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Amazing
Fact and Science Fiction Stories

JANUARY, 1962 Vol. 36, No. 1

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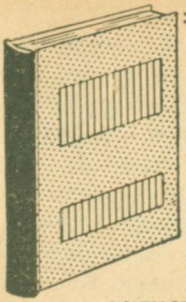

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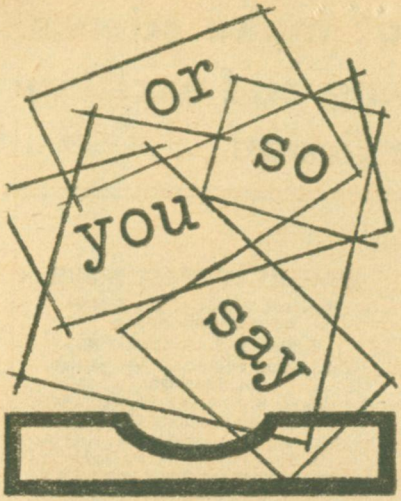


Dear Editor:

In your Sept. editorial N. L. made what he termed a "blood-curdling pronouncement" i.e. women are better space pilots than men.

This isn't blood curdling—why, we've known that since "Starship Troopers" where Heinlein repeatedly stressed that point.

Why, N. L., the shock should have been greatly cushioned. But—on second thought maybe it's still enough to curdle a little blood. Hmmm . . . . . !

Your profiles have been received with great acclaim around here—and not unjustly. I've been waiting for something on this order for quite a while and I must say that what Sam is giving us is good and worth waiting for.

In regard to the question of serials or no I must bring up this point: the SF mags in existence today were built on serials—and good ones—and they continue today on serials because better longer stories are easier to write than good short ones. When is the next serial gonna start? I love 'um.

I would also like to see an An Lab in AMAZING & FANTASTIC. I like to know what others think of the stories besides the select few in the letter-col.

As to your recent stories . . . . .

I've adopted my own system of rating since a comprehensive one is absent—(1) too bad for mere words to convey (2) poor (3) mediocre—so-so (4) good—well handled nicely developed etc. (5) Wow! Best! Great, et al.

August AMAZING:

"The Highest Form of Life" (3)

"The Survivors" (3)

"The Great Implication" (2.5)

This was a good thought story lacking thought.

"The Man Who Had No Brains" 3.75—Good adventure yarn.

Sept. AMAZING:

"Tongues of the Moon" (4)

This I like—hope there's more to come.

"The Man Who Had No Brains" (conc.) (3.9) still enjoyable adventure.

"Hen's Eyes" (2.5) I would

(continued on page 142)

EDITORIAL

ALIEN criminology—whether of another world, or of this world in another time—can be one of the most rewarding areas of exploration for the science-fiction writer and reader. Yet, surprisingly, while crime abounds as an element of plot, crime detection is a rarer subject. When it does appear, too often it appears only as an adjunct to a trick—as *crimes* committed with the help of space warps, instantaneous matter transmitters, time machines, etc.

It is refreshing, therefore, to chance upon a story—such as Miriam Allen deFord's story in this issue—wherein the detection part of the crime story is rooted in the social structure of the fictional environment, and where the motivations of both sleuth and quarry all grow out of the postulated society.

Even more pleasant is the opportunity it gives us to publish a recent speech made by Miss deFord on the subject of science-fiction criminology:

CRIME, as a common aspect of individual resistance to law and order, is of course always appearing in science fiction as in all other fiction. But simply to include as part of one's plot forms of violence—killing, assault, rape—which are crimes in all civilized communities, does not, strictly speaking, come under this special heading. For murder to be a crime we must assume a society in which the life of the individual is considered of value; for theft to be a crime, one in which ownership of private property is protected. What may be criminal here and now may be highly moral elsewhere or elsewhen, and vice versa.

Broadly speaking, science fiction deals for the most part with life and living in (1) other planets, (2) alternate universes, or (3) the future. Of course there are many other themes but the good old stand-bys still remain these three. Since, as I have said, the injection of the crime-theme

into any of these standard situations implies a civilized (or at the least a barbaric) society where some form of law—without which there can *be* no crime—exists, what we must consider here is, first, the treatment of straight crime in science fiction: e.g., a murder on civilized Antares II, or in 3164 on Earth, or in an America where the South won the Civil War—none of which may differ intrinsically from a murder in the United States in 1961; or, second, *criminal procedure as developed to meet the requirements of alien environments or a future time.*

It is this second aspect that I am considering specifically here: the construction of legal codes to fit other times and places—what we might call alien penology. Since any writer knows his own work best, I hope I may be forgiven for illustrating my point by reference to three short stories of my own.

In "The Eel" I posited a legal code on another planet which was based on the actual system among the extinct Guanches of the Canary Islands. By it a convicted criminal was not punished, but the person he most loved was put to death before his eyes. By transferring this to the case of a grand-style interplanetary robber who loves nobody—and for whom many victimized planets clamor—I had a very pretty situation, ideal for an ingenious solution.

In "Rope's End" again I constructed an alien legal code—this time one without any actual terrestrial foundation. The point of this humorous story was that the convicted man—a driver who killed a pedestrian—was deceived by a fellow-Terran into complete misapprehension of the nature of the inhabitants of the alien planet on which he lived, and of the facts of their jurisprudence.

In "All in Good Time", a law school professor of the 22nd century presents to his pupils a case involving time travel and the legal definition of bigamy. This was solidly based on the *current* common law, but could not have occurred except through the extrapolations of science fiction.

ALL these stories (though I am certainly not a lawyer) were sufficiently close to accepted legal principles for a law school professor in a university to use them as illustrations in one of his classes. In other words, if you are going to use court trials and penalties as part of your science fiction story, you must hew reasonably close to the line of actual legal procedure. Merely arbitrarily announcing that on Whoozis murderers are fed to the vicious Go-Go, or that on Waterchermay-

(*continued on page 46*)

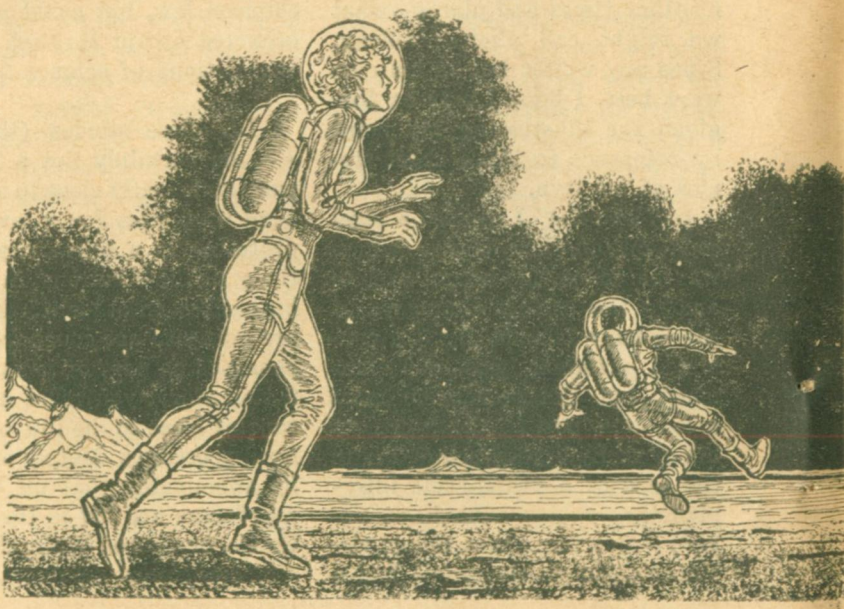
Across the frozen cliffs they loomed—the unbelievably ancient towers with the unimaginable engines deep inside them still pouring out their endless power. Dr. Sidney Lee, back from living death, vowed to find the secret of . . .

The TOWERS of

THE landing port at Titan had not changed much in five years.

The ship settled down on the scarred blast shield, beside the same trio of squat square buildings, and quickly disgorged its scanty quota of cargo and a lone passenger into the flexible tube that linked the loading hatch with the main building.

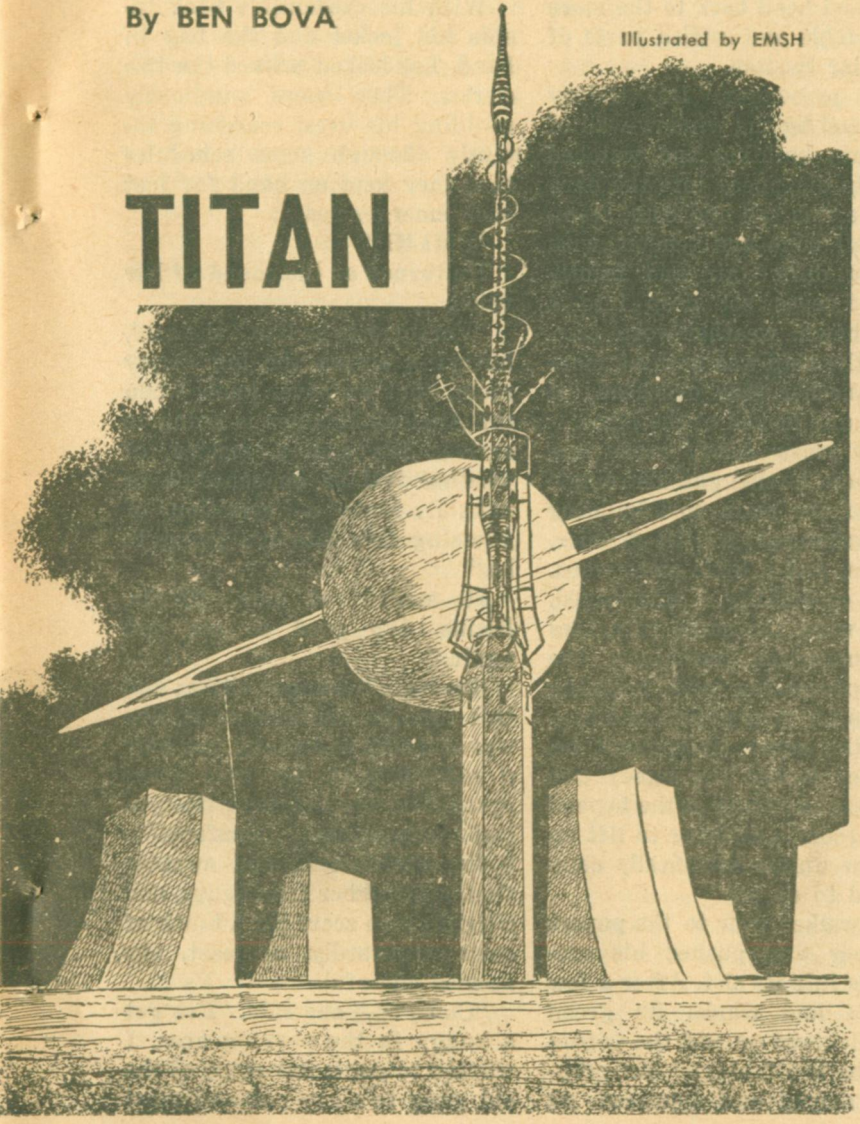
As soon as the tube was discon-



By BEN BOVA

Illustrated by EMSH

TITAN



nected, the ship screamed off through the murky atmosphere, seemingly glad to get away from Titan and head back to the more comfortable and settled parts of the Solar System.

The passenger, Dr. Sidney Lee, stood by the window-wall of the main building and watched the ship disappear into the dark sky. He was tall and lean, seemingly all bone and tendon, with graying dark air and faintly haunted eyes set deep into a rough-hewn, weather-worn face. When the ship was nothing more than another star overhead, he turned and looked at the place.

Five years hasn't made any difference, he thought. The single room of the main port building was unchanged: a little grimier, perhaps, and a little more worn. But essentially unchanged. There were the same turnstiles and inspection machines, the same processing and handling gadgets for your papers and baggage, the same (it couldn't be, but they *looked* the same) two bored/techs sitting at the far end of the room, unwilling to lift an eyebrow unless specifically commanded to do so.

Lee walked over to the papers processor and pushed his credentials into its slot. After a few wheezes and clanks its green light flickered on and the papers fell into the "return" bin properly stamped and approved. At the same time, his lone bag slid along a conveyor belt and onto the pickup table.

With his credentials back inside his jacket and the bag in hand, Lee looked toward the two clerks. They were studiously avoiding his eyes, searching intently through some schedules that they kept on hand for just such emergencies.

"Sid! Hi!"

He turned at the sound of her voice.

"I'm sorry to be late," she said, hurrying across the big empty room, "but we never know when the Ancient Mariner is going to arrive. It's not a matter of whether it'll be on schedule or not . . . just a question of guessing how late it's going to be."

He smiled at her. "Hello, Elaine. It's good to see you again."

She hadn't changed either, and this time he was glad of it. She was still slim and young, her hair a reddish gold, her eyes gray-green. She was dressed with typical casualness: comfortable boots, dark slacks and sweater that outlined her trim figure, and a light green scarf for a touch of color. Outwardly, at least, she seemed cheerful.

"Come on," she said, "I've got a buggy in the parking area. I wanted to get a few more of the old gang to come out and meet

you, but there's not many of them left, and they're all pretty busy . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"I didn't expect a brass band and a key to the city," Lee said. Then he added, "You're pretty gay for a female scientist," he said.

"I'm always gay when I meet old friends again."

He said nothing.

"I wish you'd cheer up," Elaine coaxed.

"I will; give me time."

THEY entered the parking building and got into a bubble-top car. Elaine gunned it to life, and they slid out of the near-empty parking area, through the pressure doors, and into Titan's unbreathable atmosphere.

"Have you been here straight through since I left?" he asked.

"No. I spent about eighteen months on Venus, slushing through the swamps in search of ruins that couldn't possibly have survived a century in that climate."

"And?"

"That's it," she said, shrugging. "Something ventured but nothing found. So I asked to be returned here."

"It's got you, too, hasn't it?"

Her face became serious for the first time. "Certainly it's got me. It's got all of us. Do you think we'd stay out here otherwise?"

"Anything new turned up?"

Elaine shook her head. "Nothing you haven't seen in the reports. Which means nothing, really."

He lapsed into silence and watched the frozen landscape slide by as the car raced along Titan's only highway. They crossed a bleak, frozen plain, bluish-white in the dim twilight from the distant Sun. The stars twinkling in the dark sky overhead made the barren scene look even colder. The road climbed across a row of hills, and as they made a turn around the highest bluff, Saturn came into view.

No matter how many times Lee had seen the planet, it had always thrilled him. Now, five years later, it was still an experience. Three times larger than the full moon as seen from Earth, daubed with brilliant yellow, red and orange stripes, and circled about its middle by the impossible-looking rings, Saturn hung fat and low on the horizon, casting shadows stronger than the Sun's.

"It's a compensation, isn't it?" Elaine said.

