotting out their footprints as they went.

Three days and seventy five miles later, they huddled wearily against the face of a small cliff shivering in the icy chill of the night wind. They had found a dessicated bush or two in a protected nook during the afternoon and carried it with them. Now, they fed the wiry twigs into the fire with miserly care glad of its meager light against the haunted dark.

Rodriguez held a branch to the firelight. "Looks like a sort of poorhouse cousin to birch," he hazarded. "Wonder if they ever had forests on this God-forgotten planet?"

Palmer grinned. "Well, at least there is still life of sorts. Rutherford would have flipped his lid over those comical little fellows we saw today."

A half dozen times they had seen furry little marsupials, downy as chinchillas, their young poking out inquisitive snouts toward the interlopers and as promptly getting them slapped down again.

A flicker of motion on the perimeter of firelight caught his eye. "We've got a visitor," he whispered. "There's one of the little beggars now."

He tossed a crumb from his plate toward the peering head. Flicking a tongue like a lizard's, the visitor fielded it neatly in midair and advanced, peering hopefully at the circle of grinning faces. Palmer stretched out a stealthy hand and gripped it gently about the middle as it sniffed at his food can.

"Look at him," he cried delightedly. "He doesn't even squirm. He likes me!"

He tickled its ears, sliding his fingers down through the heavy, silky pelt. "You could make a fortune with these . . ." he dropped it abruptly with an anguished yelp and a string of blistering oaths, while his friends clung to each other and howled mirthfully.

"Your little friend, he pulled a knife on you. No?" queried Rodriguez sympathetically. The grin faded from his suddenly startled face.

"Amigo, que lo es? Hey, fellows—something's wrong!"

Palmer, his face shocked and dazed had dropped to his knees, whimpering and retching painfully.

"My God, look—his hand!" whispered Bradford.

They had removed their bulky gloves before eating and Palmer's exposed hand was black and swollen beyond recognition. Even as they watched, the skin split, leaking watery fluid. His body contorted, he rolled on the ground screaming with unbearable agony.

Bradford's hand dropped to his pistol and fell away again. He looked at the others pleadingly.

"We can't let him suffer this way. But my God—I *can't* do it. . . ."

Canham looked at him dully. "You won't have to—he's finished."

The rigidly contorted body relaxed inertly, the tortured eyes open and glazed. Rodriguez crossed himself and burst into childish sobs.

Bradford put out a restraining hand toward Canham.

"Let him alone—I wish to God I could do the same thing. Give me a hand with Palmer—we'll have to bury him the best way we can."

Shaken with more than the night chill, they removed the clumsy oxygen and water containers and piled a protective cairn of rocks above the silent figure. Behind them, Rodriguez sobbed bitter Spanish curses and hurled rocks at telltale flickers of movement in the dark.

Through the next day and the next, they trudged on doggedly, speaking little as they put the reluctant miles behind them, taking what shelter they could during the bitter nights. During the day under the thin Martian sunlight, they turned off the suit-heaters, conserving the batteries; hoarding their remaining food and water with miserly care.

Bradford, assuming tacitly acknowledged leadership, pondered the situation wearily. Even with Palmer's supplies, it was doubtful that the three of them could last out the ten weeks or so remaining before the arrival of the second ship. If they could only make it to the Pole—there they were sure of water at least, in the vegetation belt surrounding the shallow icecap. If it was ice and not frozen carbon dioxide which some of the experts held out for. In their initial swing around the planet they had seen the narrow green belt dotted with shining pools. Plants meant oxygen, too; and it was possible that in a temperature supporting some

kind of growing life, it would be warm enough so that they could remove their helmets for breathing, if only in the brief daylight hours.

Bradford, lost in thought, started as Canham touched his arm, motioning him to open his faceplate and turn off the headphones.

"What's the matter with you?" he jerked impatiently.

Canham turned a thumb toward Rodriguez.

"Nothing's the matter with me. Him—I think he's going off his rocker."

Bradford looked at Rodriguez plodding unheedingly ahead. Since his first outburst after Palmer's death, he had gone mechanically about each day's routine, outwardly calm. He said little, but neither had the others. The only indication of his inner torment was when one of the deadly little marsupials peered at them as they went on their way. With deadly fury, he would hurl a barrage of rocks through the air, while the little animal eyed them in indifferent curiosity. Occasionally he scored a hit, laughing grimly as the dying animal erected the ruff of lethal spines through its silky fur.

Bradford snorted mirthlessly. "I doubt if either of us would pass a sanity test at the moment," he grunted. "What's so special about him?"

Canham's normally cheerful face retained its solemn worry.

"I know what you mean—but, watch him next time one of those dust-devils comes by."

The day before they had descended the northern slope of the high plateau onto the long, sandy plain that extended northward. Everywhere there were the dancing, careening dust-devils, tall columns of the brick-red sand; faintly menacing forms, pursuing some unseen purpose of their own. From time to time, one would swerve close, seeming to keep pace with them for a few steps before whirling off in its erratic dance.

One approached them now. Rodriguez turned toward it making a furtive gesture with thumb and forefinger and deliberately trickled a stream from his water bottle upon the sand.

Bradford came forward on the run, shouting into the hastily adjusted helmet mike. Angrily he jerked the bottle out of Rodriguez' unresisting hand.

"What the hell do you think you're playing at?" Bradford panted.

Rodriguez eyed him sullenly.

"I know these things, as my people know them. Los *Bailerines del Diablo*—the devil dancers. One gives them what is most precious. *Es muy necessario.*" More and more he was losing his usually fluent, faintly accented

English and reverting to his native tongue.

Bradford eyed him sternly. "Rodriguez, you are a good Catholic. You wear a holy medal. What's all this talk about sacrifices to the devil?"

Rodriguez' gaze slid away. "I don't think God knows about this place. This is of *El Diablo.*"

"So now you want to get in good with the Devil," Bradford grunted. "Well, you can do it some other way than with the last of the water." He jerked his head at Canham waiting wearily behind them.

"Come on, you two. We'll all feel better when we get out of this—desert." He ended with a wry twist of the lips. He had nearly said 'god-forsaken.' Maybe Rodriguez had the right idea after all.

During the afternoon, some chance convection of air currents sharply increased the dust whirls. The desert seemed full of their erratic, spinning shapes. Rodriguez plodded along, ignoring Canham's sporadic attempts at conversation. The chilly sunlight was waning and Bradford's face lighted with relief at the sight of a small sand hill. At least they could dig a hole to get their backs into and break the whistling winds. He felt an irrational comfort at the thought of the coming darkness —at least they wouldn't be able to see the dust-devils. Maybe they could get some talk going and snap Rodriguez out of his melancholy silence. Perhaps they had all been getting too introverted since the series of disasters.

