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By Philip José Farmer

HEN'S EYES

By Brian Aldiss

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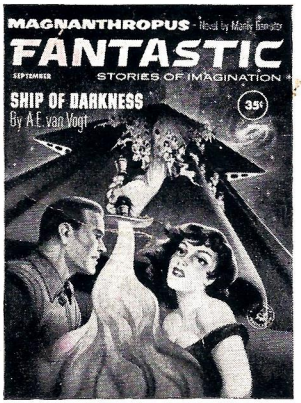

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EDITORIAL

WELL, we've always said you have to take a little bit of the bitter with the sweet, and sure enough we are once again in the process of being proven right.

A few weeks back the Martin Co.—which for some years has been simulating space flights to collect data for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—made a blood-curdling pronouncement. They said women will make better spaceship pilots than men.

At the company's plant hundreds of men and women have gotten behind the mocked-up control panel of a spaceship and "driven" millions of miles through the Great Black. A typical test, for example, is to operate controls that simulate the maneuvers which would jockey two space-craft to a rendezvous point in space.

"We find," said the program's director, "that women usually catch on to the space rendezvous controls faster than men. Somehow secretaries get the manual feel of space driving immediately. Possibly they concentrate on the simple maneuver with no side thoughts on the scientific problems involved."

Without getting into any nasty asides about how women might be just naturally better when it came to effecting a rendezvous, we can conjure up a horrifying picture of the weekend spaceways, where women drivers, secure in their simple maneuvering, are making the galactic traffic lines a mess, weaving in and out, slowing down and speeding up, with no side thoughts of the scientific problems involved—like keeping out of other people's way, and signaling properly when they transform into sub-space.

* * *

A EUGENICIST who died recently made a rather interesting stipulation in his will: His two sons will inherit a sub-

(Continued on page 33)

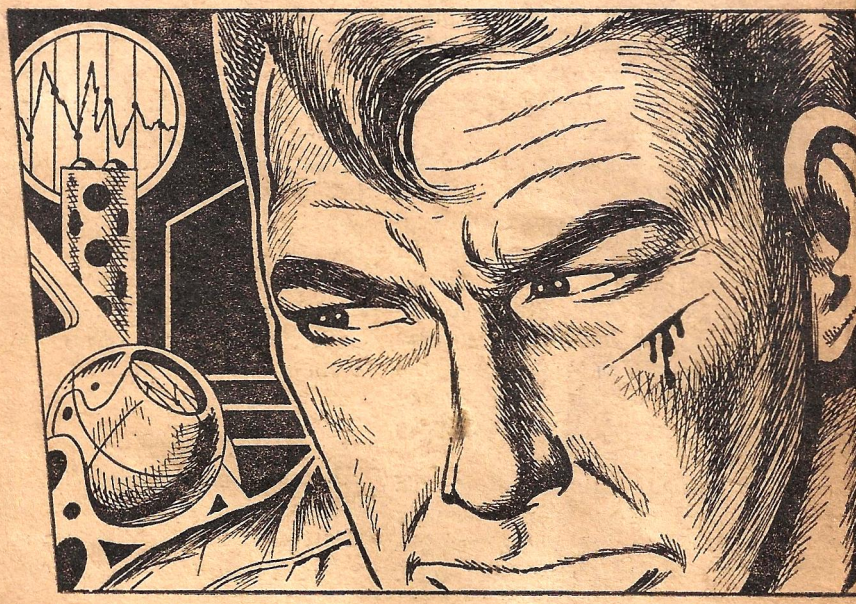
Earth was dying. Possibly the only human beings left in the Universe were those on the Moon. On this last outpost of humanity, the age-old controversy between ideologies continued to tear the human race apart, as each group prepared to unleash the deadly . . .

Tongues of the Moon

By PHILIP JOSE FARMER

FIREFLIES on the dark meadow of Earth . . .

The men and women looking up through the dome in the center of the crater of Eratosthenes were too stunned to cry out, and



Illustrated by ADKINS

some did not understand all at once the meaning of those pinpoints on the shadowy face of the new Earth, the lights blossoming outwards, then dying. So bright they could be seen through the cloudmasses covering a large part of Europe. So bright they could be located as London, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Leningrad, Rome, Reykjavik, Athens, Cairo . . .

Then, a flare near Moscow that spread out and out and out . . .

Some in the dome recovered more quickly than others. Scone and Broward, two of the Soviet North American officers present at the reception in honor of the South Atlantic Axis officers, acted swiftly enough to defend themselves.

Even as the Axes took off their caps and pulled small automatics and flat bombs from clips within the caps, the two Americans reached for the guns in their holsters.

Too late to do them much good if the Argentineans and South Africans nearest them had aimed at them. The Axes had no shock on their faces; they must have known what to expect. And their weapons were firing before the fastest of the Soviets could reach for the butts of their guns.

But the Axes must have had orders to kill the highest ranking Soviets first. At these the first fire was concentrated.

Marshal Kosselevsky had half-turned to his guest, Marshal Ramírez-Armstrong. His mouth was open and working, but no words came from it. Then, his eyes opened even wider as he saw the stubby gun in the Argentinean's hand. His own hand rose in a defensive, wholly futile, gesture.

Ramírez-Armstrong's gun twanged three times. Other Axes' bullets also struck the Russian. Kosselevsky clutched at his paunch, and he fell face forward. The .22 calibers did not have much energy or penetrate deeply into the flesh. But they exploded on impact; they did their work well enough.

Scone and Broward took advantage of not being immediate targets. Guns in hand, they dived for the protection of a man-tall bank of instruments. Bullets struck the metal cases and exploded, for, in a few seconds, the Axes had accomplished their primary mission and were now out to complete their secondary.

Broward felt a sting on his cheek as he rolled behind the bank. He put his hand on his cheek, and, when he took it away, he saw his hand covered with blood. But his probing finger felt only a shallow of flesh. He forgot about the wound. Even if it had been more serious, he would have had no time to take care of it.

A South African stepped

around the corner of the bank, firing as he came.

Broward shot twice with his .45. The dark-brown face showered into red and lost its human shape. The body to which it was now loosely attached curved backwards and fell on the floor.

"BROWARD!" called Scone above the twang and boom of the guns and the wharoop! of a bomb. "Can you see anything? I can't even stick my head around the corner without being shot at."

Broward looked at Scone, who was crouched at the other end of the bank. Scone's back was to Broward, but Scone's head was twisted far enough for him to see Broward out of the corner of his eye.

Even at that moment, when Broward's thoughts should have excluded everything but the fight, he could not help comparing Scone's profile to a face cut out of rock. The high bulbous forehead, thick bars of bone over the eyes, Dantesque nose, thin lips, and chin jutting out like a shelf of granite, more like a natural formation which happened to resemble a chin than anything which had taken shape in a human womb.

Ugly, massive, but strong. Nothing of panic or fear in that face; it was as steady as his voice.

Old Gibraltar-face, thought Broward for perhaps the hundredth time. But this time he did not feel dislike.

"I can't see any more than you —Colonel," he said.

Scone, still squatting, shifted around until he could bring one eye to bear fully on Broward. It was a pale blue, so pale it looked empty, unhuman.

"Colonel?"

"Now," said Broward. "A bomb got General Mansfield and Colonels Omato and Ingrass. That gives you a fast promotion, sir."

"We'll both be promoted above this bank if an Axe lobs a bomb over," said Scone. "We have to get out of here."

"To where?"

Scone frowned—granite wrinkling—and said, "It's obvious the Axes want to do more than murder a few Soviets. They must plan on getting control of the bonephones. I know I would if I were they. If they can capture the control center, every Soviet on the Moon—except for the Chinese—is at their mercy. So . . ."

"We make a run for the BR?"

"I'm not ordering you to come with me," said Scone. "That's almost suicide. But you will give me a covering fire."

"I'll go with you, Colonel."

Scone glanced at the caduceuses on Broward's lapels, and he said, "We'll need your profession-

al help after we clean out the Axes. No."

"You need my amateurish help now," said Broward. "As you see"—he jerked his thumb at the nearly headless Zulu— "I can handle a gun. And if we don't get to the bonephone controls first, life won't be worth living. Besides, I don't think the Axes intend taking any prisoners."

"You're right," said Scone. But he seemed hesitant.

"You're wondering why I'm falling in so quickly with your plan to wreck the control center?" said Broward. "You think I'm a Russky agent?"

"I didn't say I intended to wreck the transmitters," said Scone. "No. I know what you are. Or, I think I do. You're not a Russky. You're a . . ."

Scone stopped. Like Broward, he felt the rock floor quiver, then start shaking. And a low rumbling reached them, coming up through their feet before their ears detected it.

Scone, instead of throwing himself flat on the floor—an instinctive but useless maneuver—jumped up from his squatting position.

"Now! Now! The others'll be too scared to move!"

BROWARD rose, though he wanted to cling to the floor. Directly below them—or, perhaps, to the side but still underground—a white-hot "tongue" was blasting a narrow tunnel through the rock. Behind it, also hidden within the rock, in a shaft which the vessel must have taken a long time to sink without being detected, was a battlebird. Only a large ship could carry the huge generators required to drive a tongue that would damage a base. A tongue, or snake, as it was sometimes called. A flexible beam of "straightened-out" photons, the ultimate development of the laser.

And when the tongue reached the end of the determined tunnel, then the photons would be "unsprung". And all the energy crammed into the compressed photons would dissipate.

"Follow me!" said Scone, and he began running.

Broward took a step, halted in amazement, called out, "The suits . . . other way!"

Then, he resumed running after Scone. Evidently, the colonel was not concerned about the dome cracking wide open. His only thought was for the bonephone controls.

Broward expected to be cut down under a storm of bullets. But the room was silent except for the groans of some wounded. And the ever-increasing rumble from deep under.

The survivors of the fight were too intent on the menace probing beneath them to pay attention to

the two runners—if they saw them.

That is, until Scone bounded through the nearest exit from the dome in a great leap afforded by the Moon's weak gravity. He almost hit his head on the edge of the doorway.

Then, somebody shot at Broward. But his body, too, was flying through the exit, his legs pulled up, and the three bullets passed beneath him and blew holes in the rock wall ahead of him.

Broward slammed into the wall and fell back on the floor. Though half-stunned, he managed to roll past the corner, out of line of fire, into the hallway. He rose, breathing hard, and checked to make sure he had not broken his numbed wrists and hands, which had cushioned much of his impact against the wall. And he was thankful that the tongues needed generators too massive to be compacted into hand weapons. If the Axes had been able to smuggle tonguers into the dome, they could have wiped out every Soviet on the base.

The rumble became louder. The rock beneath his feet shook. The walls quivered like jelly. Then . . .

Not the ripping upwards of the floor beneath his feet, the ravening blast opening the rock and lashing out at him with sear of fire and blow of air to burn him and crush him against the ceiling at the same time.

From somewhere deep and off to one side was an explosion. The rock swelled. Then, subsided.

SILENCE.

Only his breathing.

For about six seconds while he thought that the Russian ships stationed outside the base must have located the sunken Axis vessel and destroyed it just before it blew up the base.

From the dome, a hell's concerto of small-gun fire.

Broward ran again, leaping over the twisted and shattered bodies of Russians and Axes. Here the attacking officers had been met by Soviet guards, and the two groups had destroyed each other.

Far down the corridor, Scone's tall body was hurtling along, taking the giant steps only a longtime Lunie could safely handle. He rounded a corner, was gone down a branching corridor.

Broward, following Scone, entered two more branches, and then stopped when he heard the boom of a .45. Two more booms. Silence. Broward cautiously stuck his head around the corner.

He saw two Russian soldiers on the floor, their weapons close to their lifeless hands. Down the hall, Scone was running.

Broward did not understand.

He could only surmise that the Russians had been so surprised by Scone that they had fired, or tried to fire, before they recognized the North American uniform. And Scone had shot in self-defense.

But the corridors were well lit with electroluminescent panels. All three should have seen at once that none wore the silver of Argentina or the scarlet and brown of the South Africans. So. . . ?

He did not know. Scone could tell him, but Broward would have trouble catching up with him.

Then, once more, he heard the echoes of a .45 bouncing around the distant corner of the hall.

When Broward rounded the turn as cautiously as he had the previous one, he saw two more dead Russians. And he saw Scone rifling the pockets of the officer of the two.

"Scone!" he shouted so the man would not shoot him, too, in a frenzy. "It's Broward!"

Coming closer, he said, "What-'re you doing?"

Scone rose from the officer with a thin plastic cylinder about a decimeter long in one hand. With the other hand, he pointed his .45 at Broward's solar plexus.

"I'm going to blow up the controls and the transmitters," he said. "What did you think?"

Choking, Broward said, "You-'re not working for the Axis?"

He did not believe Scone was. But, in his astonishment, he could only think of that as a reason for Scone's behavior. Despite his accusation about Scone's intentions, he had not really believed the man meant to do more than insure that the controls did not fall into Axis hands.

Scone said, "Those swine! No! I'm just making sure that the Axes will not be able to use the bonephones if they do seize this office. Besides, I have never liked the idea of being under Russian control. These hellish devices . . ."

Broward pointed at the corpses. "Why?"

"They had their orders," said Scone. "Which were to allow no one into the control room without proper authorization. I didn't want to argue and so put them on their guard. I had to do what was expedient."

Scone glared at Broward, and he said, "Expediency is going to be the rule for this day. No matter who suffers."

Broward said, "You don't have to kill me, too. I am an American. If I could think as coolly as you, I might have done the same thing myself."

He paused, took a deep breath, and said, "Perhaps, you didn't do this on the spur of the moment. Perhaps, you planned this long before. If such a situation as this gave you a chance."

"We haven't time to stand here gabbing," said Scone.

HE backed away, his gun and gaze steady on Broward. With his other hand, he felt around until the free end of the thin tube fitted into the depression in the middle of the door. He pressed in on the key, and (the correct sequence of radio frequencies activating the unlocking circuit) the door opened.

Scone motioned for Broward to precede him. Broward entered. Scone came in, and the door closed behind him.

"I thought I should kill you when we were behind the bank," said Scone. "But you weren't—as far as I had been able to determine—a Russian agent. Far from it. And you were, as you said, a fellow American. But . . ."

Broward looked at the far wall with its array on array of indicator lights, switches, pushbuttons, and slots for admission of coded cards and tapes.

He turned to Scone, and he said, "Time for us to quit being coy. I've known for a long time that you were the chief of a Nationalist underground."

For the first time since Broward had known him, Scone's face cracked wide open.

"What?"

Then, the cracks closed up, the cliff-front was solid again.

"Why didn't you report me. Or are you. . . ?"

"Not of your movement, no," said Broward. "I'm an Athenian. You've heard of us?"

"I know of them," said Scone. "A lunatic fringe. Neither Russ, Chinese, nor Yank. I had suspected that you weren't a very solid Marxist. Why tell me this?"

"I want to talk you out of destroying the controls and the transmitters," said Broward.

"Why?"

"Don't blow them up. Given time, the Russ could build another set. And we'd be under their control again. Don't destroy them. Plant a bomb which can be set off by remote control. The moment they try to use the phones to paralyze us, blow up the transmitters. That might give us time to remove the phones from our skulls with surgery. Or insulate the phones against reception. Or, maybe, strike at the Russkies. If fighting back is what you have in mind. I don't know how far your Nationalism goes."

"That might be better," said Scone, his voice flat, not betraying any enthusiasm for the plan. "Can I depend upon you and your people?"

"I'll be frank. If you intend to try for complete independence of the Russians, you'll have our wholehearted cooperation. Until we are independent."

"And after that—what then?"

"We believe in violence only after all other means have failed. Of course, mental persuasion was useless with the Russians. With fellow Americans, well . . ."

"How many people do you have at Clavius?"

Broward hesitated, then said, "Four. All absolutely dependable. Under my orders. And you?"

"More than you," said Scone. "You understand that I'm not sharing the command with you? We can't take time out to confer. We need a man who can give orders to be carried out instantly. And my word will be life or death? No argument?"

"No time now for discussions of policy. I can see that. Yes. I place myself and my people under your orders. But what about the other Americans? Some are fanatical Marxists. Some are unknown, X."

"We'll weed out the bad ones," said Scone. "I don't mean by bad the genuine Marxists. I'm one myself. I mean the non-Nationalists. If anyone wants to go to the Russians, we let them go. Or if anybody fights us, they die."

"Couldn't we just continue to keep them prisoners?"

"On the Moon? Where every mouth needs two pairs of hands to keep breathing and eating? Where even one parasite may mean eventual death for all others? No!"

Broward said, "All right. They die. I hope . . ."

"Hopes are something to be tested," said Scone. "Let's get to work. There should be plenty of components here with which to rig up a control for the bomb. And I have the bomb taped to my belly."

YOU won't have to untape your bomb," said Broward. "The transmitters are mined. So are the generators."

"How did you do it? And why didn't you tell me you'd already done it?"

"The Russians have succeeded in making us Americans distrust each other," said Broward. "Like everybody else, I don't reveal information until I absolutely have to. As to your first question, I'm not only a doctor, I'm also a physical anthropologist engaged in a Moonwide project. I frequently attend conferences at this base, stay here several sleeps. And what you did so permanently with your gun, I did temporarily with a sleep-inducing aerosol. But, now that we understand each other, let's get out."

"Not until I see the bombs you say you've planted."

Broward smiled. Then, working swiftly with a screwdriver he took from a drawer, he removed several wall-panels. Scone looked into the recesses and examined the component boards, functional

blocks, and wires which jammed the interior.

"I don't see any explosives," Scone said.

"Good," said Broward. "Neither will the Russians, unless they measure the closeness of the walls to the equipment. The explosive is spread out over the walls in a thin layer which is colored to match the original green. Also, thin strips of a chemical are glued to the walls. This chemical is temperature-sensitive. When the transmitters are operating and reach maximum radiation of heat, the strips melt. And the chemicals released interact with the explosive, detonate it."

"Ingenious," said Scone somewhat sourly. "We don't . . ." and he stopped.

"Have such stuff? No wonder. As far as I know, the detonator and explosive were made here on the Moon. In our lab at Clavius."

"If you could get into this room without being detected and could also smuggle all that stuff from Clavius, then the Russ can be beaten," said Scone.

Now, Broward was surprised. "You doubted they could?"

"Never. But all the odds were on their side. And you know what a conditioning they give us from the day we enter kindergarten."

"Yes. The picture of the all-knowing, all-powerful Russian backed by the force of destiny itself, the inevitable rolling forward and unfolding of History as expounded by the great prophet, the only prophet, Marx. But it's not true. They're human."

THEY replaced the panels and the screwdriver and left the room. Just as they entered the hall, and the door swung shut behind them, they heard the thumps of boots and shouts. Scone had just straightened up from putting the key back into the dead officer's pocket when six Russians trotted around the corner. Their officer was carrying a burp gun, the others, automatic rifles.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Scone in Russian. "Americans! USAF!"

The captain, whom both Americans had seen several times before, lowered her burper.

"It's fortunate that I recognized you," she said. "We just killed three Axes who were dressed in Russian uniforms. They shot four of my men before we cut them down. I wasn't about to take a chance you might not be in disguise, too."

She gestured at the dead men. "The Axes got them, too?"

"Yes," said Scone. "But I don't know if any Axes are in there."

He pointed at the door to the control room.

"If there were, we'd all be screaming with pain," said the

captain. "Anyway, they would have had to take the key from the officer on guard."

She looked suspiciously at the two, but Scone said, "You'll have to search him. I didn't touch him, of course."

She dropped to one knee and unbuttoned the officer's inner coatpocket, which Scone had not neglected to rebutton after replacing the key.

Rising with the key, she said, "I think you two must go back to the dome."

Scone's face did not change expression at this evidence of distrust. Broward smiled slightly.

"By the way," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"We escaped from the dome," said Broward. "We heard firing down this way, and we thought we should protect our rear before going back into the dome. We found dead Russians, but we never did see the enemy. They must have been the ones you ran into."

"Perhaps," she said. "You must go. You know the rules. No unauthorized personnel near the BR."

"No non-Russians, anyway," said Scone flatly. "I know. But this is an emergency."

"You must go," she said, raising the barrel of her gun. She did not point it at them, but they did not doubt she would.

Scone turned and strode off, Broward following. When they had turned the first corner, Scone said, "We must leave the base on the first excuse. We *have* to get back to Clavius."

"So we can start our own war?"

"Not necessarily. Just declare indpendence. The Russ may have their belly full of death."

"Why not wait until we find out what the situation on Earth is? If the Russians have any strength left on Earth, we may be crushed."

"Now!" said Scone. "If we give the Russ and the Chinese time to recover from the shock, we lose our advantage."

"Things are going too fast for me, too," said Broward. "I haven't time or ability to think straight now. But I have thought of this. Earth could be wiped out. If so, we on the Moon are the only human beings left alive in the universe. And . . ."

"There are the Martian colonies. And the Ganymedan and Mercutian bases."

"We don't know what's happened to them. Why start something which may end the entire human species? Perhaps, ideology should be subordinated for survival. We need every man and woman, every . . ."

"We must take the chance that the Russians and Chinese won't care to risk making *Homo sapiens* extinct. They'll have to cooperate, let us go free.

"We don't have time to talk. Act now; talk after it's all over."

But Scone did not stop talking. During their passage through the corridors, he made one more statement.

"The key to peace on the Moon, and to control of this situation, is the *Zemlya*."

Broward was puzzled. He knew Scone was referring to the Brobdingnagian interstellar exploration vessel which had just been built and outfitted and was now orbiting around Earth. The *Zemlya* (Russian for Earth) had been scheduled to leave within a few days for its ten year voyage to Alpha Centaurus and, perhaps, the stars beyond. What the *Zemlya* could have to do with establishing peace on the Moon was beyond Broward. And Scone did not seem disposed to explain.

Just then, they passed a full-length mirror, and Broward saw their images. Scone looked like a mountain of stone walking. And he, Broward thought, he himself looked like a man of leather. His shorter image, dark brown where the skin showed, his head shaven so the naked skull seemed to be overlaid with leather, his brown eyes contrasting with the rock-pale eyes of Scone, his lips so thick compared with Scone's, which were like a thin groove cut into granite. Leather against stone. Stone could outwear leather. But leather was more flexible.

Was the analogy, as so many, false? Or only partly true?

Broward tended to think in analogies; Scone, directly.

At the moment, a man like Scone was needed. Practical, quick reacting. But, like so many practical men, impractical when it came to long range and philosophical thinking. Not much at extrapolation beyond the immediate. Broward would follow him up to a point. Then . . .

THEY came to the entrance to the dome. Only the sound of voices came from it. Together, they stuck their heads around the side of the entrance. And they saw many dead, some wounded, a few men and women standing together near the center of the floor. All, except one, were in the variously colored and marked uniforms of the Soviet Republics. The exception was a tall man in the silver dress uniform of Argentine. His right arm hung limp and bloody; his skin was grey.

"Colonel Lorentz," said Scone. "We've one prisoner, at least."

After shouting to those within the dome not to fire, the two walked in. Major Panchurin, the highest-ranking Russian survivor, lifted a hand to acknowledge their salute. He was too busy talking over the bonephone to say anything to them.

The two examined the dome.

The visiting delegation of Axis officers was dead except for Lorentz. The Russians left standing numbered six; the Chinese, four; the Europeans, one; the Arabic, two; the Indian-East Asiatic, none. There were four Americans alive. Broward. Scone. Captain Nashdoi. And a badly wounded woman, Major Hoebel.

Browards walked towards Hoebel to examine her. Before he could do anything the Russian doctor, Titiev, rose from her side. He said, "I'm sorry, captain. She isn't going to make it."

Broward looked around the dome and made a remark which must, at the time, have seemed irrelevant to Titiev. "Only three women left. If the ratio is the same on the rest of the Moon, we've a real problem."

Scone had followed Broward. After Titiev had left, and after making sure their bonephones were not on, Scone said in a low voice, "There were seventy-five Russians stationed here. I doubt if there are over forty left in the entire base. I wonder how many in Pushkin?"

Pushkin was the base on the other side of the Moon.

They walked back to the group around Panchurin and turned on their phones so they could listen in.

Panchurin's skin paled, his eyes widened, his hands raised protestingly.

"No, no," he moaned out loud.

"What is it?" said Scone, who had heard only the last three words coming in through the device implanted in his skull.

Panchurin turned a suddenly old face to him. "The commander of the *Zemlya* said that the Argentineans have set off an undetermined number of cobalt bombs. More than twenty, at the very least."

He added, "The *Zemlya* is leaving its orbit. It intends to establish a new one around the Moon. It won't leave until we evaluate our situation. If then."

Every Soviet in the room looked at Lorentz.

THE Argentinean straightened up from his weary slump and summoned all the strength left in his bleeding body. He spoke in Russian so all would understand.

"We told you pigs we would take the whole world with us before we'd bend our necks to the Communist yoke!" he shouted.

At that moment, his gaunt high-cheekboned face with its long upper lip, thin lipline mustache, and fanatical blue eyes made him resemble the dictator of his country, Félipé Howards, El Macho (The Sledgehammer).

Panchurin ordered two soldiers and the doctor to take him to the jail. "I would like to kill the beast now," he said. "But he may have valuable information. Make sure

he lives . . . for the time being."

Then, Panchurin looked upwards again to Earth, hanging only a little distance above the horizon. The others also stared.

Earth, dark now, except for steady glares here and there, forest fires and cities, probably, which would burn for days. Perhaps weeks. Then, when the fires died out, the embers cooled, no more fire. No more vegetation, no more animals, no more human beings. Not for centuries.

Suddenly, Panchurin's face crumpled, tears flowed, and he began sobbing loudly, rackingly.

The others could not withstand this show of grief. They understood now. The shock had worn off enough to allow sorrow to have its way. Grief ran through them like fire through the forests of their native homes.

Broward, also weeping, looked at Scone and could not understand. Scone, alone among the men and women under the dome and the Earth, was not crying. His face was as impassive as the slope of a Moon mountain.

Scone did not wait for Panchurin to master himself, to think clearly. He said, "I request permission to return to Clavius, sir."

Panchurin could not speak; he could only nod his head.

"Do you know what the situation is at Clavius?" said Scone relentlessly.

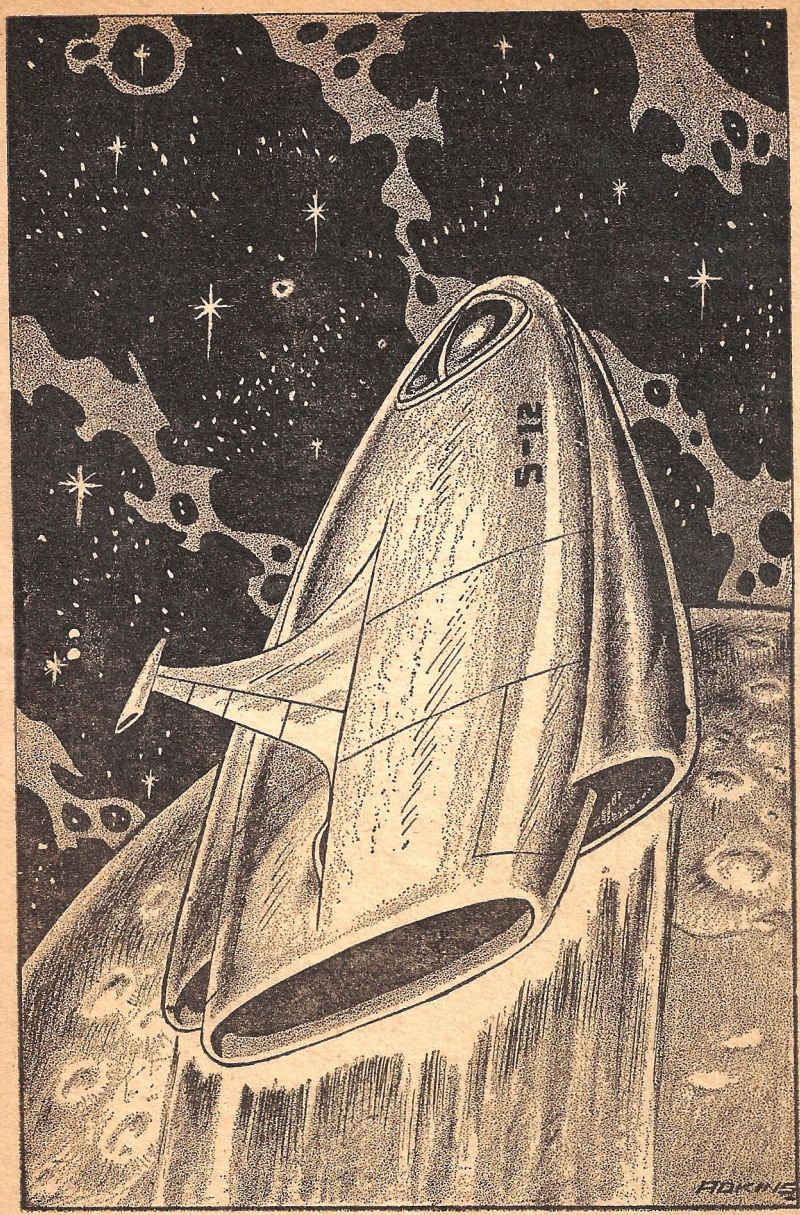
Panchurin managed a few words. "Some missiles . . . Axis base . . . came close . . . but no damage . . . intercepted."

Scone saluted, turned, and beckoned to Broward and Nashdoi. They followed him to the exit to the field. Here Scone made sure that the air-retaining and gamma-ray and sun-deflecting force field outside the dome was on. Then the North Americans stepped outside onto the field without their spacesuits. They had done this so many times they no longer felt the fear and helplessness first experienced upon venturing from the protecting walls into what seemed empty space. They entered their craft, and Scone took over the controls.

After identifying himself to the control tower, Scone lifted the dish and brought it to the very edge of the force field. He put the controls on automatic, the field disappeared for the two seconds necessary for the craft to pass the boundary, and the dish, impelled by its own power and by the push of escaping air, shot forward.

Behind them, the faint flicker indicating the presence of the field returned. And the escaped air formed brief and bright streamers that melted under the full impact of the sun.

"That's something that will have to be rectified in the future," said Scone. "It's an inef-


ATKINS

ficient, air-wasting method. We're not so long on power we can use it to make more air every time a dish enters or leaves a field."

He returned on the r-t, contacted Clavius, told them they were coming in. To the operator, he said, "Pei, how're things going?"

"We're still at battle stations, sir. Though we doubt if there will be any more attacks. Both the Argentinean and South African bases were wrecked. They don't have any retaliatory capabilities, but survivors may be left deep underground. We've received no orders from Eratosthenes to dispatch searchers to look for survivors. The base at Pushkin doesn't answer. It must . . ."

THERE was a crackling and a roar. When the noise died down, a voice in Russian said, "This is Eratosthenes. You will refrain from further radio communication until permission is received to resume. Acknowledge."

"Colonel Scone on the United Soviet Americas Force destroyer *Broun*. Order acknowledged."

He flipped the switch off. To Broward, he said, "Damn Russkies are starting to clamp down already. But they're rattled. Did you notice I was talking to Pei in English, and they didn't say a thing about that? I don't think they'll take much effective action or start any witch-hunts until they recover fully from the shock and have a chance to evaluate.

"Tell me, is Nashdoi one of you Athenians?"

Broward looked at Nashdoi, who was slumped on a seat at the other end of the bridge. She was not within earshot of a low voice.

"No," said Broward. "I don't think she's anything but a lukewarm Marxist. She's a member of the Party, of course. Who on the Moon isn't? But like so many scientists here, she takes a minimum interest in ideology, just enough not to be turned down when she applied for psychological research here.

"She was married, you know. Her husband was called back to Earth only a little while ago. No one knew if it was for the reasons given or if he'd done something to displease the Russkies or arouse their suspicions. You know how it is. You're called back, and maybe you're never heard of again."

"What other way is there?" said Scone. "Although I don't like the Russky dictating the fate of any American."

"Yes?" said Broward. He looked curiously at Scone, thinking of what a mass of contradictions, from his viewpoint, existed inside that massive head. Scone believed thoroughly in the Soviet

system except for one thing. He was a Nationalist; he wanted an absolutely independent North American republic, one which would reassert its place as the strongest in the world.

And that made him dangerous to the Russians and the Chinese.

AMERICA had fallen, prey more to its own softness and confusion than to the machinations of the Soviets. Then, in the turbulent bloody starving years that followed the fall with their purges, uprisings, savage repressions, mass transportations to Siberia and other areas, importation of other nationalities to create division, and bludgeoning propaganda and reeducation, only the strong and the intelligent survived.

Scone, Broward, and Nashdoi were of the second generation born after the fall of Canada and the United States. They had been born and had lived because their parents were flexible, hardy, and quick. And because they had inherited and improved these qualities.

The Americans had become a problem to the Russians. And to the Chinese. Those Americans transported to Siberia had, together with other nationalities brought to that area, performed miracles with the harsh climate and soil, had made a garden. But they had become Siberians, not too friendly with the Russians.

China, to the south, looking for an area in which to dump their excess population, had protested at the bringing in of other nationalities. Russia's refusal to permit Chinese entry had been one more added to the long list of grievances felt by China towards her elder brother in the Marx family.

And on the North American continent, the American Communists had become another trial to Moscow. Russia, rich with loot from the U.S., had become fat. The lean underfed hungry Americans, using the Party to work within, had alarmed the Russians with their increasing power and influence. Moreover, America had recovered, was again a great industrial empire. Ostensibly under Russian control, the Americans were pushing and pressuring subtly, and not so subtly, to get their own way. Moscow had to resist being Uncle Samified.

To complicate the world picture, thousands of North Americans had taken refuge during the fall of their country in Argentine. And there the energetic and tough-minded Yanks (the soft and foolish died on the way or after reaching Argentine) followed the paths of thousands of Italians and Germans who had fled there long ago. They became rich and powerful; Félipé Howards, El Macho, was part-Argen-

tinean Spanish, part-German, part-American.

The South African (sub-Saharan) peoples had ousted their Communist and Fascist rulers because they were white or white-influenced. Pan-Africanism was their motto. Recently, the South African Confederation had formed an alliance with Argentine. And the Axis had warned the Soviets that they must cease all underground activity in Axis countries, cease at once the terrible economic pressures and discriminations against them, and treat them as full partners in the nations of the world.