Soon they were down on the plain again, but now it was a shattered, broken expanse of jagged rock and ice. A greenish methane cloud drifted over the face of Saturn, and Lee finally turned his eyes away.

"You can see the towers from here," Elaine reminded him.

"I know," he said. He could not make out any detail, but there they were, just as they had been for—how long? Ten thousand years? A hundred thousand? Five towers jutting straight up from the bleak plain, clustered around a central, taller tower.

"Is the machinery still running?" he asked, pointlessly.

"Of course."

"There was some talk a year or so back about trying to stop it."

She shook her head. "They wouldn't dare."

THE machine had been discovered more than ten years earlier, when the first Earthmen landed on Titan. Saturn's largest satellite was devoid of life, a world of dark and cold, of hydrogen atmosphere and methane clouds, of ammonia seas and ice mountains.

And there in the midst of it all stood the machine: a brazenly unconcealed cluster of mammoth buildings, with its five stately towers surmounted by the soaring central sixth. And within, row upon row of unexplained machinery, fully automated, operating continuously in perfect order.

Alien.

The discoverors soon concluded that the machine was unbelievably old, older than the Egyptian pyramids, perhaps even older than the Martian canals. And it was running smoothly. For untold centuries, for uncounted millenia, it had continued to operate efficiently, tended only by automatic machines.

A clear challenge to the space-rovers from Earth. Who made this machine? How does it work? Why is it here? What is it doing?

As soon as its discovery was made known, the machine was visited by a steady stream of Earthmen—physicists, archeologists, engineers of a thousand different specialties, and soldiers, politicians, men who were now forced to believe the inevitable. The machine was photographed, x-rayed, blueprinted, analyzed spectroscopically, philosophically, even theologically.

Who built it? How does it work? Why is it here?

No answers.

Dr. Sidney Lee, an anthropologist who had made a name for himself by unraveling the history of the ruins on Mars, arrived on Titan full of optimism and enthusiasm. Twenty months later he was taken from Titan to a psychomedical center on Earth—completely irrational and suffering from man's oldest dread: the unknown.

* * *

Returning to the underground

center that had grown over the years near the machine, to house the living and working quarters of the tiny scientific community on Titan, was something like returning home for Dr. Lee. Someone had seen to it that he got his old quarters back again. Most of the people he had known from five years ago had gone elsewhere, but a few remained.

LEE spent his first few days renewing acquaintances and meeting the new men and women. He was surprised at their youth, until he tried to recall how he must have looked and acted when he first arrived on Titan.

"Makes you realize how time takes its toll, regardless of geriatrics," he said to Dr. Kimball Bennett. Official director of the center, Bennett had called Lee into his office for a chat.

"Come on now," Bennett scoffed, "you're talking like a man of ninety. Why, you won't need geriatrics for at least another month."

They both laughed. Bennett was a shy-looking, slender astrophysicist who spoke softly, never seemed to exert himself, and yet commanded the unabashed admiration of every member of the center.

"All right," Lee said. "You didn't call me to discuss my failing years. What's on your mind?"

"Oh, I just thought it's about time you got to work. You've been loafing around for a week now. We can't afford to feed you free forever, you know."

"No, I guess you can't," Lee agreed, smiling.

Bennett leaned back in his chair and studied Lee for a long moment. "I won't ask you why you wanted to come back. But I was delighted when I saw the paperwork with your name on it. Want to know why?"

"Now I am curious."

"I want to leave Titan. I've been heading this operation for too many years, now. I want out. And I really can't leave until I have a top-notch man to run this little show. You're my replacement."

"As director?"

"Yes."

"Not me," Lee said, shaking his head. "I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Why? Hell, Kim, you saw them carry me out of here five years ago. How do you know the same thing won't happen again? How do I know it?"

A trace of a smile flickered across Bennett's face. "Look, the fact that you returned to Titan —to this center and to that infernal machine out there—well, that's proof enough to me that you've licked whatever it was that caused your breakdown."

"Maybe you're satisfied," Lee

countered, "but how about the rest of the staff? How will they feel about having a reconditioned neurotic heading the show?"

Bennett's smile broke into an open grin. "Self-pity is a terrible thing. Do you know what those kids think of you? You're Dr. Sidney Lee, the foremost xeno-anthropologist of the human race. You're the man who deciphered the Martian Script, who uncovered the ruins on Tau Ceti, who did the definitive studies on the cave man cultures on Sirius and Vega. Your troubles here on Titan are just a six-month incident in the middle of a dazzling career. Haven't you noticed the deference with which they've been treating you? You're a big man on this campus."

"I don't know . . ."

"It won't be a lifetime job," Bennett coaxed. "In a couple of years some of the young squirts around here will have acquired enough poise and self-control to run the show. Then you can go on to something else."

Lee got up from his chair and paced slowly to the bookshelf that lined one wall of the office. "Why don't you stay on for another year or so, and then turn it over to one of the youngsters?"

Bennett wordlessly extended his arms over the desk. His hands were trembling, almost imperceptibly, but trembling.

Lee stared at the hands. "You too?"

Bennett placed his hands palms down on the desk. "Do you think you're the only one who worries about an alien race who can build a machine that we can't understand after ten years of investigation and study?"

THE official transfer took place the followng day, shortly after breakfast. Bennett called a meeting of the six department heads and announced that he would leave Titan on the next ship. It came as no surprise.

"From here on, I'm just an interested observer," he said. "Dr. Lee is in charge." He paused for a moment, then went on, "I thought this would be a good time to review what's been going on most recently, and where we stand."

Lee took an old pipe out of his jacket pocket and filled it while he watched them try to decide who would talk first. The six department heads all looked young and eager, he thought. Elaine was among them, of course, as head of the archeology group.

After a bit of finger-pointing and head-shaking, Dr. Richards took the floor. Head of the physics section, he had one of those open, clear-eyed, crew-cut faces that would look young even after his hair turned gray.

"It just so happens," he began,

"that we finished a study yesterday that may be of some slight significance." From the size of his grin, Lee judged that the physicist was making a weak attempt to underplay his speech.

Richards walked to the viewscreen at the far end of the room and turned a dial. The screen flickered for a moment, then showed a chart.

"You remember from our last meeting," he said, "that our group finally succeeded in reaching the generating unit that powers all the machinery out there. Uh, Dr. Lee, this is something we've been working on for more than a year. The power unit is buried in the sublevel of the main building out there, and it's damned difficult to get to it without tearing out other machines. We finally wormed a man down there about a month ago."

RICHARDS turned back to the rest of the group. "This chart shows what we've been able to learn about the power unit. Which isn't much. There's no input to it. No batteries, no solar cells, nothing. There's a fuel tank—at least, we think it's a fuel tank—that's sunk inside a cryogenic magnetic coil."

Elaine spoke up. "You told us that last time. Have you been able to get into the tank?"

Richards shook his head. "Not unless we break up the coil, which we don't dare try. It would probably mean destroying the power unit and stopping all the machinery. And we can't do *that* until we're certain of what the machinery's doing."

"We all know that," said Dr. Kulaki, a wiry Polynesian who headed the electronics group.

"Yes. Well, we did make a very elegant experiment," Richards continued, "a variation of Cavendish's experiment to obtain the gravitational constant, in the Eighteenth Century . . ."

"Spare the history," Dr. Kurtzman said, half-smiling.

"Okay, okay," Richards said. "We determined the mass of the fuel tank, and therefore of the fuel in it. The tank contains a degenerate gas . . ."

"What?"

"A degenerate gas," Richards repeated. "The stuff must weigh several tons per spoonful."

Dr. Petchkovich, the astronomer, frowned puzzledly. "Wait a minute. Degenerate gases are found only in the cores of certain types of stars . . . are you saying that this magnetic field they've put around the fuel tank is strong enough to create a pressure similar to the weight of a star?"

"Take a look at the chart," Richards said, pointing to the viewscreen. "If you know of any other type of substance with a density like that, I'll eat it.

There was a brief conversation, then Dr. Bennett said, "All right, Pat. Is that all?"

"Hell no," Richards said, his cat-like grin returning. "There's more."

He tapped a button on the viewscreen control panel, and another chart came up on the screen.

WE KNOW the power output of the generator. That was simply obtained, since the one unit powers all the machinery in the buildings out there. So we calculated all the known methods for obtaining power from a degenerate gas, and checked them against the amount of fuel the system has used up so far . . ."

Lee interrupted. "How do you know how much fuel has been used if you can't get into the tank?"

Richards' grin broadened. "Oh, that's easy, Dr. Lee. We know how much a degenerate gas should weigh, per unit volume. We know the size of the tank, and therefore how much it can hold, when full. So we can estimate how full the tank is simply by measuring its mass and comparing it to the mass it would have if it were full."

"Doesn't the chemical composition of the gas have any effect on the mass? Wouldn't uranium be heavier than hydrogen?"

"Yes, but not much. A factor of a hundred. You'll see in a minute that it's not enough to matter at this stage of the game."

Lee nodded and the physicist went on. "Well, anyway, you can check out our math in the report we'll issue later this month. But it turns out that the only possible energy source for this gadget is total annihilation of the gas particles into energy."

"Total annihilation? How?"

"That's a good question. I don't think we'll be able to answer it until we can start taking the damned machine apart." He flicked a new graph on the screen. "But, we can calculate how long the thing has been running, on the basis of the fuel it's used up, and the energy rates we've assumed . . ."

A slow wave of astonishment crept through the small room as, one by one, they grasped the significance of the curving lines on the graph.

"That's right," Richards said. "Unless our rough calculations are completely off the beam, which I doubt, the damned thing has been operating continuously for something like ten-to-the-fifth or ten-to-the-sixth Earth years."

A hundred thousand to a million years.

The rest of the meeting was quiet and orderly. They were all subdued by Richards' report. *It's been running continuously for a*

million years, Lee kept thinking. *A million years.*

He listened automatically as the other department heads made their reports.

Ray Kurtzman was first. His report was actually a combined discussion of the work that his engineering group, and Dr. Kulaki's electronics people, had been jointly undertaking. They had tried to determine (for the *n*th time) just what sort of power was being beamed by the antennas atop the machine's towers. No luck. The machinery was using power, the antennas were broadcasting *something*, but whatever it was could not be detected by any instrument the Kurtzman and Kulaki had applied to the problem.

Elaine gave a routine report on the latest digging expeditions that had been sent out. No artifacts, no foundations, no remains of any sort. Blank.

Dr. Childe, a short, sharp-voiced mathematician, gave his report on his department's analysis of the wave patterns that were being sent out by the antennas. The patterns had been deduced from the fluctuations in energy consumption by the antenna equipment. Childe reported another blank. The patterns were completely random.

"It's foolish to call them patterns at all," Childe complained. "They look more like the ramblings of an idiot than anything produced by intelligence."

FINALLY, Petchkovich reported on the latest astronomical studies. The antennas were tracking an empty section of space between the Sun and the planet Mercury. Careful observations had shown no noticeable effect in the widespread area where the antennas were focused.

"It is my belief," he concluded, "that the antennas were originally focused on one of the planets, but have since become disoriented in some way, and are now well off-target."

Kurtzman huffed. "Not very likely. If they—whoever they are—could make this whole damned set of buildings full of machinery to operate continuously for a million years, do you think they'd slip up on where the antennas are pointing?"

"If it's a million years we're talking about," Petchkovich answered slowly, "then the chances for errors are simply that much greater."

Lee decided it was time for him to step in. "Have there been any other attempts to date the buildings or the machines? Radioactive decay rates, or something like that?"

Elaine nodded. "It's been tried at least once or twice a year, every year. Nothing conclusive has ever been established. The build-

ings are obviously very old . . . but a million years . . ."

They all lapsed into silence.

Lee took a deep breath and began once more. "This million-year-business throws a new light on the whole subject. Up to now, I think, we've all been looking at this machine on a day-to-day basis. I mean, we've been examining what it's doing *now*. It might be worth our while to sit back a little and try to extrapolate the behavior we've observed back over a million years."

"Could you be a bit more explicit?" Richards asked.

"I'll try. It's mostly a matter of viewpoint, I think. Let's start looking at this machine as something that's been in operation for a million years. Let's admit to ourselves that what we see today is only a very small slice of the whole picture. Dr. Petchkovich, you're an astronomer; you're accustomed to studying a star for a few months and coming up with a story that covers perhaps billions of years. Right?"

"Yes, but this is entirely different . . ."

"I know. I know," Lee said. "But the line of attack isn't so different. For instance: Dr. Childe, suppose you send your wave patterns to the Orbital Computation Center at Earth and have the Big Brain work them over. Do you think it might come up with something useful?"

Childe shrugged elaborately. "Maybe. If we try to extrapolate the sample patterns we have now over a million years, maybe something will show up."

"It'll take months to get the Big Brain's time," Elaine said. "They're waiting in line all the way back to Mars for it."

"What are months compared to the time we've already spent?" Bennett countered.

"Or to a million years?" Lee added.

Kulaki suddenly started to bob up and down in his chair. "Say, we might be on the track of something here," he said. "If those circuits have been in continuous operation for a million years . . . we could learn an awful lot about reliability . . ."

Lee nodded in agreement. "We have a lot to learn, that's true enough." He cleared his throat nervously. "There's one more thing, I am about to publish a paper . . . it's a sort of a general paper, but it has some bearing on the work going on here. I wonder if you'd be good enough to be a tryout audience for me?"

They sat back to listen.

LEE gave only the basic outline of his paper. He discussed his findings among the ruins on Mars and on the lone planet circling the star Tau Ceti; and he drew some conclusions from his investigations of the primitive

human cultures found on the planetary systems of Sirius and Vega.

First, both Sirius and Vega have both been long known to be comparatively young stars. Astrophysical evidence compiled from the Twentieth Century onward, and finally geophysical data from the planets themselves, showed that Sirius and Vega—and their planets—were considerably less than a billion years old. By contrast, the Solar System was known to be at least five billion years old.

Now, the development of life takes time. It took close to three billion years for life to make its first appearance on Earth. Another two billion years of evolution were necessary before man arose.

"If the planets circling Sirius and Vega are less than one billion years old," Lee stated, "then the human populations of those planets—no matter how primitive they are—*could not have originated there.* They must have come from another planetary system. The closest system that could have born life on its own is our Solar System."

Second, the ruins on Tau Ceti and on Mars were both definitely built by human beings. The plans of the buildings, their furnishings and utensils, the scant writings and pictures that survived—all were of human origin.

"Although dating the time of destruction of these buildings is very difficult," Lee went on, "we can definitely say two things: they were destroyed suddenly in some immense cataclysm; and they were destroyed at very nearly the same time, both on Mars and Tau Ceti. I hadn't realized the correlation until this morning, but the destruction might easily be dated at approximately one million years ago."

There was a stir of reaction at the mention of the time period.

Also, Lee told them, he had been able to partially translate one of the folk tales of the Vegan people.

"Stripped of its nonessentials, it tells of a cataclysmic war between the ancestors of the Vegan people and another race, mentioned only as the Others."