They made camp before dark, digging themselves well in; Bradford and Canham forced themselves into a semblance of cheerfulness as they worked. Rodriguez's face remained dark and unsmiling. Like one of those damned stone images in the Yucatan jungle, Bradford thought with a brief burst of irritation. You wouldn't think that the little Mexican had been the ship's humorist, his face one perpetual white-toothed smile.

As they huddled cold and uncomfortable in the gathering darkness, Canham grinned apologetically and with the air of a conjuror producing trained seals from a hat, gravely presented three crushed and bent but undeniable cigarettes, distinctly contraband on the ship. He eyed Bradford with mock contrition.

"I can't imagine how I got these in my kit. I guess when I was packing everything just went black. Of course, if you'd care to be my companion in crime . . . ?"

Bradford frowned darkly. "I ought to have you in irons for this, Mr. Canham! Now give me

one of those things before I break your arm!"

With a muttered word of thanks, Rodriguez laid his carefully aside on a handy rock and slid out of the shelter into the early dark. Canham tossed a facetious remark after him and received the usual unprintable reply.

The other two sat, inhaling luxuriously. Bradford sighed comfortably.

"I think he's snapping out of it. Good thing you noticed what was happening. We'll all have to keep an eye on each other from now on."

"It's enough to drive anybody nuts. Have you noticed anything funny about—well, about the *feel* of the place?"

Bradford looked at him uneasily.

"What do you mean 'funny'!"

"It's just a feeling I get; you know how a brand-new house that's never been lived in feels different than an old house that's been deserted? They're both empty, but it's a different emptiness. It's the same way with pieces of country—where we trained on that high desert country in Arizona, it had a new, sort of *unused* feeling about it."

Bradford felt an unacknowledged tingling along his nerve ends.

"Well, this is a lot like it—" he tossed out defensively. In spite of himself he slid a sidelong glance at the surrounding dark.

Canham went on unnoticing.

"That's what I mean—it's a lot *like* it, but it's different too. Like it had been lived in for God knows how long, but everybody moved out."

"But there's no ruins, or anything—"

"Maybe there wouldn't be any after a million years or so. And how do we know what's under the sand? You can't even find your own footprints fifteen minutes after you've made them."

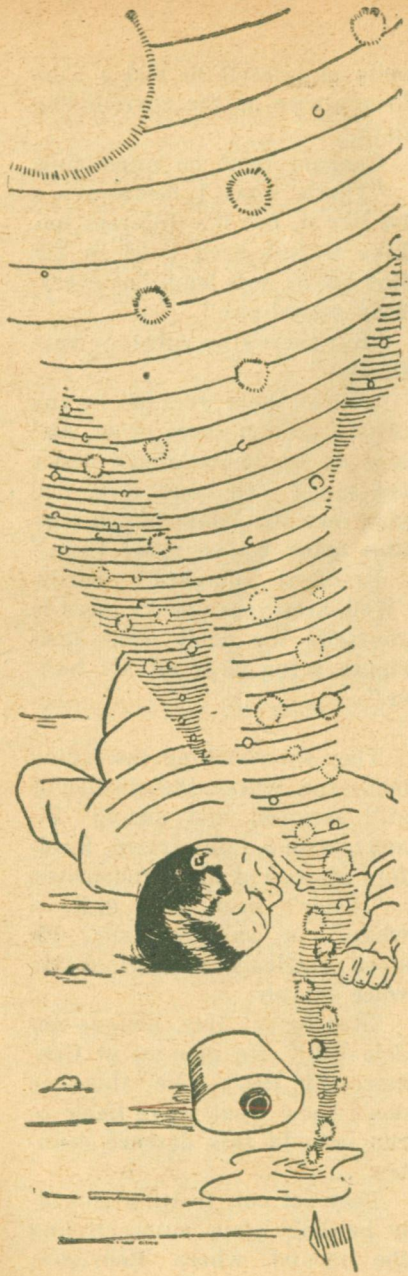
Bradford laughed shortly. "Well, keep your spooky ideas to yourself. We don't want Rodriguez going clear off his rocker."

They sat watching the fading landscape where the dustdevils still swooped and swung. Finally, with a faint frown, Bradford glanced at his chronometer.

"Roddy's been gone quite a while," he said uneasily. He stood suddenly and lifted his voice sharply.

"Rodriguez! Hey, amigo—andale Ud.!" He glanced at Canham. "I don't like this—we don't know what we're liable to run onto in this damned country. . . ."

They set out, trotting clumsily in their heavy suits, circling the mound where Rodriguez



footprints were already fading in the shifting sands. Canham gave a sudden convulsive clutch at his companion's arm. There was no need to speak—scattered over the sand were the component parts of a space-suit; the heavy gloves, the helmet, the shoes. And neatly wrapped in the padded coverall the oxygen tanks. Ahead, nearly invisible, were the prints of naked feet.

Bradford groaned. "Good God, he's gone completely nuts. He'll be frozen stiff in ten minutes!"

They saw the crumpled heap at the same moment and with a thrill of undefinable terror they saw the stooping, whirling shadow, spinning dizzily over the huddled shape.

Bradford wrenched his faceplate open, yelling frantically. Gasping, he slammed the mask shut against something like a rain of fiery sparks on his unprotected skin. It was all too evident that Rodriguez would never hear again.

Gathering his strength to turn the inert figure, he nearly overbalanced—there was no weight to it at all! Beside him, Canham cried out hoarsely, "My God—he's like a mummy—!"

The whole figure looked strangely unhuman. Completely dehydrated, the flesh molded tight over the protruding bones, Rodriguez lay peacefully, both

stick-like hands clasped over the holy medal on his chest.

Sick and shaken, they bent to the task of scooping sand over the shrunken body, glancing sidelong at the devil-dancers whirling exultantly in the shadowy night.

Bradford with a defiant look at his companion, unhooked Rodriguez' half-empty water bottle from his own belt and placed it upright at the head of the mound.

"He knew what they wanted and I took it away from him. I guess we can spare him this!"

Retrieving the oxygen tank and the heat batteries as they went, they trudged wearily back to their meager shelter, sickeningly conscious of the vacant space beside them.

Canham gave a sudden choked exclamation.

"He didn't even get to smoke his cigarette—"

Bradford caught his upthrown arm. "He left it for us. When things get tough we'll share it."

Canham gave an hysterical giggle. "When 'things get tough' —! Goodnight, Hardrock!"

The two days following went by in a continuous waking nightmare—putting one foot in front of the other foot, inching their way monotonously toward the still invisible Pole. They had left the dust-devils behind—due to some freakishness of the wind, so they figured.