If this were not done, and if a war started, and the Argentineans saw their country was about to be crushed, they would explode cobalt bombs. Rather death than dishonor.

The Soviets knew the temper of the proud and arrogant Argentineans. They had seemed to capitulate. There was a conference among the heads of the leading Soviets and Axes. Peaceful coexistence was being talked about.

But, apparently, the Axis had not swallowed this phrase as others had once swallowed it. And they had decided on a desperate move.

Having cheap lithium bombs and photon compressors and the means to deliver them with gravitomagnetic drives, the Axis was as well armed as their foes. Perhaps, their thought must have been, if they delivered the first blow, their anti-missiles could intercept enough Soviet missiles so that the few that did get through would do a minimum of damage. Perhaps. No one really knew what caused the Axis to start the war.

Whatever the decision of the Axis, the Axis had put on a good show. One of its features was the visit by their Moon officers to the base at Eratosthenes, the first presumably, in a series of reciprocal visits and parties to toast the new amiable relations.

Result: a dying Earth and a torn Moon.

BROWARD belonged to that small underground which neither believed in the old Soviet nor the old capitalist system. It wanted a form of government based on the ancient Athenian method of democracy on the local level and a loose confederation on the world level. All national boundaries would be abolished.

Such considerations, thought Broward, must be put aside for the time being. Getting independence of the Russians, getting rid of the hellish bonephones, was the thing to do now. Or so it had seemed to him.

But would not that inevitably lead to war and the destruction of all of humanity? Would it not

be better to work with the other Soviets and hope that eventually the Communist ideal could be subverted and the Athenian established? With communities so small, the modified Athenian form of government would be workable. Later, after the Moon colonies increased in size and population, means could be found for working out intercolonial problems.

Or perhaps, thought Broward, watching the monolithic Scone, Scone did not really intend to force the other Soviets to cooperate? Perhaps, he hoped they would fight to the death and the North American base alone would be left to repopulate the world.

"Broward," said Scone, "go sound out Nashdoi. Do it subtly."

"Wise as the serpent, subtle as the dove," said Broward. "Or is it the other way around?"

Scone lifted his eyebrows. "Never heard that before. From what book?"

Broward walked away without answering. It was significant that Scone did not know the source of the quotation. The Old and New Testaments were allowed reading only for select scholars. Broward had read an illegal copy, had put his freedom and life in jeopardy by reading it.

But that was not the point here. The thought that occurred to him was that, nationality and race aside, the people on the Moon were a rather homogeneous group. Three-fourths of them were engineers or scientists of high standing, therefore, had high I.Q.'s. They were descended from ancestors who had proved their toughness and good genes by surviving through the last hundred years. They were all either agnostics or atheists or supposed to be so. There would not be any religious differences to split them. They were all in superb health, otherwise they would not be here. No diseases among them, not even the common cold. They would all make good breeding stock. Moreover, with recent advances in genetic manipulation, defective genes could be eliminated electrochemically. Such a manipulation had not been possible on Earth with its vast population where babies were being born faster than defective genes could be wiped out. But here where there were so few . . .

Perhaps, it would be better to allow the Soviet system to exist for now. Later, use subtle means to bend it towards the desired goal.

No! The system was based on too many falsities, among which the greatest was dialectical materialism. As long as the corrupt base existed, the structure would be corrupt.

BROWARD sat down by Ingrid Nashdoi. She was a short dark and petite woman of about thirty-three. Not very good-looking but, usually, witty and vivacious. Now, she stared at the floor, her face frozen.

"I'm sorry about Jim," he said. "But we don't have time to grieve now. Later, perhaps."

She did not look at him but replied in a low halting voice. "He may have been dead before the war started. I never even got to say goodbye to him. You know what that means. What it probably did mean."

"I don't think they got anything out of him. Otherwise, you and I would have been arrested, too."

He jerked his head towards Scone and said, "He doesn't know you're one of us. I want him to think you're a candidate for the Nationalists. After this struggle with the Russ is over, we may need someone who can report on him. Think you can do it?"

She nodded her head, and Broward returned to Scone. "She hates the Russians," he said. "You know they took her husband away. She doesn't know why. But she hates Ivan's guts."

"Good. Ah, here we go."

After the destroyer had berthed at Clavius, and the three entered the base, events went swiftly if not smoothly. Scone talked to the entire personnel over the IP, told them what had happened. Then he went to his office and issued orders to have the arsenal cleaned out of all portable weapons. These were transferred to the four destroyers the Russians had assigned to Clavius as a token force.

Broward then called in his four Athenians and Scone, his five Nationalists. The situation was explained to them, and they were informed of what was expected of them. Even Broward was startled, but didn't protest.

After the weapons had been placed in the destroyers, Scone ordered the military into his office one at a time. And, one at a time, they were disarmed and escorted by another door to the arsenal and locked in. Three of the soldiers asked to join Scone, and he accepted two. Several protested furiously and denounced Scone as a traitor.

Then, Scone had the civilians assembled in the large auditorium (Technically, all personnel were in the military, but the scientists were only used in that capacity during emergencies.) Here, he told them what he had done, what he planned to do—except for one thing—and asked them if they wished to enlist. Again, he got a violent demonstration from some and sullen silence from others. These were locked up in the arsenal.

The others were sworn in, except for one man, Whiteside. Broward pointed him out as an agent and informer for both the Russians and Chinese. Scone admitted that he had not known about the triple-dealer, but he took Broward's word and had Whiteside locked up, too.

Then, the radios of the two scout ships were smashed, and the prisoners marched out and jammed into them. Scone told them they were free to fly to the Russian base. Within a few minutes, the scouts hurtled away from Clavius towards the north.

"But, Colonel," said Broward, "they can't give the identifying code to the Russians. They'll be shot down."

"They are traitors; they prefer the Russky to us. Better for us if they are shot down. They'll not fight for Ivan."

Broward did not have much appetite when he sat down to eat and to listen to Scone's detailing of his plan.

"The *Zemlya*," he said, "has everything we need to sustain us here. And to clothe the Earth with vegetation and replace her animal life in the distant future when the radiation is low enough for us to return. Her deepfreeze tanks contain seeds and plants of thousands of different species of vegetation. They also hold, in suspended animation, the bodies of cattle, sheep, horses, rabbits, dogs, cats, fowl, birds, useful insects and worms. The original intention was to reanimate these and use them on any Terrestrial-type planet the *Zemlya* might find.

"Now, our bases here are self-sustaining. But, when the time comes to return to Earth, we must have vegetation and animals. Otherwise, what's the use?

"So, whoever holds the *Zemlya* holds the key to the future. We must be the ones who hold that key. With it, we can bargain; the Russians and the Chinese will have to agree to independence if they want to share in the seeds and livestock."

"What if the *Zemlya's* commander chooses destruction of his vessel rather than surrender?" said Broward. "Then, all of humanity will be robbed. We'll have no future."

"I have a plan to get us aboard the *Zemlya* without violence."

AN hour later, the four USAF destroyers accelerated outwards towards Earth. Their radar had picked up the *Zemlya;* it also had detected five other Unidentified Space Objects. These were the size of their own craft.

Abruptly, the *Zemlya* radioed that it was being attacked. Then, silence. No answer to the requests from Eratosthenes for more information.

Scone had no doubt about the attackers' identity. "The Axis leaders wouldn't have stayed on Earth to die," he said. "They'll be on their way to their big base on Mars. Or, more likely, they have the same idea as us. Capture the *Zemlya*."

"And if they do?" said Broward.

"We take it from them."

The four vessels continued to accelerate in the great curve which would take them out away from the *Zemyla* and then would bring them around towards the Moon again. Their path was computed to swing them around so they would come up behind the interstellar ship and overtake it. Though the titanic globe was capable of eventually achieving far greater speeds than the destroyers, it was proceeding at a comparatively slow velocity. This speed was determined by the orbit around the Moon into which the *Zemlya* intended to slip.

In ten hours, the USAF complement had curved around and were about 10,000 kilometers from the *Zemlya*. Their speed was approximately 20,000 kilometers an hour at this point, but they were decelerating. The Moon was bulking larger; ahead of them, visible by the eye, were two steady gleams. The *Zemlya* and the only Axis vessel which had not been blown to bits or sliced to fragments. According to the *Zemlya*, which was again in contact with the Russian base, the Axis ship had been cut in two by a tongue from *Zemlya*.

But the interstellar ship was now defenseless. It had launched every missile and anti-missile in its arsenal. And the fuel for the tongue-generators was exhausted.

"Furthermore," said Shaposhnikov, commander of the *Zemlya*, "new USO has been picked up on the radar. Four coming in from Earth. If these are also Axis, then the *Zemlya* has only two choices. Surrender. Or destroy itself."

"There is nothing we can do," replied Eratosthenes. "But we do not think those USO are Axis. We detected four destroyer-sized objects leaving the vicinity of the USAF base, and we asked them for identification. They did not answer, but we have reason to believe they are North American."

"Perhaps they are coming to our rescue," suggested Shaposhnikov.

"They left before anyone knew you were being attacked. Besides, they had no orders from us."

"What do I do?" said Shaposhnikov.

Scone, who had tapped into the tight laser beam, broke it up by sending random pulses into it. The *Zemlya* discontinued its beam, and Scone then sent them

a message through a pulsed tongue which the Russian base could tap into only through a wild chance.

After transmitting the proper code identification, Scone said, "Don't renew contact with Eratosthenes. It is held by the Axis. They're trying to lure you close enough to grab you. We escaped the destruction of our base. Let me aboard where we can confer about our next step. Perhaps, we may have to go to Alpha Centaurus with you."

FOR several minutes, the *Zemlya* did not answer. Shaposhnikov must have been unnerved. Undoubtedly, he was in a quandary. In any case, he could not prevent the strangers from approaching. If they were Axis, they had him at their mercy.

Such must have been his reasoning. He replied, "Come ahead."

By then, the USAF dishes had matched their speeds to that of the *Zemlya's*. From a distance of only a kilometer, the sphere looked like a small Earth. It even had the continents painted on the surface, though the effect was spoiled by the big Russian letters painted on the Pacific Ocean.

Scone gave a lateral thrust to his vessel, and it nudged gently into the enormous landing-port of the sphere. Within five minutes, his crew of ten were in the control room.

Scone did not waste any time. He drew his gun; his men followed suit; he told Shaposhnikov what he meant to do. The Russian, a tall thin man of about fifty, seemed numbed. Perhaps, too many catastrophes had happened in too short a time. The death of Earth, the attack by the Axis ships, and, now, totally unexpected, this. The world was coming to an end in too many shapes and too swiftly.

Scone cleared the control room of all *Zemlya* personnel except the commander. The others were locked up with the forty-odd men and women who were surprised at their posts by the Americans.

Scone ordered Shaposhnikov to set up orders to the navigational computer for a new path. This one would send the *Zemlya* at the maximum acceleration endurable by the personnel towards a point in the south polar region near Clavius. When the *Zemlya* reached the proper distance, it would begin a deceleration equally taxing which would bring it to a halt approximately half a kilometer above the surface at the indicated point.

Shaposhnikov, speaking disjointedly like a man coming up out of a nightmare, protested that the *Zemlya* was not built to stand such a strain. Moreover, if Scone succeeded in his plan to hide the great globe at the bottom of a chasm under an overhang

. . . Well, he could only predict that the lower half of the *Zemlya* would be crushed under the weight—even with the Moon's weak gravity.

"That won't harm the animal tanks," said Scone. "They're in the upper levels. Do as I say. If you don't, I'll shoot you and set up the computer myself."

"You are mad," said Shaposhnikov. "But I will do my best to get us down safely. If this were ordinary war, if we weren't man's —Earth's—last hope, I would tell you to go ahead, shoot. But . . ."

Ingrid Nashdoi, standing beside Broward, whispered in a trembling voice, "The Russian is right. He is mad. It's too great a gamble. If we lose, then everybody loses."

"Exactly what Scone is betting on," murmured Broward. "He knows the Russians and Chinese know it, too. Like you, I'm scared. If I could have foreseen what he was going to do, I think I'd have put a bullet in him back at Eratosthenes. But it's too late to back out now. We go along with him no matter what."

THE voyage from the Moon and the capture of the *Zemlya* had taken twelve hours. Now, with the *Zemlya's* mighty drive applied—and the four destroyers riding in the landing-port—the voyage back took three hours. During this time, the Russian base sent messages. Scone refused to answer. He intended to tell all the Moon his plans but not until the *Zemlya* was close to the end of its path. When the globe was a thousand kilometers from the surface, and decelerating with the force of 3g's, he and his men returned to the destroyers. All except three, who remained with Shaposhnikov.

The destroyers streaked ahead of the *Zemlya* towards an entrance to a narrow canyon. This led downwards to a chasm where Scone intended to place the *Zemlya* beneath a giant overhang.

But, as the four sped towards the opening two crags, their radar picked up four objects coming over close to the mountains to the north. A battlebird and three destroyers. Scone knew that the Russians had another big craft and three more destroyers available. But they probably did not want to send them out, too, and leave the base comparatively defenseless.

He at once radioed the commander of the *Lermontov* and told him what was going on.

"We declare independence, a return to Nationalism," he concluded. "And we call on the other bases to do the same."

The commander roared, "Unless you surrender at once, we turn on the bonephones! And you

will writhe in pain until you die, you American swine!"

"Do that little thing," said Scone, and he laughed.

He switched on the communication beams linking the four ships and said, "Hang on for a minute or two, men. Then, it'll be all over. For us and for them."

Two minutes later, the pain began. A stroke of heat like lightning that seemed to sear the brains in their skulls. They screamed, all except Scone, who grew pale and clutched the edge of the control panel. But the dishes were, for the next two minutes, on automatic, unaffected by their pilots' condition.

And then, just as suddenly as it had started, the pain died. They were left shaking and sick, but they knew they would not feel that unbearable agony again.

"Flutter your craft as if it's going out of control," said Scone. "Make it seem we're crashing into the entrance to the canyon."

Scone himself put the lead destroyer through the simulation of a craft with a pain-crazed pilot at the controls. The others followed his maneuvers, and they slipped into the canyon.

From over the top of the cliff to their left rose a glare that would have been intolerable if the plastic over the portholes had not automatically polarized to dim the brightness.

BROWARD, looking through a screen which showed the view to the rear, cried out. Not because of the light from the atomic bomb which had exploded on the other side of the cliff. He yelled because the top of the *Zemlya* had also lit up. And he knew in that second what had happened. The light did not come from the warhead, for an extremely high mountain was between the huge globe and the blast. If the upper region of the *Zemlya* glowed, it was because a tongue from a Russian ship had brushed against it.

It must have been an accident, for the Russians surely had no wish to wreck the *Zemlya*. If they defeated the USAF, they could recapture the globe with no trouble.

"My God, she's falling!" yelled Broward. "Out of control!"

Scone looked once and quickly. He turned away and said, "All craft land immediately. All personnel transfer to my ship."

The maneuver took three minutes, for the men in the other dishes had to connect air tanks to their suits and then run from their ships to Scone's. Moreover, one man in each destroyer was later than his fellows since he had to set up the controls on his craft.

Scone did not explain what he meant to do until all personnel

had made the transfer. In the meantime, they were at the mercy of the Russians if the enemy had chosen to attack over the top of the cliff. But scone was gambling that the Russians would be too horrified at what was happening to the *Zemlya*. His own men would have been frozen if he had not compelled them to act. The Earth dying twice within twenty-four hours was almost more than they could endure.

Only the American commander, the man of stone, seemed not to feel.

Scone took his ship up against the face of the cliff until she was just below the top. Here the cliff was thin because of the slope on the other side. And here, hidden from view of the Russians, he drove a tongue two decimeters wide through the rock.

And, at the moment three Russian destroyers hurtled over the edge, tongues of compressed light lashing out on every side in the classic flailing movement, Scone's beam broke through the cliff.

THE three empty USAF ships, on automatic, shot upwards at a speed that would have squeezed their human occupants into jelly—if they had had occupants. Their tongues shot out and flailed, caught the Russian tongues, twisted shot out and flailed, caught the Russian tongues, twisted as the generators within the USAF vessels strove to outbend the Russian tongues.

Then, the American vessels rammed into the Russians, drove them upwards, flipped them over. And all six craft fell along the cliff's face, Russian and American intermingled, crashing into each other, bouncing off the sheer face, exploding, their fragments colliding, and smashed into the bottom of the canyon.

Scone did not see this, for he had completed the tongue through the tunnel, turned it off for a few seconds, and sent a video beam through. He was just in time to see the big battlebird start to float off the ground where it had been waiting. Perhaps, it had not accompanied the destroyers because of Russian contempt for American ability. Or, perhaps, because the commander was under orders not to risk the big ship unless necessary. Even now, the *Lermontov* rose slowly as if it might take two paths: over the cliff or towards the *Zemlya*. But, as it rose, Scone applied full power.

Some one, or some detecting equipment, on the *Lermontov* must have caught view of the tongue as it slid through space to intercept the battlebird. A tongue shot out towards the American beam. But Scone, in

full and superb control, bent the axis of his beam, and the Russian missed. Then Scone's was in contact with the hull, and a hole appeared in the irradiated plastic.

Majestically, the *Lermontov* continued rising—and so cut itself almost in half. And, majestically, it fell.

Not before the Russian commander touched off all the missiles aboard his ship in a last frenzied defense, and the missiles flew out in all directions. Two hit the slope, blew off the face of the mountain on the *Lermontov*'s side, and a jet of atomic energy flamed out through the tunnel created by Scone.

But he had dropped his craft like an elevator, was halfway down the cliff before the blasts made his side of the mountain tremble.

Half an hour later, the base of Eratosthenes sued for peace. For the sake of human continuity, said Panchurin, all fighting must cease forever on the moon.

The Chinese, who had been silent up to then despite their comrades' pleas for help, also agreed to accept the policy of Nationalism.

Now, Broward expected Scone to break down, to give way to the strain. He would only have been human if he had done so.

He did not. Not, at least, in anyone's presence.

BROWARD awoke early during a sleep-period. Unable to forget the dream he had just had, he went to find Ingrid Nashdoi. She was not in her lab; her assistant told him that she had gone to the dome with Scone.

Jealous, Broward hurried there and found the two standing there and looking up at the half-Earth. Ingrid was holding a puppy in her arms. This was one of the few animals that had been taken unharmed from the shattered tanks of the fallen *Zemlya*.

Broward, looking at them, thought of the problems that faced the Moon people. There was that of government, though this seemed for the moment to be settled. But he knew that there would be more conflict between the bases and that his own promotion of the Athenian ideology would cause grave trouble.

There was also the problem of women. One woman to every three men. How would this be solved? Was there any answer other than heartaches, frustration, hate, even murder?

"I had a dream," said Broward to them. "I dreamed that we on the Moon were building a great tower which would reach up to the Earth and that was our only way to get back to Earth. But everybody spoke a different tongue, and we couldn't understand each other. Therefore, we kept putting the bricks in the

wrong places or getting into furious but unintelligible argument about construction.

He stopped, saw they expected more, and said, "I'm sorry. That's all there was. But the moral is obvious."

"Yes," said Ingrid, stroking the head of the wriggling puppy. She looked up at Earth, close to the horizon. "The physicists say it'll be two hundred years before we can go back. Do you realize that, barring accident or war, all three of us might live to see that day? That we might return with our great-great-great-great-great-great grandchildren? And we can tell them of the Earth that was, so they will know how to build the Earth that must be."

"Two hundred years?" said Broward. "We won't be the same persons then."

But he doubted that even the centuries could change Scone. The man was made of rock. He would not bend or flow. And then Broward felt sorry for him. Scone would be a fossil, a true stone man, a petrified hero. Stone had its time and its uses. But leather also had its time.

"We'll never get back unless we do today's work every day," said Scone. "I'll worry about Earth when it's time to worry. Let's go; we've work to do."

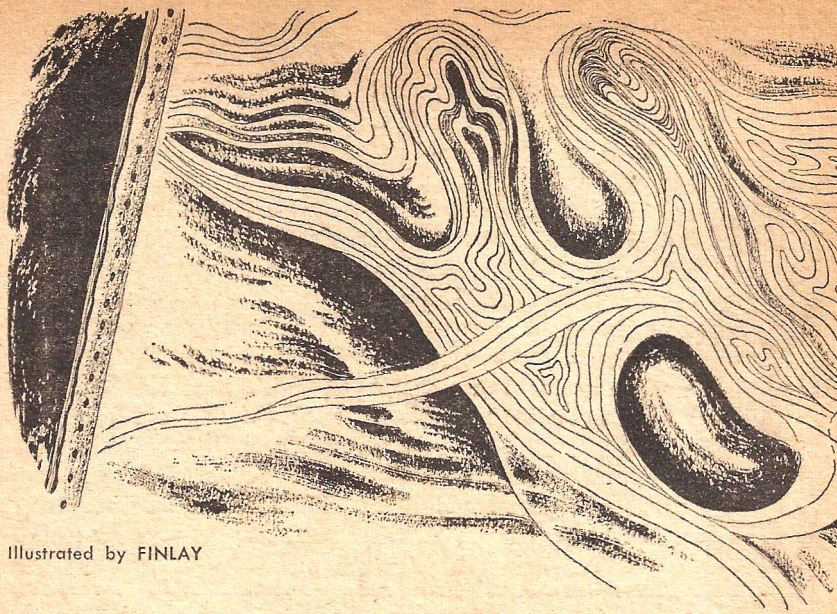
THE END

EDITORIAL *(Cont. from page 5)*

stantial amount of money—but only if they marry girls eugenically qualified to bear children who will improve the race. The scientist appointed a group of trustees to administer his estate. To qualify for the inheritance, the sons and their brides-to-be must take a battery of tests devised to yield their "E for eugenics" rating. The score would be based on the couple's "deviation above or below the American white population averages for health, intellect and character." For each point scored above the average, the lucky couple wins $400; for each point below the average, they lose $400. And for each child born to them, the couple gets $600.

The whole thing interests me because it combines in a really beautifully screwy way American idealism and practicality, the scientific urge to improve the race and the knowledge that the race is going to take quite a bit of improving before it gets beyond the profit principle.

It may very well be that the courts will hold the terms of the will unenforceable, or illegal. Meanwhile, think of its potential to a television producer. Can you not imagine what a magnificent quiz show it would make? "Now, for $400, Miss Jones . . ." N.L.



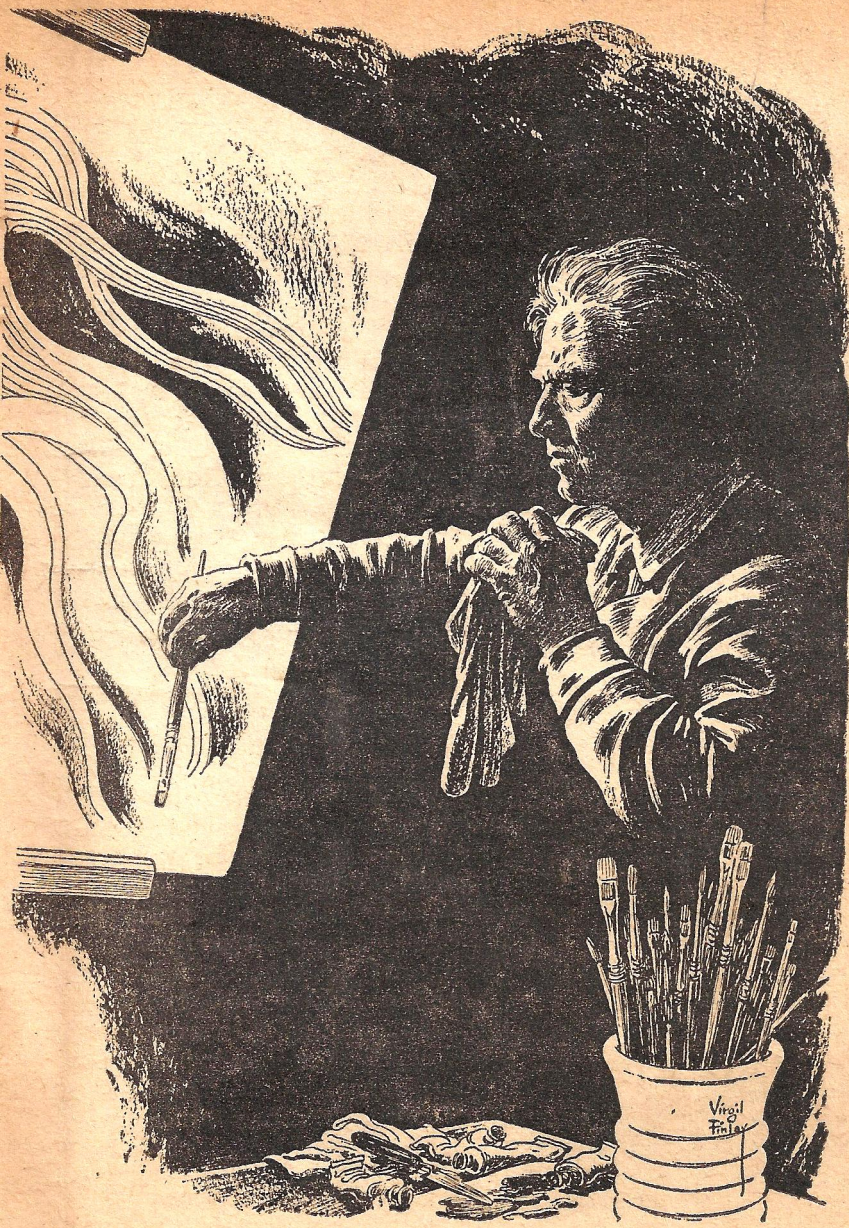
Illustrated by FINLAY

Inspector Thameson, well-known man-about-Mercury, comes up against one of the oddest cases of his career, with clues strewn from Hong Kong to the gravitic plexuses—the Case of the . . .

HEN'S EYES

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

MR. NORMAN FILLBROOK rubbed the end of his nose between thumb and index finger. The organ thus manipulated, having responded joyously to years of such treatment, was beautifully pliable, beautifully bulbous. Mr. Fillbrook drew pleasure from rubbing his nose; his only pleasure at present.


Virgil
Finlay

His new superior in the Colonial Office (Mercury), Secretary Heathercote Thatch, was demonstrating his affinities with new brooms and, in the process of sweeping clean, had raised a cloud of dust about Mr. Fillbrook's head that floated ominously there as if concealing from mortal view a damoclean sword of proven downward tendencies.

"I have been here in this establishment three weeks tomorrow, Mr. Fillbrook, is that not so?" Mr. Thatch said, looking monstrous and mottled from behind the barricades of his mustache.

"If you say so, sir."

"Damn it, it's a fact whether I say so or not. You and I are going to have a clash of wills, Mr. Fillbrook, if we are not careful."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"So am I. I'm a forgiving man, Mr. Fillbrook, but this office has been grossly mismanaged. I'm not a man to let the sun go down on my wrath—"

"Here on Mercury it can't, sir."

"Silence!—but I'm growing tired of deliberate obscurantism. Three weeks less a day I've been here and you have not put me in the picture yet."

"Oh, sir . . ." began Mr. Fillbrook, a dreadful unease filling him. For Mr. Thatch had picked up an earthgram from his desk and was scrutinizing it with a glance sufficiently blazing to illuminate half the twilight zone. "Oh, sir, I've been trying to break you in gradually. . . . The department has become so large with all these immigrants from Earth and Venus. . . . Is there something . . ."

He halted in dread. Mr. Thatch was waving the earthgram before him with the wounded dignity of a man trying to smother a fire with his best waistcoat.

"There *is* something, Fillbrook, yes. There is, to be precise, this earthgram. It comes, to amplify, from the Celestial Chuckle Ophthalmic Studios in Hong Kong, Earth. It deals, to specify, with the occular powers of one Hengist Mankiloe."

FILLBROOK gave what is termed 'a visible start'; its visibility was so great that Mr. Thatch momentarily wondered if his Chief Assistant had not contracted the Greater Mercurian Nerverot. Thus deflected from his purpose, he asked in a calmer voice, "Do I detect from that monstrous twitch that the name Celestial Chuckle has registered in your memory?"

Reaching blindly for the reassurance of his nose, Fillbrook said, "No, sir, Mr. Thatch, it was not that. It was just—the mention of Hengist Mankiloe's name."

"And what importance may his ocular abilities hold for you, pray?"

"Mankiloe himself is in our Top Secret classification."

"He is? Then I should have heard about him on the first day I arrived, not the twenty-first!"

"The twentieth, sir."

"The twentieth then, you fool! Fetch me Mankiloe's dossier at once."

"We don't have it at the moment. Inspector Thameson of Security has it."

Mr. Thatch's mustache bristled until he bore more than a passing resemblance to a bull peering over a thorn hedge.

"So? Letting a Top Secret dossier go out of this office, eh, Fillbrook? Men have done ten years in the curry mines for less."

"I got the Inspector's signature, sir," Fillbrook said, trying to take cover behind his nose.

"And I'll have his blood!"

"If you please, Mr. Thatch, Mankiloe is rather a special case. This communication about his eyes—

"What have his eyes to do with it, man?"

"The gravitic plexuses—I mean plexi. No, I think plexuses is correct. That's what they're to do with."

As he floundered, on the other side of the desk the record for the Reddest Faced Man on Mercury was broken by Mr. Thatch with several blood vessels in hand.

"Optics! Plexi—I mean plexuses! Fillbrook, what do you think you're standing there saying? Are you pulling the wool over my eyes? What's this all about?"

Desperately, waving his hands with the vigor of a Lars Porsena doing his stuff on that bridge where even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to register approval, Fillbrook cried, "It's the paintings, Mr. Thatch, the paintings, you know. Of course I wouldn't dream of wooling—of pulling your wool, but this Mankiloe business is a very strange affair, very strange indeed. If I didn't tell you about it before, it was only because I thought you might laugh at me."

Drawing himself up until he was practically levitating, Mr. Thatch took firm control of himself and said in an icy voice, "Have no fear of that; it is highly unlikely you will ever occasion me any merriment, Mr. Fillbrook. But I must point out that your elucidations are merely dragging us further into the mud. Pull yourself together and tell me—*what* paintings are you referring to?"

"Why, the ones Inspector Thameson is holding."

"Inspector Thameson again? What's the man doing, running a secondhand shop?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir—"

A BELL pinged, interrupting them with its delicate chime as successfully as one mosquito can spoil a summer night's amour in a garden. Grunting, Thatch lumbered over to the communicator to see what it offered. He punched it and it put out its tongue of paper. Reading it with a brow of thunder and more than a hint of forked lightening, he passed it over to Fillbrook.

It came from one of the biggest stores in Wyndham, the domed city on Mercury in which the Colonial Office was established. It stated that two hundred and thirty yards of coarse second grade calico had been purchased some ten days before with a check drawn on a British bank. The check had proved unnegotiable; it was signed Hengist Mankiloe.

In an inspired attempt to avoid his superior's eyes, Fillbrook read the message through thirty-two times. So opaque a silence fell during this marathon performance, that when he did finally look up it was with the faint hope of finding that Mr. Thatch had tiptoed out of the room and—for preference—tiptoed all the way back to Earth.

Alas, Mr. Thatch had no intention of performing any such feat. He appeared, in fact, to be trying to qualify once more for the final round of the Most Crimson Man in the Universe championship. When he spoke, it was as if the massive slab of Old Red Sandstone which he so much resembled had given voice.

"The plot appears to thicken, Mr. Fillbrook."

"We have everything in hand, sir, Inspector Thameson and I. This communication was not entirely unexpected."

"Mr. Fillbrook. Optics, plexi, paintings, dud checks, yards of drapery, a man called Mankiloe . . . forgive me if I trespass on your treasured privacy, but WHAT THE DEVIL IS THIS ALL ABOUT?"

"O dear, not so loud, sir—the secretaries will hear you! It—It's the RODS, sir, the Researches into Other Dimensions. These things all tie up . . . there's a perfectly logical explanation."

Secretary Thatch struggled for supremacy with a frog in his throat. Finally he said, "There's been gross mismanagement in this department, Fillbrook. Your explanation must be not only perfect, not only logical—it must be forthcoming at once. I want no more dimensions than there is legislation to cover."

"Then I think, sir, you ought to invite Inspector Thameson across. You might find Inspector Thameson's explanation more acceptable than mine."

Thatch looked Fillbrook over from head to foot in grave irony, his eyebrows twitching up and down like two squirrels playing tag round an oak bole.

"It could hardly be less acceptable," he said, adding in a voice fresh off a Plutonian glacier, "Ring for Thameson immediately. I'll speak to him."

INSPECTOR Manson Thameson was an old Mercury hand. He had known Wyndham when it was a couple of air-inflated igloos. He was a small stout man with a bad complexion and ginger hair; but being a redhead with blackheads in no way spoilt his megalomaniac vision of Mercury as a fair planet and himself as its chief Sir Galahad.

Accordingly, he became piqued as the voice of the new Colonial Office Secretary barked in his ear when he lifted his receiver. Holding the instrument at arm's length hardly remedied matters; Thameson's arms were incredibly short.

"I can't come," he said conversationally when there was a break in transmission. "I'm busy. You come over here. I know you Colonial wallahs have nothing to do but sit on your reports all day."

The sounds of a mature adult Thatch erupting were faithfully transmitted to him.

"Please yourself, of course," Thameson said, and put the receiver down gently. "We've other things to attend to."

"Mmm of course we have, dawling," said Diana Cashfare, adjusting herself more securely on her boss's knee. "Who was it?"

Thameson ran his hand so amorously through her hair that she nearly screamed.

"Dawling, you've been getting so wonderfully blonde lately. . . . What's that? Oh, some fellow from the Colonial Office. The new man, old Fillbrook's boss, Heathercote Thatch, you know. He won't bother us."

Some few hundred milliseconds later, the door opened. Thatch entered.

The Matterhorn could not have put in an appearance with more dignity; nor would the Matterhorn have had the advantage of being attended by an obsequious Mr. Fillbrook. Unfortunately the awe-inspiring effect of this visitation seemed lost on Inspector Thameson, who said, with only a cursory glance round, "Stand back from this unfortunate woman. She is radioactive. I am searching her for Strontium 90 particles."