He paused and looked at them, sitting around the table. They seemed engrossed.

"The Vegan folk tales relate that the Others won an overwhelming victory, and smashed forever their Golden Age, when they travelled through the skies and lived in unbelievable splendor.

"I'd like to make one final point. The Vegan and Sirian peoples are hardly human, by our standards. In addition to slight physiological differences, they live in caves and eat shellfish and giant insects. They do not hunt

meat-bearing animals, simply because there are not yet any meat-bearing animals on their planets. The humans on those planets did not evolve there; they are a billion years ahead of the natural evolution of their worlds."

Bennett spoke up. "In other words, they were originally a colony from Earth."

"Exactly."

"That's a lot to swallow in one sitting," Patrick said, quietly.

"I know," Lee answered. "But it fits in with what we've found here. Elaine, I'm certain that if you knew where to look, you could find on Earth the remains of a human civilization that is more than a million years old . . ."

She shook her head. "That's contrary to every known scrap of evidence about early man. Besides, a million years of weathering would wipe out almost anything on Earth. Wind, rain, Ice Ages, earthquakes . . . it would be impossible."

"What about the Moon?" Petchkovich asked. "There should be some archeological evidence on the Moon that hasn't been completely destroyed. Maybe buried under the dust or lava flows . . ."

"At any rate," Lee said, "I'm convinced that there was a human culture a million years ago. that it expanded out through the Solar System and to the stars; that it met an implacably hostile alien race; and that the humans were utterly defeated. Nearly wiped out."

"And the machine out there?"

"It was built by the Others. It's alien. And hostile," Lee said. "That's why we must find out what it's doing, and how."

YOU could feel the change in attitude throughout the center after that conference. An invisible, but almost palpable wave of tension swept through every office, every lab, every section of the underground community. Not everyone believed Lee's theory about the Others. But they could never look at those strange buildings again without wondering. What had been a puzzling, frustrating riddle took on the attributes of a living, intelligent enemy; an enemy that mocked their efforts to understand, to control; an enemy that seemed in every way superior to the feeble powers of the men from Earth.

A FEW days after that conference, Dr. Bennett left Titan for good. Lee was in full command now.

He was just finishing a quick lunch at the robocafeteria when Elaine walked by and stopped at his table.

"Hi boss. I'm on my way out to the buildings. Want to come along?"

Lee punched a button at the end of the table, and the dishes slid into a wall receptacle. "No thanks," he said. "I've got some paperwork to do . . ."

"Sid, you're going to have to come out and face it sooner or later. Why don't you come now? There's practically nobody there."

He looked up at her. "You're not a part-time psychotech, are you?"

"No," she said, grinning. "But I wouldn't want anybody to start thinking that you're afraid to go into the buildings. And I especially don't want *you* to think that."

"Okay," he said, getting up from his chair. "You're right . . . as usual."

They took a lift chute to the surface bubble, a dome of clear plastisteel that housed ground vehicles and miscellaneous outdoor equipment. There they squirmed into pressure suits, complete with fishbowl helmets. After checking out their oxygen tanks, heaters and radios, they were ready to go outside.

"Want to walk?" Elaine asked.

Lee nodded.

It took him a few minutes to get accustomed to the low-gravity shuffle that you must employ to walk on Titan, with its one-third Earth gravity.

They headed for the buildings, under the double shadows cast by the distant Sun and the ever-present, overpowering Saturn. The buildings loomed straight up from the dark plain, gaunt gloomy specters from a bygone age haunting this shadow world. There were five low, square featureless structures ringed around a central pentagonally-shaped tower that swept upward to a series of spires and antennas. Several doors had been cut into the outer buildings' walls by the inquiring Earthmen. Originally, the walls had been perfectly blank.

"Did you bring a torch?" Lee asked.

Elaine shook her head. "Don't need one anymore. We installed lights inside. They're tripped by a photocell as we cross through a doorway."

He could feel it coming on as they approached the buildings—the tenseness, the prickling along the spine, as if a deeply-buried memory was writhing within his mind.

Even before they entered the doorway he could sense the throbbing, beating *purposefulness* of the machines.

And then they were inside, surrounded by them, row on row, tier on tier, inhuman untiring infallible machines humming, growling, whining, filling the vast building with the rumbling power of their work. Driving, constantly driving at their un-

known tasks. Along catwalks that snaked through the maze of machines, automatic maintenance vehicles scurried along, stopping here for a quick adjustment, there for replacement of a faulty part.

No matter where the two invading humans went along the twining catwalks, the maintenance vehicles avoided them. If they stopped before a machine that was to be serviced, the maintenance vehicle would hover nearby, glowering at them, waiting for them to get out of the way.

HE could feel it again—the alienness, the lurking presence of an intelligence that scorned the intruders from Earth. Every nerve in his body screamed the same message: get out, get away, this thing is evil, hostile, a weapon against all mankind. In the conference room, telling them of his theory, he had inwardly wondered how much of it he himself really believed. But here, in the midst of these implacably efficient machines—he *knew*. This is the product of a cosmic hatred, the work of those who seek to destroy man, our ancient enemy, the unknown, the nameless Others.

"Are you all right?"

Elaine's voice in his earphones snapped him back to reality.

"Why, do I look green?"

She came up close enough so that their helmets nearly touched. "A little green," she said, smiling. "It gives me the creeps, too. Want to go?"

"No," he answered. "Let's see the work that's going on."

He took a firm grip on himself and went through it all, from the combined crews of archeologists and engineers tracing wiring circuits, to the handful of physicists conducting further tests on the power generator buried deep in the central building's foundation.

"It goes awfully slowly," Elaine said as they trudged back to the center.

"We're on the outside looking in," Lee said. "If we could only determine the *purpose* of the machinery, then the rest of it would come pretty easily."

They returned to the surface bubble and took off their pressure suits.

"Nearly dinner time," Elaine said, as they descended to the living area "How about eating in my quarters?" she asked.

"Can you cook?"

"You'll find out."

A FEW hours later, he had decided that she definitely could cook, and that she had somehow managed to bring to Titan some of the best wine he had tasted in years.

Now the table was folded back into the wall, and they were sitting together on the couch, listening to music tapes.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Villa-Lobos, a Twentieth Century composer. *Bachianas Brazilieris.* Number eight, I think . . ."

They listened in silence for a few moments to the moody, restless music.

"Reminds me of topside, standing at the shore of the ammonia sea when a storm is coming up," he said.

Elaine nodded. "Yes . . . the wind, and the dark, and the waves . . ."

Abruptly, the music snapped off.

"Oh damn!" Elaine blurted. "I thought I had the thing fixed."

"Let me take a look at it," Lee said getting up from the couch.

He tinkered with the recorder for a while, to no avail. "I'm no electronics tech, that's for sure."

Elaine shrugged. "Don't worry about it. I'll have it repaired tomorrow."

She went into the kitchenette and called back, "How about some brandy?"

"Fine," he answered.

She returned and handed him a glass.

"Ad astra," he said, as they touched glasses.

"Amen."

Elaine walked slowly away from him, swishing the liquor in her glass. "Let's go topside and see the stars," she said, suddenly.

"H'mm?"

"Up to the bubble. Come on."

So they left her one-room quarters and took the lift tube up to the bubble. It was deserted. Overhead, Saturn was low on the horizon, silhouetting the alien buildings. They turned to the other side of the sky, where it was clear and dark. Thousands of stars twinkled in the darkness; they made out Sirius and Vega, then Mars, and finally Earth—a bright blue jewel that outshone all the others.

"I guess Jupiter's on the other side of the Sun," Lee said.

Elaine nodded. "It looks so far away," she said, staring at Earth, "and so lonely, out there in all that emptiness."

"A psychotech would call that 'projection.'"

"I know. We're the lonely ones, aren't we?"

She was perfectly serious now.

"You know that Ruth and I have split up," he said.

"I heard . . . that she left you."

He shrugged. "That's a matter of viewpoint. She got tired sitting Earthside while I batted around the Solar System. When I told her I was going to Vega, she called it quits."

"Couldn't she have gone with you?"

"If she had wanted to . . ."

"Do you still love her?" Elaine asked.

"I don't know. I don't think I know what love really is, anymore. All I know is . . . on that long trip out to Vega, when I had nothing to do but sit and think, it wasn't Ruth I was thinking about. It was you."

"Oh . . ."

They talked a bit more, and finally he took her in his arms and kissed her and she was his, at least for a little while.

WEEKS lapsed into months, and the work on Titan inched steadily along. If he stopped to think about it, Lee knew that all they were doing was scratching around the base of the problem, and making precious little headway. *The blind men and the elephant,* he told himself. But then he asked himself what else they could possibly do, and the answer was always, nothing. But the machine was still there, doing whatever it was designed to do, and he could sense the scornful laughter of its creators as he vainly tried to understand their work. Only the thought of Elaine, the sight of her, the touch of her, allowed him to keep his sense of balance.

People left Titan, baffled and confused; new people arrived—eager, full of energy, excited at the chance to tackle the unknown, undimmed—at first—by the day-to-day frustrations of trying to unlock a door that has no key.

* * *

Lee dialed his selection at the robocafeteria and waited a few moments for the tray of food to appear at the pickup table. He had spent the morning shut away in his office, searching months worth of reports for some glimmer of encouragement. There was progress, of course; there was always progress. But it was never in a direction that would take them closer to the final answer.

And, carefully tucked into the top drawer of his desk was a nasty yellow sheet that bore a querulous message from Earth: What is the status of the project? Why are expenditures constantly climbing? Is a ninety-three-man staff really needed? When can some solid results be expected?

Lee picked an unoccupied table and sat down. As he started to eat, a quartet of young engineers, headed by Dr. Kurtzman, came in and sat at the next table.

"I still don't see why they keep digging," one of them was saying. "They'll never find anything outside the buildings."

Another countered, "Look, they've got to follow every possible angle. The only way we're ever going to understand this thing is to put together every scrap of evidence we can find until there's enough to form an understandable picture."

Kurtzman shook his head. "Not at all. This isn't going to be solved by putting pieces together, like a puzzle. There's more evidence in those buildings than we can ever hope to digest. It's not a matter of adding up clues . . . this is going to be a *gestalt*. One of these days, somebody's going to get a few thousand million of his brain cells turned the right way, and he'll say, "Ah-HAH!" Then we'll have it. Until then, it's our job to keep poking around, hoping to find the right piece of information to trigger the *gestalt*."

The first one spluttered. "But that . . . that's non-scientific!"

"So?" Kurtzman asked, arching his eyebrows. "Do you see science making any great strides around here? We're in over our heads. Intuition is the only thing that can save us."

"If we're that bad off, we might as well quit," the first one said. "In fact, that might be the best idea of all. Forget it and go home. Let the damned machine run for another million years, if it wants to."

Lee could not keep quiet any longer. "That would be fine, wouldn't it?" he said, turning on the surprised engineer. "Give it up and forget about it, without knowing where it came from, or what it's doing, or why."

"I didn't mean . . ."

"Listen to me. It's not just that the thing could be a weapon. It may not be. But we don't know. And as long as we don't know, we've got to keep trying to find out. Understand?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"And there's more at stake here than just an intellectual puzzle," Lee insisted. "If we turn our backs on this machine, we've turned our backs on a basic premise of all scientific thought. If we admit that we can't understand this machine, then we admit that there's an absolute limit to our ability to understand the universe. We give in to the old witch-doctor's claim that there are some things in the world that man must not tamper with. Taboo!

"The basic nature of man and science is at stake here! We've got to understand that machine. Our claim to the stars is tied up in it."

Lee looked up and saw that everyone in the dining hall was watching him. He stood up.

"Sorry; I didn't mean to get so vehement," he mumbled to the engineer. "Guess I'm a bit edgy today."

He walked quickly out of the dining area and returned to his office.

SLOWLY, quietly, the work went on. Dr. Petchkovich spent six weeks on Mercury, supervising at first hand the investigation of the area where the machine's antennas were focused. He returned to Titan in high excitement.

"We have definitely proved that there is a disturbance in the interplanetary magnetic field at the focal point of the machine's antennas," he announced to the department heads, when they convened in the conference room to hear his report.

"How strong a disturbance?" Dr. Kulaki asked.

Petchkovich hesitated a moment. "Well, it's only one part in a hundred thousand . . ."

The excitement died quickly. It was a discovery, yes. But it did not bring them any closer to understanding the machine and its purpose.

* * *

Lee was sitting at his desk, staring moodily at a graph that Dr. Childe had left with him: the results of the Orbital Computing Center's extrapolation of the wave patterns broadcast by the machine.

The phone buzzer sounded. Without taking his eyes from the graph, Lee flicked the phone on.

"Are you busy right now?"

He looked up and saw Elaine's face on the screen. "No, not really," he answered. "Come on in."

"I'll be there in a few minutes."

As soon as she came through the door he knew that something was wrong. She was trying too hard not to look concerned.

"What's up?" he asked her.

She shrugged and sat down in front of the desk. "I just thought we might talk for a while."

"In my office?"

"It concerns official business."

"I see."

She looked at the graph. "What's that? Something new?"

Changing the subject, he thought to himself. *What's she afraid of?*

Aloud, he answered, "It's Childe's results from the Big Brain . . . the machine's wave patterns extrapolated over a million years." He turned the graph around so she could see it better.

Elaine studied it for a moment, then shook her head. "Childe was right, wasn't he? It doesn't make any sense at all. No pattern, no rhyme, no reason."

"I don't know," Lee said. "There's something . . . well, something strange about these waves. They don't follow a regular pattern, and yet . . ."

"What?"

He frowned. "They're just too damned irregular to be really

random. That doesn't make much sense, does it? Well, anyway, I've got the feeling that I've seen this pattern—or lack of pattern—before. Somewhere I've seen something that looks a lot like this . . . but I can't remember where."

Elaine looked at the graph again, at the multiple curves swinging back and forth across the paper, intertwining in seeming confusion. "It looks like some of the graphs I drew when I was an undergrad."

He laughed. "Maybe that's where I saw it."

There was an awkward silence. Lee got up from his seat and walked around the desk. He pulled up another chair and sat beside Elaine. "Now, what's the trouble?"

"I've been thinking," she said slowly. "I . . . I've decided to transfer off Titan."

"Leave? But why?"

"For us, Sid. For both of us. Before we get so wrapped up in each other that we won't be able to break it up without really getting hurt . . ."

"I don't understand," he said.

She spoke calmly and softly, no tears, no hysterics. She had thought it all out very carefully. "Sid, take a look around you. We're like two castaways on a desert world. We love each other —here and now. But we won't always be here. What happens when we leave Titan? What happens when we're not faced with the loneliness and that . . . that *thing* out there? Suppose we find that we don't really need each other? What then?"

"But I do need you, Elaine. I love you."

"You do now," she answered. "But how long will it last? Sid, I have to get away, at least for a little while. I need a sense of perspective."