Canham looks like Death on a pale horse, Bradford thought dully. And I probably look worse. He rubbed absently at the dry, scaly pits on his face where the unholy dust had stung him and reverted to his private worry. Suppose the carefully theorized solar compass was wrong? Suppose this double-damned planet possessed a field of its own that would throw their calculations out and they were going in circles? If they were heading North, the Pole couldn't be more than another day or two distant even if his reckoning had been off.

Unconsciously he lengthened his stride for a few paces, and was reminded by his quickened breathing that he was wasting his scant oxygen supply. They already had tapped their original spare tanks, thankful for the lessened weight as they jettisoned the empty. Even with Palmer and Rodriguez' partly filled tanks they only had enough for a couple of days full time use. Since they had left the region of the whirlwinds, they had been able to experiment cautiously with leaving their faceplates open a few minutes at a time, even though the thin, oxygen-starved air caused their lungs to labor painfully.

Bradford was roused from his musings by an astonished exclamation from his companion. Down on his knees, Canham was babbling incoherently, "—green! It's green!"

Bradford knelt beside him in awestruck silence. A tiny growth scarcely large enough to be dignified with the title of shrub, here in this arid plain and undeniably—green! Canham touched it caressingly.

"Baby, I hope all your brothers and sister and the rest of the kinfolk are just over the hill!"

Clambering to their feet, they set off, lumbering awkwardly in their heavy suits, breath coming in labored gasps to halt abruptly at the edge of a steep downward slope. Before them lay another belt of arid sand and beyond a ring of marshy, pool-dotted soil encircling a solid belt of vivid green—and faintly visible on the horizon, the glimmer of the shallow snowcap.

Canham gulped audibly. "If Cortez really wanted a thrill, he should have discovered this overgrown duckpond. The Pacific—phooey!"

Bradford slapped him on the back. "I feel like I could flap my wings and fly down! Last one in's a rotten egg. . . ."

Laughing with almost hysterical relief, they ran, waddled and slid, needless of bumps and oxygen wastage. They picked themselves up at the bottom, grinning sheepishly.

"If Space Authority could only see us now!" Canham chortled. "Let us now with due dignity take possession of our kingdom."

Jubilantly they strode ahead, bowing to imaginary cheering crowds.

"We've got it made, Hardrock. We got it made!"

Bradford's grin wavered. "Well . . . we've got it made this far anyway, with two months and half to go. Let's hope there's duck on that pond!"

Suddenly sobered they went on; before them the semi-arid belt seemed to stretch interminably toward the barely visible green area. The horizon seemed to retreat as they advanced.

"Another night in this damned desert," Bradford groaned. "At least we may be able to get a fire going with this brush—and a real swallow of water apiece. I hope that stuff we saw out there wasn't a mirage," he added disconsolately.

"Not that—that was real honest-to-God water. Wish I'd brought my duck gun. These damn supply sergeants never do send out the right equipment."

Towards dusk they scooped out a shallow hole in the sand and roofed it with green branches.

"With our luck this stuff will probably turn out to be poison ivy," Canham predicted gloomily. "Join me in my thatched hut, oh beauteous one—and look out for sandburrs."

They slept fitfully, shivering through the long night hours. Bradford announced that this was undoubtedly the North Pole and they had arrived at the beginning of the six months night. With the first of the thin, cheerless rays of the distant sun, they clambered out of their cramped sleeping place, some of yesterday's enthusiasm waning as they stumbled about, relaxing stiffened muscles.

Vaguely uneasy and depressed they started out; the very nearness of their goal somehow seemed to make their chances of reaching it doubly unsure.

Afternoon brought them to the edge of the marshy area; they halted, surveying it doubtfully. Any such region on Earth would have been busy with life—frogs croaking on lily pads, water rats and fish making small plopping sounds in the water, tall reeds swaying. Here there was nothing that breathed of warm-blooded life. Only the shallow pools lying stagnant, reflecting stubby water-grasses, dotted here and there with small mounds growing a stunted bush or two.

Canham shivered suddenly. "This is more dead than a cypress swamp. How I'd love to see a little old cottonmouth rearing his ugly head out of that puddle."

Bradford shifted his shoulders uneasily.

"Well, here goes! Shall we circle around a bit to see if there's a dryer path?"

An hour's walking brought no change; always before them lay the silent marsh, inimical in its unending desolation. And beyond it, tantalizingly green, lay the only growing things on Mars.

With some difficulty they managed to find a branch apiece long enough for a probing pole and started out reluctantly, wincing as their feet sank deep in the fetid ooze.

"These boots are damned heavy," Bradford remarked doubtfully.

"You take yours off if you want to," Canham returned emphatically. "I'm damned if I'm going to step on some slimy, poisonous species of fauna in my bare feet."

They forged ahead doggedly, tapping with their poles, making for a stunted shrub lifting itself above the rest. Bradford, slightly in the lead, whirled as Canham gave a stifled yelp and hauled himself up on the mound, looking slightly green.

"Felt like a whale turned under my foot," he panted. "Let's get out of this so I can be sick—"

Foot by foot, they heaved and plunged their way through the relentless sucking mire.

"We must be nearly to the other side," Bradford wheezed. "We've got to make it before dark. It's a cinch we can't camp here."

Canham looked across the few hundred yards remaining and shook his head wearily.

"This thing is like a moat; I get the feeling that we're being kept out by one defense after another. Those harmless looking, poisonous little beasts that killed Palmer, the wind-devils that got Rodriguez and now—this."

Bradford repressed a shiver.

"Come on!" he said roughly. "Don't start telling your ghost stories here, for the love of heaven! Save them for your kids."

They plopped off the further side of the mound, their feet making gobbling noises as they lifted them one after the other in the tenacious, clinging mud. Bradford halted suddenly.

"There it is," he breathed. "You can see the shore from here. . . ."

Caution forgotten, they plunged ahead, panting with effort. Canham gave a sudden startled cry.

"Brad! I can't—lift—my foot . . . ! I can't move it!"

Bradford, a few steps to the right, felt his heart leap sickeningly at the stark terror in the voice.

"Take it easy! Get a grip on my pole—*now!*"

He heaved strongly, feet slipping, unable to get a purchase to make his strength felt against the pull of the quicksand. The perspiration trickled into his smarting eyes. Through Canham's faceplate, he could see his face set in agonized strain as he attempted to free his feet in their heavy boots, the water level rising from waist to armpits as he struggled. Bradford redoubled his efforts, muscles cracking as he tried to heave the other free bodily. Canham relaxed suddenly.

"It's no use," he panted heavily. "Don't come closer—it'll just get both of us. Don't stay and watch it—it'll just make it harder. Wait a minute—here, catch!"