Reluctantly concluding his topographical survey for the time, Thameson bustled the girl off-stage, and turned to put Secretary Thatch in his place.

This proved less easily done

than said, and perhaps better left unsaid. At the end of quarter of an hour the two men were forced to acknowledge inwardly that if Thatch was an irresistible force personified then Thameson was an immovable object in human form. From then on they treated each other with the respect that grows between irreconcilables.

"SO you've come to seek a little enlightenment on the Mankiloe affair," Thameson said, when it was obvious they had sparred to a standstill.

"A little *explanation* . . ." Thatch emended impatiently.

"Quite so, quite so, always glad to help a newcomer, Mr. Thatch. It must be terrible to feel like a fish out of water. Well, first we'll go next door to the old police station."

"Is that necessary?"

"Oh, it is necessary, sir," Mr. Fillbrook said, glad to be able to prove his existence verbally. "You see the Inspector keeps his paintings in there."

"So, you are an artist, Inspector?" Thatch said, surveying his opponent's carrotty skull as if comprehending its significance for the first time.

"Fillbrook meant Mankiloe's paintings. You've heard of Mankiloe, I suppose?"

"He paints." It was Thatch's bid at a punchy answer.

Shaking his head as if he had freshly taken on a wager to get one of his ears loose by Christmas, Thameson gathered up a bunch of keys and led the way outside.

Evidently hoping to remedy the ignorance of the air before him, he said, "Hengist Mankiloe is a great painter. It may be that he is the greatest painter alive today. That hardly matters. What matters is that he still paints old-fashioned traditional style, with brush and canvas and pigment. His pictures fetch money—one of them would cover a colonial officer's salary for the thick end of three mercurian years.

"Mankiloe is known throughout the system—by anyone with any cultural pretensions. But how many people have any cultural pretensions these days? Not people like Mr. Thatch and Mr. Fillbrook."

"Nonsense, Inspector, I know what I like and what I don't as well as the next man."

"Well, that's true humility for you, when you consider the next man," admitted Thameson, glancing at Fillbrook. "But all I was saying is that Mankiloe, who is a complete crook in just about every other way, has integrity when it comes to art. He won't compromise. He has remained his own man. That's why few people care for his work; it

clashes with their piddling milk-fed vision of the world."

"He sounds a detestable man."

"It's possible to detest the man and admire the artist. Anyhow, it was because so many people on Earth found him detestable—or rather because he found so many of them destestable, that he came to Mercury. Since when he has been a thorn in my ample side. But it may be that he has also discovered another dimension; I for one would be delighted if it was an artist rather than one of these god-damned toffee-nosed scientists who did it."

The signs that Thatch was winding himself up for a burst of controversy were three: a pavement-pulverizing emphasis in his tread, a tendency to smoulder about the neckline, and an increased air-intake with high decibel yield. He was about to burst into argument if not flame when they reached the ancient shack which had housed all the Wyndham police in the dear dead days when Thameson was all the Wyndham police.

Unlocking the door, the Inspector led the way in.

THE room was large and bare, with a great desk that resembled a medieval stocks in one corner, a clock whose hands—not of the best plastic—had curled into a derisory gesture, and various notices and rude epithets on the walls. Some of the latter, most of them questioning the legitimacy of the Wyndam police, were obscured by a row of canvases turned outwards along one wall so defiantly that Thatch shied towards them like a Turkish charger confronting the giaur.

Mankiloe's paintings were seven in number. Three were large, three or four feet wide by seven high; one was about four feet square; the others were smaller, going down to a rectangle nine inches wide by some twenty inches high.

"They're mere daubs!" Thatch exclaimed at once.

"Don't show your ignorance, man. Take a minute to look at them—they took days to paint."

The canvases were recognizably on the same theme. The subjects they represented were a disquieting blend of abstract and surrealist, difficult to describe. In one, a recognizable stretch of mercurian silicate desert merged into a curious distortion of towers where objects like plumes floated or lay. In another, things remotely like tractors, had tractors ever been built of woolly balls, distended themselves into a tranced brown twilight. In the third, the brown twilight was predominant; fluttering objects like falling books could be seen. In the fourth, behind a recog-

nizable boulder, something like an attenuated bus swathed in grey bunting was surrounded by wavering figures. In the fifth, the brown twilight was back, but punctuated by a curious object resembling the hull of a ship; but distortion and compression rendered its true shape unguessable.

The last two paintings bore an obvious relationship to each other. The smallest, the narrow rectangle, was of an inhuman figure; the other was, or appeared to be, a facial portrait of the figure.

It was difficult to be more explicit than that. The figure was golden, a hard unearthly gold, with three stilt-like legs and a polyhedric head. Either it was swathed in strips of cloth and armless, or it was naked and had several 'arms'. The distortion, fore-shortening, and blurring effects evident in the other pictures were equally obtrusive here; they seemed to be less a freak technique than the artist's deliberate attempt to capture something uncapturable. In the painting of the head, blurring was again present. The polyhedric shape was clear enough; several planes rose into nodes which might have been taken for features.

The execution of all seven canvasses was forceful. Here and there the paint protruded almost an inch from the rest, as if the artist had been forced to try to overcome the limitations of his medium.

"Extraordinary!" said Thatch.

Fillbrook turned to gaze in astonishment at his superior. In three weeks less a day this solitary breathed word was the only intimation he had had that Thatch could be impressed by the work of his fellow men. Like one quickly slipping a medical boot over an Achilles heel, Thatch added, "Extraordinary rubbish, I should say. Now perhaps you'll tell me what all this has to do with an optician in Hong Kong and the fourth dimension."

TEARING his gaze from the paintings and facing Thatch with the visible effort of a butler disentangling two flypapers, Inspector Thameson shook his body into a somewhat more spherical shape and said, "No time for that. I'm just off to arrest a man."

"Inspector, I came to see you expressly for the purpose of eliciting from you an explanation—"

"You may have heard of the man. His name is Hengist Mankiloe. Profession, artist. Whereabouts, out towards Brittling's Gap on the edge of the West Salt Desert not a hundred miles from here. Want to come along, boys?"

As he spoke, Thameson had begun towards the door like a one-man stampede, leaving his companions little chance to argue.

"We've no reason to go," Fillbrook said feebly. He personally knew of explorers who after returning from the West Salt Desert had spent the rest of their days in a refrigerated asylum clinging to the conviction that they were Tournedos steaks *bien cuit*.

"We've every reason," said Thatch, flinging his legs into gear. Even the Salt Deserts were preferable to self-accusations that he was pampering underlings. Puffing after the nearest upholder of the law, he asked, "What made you decide so suddenly to arrest this man, Inspector?"

"I caught sight of that communication about the bouncing check Mankiloe tried to pass for the calico. It was stuck in your fist while you stood gawking at his paintings. It gives me the pretext I need for entering his caravan."

"Caravan?"

"Don't ask so many questions. Fillbrook, tell your new boss about how there's no air on Mercury outside these domes, so that itinerants have to live in caravans."

He bounded along under the polarized dome, a round determined man with a long indeterminate shadow. Behind him two stalwarts of empire strove to keep up and their dignity at the same time. They crossed Sun Avenue at a controlled canter and burst into the vehicle yard of the new Police HQ with some breath still in hand.

A sergeant came forward, listened to Thameson's instructions, and led him over to a waiting bubbletrack.

"Excellent," Thameson said. "Keep a watch for my automatic signal over UVHF, sergeant, but send a search party out for us if we are not back in this yard in twenty-four hours."

"Very good, sir."

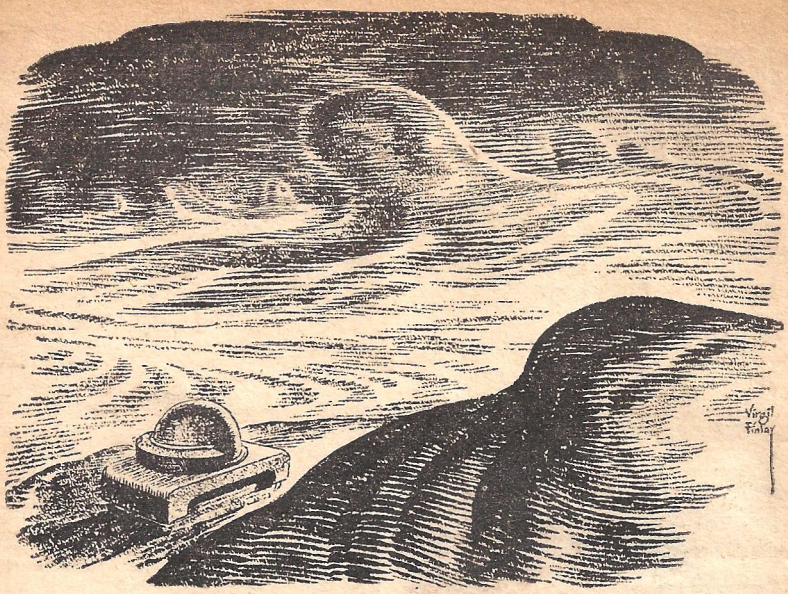
At this exchange, both Fillbrook and Thatch quailed. Their eyes met, as far as that was possible across the natural hazard of Thatch's mustache. Something akin to mutual sympathy flickered there, like a shy fish in a large cold pond.

"Do you really think we ought to go, sir?" Fillbrook bleated.

The fish nose-dived into the murky depths.

"Duty, Fillbrook. I mean to get to the bottom of this," snapped Thatch.

"Then get to the top of this," urged Thameson, indicating the rung ladder up the side of the bubbletrack. The three men climbed up and into the vehicle. Last in, Thameson lowered the



bubble over them and clamped it down. Settling himself in the high driver's seat, he gave a chummy wave to the sergeant and let her roll.

They headed down Sun Avenue and out through the West lock.

"It's enough to melt the ball-bearings off a brass monkey out here," Thameson said cheerfully, and that the refrigerated air-conditioning was not proof against self-suggestion was shown by the beads of sweat which immediately blossomed forth on Fillbrook's forehead.

All around them stretched the landscape referred to not inappositely by a leading politician as 'the backside of the universe'. Even under a sun more glorious and unkept than Thameson's hair, the land was a sterile grey, beautified only by natural slag-hills, an occasional gay bank of ash, or the alluring black of a sluggish lead stream.

"Now, with a bit of natural scenery about us, we can relax," said Thameson, "and I'll fill you in on the background to the Mankiloe case . . ."

IF YOU ARE standing on your head again, Joe," Hengist Mankiloe said in measured tones, "I'll flay you alive and use your skin for my next canvas."

He spoke without looking

round or ceasing to slash a mixture of burnt umber and sienna into one tortured corner of a canvas.

Behind him, Joe came abruptly down, his feet sweeping through a parabola culminating in a loud crash on the floor that rocked the caravan. He dived for shelter as a palette knife skimmed above his head.

Mankiloe sighed. His aim was off when his spectacles were. He turned back to the painting and the view through the visionport, where a thing like a distorted skyscraper lumbered about the middle distance. All this post-lunch shift he had worked at fever-pitch . . . which reminded him . . .

"Acne, old girl," he said conversationally, although nobody was present in the compartment, "I suppose you don't happen to be intending to roast us, do you? Do you mind telling me what the temperature is in here?"

"At twelve noon the longitude on the meridian approaches twelve point four two litres of prussic acid."

Wrenching himself away from his easel, Mankiloe turned and kicked at a panel of Acne, the Automated Captain and Nurse (Electronic) which coped, or was supposed to cope, with the many problems of caravan life on the equivalent of a vacuum-packed furnace floor.

"What's the matter with you, girl? Can't get any sense out of you these days."

"It's the cafard," Acne explained. "You bought this pile of junk sixth hand, I myself was third hand, you've never bothered to maintenance me, and now at last the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the square root of one is minus one."

"Okay, Acne, forget it, but let's have the place ten degrees cooler, if you can manage it."

"A drop in temperature precedes the precipitation of snow on the southern slopes of Aspasia was Pericles' mistress. Alexander was the horse of Bucephelus the Grat who—"

"ALL RIGHT, forget it! Babs!"

Babs appeared, lightly clad in a few beads and a suspicion of chiffon. This was her first trip and Mankiloe was going to make sure it was her last. She was a success in some vital respects, but her long sessions watching the Wyndham CV interfered with Mankiloe's work.

"What's the matter, Hen? Want some more beer?" she asked, with a smile that by exhibiting her teeth left nothing else to be exhibited.

Mankiloe waited patiently until her chiffon settled before replying. This body certainly knew how to dress for a warm climate.

"Yes please, love. And see that Joe's okay. Maybe he wants to

go out. He has got the fidgets."

"So have I, come to that."

He patted her behind absent-mindedly.

"You're lovely, Babs."

"So are you, Hen."

"Get that beer, love, eh?"

"Okay."

She disappeared into the other compartment where they cooked, ate and slept. Dimly he heard her chatter to Joe. Sharply he heard her squeal in surprise. She came running back into the studio without the beer.

HEN, Hen, there's something coming—a vehicle!"

"Head'n' this way, huh?" asked Hen, hamming it up with a mid-West accent. "Kinda reckon it must be them pesky Injuns agin." He put on his spectacles to look at her. "You forgot the beer, Babs."

"But they're nearly here, Hen. Who can it be?"

The lock bell rang.

"The sound of the doorbell ringing is equal to volume times mass of the gas," Acne announced.

"Shut your great automated trap," said Hen.

"It's not really her fault," Babs said in a parenthesis. "Joe will post his crusts into her."

As Mankiloe moved over to the door, Joe skidded forward and got there first. "I'll go, I'll go," he cried.

They opened up. Three men, one nose, one Great Barrier Reef mustache, and one head of hair stood without, smouldering in the tinny confines of the caravan lock.

"You're trespassing on private property," said Mankiloe mildly. "Get out."

"I know my Mercurian law as well as you do, Mankiloe," Thameson replied, rolling forward as if he had been specially constructed to test the maximum load of caravan floors. "We're police, and I have here a warrant for your arrest on which the ink is hardly dry. Anything you say may be taken either up or down in evidence."

"That's a different kettle of fish; why didn't you say that in the first place?" Mankiloe asked defensively as he removed the paint brush from his mouth.

"He did," said Thatch.

"I'll handle this," said Thameson.

"Thank goodness," said Fillbrook.

Thameson patted Joe's head.

"A nice kid you have here. Yours, Mankiloe?"

"Hell, does he look like mine?"

A friendly atmosphere having thus been established, they settled down to business. Babs appeared after a brief interval clad in something less revealing, chiefly because she had nothing *more* revealing, and served beer.

"First time I've ever sampled beer at boiling point," said Thatch, mainly to keep his end up and his stomach down, for the bumpy ride over the desert had shaken his equilibrium.

"The sale of beer has been the subject of license ever since 1869, when brewers paid tax on every hundred barrels of Beerbohm, an essayist and stylist who rose to fame in the 1890's . . ." said Acne.

"Pay no attention to her," Mankiloe told his guests. "Her beer-Beerbohm circuits appear to be shorting; they're probably adjacent. As for the temperature of the beer, I apologize. Our fridge and oven are also adjacent and there too Acne seems to be in some confusion. What can I do for you gentlemen?"

That Inspector Thameson was pulling himself together was externally evidenced only from a series of undulations of his sacrocostal area, as if in the battle to adjust himself, his ilium had become a second Ilium. The truth was, his preconceptions about artists were strong; he had expected a rebel painter like Mankiloe, this little wisp of a stoat of a man before him, to look slightly more capable of waving a banner at a barricade. However, since he was not one to take refuge in confused silence, he burst into confused speech.

"I have reason to suppose you have in your possession, Hengist Mankiloe, two hundred and thirty yards of fabric; to specify, coarse second grade calico."

"Golly, did the check bounce?" groaned Mankiloe. He caught a wolf-like grin of satisfaction on Thatch's face and added, "You can have it back intact if you like. This trip I decided to paint on hardboard instead."

"That's right," Babs said. "He's pulled out all the panelling in the kitchen to paint on. That's how Joe is able to stuff crusts into Acne."

JOE stood on his head in confirmation, Fillbrook stared at Babs in envy.

"If we can return the goods intact," Thameson said, "no doubt we can get this matter straightened out. I'll hold that rap over your head, Mankiloe, to insure I get satisfactory answers to my main line of questions."

"Ah ha, I didn't think you came all this way just for a few yards of canvas. Well?"

Scowling as when a kraken awakes with a hangover, Thatch said, "We want to know what your paintings really represent."

Thameson waved him into silence with his beer mug and assumed a judicial air.

"Supposing we lay a hypothesis before you, Mankiloe?"

"As you please."

"All right. Supposing we—you and me and these gentlemen and even that half-clad young lady there—were standing all unknowing on the brink of a revolutionary discovery. Supposing you could be the instrument of that discovery. Supposing you knew you could, but because you were a bit antisocial you were holding out on the world and impeding progress."

"Supposing your views and mine of what is progress did not coincide," said Mankiloe sharply.

"Joe, you go and play in the other room before there's an argument," Babs urged softly. She knew that progress and Mankiloe were as antithetical as prose style and communist manifestoes.

Inspector Thameson slapped his legs and took a new tack.

"Let me put a story to you, Mankiloe. Suppose we have a young artist. He's pretty good, becomes known to connoisseurs, but critics agree his subjects are pretty plebian.

"Suppose this young artist, after a few chastening rubs with authority, decided Earth is overcivilized and heads out for a back-water like Mercury. Let's go on to suppose he buys an old space-sealed caravan sixth-hand, and in it makes various forays into the Twilight Zone of Mercury. And there he does a lot of paintings."

They were all listening carefully. Even Fillbrook switched his gaze from Babs to Thameson with the sound of a rubber suction pad tearing off a steel wall.

Becoming somewhat histrionic under such rapt attention, Thameson rose and flung out a hand towards the nearest port.

"Look at that landscape simmering out there, gentlemen. That was what our hypothetical young artist had to paint. Dust, rock, debris. Fields of lava, no fields of grass. No trees—mountains of ash, but never a mountain ash. Blinding brightness, dense shadow, and a featureless plain that is plainly featureless.

"And yet—and yet, gentlemen—"

"Cut out the rhetoric, Thameson," Thatch interposed testily.

"And yet, gentlemen and Mr. Thatch, those are not the objects that our imaginary artist paints. Until now, he is an artist who has always depicted what he sees. He is not a surrealist; he is neither the exploiter nor the victim of his subconscious. He *paints what he sees.* And what does he see? Ha! Indescribable things, weird things—things you might say that could only belong to another dimension!"

HE lowered his voice into a whisper and his bulk into a chair, pointed a finger at Mankiloe and proceeded.

"Now then. Some of these revolutionary paintings sell in London, where they come under the scrutiny of certain gentlemen of the Royal Society. These certain gentlemen, as it happens, are doing research into the findings of the First and Second Mercurian Geogravitic Expeditions which took place recently.

"The curious thing is that these paintings seem to link up in an odd way with the expeditions' findings, which were otherwise inexplicable. For one thing, the findings showed several considerable perturbations in magnetic and gravitic flow on the surface of Mercury; these perturbations were not static, but moved apparently at random over the Twilight Zone, just as our imaginary artist friend did.

"What was more, after careful inquiry the Royal Society gentlemen found that the movements of the major perturbation and our minor artist coincided."

With a nervous gesture, Mankiloe pulled off his spectacles, mopping first them and then his countenance. Thameson noted the gesture and moved in his seat with such ponderous dignity that Acne was inspired to announce: "Earth's greatest mountain range is the subterranean Mid-Atlantic range, which is over 7,000 miles long."

"Silence! Proceed, Inspector Thameson," ordered Thatch.

"I was about to. The next step in the inquiry was to place the whole matter into the capable conscientious—never mind inspired—hands of a man actually on the spot, a highly talented individual we will call Inspector X.

"Now the Royal Society was fortunate in its man. Inspector X had not only a wide knowledge of matters scientific at his fingers; he also had a unique appreciation of things artistic. And he had imagination. With the comparative nearness of the sun, unusual stresses are formed on Mercury's surface that may form lesions in the fabric of space. It did not take the Inspector long to grasp that these gravitic plexuses, as the perturbations are called, might well be the gateways to other dimensions and other worlds.

"He got in touch with the RODS operative—Research Into Other Dimensions—and that gentleman confirmed the likelihood of the Inspector's supposition about the gateways.

"Obviously this artist fellow could see through these gateways. The question the wily Inspector next asked himself was —why should he alone be able to see through them? And the answer would seem to lie in the peculiar construction of the artist's eye.

"The artist, who was a little

fellow like you, Mankiloe, wore specs just like you. So our Inspector cabled off to Earth to make a few inquiries. Eventually he got a highly satisfactory answer.

"It appears our artist had bummed around a bit before leaving Earth. He lit out for Mercury from the space port in Hong Kong, but before leaving there he had had a new pair of spectacles made in the Celestial Chuckle Ophthalmic Studios. These studios in due course forwarded details, forwarded exact details of a rare type of astigmatism from which the artist suffered, and which his spectacles were designed to alleviate."

WITH a well-timed gesture the Inspector leapt forward and twitched the spectacles from Hengist Mankiloe's nose.

"And, gentlemen, here by more than coincidence is the very pair of glasses to which I refer."

He waved them aloft.

"Notice that on the nose-piece or bridge is stamped the word 'Ha-ha', the trade mark of the Hong Kong optician in question. So let us descend from fantasy to fact. *I*, gentlemen, am Inspector X. Hengist Mankiloe, you are the painter!"

Calmly, Mankiloe retrieved his spectacles and wedged them back into place.

"You have been ingenious, Inspector, you have been thorough, whereas I on the other hand am going to have another beer. But where does all this airy-fairy nonsense get you? Where does it get me?"

"It's going to get you into trouble if you don't watch your step," Fillbrook said.

"Quiet, Fillbrook," Thatch ordered. "This needs handling with tact. *I'll* speak to him."

He squared his shoulders and advanced on the painter.

"Listen, Mankiloe, we're going to let the Army Technical Wing have these astigmatism specifications. They're going to build big lenses with the same properties as your eyes. Obviously it just happens that your retina defects coincide with the degree of stress in the major gravitic plexus. But once we are equipped with these lenses, we'll be able to see what you see. How do you like that?"

"I dislike it intensely," Mankiloe said. "Just as I dislike you intensely." He turned to the Inspector.

"Mind you, I'm admitting nothing, but suppose this were all true. Suppose these Army lenses were made and you people discovered this new dimension. Then what would you do?"

"Well, er . . . the question of colonization would naturally arise . . ." The Inspector seemed ill at ease.

"Of course it would, and that would be my province," Thatch said, coming to the fore again with the verve of a heavyweight back off diet on to red meat again. "We'd go in with guns, prepared to meet any trouble the natives felt inclined to offer us."

"The Strychnos Nux-Vomica is an Indian tree of the family Loganiacae. It contains strychnine, the formula for which is $C_{21}H_{22}O_2N_2$. Strymon, Struma Strutt, Struve, Strumica in Macdeonia . . . " interposed Acne, pursuing her own line of reasoning.

"Shuddup!" said Babs, who had crept back in on the discussion carrying Joe.

A momentary silence fell in the caravan. Then Thameson thumped the half-finished painting on Mankiloe's easel.

"This weird object you're painting now, Mankiloe. Looks like a cross between a Victorian hat stand and a guillotine-maker's do-it-yourself kit. You didn't invent that. You can *see* it outside when you take your glasses off, can't you? Come clean, man!"

"Inspector, do you like my paintings?"

"Why, yes, I do.. They take a bit of getting used to . . . But —well, suppose this hat-stand affair was one of their trees?"

GOOD guessing, Inspector. And suppose I told you several items you couldn't guess? Suppose I told you that once you could see into that other world you could walk into it. That it was a wonderland completely new—a dimension where nothing was the same as ours, where new standards of beauty and behavior existed, where you could ever find things beyond imagining, fresh colors, different perspectives, and even alien qualities in your own body. So that everyone, even the most plebian person, could just walk in and enjoy an overpoweringly intense aesthetic experience such as only a few rare visionaries have hitherto managed to qualify for . . ."

"What a holiday center it would make!" exclaimed Fillbrook, polishing his nose in excitement.

"Go on, Mankiloe," said Thameson tensely.

"Don't tell them any more, Hen!" Babs said.

But Mankiloe had removed his glasses and was gazing out of the window like Keats sticking his head through a magic casement and casing the joint for fairy lands forlorn.

"And supposing that enchanting place were full of enchanting creatures, beings entirely outside our limited sphere of reference. Suppose these people were curious to look on, like a cross between an insect and an involved figure in a geometry book.

Suppose they were golden, of a hard unearthly gold, and had dodecahedric heads, with only a blurred suspicion of features... And suppose these people were as innocent as children and as powerful as devils."

"Could they come and go into this world?"

"Yes, though with your everyday eyes you might not recognize them."

"All right, Mankiloe," Thatch said, in the manner of one who has endured shilly-shally long enough. "Obviously this place, this dimension is ripe for exploitation. You've admitted it exists and—"

"I've admitted nothing!" Mankiloe said. "I said 'suppose' all the time. I'm an artist; I live in a world of suppose. You've come here on a wild goose chase, the bunch of you."

"Not so fast, not so fast," Thameson said. "My friend didn't mean what he was saying about exploitation."

"Or about going in armed? Or about establishing holiday centers? Rubbish! I tell you I know nothing! I paint what I imagine. Now take this wretched calico and get out of here."

"You're lying to us, Mankiloe!"

Mankiloe laughed.

"Of course I'm not. I was kidding you along, that's all. Now I'm tired of the joke and I want to get on with my painting. There's the door. Kindly use it."

NONPLUSSED, Thatch, Thameson, and Fillbrook fell back like factory owners confronted by a stray shop steward.

"Look, Mr. Mankiloe, we have got all the facts," Fillbrook said feebly.

"A few theories and a Chinese prescription—that's all you have! Take 'em and go."

"We shall pursue this matter to the limit," Thatch threatened.

"Not in my caravan you won't. Good-bye."

Recognizing defeat, Inspector Thameson picked up the bale of calico and passed it to Fillbrook to carry.

"You know, Mankiloe," he said, pausing reluctantly by the air lock, "I'm sorry you have to be like this. One of these pictures—a small one I hold back at Wyndham—it looks almost as if it might have been a child from a strange dimension—polyhedric head, golden skin, just as you said. I thought it was a beauty. I'm sorry—well, I'm sorry it's not true."

"Good day, Inspector. No charge for the beer."

Defeated, the three men disappeared.

Mankiloe, Babs and Joe climbed into the blister to watch the bubbletrack crawl off over the desert in a cloud of dust.

"Prothyle is hypothetical primitive matter from which all the chemical elements are supposed to be formed," Acne said sadly.

"It's all hypothetical," agreed Mankiloe. "What those blighters will do, I mean."

"Oh, Hen, I'm sure they won't rest with your explanation," Babs said, obviously concerned.

"Probably not." He removed his glasses and wiped his face wearily. Then he patted Joe's little golden dodecahedric head.

"We'd better go and tell your parents to get their solar annihilators ready," he said.

THE END

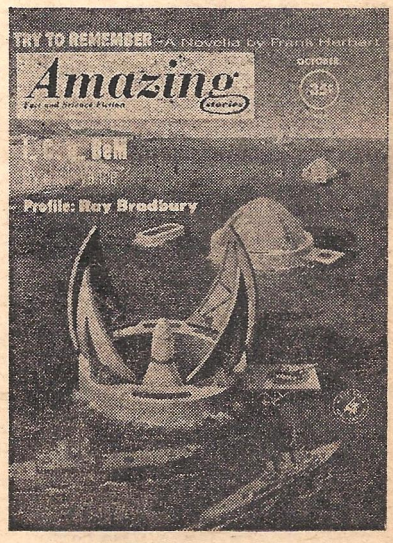
COMING NEXT MONTH

Out of the sky it flapped — a ship like a giant paramecium, and in it five froglike aliens. They gave an ultimatum to every earth nation: Communicate or die!

Man's frantic search for a way to express the inner meanings of the soul makes the compelling novella "Try To Remember," by **Frank Herbert,** featured in our October issue.

The next AMAZING will also offer you an intriguing "mystery" story. For now all we can tell you is the title: "I-C-a-BEM," and inform you it is by **Jack Vance,** and show you the cover illustration taken from it (r.). If you can guess in advance what surprises this will have for you, you should be writing, not reading!

PLUS another in our series of SF Profiles; this time, **Ray Bradbury,** one you certainly will not want to miss.



All these goodies, plus other stories and our regular features in the October AMAZING, on sale at your newsstand Sept. 12.

FACT

When space crews land on the moon they will need specially designed Lunar vehicles to implement the . . .

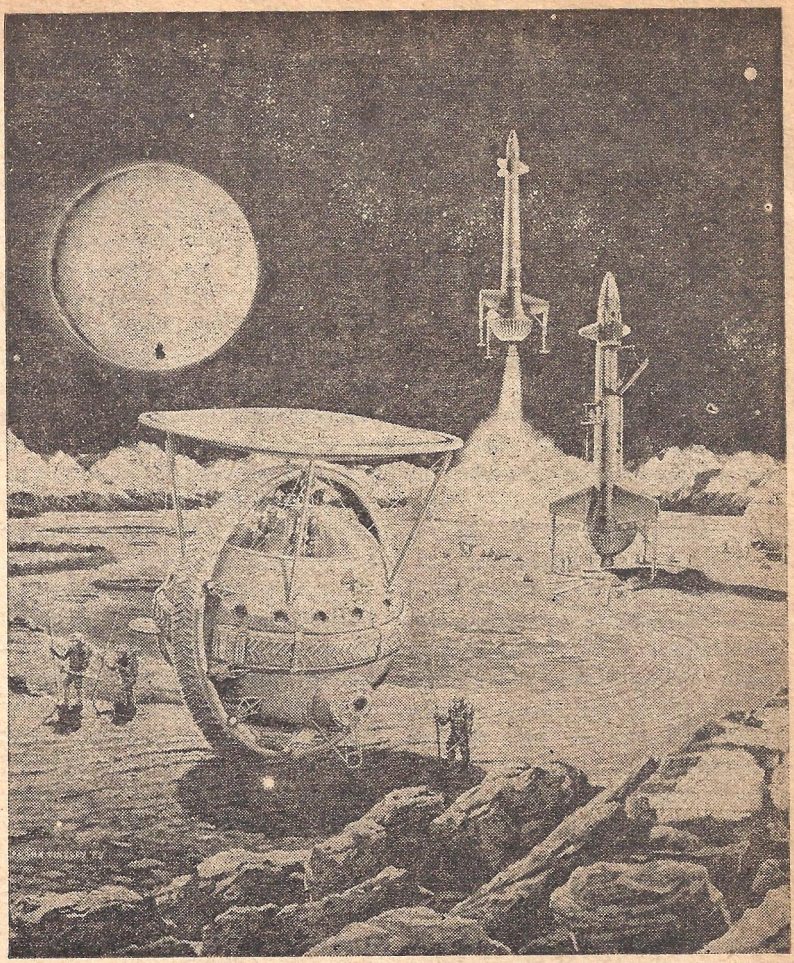
Early Exploration of the Moon

By FRANK TINSLEY

ONE of the happier phenomena of the post-Sputnik era has been a renaissance of engineering imagination. It has drawn a host of young and original minds into the field of cosmic research and spawned an ever-growing variety of unique spacecraft proposals. Most of these concepts are of interim machines—unmanned conglomerations of electronic gear designed to pop from the final stages of today's Atlas' and Titans and unfold, unwind or balloon into useful orbital satellites. Others, more ambitious and projected farther into the future, are larger vehicles planned for assembly in space and designed to carry human crews to the moon and nearer planets. Masses of data and reams of mathematical computation have been assembled to prove the advantages of this fuel or that theory of propulsion.

All this effort has been logical and laudable. And in a period of man's cosmic development that corresponds to that of the Wright Brothers in flying, it is natural that the emphasis has been almost entirely upon the problems of flight itself. Even among the more forward-looking of our space pioneers the major effort is still pointed toward a flight to the moon and the landing of a handful of men on its rugged surface.

The catch is that few of them have considered just what these first men on the moon will do when they get there—how they will get around in a sun-baked, sub-zero, airless environment. When such awkward questions are propounded to some of our would-be argonauts, they smile condescendingly. "Why, what do you think we'll do? We'll explore it, of course!"



Reproduced by courtesy of American Bosch-Arma Corporation

When you inquire "With what?" a blank look flits across the exalted one's countenance.

"Well-l-l . . . I suppose we'll have to whip up some sort of Lunar transport. To tell the truth, old man, I've been a mite too busy with the transit vehicle to give these details much thought."

Actually, all too little thought has been given to such mundane matters, even by the old pros of space travel. In their preoccupa-

tion with the admittedly knotty problems involved in "getting there," they have tended to skimp the question of surface transportation. One of the oddities of current space research is that brilliant engineers who have come up with really original and ingenious spaceship designs seem to lose all their originality once they theoretically set foot on the Moon or Mars. Russian scientists, who have brought off a series of technical tours-de-force in space, subside into uninspired mumbles of "tankettes." Our own cosmic wunderkinde are little better. To date, the best they have offered is "some form of lightweight tractor."

It is high time a little original thinking is done on this problem; before we talk so blithely about landing on our sister planets, shouldn't we design some usable vehicles for their surface exploration. As shown in the accompanying illustration, we have attempted just that.

OUR lunar vehicle must be self-sustaining, capable of traversing both the smooth, dust-paved crater beds and the steep, rocky passes of their mountainous rims. The combination calls for either a track-type of running gear or broad-tread, large diameter wheels. The living quarters must be armored against "meteoric rain," insulated against extremes of Lunar heat and cold, and pressurized within. To preserve this pressure and prevent loss of precious atmosphere, entry and exit must be through air-locks. The machine should operate on some form of power other than chemical fuels or internal-combustion engines, and must manufacture its own balanced and conditioned air. Finally, it must be as light in weight as possible and capable of being stowed compactly in the transporting spaceship.