"I see," he said, shifting his gaze away from her. "That doesn't leave me much to say, does it? All right, Elaine. Make out a transfer request and I'll sign it."

"Thanks. I . . . I hope you understand." She got up and started slowly toward the door.

"I'm not so sure that you understand this yourself," he replied. "But I know this—I don't want to lose you, Elaine. If you haven't worked this out within a month or so after you leave Titan, I'll come looking for you."

She turned and, without a word, went over and kissed him. Then she quickly left the office.

Lee returned to his desk. He sat down and stared at Childe's graph again. After a few minutes, he angrily slapped it in a drawer, slammed the thing shut, and stamped out of the room.

PERSONAL matters were soon buried in the excitement of another discovery, this time an

important one. It looked promising.

Kurtzman and Kulaki finally discovered what form of energy the antennas were beaming out.

After years of trial-and-error experimentation, the engineer and electronicist asked Richards and Childe to lend a hand. With a firm theoretical and mathematical background to bolster their work, Kurtzman and Kulaki started out on a process of elimination.

They soon proved that the antennas were not broadcasting any known form of electromagnetic energy, from gamma to long-radio waves. They investigated one possibility after another, turning up a steady succession of negative answers. Negative, but answers all the same, It was time-consuming, but at least they were definitely determining which avenues were blind alleys.

Then Childe started tinkering with a hunch, and showed his paperwork to Richards. The two of them made a few suggestions to Kurtzman and Kulaki. Their problem was that their detection instruments were drawing blanks, when applied to the antennas' output. But the power input to the antennas showed they were working continuously.

Childe showed, mathematically, that their output must be an extremely weak, low-frequency form of energy. Richards agreed, and pointed out that there was only one known form of energy that fulfilled these conditions: gravity.

"Gravity waves?" Kurtzman asked, incredulously, when they told him about it.

Kulaki's mind reacted faster. "Knowing it's gravity waves, on paper, and proving it experimentally are two different things."

But they were up to the test. They had to scavange equipment from the center's grav screen machinery, and the whole underground community was without its Earth-normal grav field for two and a half days, but when the field was returned to normal (and people stopped hopping and bouncing all through the center) Kurtzman and Kulaki had proved that the antennas were indeed beaming out gravity waves.

It's all here, Lee thought, as he read their combined report. *Now we know what the machine is doing. But to what purpose? What influence does this have on Earth?*

Then he put down the report and turned to another bit of paperwork that lay on his desk: Elaine's official request for a transfer. He looked through it automatically. There was a place marked *Justification for Request.* Elaine had typed simply, "Personal." Lee flipped to the last page and signed.

He leaned back in his chair and tried to let his mind float free; forget about her, forget about the buildings out there, forget about everything . . . at least for a few moments. Just drift and let your mind wander where it pleases . . .

THE automatic secretary on his desk hummed into life and announced, "Department heads' meeting starts in five minutes."

To hell with the department heads. To hell with Titan. A world of cold and dark and ice. Like Dante's Inferno. Titan is hell. A place where sinning scientists are sent. Their punishment is to stand out in the cold and try to solve the unanswerable. Forever. Stand in the icy darkness and try to understand the unknown. Once in a while you make a discovery that excites you; but when you look again, your discovery is meaningless, you know as little about the real answer as you knew before. The discoveries are just part of the punishment, part of the eternal torment, they just keep you going after the carrot on the stick, but the carrot is always out of reach . . .

"Department heads' meeting beginning now," the automatic voice said.

Lee cocked an eye at the tiny device. "All right," he said, getting up, "I'm going."

The meeting was strictly routine. The reaction had set in. A week ago they had all been agog with the gravity-waves discovery. Now it had become apparent that the discovery had not opened the door they were trying to get through. *We're like children,* Lee thought, *trying to put together a stereo transceiver from an assembly kit; all the pieces are there, but we can't get them together in the proper way.*

It was a short meeting. As they broke up, Lee saw Richards walk over to Elaine.

"I hear you're leaving us," the young physicist said. "Going Earthside?"

"Yes," Elaine answered. "For a while, at least."

Richards broke into his feline grin again. "Good. I'll be vacationing on Earth in a few weeks. Do you like to ski?"

"I haven't skied in years . . ."

"There's a lodge I go to in Switzerland. Really fine. And the skiing is marvelous. Even if you don't want to ski, there are mountains to climb . . . and glaciers . . ."

Lee started toward them, thought better of it, and walked sullenly out of the room. He went to his office, sat fidgeting at his desk for a while, then called her on the intercom. She was not at her office or her quarters, so the equipment automatically paged her. When her face finally

showed on the viewscreen, Lee could see that she was still in the conference room, which was now empty, except for her and Richards.

"What is it, Sid?"

"Uh . . . can you come down to my office for a minute? Right now?"

She quickly covered her surprise. "Of course. I'll be right down."

WITHIN a few minutes, she was entering his office. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said, gesturing her to a chair. "I just wanted to get you out of the grips of that All-American physicist."

"What? Why, you jealous old goat!"

"Never mind. If you want to listen to propositions, please make sure I'm out of earshot."

She laughed. "Is that what you brought me down here for?"

"Yes."

"I'm flattered."

"Don't be cute."

"He's a very nice boy."

He frowned. "All right, so I'm foolish and juvenile . . ."

"And he's so interesting," she went on, paying no attention. "He was telling me all about glaciers. In Switzerland. Near this ski lodge. Seems the glaciers have been growing during the past few years. Something I should really be sure to see."

"Sounds fascinating," Lee grumbled.

"Oh, it is. The glaciers, that is. They were retreating, you know, until a few years ago. Now they're growing again. Goes in cycles, it seems . . ."

Lee suddenly stiffened. "Great God of our forefathers!"

"What now?"

Instead of answering, he scrambled out of his chair and went to the floor-to-ceiling bookcase that lined one wall of the office.

"Sid, what's the matter? Did I say something . . ."

But he was not listening to her. "That's it," he was muttering, "That *must* be it."

Elaine watched him paw through the shelves of books, desperately searching for something.

"Can I help?" she asked.

"No. I think . . ." he snatched at a book and riffled through it. "Yes! Look at it!"

He wheeled and shoved the open book at her. She nearly dropped it as he ducked back around his desk and rummaged through a pile of papers.

"Here it is. Look at them!" he shouted, handing her a sheet of paper. "Put them side by side and look at them."

The book was opened to a graph, Elaine saw, that showed the advance and retreat of the Ice Age glaciers over the past

million years on Earth. The sheet of paper was Childe's graph of the wave patterns of the machine's antennas.

Her face went pale as she looked at the two graphs, side by side. "They . . . they're the same . . . almost identical."

"It all fits together now," Lee said, drumming his fingers on the desktop in a restless tattoo. "The machine beams gravity waves into the interplanetary plasma between the Sun and Mercury. The effect is infinitesimal, by our short-term standards, but over a hundred thousand years or so, the cumulative effect must be enough to block off a small fraction of the Sun's radiation. The Earth goes into a deep freeze for a few millenia!"

"But why?" Elaine asked. "Why did the Others build it?"

LEE paced nervously across the room. "Think a minute. They had beaten the Earthmen in a bitter interstellar war. They had done their best to wipe out the human race. What better way to insure their victory than by subjecting our homeworld to violent climate changes? They probably thought they were guaranteeing the complete extinction of mankind."

"But the Ice Ages didn't destroy man," Elaine said.

"No. They reduced him to the level of a beast, though. Those few survivors of the interstellar war were robbed of their civilization. They had to go back to living in caves, to fighting the other animals for sheer survival. They made it, though, and re-learned what was lost, and built a new civilization."

"Then the machine failed its purpose."

"Right," Lee said. "But remember, it's only an automatic machine. Those who made it, the Others, they're still out there among the stars somewhere. They're going to be mighty upset when they find out that we're not dead."

"It's . . . terrifying . . . in a way."

"The important thing is that we *understand*. Now we can face them, wherever they are. They're no more intelligent than we are. We've proved that by learning what the machine is all about. They may be older, and they certainly know more tricks, but they're not on a completely higher plain of mental development."

Elaine leaned back in her seat. "Well, it's over. A last it's ended. We can leave Titan for good now."

"Leave? Not likely. Now we can finally start to tear the machinery apart and see how it works. We've just been sniffing around it so far, treating it like a museum exhibit. Now we can shut the damned thing off and

start dissecting it. There's a lot to be done, a whole new technology to be learned. How does it work? Who are the Others and where did they come from? There are more questions to answer now than ever."

"That means that you won't be leaving Titan?" she asked.

"Not for a while. How about you?"

She thought for a moment, then answered, "If you're right about all this, then there should be a lot of archeological evidence awaiting discovery on the Moon. Maybe I should organize a team . . ."

"Then you're leaving anyway," he said.

"For a while, Sid. I'll be back in time."

"Stay off the ski slopes."

She grinned and got up from her chair. Lee kissed her, and she turned away and went to the door. She looked back to say a final word, but he was already at his desk, punching buttons on the automatic secretary:

"All right, you mechanical marvel, call the department heads to the conference room for a meeting in five minutes. And take a message for the Terran Council Science Committee—Gentlemen: It is my belief that the question of the alien machinery on Titan is now essentially solved. . . ."

THE END

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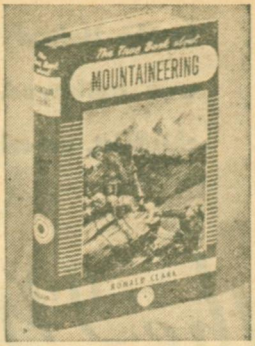

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In the United World, mental therapy of any kind was outlawed. But Dr. Charles Gregory, ex-psychiatrist, ex-criminal, always seemed to attract . . .

the INSANE Ones

By J. G. BALLARD

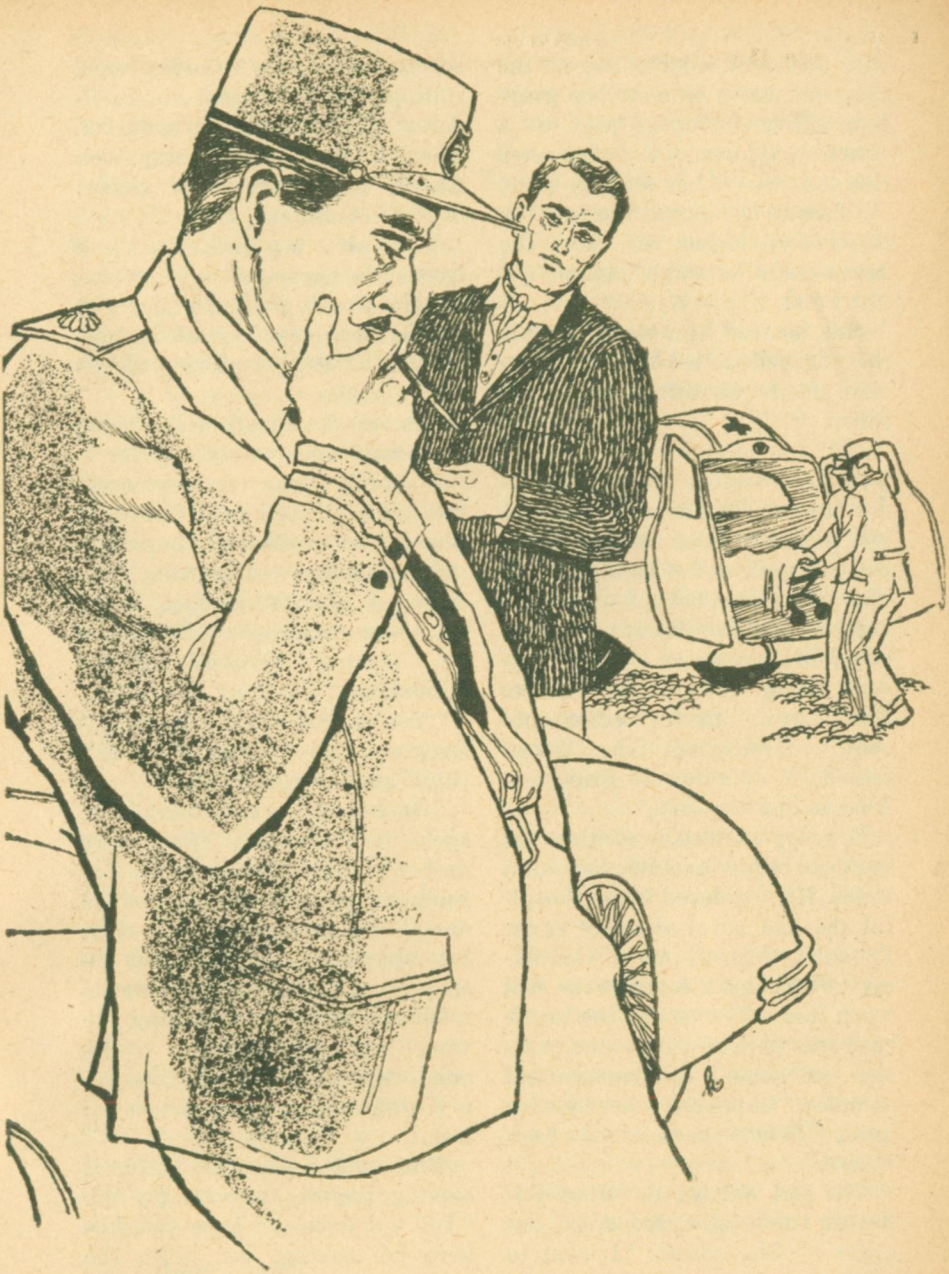
Illustrated by KILPATRICK

TEN miles outside Alexandria he picked up the coast road that ran across the top of the continent through Tunis and Algiers to the transatlantic tunnel at Casablanca, gunned the Jaguar up to 120 and burned along through the cool night air, letting the brine-filled slipstream cut into his six-day tan. Lolling back against the headrest as the palms flicked by, he almost missed the girl in the white raincoat waving from the steps of the hotel at El Alamein, had only three hundred yards to plunge the car to a halt below the rusting neon sign.

"Tunis?" the girl called out, belting the man's raincoat around her trim waist, long black hair in a left-bank cut over one shoulder.

"Tunis—Casablanca—Atlantic City," Gregory shouted back, reaching across to the passenger door. She swung a yellow briefcase behind the seat, settling herself among the magazines and newspapers as they roared off. The headlamps picked out a United World cruiser parked under the palms in the entrance to the war cemetery, and involuntarily Gregory winced and floored the accelerator, eyes clamped to the rear mirror until the road was safely empty.

At 90 he slacked off and looked at the girl, abruptly felt a warning signal sound again. She seemed like any demi-beatnik, with a long melancholy face and grey skin, but something about her rhythms, the slack facial tone and dead eyes and mouth, made



him uneasy. Under a flap of the raincoat was a blue-striped gingham skirt, obviously part of a nurse's uniform, out of character like the rest of her strange gear. As she slid the magazines into the dashboard locker he saw the home-made bandage around the left wrist.