With a last convulsive effort, he jerked loose the oxygen tank and gave it a desperate throw. Bradford automatically caught it, nearly going off-balance and righting himself with panic-stricken effort.

"Hold on! hold on—" he gritted. "I'll get some branches from that shrub; you can throw yourself forward so I can get a grip on you."

Canham looked at him palely.

"No use. But, I'm not going under with my helmet on, still alive, under—*this!*"

He shuddered queasily, and with one quick jerk freed his faceplate as he went under. For a moment the water boiled furiously as the remaining oxygen in his suit released. Then Bradford stood alone, staring stupidly with shock, watching as the bubbles rose more and more slowly and died away.

He had no recollection of floundering the remaining hundred yards to the shore. Physically sick and shaking with horror, he ploughed through the shallowing ooze and fell headlong on wet, but solid earth.

The sun was sinking as he finally stirred, groaning, and pulled himself further away from the haunted ooze. Incredibly, he slept at last, waking to the first rays of the sun, dazed and unbelieving. Turning instinctively for the reassurance of another face, remembrance hit him like a blow. Bile came up into his mouth as he wrenched his faceplate open and was grindingly, shudderingly sick.

The spasm over, he heaved himself to his feet, staring about stupidly. Surely there was something he had to do? Every morning for so long he had had to lift himself to his feet and force himself to go on till dark—toward the Pole.

But—here *was* the green and a few miles away the hoarfrost glitter of the snowcap. There was nowhere to go!

"We made it—" he said uncertainly, looking around. But there was no one to share the triumph. Dully, he thought of them all—Palmer, betrayed by a gentle, kittenlike thing—Rodriguez, a human sacrifice to something utterly alien—Canham, dead on the edge of victory. He looked at Canham's oxygen canister and laid his hand on it gently. Then slowly, with dragging steps, he went on toward the shining green that had cost them so much to achieve.

The ground and the air above it as he approached were strangely warm. And the plants too, were warm and oddly different. No biologist, he dimly sensed a difference from any growth that Earth knew. The stems, the leaves were veined with pulsing red and at the tip of each stem, a flower lifted, shaped like an open mouth. There was a space between each plant, none crowded his neighbor. It was very orderly and pleasant and so warm—so warm. He opened his faceplate.

Drowsy and relaxed, no longer driven by unrelenting urgency, he found himself nodding dreamily as he walked between the tall

stems. With a sigh of pleasure, he laid down among them, conscious on the verge of sleep of an insistent demanding whisper —"More air! Give us air!" Unhesitatingly, he opened the gauge of the oxygen tank, drifting into a sea of darkness.

The red-veined plants about him pulsed with a quicker rhythm as the thousand opened mouths drank in the air, rich with a richness they had not known for a million years. And about the unconscious form of the man, poured the carbon dioxide from the lips of a thousand oxygen breathing creatures.

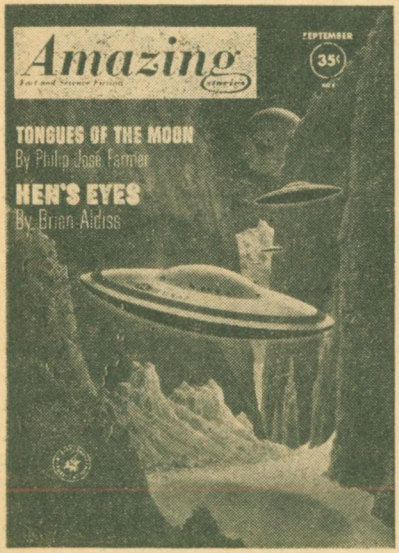
They had had a million years to learn the technique of survival as the atmosphere of their planet drained off into space. Retreating, adapting, eon by eon to their last stronghold; ringed round by their guardians of the Earth, the Air and the Water.

Here were the Survivors.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

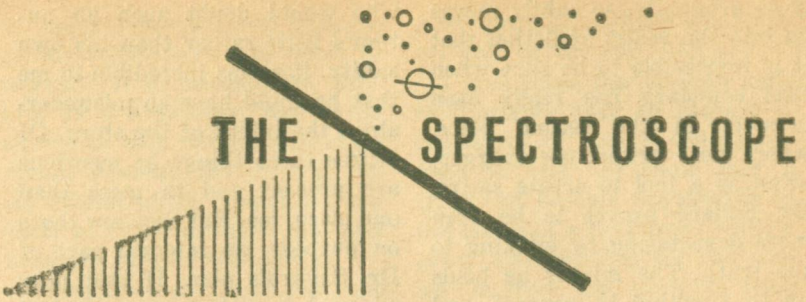
Philip Jose Farmer makes his premiere appearance in September AMAZING with a striking interstellar novelet.



It is just possible, if all goes well, that *Tongues of the Moon* may be merely the first of a Farmer epic cycle—all to appear in AMAZING, of course. Another featured author is **Brian Aldiss,** with *Hen's Eyes,* a chiller well calculated to hold you in a state of aspic.

Also in the September AMAZING will be the concluding instalment of *The Man Who Had No Brains* and a fact-fiction feature by Frank Tinsley, who invites you for a ride in his ingenious Mooncar.

Plus as many short stories as we can squeeze in. And our regular features. The September AMAZING will be on sale at your newsstand August 10. Place your order now.



By S. E. COTTS

FEAST or famine seems to be the phrase that best characterizes the book reviewer's lot. Some months there is a vain search for a single spark of inspiration among the hundreds of pages to be devoured. Other times there are many books with merit, so many that one cannot write at length about each one, much as they may deserve it. This month falls into the last category, a situation that is not all to the good. I received three volumes of short stories, any one of which would have been ample to grace a single column. Instead, I am forced to deal with them all at the same time. Though I am grateful for such largesse, I apologize for the fact that I will undoubtedly slight one at the expense of another.

THE VOICE OF THE DOLPHINS. *By Leo Szilard. 122 pp. Simon and Schuster. Hardcover: $3. Paper: $1.*

This is a volume of short stories, the title one and four others, which represent a publishing event of the first magnitude and a living monument to the ideas and ideals of one of our greatest scientists. In case there are any readers not familiar with Dr. Szilard let me briefly state that he holds, together with the late Enrico Fermi, the first patent issued on the atomic chain reaction, that he has been a leader in the fight to secure international control of atomic energy, and that he recently was awarded the Einstein medal for achievement in the natural sciences. He is now ill with cancer, but seems not to have curtailed his work schedule or slackened his efforts in behalf of peace.