A tank-type vehicle—even one constructed of the lightest known metals—is ruled out both on the score of weight and transportability. Suggested combinations of a tractor chassis and inflated-fabric cabin are likewise discarded. While these are an improvement on the all-metal concept, they still require heavy, bulky and unpackable hulls. The Rolligon or Terratire gear is a better bet, but it too, requires a bulky metal frame. We hit upon a possible solution—a giant "unicycle" with a spherical body mounted inside its rolling rim, and composed almost entirely of inflatable fabric components. This combination constitutes the lightest possible form of structure and the most efficient pressure container. It can be readily disassembled and deflated to stow in the smallest possible space.

The moon explorer is 32 feet high, driven by electric motors, stabilized and steered by gyroscopic tilting. Power is derived from a circular "parasol" faced with solar batteries. Those atop the inflated disc are of the light-actuated type. The bottom units are thermal generators, extracting electricity from reflected ground heat. This arrangement uses almost every square inch of area and constitutes a simple, long-lived power source, with no moving parts. Despite its large size, the parasol is extremely light in weight, consisting of an envelope of thin fabric stiffened by internal "spokes" and a tubular "rim" of the same material. It is carried well above the wheel on four magnesium legs which spring from the Explorer's body. Atop this light-metal pedestal is a ball-joint mounting, power-operated to tilt the parasol to any desired angle. An electric eye linked to gyros in the hub controls its movements automatically. Regardless of the vehicle's path or changes of direction, the batteries always face into the sun and the body is always shaded. Throughout the long Lunar day—about equal to an Earth month—a constant supply of electricity is thus provided. This not only operates the machine's running gear and auxiliaries but also recharges a bank of storage batteries used when moving through shadowed areas.

THE Explorer's single wheel is really a huge pneumatic tire made up of a wide row of inner-tubes, set side by side and faced with a diagonally-cleated tread, similar to those used on farm tractors. Its under surface is equally husky and is lined with driving lugs. For convenience in assembling and changing, these outsize tires are built in two halves, joined by rugged, belt-lacing type fasteners.

The wheel rides on a series of inflated "driving units," much like "Terratires," and is kept in line by inflated, ball-bearing guides. The drum shaped Drivers are mounted on light-metal frames which carry power and air-cooling lines into them through their hubs. Geared electric motors built into the axles, provide the driving power. There are eight of these units, all powered and all interchangable in case of breakdown. The bottom five support the body and act as drivers. The upper three function as idlers and reserve powerplants. To meet field emergencies, a spare tire is carried around the vehicle's body, inflated to act as a bumper in traversing rocky defiles. In the event of a puncture or blow-out, these tires can be switched and repaired by the crewmen.

The Explorer's body is a double-walled sphere of plasticised fabric, reinforced internally by floors and vertical tubing. The outer skin is tough and strong, designed to resist the impact of cosmic dust and the abrasion of ordinary wear and tear. Its exterior is coated with a radiant paint for maximum visibility and radar reflectiveness. The body's inner shin is finished in soft, relaxing pastel tones and is stressed to take the normal atmospheric pressures of Earth. Between these walls is a layer of thick insulation to protect the crew against heat, cold and harmful radiation. Lightweight floors of honeycomb structure divide the interior into three levels in which the vehicle's six-man crew live and work.

TO GET a clear picture of life in this tiny, self-contained world on wheels, let's thumb a ride on one of Explorer's shorter voyages. But first, perhaps we should go back to the beginning —see just how "Old Rock and Roller" was originally transported to this lonely Lunar crater and here assembled in all her seeming complication.

As can be seen in the right rear of the illustration, her component parts were unloaded from the upper hold of an Earth Moon ferry and laid out nearby for assembly. The compact, tightly folded bundles of rubberized fabric that form the three decks of the cabin were then unrolled, zipped together level on level and blown up with compressed air from the Ferryship's tanks. Telescopic metal legs, anchored to the cabin's upper deck line, were splayed out in a quadrupod to hold the sphere erect and off the ground.

Meanwhile, the eight Driving units had been unpacked, inflated and installed on their metal mounts. These were then strapped in place around the cabin perimeter and with juice from a spaceship power line, their connections were checked and drive motors tested. All was now in readiness for the main Tire to go on. Its separate halves were soon fitted around the circle of Drivers, laced together and filled with air. The running gear was now complete.

While all this was going on, another pair of space-suited mechanics had hauled the unfolded Parasol into position atop the sphere and coupled the ball-joint fitting. Electric cables were plugged in, the air hose applied and the limp fabric swelled and took shape. As it tightened into a huge, shallow disc, the fiery Lunar sunlight flashed on its silicon batteries and power began to flow into the vehicles copper veins. Air-conditioners hummed and in the protective

shadow of the big umbrella the cabin interior cooled to a comfortable level. The assembly job was nearly finished. Quickly the piles of supplies and equipment were passed aboard and stowed in their appointed places. The pilots followed, seated themselves in the control seats and ran deft fingers over instrument panels. Lights blinked on, motors whirred and the big balancing gyro began its silent spin. Explorer was ready for her trial run.

All this was months in the past. Today, as we find ourselves standing beside her travel-stained flanks, "Old Rock and Roll" is a Lunar veteran, waiting to take a pair of greenhorns on a demonstration trip. Outside her elliptical shadow the solar rays feel uncomfortably hot; we are glad to see the airlock hatches swing open. Passing through the locks is a one-at-a-time procedure, so two locks are provided. Waving precedence to you, I trudge around to the twin entrance on the other side of Rock and Roll's cabin. Encumbered by our clumsy space harness, we mount the short access ladders and step into the spherical lock chambers. When, in obedience to instructions, we poke the operating buttons, the hatches close behind us and there is a hiss of air entering the near vacuum. Rapidly, the gauge rises until the vehicle's interior pressure is reached. Then, with a click, the inner doors unlatch. Stepping through, we find ourselves facing each other on the Explorer's tiny lower deck.

THIS is little more than a vestibule/dressing-room, with the ball-like bulge of the airlocks intruding on either side. Between us, in the center, a tubular ladder rises to the vehicle's upper levels. Set around the deck's perimeter is an array of lockers, supply bins, and air-conditioning apparatus. Beneath our feet is a water tank which doubles as the Explorer's ballasting weight. Helping each other unfasten the numerous straps, buckles and zippers, we climb out of our gear and hang the spacesuits in their lockers. Then I lead the way to the floor above.

Here are the crew's living quarters. The little circle of rooms, just 15 feet in overall diameter, is compact yet surprisingly comfortable. We step off the ladder into a lounge, fitted with chairs, desks, lockers and Pullman type sofa-beds. On one side this opens into a galley with ample space for food storage, on the other, into a double lavatory with twin toilets, washbasins and a capacious shower stall. The final segment of the cabin is allotted to a separate,

sound-proof stateroom for off-duty crewmen. The whole layout is designed for a maximum of ease and privacy within a necessarily restricted space.

Moving up to the top level we find ourselves on the Control Deck, enclosed in a transparent dome of tinted plastic. This is the Explorer's principal working area. Her pilots sit in bucket seats on either side of the central ladder, elevated to permit clear downward vision in a 360-degree arc. Around the deck's outer edge a circle of waist-high instrument cabinets form a protective bulwark. Overhead, beneath the metal center of the dome, are more instruments and controls. At the Skipper's suggestion we peer over the bulwark. Belted around its exterior, exposed to the shadowed light and heat of the sun, is a compact bank of large-diameter plastic tubes. We look closer and see that they are a smaller version of the hydroponic gardens familiar to space-station crews.

The Skipper grins. "These babies put out more oxygen than we can use . . . And food, too—*if* you like algae soup!"

He explains the various instrument installations and gives us a run-down on the Explorer's functions. Later during our familiarization trip we will see these demonstrated: prospecting, mapping, the collection of soil and mineral samples, etc. Donning space-suits, we will tramp around with the outside crew, sinking into the gray Lunar dust, squirreling odd souvenir stones and photographing the unearthly vistas of sterile peaks and chasms.

The Explorer makes no pretense of being the only vehicle especially fitted for Moon travel. It is frankly an interim type, intended to operate under conditions that we can still only guess at. When we have first-hand knowledge of Lunar climate and terrain, other, perhaps more efficient types, will be evolved. Meanwhile, Old Rock and Roll is an honest effort to meet a problem that to date, has been sorely neglected.

THE END

HERE is a noteworthy thought we ran across recently, and would like to share with you. is a quote from Albert Einstein:

"The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle."

The MAN WHO HAD NO

By JEFF SUTTON
(conclusion)

Illustrated by ADKINS

SYNOPSIS

BEN YARGO, 90th Prime Thinker of the Empire of Earth, calls World Council of Six into extraordinary session at planet Capital, Sydney, Australia, in 2449 A.D. He tells Council that the First Law against atomic research has been violated: An atomic conspiracy has been discovered. This is first time the law has been violated since the rise of the Empire in 1999 A.D., following global atomic war which devastated earth. Proof of conspiracy: William Bixby Butterfield, a long missing professor,

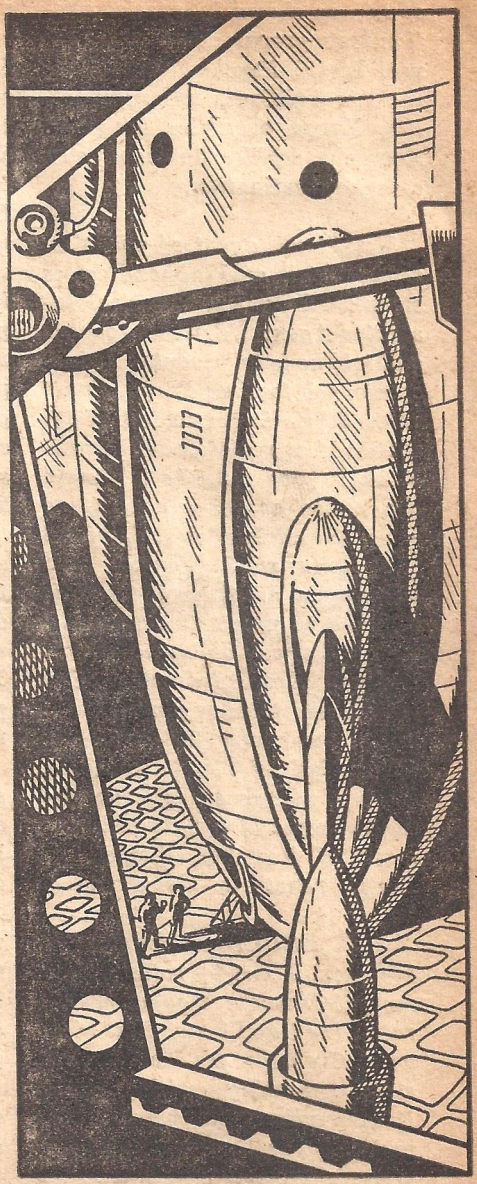
BRAINS

has been found dead of radiation burns. The news is top secret.

The conspirators are unknown. Members of the Council, each representing one of earth's six major political subdivisions, argue over extent of conspiracy, and how to handle it. Kenneth Kingman, Council member representing Anzaca, is hostile toward Ben Yargo, says immediate police investigation must be pushed as he suspects conspiracy is headed by espers.

Council member Hans Taussig of Europe, a sociologist, pooh-poohs esper threat, denies existence of any form of extra-sensory perception aside from simple telepathy. Taussig points out that telepaths, under law, are registered and their activities are regularly checked. Besides, the government maintains a secret police force—called The Searchers—who constantly ferret all esper activities.

Kingman argues that Ivan Shevach, World Manager, should head investigation. Shevach agrees. Latter is opposing Ben Yargo for office of Prime Thinker at next election (which is decided in a contest



of I.Q. as shown by special election tests prepared by Karl Werner, World Psychmaster). Shevach is brilliant, unscrupulous. Ben Yargo overrules Kingman Shevach, decides to head own covert investigation.

Max Krull, agent of police on remote atoll of Waimea-Roa, is summoned by his superior, Inspector-Agent Martin Jonquil, and told he is to be sent to handle special job for Ben Yargo, planet ruler. Krull is astounded. He is stationed at remote atoll because of an I.Q. of 113, the lowest in the police academy graduating class. He thinks mistake must have been made. Jonquil says I.Q. is not everything—perhaps Ben Yargo needs an agent who is not known, and who can be trusted. Krull leaves station, feeling the tension come. He realizes Ben Yargo is most brilliant mind on planet. Himself? *He is a hidden esper, concealed in the ranks of agents behind a mask of low I.Q. Would Ben Yargo penetrate his disguise?*

MAX KRULL arrives in Sydney, is met by rotund agent named Cranston who works directly for Ben Yargo. That night when Cranston escorts him to a secret meeting with Yargo, Krull realizes the planet ruler probably has peeper agents, and tries to erect a mindshield. He passes a beautiful girl on the staircase before meeting Yargo. Latter swears Krull to secrecy, tells him of evidence of atomic conspiracy, and gives name of dead radiation victim: William Bixby Butterfield. Yargo briefs Krull on reactions of council members and Shevach, and states own belief that conspiracy is "small, at some out-of-the-way place."

When Krull leaves, girl he passed on staircase runs to Yargo, tells him Krull is an esper—she had penetrated his mindshield. Girl is Jan Yargo, Prime Thinker's daughter; she also is a hidden esper. Yargo frets, ponders what to do with Krull; he finally pushes him from mind and concentrates on a history of Alexander the Great. For only Yargo knows that Alexander is yet to play another role in history.

World Manager Ivan Shevach scans dossier on Krull that an agent, planted in Yargo's house, had purloined. Shevach is baffled at why Yargo selected an I.Q. 113 agent for such an important investigation. He assigns Jordan Gullfin, his sadistic chief of special agents, to keep Krull under surveillance. Gullfin tells Shevach about Yargo's concentration on history of Alexander the Great. Shevach realizes volume somehow is important, gathers all known material on Alexander.

Krull tracks past of Butterfield, the radiation victim, and finds World Manager has autopsy report under surveillance. Krull has brush with Cathecart, one of Shevach's agents, gets autopsy report and finds Butterfield has a brother named George Henry Butterfield. Entry looks as if it were added later. He goes to agent headquarters, is aided by a thin giant named Peter Merryweather, who identifies himself as a public relations man for the World Manager. Merryweather is affable, offers to help Krull in any way possible. Krull visits Butterfield's brother in Benbow Deep, a submerged city, and discovers the dead man was a hidden esper. Krull realizes he must penetrate the mysterious world of espers—a great danger to himself.

A mysterious telephone caller promises Krull information on the atomic conspiracy. Krull goes to rendezvous, is nearly murdered but manages to kill attacker. He finds dead man is Cranston, Ben Yargo's trusted lieutenant. Krull arranges midnight date with Yargo, is escorted to meeting by Jan Yargo, the Prime Thinker's daughter—herself an esper.

Yargo is not disturbed at revelation that his aide tried to kill Krull. He says that it's part of the swirling tides of intrigue that surround his office. But he appears surprised when Krull states Butterfield was a hidden esper. Krull is uncertain of Yargo's true role. Did the Prime Thinker engineer the attempt on his life?

Krull returns to hotel room and finds beautiful woman waiting for him. She gives her name as Anna, says she can lead him to man with knowledge of atomic conspiracy. Krull suspects trap but goes. He meets extremely old man named "Mr. Bowman," who asks Krull not to press search for conspirators. He says conspirators are near end of their age-long quest; that this will be saving of mankind. Mr. Bowman denies he is one of conspirators. When Krull refuses to abandon search, Bowman says he already knew Krull's answer, but he had to ask because he was "a faint force in the causal chain." Krull, baffled, later draws a sketch of Mr. Bowman. Newsman identifies sketch as that of Herman Bok, President of the World Council of Espers.

KRULL asks Peter Merryweather for information on Bok. Merryweather appears cooperative but can tell him nothing—only that Bok has pretty secretary named Anna Malroon. That night Shevach's agents arrest Krull for murder of Crans-

ton. Jordan Gullfin gives him third degree. Ivan Shevach and Peter Merryweather appear at cell. Latter, as usual, appears jovial. At critical moment Ben Yargo arrives with Joseph Grimhorn, Chief of World Agents, and Yargo orders Krull freed. Outside, Krull asks how Yargo knew he was imprisoned. Yargo says he got an anonymous tip from a mysterious man named Mr. Bowman."

Yargo has a midnight visitor named Karl Werner, chief psychmaster of the world. Yargo has summoned him for a special task. Werner reveals he has found a young boy in Africa with psychokinetic powers, and says boy is hidden from The Searchers. *Yargo is surprised to find that man hiding boy is Hans Taussig, of the World Council of Six. Yargo and Werner agree that such mutants herald the dawn of* Homo Superior, *the Man of Tomorrow, and they must be protected from hate and persecution. Yargo reveals mission for which he has called Werner, and gives latter volume of history on Alexander the Great.*

Krull flees back to Waimea-Roa to seek Jonquil's advice. After he tells Jonquil all that has happened, Jonquil confides that Peter Merryweather is head of The Searchers, *and advises him to beware of Ivan Shevach, but to trust Ben Yargo implicitly. He also says that Herman Bok, the esper leader, is an evil old man. While swimming in atoll, a strange frogman tries to kill Krull. Krull kills attacker, finds he is one of the Sydney police agents.*

CHAPTER 9

ALTHOUGH the Empire of Earth was founded upon Crozerian principles, dissidents appeared from time to time. Some early writers (e.g., Huxtel, 2210, and Brinkton, 2309) saw Crozener as harsh, unjust, a dictator who imposed his philosophy of government upon the planet without the people's consent. Huxtel portrayed civilization as ". . . a monstrous vegetable, devoid of thought."

Chau, in his *Regression Into Stagnation* (2356), followed Brinkton's earlier thesis that human progress had stopped, the world was static and mankind was living "in an intellectual vacuum, much like a hive of bees."

Kloppert's *Slumbering Race* (2395) argued that humanity had cut itself off from its natural destiny, the conquest of the stars. He referred to space as "the waiting cosmic biosphere" and termed human efforts to develop a far-flung empire of submerged cities as an "escape into

a womb" symbol. Wallfort, in his remarkable biography, *Edward Crozener, The Saintly Benefactor* (2396), argued against Kloppert, stating that only dangerous progress had been stopped (i.e., atomic research). Wallfort noted that Leon Konstantine (IQ 213), the seventh Prime Thinker, had ruled that satellites used as weather stations and communications relays did not violate Crozerian principles, and that such space vehicles had been used for these purposes since Konstantine's time. He saw this as proof that mankind had not abandoned space. Far from being in a state of slumber, as claimed by Kloppert, Wallfort contended that planetary civilization had achieved a serene equilibrium, in which the very predictability of the future was its greatest assurance of security.

In 2410 A.D., Kemal Nazir (IQ 198), the 82nd Prime Thinker, made opposition to Crozerian principles a felony.

Blak Roko's
Post-Atomic Earthman.

KRULL returned to Sydney with a sense of urgency, a feeling he had to conclude the investigation to Yargo's satisfaction and get back to Waimea-Roa before he was caught in a political explosion. Jonquil had given him a better insight and for the first time he fully appreciated the tremendous undercurrents swirling around Yargo's throne. That was the danger. The election was only days away. If Ivan Shevach won . . . the prospect wasn't pleasing. The disquieting revelation of Merryweather's true role shook him. Why the searchmaster? He shuddered inwardly. The gaunt man was a chilling specter.

When the carrier landed, he hurriedly disembarked, almost bumping into Hardface Cathecart coming down the ramp. Krull recoiled and managed a grin.

"Nice to see you again."

Cathecart tried to conceal his surprise. He grunted and walked past him, stationing himself on the float. When the last passenger emerged, he turned with a frown. Krull grinned. He wanted to tell him that Earlywine must have missed the plane, but refrained. He returned to his room to formulate a plan of action: the esper seemed his best bet. He discarded the idea of working through Anna Malroon—that would forewarn Bok—and finally settled for a frontal attack.

After dark he took a cab to an address a few blocks from Bok's house. His destination turned out to be an area of rolling tree-shaded hills occupied by spacious mansions that clearly spelled HIQ. He smiled grimly. At least Bok was human enough to enjoy

the better things of life. His heart might bleed for the LIQ's, but not to the extent that he lived among them. When the cab's lights receded, he started toward Bok's address.

The House of Espers proved to be a spacious two-story residence of pale green plastiglass and brick with a large pyrmont stone fireplace climbing up one side. It was, he noted, more pretentious than the mansion allotted Yargo. At the moment it seemed dark and lifeless except for a yellow shaft of light from an upper window that made a long rectangle across the ground. He paused a moment before going to the porch. The wind stirred through the trees but the house was still. He reached the door, hesitated, rang the chimes and waited. No answer. He tried again with the same result. He debated a moment and tried the knob. It turned.

HE paused inside to get his bearings, aware that he was perspiring and his nerves were on edge. Because he was going to face the esper? That was silly. Bok was a doddering eighty-seven. There was a flight of stairs that led toward the place he had seen the streamer of light. He reached the top of the stairs and spotted a half-open door leading to the room he sought. He moved quietly, and stopped with his eye against the opening. The opposite wall of the room was lined with books and, lower, the top of a nearly bald head protruded above the top of an easy chair. Beyond was the reflection of flames from an open hearth. He was congratulating himself when an ancient voice wheezed:

"Come in, Mr. Krull. I've been expecting you."

He sheepishly pushed the door open and entered.

"Come, sit by the fire." Krull glanced around. Bok—for it was Bok—was alone. He tried to conceal his discomfiture as he walked over to the hearth and looked down at the esper.

"Old bones like fire," Bok said. "Sit down, Mr. Krull." He motioned toward an easy chair alongside the hearth.

"Thank you, I will." He studied the old man while trying to pull his thoughts together. For the moment, the esper had him off balance. If the ancient man facing him felt the victory, his face didn't show it. Instead, it bore a look of warm welcome, as if a dear friend had come to visit.

"I've always liked an open hearth," Bok continued conversationally, "much better than electrical heat." He chuckled. "A psychmaster would probably say it's related to racial memories, when man had no other

form of heat. Or maybe it's because a hearth always seems conducive to dreaming. He smiled gently. "Old men do fall into the habit, you know. In fact, their lives center around their dreams. But I suppose you wouldn't know that—yet."

"We all dream." Krull retorted, trying to figure out the best way to launch his attack.

"Yes, I suppose so, but with a difference."

"What's that?"

"Young people dream of the future—old men of the past. Your dreams, I suppose, are largely hopes. Ours . . . are regrets. Regrets mixed with pleasant memories; thoughts of what might have been as well as what was." He looked gently at Krull. "But I don't suppose you came here tonight to hear an old man reminisce."

"No, as a matter of fact, I didn't." He tried to introduce a note of harshness into his voice and failed. It was difficult to be harsh with such a saintly-appearing old man even if—as Jonquil claimed—he had the soul of Lucifer. You have information I need, Mr. Bok. Need and intend to get."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Butterfield again."

"And the rest of the facts about the conspiracy."

"I'm not a conspirator," Bok remonstrated gently.

"I won't argue the point," Krull said coldly. "You've already admitted extensive knowledge of the conspiracy. Now I want the rest of it."

Bok smiled. "I'm afraid I can't supply the information you want, Mr. Krull."

"Can't or won't?"

"I'm only interested in guiding you into proper channels of thought. Have you ever considered the satellites, Mr. Krull? Aren't they more to you than mere weather-forecasters—TV relays?"

"I don't know what you're driving at," Krull snapped harshly. "I'm interested in conspirators, not weather stations in space."

"Ah, yes, just weather stations." Bok contemplated the flames. "Yes, they go around and around, unvarying, telling us about such things as monsoons and sunny days. Very practical, Mr. Krull, but consider their history."

"I'm not interested," he answered bluntly.

THE conspirators are." Bok's pale eyes caught and held his. "The first satellites were put up before the Atom War—Sputniks, Explorers, Vanguards and dozens more. Mechta still circles the sun; probes lie on the barren deserts of Mars and beneath the mists of Venus. The

heavens are not entirely alien to the hand of man. The moon was circled and televised. In time men went up, Mr. Krull, went up and rode the fringes of space in manned orbital vehicles. Do you know why? The future. They were seeking the future. It was the first step into space. All they needed was more power—atomic power. They built the first interplanetary vehicle, were ready to strike out when the Atom War dawned . . . and darkened the world." Bok's voice dropped.

"Now we use satellites to tell us about winds and rains and we've forgotten our dreams . . . content ourselves with mediocrity. We send satellites into orbit to use as TV relays. Do you know why, Mr. Krull? To transmit lurid pictures and sensational plays, to keep the populace amused and"—he chuckled whimsically—"to transmit commercials. Oh, yes, now the backward peoples of the world can be apprised of the IQ value of wearing Zarkman clothing. That's what we do with our knowledge, Mr. Krull—prostitute it. But the men you call conspirators remember. They know that man has a destiny far beyond the borders of this speck of dust we seem to prize so highly. Now they have the power . . ."

"To wreck the world," Krull grimly cut in. "Do you want that to happen?"

"I want to see mankind realize its destiny," the old man said quietly. "Unfortunately, I won't be here when that event actually occurs. But it will occur. I can tell you that much."

"You couldn't know so much without being a member of the conspiracy," Krull accused.

"Wrong," Bok replied, "but my role is more than that of a sympathizer. They haven't asked my aid, but I'm giving it . . . freely."

"They're undoubtedly appreciative," Krull said drily.

"Yes and no."

"Explain that."

"Only a few of the conspirators are aware of my—shall we say—sympathy toward their cause. None know I hold the key to their success."

Krull was startled. "Key?"

"Yes." Krull felt the ancient eyes, the color of sunstruck ice, rest on his face. "You see, the conspirators are working in the blind, lack the knowledge of how to make the final step come true; they know, only, that some miracle will happen to make the dream live. They are working on faith, Mr. Krull."

"And you . . . ?"

"Will help the miracle come true."

"How?"

"You will see, but it's no honor to me. I'm merely a link in the casual chain, a pawn that moves

and acts according to destiny. Not that I have any alternative. *'Tis all a chequer-board of nights and days where Destiny with men for pieces plays;* but perhaps you've never heard of Omar, Mr. Krull." He chuckled softly. Krull suppressed the desire to shake the information from the frail body. Was Bok sane?

"Men . . . men with dreams. That's all I can tell you. The rest you'll have to find out for yourself."

"I could force it from you," Krull threatened.

"No—no, you couldn't. My frail body couldn't take any force, and you couldn't get information from a corpse. But that's beside the point. You wouldn't use force." He smiled faintly. "It even makes you wince to contemplate it."

HE FELT trapped. No, he couldn't use force, not on such a harmless old man as Herman Bok. Harmless? He remembered Jonquil's words. But even if the Inspector were right he couldn't do it. Bok had him whipped—at least on that score.

Bok said thoughtfully: "My murderer will be a much more brutal man, Mr. Krull?"

"Your murderer?"

"Yes, I suppose you would call it murder. Like I said, I'm frail. It would take but slight force."

"No, I don't think anyone would use force on you, Mr. Bok."

"You're wrong—unfortunately."

"You seem to know?"

"I know."

"You're a fatalist."

"With good cause."

"Or, perhaps, I should say a pessimist."

"No, not a pessimist, Mr. Krull. To the contrary, I'm exceedingly optimistic about the future."

"Even if you're going to be murdered?" Krull shrewdly shot.

"My optimism is not for me." Bok chuckled. "A man of eighty-seven would have to be optimistic, indeed, to see a good future in terms of himself. No, I'm optimistic for mankind. I see a glorious future."

"But there's nothing you will tell me?"

"Nothing beyond what I've already said," Bok answered firmly. "Except, when the time comes, you won't disappoint me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You'll see, you'll see." Bok smiled. "Don't be discouraged, though. You'll find your conspirators. I can promise that."

"Thanks," Krull said drily. He debated his next move. It was clear that questioning Bok would yield nothing. The old man was shrewd, elusive, too wily to pin down. Okay, he'd play it another way. He got up to go.

"Be ready when you leave the house," Bok said.

"Why?"

"There's a man waiting for you."

Krull was startled. "Why?"

"To kill you."

"Is that a joke?"

"Do I look like a joker, Mr. Krull?" He searched the ancient face. No, he thought, he didn't. The old man who headed the espers might he mad but he wasn't a joker. He momentarily wondered if Bok's telepathic powers were great enough to enable him to peep someone outside and almost as quickly discarded the idea. He would have to know someone was there before he could peep him. How would he know? He looked down at the esper. Mild blue eyes peered back at him. He's peeping me, Krull thought, but he didn't bother to erect a mind shield. Somehow, he felt it wouldn't do much good. He returned his thoughts to the esper's warning.

"How do you know someone's waiting to kill me?"

"I know." The words were uttered with finality.

BOK smiled faintly; his eyes closed and his head nodded as if he were falling asleep. Krull studied the fragile figure; the narrow chin was slumped forward and the hands, blue-veined talons, lay relaxed on the arms of the chair. He turned and stole from the room, pausing at the door for a final backward glance before leaving, then descended the stairs. He hesitated at the front door. Was Bok mad? A dreamer? A senile old man with an overworked imagination? He decided he was none of those and drew his gun, then opened the door a few inches and peered out. The porch and sidewalk seemed clear, but the latter was hedged in with tall shrubbery and overhanging trees. He decided he'd have to chance it and stepped out on the porch, glanced nervously around and started down the walk.

He had taken only a few steps when he sensed rather than saw movement in the bushes beside him, and automatically ducked and whirled just as a hand came through the bushes.

A gun blasted alongside his face.

He brought his weapon up and triggered it three times, leaping backward. A dark form stumbled from the shrubbery, staggered with loud gasping wheezes and slumped to the ground at his feet.

He held his gun ready and bent down, grasping the man's arm and flipping him over. Kruper's face stared vacuously at him. The Manager's man! He dropped the dead arm just as a voice grated in his ear:

"Stand still—don't move."

Krull froze, feeling his heart rise to a hammer in his chest; slowly, deliberately, he turned his head. Gullfin's flat evil face stared at him and his hand gripped an automatic that resembled a field piece.

"Drop the gun!"

Krull straightened his fingers—his weapon clattered on the walk.

"I'm going to kill you," Gullfin taunted. "Rip you open."

"No you won't," Krull countered, trying to sound calm. He heard a thumping and realized it was his heart.

"Why not?" Gullfin sneered.

"Because—if you were going to kill me, you would have done it already."

"Wrong. I want to see you squirm—feel it, taste it, sweat a little, then I'll let you have it right in the middle; scramble up your guts so you'll suffer a while. I don't want it to be easy."

"Lousy rat!" Krull spat the words without losing his watchfulness. When Gullfin's finger started to tighten . . .

"I know what you're thinking but you won't have time," the burly agent taunted. His eyes became pinpoints, his lips pulled tight against his teeth. The gun moved upward slightly.

The front door opened . . . a sharp scream . . . Gullfin whirled with a startled curse and Krull twisted, bringing a smashing right against the stocky agent's jaw. Gullfin staggered backward, and he followed through with hard chopping lefts and rights, dropping him with a hard rabbit punch.

"Quick—inside." Krull whirled toward the porch and saw Anna Malroon standing at the door, beckoning him to hurry. He stooped to retrieve his gun and took the steps four at a time. She stepped back into the house and slammed the door behind him. "Follow me—out the back," she gasped.

SHE turned without waiting for his answer and darted down the hall, Krull at her heels. She fled through the rear door and across the lawn, keeping in the shadows of the trees until she reached the street. There she stopped, motioning him to silence, before starting rapidly down the sidewalk. He reached her side and whispered:

"Where to?"

"Don't try to talk now," she gasped. "My car's parked around the next corner." She walked quickly, her breath coming in short violent pants.

"Take it easy," he counseled. She didn't answer. When they reached the next intersection she motioned to a car parked halfway down the block. When they reached it, he saw it was the

same one she had used the first time he'd met her. She had the engine started almost before he got in beside her, and pulled away from the curb. She pushed to a high rate of speed, twisting down the hill to the freeway, turned and reduced her speed until she was moving with the flow of traffic. Krull broke the silence.

"You showed up just in time."

"Yes, I was on schedule." The way she said it caused him to turn toward her; her face, in profile, looked taut and pale.

"Schedule?"

"Mr. Bok's schedule," she explained.

"At least he's Bok instead of Bowman," Krull observed. When she didn't reply, he said: "What does Bok do, schedule things like this for a hobby?"

"He didn't schedule it, really. He just told me of the schedule," she explained. "He was a wonderful man."

"Was?" He questioned, startled.

"Yes, Mr. Bok is dead, now."

"What do you mean dead? I just saw him."

"Gullfin just killed him—a moment ago."

"How do you know that?"

"When Gullfin regained consciousness, he was enraged. He figured Mr. Bok was in league with you and he . . . handled him roughly. Too roughly."

"How do you know?" Krull repeated. "You weren't there."

"Mr. Bok told me."

"Oh . . ." He slumped back in the seat and gave up trying to solve the puzzle. Anna was talking riddles. The fact she was an esper didn't answer anything—not the kind of information she fed him. Of course, that had held for Bok, too. The old man—somehow Krull was convinced Anna spoke the truth when she stated he was dead—had been an odd duck. It was hard to fit Jonquil's description of him to his own observations. His saintliness had seemed genuine—as real as his expressed concern for the future of mankind. He had no reason for acting Lucifer's role; not with the knowledge of his own imminent death. He only wished Bok had come through with more information—such as the identity of the people involved in the conspiracy. Conspiracy? Actually, he didn't have a shred of evidence that one really existed, if one discounted William Bixby Butterfield's death—and Bok's admission.

THE car swung off the freeway, climbing along a narrow road which lead to the brow of a hill. He recalled the route from the first visit; Anna's apartment lay just ahead. She turned into the driveway and parked.

"Wait here," she said hurriedly, and got out of the car without waiting for a reply. He heard her sandals receding down the drive toward the front of the house. A door banged, then there was silence. She returned a short time later.

"I've called a cab."

"Oh . . . ?" He looked inquiringly at her, but she didn't offer any further information. She looked nervously over her shoulder and said: "Let's wait in front."

"Okay." He crawled from the car and walked with her back along the dark driveway to the front of the apartment, halting in the shadows of a lace fern tree. She was visibly nervous and kept scanning the street in both directions. Finally she turned to him.

"Do you have a light, Mr. Krull?"