She noticed him watching her and flashed a too-bright smile, then made an effort at small talk.

PARIS Vogue, Neue Frankfurter, Tel Aviv Express—you've really been moving." She pulled a pack of Del Monte's from the breast pocket of the coat, fumbled unfamiliarly with a large brass lighter. "First Europe, then Asia, now Africa. You'll run out of continents soon." Hesitating, she volunteered: "Carole Sturgeon. Thanks for the lift."

Gregory nodded, watching the bandage slide around her slim wrist. He wondered which hospital she had sneaked away from. Probably Cairo General, the old-style English uniforms were still worn there. Ten to one the briefcase was packed with some careless salesman's pharmaceutical samples. "Can I ask where you're going? This is the back end of nowhere."

The girl shrugged. "Just following the road. Cairo, Alex, you know—" She added: "I went to see the pyramids." She lay back, rolling slightly against his shoulder. "That was wonderful. They're the oldest things on Earth. Remember their boast: *'Before Abraham, I was'?"*

They hit a dip in the road and Gregory's license swung out under the steering column. The girl peered down and read it. "Do you mind? It's a long ride to Tunis. 'Charles Gregory, M.D.—'" She stopped, repeating the name to herself uncertainly.

Suddenly she remembered. *"Gregory!* Dr. Charles Gregory! Weren't you—Muriel Bortman, the President's daughter, she drowned herself at Key West, you were sentenced—" She broke off, staring nervously at the windshield.

"You've got a long memory," Gregory said quietly. "I didn't think anyone remembered."

"Of course I remember." She spoke in a whisper. "They were mad what they did to you." For the next few minutes she gushed out a long farrago of sympathy, interspersed with disjointed details from her own life. Gregory tried not to listen, clenching the wheel until his knuckles whitened, deliberately forgetting everything as fast as she reminded him.

There was a pause, as he felt it coming, the way it invariably did. "Tell me, doctor, I hope you forgive me asking, but since the

Mental Freedom laws it's difficult to get help, one's got to be so careful—you too, of course . . ." She laughed uneasily. "What I really mean is—"

Her edginess drained power from Gregory. "—you need psychiatric assistance," he cut in, pushing the Jaguar up to 95, eyes swinging to the rear mirror again. The road was dead, palms receding endlessly into the night.

THE girl choked on her cigarette, the stub between her fingers a damp mess. "Well, not me," she said lamely. "A close friend of mine. She really needs help, believe me, doctor. Her whole feeling for life is gone, nothing seems to mean anything to her any more."

Brutally, he said: "Tell her to look at the pyramids."

But the girl missed the irony, said quickly: "Oh, she has. I just left her in Cairo. I promised I'd try to find someone for her." She turned to examine Gregory, put a hand up to her hair. In the blue desert light she reminded him of the madonnas he had seen in the Louvre two days after his release, when he had run from the filthy prison searching for the most beautiful things in the world, the solemn-faced more-than-beautiful 13-year-olds who had posed for Leonardo and the Bellini brothers. "I thought perhaps you might know someone—?"

He gripped himself and shook his head. "I don't. For the last three years I've been out of touch. Anyway, it's against the MF laws. Do you know what would happen if they caught me giving psychiatric treatment?"

Numbly the girl stared ahead at the road. Gregory flipped away his cigarette, pressing down on the accelerator as the last three years crowded back, memories he had hoped to repress on his 10,000-mile drive . . . three years at the prison farm near Marseilles, treating scrofulous farmworkers and sailors in the dispensary, even squeezing in a little illicit depth analysis for the corporal of police who couldn't satisfy his wife, three embittered years to accept that he would never practice again the one craft in which he was fully himself. Trick-cyclist or assauger of discontents, whatever his title, the psychiatrist had now passed into history, joining the necromancers, sorcerers, and other practitioners of the black sciences.

The Mental Freedom legislation enacted ten years earlier by the ultra-conservative UW government had banned the profession outright and enshrined the individual's freedom to be insane if he wanted to, provided he paid the full civil consequences for any infringements of the law. That was the catch, the hidden object

of the MF laws. What had begun as a popular reaction against 'subliminal living' and the uncontrolled extension of techniques of mass manipulation for political and economic ends had quickly developed into a systematic attack on the psychological sciences. Over-permissive courts of law with their condoning of delinquency, pseudo-enlightened penal reformers, 'victims of society', the psychologist and his patient all came under fierce attack. Discharging their self-hate and anxiety onto a convenient scapegoat, the new rulers, and the great majority electing them, outlawed all forms of psychic control, from the innocent market survey to lobotomy. The mentally ill were on their own, spared pity and consideration, made to pay to the hilt for their failings. The sacred cow of the community was the psychotic, free to wander where he wanted, drooling on doorsteps, sleeping on sidewalks, and woe betide anyone who tried to help him.

GREGORY had made that mistake. Escaping to Europe, first home of psychiatry, in the hope of finding a more tolerant climate, he set up a secret clinic in Paris with six other émigré analysts. For five years they worked undetected, until one of Gregory's patients, a tall ungainly girl with a psychogenic stutter, was revealed to be Muriel Bortman, daughter of the UW President-General. The analysis had failed tragically when the clinic was raided; after her death a lavish show trial (making endless play of electric shock apparatus, movies of insulin coma and the testimony of countless paranoids rounded up in the alleyways) had concluded in a three-year sentence.

Now at last he was out, his savings invested in the Jaguar, fleeing Europe and his memories of the prison for the empty highways of North Africa. He didn't want any more trouble.

"I'd like to help," he told the girl. "But the risks are too high. All your friend can do is try to come to terms with herself."

The girl chewed her lip fretfully. "I don't think she can. Thanks, anyway, doctor."

FOR three hours they sat back silently in the speeding car, until the lights of Tobruk came up ahead, the long curve of the harbor.

"It's 2 a.m.," Gregory said. "There's a motel here, I'll pick you up in the morning."

After they had gone to their rooms he sneaked back to the registry, booked himself into a new chalet. He fell asleep as Carole Sturgeon wandered forlornly up and down the verandas, whispering out his name.

AFTER breakfast he came back from the sea, found a big United World cruiser in the court, orderlies carrying a stretcher out to an ambulance.

A tall Libyan police colonel was leaning against the Jaguar, drumming his leather baton on the windscreen.

"Ah, Dr. Gregory. Good morning." He pointed his baton at the ambulance. "A profound tragedy, such a beautiful American girl."

Gregory rooted his feet in the grey sand, with an effort restrained himself from running over to the ambulance and pulling back the sheet. Fortunately the colonel's uniform and the thousands of morning and evening cell inspections kept him safely to attention.

"I'm Gregory, yes." The dust thickened in his throat. "Is she dead?"

The colonel stroked his neck with the baton. "Ear to ear. She must have found an old razor blade in the bathroom. About 3 o'clock this morning." He headed off towards Gregory's chalet, gesturing with the baton. Gregory followed him into the half light, stood tentatively by the bed.

"I was asleep then. The clerk will vouch for that."

"Naturally." The colonel gazed down at Gregory's possessions spread out across the bedcover, idly poked the black medical bag.

"She asked you for assistance, doctor? With her personal problems?"

"Not directly. She hinted at it, though. She sounded a little mixed up."

"Poor child." The colonel lowered his head sympathetically. "Her father is a first secretary at the Cairo Embassy, something of an autocrat. You Americans are very stern with your children, doctor. A firm hand, yes, but understanding costs nothing. Don't you agree? She was frightened of him, escaped from the American Hospital. My task is to provide an explanation for the authorities. If I had an idea of what was really worrying her . . . no doubt you helped her as best you could?"

Gregory shook his head. "I gave her no help at all, colonel. In fact, I refused to discuss her problems altogether." He smiled flatly at the colonel. "I wouldn't make the same mistake twice, would I?"

The colonel studied Gregory thoughtfully. "Sensible of you, doctor. But you surprise me. Surely the members of your profession regard themselves as a special calling, answerable to a higher authority. Are these ideals so easy to cast off?"

"I've had a lot of practice." Gregory began to pack away his things on the bed, bowed to the colonel as he saluted and made his way out into the court.

HALF an hour later he was on the Benghasi road, holding the Jaguar at 100, working off his tension and anger in savage bursts of speed. Free for only ten days, already he had got himself involved again, gone through all the agony of having to refuse help to someone desperately needing it, his hands itching to administer relief to the child but held back by the insane penalties. It wasn't only the lunatic legislation but the people enforcing it who ought to be swept away—Bortman and his fellow oligarchs.

He grimaced at the thought of the cold dead-faced Bortman, addressing the World Senate at Lake Success, arguing for increased penalties for the criminal psychopath. The man had stepped straight out of the 14th Century Inquisition, his bureaucratic puritanism masking two real obsessions: dirt and death. Any sane society would have locked Bortman up for ever, or given him a complete brain-lift. Indirectly Bortman was as responsible for the death of Carole Sturgeon as he would have been had he personally handed the razor blade to her.

AFTER Libya, Tunis. He blazed steadily along the coast road, the sea like a molten mirror on the right, avoiding the big towns where possible. Fortunately they weren't so bad as the European cities, psychotics loitering like stray dogs in the up-town parks, wise enough not to shop-lift or cause trouble, but a petty nuisance on the cafe terraces, knocking on hotel-room doors at all hours of the night.

At Algiers he spent three days at the Hilton, having a new engine fitted to the car, and hunted up Philip Kalundborg, an old Toronto colleague now working in a WHO children's hospital.

Over their third carafe of burgundy Gregory told him about Carole Sturgeon.

"It's absurd, but I feel guilty about her. Suicide is a highly suggestive act, I reminded her of Muriel Bortman's death. Damn it, Philip, I could have given her the sort of general advice any sensisible layman would have offered."

"Dangerous. Of course you were right," Philip assured him. "After the last three years who could argue otherwise?"

Gregory looked out across the terrace at the traffic whirling over the neon-lit cobbles. Beggars sat at their pitches along the sidewalk, whining for sous.

"Philip, you don't know what it's like in Europe now. At least 5% are probably in need of institutional care. Believe me, I'm frightened to go to America. In New York alone they're jumping from the roofs at the rate of ten a day. The world's turning into a madhouse, one half of society

gloating righteously over the torments of the other. Most people don't realize which side of the bars they are. It's easier for you. Here the traditions are different."

Kalundborg nodded. "True. In the villages up-country it's been standard practice for centuries to blind schizophrenics and exhibit them in a cage. Injustice is so widespread that you build up an indiscriminate tolerance to every form."

A TALL dark-bearded youth in faded cotton slacks and rope sandals stepped across the terrace and put his hands on their table. His eyes were sunk deep below his forehead, around his lips the brown staining of narcotic poisoning.

"Christian!" Kalundborg snapped angrily. He shrugged hopelessly at Gregory, then turned to the young man with quiet exasperation. "My dear fellow, this has gone on for too long. I can't help you, there's no point in asking."

The young man nodded patiently. "It's Marie," he explained in a slow roughened voice. "I can't control her. I'm frightened what she may do to the baby. Postnatal withdrawal, you know—"

"Nonsense! I'm not an idiot, Christian. The baby is nearly three. If Marie is a nervous wreck you've made her so. Believe me, I wouldn't help you if I was allowed to. You must cure yourself or you are finished. Already you have chronic barbiturism. Dr. Gregory here will agree with me."

Gregory nodded. The young man stared blackly at Kalundborg, glanced at Gregory and then shambled off through the tables.

Kalundborg filled his glass. "They have it all wrong today. They think our job was to further addiction, not cure it. In their pantheon the father-figure is always benevolent."

"That's invariably been Bortman's line. Psychiatry is ultimately self-indulgent, an encouragement to weakness and lack of will. Admittedly there's no one more single-minded than an obsessional neurotic. Bortman himself is a good example."

AS he entered the tenth-floor bedroom the young man was going through his valise on the bed. For a moment Gregory wondered whether he was a UW spy, perhaps the meeting on the terrace had been an elaborate trap.

"Find what you want?"

Christian finished whipping through the bag, then tossed it irritably onto the floor. He edged restlessly away from Gregory around the bed, his eyes hungrily searching the wardrobe top and lamp brackets.

"Kalundborg was right," Gregory told him quietly. "You're wasting your time."

"The hell with Kalundborg," Christian snarled softly. "He's working the wrong levels. Do you think I'm looking for a jazz heaven, doctor? With a wife and child? I'm not that irresponsible. I took a Master's degree in law at Heidelberg." He wandered off around the room, then stopped to survey Gregory closely.

Gregory began to slide in the drawers. "Well, get back to your jurisprudence. There are enough ills to weigh in this world."

"Doctor, I've made a start. Didn't Kalundborg tell you I sued Bortman for murder?" When Gregory seemed puzzled he explained: "A private civil action, not criminal proceedings. My father killed himself five years ago after Bortman had him thrown out of the Bar Association."

Gregory picked his valise off the floor. "I'm sorry," he said non-committally. "What happened to your suit against Bortman?"

Christian stared out through the window into the dark air. "It was never entered. Some World Bureau investigators saw me after I started to be a nuisance and suggested I leave the States for ever. So I came to Europe to get my degree. I'm on my way back now. I need the barbiturates to stop myself trying to toss a bomb at Bortman."

Suddenly he propelled himself across the room, before Gregory could stop him was out on the balcony, jack-knifed over the edge. Gregory dived after him, kicked away his feet and tried to pull him off the ledge. Christian clung to it, shouting into the darkness, the lights from the cars racing in the damp street below. On the sidewalk people looked up.

CHRISTIAN was doubled up with laughter as they fell back into the room, slumped down on the bed, pointing his finger at Gregory, who was leaning against the wardrobe, gasping in exhausted spasms.

"Big mistake there, doctor. You better get out fast before I tip off the Police Prefect. Stopping a suicide! God, with your record you'd get ten years for that. What a joke!"

Gregory shook him by the shoulders, temper flaring. "Listen, what are you playing at? What do you want?"

Christian pushed Gregory's hands away and lay back weakly. "Help me, doctor. I want to kill Bortman, it's all I think about. If I'm not careful I'll really try. Show me how to forget him." His voice rose desperately. "Damn, I *hated* my father, I was glad when Bortman threw him out."

Gregory eyed him thoughtfully, then went over to the window and bolted out the night.

TWO months later, at the motel outside Casablanca, Gregory finally burned the last of the analysis notes. Christian, clean-shaven and wearing a neat white tropical suit, a neutral tie, watched from the door as the stack of coded entries gutted out in the ashtray, then carried them into the bathroom and flushed them away.