Dr. Szilard has a distinctive way of storytelling and the result is uniquely his own. For one, his style is lean, clear and above all logical. He starts with a fact or a non-fiction situation and on-

ly so gradually, so subtly moves us into the realm of fiction that it is impossible to be sure when that boundary has really been crossed. In the second place, where most writers use exaggeration as a tool to create satire, Dr. Szilard proves to be even more devastating by sticking to the truth. The mirror he holds up to mankind in general, and science and government in particular, is so highly polished that he has no need of the magnifying devices most writers would have employed.

The title story represents the author's most extended effort. Briefly, this is a report of events that occur between 1960 and 1985. During this time, scientists discover how to communicate with dolphins, and having done so, find the dolphins more intelligent than they are. Thereafter the dolphins make the decisions which the scientists then carry out.

In one of this country's leading periodicals, a reviewer chides Dr. Szilard for inconsistencies in this story, saying that they reflect portions of his personal philosophy that he has not completely thought out yet. He also roundly criticizes what seems to him, Dr. Szilard's search for farfetched explanations without recognizing the existence of obvious ones. Without commenting on the colossal conceit of a critic who would doubt such an author's logic rather than his own sanity, it seems incredible to me that he could have so misunderstood the intent of the story. Of course these things he mentions are present and in more than one place, too. But they are there on purpose, an integral part of Dr. Szilard's plan. If that poor misguided critic is so perturbed by not knowing what things to take seriously and what to take lightly, I suggest it is because he has become so accustomed to the flat stale ideas permeating modern fiction that the highly stimulating carbonation of Dr. Szilard's imagination has given him a hangover. Perhaps, if he were to consider science fiction worthy of his time regularly instead of only when a special treat comes along, his capacity would increase. Meanwhile, for those of you who have learned to hold your liquor, I recommend a generous shot of Dr. Szilard. In my opinion, exhilaration is guaranteed.

FAR OUT. *By Damon Knight. 282 pp. Simon and Schuster. $3.95.*

This collection, by one of science fiction's "mighty men" is, in a word—superb. It contains thirteen stories and there's not a clinker in the lot which must certainly be some kind of world's record. If I am not able to spend

so much time discussing them as my accolade would seem to warrant, it is because Dr. Szilard, as a newcomer, had to be shown he was welcome to come again, whereas Mr. Knight, an old friend of sf, knows he can come as often as he wants and have the run of the house.

In addition to the stories, the book contains a real rarity, an introduction by Anthony Boucher who used to be a good neighbor until he gave up space for the dubious privilege of being a reviewer of crime and mystery books.

The various tales have hardly anything in common except their quality. The locales vary and so do the moods. Though all the stories are excellent, there are three that I especially liked which exemplify the variety. One is, essentially, a humorous tale about a small-time crook who comes into possession of a machine that paints masterpieces. Another is a serious, evocative piece about a fifteen year old girl who is left on an asteroid to prospect for valuable ores, and the soul-shattering experience that befalls her there. The third is about the last man and woman left in the world, a common enough subject but with a different treatment here. The focus is not on the catastrophe which has eliminated the rest of mankind, but on the way a ludicrous personal problem defeats the modest goal of the last couple.

I give these few samples only to illustrate that no subject or treatment of one is inherently good or bad; to show that a trifle can become worthwhile in the hands of a craftsman while a great idea can flop for the novice; to show that even the trick ending (normally one of my pet peeves) can succeed if it is adequately prepared in the rest of the story.

So, hats off to Mr. Knight, who, with foolhardy courage, has assembled such a fine collection that I do not see how he can possibly hope to equal it.

TIGER BY THE TAIL. *By Alan E. Nourse. 184 pp. David McKay Company, Inc. $3.50.*

If Alan Nourse does not succeed quite as well as Damon Knight, still his batting average is high enough to make most ballplayers green with envy. This is a collection of nine stories which (like Knight's) have an extraordinary range of subject and treatment. They run the gamut from a spoof on anthropology to the most incredible ordeals of mind and body. There is a further interesting comparison with the Knight book. I just discussed one of the latter's stories, which was about the last couple on Earth, as a combination of the ludicrous and the tragic. Mr.

Nourse has a story that is very similar in effect, though in no sense imitative. It is a tale of the world coming to an end in a most grimly funny fashion.

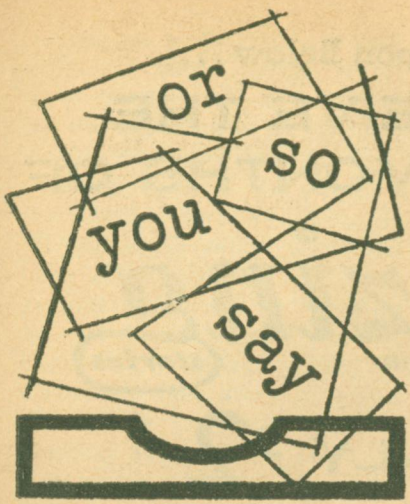
In my opinion, the finest of the works included here is "Brightside Crossing" which had been previously available in a general anthology. I was impressed by it when I read it then, and my feeling has been reconfirmed. This story of man's attempt to cross the side of Mercury which always faces the sun ranks with all the great stories about the dauntlessness of the human spirit. It would be hard indeed to surpass the "you-are-there" feeling Nourse evokes. He does it with such fidelity that it is hard to believe in it as fiction. The comparison that most easily comes to mind is some true adventure such as the account of the conquest of Mt. Everest. Such vividness is one of the marks of a superior writer.

THE JOY MAKERS. *By James Gunn. 160 pp. Bantam Books. Paper: 35¢.*

The millenium has arrived. No longer is happiness on a hit or miss basis. It is assured, constant, the law of the land. For happiness has become a science, and the hedonist, its practitioner. He attends to all needs and wants—a sort of mother, father, priest, and psychoanalyst rolled into one, plus a few other functions the aforementioned never thought of having.

This is a very ingenious treatment of a subject that has had its share of hard knocks at the hands of writers less skilled than Mr. Gunn. When the book opens, the purveyors of pleasure have just arrived and people have begun to convert. It is told by an arch-materialistic, ultra-cynical businessman, Joshua Hunt, who thinks Hedonics is just a smart ad man's brain child. In the second part, the story is narrated by one of the Hedonists (everyone is assigned to one). Not only has the whole populace embraced the science of pleasure, the whole world is governed by it. In the last part, the inevitable dissenters have fled to Venus. The narrator is D'glas M'Gregor, a member of the Venus colony who has been sent to Earth to see whether it might hold the answers to some troubles that are beginning to plague Venus.

The plot is further enlivened by a rich sprinkling of quotes from famous thinkers, writers, etc. These mind-teasers occur at key points in the development of the story. They are so relevant in every case as to be living proof that no matter how crazy your ideas, or untenable your position on an issue, you can find some source to back you up—even if it is out of context.



Dear Editor:

There are a few defects that I find apparent in the science fiction stories published in your magazine.