"Sure, but call me Max." She smiled wanly, fumbled in her purse for a pack of cigaretts, extending it toward him.

"Thanks, Anna." He took one and held a light for her, looking down into her face. He wanted desperately to ask questions but refrained—she seemed to have a course of action in mind. They smoked in silence. After a while a cab cruised up and halted at the curb. Anna flipped the stub of her cigaret into the shrubbery, looked nervously up and down the street and started toward it. Krull followed at a more leisurely rate.

"Emberly Hotel," she told the driver. He nodded and pulled away from the curb, heading back down the hill. Krull watched the flashing colored neons of the town draw near while he tried to fathom his position. The cab pulled up in front of the Emberly; Anna paid the driver and got out before Krull could offer a protest. He followed sheepishly. She waited quietly until the cab pulled back into the stream of traffic before speaking.

"Let's get another one." She looked both ways along the street and started in the direction of another parked taxi. He nodded and followed, getting the idea—she wanted to scramble their trail. They changed cabs several times before they finally reached the center of the LIQ business district.

THE cab passed through a series of narrow streets lined with small plastiglass houses of soiled shades onto an older street dominated by small businesses and somewhat decrepit hotels. The driver stopped at the address Anna had given, and this time Krull was ready with the change. After the cab left, she led him down the street to a shabby building whose flashing red neon proclaimed it the Charles Hotel.

She paused and turned toward him, looking up into his face.

"Take my arm," she murmured. "For the time being we are Mr. and Mrs. Bowman . . . Chester Bowman."

He grinned. "I like the idea, but why Bowman?"

"It's as good a name as any," she parried.

"I suppose Bok dreamed this up."

"As a matter of fact, he did."

"Well, bless him." He took her arm possessively as they entered a dilapidated lobby and approached the desk clerk, an ancient bespectacled man with a tired face. He lowered his girlie magazine and got slowly to his feet. Krull was momentarily alarmed —were they already registered? Anna hadn't mentioned that. She saw his predicament and spoke up:

"Room 211, please."

"Yes, Mrs. . . ." The clerk fumbled for the keys and waited.

"Bowman . . . Chester Bowman," Anna supplied.

"Yes, Mrs. Bowman." He slid the keys across the counter and returned to his magazine. Krull held Anna's arm up the stairs. She steered him to the right at the second floor and stopped before Room 211. He followed her in and looked around curiously at the large, square somewhat old-fashioned room with its sagging divan, double bed, battered chairs and small wall TV. There were a couple other items of equally dilapidated furniture and, off to one side, a door leading into a bath. At the opposite side of the room was a small pantry-type kitchen from which he could hear the steady drip of a leaking faucet.

"Looks homey," he observed. "Part of the plan?"

"Yes."

He glanced around, then looked at her. "I think I'm going to like it," he said firmly.

"I hope so—Max." She looked wistfully around the room. "It's not the best place in the world but it's . . . it's anonymous, safe."

"Bok said that?"

"Yes . . ."

"Then it's safe," Krull decided. Somehow, he had come to have great confidence in the dead esper's predictions."

"Coffee?"

"Ummm, yes, please." He heard the rattle of pots in the kitchen and mused over his situation while waiting for her to return. Mr. and Mrs. Bowman—he liked the idea. Was she merely following Bok's directions? She was a strange girl—beautiful but with an aura of sorrow surrounding her that puzzled him. Her dark eyes were haunted; her olive face was taut, expectant, as if she were awaiting some blow.

"The news should be on," she

called. He walked over, pressed a button and the screen came to life. The fat face of a well-known newscaster looked out at him. The lips were moving rapidly but it was a moment before the sound came on. When it did, Krull caught his breath.

". . . IQ 113, Agent of police," the voice was saying. He heard Anna's quick footsteps coming from the kitchen. ". . . Wanted for the brutal double murder of Herman Bok, President of the World Council of Espers, and Joe Kruper, a fellow agent who had been instructed to question Krull on a routine matter . . ."

"They can't hang Bok's murder on me," Krull said savagely.

"Listen . . ." Anna beckoned for silence.

"Bok was slain in his quarters in the House of Espers, located in the exclusive HIQ district of northwest Sydney just moments ago." The announcer paused to lick his lips before continuing:

"Krull was believed fleeing the house when he met and killed Agent Kruper, IQ 116. Gordon Gulfin, Chief of Special Agents for the Manager, witnessed the fatal shooting and immediately subdued Krull, but in turn was attacked from behind and slugged unconscious by an accomplice of the slayer. Regaining consciousness, he sought aid at the House of Espers and subsequently discovered the body of the esper leader. Bok was serving his eighth consecutive term as President of the World Council of Espers . . ."

THIS makes it rough," Krull said. She nodded silently and he saw her eyes were tear-filled. Clenching his teeth, he turned back to the screen.

". . . Agents of police believe Krull was engaged in a secret conspiracy with the leader of the espers, who was eighty-seven years old, and killed him following an altercation. All agents of police, troop police and private citizens are warned to watch for the killer and immediately report his presence to the nearest police agency, or directly to Gordon Gullfin, who is spearheading the search. Now . . . here is what the killer looks like . . ."

The announcer held up an enlarged photo. Krull was startled, recognizing it as a picture taken in his room at the Edward Crozener. So, they'd had the room tapped. He cursed at his failure to inspect it. The camera swung in for a close-up—a straight-on shot. Krull grimaced—every detail was clear. The announcer lowered the photo. Krull reached over and snapped the set off.

"I won't be able to budge from this trap," he said grimly. Anna watched him quietly. "I can't risk trying to call Yargo from

here—they'd nail us in a second."

She looked thoughtful. "The clamor will die down in a day or two, at least as far as the general public is concerned."

"Can we risk it here that long?"

"There's no other choice. I don't feel any sense of immediate danger." She went to the kitchen and he heard some cups rattle before the significance of what she had said struck him. She returned with their coffee and he thoughtfully said:

"I forgot you were an esper. Can you really sense danger—at a distance?"

"It depends . . ." She set the cups on the table. "It's related to, well, the intensity of the thought. A hateful, violent mind like Gullfin's is like a broadcasting station." She looked quizzically at him. "You should know that." Of course, she would know he thought.

"I don't really know if I am an esper," he replied truthfully. "I seem to draw mostly blanks."

"Of course, it takes practice, like learning anything else. It's not much use in the latent state." Her lips pursed speculatively. "You've spent your life hiding your talent, submerging it, denying it was there. That was a mistake, Max. There's nothing wrong with being an esper . . ."

"Except that it gives you an advantage over other people that they resent," he cut in.

"So does a high IQ."

"I don't have that trouble." He grinned. "I'm 113."

"Part of your hiding role," she said softly.

"Besides, a high IQ doesn't bear the same connotation. There's no invasion of privacy involved. That's the difference: the LIQ's and MIQ's and HIQ's aren't peeping one another."

"Good espers don't invade the privacy of others either," she said defensively. "Telepathy is just another form of communication—another sense receptor put to use."

"But you peep non-telepaths?"

"Occasionally," she said calmly," but only as a means of self-preservation.

Krull grunted. "Bok must have done it on a mass scale."

"Oh no," she denied, "Mr. Bok never peeped people."

"Never? Come now, that's a big statement in view of what he seemed to know."

"Never," she repeated stoutly. "You see, Mr. Bok wasn't a telepath."

"Not . . . a telepath?" Krull uttered the words slowly, with disbelief. There was a span of silence before he continued. "But he was an esper—President of the World Council of Espers."

"The greatest esper," she affirmed. Her eyes shone as if she

were looking into some corner of hallowed ground. He pulled his thoughts together with effort and said harshly:

"How can an esper not be an esper? Tell me that."

"I didn't say Mr. Bok wasn't an esper. I distinctly said he was the greatest esper."

"You said he wasn't a telepath," he accused. She faced him, a look of understanding growing in her face, and she quietly replied:

"All the known adult espers—all members of the World Council of Espers, as far back as we know—have been telepaths. All but Mr. Bok—that's what made him the greatest. He was a *down through*. He saw down through time. We regarded him as a further step in evolution. Even to us he was a kind of superman—a wonderful kind of superman."

"Impossible," Krull snapped.

"Down through is a case of special clairvoyance." She looked speculatively at him. "You've heard of clairvoyance?"

"Certainly," he said ruffled, "the theoretical ability to see objects or events not present to the known senses, but it's strictly a psychmaster's dream."

HAVE you heard of precognition?"

"A fancy word for prophecy—also a theoretical possibility."

"Mr. Bok combined them," she said simply. "He saw . . . future events."

He started to protest and abruptly closed his mouth. He recalled the incident when he had come up behind the old man unawares, or so he had thought. Bok had said:

Come in, Mr. Krull. I have been expecting you.

Bok had seen him entering before, perhaps, he had left the hotel. It also explained his knowledge that Kruper would try to murder him. A telepath might have detected Kruper's presence, but Bok had known his physical location; had also stated that Krull would uncover the conspiracy—stated it with undeniable certainty. A sudden humility gripped him. It must have shone on his face for Anna said:

"Now you believe . . ."

"Yes, I believe." He was silent a moment, absorbing the drama in the life of the fragile old man who had so calmly planned Krull's deliverance in the face of his own imminent death. Jonquil had been wrong. But, of course, he couldn't have suspected the esper's special talent. He had forgotten the presence of Anna until she spoke:

"I'll be going now."

"Going?" He asked, startled.

"We're hiding out—remember?" She flung a cape over her shoulders and drew it together at the neck. "My name's Ruth

Bowman, IQ 90, and I'm a poor working girl."

"Is this a joke?"

"Not at all. It's part of the camouflage."

"What kind of work—where?"

"The Cassowary Cabaret, up on the next block. I got the job last week when . . . when . . ."

"When Bok told you to?"

"No, when Mr. Bok told me I was going to," she corrected. There's a difference." Her eyes were grave. "If I acted on Mr. Bok's orders, he would be influencing the future, but when he tells me what is going to happen, he is merely reporting the future."

"Supposing you don't do something he says you're going to do; that is, you know what's ahead and deliberately take another route, so to speak. Then the future would be different."

"No, that's not possible," she contradicted. "When Mr. Bok reported what he saw in the future, that meant it would actually happen. But if the causal chain which led to the event were changed—which isn't possible—he could not have seen the event but, rather, the event which would have occurred in its place. Can't you see that?"

"It's not crystal clear," he confessed, grinning.

"I'd better hurry. I'm going to be late as it is."

He looked ruefully around the room. "I thought we were supposed to be married," he complained. She laughed and went to the door, then turned and gave him an impish look.

"Not that married."

CHAPTER 10

KRULL slept. He kicked off his sandals and flopped on the divan the moment the door closed behind Anna's slim figure and was asleep almost immediately. It was a deep, undisturbed sleep, without dream or awareness; when he woke the pale dawn light was filtering through the smudged lace curtains of the room's single window. He raised to his elbow and looked around —Anna had returned sometime during the small hours of the morning and was asleep on the bed. Her bosom rose and fell gently under the thin covers and her face, in repose, had lost its haunted look. It seemed peaceful, yet somehow pale despite the normally dark texture of her skin, and he noticed for the first time the extremely long curved sweep of her eye lashes and that her lips were a trifle too full to support her small jaw. Yet, he thought, it was a beautiful face, more beautiful since the haunted look had gone.

He swung off the divan, slipped on his sandals and left the room without disturbing her.

He passed through the deserted hotel lobby—the clerk was nodding behind the counter—and paused when he reached the sidewalk. The street was just awakening to the day's activity. A few cars and trucks were on the move and farther down the block a couple of pedestrians were oggling a drunk passed out on the sidewalk. The air held the tang of the harbor, the industrial odors of smoke, coal tars and fish scents from nearby canneries.

An elderly couple pushed a handcart laden with junk toward some unknown destination, their heads bent into the morning chill. Krull listened to the rattle of the wheels over the uneven pavement and wondered if this was what Bok had meant when he referred to the people for whom there was no tomorrow. But there had to be workers—society couldn't be blamed for the vagaries of genetics. Still, the sight disturbed him. He watched the couple until they disappeared around a corner, then walked down the block until he found a place where he could buy a morning paper and breakfast.

A tired, middle-aged waitress with shadowed eyes looked up at his approach, closed the magazine she was reading and smiled artificially. He nodded, glancing around, disturbed to find he was the only customer; it would make him more conspicuous. Sighing, he sat down and gave his order. As the waitress shambled toward the kitchen he opened the paper. A picture of himself leaped to meet him. He quickly scanned the accompanying story, conscious of mounting tension, then looked at the headlines again:

BOK'S KILLER LINKED TO ATOMIC CONSPIRACY.

The picture was the same one shown on the screen. He read the story again, this time more slowly. According to the paper, ". . . A high government official who refused to allow his name to be used last night disclosed that the renegade agent, Max Krull, sought for the murders of Herman Bok, President of the World Council of Espers, and Agent Joe Kruper, was believed implicated in a secret atomic conspiracy that had seizure of world power as its goal."

KRULL whistled softly. The story named him as a special agent assigned to the Prime Thinker's personal staff. Further down it stated Yargo had secured his release from police a few days before, following his cold-blooded slaying of Oliver Cranston, another agent assigned to investigate his alleged role in atomic activities. The story obliquely inferred his activities had Ben Yargo's sanction.

Shevach—it's Shevach, Krull thought. The Manager was using him to undermine Yargo. The article was calculated to arouse public anger on one issue that was practically a world phobia—atomic research. Was there some other motive? More important, could Yargo ride it out? The waitress slid the coffee and hot rolls in front of him.

"Anything else?"

"No thanks." He glanced up—her face held a coquettish look.

"It's awful about that killer, isn't it?"

"Pretty bad." He stirred his coffee, keeping his face averted.

"Imagine, a man wanting to blow up the world."

"What?" he asked, startled.

"That's what it says—he's making atomic bombs, just like the kind that wrecked the world before."

"Hadn't read that part," he admitted. The waitress got an interested look.

"With a killer like that around, I'm almost afraid to go to my room . . . alone." Her eyes flicked to the clock. "I'm off in half an hour. I feel afraid . . . living alone."

"You don't have to be," he consoled.

"Why not?" Her face perked up.

"He only kills agents—not pretty girls."

"Oh . . ." She looked pleased until he returned to the paper. When she saw he had no intention of following her lead, she sauntered disconsolately back to her magazine. Finished with his coffee and breakfast roll, he tucked the paper under his arm, left some change on the counter, and returned to the hotel. Anna was in the kitchen making coffee.

"A working girl needs more sleep than that," he reprimanded.

"I'll nap in the afternoon," she promised. She saw the worried expression on his face and came out to meet him.

"Trouble?"

"A storm brewing." He forced a smile and indicated the paper. "Now I'm a member of the atomic conspiracy—along with the late Mr. Bok." He heard the sharp intake of her breath and handed her the paper, pouring himself a cup of coffee while she read it. She finished and looked up at him with fear in her eyes.

"You didn't expect that?" he asked.

"No, of course not."

"I thought you knew the future?"

"Only milestones along the way." Her eyes met his. "It would be terrible to know every moment of the future. There would be nothing to live for—no anticipation or expectation because the end would already be

known. Mr. Bok knew that. That's why he only told me certain things—and even his telling was part of the causal chain in events to come. No, I couldn't stand to know the future in its entirety."

"Bok did."

"That was his tragedy. He even knew . . . his murder."

"Yet he didn't try to change things," Krull mused.

"He couldn't. I've explained that before. He was only seeing what was to happen . . . just as a historian sees what has happened. But neither has the power to change what he sees."

"No, I suppose not."

SHE glanced toward the TV; he nodded and turned it on, discovering he had become a world villain overnight. The announcers had tried and convicted him of triple murder, violation of the First Law of Mankind; he was pictured manufacturing atom bombs in a secret laboratory, plotting to destroy the world. Anna got more coffee.

"Good for the nerves." She set a cup in front of him and sat down, smiling faintly. The commercials were followed by a geography professor who used a large globe to show how radiation from the Atomic War had blanketed all but a few areas of the world.

"But we could not expect to be so fortunate next time," he concluded. He smirked at the audience and withdrew, making way for the commercial. Krull flipped the switch.

He looked at Anna. "What now?"

"Wait. We'll have to wait."

"Wait and get trapped. I think we ought to be getting out of here."

"Where to?"

"I'll have to figure that out."

"We'll be safe . . . for a while." Her eyes were pleading.

"I won't do anything rash," he promised.

"You did this morning."

"I didn't think it was rash, then."

"But you won't leave again? Everyone will be watching for you."

"Not until I can figure a plan of action," he promised, "a safe way of getting in touch with Yargo."

"That might be the answer," she mused. They fell silent for a while, then she began talking about telepathy. He got the idea she didn't think he was much of an esper. She switched to Bok and her face became almost reverent. Unaccountably, he felt angry.

"I'm glad I'm not like Bok," he brutally cut in.

"No, you're not like Mr. Bok," she said quietly. Her eyes got a strange look. "Max . . ."

"What's the matter, Anna?"

"Nothing."

"You were going to say something."

Her eyes brimmed with sudden tears. "Max, I'm frightened for you."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Mr. Bok's burden was easy in comparison." She rose suddenly and left the room; he heard her heels echoing through the hall. Now what in hell, he thought savagely.

HE STAYED close to the room the rest of the day, occasionally turning on the TV to catch the news. The story had blown big and before evening dominated the world news. According to the announcers, Yargo had declined to give an official press release; the Manager smugly confirmed that Krull had been assigned to the Prime Thinker's staff ". . . in a secret capacity that Ben Yargo declined to reveal to the public."

Rumors cropped up in legion. Krull variously was reported spotted in Wellington, Melbourne, the floating city of Kulahai and as far away as Leningrad and Capetown. A man answering his description had been arrested boarding the Hawaii carrier at Honolulu, and agents of police had picked up a number of suspects, including a wino, an IQ 50 farmhand with a record of window peeping, and an IQ 90 laborer who had just been released from the Dreamland Mental Hospital as a cured manic depressive. All espers suspected of political activities or who had majored in physical sciences at a post-graduate level had been rounded up for questioning by the searchers. Anna returned in time to hear the last bit of news.

"Regular witch-hunt," Krull growled.

"Dangerous," she said soberly. "Everyone will be watching for you."

"Maybe not so dangerous," he reflected aloud.

"How do you mean?"

"By now I've been reported seen all over the globe. Everyone will think I'm somewhere else."

"I know." She was quiet a moment. "I worry, even though I know you'll . . . come through, all right." She went to the kitchen leaving him to puzzle her meaning. After supper they talked until it was time for her to go to work. She made him promise he would remain in the room.

"Cross my heart," he told her.

"I'd be afraid if you went out." Her eyes were soft; she turned suddenly and departed. After a while he kicked off his sandals and lay on the divan.

Sleep came slowly.

"Max . . ." He woke with a

start, pushing himself to his elbow.

"Max . . ." He saw her or, rather, her shadowy form.

"What is it?" he asked guardedly.

"Max, there's not much time left." Her voice was low, husky, intense.

"Not much time . . ." His vision cleared and he cut the words off abruptly, catching the reflection of dim light through the window on the dusky skin of her body.

He got up, slowly, and moved toward her, realizing that, somehow, time was running out—for Anna Malroon. Time was running out and she wanted something to take with her. She moved to meet him and he saw that her breasts in the dim light were paler than the rest of her body.

THEY were subdued during breakfast but Anna looked happy, contented and, for the first time during wakefulness, had lost the haunted look. She hummed softly while she returned to the kitchen for more coffee. It was good to see her so cheerful, yet he was uneasy. He had the feeling she had come to a crisis, had met it in her own way, now was waiting for some predetermined destiny to come to pass. Foolish, of course, but that's the way it seemed.

How much had Bok told her?

Did she know, like the esper had known, the coming shadows?

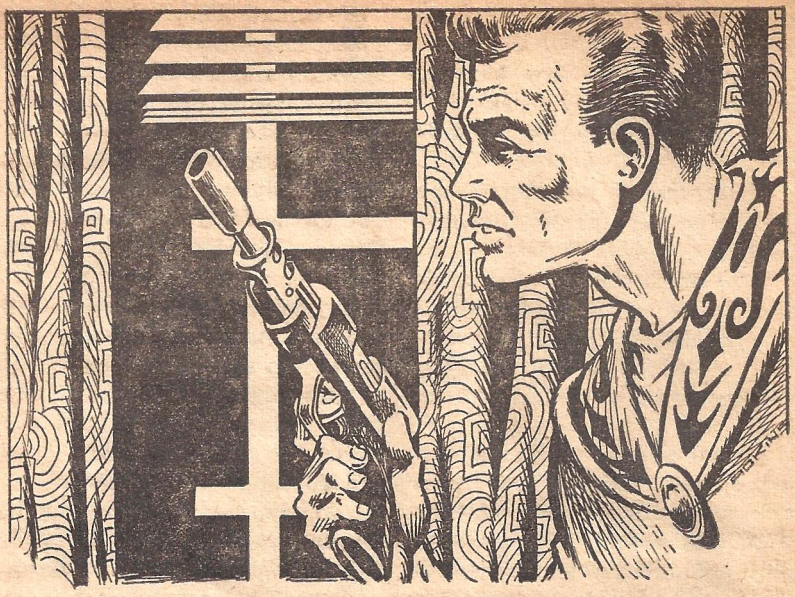
They spent the day as they had the previous one—listening to news broadcasts; but, unlike the day before, she avoided any talk of the future. She knows, he thought. Bok has told her. When night came, she prepared for work, only this time she didn't caution him against leaving the room. She merely said:

"Goodnight, darling." Her eyes flooded with tears. She closed the door and rushed down the hall before he could stop her. He waited, half expecting her to return—knowing she wouldn't. Later he turned off the lights and went to sleep.

He was awakened by a sensation almost as sharp as an electric shock. He sat upright on the divan, feeling his heartbeat rise to a fast hammering, conscious of a warning signal flashing in his brain like a signal light blinking on a dark sea.

Danger! Danger!

The warning screamed in his brain. He leaped from the couch, shoved his feet into his sandals and stole to the door. The faint sound of music came from somewhere down the hall; the warning came again, sharp as a rapier —the slow shuffling of feet in the hall came to a halt at his door.



"Here."

He heard the low single word and backed quickly into the room, peeping the hall. He got the vague impression of several forms, a towering figure, a mixed jumble of thought. He grabbed his gun and moved to the single window which overlooked a dark alley—closed his eyes and concentrated. The sense of danger diminished; he deliberately concentrated on the hall again—the warning rose to a high jangle in his brain.

Danger . . .

Run! Run!

He raised the window without hesitation, slipped through feet first and hung from the sill while trying to see the ground below. No use, it was lost in shadows. The door splintered inward and he released his hold, flexing his legs to absorb the impact. He struck hard—involuntarily winced—and fled down the alley toward the nearest corner, slowing his pace when he reached it. A few pedestrians were abroad and several small groups of loafers stood before a bar on the opposite side of the street. The garish reds and greens of neons gave the scene an odd pattern of shifting light and movement. A few cars and trucks were parked at the curbs but moving traffic was light—nothing resembled a police car.

The flick of danger came again, this time from the alley at his rear; he started hurriedly down the street. He reached the next corner, glancing over his shoulder in time to see several figures emerge from the alley and start in his direction. He turned the corner and increased his pace, conscious that his shadows were closing in.

Faster . . . Faster!

HE WAS halfway down the block when a police car rounded the corner, a spotlight combing the street. He cursed and ducked into a dark doorway, hugging the wall. He sensed his pursuers—how many?—drawing near. The danger signal rose to a discordant howl and he tried to peep the source. A now-familiar mental pattern filled his mind, movements in various shades of gray; it sharpened and the imagery of a face took form.

A face . . .

His face!

He was startled until he remembered. Of course, they were concentrating on him; he was picking his picture from their minds. Hunters—he was the hunted. The police car swept its torch across his hiding place and moved on. He exhaled slowly and fled down the street. He spotted a pub garishly lit by green and red neons and filled with the sound of raucous music. It would be jammed, noisy, filled with people.

A place to hide!

He slowed down and pushed through the door. It was crowded. Most had their backs toward him—they were watching a tall blonde perform a strip tease. Her arms moved languorously in rhythm with her hips, her skin was golden. She was down to the last garment and the crowd was tense. He elbowed his way to the rear and, as he hoped, found an exit. He turned the knob and looked out; it opened onto a dark alley.

The jangle rose in his brain again and he quickly looked back. The strip teaser was whirling naked; the crowd was hanging on, whistling and making guttural cries. The dark lantern-shaped face of Henry Cathecart was framed in the door. Another figure loomed behind him, thin, gaunt, tall . . . Merryweather . . .

The searchmaster!

A lean arm swept up and pointed in his direction; Krull flung the door open and fled into the night, his mind a jumble of thoughts. He heard feet pound the pavement behind him and gave an extra burst of speed, rounding the corner onto the street without slacking his pace. Several startled pedestrians stepped aside without trying to stop him. Run. Run.

HE REACHED the next corner, fled halfway down the block, ducked into a recessed doorway to get his bearings. His heart pounded and sweat dripped from his body and stung his eyes. He gripped his gun and peered back down the street. Empty. He was starting to breathe easier when three figures rounded the corner. One of them crossed the street—all three moved in his direction. Merryweather was tall, thin, an ominous skeleton towering above his companions. Krull cursed savagely, debating whether to try and ambush them. He watched, gripping his gun, feeling his heart thump against the rib case. Suddenly they stopped and the bony hand came up again, pointing toward his hiding place. He broke and ran, trying to fathom Merryweather's uncanny ability to detect him. Run, dodge, hide . . . He twisted through the dark narrow streets of the LIQ section, frantically trying to elude his pursuers—trying to shake the gaunt lean figure of Merryweather.

He ducked through several groups of bystanders and rounded corners at top speed, fearful he would encounter a police car. He was halfway down another block when the alarm sounded in his brain. He stopped abruptly. It was ahead of him . . . No, behind him. He turned bewildered. Boxed in! Trapped! He spotted an alley almost across from him and fled toward it. If he could reach it, reach the shadows . . .

"Stop that man!"

The cry was harsh in his ears and it took him a second to realize it was a human voice and not a telepathic warning. Several men standing in front of a bar ran to intercept him—he tried to dodge them. A hand caught him and he slugged out, feeling the crunch of bone beneath his fist followed by a sharp cry of pain. Before he could twist free someone struck him a glancing blow on the jaw. His head reeled and he staggered, his gun clattering against the pavement as he broke free and darted into the black mouth of the alley. Shouts . . . the sound of running feet . . . the raucous jangle of danger . . . darkness . . . the thump of his heart.

Wham! Wham! Something stung his shoulder. Wham! A bullet whizzed past his ear and he broke into a frenzied burst of speed. A whistle shattered the air—the raucous behind him grew until he couldn't separate the jangle in his brain from reality. Hide. He had to hide! He raced into the alley. There were more shouts, another whistle, this time ahead of him. He stopped abruptly, breathing heavily, conscious of a dull burn-

ing ache at the top of his shoulder.

Boxed in—done for . . .

He hurriedly studied the sides of the alley and tried to allay his panic. His breath was a hoarse rasp in his throat. He saw the dim outlines of a door and twisted the knob. Surprisingly, it was unlocked. He leaped in, closed it behind him. His hand located a small bar lock and slipped it in place—he leaned against the door trying to control the harsh sound of his breathing. Feet pounded up the alley; they stopped—silence—followed by a faint shuffling.

"Here," a monotone voice said, "he's inside."

Krull recoiled, feeling a stab of fear. Merryweather! Only Merryweather wasn't the genial man he had met. This Merryweather was a bloodhound. He heard the boom of his heart and wondered if it carried outside.

"Krull—give yourself up or we'll kill you."

HE FROZE, immobile. They were bluffing—they hadn't seen him enter, couldn't know. Couldn't? It struck him then. Merryweather—an esper! That accounted for his role of searcher. He was a renegade, hunting his kind. A telepathic killer! He had been trailing him by thought pattern—that was the only explanation. Suddenly he saw the whole picture. His first encounter with Merryweather hadn't been happenstance. No, the gaunt man had met him for the sole purpose of peeping him. He was Shevach's eyes and ears, Shevach's hidden power, the lever he used to propel himself into high places. He knew it—knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt. Then Shevach knew he was an esper, knew it and feared him. That explained the attempts on his life.

"Krull—we're coming in!"

He turned, moved deeper into the cellar, feeling his way and trying to find an exit.

"Krull . . ." The voice was soft, almost at his side. He recoiled instinctively. "Follow me—I'm a friend."

"Who?" He whispered harshly, girding himself to either fight or run.

"There's no time to explain. Follow me." The voice was soft, yet imperative, and all at once he saw the outlines of a man's body. A small man. "This way!"

The figure started to retreat and he followed carefully, watchful, certain it was a trap. If he had a gun . . . Behind him the door splintered inward and a beam of light caught him in full circle. He whirled toward it and froze, half-blinded, conscious that his breathing was harsh in his ears. He tensed his body to spring.

"Don't try it," a voice grated. A figure moved into the circle of light and Krull struggled to clear his vision. Hardface! Hardface Cathecart, holding a gun.

"Not so damned mighty this time, are you?"

Krull spat an oath and moved his eyes sideways from the center of the light, trying to see the man holding the beam.

"You've come to the end of the rope—Killer." Cathecart's eyes swung around the cellar as he reached over and took the flashlight from his companion:

"Leave us alone, Peter. I'll handle it from here." Krull heard a merry chuckle; the door opened outlining a tall gaunt figure for a moment before it closed behind him. He was alone with Cathecart—except for the mysterious man hiding somewhere in the shadows behind him.

Cathecart glanced around the cellar. "Nice execution chamber you've selected."

Krull cursed him calmly. The hard faced agent's eyes glittered, and the hand holding the gun moved up; he found himself looking down its barrel. Cathecart sneered.

"You've murdered a couple friends of mine. Seeing as we're alone, and you're attempting to escape . . ."

HIS finger tightened on the trigger. "It's not going to be easy . . . I'm putting 'em where it'll hurt!" He held the muzzle steady.

"Go on, sweat," he taunted. "Beg for mercy—and I might allow you another minute. Go on —plead."

Krull tensed his body and told him what he could do with his gun. Cathecart's voice dropped to a toneless grate:

"So long—killer!"

Krull dropped to a crouch and sprang sideways at the same time. Wham! Wham!—flame laced past his ear. He sprawled off balance, hearing the sound of bullets thudding into flesh. Cathecart staggered and grunted. Wham! The flame laced out again and this time he saw it came from his rear. Cathecart swayed, tried to raise his gun, half-spun on buckling legs, gasped, and slumped to the floor.

"Let's get the hell out of here," the voice behind Krull growled. "My car's around the corner." The shadow broke into a blur of movement and Krull scrambled after him. His companion broke into a sprint when they reached the street, but Krull noted that his unknown benefactor was short, slender. They reached the corner—there was a small black car parked against the curb. The man pulled open the door and leaped in; Krull followed. The engine roared to life.

He pulled the car away from the curb, rounded the first corner too fast for comfort, zigzagged for several blocks and finally turned onto a freeway. Krull studied his profile; it was familiar, a face he knew and couldn't place. He remembered the voice . . . it was familiar also. A name was surging at the back of his mind and he fought to recover it, a tantalizing moment. An overhead street beam lighted the man's features, jolting Krull upright in his seat. The man beside him was . . .

"Butterfield!" The little public works engineer from Benbow Deeps. Butterfield turned and looked at him full-faced.

"Butterfield." He repeated the name, stupidly, then a wave of anger struck him. Butterfield, the meek little engineer who had been awed by his credentials, had fearfully confessed his brother was an esper, was a phoney. He finally managed words.

"Just who the hell are you?" he rasped.

"Oh, I guess you could call me the head of Yargo's special agents. Sort of an honorary title," he admitted reticently.

KRULL was jolted. Butterfield, the timid engineer, wasn't an engineer. Furthermore, he wasn't timid. Not by a damned sight. Not the way he had coolly blasted Cathecart to death. Krull's anger turned to Yargo. The Prime Thinker had suckered him, played him for a clay pigeon. Why? He savagely promised himself he'd find out. Butterfield spoke:

"Looks like I got to that cellar just in time."

"Yeah . . . you did." Krull uttered the words thoughtfully, then swung toward him curiously. "How did you know? I picked that particular spot on the spur of a moment."

"Damned strange." The engineer's lips pursed thoughtfully.

"How did you know that I'd be there . . . at that particular spot, at that moment?" Krull demanded.

"Like I said—damned strange. All I know is that Yargo got a letter saying you'd be there . . . and under what circumstances. So he sent me."

"Who was the letter from?" Krull asked harshly.

"Bowman. Some guy named Bowman, but I can't get a line on who he is."

"Was . . . ," Krull corrected automatically.

"Was?"

"Listen," he interjected angrily, "you've got some questions to answer.

"Not me," Butterfield said, his voice cold and hard. "Ask Yargo."

"Damned tootin' I'll ask him."

"You might ask him about

Bowman, too," Butterfield said hopefully. "That one's got me baffled."

"No problem there," Krull answered maliciously. The engineer turned toward him inquiringly, but he remained silent. If Butterfield wouldn't talk, neither would he.

CHAPTER 11

KRULL idly watched the lights of oncoming cars sweep past while he tried to untangle the latest twist in the complicated plot in which he seemed to be the main character. Herman Bok knew the end of the story; otherwise he wouldn't have bothered to post the letter that had brought Butterfield to his rescue after his own death. And Anna Malroon had known what was going to happen. Why hadn't she warned him? Had she known he would be saved by Bok's intervention? It was all a weird tangle—one which, for the moment, he despaired of solving.

His companion swung the car into the lane leading to the House of the Prime Thinker and Krull's interests perked up. How would Ben Yargo explain Butterfield—the use of Butterfield to decoy him to Benbow Deep? And why the decoy? Yargo had better start talking, he moodily told himself. He didn't like the idea of being a clay pigeon. They passed the sentry box and the house came into view, a black square against the sky with only a single lighted window at the upper story. The car rolled to a stop under the portico and Butterfield got out.

"Wait here" he ordered softly. He walked toward the porch; a shadowy figure emerged to meet him. They huddled a moment before he returned and beckoned Krull.