When Christian had loaded his suitcases into the car Gregory said: "One thing before we go. A complete analysis can't be effected in two months, let alone two years. It's something you work at all your life. If you have a relapse, come to me, even if I'm in Tahiti, or Shanghai or Archangel." Gregory paused. "If they ever find out, you know what will happen?" When Christian nodded quietly he sat down in the chair by the writing table, gazing out through the date palms at the huge domed mouth of the transatlantic tunnel a mile away. For a long time he knew he would be unable to relax. In a curious way he felt that the three years at Marseilles had been wasted, that he was starting a suspended sentence of indefinite length. There had been no satisfaction at the successful treatment, perhaps because he had given in to Christian partly for fear of being incriminated in an attack on Bortman.

"With luck, you should be able to live with yourself now. Try to remember that whatever evils Bortman may perpetrate in the future he's really irrelevant to *your* problem. It was the stroke your mother suffered after your father's death that made you realize the guilt you felt subconsciously for hating him, but you conveniently shifted the blame onto Bortman, and by eliminating him you thought you could free yourself. The temptation may occur again."

Christian nodded, standing motionlessly by the doorway. His face had filled out, his eyes were a placid grey. He looked like any well-groomed UW bureaucrat.

GREGORY picked up a newspaper. "I see Bortman is attacking the American Bar Association as a subversive body, probably planning to have it proscribed. If it succeeds it'll be an irreparable blow to civil liberty." He looked up thoughtfully at Christian, who showed no reaction. "Right, let's go. Are you still fixed on getting back to the States?"

"Of course." Christian climbed into the car, then shook Gregory's hand. Gregory had decided to stay in Africa, find a hospital where he could work, and had

given Christian the car. "Marie will wait for me in Algiers until I finish my business."

"What's that?"

Christian pressed the starter, sent a roar of dust and exhaust across the compound.

"I'm going to kill Bortman," he said quietly.

Gregory gripped the windscreen. "You're not serious."

"You cured me, doctor, and give or take the usual margins I'm completely sane, more than I probably ever will be again. Damn few people in this world are now, so that makes the obligation on me to act rationally even greater. Well, every ounce of logic tells me that someone's got to make the effort to get rid of the grim menagerie running things now, and Bortman looks like a pretty good start. I intend to drive up to Lake Success and take a shot at him." He shunted the gear change into second, and added, "Don't try to have me stopped, doctor, because they'll only dig out our long weekend here."

As he started to take his foot off the clutch Gregory shouted: "Christian! You'll never get away with it! They'll catch you anyway!" but the car wrenched forward out of his hand.

Gregory ran through the dust after it, stumbling over half-buried stones, realizing helplessly that when they caught Christian and probed down into the past few months they would soon find the real assassin, an exiled doctor with a three-year grudge.

"Christian!" he yelled, choking on the white ash. "Christian, you're insane!" **THE END**

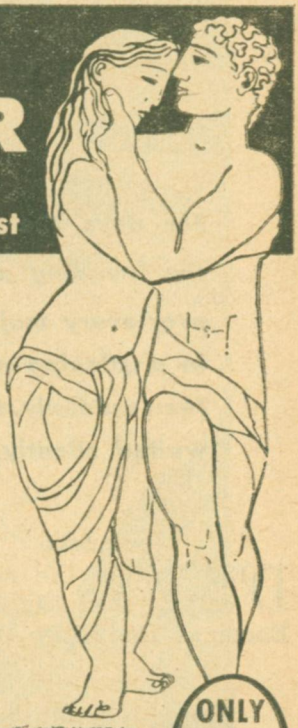
(*Continued from page 9*)

callit the only punishable crime is being polite to your mother-in-law, may be fantasy, of a kind, but it is not science fiction. Science fiction is distinguished by being always a rational extrapolation from known facts or discoveries. Fantasy may deal with impossibilities; science fiction must deal with possibilities and most often with probabilities.

Alien penology is, to my mind, a fascinating aspect of science fiction. Whether it concern itself with, say, the superior penal system on Cygnus IV (instanced by the penalty that time when Flohut deliberately failed to revive his seventh mate from her annual deep freeze)—or with a sobering realization of how much better they will handle things in some world of the remote future, when the best of our present penology will be known to historians as an unbelievable phenomenon of the bad old days before true civilization began—it is a true challenge to the writer.

OVID WAS HER MASTER

He Guided Her From the First Flirtation to the Ultimate Conquest



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PAWN of the BLACK FLEET

By MARK CLIFTON

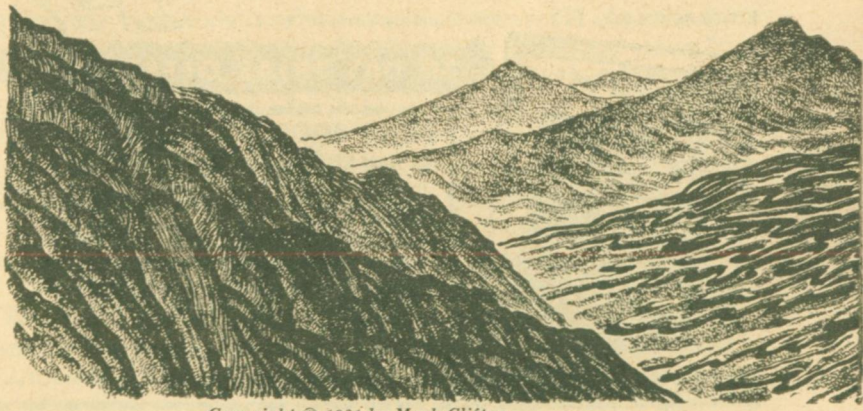
Illustrated by FINLAY

(First of two parts)

For days the grim, threatening spaceships of the invading armada appeared simultaneously over every major city, washing the earth below in a stinking miasma of revolting, evil dread. Then suddenly, the pattern stopped and the world waited silently, fearfully, for the next move.

PROLOGUE

DEEP within the spiralling galaxy, seen edge-on from Earth as the Milky Way, the thought channels summoned the regular members of the Interstellar Galaxy Council into communion.




Virgil
Finlay

"Our detection traps have been sprung."

"Another life form is stirring within the egg of its solar system."

"It has already spread from its mother planet cell to other cells within the egg."

"It may soon crack the shell, break through the insulating distance, spread out among the stars."

"Encountering our own cultures."

"Let us not be premature. It may prove stillborn. Never discover how to leave its egg, and destroy itself by its own growth within."

"But again, it may break through at any time. It need only discover the principle of the interstellar drive. So many have."

"Or, as among some of us, transcend mechanics entirely and learn how to transport or transmute the material, or the illusion of the material, by wish alone."

"To appear among us instantaneously."

"Unprepared for community responsibility."

"We do not know if this new life form is virulent or benign."

"Probably just adolescent."

"Virulent, then."

"Some study in how to protect ourselves from it is indicated. Are we agreed"?

"Yes. Summon the Five."

I SUPPOSE it is the usual survey job?"

"Council seems to think so."

"Best follow regular procedure; go right into the egg; remain undetected until we know the problem. Then appear, or not appear to them, as needed."

"Assuming their adolescence. That means they'll be more concerned with asserting than with learning. We'll need to gain their confidence if we appear."

"Not always easy to gain the confidence of an adolescent. His standards are not necessarily logical."

"But always naive. Rescue him from peril and you are his friend. Ridiculous, but it does work."

"The trick is to find out what he considers peril."

"Threat to his survival, usually."

"But the semantics of the threat varies."

"His art forms usually reveal the semantics of his mores. If they've sprung the detection traps they undoubtedly have electronically distributed art forms."

"Reshape our outer forms into the approved symbols revealed by his art forms, faithfully follow the pattern."

"Yes, that usually works."

"Wait a while. I've been vec-

toring this new disturbance, I seem to recall from the archives of some culture somewhere that there were some recent visitations to that area."

"How could there be? It's strictly violation of Galaxy Council's rules to make unauthorized visits, and we Five are always sent in first to make the initial survey."

"That brings it to mind. It was Vega. The fourth planet of Vega. The one who broke through the barrier before Council estimated they were ready. On their own they did some exploration of that section. The Vegans were still pretty primitive in some aspects."

"Still are."

"Well, they do admittedly still have a malicious streak in their character. Anyhow, they appeared before this lower life form as super-beings, and got quite a kick out of impressing them with magic tricks. Childish behavior, of course, and Council soon put a stop to it."

"But damage could have been done. If it is the same place, we could find a really messed up semantic development."

"Might not be the same one. Hardly see how a life form could have progressed to the science of atomics if it were all messed up with belief in super being magic—the unlogic of unreality behavior."

"Hope it wasn't the same culture. Such a messy problem."

"We'll have to study their art form communication patterns carefully before we reveal ourselves. The meddling Vegans could have complicated the problem."

"Probably wasn't this culture at all. They've got nuclear fission and fusion. They've got interplanetary travel. We know they've got that, and they couldn't have if they hadn't at least some accurate estimations of reality."

"So they must be rational, after all."

The silken sough of sighing whirled infinity.

"Yes, of course. You're right. They're already rational!"

CHAPTER 1

THE scene in my waiting room was usual that June morning when I came, a little late, into my office. It was just after graduation and the benches and chairs were filled with young cybernetics engineers, primed by their college instructors to tell us what was wrong with our Company and how it ought to be operated—for a fabulous salary, of course. In the meantime they were waiting for someone to help them solve the hopeless puzzle of our application form —revised and simplified version

—or to tell them how to spell "Yes" and "No".

"There's an important letter on your desk, Mr. Kennedy," my pretty receptionist called out in a voice louder than necessary as I approached her desk. I may have looked a little startled. Normally, we do not parade the mechanics of operating our Personnel Department before the applicants. And, too, it was usually reserved for Sara, my secretary, to break the news of what would face me that day.

"It's from the Pentagon," the receptionist prattled on loudly, but her eyes were covertly on the applicants. I got the message then. Lucky applicants! to be hired by a Company who has an Executive who gets mail from the Pentagon!

"It's marked Personal, Private, Confidential, Urgent, and . . ."

"Why don't you get yourself a loud speaker, girl," I murmured out of one corner of my mouth as I started to pass her desk.

"Aw, give 'em a thrill, boss," she murmured back through tight lips. "Think of all those years of deadly monotony ahead of them if they do get hired."

"All right, all right!" I cooperated a little loudly, myself. "Now what does that Pentagon want?" I shrugged impatiently.

I really wasn't very impressed. It was probably a poster they wanted pinned on our bulletin board telling our young men to quit their jobs and join Space Navy to see the universe. Which would be stretching it a bit, because we were still planning that supreme effort which would get us out as far as Jupiter's moons.

I walked on through the open door into my secretary's office, which was a buffer zone between me and the crude, rough world outside. Sara was alert and grinning as she sat behind her own desk. She held up a letter knife, handle toward me.

"You may open it all by yourself," she said with her characteristic burlesque of secretarial concern. "With all those red cautions stamped on it, I didn't dare. It's laying right on top of your desk."

I grinned back at her, took the knife and went on into my own office. The letter lay on an otherwise clean and polished surface. I slit the envelope and pulled out a single folded sheet.

It wasn't a poster.

I slid my eyes past the quarter page of protocol, file and reference numbers, to the first paragraph. Half way through the first sentence I sat down in my chair, rather heavily.

Dear Mr. Kennedy:
Pursuant to your application for the position of Staff

Psychologist, specializing in the adaptation of Extraterrestrial Beings to Earth Ecology, your appointment is hereby confirmed.

You are ordered to report to Dr. Frederick Kibbie, Director of the Department of Extraterrestrial Life Research, Space Navy, Pentagon, promptly at 900 22-June-annum.

Inasmuch as this appointment automatically constitutes an Acting Commission in Space Navy (pending personal investigation of your sex practices by F.B.I.) failure to comply with this order will be prima facie evidence of willful disobedience of military orders by a commissioned officer in time of war emergency; an act of high treason; the exact penalties to be later fixed by formal Courts Martial.

Cordially yours, and my personal warmest congratulations.

STAR ADMIRAL HERBERT LYTLE
Space Navy
Personnel Director

I SAT and stared through the slits of venetian blind at the blank wall of our factory production unit across the street while I fumbled with a free hand for a sustaining cigarette.

It was a mistake, of course. Space Navy had got its files mixed up.

In the first place, I was plain Mister, not Doctor.

In the second place, I hadn't made any application to Space Navy for any kind of job.

Third, I wasn't a psychologist, let alone a specialist in the adaptation of Extraterrestrial Beings to Earth Ecology, whatever that might be. Frankly, I didn't see how there could be such a specialist since, so far, we hadn't discovered any Extraterrestrial Beings to adapt. And if we ever did, I wasn't sure who would have to do the adapting—they or us.

Fourth, there wasn't any war emergency, at least not that I'd heard of, and I'd surely have noticed the headlines while I was looking for the funnies.

Fifth, I didn't think it was any of the F.B.I.'s business what I did with my sex life, even if I were going to work for government, which I wasn't.

Sixth, I didn't want a commission in any kind of Navy, Space or Puddle.

Seventh—neither did I wish to be Court-Martialled for high treason by not showing up in precisely forty-eight hours.

In military style, that seemed to have ticked off the reasons why it must be a mistake. I need only communicate these points

to Space Navy to straighten it out. I crushed out my cigarette and reached for the telephone.

Of course I didn't get to Star Admiral Herbert Lytle, who had welcomed me with such warm personal cordiality, but I did get as far as the clerk-yeoman in charge of the department of files handling names beginning in K.

There was a delay, Computer Research expense, while this fellow went to find my file. From three thousand miles away I could visualize his every movement while he searched the files where my dossier ought to be—but wasn't. From my own long experience in Personnel Offices, I could have told him to arrange a conference of the various department heads to have their staffs look under D for Doctor, Ra for Ralph, or in the Star Admiral's bottom desk drawer, his secretary's IN tray, OUT tray, wastebasket; or in possession of a contingent of Shore Patrolmen already on their way to arrest me.

But the clerk-yeoman fooled me. He came back on the wire and started talking, rapidly.

"Now you listen here, Doctor Kennedy," he began severely—although he made me feel at home to note his voice did contain those overtones of hysteria which are a trademark among personnel clerks. "We absolutely cannot consider a stay of time in your case. Your personal inconvenience is of small consequence compared with the needs of the United States Government, Space Navy, and our responsibility to keep the Universe under control. This lack of discipline and proper attitude from you civilians . . ."

"There's-been-a-mistake!" I managed to shout him down.

THERE was complete silence, catatonic shock silence. It was broken by an impatient long distance operator.

"Are you still on the line?" she asked crisply.

"*I* am," I answered patiently. "I suspect the party at the other end may have fainted."

The clerk-yeoman came back on the wire at that point. Now his voice was slow, ominous. He quoted my social security number at me. I checked my wallet, found my card among my status symbols, and admitted to him it was my number. He quoted my middle name, without laughing. I confessed to it. He told me my mother's maiden name. I admitted he had me pegged down, but I made another try.

"You've got the right data," I said. "But the wrong man. Somewhere in these United States there must be a Doctor Kennedy who wants that job, and you've got the files mixed up."