First, the majority of the sf writers imagine that America or the Western countries will rule supreme in space. In almost all the sf stories I've read in AMAZING there has been no mention of the Russians in space. And events have certainly proved that they are ahead of America in space technology. They launched the first artificial satellite and now they have launched the first man into space. Even President Kennedy admitted that America was behind Russia in the space race.

Secondly, in the world of, say, 2,000 years hence, as depicted by about 99% of American sf writers, America is the leading World Power. However, this is not supported by past history. Rome ruled the world 2,000 years ago but today Italy is now a fifth rate power. Even England who had a vast Empire at the beginning of the century and was the leading power is now a poor third.

Can you imagine America really being any different from these examples?

These are two points of many which should be obvious to all non-American and even some American readers.

Brent Phillips
46 Barbados Road,
Federation Park,
Port-of-Spain
Trinidad, West Indies

• *Very true, but perhaps you are generalizing just a little bit too freely. I believe a majority of "future" stories postulate either a World Government or a two-power-dominated planet rather than a purely American world. As for men in space, I guess some sf writers are victims of the paranoiac chauvinism that often afflicts human beings.*

Dear Editor:

Is John Baxter kidding? "And let's face it—science fiction has so far failed to produce a writer

who could even qualify as the poorest hack out in the cold hard world of 'serious' literature." Look, let's face it, sf writers HAVE produced great mundane stuff. Chuck Beaumont's "The Intruder" was a best-seller. Poul Anderson's "Perish By The Sword" went over big. Ray Bradbury did ok with "Dandelion Wine." If you want a list, John, I'll send you one. I can think of a dozen other 'serious' works right now without even trying. Doesn't that prove that sf writers rank with the 'modern' writers?

Dave Locke
P.O. Box 207
Indian Lake
New York

• *Well, you make an interesting point, but isn't there still a difference between "serious" literature and "mundane" stuff. "Mundane" can mean two things. It can mean "of the world, worldly" or it can mean "ordinary." Perhaps Baxter merely meant sf has not yet produced a Hemingway or a Tolstoi. Or have you one such on your list?*

Dear Editor:

Well, I've finally gotten around to writing you this long neglected letter. To begin with, since your change to the new AMAZING, your covers have improved tremendously, if nothing else has. The April issue was neatly done but the only thing I enjoyed was the Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Almost as a rule, you run some of the best short and short-short stories in all sfdom, but your novelets and novellas are pretty mediocre. Your serials are also of exceptionally high quality, but those in FANTASTIC are even better.

I thought your classic reprint department would be a good thing, at first, but now the only interesting thing is the small biography of either the author or the story itself, written by Sam Moskowitz. By the way, I just finished the article on Robert Heinlein; it was very enjoyable and informative, as I expected. I also read most of the series you ran in FANTASTIC.

Now then, I want to say, I like serials. They have more time to better develop the plot, and characters; they also give the reader time to try to guess what's going to happen next. ("World of the Imperium" was a beautiful example of the perfect serial.)

I, personally, don't think you should change the name of AMAZING to something more conservative because, when the Joe Public goes to the newsstand, which isn't too often anymore, he is looking for *sex* and nothing else. It is only the already devoted science fiction reader who is personally introduced to an sf maga-

zine who buys and eventually gets a subscription to it. This applies only to the very first magazine of course.

I once got my grimy little hand on a very old issue of IMAGINATION which among other things included five pages of "Fandora's Box." It was the most boring five pages I think I have ever read and I've read some pretty boring stuff in my fifteen years.

I hope someone out there in sfdom will please start corresponding with me. My one and only sf friend has moved away and now I'm all alone.

Bill Pearce
789 Ponce de Leon Avenue
Macon, Georgia

• *Who said anything about a change in name? Not us. And who said anything about getting sexy? Not us. And who said anything about running fanzine reviews? Not us. And if nobody writes to you, at least we will.*

Dear Editor:

It has been a good two or three years since I've pulled out the trusty typer to take to task either an issue of AMAZING or FANTASTIC. The last time I had a letter printed, I believe it said something like, "AMAZING missed excellence by a mere fraction of a point." This remark prompted a few correspondents of mine to say that they'd sure as hell hate to see what I considered punk.

To be truthful, I wrote to get my name in print rather than because I felt either AMAZING or FANTASTIC to be the *ne plus ultra* of science fiction (be-sure-to-spell-it-with-a-capital-'L') Literature. And altho I am not about to make the gungho and gosh-wow statements of yesteryear, I really do think it's about time to compliment you, and this time in all sincerity.

I think that both magazines have seen a considerable rise in general readability—enough so, in fact, that I no longer hound the newsstands for occasional copies, but have become a full-fledged subscriber (sound of trumpets, roll of drums, all men called to attention)—and I have traced this back to the beginning of Cele Goldsmith's reign (of terror?).

Might I voice a late bit of enthusiasm for Poul Anderson's novel, "A Plague Of Masters," which appeared in FANTASTIC just a few issues ago? Poul shows quite ably, here, that action/adventure stories and well-written stories are not necessarily two different things. There's a touch of humor (such as where Our Hero is sitting in the den of his enemies, gayly scarfing up on their goodies, answering questions with inarticulate noises), some good characterization, and

good reader identification, which is to say that, at least, Our Hero knows which side his swash is buckled on. In my opinion, a truly fine piece.

You are prompted to ask, at one point, "Is science fiction fandom a useful place for beginners?" Having published a little under 50 issues of various fan magazines, for several amateur press associations, science fiction clubs, and science fiction fandom at large, I think I might be able to throw a little light on the subject.

The answer, after a lot of deliberation, seems to be both yes and no. The fact that fandom is useful to a beginner is easily proven by your own magazine; two of your artists (George Barr and Dan Adkins) are active fans. Dan Adkins was editor of a beautifully (largely self-) illustrated dittoed fanzine titled SATA ILLUSTRATED; he later co-edited it with Bill Pearson. As a matter of fact, it was Bill Pearson, I believe, in a later edition of SATA, who discovered George Barr. Barr's illustrations have graced the pages of many fanzines since. And, heck, Sam Moskowitz has been a fan since the year One, or thereabouts. He's just a member of FAPA now (as am I), but it's still fannish activity.

It is equally provable by the amount of professional writers and editors it has produced and will probably continue to produce; such names as Donald A. Wollheim, Larry Shaw, Ray Palmer, Bob Lowndes, Harlan Ellison, Bob Silverberg, Ray Bradbury, Bob (Wilson) Tucker, Algis Budrys and the late Cyril Kornbluth are just some of the bigger names fandom has produced; and the others, those who just appear from time to time, would take pages to list.