"Follow me." He led the way into the house, went upstairs in the dark and opened a door at the end of a second floor corridor, stepping aside to let Krull enter. He closed the door behind them and switched on the lights.

"Part of the family quarters," he explained. "You're to stay here until Yargo decides what to do with you. Don't leave—and keep out of sight."

"How about seeing Yargo?"

"In the morning."

"Is he up now?" Krull asked doggedly.

"I wouldn't know."

"Listen . . . ," he started to protest. Butterfield opened the door and cut in decisively:

"It'll keep."

Krull watched the door close behind him and fumed inwardly. He didn't like being pushed around, and Yargo was pushing. Butterfield's words implied he had become some kind of liability to the Prime Thinker, a mill-

stone around his neck—someone to hide in corners until he could be gotten rid of. He was a prisoner. He cursed softly. He didn't need Yargo or anyone else to pull him out of the hole—all he wanted was free rope, and the Manager's killers kept off his neck. Then he might get somewhere. But he'd never crack it at the present rate. A thought buried in the back of his mind plagued him: he wasn't so certain any more that the power politics in which he was snared and the conspiracy were two separate things. Something told him they were linked, that both Yargo and the Manager knew a lot more than he had been told. Maybe Yargo himself was involved? Okay, if that was it, he'd have it out with him in the morning.

HE LOOKED around; the room was large, comfortably furnished and possessed a wall TV and—yes—a phone. He listened—the house was quiet. He crossed to the phone, looked up a number and dialed, waiting impatiently while the phone at the other end rang. It occurred to him that the room was probably bugged, but he didn't care. Someone answered:

"Cassowary Cafe."

"I'd like to speak to one of your employees—Ruth Bowman."

"The cigaret girl . . . she's not here."

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Can't say. She didn't show tonight . . . left us shorthanded."

"Thanks." He hung up thoughtfully. Sure, she had known what was coming—had taken off. Yet, there had been something more in her voice than just the end of their short masquerade when she had said:

There's not much time left, not much time . . .

She had sounded more as if she had been referring to herself—and time was short. That tied in with her one brief pre-dawn search for happiness, a frantic quest to cram a lifetime into moments.

He moodily undressed for bed when he saw blood on the shoulder of his shirt, and remembered the stinging bite of the bullet that had struck him in the cellar. He went to the bathroom and examined it—the wound was superficial, creasing the top of the shoulder. He found a tube of antibiotic salve in the medicine cabinet, rubbed some into the wound and dropped into bed. He was just getting to sleep when a light knock at his door jolted him to sudden wakefulness. Instantly alert, he shoved his hand to the gun under his pillow.

"Come in," he called softly. The door opened, framing a slender figure against the rectangle of dim light; it closed and he caught a whiff of fragrance.

"Mr. Krull." The voice was soft, husky and definitely feminine, but he wasn't about to be caught off guard. He kept his fingers curled around the gun and replied:

"What do you want?"

"To talk with you." The voice was faintly familiar, but he couldn't place it.

"At this time of night?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, at this time of night," she answered calmly, adding, "I'm Jan Yargo."

"Oh . . ." Sure, he placed the voice now. He snapped on the bedside lamp, at the same time relinquishing his grasp of the gun. The girl watching him from the foot of the bed was Yargo's daughter, all right. Her blue eyes held a bemused look. She wore a light house cape over a negligee —more revealing than concealing, he thought—and she hadn't forgotten to make up her face. He was pondering the proper etiquette of his next move when she solved the problem for him by coming around to the side of the bed and sitting on it. He felt a sudden unease. He didn't mind pretty girls popping into his room in the dead of night but she was, after all, daughter of the most powerful figure on the planet.

"What now?" he asked.

"Please don't be rude."

"Excuse me," he said stiffly, "but I didn't expect the Prime Thinker's daughter after midnight—in my bedroom."

She smiled unexpectedly. "You sound like a stuffed shirt."

"Don't make that mistake," he advised softly.

Her smile sobered. "I won't."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Butterfield told me." He weighed her a moment, started to ask a question, let it pass. Instead he said:

"I suppose I'm a prisoner."

"No—not that." She looked levelly at him. "But it wouldn't be safe to leave."

HE deliberately moved his eyes the length of her body, taking in the curving lines beneath her thin attire and ending at her face. She didn't alter expression and he said:

"At least I've got a lovely jailer."

"Not a jailer, Mr. Krull."

"Call me Max."

She laughed softly. "And I'm Jan."

"Okay, Jan, now that we're on first-name terms, why did you really come here?"

"Because . . . well, for my father."

He asked shrewdly; "Does he know you're here?"

"No," she confessed, looking suddenly defiant. "You represent a danger to my father."

"I didn't ask for the job." He suppressed the desire to peep her.

"No, I suppose not," she said finally.

"If your father's on the level, why the run-around?" he shot.

"Run-around?" She looked puzzled.

"The agent," he said softly, watching her face. "He's no more Butterfield's brother than I am."

She regarded him calmly. "No, his name's Foxhill . . . Raymond Foxhill."

"Why did Foxhill—if that's his real name—tip me about Butterfield being an esper? Was that hokum, too—a red herring?"

"No, it was true . . ."

Another thought occurred to him. "If Butterfield had just been dead a few days, how did your father know he was an esper?" He watched her, sharp-eyed.

"He was informed of it," she said simply.

"By who?"

Her face clouded. "A Mr. Bowman, but I'm not quite sure who he is. Dad didn't explain."

He dropped the subject of Bowman.

"Why the wild goose chase in the first place?" he pursued. "Why did he have Foxhill pose as Butterfield's brother?"

She deliberated a long moment, watching him enigmatically, and he saw her bosom rise and fall with suppressed emotion. Finally she said:

"He had to be sure of you—he needed time."

"Benbow Deep was just a stall?"

"Yes."

"But why the tip about Butterfield?"

"He wanted to know your reaction."

"Why?" he asked curiously.

"He wasn't sure of you."

"If he wasn't sure of me, why did he summon me in the first place? It doesn't make sense."

"No, I suppose not." She bit her lip. "It was because of some developments that came up after he talked with you," she explained finally.

"What developments?" he challenged. She hesitated, obviously nervous, and he repeated the question without taking his eyes from hers.

"You . . . you weren't truthful about your past and . . . he found out."

Krull was startled. "Not truthful?"

"You didn't tell him you were an . . . esper."

"What!" He stared incredulously at her, and broke into a mirthless laugh. She waited, her face expressionless.

He asked tersely, "who told Yargo that—Mr. Bowman?"

"No."

"Who, then?" he persisted.

"Can I trust you to keep it in confidence?"

He looked curiously at her. "Yes, certainly."

She hesitated before answering. "I did."

"You?" he blurted.

"Yes."

He didn't bother to deny the accusation. The certainty of her words told him she knew it was true, knew it beyond any shadow of doubt. His eyes searched her critically. She was an overly-tall, slender girl with evenly-chiseled features, disarming blue eyes, a mass of red curls piled high and just now—dressed in disturbingly scanty attire. She was, he thought, every bit as lovely and desirable as Anna Malroon, but with a difference. The girl sitting on his bed didn't possess the dark girl's haunted look. Her face was calm, certain, and it was evident she knew exactly what she was saying. He measured her again before speaking.

"Who told you that?"

She pursed her lips, abruptly got up and moved toward the door. When she reached it she turned, with one hand on the knob, and looked at him over the span of long seconds.

"No one told me," she said quietly. She watched him again, watched and weighed and her words, when she spoke again, were so low he scarcely heard them.

"Because I'm like you, Max." She was gone—the door closed silently behind her. He was falling asleep when the real reason for her nocturnal visit came to him. She had peeped him! All the time they had talked she was searching his mind, finding out exactly how trustworthy he was. Why had she revealed herself an esper? He'd have to ask her that. One last thought occurred to him before sleep came. He wondered what she thought of his first reaction to her Presence? Well, at least he had given her something to think about.

THE sunlight filtering through the window from a position high in the sky awoke Krull. He had slept long and, for the first time in days, felt completely rested, as if a burden had been lifted from his shoulders. His secret was out—his days of hiding over. For better or worse he was no longer a hidden esper. Jan knew and Ben Yargo knew, and how many others?

Merryweather.

Shevach.

Esper—that's right, Jan was an esper too—a hidden one. Or had been. He wondered if she felt the same relief he did at having disclosed her secret. He hoped so, hoped she wouldn't regret it. He took her confession as an indica-

tion of trust in him and, he hoped, a reflection of Yargo's as well. Now he could face the Prime Thinker on even terms, and to hell with the mind shields. Not that they had worked.

He slowly showered, shaved and dressed, luxuriating in the knowledge that for the time being he faced nothing worse than a pleasant confinement, cared for by a quite lovely jailer. He finished and turned on the TV.

Another murder had been pinned on him—this time the killing of Agent Henry Cathecart, IQ 115. The announcer named Cathecart a representative of Gordon Gullfin, Chief of Special Agents for the Manager. According to the broadcast, he had shot the agent to death in the deserted cellar of a furniture warehouse after Cathecart had recognized him and pursued him into the dark building. The searchmaster wasn't mentioned. The announcer pictured him as a maniacal murderer rumored to be allied with a secret group plotting to build atomic weapons; also recalled that Krull was the handpicked choice of Prime Thinker Ben Yargo. Yargo seemed the prime target; he was merely an instrument for his destruction. Shevach—for he was sure it was Shevach—was using him to undermine public confidence in their leader. What could he gain by the attack? Nothing, he thought, unless Shevach hoped to depose Yargo on a charge of malfeasance in office if he lost the election. Or, if he won, it might enable him to order Yargo's arrest the moment he assumed the reins of government.

Why? Could Yargo possess some knowledge Shevach wanted —or knowledge he didn't want Yargo to use if he lost the election? His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. It was Jan with a tray of food.

"TOO LATE for breakfast and too early for lunch," she greeted. "I brought along a bite to tide you over." They regarded each other gravely across the short span of feet and Krull said:

"Hello, fellow esper."

"Hello." Her eyes held his and she whispered softly: "I've never known anyone like myself, before. I'm glad, Max . . . glad." She turned quickly and left. He started to call after her, but desisted. She had told him all he wanted to know. She had been lonely, lonely and hidden, and he had come to free her. Yet, he knew, it gave him a powerful hold over the Prime Thinker's daughter—and the Prime Thinker—and a great responsibility, he mentally added.

Yargo stopped by in the early afternoon, looking calm and at ease. He greeted Krull cordially

—nothing in his demeanor suggested he owed him any apologies. The agent marveled at his composure, thinking an outsider would never guess that the square, graying figure was the focal point of a vicious intrigue and, within hours, would be battling for the highest office on earth at what promised to be a bitterly-contested election. Yargo went through the pleasantries of a good host, before plunging briskly into the real reason for his visit.

"It's going to be necessary for you to remain here until after the elections."

"Butterfield told me that," Krull replied drily. He scanned the Prime Thinker's face as he deliberately used the man's false name, but detected no reaction. Yargo said:

"He also indicated you weren't pleased with the idea—that you might have thoughts of leaving." Yargo looked sharply at him. "That would be unwise."

He wanted to reply that it wasn't true, as long as Jan was his keeper, but didn't. Instead he said: "There's no worry on that score. I'll stay."

"Good," Yargo said, pleased. "As soon as the elections are over we'll get this little matter cleared up and you can get back on the job."

"Shevach won't let it die so easily."

"To hell with Shevach," Yargo replied amiably. "The computers indicate I'll have a more favorable crew next term. With a unanimous Council behind me I can remove him from office." He paused and eyed the agent keenly. Krull wondered if he would try to explain his duplicity in sending him on the wild goose chase to Benbow Deep—or his espership. He didn't. He made light conversation for a moment longer, repeated his advice to stay close and departed abruptly.

KRULL passed the remainder of the day alternately reading and watching TV. The announcers were whooping it up and he was, he thought, becoming more of a menace by the moment. Not that he gave a damn. He had all his chips in the pot and there was only one way to win—break the conspiracy. Do that and he'd be god, and not even Shevach could tumble him. In the meantime, it didn't matter what people thought. Except Jan. And Anna, he added as an afterthought. Wherever she was, he hoped she was safe. Later that evening an announcement sobered him a little:

The miners of Melville Deep had gone on strike, demanding that the government do something about the atomic conspiracy. The *something* they demanded was vague, but the main

fact was they had struck, had quit work. He tried to recall when he had last heard of a strike against the government and couldn't. It was a bad omen.

A computer extrapolation of preliminary returns of the latest UPOP results showed Yargo's popularity taking a sharp dip. Seventy-three per cent of the people polled expressed the belief Yargo knew where Krull was hiding. Sure, Yargo knew—and so did Shevach and Merryweather, he thought grimly.

Jan brought his supper that evening but, to his disappointment, lingered only a moment. She appeared disturbed. He watched the door close behind her. Well, tomorrow was it. Election day—and Yargo's fate literally hung on the vagaries of the computers. Yeah, Yargo's fate. And his. He went to bed hoping the computers were in fine fettle.

CHAPTER 12

HE awakened to the high clear sound of a trumpet, opening his eyes with a start, and remembering. Election day. The trumpet heralded the formal ceremonies to come. He grimaced, thinking his fate hung on the outcome. If Ben Yargo won, he'd have a breathing spell; Shevack would be off his neck. If he lost . . .

He hurriedly shaved and showered. It would be a day of rigidly prescribed formalities until the new Prime Thinker and Council of Six were elected. A world-wide celebration would follow; all laws except those governing felonies would be suspended. Festivities, carnivals, brawls—the world would go wild. Social and intellectual barriers would be brushed aside, the rich and poor would mingle and hilarity would be king. Until dawn. To some it would be a time of debauchery, to some a time of prayer.

He finished dressing and went to the window overlooking an open square alongside the house. It was already thronged with uniformed police, black-caped agents, dignitaries of government; a portable platform had been erected and the drive was filled with gleaming open-topped limousines flying purple streamers. Below him a TV crew was positioning cameras.

The crowd stirred as a portly little man wearing a voluminous white cape fringed with red braid started up the platform. His face brimmed with importance. He reached the top and faced the house. The cape denoted his position as Caller of the Bureau of Elections, an honorary position highly sought for its prestige.

Krull idly scanned the crowd. A figure caught his eye and he stepped back, startled, then

moved to one side where he could peer out without being seen. Yes, he was right—Merryweather. The Searchmaster stood at the rear of the square. He could see him plainly—a head taller than those around him, a thin face with high cheekbones, eyes deep-sunk in the caves of his face. He studied him with growing apprehension.

The Searchmaster's head was pivoting like, he thought, a radar scan. Suddenly the face stopped, turned toward the window. He knows. Krull was completely dismayed. He felt the tension building up and momentarily tried to squelch it. Merryweather was there but for one purpose. Krull's apprehension was replaced by a feeling of defiance. *To hell with him,* he told himself, and deliberately stepped into full view, disregarding the gaunt man. From time to time the Caller glanced at his watch, finally motioned toward the TV crew and lifted a mike to his lips. A hush fell over the square.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye . . ."

His voice twanged from the speaker with a nervous tremor. He paused, took a deep breath and continued:

"Now the person of Ben Yargo, having been found qualified on appropriate tests, and having been adjudged IQ 219 by the World Board of Psychmasters, is hereby invited . . . invited . . ." —he glanced desperately at his notes—"by the people of the world to participate in election for the office of Prime Thinker."

He paused, a trumpet sounded followed by the low roll of drums, then silence. The Caller threw back his shoulders and boomed:

"If you accept, come forth and so state."

DRUMS rolled, trumpets blared, the crowd milled expectantly and here and there a voice cried: "Come forth." The call became a chant; the Caller threw up his hands for silence. The noise died away, quiet except for the restless shuffling of feet. A moment passed.

Ben Yargo strode purposefully from the house, his formal tricorned hat and purple garb designating his candidacy for office. The crowd parted before him. He reached a point a dozen yards from the base of the platform and halted, looking up at the Caller. There was an awed silence before he spoke:

"I accept."

A cheer swept the square and trumpets and drums added to the din. He stood with face turned upward until the roar died away; then, to the measured roll of drums, marched to the official limousine which would bear him to the Hall of Elections. Engines roared to life and the cavalcade

started slowly down the drive. It was a scene enacted in four parts of the city simultaneously—the official invitation to each of the candidates for earth's highest office.

Krull tried to spot Merryweather but he had disappeared. Within minutes the House of the Prime Thinker was shrouded in silence. Alone and forgotten, his brief moment of glory past, the Caller descended from the platform and walked slowly across the deserted grounds.

There was a knock at Krull's door. It was Jan with coffee. She greeted him with a nervous smile.

"Mind if I share your screen?"

"Not a bit," he promptly declared. He didn't worry her about Merryweather. He turned on the TV while she poured the coffee. Yargo's cavalcade was winding through streets lined with cheering, flower-bedecked crowds whose dress proclaimed a mixture of IQ's. A closeup of the lead car revealed him smiling, waving, being pelted with flowers. Signs proclaiming *We want Yargo* and large photos of him were hoisted in front of the camera. Krull caught a glimpse of a sign reading, *Down with the atom men* before the camera hurriedly swung away. The cavalcade was met by three similar ones, each bearing an official candidate, and the entire procession moved on to the Hall of Elections. It halted in front of the building, where cordons of police held back the crowds until the candidates descended, bombarded by flowers and shimmery streamers of colored tape.

The camera moved in on Yargo's face: it was square, hard, but a crinkling around the lips gave him a slightly paternal expression. He nodded. The camera swung toward Shevach; his face was lean, saturnine, pale, with the broad high forehead somehow oddly out of proportion with the delicate bone structure beneath.

THE lens moved again. Sherif was a squat dark Asian with bushy brows and piercing eyes set deep in a confident face. He was, Krull knew, a controversial figure. His chief platform was based on what he termed *the equality of man.* He was outspoken in his opposition to castes founded upon IQ, which made him the darling of a large segment of the LIQ's. Watching him now, Krull had the feeling he was sincere; there was a quality about the dark eyes that suggested compassion. Only William Harshberg, scholarly and pale, with a narrow intelligent face and watery eyes, was visibly nervous. The camera recorded the slight quivering of his lips. The candidates met at the bot-

tom of the steps, formally shook hands, and marched into the building flanked by a guard of special agents in spit-and-polish splendor.

"I'm glad this only happens once every five years," Jan said nervously.

"Don't worry, he'll come through."

"Sometimes I wish he hadn't tried again. Two terms are enough to give." He sensed the bitterness in her voice.

"It's for the world."

"I know, he had to run. There was no other alternative," she replied enigmatically, turning back to the screen.

The candidates were entering the main auditorium. One end contained a large stage holding the election booths and computers. A podium in the center was occupied by a florid-faced man whose ceremonial dress identified him as the official Host; behind him sat Karl Werner, Psychmaster of the World, and Marvin Chadwick, the Archon, who headed the World Court. Eight subarchons dressed in formal scarlet tophats and matching capes sat behind them. The Host, whose name was Clender, pompously held up a hand for attention; the auditorium grew silent and he announced:

"Elections are in order. The Right Honorable Archon, Marvin Chadwick, will attest to the procedures." He turned and bowed as Chadwick came to the mike.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the world—Archon Chadwick."

The Archon nodded, adjusted the mike and looked solemnly at the row of scarlet-clad official judges. He was a tall, lantern-faced man with sharp brown eyes and brisk movements.

He announced that a Prime Thinker and six members to the World Council of Six would be elected, in that order. He spoke slowly, measuredly, conscious that his audience was the world. He explained that election to the office of Prime Thinker would be by test. Each candidate would take three tests—the same three—and the person having the highest total score would be adjudged winner. The tests would be machine-scored with the results automatically translated into IQ values. He paused occasionally while the official judges nodded agreement.

KRULL listened interestedly. There were an even twelve thousand tests, of which three would be selected on the basis of random numbers. The scoring and converting to IQ values would be recorded by cameras so the citizens of the world could judge the fairness of the procedures.

He finished. The subarchons nodded and Clender resumed his

place at the microphone and announced he would introduce the candidates with precedence based on present IQ rating. He turned toward the entrance and nodded. Ben Yargo rustled forward, his face an inscrutable mask.

"Ben Yargo, IQ 219, philosopher-ecologist . . ." Clender pumped Yargo's hand vigorously, dropped it and signaled the attendant. Yargo smiled faintly and retreated to a row of chairs set in front of the election booths as Ivan Shevach came to the mike. The Manager smiled sardonically when his IQ rating was announced as 217. He turned abruptly from the mike and sat alongside Yargo. Mustapha Sherif (IQ 216) and William Harshberg (IQ 214) followed. Sherif's expression was wooden, all except the dark eyes glowing under bushy brows. Harshberg appeared jittery and had some difficulty controlling a facial twitch. When he was seated, a trumpeter appeared, sounded a silvery blast and disappeared into a wing. The elections had begun.

Clender beamed into the camera. "Citizens of the world, Dr. Karl Werner, Psychmaster, will activate the election computer for selection of test number one. Dr. Werner . . ."

Werner stared myopically through thick-lensed glasses, nodded briefly and limped toward the election machine. The camera moved in until only his hand was visible, one finger pointing to a red button. The finger moved, pressed the button, and the camera focused on a spinning counter which gradually slowed and finally stopped at number 8250. Another camera cut in with an overview of the chamber.

The Psychmaster announced: "The official number is 8 . . . 2 . . . 5 . . . 0." The Archon rose, repeated the number and the judges nodded confirmation. Werner came into view again with his hand poised above the control panel. He turned a pointer to figure "4" and moved his hand to a selector dial. Again only his finger and the dial face were visible. He slowly dialed the official number. Another camera cut in to show the face of the computer. Lights blinked, the machine hummed and four booklets tumbled into a slot at the base of the console. Werner scooped them up and held them toward the lens to display the number for the world to witness. An overview came on and Clender said:

"The election booths . . ." An attendant opened the booths to display their interiors. Each was furnished identically—a straightback chair and writing table holding several pencils.

"They keep it honest," Krull observed.

THE Psychmaster placed a booklet on each table and limped to his seat. Clender ordered the candidates to station themselves by their booths and read the instructions. The test would start at the sound of a gong, would last exactly sixty minutes, and would be terminated by a second gong. Any candidate not leaving his booth within ten seconds of the final gong would be automatically disqualified.

The Archon rose. "That is the law and I so testify." The subarchons nodded assent. Silence.

A gong sounded.

Harshberg popped through the door of his booth like a scared rabbit. The others followed more slowly. When the doors were closed, the Psychmaster dropped a note on the podium. Clender examined it and announced:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the first official test is titled, *Test of Motives Behind Historical Political Actions*. Needless to say, this test definitely favors William Harshberg who, as you know, is a political scientist. For example . . ."

Jan moodily snapped the screen off, turning pensively toward Krull. "I'd forgotten, you haven't had breakfast."

"I'll help," he offered.

"You won't budge from this room," she replied firmly.

"Until after your father gets elected." He smiled crookedly. "He'd better."

"He will."

"Sure." After she left he turned on the screen. The camera had returned to the outside of the building. The streets were jammed with jostling, singing crowds bearing placards and huge pictures of the candidates. A woman tried to thrust a Yargo poster in front of the camera and was shoved aside by a rough-looking LIQ bearing a Shevach placard. Two men hoisted a thin elderly woman in front of the camera and she shrilled:

"Down with the atom fiends!"

Hands reached up, caught her and she was pulled back into the crowd. The camera rested for an instant on a young blonde with brilliantly painted face. She saw the camera, winked and jerked open her tunic to display her breasts; the camera swung away. Krull thought the celebration was starting early.

HE SNAPPED the scene off when Jan returned. They ate in silence. She didn't turn the set on until the time for the candidates to emerge from the election booths. Yargo and Sherif appeared stolid-faced, unconcerned; Shevach seemed a bit anxious, Harshberg was plainly jittery. The Psychmaster gathered the tests and held them so the audience could see the num-

bers, then limped to the computer and fed the first one into a slot.

"Test number one . . . Ben Yargo," he called.

Clender broke in: The test will be scored automatically and translated into IQ points, which will flash on the master screen at the top of the panel." He broke off as a light winked; there was a low hum followed by a number on the screen: 212.

"Two-twelve, pretty good," Krull mused aloud.

"Yes, it's good," Jan agreed.

"Test number two . . . Ivan Shevach."

They waited, tense. The light blinked again and number 210 appeared on the screen.

"Beat him," Krull said gleefully.

"Of course."

The Manager's face was slightly furrowed. Sherif scored 214; his expression didn't change.

"Test number four . . . William Harshberg."

There was an agonizing moment. The thin political scientist tensed in his seat and leaned slightly forward, his eyes riveted on the computer. The screen came to life: 223. Jan gasped involuntarily. A smug smile creased Harshberg's face. Shevach looked visibly perturbed. Yargo didn't change expression and the squat Sherif merely glanced at the reading.

"Don't worry," Krull consoled, "the subject matter was in his field. He won't get that break again."

"I hope not." Jan was shaken. The camera flashed to the exterior of the building. The crowds were noisier. *Elect Ben Yargo* and *We want Sherif* banners competed with signs backing Shevach and Harshberg. One sign borne by a grim-faced delegation proclaimed: *Down with the atomic conspirators.* The camera paused at a corner to show several women dancing, cheered on by a ring of festively-clad celebrants; as swung abruptly away when one of the women began peeling off her clothes.

THE second test turned out to be the analogy variety—things that resembled other things in obscure ways. It was strictly a powerhouse affair and, as Clender explained, was more nearly related to pure IQ than the mere possession of factual knowledge.

To Krull's disappointment, Jan left and didn't return until almost time for the tests to be scored.

The scene was a replica of the first, except for the results:

Yargo: 219
Shevach: 220
Sherif: 217
Harshberg: 214

Krull relaxed with a satisfied

smile. That put Yargo's total one above Shevach, a tie with Sherif, and only six behind the political scientist. Jan didn't share his enthusiasm.

"It's too close," she murmured.

"He's got it whipped."

"I hope so, I hope so." she said pensively. "If only he can overcome Harshberg's lead."

"That's the least of his worries," Krull said. "It's Shevach I'm worried about."

"Sherif's strong, too."

"Yes . . ." They turned back to the screen. Yargo and Sherif remained impassive, Shevach was sucking his long underlip nervously and Harshberg seemed vacillating between elation and despair. If the next test were favorable, he could easily become the 91st Prime Thinker.

The Psychmaster pushed the button to activate the random number dial for test number three. The dial was a blur of movement, gradually slowing, stopping on number 7777. He read the official number and the Archon testified to its correctness. When the doors closed behind the candidates, Clender announced:

"Test number 7 . . . 7 . . . 7 . . . 7, selected at random, is entitled *Alexander the Great*—simply *Alexander the Great.* Ladies and gentlemen, this test is unusual in that it takes us into ancient history . . ."

Jan snapped the set off. "That's strange."

"Yeah," Krull said thoughtfully. She started to say something and abruptly stopped. He looked puzzled. The test struck an odd chord but, somehow, he couldn't put a finger on the disturbing thought. He voiced what he was thinking.

"Everyone's heard the name *Alexander,*" Jan replied evenly. All at once she seemed anxious to drop the subject. She smiled and grasped his hand. "But I feel better. Shevach was the only one Dad was afraid of and he's beating him. I'm glad." Krull looked into her eyes and she dropped his hand and retreated toward the door.

"I'll get some more coffee."

"No—stay."

She smiled demurely. "No." She whirled and disappeared through the door and he heard her laugh echoing in the hall. He looked at his hand. The spot she had touched felt warmer than the rest of his body. Strange, she was no more beautiful than either Rea Jon or Anna, but she was more exciting. Rea had been provocative, willing; Anna's forte had been the sorrow mirrored in her eyes that had made his love more an act of compassion. Jan was different. She was alive, vital—whetting him for the chase. But she would be fleet and not easily overtaken; she

knew exactly how far and how fast to run. He savored that.

HE browsed restlessly around the room but she didn't return until time for the test scores to be read. He turned to the set while she poured the coffee, impatiently watching the returns.

The camera closed in on the candidates. Yargo was grim. Shevach's face glistened with perspiration; he was sucking his lower lip and his eyes seemed to have become small gimlets. Sherif remained imperturbably; Harshberg's face muscles were twitching and his jaw hung slack. The camera swung back to the Psychmaster.

"Test number one . . . Ben Yargo." Werner inserted the test into a slot; a light came on accompanied by a hum which ended suddenly as a number flashed on the screen: 229.

"Wonderful." Jan's face was jubilant. An awed sigh rose from the auditorium. Werner inserted another paper.

"Test number two—Ivan Shevach."

The lights and humming came and died, and both Krull and Jan leaned involuntarily toward the screen. The number was 227.

"He's won, he's won," Jan whispered.

"Wait," he cautioned.

Sherif scored 220. There was a moment of anxious waiting while Harshberg's test was fed into the machine. He scored 211.

"He's won," Jan exclaimed. She impulsively flung her arms around Krull's neck and suddenly drew back, as if appalled at her action.

"I don't mind," he said, grinning. He was elated. Now, maybe, his troubles were over. Perhaps Yargo could get Shevach appointed inspector of oyster beds off Easter Island. He turned back to the screen.

The Archon was giving Yargo's official—and winning—IQ as 220, one higher than Shevach and three above Sherif, who led Harshberg by one point. Krull started to snap the set off, then froze. The door of the chamber burst open and a squad of armed agents marched in.

"What's happening?" Jan worriedly asked.

"I don't know."

The agents halted. A stalwart, familiar-appearing gray-haired man strode to the center of the room. Krull was startled. It was Joseph Grimhorn, Chief of World Agents.

"What's the meaning of this?" The Archon asked Grimhorn.

"Your honor, I am sorry but a felony charge has been placed against two persons present."

"Is there a court order?"

"There is, your Honor, initiated earlier. My office just received it a few moments ago."

"And the nature of the complaint?"

"Fraud—fraud involving the operation of the computer."

"What!" The Archon was startled. "Sworn out against whom?"

"Karl Werner, the Psychmaster, and"—Grimhorn's face became sad—"Ben Yargo, the Prime Thinker."

"And the complainant?"

Grimhorn swung angrily on his heels and leveled a long finger. "Ivan Shevach."

Pandemonium reigned in the auditorium.

CHAPTER 13

BEN YARGO came home that evening—came without trumpet or drum or waving banner, came without the cheering throngs and honor guard that had escorted him to the Hall of Elections. He was still Prime Thinker, still free, but only because of the privilege of immunity accorded his office. He returned to a house that lay on the hill like a shadow-box, brooding and silent, seemingly deserted—an oasis unmindful of the raging political fires.

Krull sat alone, watching the screen, half his mind occupied by the sudden change in Yargo's fortunes. Jan had fled precipitously following Grimhorn's dramatic charge, nor had he seen her since. Once he had heard her footsteps echoing in the lower hall as she rushed to greet her father.

The stillness had come again.

Psychmaster Werner had been booked and released on his own recognizance without making a statement; a team of engineers were methodically examining the election computer under the watchful eyes of Grimhorn's chief deputy and a squad of agents. The Archon had suspended elections of the Council of Six on the legal requirement they follow the declaration of election of a prime thinker—an act which hadn't come off. The old council remained, sadly divided between an outraged Kingman and a calm Eve Mallon.

The scene in the Hall of Elections had immediate world-wide repercussions. Supporters carrying Yargo banners were mobbed, their signs shredded. There were riots in New Berlin, Greater London, Rio de Janeiro; California mobs stormed government offices and Shanghai was in the throes of looting. The Capetown Royal HIQ Society ("All members above IQ 160") demanded immediate self-rule; the Turkish Council of Mayors called for recognition of Sherif as Prime Thinker. New Delhi was in flames. But the public would not be robbed of its holiday; along with the riots there were wild celebrations.

The Archon immediately called a special session of the World Court to decide what action should be taken if election fraud were determined. Yargo's current term expired in ten days. Who would succeed him if the election were found invalid? It was a situation that never before had occurred, one that threatened to split the government right down the middle.

Harshberg demanded the court void the entire election and set an immediate date for a new one. Mustapha Sherif told a TV audience: "I have faith in Ben Yargo's integrity. Let's wait and see." He was stoned leaving the station. Shevach was vociferous. He demanded Yargo's test scores be voided and the office conferred on the highest scoring candidate of the remaining three—which happened to be himself.

Eve Mallon told a press conference that Shevach's charge of fraud had been made prior to the election, thus his participation in an election believed by him to be fraudulent made him a party to the fraud. Shevach vehemently denied the charge. He claimed he had acted in the interests of good government on the basis of anonymous information; he had merely held off having the warrant served until the selection of the test verified the charge. No, he was not guilty. Rather he was the victim of a plot to rob him—and the people—of their just victory.

EVE MALLON countered by producing evidence that Shevach's secretary had withdrawn all books and tapes on Alexander the Great from the public library long before the election. Shevach couldn't explain that. Grimhorn promptly charged the Manager with "participation in a felonious act," which, if proven, would bar him from public office. Shevach responded by attempting to have Grimhorn removed from his post; he suggested Gordon Gullfin as interim Chief of World Agents. Eve Mallon hurriedly formed a council bloc consisting of herself, George Lincoln, Kim Lee Wong and Hans Taussig that effectively stymied the move despite Kingman's angry opposition. UPOP rushed out a spot survey which showed sixty-seven per cent of the people believed Yargo guilty, twenty per cent thought him innocent and thirteen per cent gave no opinion. Broken down by IQ, most of the twenty per cent supporting Yargo were HIQ's.

The fast-breaking news answered the question perturbing Krull. Alexander the Great—he remembered now—he had seen the book on Yargo's desk. It could be a coincidence, of course, but it looked bad. Yargo—he couldn't believe it. He stayed

riveted to the screen, trying to assess his own moves. The news took an ominous twist.

Shevach stated Yargo was harboring the fugitive killer, Max Krull, and demanded his immediate arrest. The words had scarcely ended before there was a sharp rap on the door, followed by an imperative exclamation.

"Krull!" He opened it and faced Yargo's chief of special agents.

"Hello . . . Foxhill." There was no reaction to the name.

"Let's get the hell out of here," he barked.

"Why?"

"Mob coming."