There was a gasp at the other end of the line.

"Then why would we have your file at all?" he asked.

"Don't ask me how you should run your office," I snapped back. "Computer Research, where I work, has had a lot of past dealings with the Pentagon. I've had personal brushes with quite a few high ranking officers in various branches.* Doubtless someone, sometime, has run up a dossier on me, and that's the one you've got. But I'm not a Doctor Kennedy. I'm a plain Mister Kennedy. It makes a difference."

"Certainly it makes a difference." His tone was growing waspish now. "Space Navy does not hand out commissions to any status level below that of Doctor. Star Admiral Lytle has given you a commission. Therefore you must be the correct Doctor Kennedy."

"Then Lytle has made the mistake," I said reasonably.

There was a double gasp this time. "I'm to tell *Star Admiral* Lytle *he* has made a mistake?" he asked. "Oh my God," he groaned. "This is what comes of making civilians into commissioned officers. A Star Admiral does not make mistakes. He cannot make mistakes. The Space Navy does not make mistakes. It cannot make mistakes. You are therefore Doctor Kennedy, *the* correct Doctor Kennedy, and all this is an evasion, a subterfuge you are using to avoid performing your patriotic duty to your country."

He paused for breath, and when his voice came again, it was a full octave lower in tone.

"You will report at the designated time and place of your own free will," he said slowly. "Or you will report in irons. It makes no difference to me."

He hung up.

I hung up, too, slowly. I'd better go see Old Stone Face, Mr. Henry Grenoble, the General Manager. He had also had a lot of past dealings with the Pentagon, and at levels higher than my contacts. Maybe he could help.

CHAPTER 2

OLD Stone Face, at his half acre of desk and surrounded by the rich walnut panels glowing warm in the muted indirect light, was confident that one telephone call would straighten it all out for me. I didn't often ask his help in running my department, to say nothing of my personal affairs, and he seemed glad to demon-

* *What Thin Partitions*, ASTOUNDING, September, 1953; *Sense From Thought Divide*, ASTOUNDING, March, 1955; *How Allied*, ASTOUNDING, March 1957; *Remembrance and Reflection*, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, January, 1958.

strate how much weight he could swing around the Pentagon.

But as the series of frustrating telephone calls wore into the morning, he progressed from high confidence, to exasperation, to self disciplined patience, to bewilderment, to anger, to defeat.

He sat back finally in his overstuffed chair, beetled his heavy brows, and peered at me suspiciously across the desk.

"You *say* you didn't apply for the job. Let's *say* I believe you."

I straightened up from a weary slouch, and raised my hand in the scout oath position.

"Wouldn't have done you any good if you had," he rumbled from somewhere down in the granite facade. "After some of the things you've done to some of those officers, you'd have been turned down like a shot. They all agree with me that the sheer safety of our nation depends on keeping you away from the Pentagon."

"Well then?" I asked.

"So they're all hot to intercede until I mention it is Space Navy. Then they cool down a bit. And when I mention it's the Extraterrestrial Psychology Department they back off and want no part of trying to spring you. Sanfordwaithe says maybe they need you in that Department after all, that no sacrifice is too great for the rest of the Pentagon, if. . . . He didn't say, if what. But something's going on, and they're all mighty skittish about it."

"So what'm I going to do?" I asked.

"Guess you'd better make the trip," he said slowly. "Somehow I think maybe Computer Research wouldn't have to close its doors if you were gone for a day or so. You go see this bird, this Kibbie fellow. You tell him, in person, you're not the man he thought you were. Soon as he sees you, he'll believe it. But it looks like it has to be in person. I can't get even a general or an admiral to so much as call him on the phone."

"So I suppose I'd better go," I admitted. "On expense account?"

He rared up at that.

"It's your personal neck," he roared. "Why should the Company have to pay for saving it?"

"Now, Henry." I looked at him and shook my head sadly.

"Oh, all right. I'll set it up. I was going to, anyway." There was a fleeting crack in the granite of his face.

"I wonder what's going on?" he mused thoughtfully, and put his fingertips together. "There's something they're not telling us. You find out what it is, Ralphie, my boy."

I sprang up out of my chair as if I'd been stung.

"Yeah," I said bitterly, glaring down at him. "And see if we can't get the job of making a computer to solve it, whatever it is. You couldn't possibly pay my expenses just because it's me; just because of all the years I've worked my heart out for dear old Computer Research."

I whirled around angrily and started for the door. His voice, slow and measured, followed me, stopped me.

"We got a Board of Directors," he was saying. "We got Stockholders. If it took one lousy nickle out of their pockets to save you, they'd see you hang without batting an eye. You know that, well as I do. But now, say, suppose it was my best judgement to send you to Washington to drum up some more business . . ."

I turned around and stared at him, incredulous. Far down in the glacial ice blue of his eyes, I thought I detected the faintest possible gleam of affection.

He stood up and came around the desk. He held out his hand. It was a momentous occasion. In all the years, I couldn't remember having shaken hands with him before. Looking back, now, I wonder if he had some premonition, even then, that I wouldn't be back. I hadn't. Even with all my experience in dealing with the military, I was still thinking it was a little error I could clear up with a few words of explanation once I got to the right person.

BY the time I reached Washington and the Pentagon building I had only thirty-seven hours to find the right department, which was shaving it pretty fine.

Even Space Navy, after another long hassle of my trying to tell them I wasn't Doctor Kennedy, and they stubbornly maintaining that I was; and the still longer procedures of signing me in and clearing me for low level security, weren't sure they ought to let me in on the secret of how to find Dr. Frederick Kibbie.

But they were damned sure they would Courts-Martial me if I didn't find him. Something was, indeed, going on.

SECURITY prevents me from Revealing The Word of how to find the Department of Extra-terrestrial Life Research in the Pentagon. Not that the top hierarchy of Russia doesn't know where it is down to the square inch, but John Q. Public, who pays the bills, mustn't be told.

And there are reasons.

Take away the trappings of Security Regulations, and our special qualifications to meet them, and what have we got left to mark us as superior to the

common herd? It's a status symbol, pure and simple, and the gradations from Confidential on up to Q.S. have nothing whatever to do with enemy spies—they merely mark the status relationship of the elect within the select. And, after this passage of events I am about to relate, since I am now one of the, THE, Q.S., and have the awesome weight of knowing things that even—well, I mustn't reveal who isn't allowed to know what I know—I guess that makes me pretty hot. Sometimes even Sara (yes, I had to send for her) begins to show signs of going Government in her attitude toward me.

But once inside the department door, it was pretty much the same as any other suite of offices. There was first an anteroom where a narrow eyed and suspicious young man examined the sheaf of credentials Space Navy Personnel had prepared for me while running me through their dehydrated equivalent of six weeks in boot camp. Reluctantly, he passed me on to the next anteroom where a secretary's secretary confirmed that I had an appointment. In the next room the Secretary, himself, pretended he'd never heard of me, and we had it all to go through again. Of course I insisted to each one of them that a mistake had been made, that I was the wrong man, that I should be turned away and not allowed to see Dr. Kibbie, and that may have hurried the process of letting me through.

Against my will, I liked Dr. Kibbie as soon as I stepped inside his office. He was rushed, but he was cordial. It was evident he had a thousand things on his mind, but he was willing to give me that thousandth part of his mind which was my rightful share.

He was about twenty years older than I, around fifty-eight to sixty, I'd say. I'm tall and thin, he was short and round. I'm dark haired and can still wear it in the young blade fashion of the day; he was shiny bald with a grey fringe around the sides and back. I'm inclined to be a little dour at times, so they tell me; he was as phoney happy and bouncy as a marriage counselor —and, at once, I suspected he was about as useful.

He had that open enthusiasm, that frank revealment of the superior con-man as he told me all about his department and its four hundred employees.

Four hundred employees to do research on life forms which hadn't yet been discovered. I, personally, wouldn't have known what to do with them all, but this was government. They were all working like little beavers on fancy charts and graphs, statistics and analyses—covering

something which doesn't exist—which is about par for government which models its approach to reality from the academic.

Mainly because I couldn't find a pause to interrupt, I let him finish the quick once over of his department, since it was apparent he liked to talk about all the wonderful things they were thinking of doing. Then I dropped my bomb.

I wasn't the right man for the job—whatever it might be!

Apparently that thousandth part of his mind he was giving me wasn't enough for him to grasp that I meant I was the wrong Kennedy.

"NOW, now, now, Doctor!" he chattered absently, hurriedly. "We haven't time for the usual polite self-deprecations. All very commendable, of course. Shows you had the proper training. Gives me confidence in you. Understand your reluctance to succeed where the rest of us have failed. Natural teamwork spirit. Commendable, most commendable. Ah yes, better to fail and keep the approval of your fellow scientists than to succeed and make enemies of them.

"Proper attitude. Most acceptable. Proud to have you on my team, Dr. Kennedy. Knew you were just the man. Knew that right away."

I leaned my elbow on his desk and braced my head with my hand. Too late, I realized what my procedure should have been. I should have told him I was eager for the job, just had to have it. That would have made him judiciously consider and reject me. I should have done it with Space Navy. Then they'd have been sure to find some reason why I couldn't make the grade.

". . . proper humility, modesty," Kibbie was still rambling along. He whirled around and shook an admonitory finger at me, which made me lift my head again. "But that's all out now. For the duration. Can't afford to fail this time. Not even if the other scientists get annoyed with you for admitting that you know whatever it is you know. In a war emergency, individuals have to rise to self-sacrifice. Martyrdom!"

He paused to beam upon me proudly.

"What war emergency?" I was finally able to get down to the question.

"Why—ah—" he looked startled, and then came to a quick recapitulation of my state of ignorance. For a moment I thought the added burden might be too much for him, but he shouldered it manfully. He got up and took short, rapid steps over to the window where he gazed at the impressive row of shining white

government buildings stretching to the horizon. There was a silence while he collected his thoughts. Apparently he decided I could take the full brunt of it, all at once.

"We're going out to Jupiter's moons!" He made the announcement portentous.

"Of course," I said, indifferently. "So?"

His face took on a hurt expression.

"You already know that?" he asked, disappointed.

"It's been in all the papers for days, weeks."

"Those Congressmen!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Always sucking up to news reporters, hoping they'll get their names in the papers or even mentioned on TV."

"But anybody could have figured it out," I consoled him. "We've already got contingents on Mars and Venus. We're not equipped to start mining the Asteroid belt just yet. The state of the art won't permit landing on Jupiter, itself. Naturally, its moons would be next."

"I suppose you're right," he agreed ruefully. "Not really much of a secret."

"But what has that got to do with a war emergency?" I asked curiously.

"Don't you see?" he admonished me, and shook his finger at me again. "We don't know much about those moons. What if there is some kind of life form there? What if it is technically advanced? What if it is hostile? What if we weren't prepared? So —a war emergency!"

"Oh come now!" I made no secret of my disgust. "That's going pretty extreme, even if you had a military mind—which you haven't."

HE looked at me piercingly, and then his eyes began to twinkle.

"Shrewd!" he congratulated me. "Very shrewd. Oh I knew you were the right man for me. Doesn't take you in for a minute. Took in that Congressional Committee without a murmur of doubt. Secret session of course. Very, very hush-hush. I asked for four billion. They gave me only two billion, so, later when it can be told, they can show the voters how economy minded they were. Paid me two billion dollars, well, for running my department, of course, for the status satisfaction of being in on something nobody else knows. In open session they wouldn't have given me a dime."

"So the war emergency is just a con," I said.

He paced the floor for a moment more. His face was serious, drawn in worry.

"No," he said, at last. "It's real." He came across the room

to stand at my elbow. "So now I'll tell you the real reason. The one known to the top men here in the Pentagon. The one we couldn't tell Congress because they're such blabbermouths, and so we had to con them. Mustn't leak this to the reporters, son," he began in a warning. "Public mustn't know, mustn't find out."

"Why?" I asked.

He drew a quick breath.

"Oh my! Oh my! You really are from the Outside! Have to do something about that Outside attitude, right away. You're in government now. First rule of government of the people, by the people, for the people: Never tell the people!"

He came over and stood in front of me. He peered at me through narrowed eyes. Apparently he was waiting for a loyalty oath. I raised my fingers in scout's honor. It seemed to satisfy him.

"The Black Fleet has struck four times!" he whispered hoarsely.

"The WHAT?" I shouted.

"Sh-h-h!" he put his fingers to his lips hurriedly, and looked around the room.

"The what?" I asked, more normally.

"The Black Fleet."

"What the hell is the Black Fleet?"

He snapped his fingers in delight.

"Good! Oh, good! Then that news hasn't leaked yet. Sometimes those generals and admirals are as anxious to get their names in the paper as a Congressman." He was as delighted as a child successfully playing button-button.

"Tell you all about it," he said.

He came back and settled down at his desk.

"Best if we start at the beginning," he said. "We'll review the charts and analyses of all my departments on it. You're going to need to know every detail. Because, as the expert in Extraterrestrial Psychology, that's your job.

"To interpret what it all means.

"To find out who they are.

"What they are.

"What they're up to."

I waited, for he had spaced each item with a long impressive pause, and wasn't finished.

"And how we can drive them off before the people find out that Earth has been invaded!"

CHAPTER 3

THE announcement proved more impressive than the evidence.

Dr. Kibbie's staff tried. He combined introduction of his various department heads with a full dress presentation of their material; but since neither then

nor later did I have more than the most casual relations with the men, their names remained only names.

This half dozen or so assorted names brought in their charts and graphs, and charts and graphs explaining their charts and graphs. They produced maps and statistics and analyses, and analyses of maps and statistics and analyses. As the office walls, tables, desks, and even the floor became littered with these impressive evidences of loving labor, I began to get the feeling I was in a room of mirrors, where images of images were being repeated to infinity.

One such chart I remember as being a prototype of most. It was the pride and joy of Dr. Er-Ah. Meticulously, beautifully drafted, it covered an entire work table. He went to some pains to assure me that this was only the working copy, that the master remained locked in their vault except at times it was mandatory to make further entries upon it, after such entries had been charted and approved on the working copy.

The purple vertical lines represented the hours. The red vertical lines represented the minutes. If I cared to verify the chart's accuracy, I would find there were always fifty-nine red lines in between the bolder purple lines. The still bolder black horizontal line represented the actual passage of time through the minutes and hours. The dotted pencil line, stretching out beyond the black horizontal, represented the *prediction* of time passage through the minutes and hours of the future.

WITH almost uncanny accuracy, Dr. Er-Ah could predict that when so many minutes in the future had passed, a given number of hours would also have passed! It was now eleven o'clock. When sixty more minutes had passed, his chart revealed that there was strong probability that it would be twelve o'clock!

Now I began to get the idea how four hundred people could be kept busy, but I was not to wool-gather about it, for he was not finished.