Too, since fandom is a *communicative* hobby, one develops the ability to express one's thoughts easily; and since writing is 90% of fandom, one also receives plenty of practice in writing. The type of writing is not necessarily a matter of concern. It's also true that many people in fandom are fine critics, and despite what many say, criticism *does* help a writer.

To cover the other, or "no", side of the question, there's the fact that it's *not* sure-fire. There are a lot of fans who have tried to write professionally who have never made a sale; they are still fans. And fanzines are not (as many people seem to think) little science fiction magazines. I have seen—and put out myself, I must admit—fanzines that have gone through entire issues without so much as mentioning science fiction. The more serious element of fandom seem to think there must be some lack of mental capacity not to devote oneself to

discussing just how one hack differs from another, and instead find other things worth talking about; they say that anyone who does not fill their fanzines with solid devotion to science fiction (spell-it-with-a-capital-'L') Literature are "betraying the Cause of Science Fiction," and that we are "tearing down everything we [the serious and constructive element of fandom] have tried so hard to build up." These people deserve the name of *fan* in its original meaning; a shortening of the term "fanatic." They live and breathe only for the Literature of Science Fiction; they feel it is their *duty* to support all prozines and to bring Science Fiction to the place where it belongs, in front of the eyes of the Average Man where it will be recognized as The Only True Form Of Literature.

My reply to these people is usually quite short, quite simple, and serves to express my opinion exactly. Unfortunately, this reply could not be printed in a family-type magazine. I am a science fiction fan, and I read science fiction because I happen to enjoy it, not because I think it is a Holy Cause. If a magazine does not please me, I'll show my displeasure by not putting any money from my pocket into the pocket of whoever edits it; and whether Joe Blow or Fenimore Artichoke ever pick up and read a science fiction magazine is of no concern to me, and will neither increase nor decrease my enjoyment of science fiction *per se*.

I was anticipating writing this letter when the Anniversary issue of AMAZING was announced; rubbing my grubby little paws in fiendish glee I anticipated being able to trounce the old saw about the "Sense Of Wonder"—which is, I believe, a Moskowitzian turn of phrase—being produced by old-time sf.

But only two pieces in that issue failed to completely hold my interest. One was disappointing—"Devolution," by Edmond Hamilton; and this is probably because Hamilton is best at Space Opera (which isn't necessarily a bad thing, because with Hamilton, Space Opera is usually fun) and this piece seemed rather trivial. The other piece I can't really criticize; it was the John Carter piece and I didn't care for it because I never was interested in the high-flowered melodramatic incident-upon-incident style of Burroughs. Still, that's a personal prejudice which is only barely valid as a criticism.

I expected to be able to trounce Bradbury, but this piece, "I, Rocket," one of his earlier pieces, is better told than many of his present-day tales which are overwritten to an extreme and leave the reader so style-conscious that it becomes difficult for him

to follow the line of the story.

I expected Keller to be good, because altho there is such a thing as a poor Keller yarn, there is no such thing as a poor yarn by Keller . . . if you know what I mean. "A Flying Fool" did not leave me disappointed; it was truly one of the high points of the issue, as I fully expected it to be.

One thing that did surprise me was the Buck Rogers piece, because I didn't expect to enjoy it, even fought a little against trying to enjoy it. But it was hopeless trying, it *was* an enjoyable story, tho 'tis somewhat croggling (to say the least) to realize that the next time someone asks me if I really *enjoy* "that crazy Buck Rogers stuff" I'll be forced to answer yes.

Eando Binder's "I, Robot" stands out as a remarkable piece in itself; I've read it, now, four times, and it's stood up with each reading.

Rich Brown
Box 1136
Tyndall AFB, Fla.

• *Well, that takes care of everything for the past several months, and may start enough controversy to overwhelm our letter col space for the next few.*

Dear Editor:

I have been a silent reader of sf for most of my young life. Last year, I brought my first copy of AMAZING and since then, I have become one of your most devoted fans. Every once in a while, people like to get in their two cents. I am no different, so here goes.

What happened to Jack Sharkey's wonderful crossword puzzle? I found that I had just another reason for liking one of the best sf mags around. I looked forward to the one that I hoped you would publish in your June mag but alas and alack, no crossword puzzle did my eyes behold!

When your May and June mag. came out, I devoured them. (Such is what always happens when I find out about some good reading dealing with sf.) The first part of your serial was quite good, but I did not care for the last part. On the whole "The Planet of Shame" was about average. I have read much better, the very first one "The Last Vial" for instance, and I have read much worse.

Please dear editor, under no circumstances, stop publishing the serials. I disagree with Mr. Sam Jason when he said in your June mag "I know the majority of sf readers dislike serials." I agree with you when you tell Mr. Jason that "the best stories are long—too long to run complete in one issue." I don't think that the majority of sf readers

dislike serials as long as they are good. If Mr. Jason is an avid sf fan like myself, he would know that no matter how long or how short a sf story is, as long as it is good, you will always find the true sf fan reading it. (Whether it be in serial form or not)

Mr. Jason, I spoke up—others who feel the way I do, will also speak up. Mr. Jason, you are the one who is in the minority.

Phyllis Brodsky
3123 Glenwood Rd.
Brooklyn 10, N. Y.

• *We never said the crossword was going to be a regular feature; 'twas you who leaped to conclusions. As for serials, we've convinced ourselves—and been convinced by reader response—that we should continue to run them, mixed occasionally, with a novel, complete-in-one-issue.*

Dear Editor:

Please add my salute to the many others commending Schomburg for his cover illustion of "What Need of Man?" on your February issue. That cover struck me so forcefully that I bought a copy and have not missed an issue of AMAZING since. I am not over-emotional or overly attached to animals (at least not in an SPCA fashion), but I was very nearly moved to tears by the pathetic plight of that little simian. The sheer hopelessness of his situation!

I hope Mr. Schomburg will not mind, but I do have one small criticism to make. Unless I am mistaken, he has invented a new type of monkey! It could have been a chimp but for the prehensile tail (found only on South and Central American monkeys). Or it could have been a new world monkey but for the body shape and the large ears. So it would seem to be a cross between a primate and a lesser, Western Hemisphere monkey, which is, I believe, genetically impossible. Perhaps it was merely a symbolic representation of the concept "monkey." At any rate, I hasten to add that this technical error, if it is an error, detracted not a whit from the impact and appeal of Mr. Schomburg's cover.

Keep up the "classic reprints!" They have been greatly enjoyed and appreciated. And let's have more such covers in hopes that other stray AMAZING fans may be attracted back to the fold.