Sure, there would be a mob. Shevach would see to that. Gullfin and the searchmaster were probably behind it stirring it to a frenzy. But what of Jan? The agent saw the question in his eyes and said:

"The Prime Thinker and his daughter have gone; they're safe."

"Where to?"

"I wouldn't know," Foxhill snapped, "but you'd better step on it if you want to beat your admirers."

"Okay," Krull said shortly, "I'm ready. Where to?"

"Wherever you want. You're on your own now," the agent responded grimly. "I'll drive you to any place of your choosing."

"Why?"

"Yargo's orders." Krull tried to assimilate the information. Yargo's sole motive was to get him out of his hair. That made sense. But it would leave him an outlaw, exposed to every hand. If he could crack the conspiracy he could still vindicate himself. He followed Foxhill out the back of the house to his car. They got in and the agent started the engine.

"Where to?"

KRULL hesitated—one place was as good or bad as another. He decided on the LIQ district, thinking the crowd would be a good mask until he could formulate a plan of action. He spoke briefly, the agent nodded and started down the drive. They had scarcely reached the main thoroughfare before they passed a cavalcade speeding in the opposite direction, horns blaring. Krull looked back; the procession turned into Yargo's drive.

"Just beat 'em," Foxhill muttered. Krull nodded grimly. It had been close. The crowds thickened as they drew closer to the heart of the city. People were dancing, shouting, hoisting bottles and waving banners bearing Shevach's name and picture; here and there large photos of him were plastered on buildings. Krull smiled sourly. It was too neat; it smacked of long planning. The crowd grew thicker

and Foxhill was forced to stop.

"You'll have to take it from here," he said. Krull nodded and jumped out, then looked back.

"So long, and thanks."

"Don't mention it."

He moved away, threading through the crowd without any particular destination. He needed a place to hide . . . a place to think. But where? He couldn't risk a hotel, not even a rat-ridden hole in the LIQ district. Gullfin's agents would be making the rounds.

And the searchmaster!

He damned the gaunt man mentally, pushing through the mob. He was jostled and hemmed in until his progress practically came to a standstill. A drunk in a LIQ tunic wearing an expensive pink HIQ cape waved a bottle in his face and shouted:

"We want Shevach . . . We want Shevach . . ."

A hand reached out and snatched the bottle—and the drunk turned, cursing. A bloated-faced woman naked to the waist grabbed Krull's arm.

"Everybody celebrate, honey." He pushed the hand off and forced his way next to the buildings. People shouting, pushing, singing, dancing—people and banners and laughter and screams. People . . . Dusk. The shadows came, reached out. He reached a corner and found himself staring into a public screen diagonally across the intersection. Suddenly it was filled with a face—his face! A voice from the speaker rose harshly above the noise.

Watch for killer Krull . . . Watch for killer Krull . . .

He stared, fascinated, waiting for the picture to change. It didn't.

Watch for killer Krull . . .

He turned his head down and pushed away from the intersection, threading deeper toward the heart of the LIQ quarters. Damn, Shevach wasn't missing a bet. They'd keep his picture on the screens, keep shouting his name. If someone saw him, gave the alarm . . . The crowd would kill him—tear him to pieces. That's what Shevach wanted. He stepped into a doorway, hurriedly retreating when he found it occupied by lovers.

Shevach . . . Shevach . . . *Shevach . . .*

SOMEONE started the refrain; it caught on—everyone was shouting the name. After a while it died out. Night came on and the faces under the yellow street lights looked like those of animals; faces and half-naked bodies and the smell of liquor and tobacco smoke. Bedlam. A light haze was coming in, the lights took on a yellowish hue. More screens, each with the image of Krull staring out over the crowd.

Watch for killer Krull . . .

He hastily retreated. Hide. Hide where? He gave thanks for the crowd; it had forgotten the screens, forgotten Krull, forgotten everything but the revelry at hand. Several times he caught sight of black capes and stopped, watching until they melted away. Agents, there must be a hundred of them watching for him, combing the LIQ quarters. Maybe he'd picked the wrong place. Next time he looked up he was diagonally across from the Edward Crozener Hotel. A screen above street level was filled with his image. He started to turn a corner and stopped abruptly. A gaunt figure stood by the corner of the hotel, towering above the revelers.

The searchmaster!

Krull's blood ran cold but he remained watching. Merryweather was pivoting his head from side to side, covering the intersection. His face looked like a mask under the garish yellow light and where his eyes should be were two black holes. He looked as if he were sniffing the wind. He thought again that the gaunt man was a bloodhound, a shadow he couldn't shake. A peeper who could peep crowds! He felt a tinge of panic, abruptly turned and pushed deeper into the crowd. Merryweather—he had to shake him—put distance between them. His presence there meant he knew Krull was in the LIQ quarters. How? He felt baffled and cursed savagely. Once the searchmaster detected him he would cling to his mind like a leech . . . trail him through the thickest crowds. Nail him. The festivities and sounds of occasional brawls grew louder. He liked that . . . something comforting in the din, the press of bodies, the sweat and the odor. Even Merryweather couldn't pick a single mind from a throng like this. The crowd was an animal, a vast protoplasmic mask hiding him from the Manager.

From the searchmaster.

But when the crowd thinned? He'd have to hide, have to hide, hide . . . hide . . . hide. The word was a refrain in his mind. Run, hide . . . run, hide, find a room, a black cellar, anything

A black cellar?

He remembered.

THE cellar where Foxhill had killed Cathecart. It was the perfect spot, the last place they'd look. It would give him time to think, to plan, time to tie the threads together. He traversed several blocks trying to recall its location. After a while he spotted the pub where he'd taken refuge and remembered. Keeping his face turned down he pushed through the crowd. Capes. Black capes. The agents seemed all around. Another scream, another

image, a jumble of milling, sweating, smelling bodies blocking his path, a voice calling his name. He held his head low and hurried.

Noise . . .

Screams . . .

Wild laughter . . .

A young LIQ with purpled lips and hair lacquered in a spiral cone stopped his progress, swaying in front of him supported by the arms of the escorts who, he thought, resembled stevedores. She swayed and looked blurry-eyed at him.

"Come along, honey, join the party."

"Get along," one of the drunks growled, looking meanly at Krull. He pushed around them, followed by her shrill laughter. It took him a while to find the alley. It was a black maw opening into the street. Its entrance was blocked by the mob—cursing, shouting, laughing humanity, bottle wavers and half-naked celebrants, some still carrying Shevach banners. He managed to gain the entrance and slip into the shadows.

He probed his way by memory, occasionally circling to avoid a whispering voice or the dim outlines of swaying bodies. The din gradually receded and, as his eyes became dark-adapted, the outlines of buildings took form.

He finally located the door he was seeking, more by feel than by sight. He twisted the knob and it opened. He waited, trying to discern thought in the blackness of the cellar, and failed. After a moment he stepped into the blackness, conscious that he was sweating and breathing heavily. He stood for a while, hearing his heart thud against his ribs. Nothing happened. Strange, he had half-expected Peter Merryweather. He hesitated. Distant cries and laughter came from the street but the cellar was a tomb. He saw nothing, heard nothing, nor did his mind register any cause for alarm. After a moment he breathed easier and felt his way toward one wall where he remembered seeing a jumble of old furniture.

Safe. He was safe.

He found a pile of battered chairs, desks, tables and odds and ends of junk. Some of the better pieces were covered against dust with plastic tarp. He rummaged around until he found a comfortable place to lay; in moments he was asleep. Once he woke to the sound of shrill voices and screams, revelry from the streets. His muscles ached from the hard floor, he shifted position and drifted off to sleep again.

NEXT time he woke it was early morning. Pale light filtered in through cracks above the door and half-covered win-

dow. He felt a sudden fear. Perhaps the cellar wasn't abandoned . . . maybe it was worked in during the day. He rose and peered cautiously around; no sign it had been used recently but he'd have to be careful of watchmen. He debated sneaking out for something to eat and discarded the idea. He'd be too conspicuous on the almost deserted streets. Well, he'd found himself a hideout, all right. Now the trick would be to get out of it. He grinned ruefully and settled back to wait it out, thinking that night was a long time off. During the day he heard activity in the building above him; once someone entered the far end of the cellar and rummaged around a pile of boxes. Krull hid under the plastic tarp until he left.

He passed the hours debating his course of action. He wasn't getting any place this way—he'd have to make a break. How? Bok—but Bok was dead. But the esper would have a successor. It seemed logical that he would have been a party to Bok's activities. Well, this time he wouldn't be so soft. He'd go to the House of Espers and force the information. He felt better at the decision. At least it was a course of action.

The day seemed eternal, but finally the half-light of the cellar darkened and the shadows around him jelled into a solid black. He waited a while longer, planning his exact moves as carefully as he could, knowing that success or failure perhaps depended upon the next few hours. Finally he emerged from hiding and started toward the door.

"Max . . ."

He froze and his heart suddenly sped up again, booming inside him.

"Max . . ." It was a soft voice, husky and low. He turned slowly.

"It's . . . Anna."

"Anna." He repeated the name huskily, without believing; saw the shadow of her body moving toward him.

"How did you know I'd be here?" He asked harshly, conscious that his anger was unreasonable. She didn't answer and he said, slowly, "Herman Bok?"

"Yes," she admitted. She was next to him. "Oh, Max . . ."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Nothing."

His eyes were becoming dark-adapted and he saw the paleness of her face; even in the darkness he knew it was wistful, filled with sorrow. He spoke more gently.

"Nothing at all, Anna?"

She hesitated. "Nothing, Max, but he gave me some orders." Her voice trailed away.

"Go on," he ordered.

"I'm to take you to the conspirators."

"What?"

She repeated the statement, and added, "But, please, follow me. There's a schedule, Max."

As she started to withdraw, he caught her hand and pulled, gently. She came back, looked into his face a moment, and flung herself in his arms. He felt her body trembling, heard her sob. He lifted her chin and kissed her. Her lips were cold. She broke away again.

"Please, we have to hurry."

SHE led him through the same passage Butterfield had taken. They reached the alley and walked toward the corner. He heard the voices ahead and hesitated.

"Please don't worry, Max. I'll get you there safely," she said, as if reading his thoughts.

"Did Bok tell you that, too?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"Okay." All at once he felt better. This was the break he'd been waiting for. He had everything cinched and no worries—Bok guaranteed that. He followed her to the mouth of the alley, took her arm and walked by her side until they reached her car. She pulled into the stream of traffic and headed toward the bay.

"Where to?" Krull asked curiously.

"The seaplane ramp."

"The police will be there."

"Yes, but they won't stop us."

"If Bok was right."

"He was right," she said simply.

"Okay, I'll take a chance." After a moment another thought struck him.

"Who are the conspirators?"

"That I can't say," she answered simply.

"Can't or won't?"

"Max . . . please, I've told you everything I can."

"Except the destination . . ."

She turned and looked soberly into my face.

"Well?" he demanded impatiently.

"Waimea-Roa," she said simply. She turned back to the traffic, leaving him for the minute speechless. Finally he slumped back against the seat and murmured:

"I'll be damned."

Anna reached the seaplane ramp and headed directly toward the ticket booth. Krull nervously followed—Shevach wouldn't leave any of the transportation routes unattended. There, ahead, just as he feared he saw a bulky man lounging across from the ticket window watching the crowd. AGENT was stamped across his features. Krull tugged Anna's arm.

"It's watched."

"Bok said we would be safe."

He hesitated, shrugged and followed, covertly watching the man. Krull studied him out of the corner of his eye, prepared to

either fight or flee, trying to play it by ear. To his amazement, the watcher didn't seem to notice them. They turned down the ramp, and Krull could almost feel the cold eyes follow them. They reached the bottom.

Anna excused herself a moment.

Krull fretted nervously until she reappeared. Just in time. Five minutes later the seaplane engines roared to life; it taxied into the stream and started its sluggish take-off. Minutes later Sydney was a sea of lights rapidly falling astern.

THE floating city of Kulahai fled past; there was only a vast expanse of stars and black sea beneath until the scattered lights of Abiang Atoll rushed toward them from the heart of Waimea-Roa. The plane dropped lower, banked, let down to a smooth landing on the surface of the lagoon and taxied toward the ramp.

"Okay," Krull said harshly, "now what?"

"Wait . . . until we're alone."

"That'll be a couple of minutes," he promised grimly.

They were the only passengers to disembark, he noted. At least Shevach didn't have a shadow on his heels yet. He steered Anna to the top of the ramp, halted and faced her.

"Let's have it," he said quietly. "I know every person on the atolls. Start spilling names."

"But I don't know them," she protested. "All I know is the place."

"Where?"

"Chimney Rock."

"What?" He spat the word incredulously, then laughed mirthlessly. She watched him puzzled. "Bok's been taking us in," he said finally. "Chimney Rock is just a pillar, a massive black chunk jutting up from the sea. Even birds have a tough time getting a toehold," he added grimly.

"Not on the rock—under the rock," she said quietly.

"Under . . ."

"A cavern, a huge grotto. There's a laboratory, factory, places to live . . ."

"You've seen that?"

"Bok told me," she said simply.

"Impossible. It couldn't go undetected."

"It's been built over the years . . . decades."

"I don't believe it."

"I do."

"Then why are you leading me there?" he challenged. "Why would Bok undue the work he says he believes in. No, it doesn't make sense."

"Because you're not going as an agent, Max."

"I'm not?" He smiled sardonically.

"No—Mr. Bok says you're necessary to . . . to it's completion."

"No," he said stonily. Another thought struck him. "How do we get there?"

"There's a way. I can't tell you yet. I'll have to . . ."

"Yeah, there's a way," he cut in. "Follow me."

"Max . . ."

FOLLOW me," he repeated roughly. He started down the main street of Abiang Village and, after a moment, heard her footsteps behind him. To hell with Bok, he thought. He'd break the causal chain. From here on out he didn't need her. Or Bok either. He knew where the conspirators were; he also knew exactly how he'd round them up. He'd smash them and vindicate himself, and not even Shevach could touch him, even if he were declared Prime Thinker. He reached the small pastel house that had been his home since coming to the atolls, unlocked the door and beckoned her to precede him. She walked past him tight-lipped.

"Make yourself at home," he mocked. "I'll be back."

She turned and her voice was a plea: "Max . . ."

He had one hand on the door when she screamed, "Max—you've got to listen."

He spun back. "Okay, make it short." He held the door ajar and waited. Her voice was subdued, almost toneless.

"Herman Bok was a great man," she said, "great because he was different . . . because he had a talent no one else in the whole world had. He was a *down through*, Max, could see the future."

"I know that," he cut in.

"Yes, but you don't know what it does to a man . . . the damnation of being able to see every moment of every day ahead of time; being able to see your own personal failures and disasters, your own death, not being able to change things . . ."

"So . . .?"

"Why do you think Herman Bok considered it so important that you find the conspirators?" she blazed. He looked soberly at her.

"I don't know."

"Mr. Bok said you would save the conspiracy. Do you hear that, Max? You're going to save it." She laughed hysterically and he felt a desire to take her in his arms and soothe her. She was wrought up, half out of her mind. He took a step toward her. She halted her laughter and said:

"No, I'm not crazy, if that's what you think."

"All right, you're not crazy," he said quietly, "but Bok was, at least with regard to me."

"He wasn't," she whimpered. "You don't know . . ."

"No. . . ?" He leaned against the door and contemplated her bemusedly. "Look, Anna, I'm supposed to be an esper. Well, I've tried it. I can get vague impressions from people's minds, but I really can't read them. Once in a while I get sharp images but not often. As an esper, I'm a dud, and I know it . . ."

"You don't know . . ."

"I can't see into the future," he said bluntly, "so don't try and give me that." There was a tinge of regret in his voice. "I'm just an agent—a plain agent. But right now I'm going to make the damnedest haul . . ."

HE yanked the door open and stepped into the night, gritting his teeth savagely. Damn, all his life he'd hated the knowledge he was an esper. Now, when he wanted to be an esper, he wasn't; all Bok's ravings couldn't alter that. He stomped into the station, surprised to find Derek behind the desk. The wizened clerk gasped a flustered welcome.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" Krull asked.

Derek nodded toward the door. "The Old Man's in. There's something hot."

"You can say that again," Krull snapped. He walked past the clerk and entered the Inspector's office without knocking. Jonquil looked up in surprise and his face wreathed into a smile.

"Welcome home, Max. I wasn't expecting you but I'm sure glad to see you."

"I'm glad, too," Krull said fervently. He plopped into a chair opposite the littered desk. "The chips are down and we're going to work."

Jonquil abruptly rose, motioning him to silence, and drew him to the corner of the room.

"You've located the conspiracy?"

Krull nodded.

"That ties in. I've got orders to marshal my agents and stand by."

"Then why the need for secrecy."

Jonquil looked grim. "The orders were from the Manager. He's coming personally—due to land shortly."

Krull digested the information.

"I also got an order from Yargo not to assist Shevach—I'm in the middle."

"Don't help him," Krull urged.

"We've got to plan but I think we'd better get out of here," Jonquil murmured. "Right now I don't even trust Derek."

"Listen, I've got to break that conspiracy myself," Krull said desperately. "It's the only chance I've got for vindication. Besides, if Shevach beats me, he's got the world in his hand."

"I know. So does Yargo. But he won't beat you. Go over to Dying Girl Point—I'll meet you there in a few moments. Maybe there's a way but we'll have to work fast."

Krull nodded assent and began talking in normal tones for the benefit of any possible electronic listener: "I'll see you in the morning. Right now I'm going to turn in and get a good night's sleep."

Jonquil winked. "Good night, Max," he replied conversationally.

KRULL left the station, hesitated, then popped his head in the door of his house. Anna was studying the sketch of Rea Jon; she turned at the sound of the door.

"Wait, I'll be back," he snapped.

"Max . . ." Her eyes were pools of sorrow again. "I have something to say."

"Say it," he spat, "I've got work to do."

"Next time you see me, read my mind."

"Why?" He was startled.

"I can't say . . . now. Just read my mind!"

Mystery. Hell, couldn't she ever come out and say what she thought? He yanked the door shut without giving her time to protest and struck off toward Dying Girl Point. The night was cool in his face and his clothes were damp on his body. He walked swiftly to the promontory which jutted into the sea, picking his way more cautiously until he reached its end. The point was a favorite spot, filled with fond memories. He and Jonquil had set their canvases there, had fished from its heights with both line and speargun. On nights like this he had come here with Rea Jon. He looked upward. Stars—millions of stars pinned against the sky all the way down to where it merged with the blackness of the Pacific.

Stars.

Espers.

Atoms. The world was all fou'ed up.

He heard footsteps and turned; Jonquil came out of the night, a lean silhouette. Krull moved to meet him and they stopped, facing each other across the span of feet. He saw that the Inspector was disturbed. There was a heavy silence before Jonquil spoke:

"Max, you are my friend."

"And you are mine."

"You've been like a son to me." The anguish in his voice startled Krull. He's worried, he thought. I'm putting a load on his shoulders, asking him to share my job. He felt guilty.

"I didn't mean to burden you, Martin, but I need help. You're the only one I can trust."

"Don't say that," Jonquil replied sorrowfully.

"Why not?" Krull asked. "It's true." He looked at the Inspector's face. Even in the dim light he could see it was a mask of sorrow. A gaunt hand came out from under the cape holding a snub-nosed automatic.

"Because I have to kill you."

CHAPTER 14

KRULL stepped back, startled, and fought to relax, conscious that his life span had become measured in moments. He kept his eyes rivetted on the Inspector's face.

"Why?" he asked simply.

"I love you," Jonquil said. "You've been like a son to me—the son I never had. But this is bigger than us. I've been asking myself if I could really do this—kill you. Now I know I can—must. But it'll be like killing myself, Max. Worse, for you have been dearer to me than life.

"Then, why?" Krull asked, conscious of a deep inner sorrow, not for himself but for the man standing in front of him, a man going through hell. Jonquil didn't answer. Krull turned and took a few slow steps toward the cliff, speaking as he did.

"You are my friend, Jonquil, more than a friend. We have lived and played and dreamed together—swum these waters . . ."

"Stop," Jonquil rasped harshly.

"I don't know what terrible thing drives you," Krull continued, trying to keep his voice free of the touch of panic he felt, "but I do know it can't be bad enough to demand such a price."

"Stop—don't move another step," the Inspector warned. Krull hesitated, deliberately took the last step which separated him from the edge of the cliff, momentarily expecting a burst of slugs to rip his body. He turned slowly. Jonquil's eyes in the night were brooding pools, dark and deep, and his skin was pallid in the starlight. Krull flexed his body slightly and dug his toes under the sand without moving his eyes. For a long moment they regarded each other. He saw the muzzle of Jonquil's gun move slowly upward and said:

"You are one of the conspirators."

Jonquil stopped the weapon in midair, hesitating as if to voice a denial.

Krull did something he had never done before—did it feeling as if he had violated a sacred trust. He peeped his friend; he closed his mind to everything except the Inspector's face and concentrated on his mind. In the first seconds it was like looking into a whirlpool, a maelstrom of flurried thoughts, resolution and

decision surcharged with pain. The jumbled thoughts focused and became imagery; but it was the imagery of a bizarre montage in which he simultaneously glimpsed a series of pictures, one merging into another. There were faces, an odd-fantastic structure that appeared like a rocket, a grotto bustling with men and machines, filled with a blue dancing light resembling the harsh brittle glare of an arc welding torch—a hand holding a spitting automatic. The imagery suddenly vanished, replaced by a formless gray mosaic, an unbroken pattern of nothingness. He came back to reality with a start.

"You are one of the conspirators," he repeated.

"I am . . . if you call us that," Jonquil replied woodenly. A touch of pity came into his eyes. "You wouldn't understand, Max."

"What wouldn't I understand?" he asked curiously.

"Why I have to kill you." Jonquil's voice was toneless. "This conspiracy, as you call it, is the work of decades, Max. Untold men have sown seeds that their brothers might reach the stars; the harvest is here and no single man can stand in the way . . ."

"Harvest of death," Krull broke in bitterly. "You've sold yourself a bill of goods and turned against the law, the First Law of Man-

kind. Turn back, Martin. Turn back now and no one need ever know," he pleaded.

"No," Jonquil said harshly. His body stiffened.

"Jonquil—wait . . ." He suddenly knew only split seconds of life remained.

Jonquil's hand was moving up.

KRULL brought his foot up through the sand, kicking it into the agent's face; at the same instant he spun around and leaped from the cliff, hearing the staccato bark of the automatic behind him. He straightened his body in midair and struck the water at a steep angle . . . swam along the bottom with powerful breast strokes. Have to get out of range, he thought desperately. Jonquil would be waiting for him to come up. He finally broke water long enough to catch a breath and throw a fast backward look. Jonquil's body was silhouetted against the sky. When he came up again, the Inspector was gone.

He debated, then swam toward the beach. Jonquil or no Jonquil, he would smash the conspiracy. There *was* a conspiracy and it was in the grotto; he knew that from the Inspector's mind. Anna had been right on that score. He smiled grimly. From here on out it was going to be rough.

He clambered up on to the beach and stood for a moment breathing heavily, looking upward into the night. The stars glittered in savage splendor, magically mirrored again in the black water at his feet. Strange, he had never particularly thought of the stars before. He had read some, of course—remembered a description of space that had likened it to a vast box without sides or top or bottom. To the mind of man space is infinite. Logic and reason proclaim the fact; yet the word vast itself implied a finite quality that puzzled him. He knew about the solar system, galaxies, inter-galactic space; but it struck him forcibly that man—here and now—could envision it in terms of conquest.

What power moved men like Jonquil that they were willing to forsake the laws of their kind? His eyes fastened on a brilliant red star and he watched it, fascinated. There was a hypnotic quality about the baleful eye and he reluctantly looked away. Was that it? Did men look at the stars and lose their reason? He wondered. He had always considered the sky an artistic creation; but it was more, far more, to Bok . . . Jonquil—how many others? It wasn't the beauty of the Universe that caught them. They didn't see it as artistic, not as an awesome and God-formed cosmos, but as something to be conquered. Power—it was the symbol of power. Men looked sky-

ward and became power-mad. Even Jonquil. He returned his thoughts to his predicament.

TRAITORS, conspirators, the Manager's killers—he was besieged on every side. But he knew the secret, knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt. Incredible as it seemed, the conspiracy was centered under black forbidding Chimney Rock. Okay, he'd dig it out, single-handed if need be. Do that and no man could touch him. Not even Shevach if he became Prime Thinker. But he needed help.

Who could he trust?

The agents of police were out. Wait—Grimhorn, he was the man. The Chief of World Agents was a man of integrity. But at the moment he couldn't wait. Jonquil couldn't afford disclosure. Even now he'd be organizing a net to snare him. Kill him. Alba. The innkeeper was a good friend. Alba would hide him, handle the message to Grimhorn.

He abruptly turned and plunged into the shadows of the trees, cutting across the atoll. If Jonquil were right, Shevach knew the secret of the Rock, was rushing to break the conspiracy and grab the glory. Damn, he thought frantically, there wouldn't be time to wait for Grimhorn. He cursed without slowing his pace.

He broke out on the opposite shore and halted, momentarily puzzled. The seaplane ramp was flooded with light, light and movement and sound. He heard the creak of winches and voices borne on the night breeze, caught sight of a moored seaplane carrier. He moved closer, keeping in the shadow of the foliage until he reached the edge of the circle of light.

Shevach! There was no mistaking the Manager's slim figure; the burly Gullfin and cadaverous Merryweather loomed beside him. He cursed savagely at sight of the Searchmaster, stopping as he spotted Jonquil and Anna. They were cagey, he thought. The conspiracy was collapsing like a house of cards and they were joining the winners. Merryweather began pivoting his head with his chin tilted up as if he were sniffing the wind. Krull stepped back in alarm. The man was a bloodhound. Inhuman.

The creak of a winch caught his attention. Torps! They were moving torps from the seaplane carrier. Police torps with weapon compartments in the hull. The conspirators wouldn't have a chance. That explained Anna's presence. She was their guide.

A traitor!

HE wheeled around and raced back along the beach. Damn Shevach! Damn the traitor Jonquil! They couldn't rob him now.

He'd beat 'em, beat 'em. The words became a refrain in his mind and he forced his body to greater effort. At the end of the atoll he splashed across the partially submerged bar to Te-Tai and forced his tired legs to a dead run. He was gasping, his lungs burned and sweat stung his eyes. He saw lights on the headland and began shouting while still a hundred yeards away.

"Cominger! Cominger!" The name came with a wheeze from his tortured lungs. He had almost reached the porch when a door swung open, framing the hermit's lean figure in a shaft of light. Krull pulled to a stop, breathing harshly, trying to get his voice.

Cominger looked worriedly at him. "What is it?"

"Your torp," he gasped. Cominger took a backward step and eyed him owlishly.

"What about it?"

"I need it."

"Why?" The hermit seemed to compose himself with effort.

"Chimney Rock—I've got to get to the rock."

Cominger's body stiffened. "No."

"I'm ordering you as an agent of police."

"No," Cominger repeated.

"Give it to me or I'll take it."

"Why?" the hermit parried, his voice suddenly curious. "What's the emergency?"

"Damn you, Cominger, there's trouble at the rock. The police—Ivan Shevach—are unloading torps at the ramp. They're heading there but it's my baby. I cracked it and I'm going to get there first."

"Shevach!" The name dropped from the hermit's lips in disbelief. Suddenly he drew himself up. "Listen, you don't know the area. You'd wreck the torp, kill yourself. But I know it. I'll take you."

"Then let's get going."

"Follow me." Cominger raced to the far end of the porch with Krull at his heels.

"Grab some gear." He dived into a pile of underwater equipment and Krull sprang to help him. They quickly stripped to their shorts and strapped on compressed air tanks and breathing masks.

"One second." Cominger dashed into the house and returned with a small rubber sack that he hooked to his gear. Gun, Krull thought, he's afraid of me. He made a mental note of it. At least he knew where a gun was when the time came.

The torp was a long cylindrical affair just now above the tide line. The hermit rolled the vehicle into the water and tugged it into position. Suddenly he straightened and raised a hand for silence.

"Listen!"

Krull tilted his head, straining to hear. The sound of a muted roar over-riding the night breeze came to his ears; it grew louder, the noise of spitting motors, and he realized he was listening to the voices of torps boring along the surface of the lagoon. He swung in the direction of the sound in a futile effort to see, then whirled toward the hermit.

"Hurry."

"They're nearer to the reef than we are." They hurriedly positioned and checked their masks and Cominger said: "We'll ride the surface to the reef, then we'll have to go under. It'll be slower but you couldn't hang on in the waves."

KRULL nodded, anxious to get started. He had hoped they could ride the surface all the way out but the hermit was right; the waves would rip him loose. Cominger positioned the torp and kicked the starter. The engine barked to life and spat angrily for a moment before settling into a steady roar. He laid his body lengthwise on the sleek hull, grasped the steering bar and hooked his feet through the end stirrups, then motioned Krull to hang on. The agent checked his face mask, slanted his body down and hooked his arms and legs around the hermit's, hoping the swirl of water wouldn't tear him loose.

Cominger gave a hand signal, cut in the drive lever and the torp moved sluggishly into the lagoon and began picking up speed. Water sloshed against Krull's body and the stars became blurry lights swimming across his faceplate. He tried to catch a sign of Shevach's torps but they were lost, the sounds of their motors masked by the roar of the powerful engine under him. They cut across the lagoon at an angle toward the break in the reef, picking up speed in the smooth water despite the double load.

Shevach would beat him.

No, he couldn't! But he would. Okay, he'd take it from there. Just let him get to the rock.

They passed Paha Jon's yellow-sailed outrigger and the torp began pitching in the swells rolling in through the narrow mouth of the reef. Krull clung to the hermit desperately. Water smashed against his faceplate and his body yawed from side to side. The break in the reef rushed toward them, then fell off on either side as they breached the open sea. A wall of water smashed against him and the blurry stars vanished; Cominger had dived the torp beneath the surface.

They rushed through the black night of the subsea with water tearing at their bodies. Krull's arm and leg muscles ached from

his right hold and he shivered in the colder ocean water. A leg muscle began to cramp. He flexed it but the muscle gripped spasmodically, becoming a hot pain. The noise of the engine and the swirling waters drummed against his ears with a tickling sensation. He strained to see ahead, fearful his companion would smash into a submerged rock. But—no!—Cominger was too certain; he drove the torp through the ebony depths at full speed with the certainty of a pilot bringing a ship to safe anchorage. He neither slowed nor deviated; clearly he knew every inch of the sea as well by night as by day.

Knew every inch?

It struck him then that Cominger hadn't bothered to ask questions. He had merely said: *I'll take you.*

SURE, he knew the entrance to the grotto! He knew exactly where he was going . . . could pick the door of the grotto out of the maw of the sea with a certainty born of experience. Yes, he knew where he was going!

And why!

Suddenly Krull knew.

Trapped!

The hermit was delivering him into the hands of the outlaws. Cominger, the hermit—the man with the torp. Only it was Cominger, the contact man for the conspirators. He clung to his back and debated. He could kick free and swim to the reef but he'd be no better off than before; Shevach would still grab the glory and he'd be branded a public enemy. No, let Cominger deliver him; he'd pull the net closed and snare him with the rest of them. Just now he hadn't the slightest idea how he'd go about it but, once in the grotto, he'd figure a way, he savagely promised himself.

The torp slanted downward and the pressure on his ears increased. A beam shot out from the torp, licked across the looming faces of ocean-bottom rocks and waving fronds and blacked out again. The hermit moved the speed lever and the torp slowed, began swinging in a wide half-circle, dropping lower in the velvet water. He periodically flicked the beam on and off, steering through a stone jungle. Krull felt the torp losing speed, swinging; the beam came on again and it seemed as if they must surely ram the base of an undersea cliff. At the last instant the hermit dived it toward the base of the rock bastions; they shot into a narrow tunnel whose walls glowed irridescent under the glow of the beam. The tunnel slanted upward; the hermit gave the torp a burst of power, climbed, leveled off and cut the engine.

Krull felt his body emerge from the water. The torp jarred against sand and he struggled to his feet, staring into the muzzle of a submachine gun. Gordon Gullfin's flat face leered at him from the other end.

"Well, look who's here . . . just in time for the party."

KRULL froze at the tableau that met his eyes. He was standing knee-deep in water in a black chamber illuminated by a bluish light emanating from some unseen source. The floor was a smooth rocky shelf which retreated and became lost in shadow. The stone walls, floor and ceiling formed a fantastic stage peopled by immobile manikins, garish in the blue light.

Yargo! The identity of the actors struck him with full force. Ben Yargo, Jan, and the short slim Foxhill were huddled in a group off to one side, with a woman whose face was familiar despite her swim attire. Eve Mallon! He was startled until he remembered the rumor she was Yargo's mistress. Now they stood, dripping in swim gear, frozen into momentary immobility.

Ivan Shevach, flanked by two swarthy men armed to the hilt stood a few yards beyond Gullfin's shoulder; behind them towered the lean skeleton of Merryweather, the Searchmaster.

A few yards beyond Martin Jonquil stood alone.

Off to one side, Anna Malroon —thin and wet and shaking with cold—watched him with tragic eyes. He captured the scene in a flash. Gullfin's voice boomed again.

The tableau was magically broken.

"Over there," he waved the gun menacingly, "both of you—over by Yargo."

Krull stood his ground. "I'm an agent of police. I'm here to enforce the law."

"I'm the law," Gullfin snarled. "Get moving—both of you."

"Max Krull is not one of us," a voice said. Krull looked up. The speaker was Yargo. So, the Prime Thinker was one of the conspirators; and Jan, Foxhill, and Eve Mallon of the Council of Six. He wasn't surprised.

"He dies anyway," Shevach cut in icily. He smiled balefully at Krull. "You won't get out of this one so easily . . . esper!"

"Sentence without due process of law? I'm shocked," Yargo mocked. Shevach regarded him scornfully.

"You talk about law—you, who rigged the election with that phoney Alexander test?" Yargo didn't flinch. He stared at the Manager for a long minute before answering:

"True, but I didn't do it for my own self-gain."

"No?" It was Shevach's turn to mock.

"No, I did it for this." His hand swept toward the rear of the grotto. I had to ensure the work would be finished. Fortunately, it has been."

If Krull were startled, he hid it. Shevach merely arched his brow.

"Finished?"

"You might kill us, here, but you can't stop what's beyond this grotto, Shevach."

"I didn't intend to stop your work, Yargo." The Manager smiled thinly. "I merely intend to take it over, and will, thanks to the young lady who tipped us in Sydney, then met us at Abiang and led us here." He nodded toward Anna. Krull was startled but didn't bother to deny the charge; the girl's face gave him the truth. She, like Jonquil, had played both ends. Why?

"She betrayed you, too," Shevach added, looking vindictively at Yargo, "including the fact that your mistress had fled here with you."

YARGO returned his look calmly, without answering. Jan's face was white, frightened, but Eve Mallon stood straight, a whimsical smile on her lips.

"She must have been a member of the conspiracy to have known so much," Shevach resumed, "therefore she dies."

"No," Krull exploded loudly.

"Ah, the lover," Shevach sneered disdainfully.

"You're wrong, Shevach." The soft voice of Martin Jonquil was a velvet note tinged with death. "You've miscalculated." Krull stared at him in surprise. A moment before the Inspector apparently had been unarmed; now he held a wicked looking automatic with its black muzzle centered on the Manager's breast.

"I came to save the conspiracy."

The Manager's face turned white with fear and he nervously bit his thin lip and tried to form words. None came. The silence was heavy.

Krull heard the bullets thud into the Inspector's body; he staggered, dropped to one knee, slipped backward to the floor, his dead eyes staring terribly toward the blue-black ceiling.

Peter Merryweather grinned amiably, bringing the concealed gun into view. A wisp of smoke curled upward from the barrel.

"Read it in his mind," he said pleasantly. He smiled at the dead agent's body. "Fool."

"No matter, he would have died anyway." Shevach's voice rose to a hard rasp. "I almost wish you could live, Yargo. You'd see how a real ruler operates."

"You didn't intend to smash the conspiracy. You merely intended to use the power for your

own means," Yargo accused quietly.

"Certainly," Shevach snapped, "do you take me for a fool? I agree with you, we need atomic power, Yargo, and now—thanks to your blundering conspiracy—I have it. But not for the stars. That's for fools and dreamers . . ."

"You would enslave the earth?" Krull cut in.

"I'll rule the earth, if that's what you mean." His eyes gleamed triumphantly. "I'll rule it for my lifetime, an emperor . . . pass it to my heirs. I'll make the miserable LIQ's and MIQ's . . ." He cut off whatever he was going to say and stepped back, breathing heavily. His lips compressed tightly and he snarled, "Kill these scum!"

MAX!"—Anna's scream rang terribly in the grotto, reverberating from wall to wall—"remember what I told you."

Gullfin snapped the submachine gun up, grinning viciously and his finger came back on the trigger.

"Hold it!" Shevach snapped. Gullfin stopped, bewildered, glancing from Krull to his chief. Shevach disregarded him and turned to the shaking girl. "Maybe it's something I should know. What did you tell Krull that's so important?"

Anna didn't reply. She looked at Krull. Her wan face was filled with anguish, and her eyes were enormous limpid pools.

He peeped her.

A thought screamed in her mind.

Screamed, jolted him, numbed him with its force.

"What did you tell Krull?" The Manager's words jerked him back to reality.

Anna pulled herself together with difficulty, staring at the Manager with large tragic eyes. When she spoke, her voice was so soft Krull could scarcely hear her.

"You're right," she said, "I am one of the conspirators." She half-turned and smiled apologetically at Yargo; turned back to the Manager. "Only they didn't know.

"Didn't know?" Shevach sneered.

"No, I was working for a man who wasn't a conspirator, but was guiding it. I was his messenger."

"Who?" Shevach snarled.

She looked at him, silently. Shevach lifted his face, arrogantly. "Keep the name,' he rasped. "It doesn't make any difference. Die with it." He started to motion to Gullfin.

"But it does," Anna said softly.

"Oh. . . ?" Shevach observed sardonically.

"I didn't betray the conspiracy

by bringing you here. I did it because it was part of my job—to make sure no one remained alive who might stop us . . ."

"Explain that," Shevach rasped, visibly disturbed at her words.

"I was ordered to bring you here for your own execution, even though I would die first."

"Whoever gave that order was a fool." Shevach's voice dropped to a hiss: "Who was it?"

"Got it." Merryweather's voice cut through the grotto like a sliver of ice. His bony face was searching the girl's—he stepped back, white and shaken.

"Bok," he whispered. "Herman Bok . . ."

ANNA pulled herself erect and looked defiantly at him. "Mr. Bok," she said calmly, "and he was no fool."

"Herman Bok . . ." Shevach spoke the name wonderingly, then snapped it out like an epithet: "Herman Bok! Doddering esper!" He spun toward Gullfin.

"Kill them."

"Max . . ." Anna shrieked.

Gullfin's gun came up . . . swung toward him. Krull looked desperately at him, trying to control and shape his mind to do what he had never done.

What Anna said he could do! *Pk, pk, pk*—a pk could control matter. That was why Bok had guided him to the cavern; he was a latent pk. The submachine gun centered on him; Gullfin's face was a grinning evil mask and his body was tensed for the recoil of the weapon.

Shevach . . . Shevach . . . Kill Shevach and his men.

The thought streamed from Krull's mind; he tried to focus it, point it at the evil visage behind the weapon. A gun crashed and his concentration was broken. Gullfin turned, startled, for a moment lowering the weapon.

Anna was swaying, blood welling from her breast. The Searchmaster stood frozen . . . smoke curled from his gun . . . his eyes were frightened.

Krull pushed Anna from his mind and forced himself to concentrate.

Kill Shevach . . . Kill Shevach . . .

Gullfin swung back, bringing the submachine gun to bear.

Kill Shevach . . . kill Shevach . . .

The gun barrel wavered and he concentrated on the thought, oblivious to everything except Gullfin's hideous face which, now seemed to fill the cavern.

Kill Shevach . . . Kill Shevach . . .

The face grew larger in his eyes until nothing seemed to remain but a single gigantic baleful eye; he sped into the eye, along the optic nerve and stared

at the greasy gray coils and crevices of Gullfin's brain.

Kill Shevach, he screamed at the brain, *kill, kill, kill . . .*

ABRUPTLY Gordon Gullfin stiffened. He spun around. Shevach screamed incoherently, a high falsetto scream like a wounded cat. Merryweather's gun came up. Bullets thudded into Gullfin's body. The burly agent staggered backward, yanked back on the trigger and staccato blasts ripped the cavern. Acrid fumes stung Krull's eyes bringing him back to reality. Shevach was screaming horribly, bending forward with pieces of flesh jumping from the side of his head; he collapsed, gurgling, atop the bodies of the two agents flanking him. Merryweather stood straight and tall, swaying, his eyes rolling wildly; blood gushed from his middle and he slowly bent forward, toppling down across the bodies of Shevach and his men.

The chattering of the gun abruptly stopped. Gullfin stepped back with a bewildered look; his eyes went to Shevach, to Krull, back to Shevach again. The machine gun slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor. He moved a hand up and rubbed his chest, looked blankly at the blood on his fingers. Krull hesitated, and sprang to Anna's side. He bent down and lifted her head.

"Max . . . behind, look out!"

He twisted his head in alarm. Gullfin, breathing heavily had yanked an automatic from his belt and was aiming it point-blank at him. He felt death coming and tried to twist aside. Another roar shattered the grotto and Gullfin stumbled, holding the weapon numbly. He tottered, swayed, a glazed expression clouded his eyes and he fell, slowly, across the body of Peter Merryweather. August Cominger stared at the weapon in his hands, let it clatter to the floor.

"I never killed a man before," he said quietly.

Krull stared thankfully at him, and turned back to Anna. Blood was welling from her breast and her eyes were closed; he knew she had already fled the dark cavern. He held her head in his lap and looked up, filled with sorrow, remembering the sadness in her eyes. She had known, had known . . .

He looked at the body of Jonquil, who had hated espers and, unknowingly, had served one faithfully. Martin had been faithful to the conspiracy. Faith . . . faith in man's future.

"The story is written," Ben Yargo said gently. "The story of man on earth lies behind—ahead is the story of the stars. If we conspired, Krull, it was for the future." He came forward and rested his hand on his shoulder.

"We hope that you will join us."

Krull looked somberly at him; he turned toward Jan. Her lips were parted, expectantly, waiting his answer. There was nothing left on earth for him—not anymore.

"I will," he said steadily. He laid Anna gently on the floor of the grotto and rose, looking down at Martin Jonquil's body. Martin, you were right, he thought.

"Look," Ben Yargo said. He took his arm and walked with him into the deep shadows of the grotto. They came to the end and a door opened; beyond he saw a vast cavern flooded with brilliant blue light, heard the whisper of machines, saw the distant figures of men and women working around the base of a tremendous rocket that reached almost to the ceiling of the cavern. It was thick of girth, monstrous, nestled in a crosspatch of framework set on tracks.

But they can't get it out.

"We can get it out," Jan whispered, reading his mind. She had come up behind him and slipped her hand in his. "Don't you see, dad had to remain in office long enough to protect the ship. That's what he didn't know: how or when it could be gotten out. All he knew was that it would happen someday.

"How. . . ?"

"You found out tonight—in Anna's mind . . ."

"I don't understand . . ."

"Psychokinesis."

HE stepped back, awe-struck. Suddenly he felt very humble. This great ship . . . the labor of decades . . . the dreams of men had awaited his coming. He, alone of men, had the fantastic power to move the mountain shielding the rocket from the stars. A lonely feeling swept over him. In that moment he knew how the leader of espers had felt. He looked into the cavern, then he saw them.

Children.

He looked questioningly at Jan.

"The children of tomorrow. Children, with great talents. We have to save them from the searchers. They will be the new beginning, Max—they and the children of the pioneers."

He felt a sense of wonder. Thank God there had been dreamers—and men of action. He lifted his eyes. Across the nose of the rocket he saw its name.

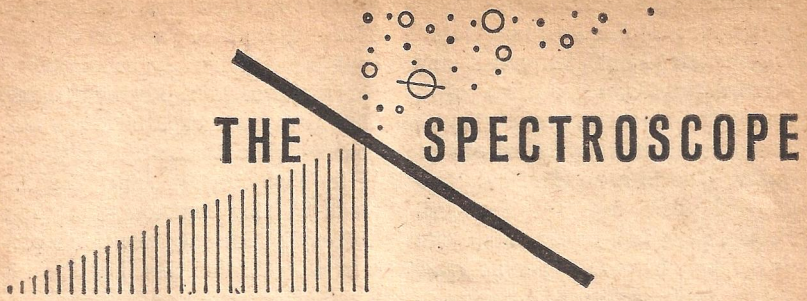
* * * *

The first spaceship, the *Herman Bok,* lifted from earth early in January, 2450 A.D., following inauguration of Mustapha Sherif as 91st Prime Thinker of the Empire of Earth . . . Blak Roko's

Post-Atomic Earthman

Venusian Press, 2672 A.D.

THE END



By S. E. COTTS

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. *Edited by Robert P. Mills. 262 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. $3.95.*

This is the tenth in a series of anthologies culled from recent issues of the magazine of *Fantasy and Science Fiction.* It contains seventeen stories, all of which are well written, but some of which are rather thin and insignificant as far as content and lasting value. Of course, a good use of language is one of the basics of a good story, but it is also necessary to have a fairly sturdy structure upon which to hang the niceties of phrase; otherwise the result is little more than a mood.

On the credit side, I consider it a most healthy sign that one of the most unusual stories was written by a beginner. It is Robert Murray's "The Replacement." The other one by a new writer, Vance Aandahl's "It's a Great Big Wonderful Universe," is a promising work, but one that falls into the category I criticized earlier—good, but somehow thin.

Of the better known writers represented, Daniel Keyes' "Crazy Maro" is a moving tale about some juvenile misfits. It is not quite as rich and well-developed as his much-applauded "Flowers for Algernon," but stories such as that are extremely rare. Another writer in the same stream as Keyes (meaning warmth, compassion and character penetration) is Richard McKenna. His "Casey Agonistes" now has a worthy successor in "Mine Own Ways." There is a brief story by Allen Drury which is adequate, but somehow not as chilling as it should be. John Collier's contribution, "Man Overboard," is one of his excellent stories of the unusual and the unexpected. The distaff side has two of the more impressive entries; Katherine Maclean's

"Interbalance" and Jane Rice's lighthearted "The Rainbow Gold." Efforts by Poul Anderson and Avram Davidson are disappointing. (The former is much better represented in two recent paperbacks. One is a novel, *Orbit Unlimited,* put out by Pyramid Books. This is a lively story of a dedicated band of people who defy their autocratic government to take to the stars. The other is an anthology of various magazine stories, put out by Ballantine Books, called *Strangers From Earth.* I'll discuss one of the tales included shortly.)

Also present are two oddities. One is a poem by Rosser Reeves called "Infinity." In an editor's note, Mr. Mills tells us that Mr. Reeves is a corporation president. I'm delighted to hear this, because if he had to eke out his living on poetry he'd starve. It is completely amateurish in all respects, being reminiscent of nothing so much as ladies' magazine poetry. The second oddity is of quite a different caliber. It is a French story called "The Blind Pilot" by Charles Henneberg. In some of its more poetic passages, it succeeds admirably in doing what Mr. Reeves attempts. It has been beautifully translated by that jack-of-all-trades, Damon Knight.

The other stories are very much in the minor leagues with the exception of two which I want to mention in a special way. These two bear an almost incredible (yet surely unknowing) resemblance to two other stories. The first parallel is between this book's "Who Dreams of Ivy," by Will Worthington, and the famous Shirley Jackson tale, "The Lottery." Not only are there certain plot similarities, but the atmospheres match each other. The second is between the narrative of this volume's "The Fellow Who Married The Maxill Girl," by Ward Moore, and a story by Poul Anderson to which I alluded before, "Earthman, Beware." Both are concerned with aliens on earth but in a different way than usual. They have had contact with their own people severed because they were considered retarded as far as the achievements of their own races.

I don't mean to imply that the Worthington and Moore stories are imitative. I merely felt the similarity was an interesting one. In fact, the last thing I would say about any of the selections in this anthology, be they good or bad, is that they are imitative.

RINGSTONES. *By Sarban. 139 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

This, Sarban's third tale to be published in the United States, seems to me to define more clearly his talents, but perhaps also his limitations. It has all the vir-

tues of his other two books. In its best passages it has a tone and mood so intense that it seems a wonder words can convey it. It boasts a command of certain branches of knowledge—archaeology, myth, pagan religion, etc. —that is both erudite and interesting. It penetrates deeply into the mind and spirit of the girl who is the leading character and also the narrator.

In form, the tale is presented the same way as the previous two, the meat of the story being set forth between an introductory part and a close which ties everything together. This in itself is not a criticism, though one is naturally curious to see what would happen when Sarban decides to stretch his wings a bit. But in the present case, so much space is taken by the beginning and end sections, and so much space is allotted to an immensely skilled development that the climax is attained and passed almost before one is fully aware. In other words, the road to the peak is so long and the stop there so brief that what should be the climax is anticlimactic through our not realizing that it has been reached. After a gradual acceleration, one should be able to relish a few moments at top speed before drawing to a halt. This shortcoming makes the plot seem less credible than those of the previous books, though, as far as the events described, it is really more so.

Nevertheless, one looks forward with utmost anticipation to Sarban's next book. We may carp about faults and tendencies, but he is still one of the most original yarn spinners around, and a first-rate writer, beside.

FACIAL JUSTICE. *By L. P. Hartley. 263 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. $3.50.*

This is a strange novel by an English author, unknown to me before now. There are many haunting familiarities about it, bits and pieces seemingly influenced by the most diverse selection of writers. Yet, in spite of this, the end result is not a patchwork quilt, but an organic whole ornamented by a highly individual style.

After World War III, the remainder of the populace fled underground, and a whole new life began. People died; whole new generations were born there. But one day a "voice" incited the people to rebel against this unnatural habitat and led them out to the Sun again. This voice became their Dictator, but a most benevolent one. The people, having forgotten how to fend for themselves, were happy to have their decisions made for them.

And what a strange world the voice fashions for them! A world where all extremes are avoided;

where it is as bad to be too pretty as too plain; where people are named after murderers to remind them of the bad times that went before; where tranquilizers are required; where envy is called Bad E and anyone who is the source of it is bad.

With this background, we follow the fortunes of Jael (too pretty for her own good) who cannot sink into her proper place but has strange desires for a bit of danger or for looking in the mirror. It is easier, however, to describe the plot than the total effect the book has on the reader. It has elements of satire, but there is nothing blunt about the way it is used. It's ingenuous, artless, almost naive in its treatment. Sometimes it has the quality of a fairy tale; other times it seems to partake of a Harry Golden type of simplicity; still other times it seems to be a Thurber-like fable. Yet, no matter what it may seem like at any given time, it is no less than enchanting. We look forward to more.

A HOLE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA. *By Willard Bascom. 352 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. $4.95.*

This account of oceanographic research was written by the Director of the Mohole Project for the National Academy of Sciences.

The objectives of Project Mohole are to develop equipment needed to drill a hole through the earth's crust (five or six miles) and to sample the substances found there. This is every bit as complex as orbiting a man in space, as it involves not just the one field of oceanography but also geology, engineering and the most modern drilling techniques.

The Mohole Project is so-named after the "Moho," a region within the earth believed to mark the boundary between outer crust and the layer of rock around the molten core.

The hole will be drilled beneath the water to secure the advantage of the relative thinness of the crust there. Even so, it will take some time before the technical details are smoothed. Here are a few of the intriguing problems that the men working on Project Mohole will face. Men have drilled for oil under water, but in places that were only 500 feet deep; this project will have to drill out where the water is some 18,000 feet deep. Furthermore, the hole will have to be lined with pipe to prevent its collapse. As you can see, the subject is every bit as challenging as the problem of rocket fuel.

Mr. Bascom's presentation may not be so exciting, but the subject itself is inherently so. It is an informative book well worth your reading time.

Dear Editor:

I have just concluded reading your 35th Anniversary issue of AMAZING and for the most part I felt all the reprints were excellent.

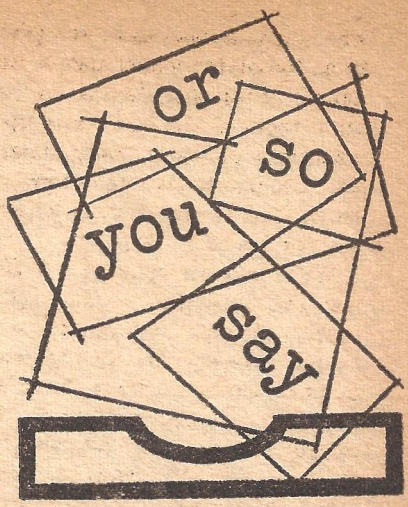
But I have two gripes.

One is that in stories like "Armageddon-2419" and far more frequently in modern stories, Australia is forgotten. Even in 1927 we had the reputation of the best soldiers in the world. We are not a lot of abo's riding around on kangaroos though we do have a rather small population for a continent; we are as urbanized as or more urbanized than most other continents (and there are only five or six). I am sick and tired of third world wars where the forces of the west consist only of Britain and the U.S.A. Similarly in world disasters, etc.

The other is about the letter column. It is almost wholly American. Surely you receive some letters from places like Australia or New Zealand.

J. C. Young
20 Chalder St.
Newtown, Sydney, N.S.W.
Australia

• *You fellows Down Under want in on the fighting? Ok by us. But seriously, Australia is no sf stepchild. How about all those stories of the Woomera rocket range? How about Charles Eric Maine? How about A. Bertram Chandler? How about "On the Beach"?*



Dear Editor:

I'm kinda' new at this type stuff, but I'm going to try anyway. Seems like you're having a lot of argument about serials in your letter col. If the serials are going to be like "The Planet of Shame," I hope you discontinue them! The story had a crummy idea from the beginning. This was mangled and murdered through the whole thing, in general the story was bad!

You do have two things about AMAZING that I really like tho, that is your reprints and your author profiles. The reprints give readers a chance to read old sf

that they otherwise wouldn't get a chance to read. The profile provides a lot of interesting material about authors.

Seems like you've also got a lot of comment on fmz reviews. I'm for them even if they do appeal to only a limited amount of your readers! After all fans are the most active readers of your or any other promag; they deserve a review section. It wouldn't take up much room if it were printed in micro-elite type, and after all if it doesn't appeal to some people they don't have to read it!

Ken Gentry
3315 Ezell Rd.
Nashville 11, Tenn.

● *We're still thinking about a fan mag review col., and still interested in reader opinion on the subject. There will be no hasty decisions.*

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the June edition of AMAZING, and I must say I was disappointed in the article on Robert Heinlein. I'm one of your younger readers, but I have been reading sf for several years now, and Heinlein's always been my favorite writer. What disappointed me the most in the article was that I learned almost nothing of Heinlein himself, other than that he was born at such a time in such a place, was disabled in the navy, and took up writing. The entire article was devoted to his stories, how they were written, why, when, and so forth.

I've read almost all of Heinlein's stories, old and new, and I've longed to know more about Heinlein himself; how he lives today, what his hobbies (if any) and personal interests are. I'm sure that other Heinlein fans agree, and I hope that your future profile on A. E. van Vogt will tell a little more about van Vogt himself, and not mainly his past greats.

Well, so much for that. Your letter department was interesting, as usual, and I'm not surprised to find that readers are still growling about the serials. Personally, I enjoy longer stories, and I can see why readers get discouraged, waiting for the completion of a novel. But in AMAZING's case, published each month as it is, the waiting between each serial installments is not so unbearably long. Why all the gripes over a short month's wait?

If readers want to get discouraged over a novel, they should (and probably do) gripe about the serials published in bimonthly mags, where a wait of at least four months is inevitable.

I'm sure that if a vote were taken, serials would win over. For, as you say, "the best stories

are long—too long to run complete in one issue." Whether you keep the serials coming or not, this is one fan you'll never lose.

Fred Mueller
6102 Pepperwood
Lakewood, Calif.

● *Of course we can understand your wanting to know more about the man, but the main point of our sf profiles is to place the man in his writing perspective, and to profile him as a writer rather than as a person—assuming, that is, that writers are people.*

● *Hugo Gernsback clarifies a point in his recent article that has come under much discussion:*

Dear Editor:

I am in receipt of several critical letters in connection with my recent article in AMAZING STORIES. Recently there also appeared in the first issue of a new fanzine, FANTASMAGORIQUE, an article entitled "The Senility of Science-Fiction" written by my very good and old friend, David H. Keller, M.D. I am afraid that it did not convey the correct meaning of my article in the April 1961 issue of AMAZING STORIES. Dr. Keller quotes me: "He (Gernsback) predicts an electronic calculator capable of writing any kind of story." May I quote the complete version as it appeared in AMAZING STORIES: "There will come the future amazing day . . . when AMAZING STORIES will be *composed,* or perhaps outlined in detail, not by human authors, but by an *electronic biocomputer-menograph* (*menos*-mind)."

You will observe that nowhere did I say, as suggested by Dr. Keller, that from the machine there "will come a tale of science-fiction, romance, poetry, or western." I used the word *composed,* which I italicized for the following reason:

Many well-meaning people, unfortunately, do not understand the working of computers or electronics and still believe that such machines can *think.* They do not; and I am certain that such an electronic "brain" will not be created in the foreseeable future. *Computers cannot function unless they are first fed all the information.* It is quite possible to build a computer into which is fed every science fiction story that has ever been written. The computer will then digest the data and memorize all the facts given or enumerated in the stories. Note well the word "memorize." Then if the machine is given a specific order, it will shuffle all the facts, just as you would shuffle a deck of cards. The result would come out on a

tape; *it would not necessarily have to make sense.* All you would get from such a digest of facts would be a new sort of "composition." And it is here that my original sentence comes in: ". . . *composed,* or perhaps outlined in detail . . ."

Then the author would have to evaluate this literary hodgepodge and from it he might perhaps get new ideas for a story. Note that the machine does not do any thinking whatsoever. The author would still have to *think* how to make use of the information which the machine furnished. There would be nothing radically new that the computer could come up with because it would simply use old facts *rearranged in perhaps a novel manner.* If you string together thousands of science fiction ideas, jumble them into different sequences, it is quite certain that the computer will outline different ideas because of novel juxtapositions of old facts. It is here that a sophisticated future machine can be of great help to authors, as a powerful stimulus, but that is all.

Hugo Gernsback

Dear Editor:

This letter really has 2 related purposes: 1. To comment on AMAZING and FANTASTIC 2. To comment on Moskowitz's profile of Heinlein.

1.) Is taken care of easily enough. AMAZING's a pretty good magazine these days, publishing a lot of readably competent stories, a few very good ones, and virtually no clunkers. Format is attractive, covers on the whole are good (I'm not referring to the June monstrosity). The June issue was an average one, with "A Time to Die" the best story (unfortunately, it fell completely apart at the end, but still scored 7 on my 10-point rating scale—5 is average, 8 excellent), and "The Exterminator" (6) following close behind—same weakness, incidentally. "Weapon" (5) was readable but over-obvious; well-written, though. "Before Eden" (again 5) was very disappointing Clarke; "The Planet of Shame," although competently written, just didn't convince me, and the plot relied overly much on unexplained coincidences. I gave it 4.

FANTASTIC I enjoy a little more than AMAZING, but maybe that's because I have a weakness for good fantasy. Keep up the classic reprints in *both* magazines.

2.) Moskowitz's article on Heinlein was interesting, but only half there. After a brief lead-in in the present, we jump back to a very interesting survey of Heinlein's literary career through the War. And then the article stops. There's a brief mention of his sales to the slicks

in '47 and '48, followed by a summary. No mention of his famous "juveniles" for Scribners, of the revision of the "Future History" series for book publication, of his various experiments with style and theme, of his enormous spread in recent popularity, or even of his Guest-of-Honor-ship at the forthcoming World SFCon. Shame on you, Mr. Moskowitz, for leaving us in a vacuum like that! You're slipping.

But worse is to come. Mr. Moskowitz has, I believe, one of the world's largest sf libraries, but evidently he doesn't use it. The clumsily worded second paragraph, p. 71, implies through a haze of verbal obfuscation that Theodore Sturgeon's "Ether Breather" appeared in the *same* issue of ASTOUNDING as Heinlein's "Life-Line." In actuality it appeared in the following (Sept. 1939) one. Tut-tut. (Just occurred to me: maybe that clumsy wording's a printer's error and not Moskowitz's. If the clause beginning "that followed . . ." is meant to follow the word "issue" in the next sentence, Moskowitz is correct. If this was meant, I apologize for my cutting comments.)

The critical technique Moskowitz uses in approaching his subject is welcome, though I don't always agree with his conclusions. Keep this series coming. But I hope that next time Sam will finish what he started, and not leave us hanging in mid-air.

Julian Reid
322 Plaskett Place
Victoria, B.C., Canada

● *'Twas the editing at fault, not Sam, in that bibliographical boo-boo. As for the bios themselves, they aren't meant to be agreed with—but to be chewed over—and, if you like, chewed apart.*

Dear Editor:

You will no doubt get a large and enthusiastic response to the new biographical feature of current authors, so you should be able to stand one critical letter on this first one.

The idea is excellent. Robert Heinlein is a logical first choice. Mr. Moskowitz is an eminent historian, but . . .

This is about the most superficial biography one would dream of. Sam must have set out to prove a point, and whatever he had to ignore to prove it had better not be mentioned. Or so it seems, though I guess it is normal enough these days, got to show how 'mature sf is, how it is meeting the challenge for which it was originated, to publish enduring 'literature' as such is considered these days. To coin a phrase call it the "Amis syndrome".

Quite a spectacle, this one, not

one mention of the story that the readers have made their own favorite, as is easily proven by sales. That one of course is *Door Into Summer*. About on a par with a van Vogt biography without *The Weapon Makers*, or Doc Smith while ignoring the *Lensman* epic. Or (horrible thought) Eric Frank Russell without suggesting he wrote *Dear Devil*. How valid can such a discussion be?

Oh, he couldn't mention all the Heinlein stories, there are too many. Still one might wonder if *We Also Walk Dogs* might possibly be deserving of more than the oblivion he seems ready to consign it to. Perhaps *Our Fair City* is hardly to Sam's taste, and the same might also apply to *The Puppet Masters*. But it seems odd to think that a biographer can ignore *Year of The Jackpot* completely. Perhaps Sam is able to casually forget the Juveniles with a mention of *Destination Moon*, but I personally am rather fond of *The Rolling Stones* myself, and presume others found it entertaining as well.

Space Limitations, surely, but that is hardly an excuse for this superficial examination of Heinlein, now is it?

Oh, Sam can be forgiven, I suppose. After those magnificent biographies of Abe Merritt, Stanley Weinbaum, Philip Wylie, and Olaf Stapledon among others he deserves one bad one. But please Sam, no more, you can do better. If you try something like this when you get around to Eric Frank Russell, you may think the roof has fallen in on you. Fair warning.

While in this violent mood, I disagree completely with the suggestion of Mr. Jason, that you eliminate serials. It should be a pretty safe wager your readers agree, and that a high percentage of them buy your publication for those stories, and practically nothing else. Take note of which ones get the most comment in your letter column.

Enough of this, I am still buying AMAZING, and that should pretty well show I still approve of you.

Clayton Hamlin
28 Earle Ave.
Bangor, Maine

● *Well, we have achieved with the bios what we hoped to. Mr. Reid (above) says Sam was "half there" on Heinlein. You think it was awful. Mr. Crilly (below) says it was "excellent." If all this proves anything, it proves sf fans are still ready to come out fighting—if they are given anything at all to fight over.*

Dear Editor:

Even though I haven't had the time to read the June ish in en-

tirety, I want to get this comment off right away.

Clarke's story was in his poetic vein; very good. "The Planet of Shame" was one of the most idiotic stories I've read in some time. No more in that line, *Please!* "The Exterminator" was dated.

Sam Moskowitz's article on Heinlein was *excellent!* Hope to see lots more of these profile things. *That* ought to put me on Sam's good side.

The cover illo was superb! Naturally, I prefer Finlay's illos on the inside. Bernklau should learn how to draw.

Would it be too much to ask Cotts to review a few more books? His first review this month was overly emotional. I disagree with his statement that German scientists were not of superior stock . . . I have ¼ German blood in my veins and anyone can tell that I am vastly superior in intelligence to other humans. The proof is that I read your mag. H'mmmm.

Ah! Now to the best part of the mag . . . the lettercol!

I disagree with George Zebrowski most emphatically! Hasn't JWC done enough by changing his mag to *ASF&F?* Let him show his friends *that* mag if he wants them to become interested in sf . . . if he dares!

I agree with John Baxter. I too should prefer to see the space taken up by the reprints devoted to a fanzine review, longer lettercol, and longer book review. In that order! Please Cele, for the sake of those readers who have no inkling what the heck fandom is, put in the fmz review and give them a chance to find out! I'm sure there are many readers who would be interested in finding out. The fen don't deserve it, in my opinion (except for neofen such as I).

If you want to run reprints, which I'm not against by any means, revive AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY in pulp size and reprint one or two stories in each ish. As long as you're going to bring ASQ out of limbo (sneaky, eh wot!) you can't forget a lettercol using micro-elite type so that letterhacks (heh-heh . . . wonder who that could be . . .) can have longer letters printed and bring more readers closer together by way of the lettercol. Some lettercols—such as those in the Standard Magazines—were better than the stories for pure enjoyment. I believe that a pulp mag could—and would—do extremely well on the stands, provided that it received *good distribution* on the stands. The stands around here don't receive *half* the mags they could sell.

Sam Jason: I, for one, hate one-shot novels which are so chopped to pieces by the editor (no reflection on you, Cele) that

only the bare plot of the story remains. Continue printing serials, the majority of readers approve.

Lawrence Crilly
951 Anna St.
Elizabeth, N.J.

Dear Editor:

Just finished June issue, and, as usual, the stories were very good. But what I am really writing for, which, incidentally is the first time I have ever written to an editor, is to say a *Hurrah!* for Sam Jason, he, who dislikes serials in magazines. I am on his side. A good many times I have not purchased a magazine because it had a serial in it. I hate to start a story and then have to wait a month for more.

Even if good stories are long, I would rather read *one good* story than several short stories that don't come up to par.

My idea of serials has always been to keep up the circulation of a magazine. I don't blame anyone for trying to do that, but I have been an sf fan for thirty years and I never needed a serial to keep me buying, in fact it works just the opposite.

Mrs. Ruth Buskey
1279 Main St.
Holden, Mass.

● *Looks like another argument shaping up over serials, but you battlers might as well calm down. Policy statement: when we see a* good *one-shot novel, we will buy it and run it. When we see a* good *serial, we will buy it and run it. Fair enough?*

Dear Editor:

After reading "John Carter and the Giant of Mars," in the April 35th Anniversary issue of AMAZING, the question has occurred to me and some friends: Why is it, what with all the reverence and respect accorded to Edgar Rice Burroughs over the years, and with all the Burroughs' collectors extant that there is no real authentic biography of the man to be had? I think it would be interesting to know which rumors about Burroughs are true and which are fantasy. I have heard that he dictated most of the John Carter stories and that he took none of his writing seriously—only enough to collect his royalty checks.

Surely if Edgar Guest, Zane Gray, Norman Vincent Peale, and lesser literary lights rate biographies, such a man as Burroughs rates one. I'm beginning to collect Burroughsiana and the more I get interested in the man—the author—the less I find about him. Kingsley Amis in "New Maps of Hell" barely mentions him, the capsule in "20th Century American Authors" is puerile.

(Continued on page 146)

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. . . OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 144)

I am also interested to know if there is a complete bibliography of Burroughs' stories, novels, etc. available.

I hope you can help me answer these questions.

Dale Walker
2700 Federal Avenue
El Paso, Texas

• *To answer your questions: 1) Sam Moskowitz wrote the best Burroughs biography; it appeared in the October, 1959 issue of* SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION *Magazine. 2) For a bibliography of Burroughs write to Brad Day, Science-Fiction and Fantasy Publications, 78-04 Jamaica Avenue, Woodhaven 21, N. Y. This is also a source for the October '59* SATELLITE.

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(See *Hen's Eyes*, page 34)