Mrs. John Robin Hood
P. O. Box 551
Bradenton, Florida

• *Let's settle for a symbolic monkey. Or perhaps the radiation in the Van Allen belts works faster than we think.*

(continued on page 146)

SHOPPING GUIDE
Classified

Rate: 25¢ per word including name and address. Minimum 10 words. Send orders and remittance to AMAZING STORIES, One Park Avenue, New York City 16, New York. Attention Martin Lincoln.

FOR SALE

WHY Pay High Prices? Buy wholesale and Save 2/3! Catalog $1.00. The P.X. Vandalia, Ohio.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

SPECIALISTS: Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Wierd Fiction. Books, pocketbooks, magazines. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, 71 Third Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

FANTASY & SF BOOKS & Mags lowest prices, list free. Werewolf Bookshop, 7055M Shannon Road, Verona, Pa.

BOOKS, Pocketbooks, magazines. Tremendous stock, reasonable prices. Lists on request. Science-Fiction and Fantasy. Publications, 78-04 Jamaica Avenue, Woodhaven 21, N. Y.

BACK Issue Magazines, Books. Free Catalog. Gerry De La Ree, 277 Howland, River Edge, N. J.

BOOKS—All 10¢, 2000 titles, all subjects, catalog free. Cosmat, Clayton, Ga.

BACK Issue, Science Fiction, Magazines and Books. Pocket Editions 5 for $1.15. Free Lists. John E. Koestner, 2124 Rene St., Brooklyn 37, N. Y.

WANTED TO BUY

QUICKSILVER, Platinum, Silver, Gold. Ores analyzed. Free Circular. Mercury Terminal, Norwood, Massachusetts.

PHOTO FINISHING

PHOTOMURALS Individually Made Any Size Or Color Your Negative or Choose From Our Thousands. Brochure 50¢. Al Greene Associates 1333 South Hope Street, Los Angeles 15, California.

COLOR SLIDES

BEAUTIFUL Chinese Girls on Colour Picture Post Cards. Eight Cards $1. Mrs. Douglas Taylor, Box 103, RRI, Orleans, Ontario, Canada.

STAMPS AND COINS

GIGANTIC Collection Free! Includes triangles, early United States, animals, commemoratives. British Colonies, high value pictorials, etc. Complete collection plus big illustrated magazine all Free. Send 5¢ for postage. Gray Stamp Company, Dept. Z2, Toronto, Canada.

MORE Stamps For Less Money! Bargain Lot: Packets, Sets, Rare Stamps, Gifts $1. Giant Assortment $5. High Value Packet $3. Persile 436 N. Y. Ave., Brooklyn 25, N. Y.

SELLING entire personal stamp collection. All foreign. Good condition. Assorted packets of 50—25¢ and self-addressed, stamped envelope. Popular Electronics, Box 107, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York.

BINOCULARS AND TELESCOPES

SCIENCE Bargains—Request Free Giant Catalog "CJ"—144 pages—Astronomical Telescopes, Microscopes, Lenses, Binoculars, Kits, Parts. War surplus bargains. Edmund Scientific Co., Barrington, New Jersey.

PRINTING

REAL Quality Low Cost Printing! Peerless 266 Dean St. Brooklyn 17, New York

RECORDS

ADULT Party Record and Catalog: $1.00. DRC—11024 Magnolia, No. Hollywood, California.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

COMPLETE Your High School at home in spare time with 64-year-old school. Texts furnished. No classes. Diploma. Information booklet free. American School, Dept. XB35, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37, Ill.

PERSONALS

ASTROLOGER—Consultant: Have You Problems? Advice and 2 Questions Answered. $2.00, Full Birthdate. Bryant, P. O. Box 268, Raleigh, North Carolina.

. . . OR SO YOU SAY

(continued from page 144)

Dear Editor:

Your June issue was simply superb. All the stories were good, and most were excellent. The classic reprint series is a fine idea, and is turning out better than I had expected.

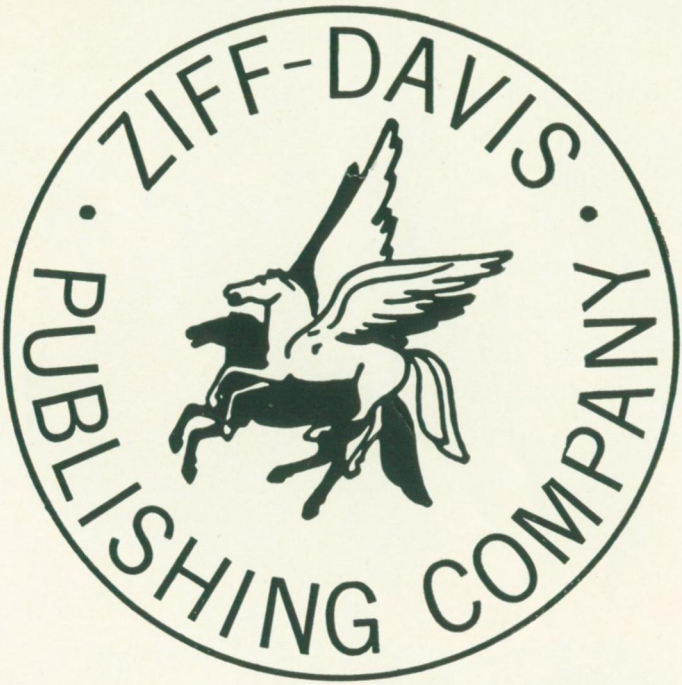
Your latest sequel, "The Planet of Shame," was absolutely masterful. Bruce Elliot can't be a new writer with such a work of art, can he? The novel reminded me slightly of Dr. McClatchie's "The Last Vial," not because it was similar in plot or setting, it wasn't, but because they both had a bit of biology thrown in here and there, and you know what else.

Mr. Moskowitz did an excellent job on writing the profile on Robert A. Heinlein, but I was slightly disappointed to see he followed so closely to Mr. Heinlein's writing career. When I first heard of the profile, I expected to see at least a column on some of his other interesting experiences. For instance, on the jacket of Mr. Heinlein's *Door into Summer*, I found, "He once owned a silver mine, and failed to sell it because the prospective buyer was tommygunned the night before. He learned to play chess before he could read. He has known eight murderers socially. And at one point in his career, he went down in a diving suit and had a tough time getting back up."

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

● *The lives of most sf writers would provide enough color for a month of Sunday painters, but we are limited in Space, and Sam is under orders to concentrate on what, why, and how the writer writes.*

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.



THIS

SYMBOL

IS YOUR

ASSURANCE OF

QUALITY—LEADERSHIP—APPEAL

"Concentrate, don't think that word. *Esper*—the word formed in his brain and he concentrated harder on the features of the man sitting opposite him: thick neck, heavy shoulders, small ears, squat . . . Anything to create a mind shield."

(See *The Man Who Had No Brains*)