His clerks would fill in the bold black line, as each minute passed, to check the accuracy of his prediction. When this had been properly checked and verified and authorized, the master copy could be taken out of the vault and brought up to date with the working copy. Of course I appreciated that while he had the working copy tied up in here for review, his department was being greatly handicapped, and would probably have to work overtime to catch up the delay in their work.

HE reached his moment of triumph when I inquired what this had to do with extra-terrestrial psychology.

"When, and if, another life form is discovered," Dr. Er-Ah instructed gravely, "the instant will be marked on this chart, and finally on the master chart in the vault, as a permanent record for all posterity." As one of the most momentous events in all mankind's history, I could appreciate the necessity for absolute accuracy when I realized that historians of the future for thousands of years, tens and hundreds of thousands of years, must refer back to this historic chart for an absolute fix.

The dedicated vision, which makes some few scientists great, shone from his visage.

Nor was Dr. Kibbie far behind in exaltation. Here, surrounded by the months of work which had gone into this display, each piece of which made valiant effort to equal the time chart in workmanship and usefulness, the man came into his own. Now I began to realize why a Congressional Committee had paid out two billion dollars. They are not the only ones to assume that charts and graphs must mean something.

Even more, I appreciated Dr. Kibbie's motive in keeping four hundred people busy accomplishing absolutely nothing. The status of a government official depends entirely upon his title and the number of people he supervises. It has nothing whatever to do with what he accomplishes, or whether anything at all is ever accomplished—the academic transferred to the government.

And Dr. Kibbie was determined to become a most important man.

I found myself wanting to believe in all this impressive work—a work of which I now, somehow, had become a part. Kibbie had that quality about him. There was no doubt now that he was a first class con-man, active where the pickings are richest. He had already conned Congress out of two billion for nothing, and even granting the traditional Congressional habit of shoveling out tax millions for wild-haired schemes while withholding pennies from sound and sorely needed projects, it was still quite a con feat. I suspected it was only a beginning.

I wanted to believe, to become a True Believer like the rest of his department. But obviously, I must still be thinking as an Outsider; for, boiled down to essentials, all the charts and graphs and analyses added up to little more than some of the vaguer flying saucer reports.

IN the central Ural Mountains of Russia, some goat herders

had seen a fleet of black flying saucers hovering overhead. A red ray had licked down and melted away one of the peaks to make it run like a river. That was the sum and substance.

Some of their kids had brought the hallucination of their ignorant parents to the district school where it could be exposed by the analysis of dialectic materialism. Ever alert to the evil machinations of the Wall Street Overlords, even while the teachers felt it best to soothe and explain away the superstition for their students, they, nonetheless, forwarded the information through the proper channels to the Propaganda Ministry. Possibly there was hope of reminding the peace-loving people of Russia of their danger by this latest invasion of the Capitalist Royalists and their Boot Licking Lackeys.

The Propaganda Ministry sent out some of its best propagandists to the Urals, and among them, of course, was one of our own C.I.A. operatives.

But when they got there, the parents had been convinced by their more enlightened children that either they hadn't seen what they knew they had seen, or had better keep their mouths shut about it. The reports and evidence were too evasive, tenuous and vague, even for Kremlin purposes, and nothing more would have been heard of it—except that the C.I.A. operative felt it necessary to include a summary in his report to substantiate his expense account. He did see fit to add a footnote, a rather extensive footnote, to provide our own propagandists with whatever color background they might find useful.

As for example, although this was now fourth generation under Communism's dialectic materialism, the backward peasants—er, enlightened Comrade-Workers—had been unable to separate natural from supernatural. With the excellent police training he had received here in the United States, he had succeeded in inciting them into committing the crime they had not intended to commit. Because he succeeded in convincing them he was one of them at heart, they confessed to him, in secret, how they had felt toward the phenomenon. They had dwelt heavily upon the semantics of Evil, as a palpable force, which emanated from the Black Fleet. Fear and hatred of the Fleet had swept over them, appalled and frozen them in their tracks, even before the emission of the red ray.

Perhaps it was this hint of the supernatural seeping through which made the Russian propagandists feel more was to be lost than gained through making something of it all and which

caused them to hush up the whole thing. But maybe ours could find it useful to show that you can't educate primeval superstition out of man through appeals to logic and reason—or however sentimentally and culturally acceptable our own propagandists might want to phrase it.

Whether there actually had been a Black Fleet and a red ray, to say nothing of its having been a materialization of the forces of Evil, was not for the C.I.A. man to say. He, he said, reported only facts. The sense of Evil was one of those facts. As for the rest, he had truly seen a level mountain table of hardened lava with octopus tentacles running down adjacent ravines.

THERE seemed to be a discrepancy in time. Where a chance of influencing world opinion is concerned, the Russian government can move fast. They are indifferent only to the welfare of their own citizens, and it is only there that months and years of bureaucratic red-tape intervene between the need for a pair of shoes and getting them. The Propaganda Ministry had moved fast. The peasants claimed a sharply pointed mountain peak had stood there only one week before. But the lava was quite cold and hard, and couldn't have lowered its temperature to that of the surrounding untouched rock in so short a time. Since no government office maintained an accurate time chart in that area; or at least no Dr. Kibbie trained scientist of the calibre of Dr. Er-Ah maintained one, the time it had happened, if it had happened at all, was inconclusive.

I, personally, thought "inconclusive" was just the word to describe the whole thing.

This was the most detailed and authentic of the reports. As to actual details, it seemed to me the C.I.A. man must be bucking for a transfer to writing propaganda instead of collecting facts. I was prepared for the remaining reports to be even more vague and inconclusive. They were.

There was one from the interior of the Sahara Desert, to wind up as gossip in an Oasis Bazaar; but since the tribesmen had departed with their caravan and no one knew who they were by the time our C.I.A. man got onto it (his Arabic was too weak and the palm wine too strong) there was no way of checking the facts.

Another came from deep in the Andes, reported by some mountain Indians; but since this was South America which knew better than to cause any trouble for the United States we had no C.I.A. operative on the spot. The report had filtered down to the coast, and was picked up there

by some government operatives masquerading as Maritime Union sailors. In due course it, too, had filtered into the Department of Extraterrestrial Psychology because it seemed to be something about possible visitors from outer space. Even this department didn't not consider it iron clad evidence.

The fourth report came from some all but deserted South Sea Island; brought in to Tahiti by some itinerate Polynesian fishermen who had somehow escaped from Tourist Entertainment Service, and were therefore low characters not to be trusted.

I did have to credit the significance of an almost identical rumor coming from widely separated sources, all at about the same time, and two of them not reported by C.I.A. operatives, and therefore not necessarily planned to please the boss, the press, or to increase world tensions and protect their jobs.

A Fleet of black, disc shaped Things hovering overhead. A red ray licks down and destroys something, a mountain peak, a sweep of sand dunes, a mountain peak again, a deserted island. And the horror, the stunning and freezing horror of Evil, malignant Evil. That, most of all.

Even granting that the reports had, by the time I saw them, already been manipulated by the hands of analysts and statisticians, the similarities caught me.

I was far from sure, however, that there was sufficient meat for me to carry out my assignment —how to say who they were, what they were, what they were up to.

And how we could drive them away without anybody learning about it.

BY mid-afternoon the various Dr. Er-Ah's carted away their treasured evidence and I was left once more, with Dr. Kibbie for whose ears alone my valuable judgement was reserved.

He leaned forward over his desk and looked at me alertly, brightly, hopefully, expectantly. I didn't have the heart to disappoint him.

"Interesting," I breathed. "Ve-e-ery interesting! But without further corroborative studies, sampling statistics, and analyses of your analyses. . . ." I trailed off vaguely in the approved scientific manner.

He beamed in satisfaction.

"I'll need an office," I said.

"Already set aside for you," he answered. "I'll show it to you before you leave for the hotel where we've reserved a suite for you. That way you can come right to work in the morning without the delay of coming to me, first. I'm really quite busy, and time, time is precious."

"I'll need a staff."

"Already requisitioned from the government employee pool," he said promptly, and anticipated my approval of his efficiency in providing for all my needs. I nodded appreciatively. "Your staff is limited to three people as a start," he added apologetically. "That's standard procedure."

"Enough to start with," I conceded; and then decided that so long as I seemed to have no choice about becoming a government official, I might as well be an important one—by their standards. And the more important I became, the more important he would become, since he was my boss. "But only as a start," I continued. "The work I foresee may well require two or three hundred. Maybe more."

"That's the ticket!" he exclaimed. "Think big! Oh I can see we have the right man. I'll confess I've been a little disappointed in some of my Division Heads. Good scientists all. The Best. But perhaps, administratively, their vision has been limited."

I decided to see just where that limit might be.

"Before I'm through," I warned. "My needs may run into thousands of people."

I thought of Old Stone Face. Computer Research already seemed far away, a tiny speck down there somewhere from these Olympian Heights. Of course I'd have to call him, let him know I'd turned out to be the right man after all. I might even throw him a little business to clear him with his Board of Directors and Stockholders—grubby little businessmen, but the source of tax monies.

"And equipment," I continued. "I may need some specially designed computers—in fact I may even need a Brain."

He looked thoughtful, cautious.

"There's only two billion available, at present," he warned me. "And Congress is not in session just now."

"I know a company which might be able to stay somewhere within that figure," I said.

"Don't tell me the name," he said hurriedly. "Must remember you're an important governmental official now (or will be important when you've hired all those people and spent all that money). You have a responsibility to the tax-payers not to use anything you have learned outside of government service. Where to get the proper computer would be that kind of misuse of special knowledge."

He shoved a memo pad toward me.

"Here," he said. "Don't trust your memory. You'll have too many things on your mind to remember such a detail. Jot the name down on a pad. Just for

your own use if the need ever arises. Press hard, so my lab boys won't have too much trouble in bringing up the impressions from the pages below the one you tear off."

He beamed at me, as if to approve that I was already learning, fast, how to be a government man.

CHAPTER 4

NATURALLY I had no choice in selecting my staff personnel. It was well I hadn't, for I was to learn that knowing the ropes of red tape and protocol was far more important than any possible skill or efficiency learned on the Outside.

When I arrived the following morning at the departmental suite which had been set aside for me, temporary quarters until we outgrew the space, I found the door had already been lettered:

BUREAU OF
EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE
RESEARCH
DIVISION OF
EXTRATERRESTRIAL
PSYCHOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF
EXTRATERRESTRIAL
VOCATIONAL RESEARCH
DIRECTOR
Dr. Ralph Kennedy

Apparently my real mission was to be concealed. Ostensibly my job was to train extraterrestrials vocationally and put them to work in self respecting employment—if we ever did discover any.

My real mission, of course, was to drive them away before anybody found out they'd been here; but I correctly suspected my staff would not know why they were really hired and what they were really supposed to help me do.

When I opened the door, I found that staff already busy at work. It consisted of a middle aged woman and two reasonably young men.

Their desks were already piled high with file folders, yard long printed forms with such ample blank spaces that it would take many hours to fill them out, and thick sheaves of bound reports. Some extra desks in the big, barn-like work room had imposing charts, graphs and star maps in varicolored inks spread over them. It was a beehive of activity and gave the quick illusion of many, many more staff members who just happened to be away from their desks on important missions or in vital conferences at the time.

I suddenly realized that not only was the status of an official determined by how many people he commanded; but this, in turn, reflected upon the status of those

working for him, as well. My staff of only three must have been feeling their unimportance keenly.

No one looked up when I entered the door. They were much too busy. Since I hadn't yet begun to plan the kind of work to keep them busy, even with the excellent examples I'd seen the day before, I marveled at their skill in looking so frantically overworked so soon. But then, I was still thinking as an industry man, and, instead, I must immediately requisition some more help to lift the burden from their overworked backs.

THERE was a long, high counter between me and the area where they sat. Standard equipment where common citizens could stand and wait to be noticed. At one end was a gate for entrance into the sanctuary—with an angry notice on it telling me what Federal Law I would break and how many years penal servitude I'd risk if I entered without permission.

I tried the gate and found it locked.

I went and stood patiently at the counter.

When I didn't go away, the woman finally lifted her head and looked at me with exasperation; then pointedly returned her eyes to her work.

Central Personnel had filled my requirements without prejudice. They had given me thoroughly typical Civil Service Clerks.

"Who takes care of the cash customers?" I asked conversationally, after I'd stood another two minutes.

The woman lifted her head and stared at me with a level, intimidating gaze. Her face was thin and narrow; with sharp, neurotic lines running from the sides of her nose up to the corners of her piercing eyes. She could well have posed for a painting: Government Career Woman after Thirty Years.

"You will not be able to see Dr. Kennedy today," she said firmly. "He is much too busy."

"I'm Kennedy," I said mildly. "I'd just like to come through the gate so I can go to my office."

THE two male heads lifted them and looked me over. The woman got up and stalked over to release the catch.

"*Doctor* Kennedy," she acknowledged and at the same time reproved me for not using my title. "You have a private entrance to your office farther down the hall. The one marked 'No admittance'."

"But the penalty printed below the no admittance is so severe," I said, "I didn't dare use the door. I noticed it yesterday, when I looked over the joint."

"Surveyed the premises," the hornrimmed young man murmured with disgusted asperity. I looked at him as I walked through the open gate.

"Who are you?" I asked him.

It seemed a natural question at the time, but the woman's face flamed red, and she glared at me. Hornrims looked at her with a certain glint of malicious mischief. Apparently I had tried to reverse their status by asking his name first. The woman quickly repaired the ordained order of the cosmos.

"I am Shirley Chase," she said quickly, before he could answer. "Miss Shirley Chase. I am Executive Clerical Administrator of the Department of Extraterrestrial Vocational Research, Division of Extraterrestrial Psychology, Bureau of Extraterrestrial Life Research!" Then she turned toward Hornrims.

"This is Doctor Gerald Gaffey, A.B., B.S., M.A., M.S., PhD., Abstract Vocational Research Director of the Department of Extraterrestrial, etc., etc., etc. In research matters he may answer directly to you if and when required. In Departmental routine matters, he is under my jurisdiction."

Dr. Gerald Gaffey nodded coolly at a point somewhere above my head. I tried the friendly approach.

"H-m-m," I said. "Research into vocational guidance for extraterrestrials, huh? You must have held some powerful jobs in industry to qualify for that!"

"I am a Harvard man," he answered frigidly.

I realized I simply must overcome my provincial West Coast attitude of wanting to see what a man had done in life before I measured his worth.

"Well," I said judiciously. "That's even better, isn't it."

Apparently the introductions were over. Miss Chase indicated the corridor leading from the work room to my office, as if to tell me I might enter that way—this time.

"I haven't met the remainder of my staff," I said, and looked at the young man over in the corner.

"Oh?" Miss Chase looked at me questioningly, and smiled thinly. She had just come to the realization that I had absolutely no sense of protocol or etiquette whatever, and wasn't deliberately offensive. "That's only an N-462."

N-462 stared at me with startled eyes, and didn't nod.

"And what do you do here?" I asked.

His surprise seemed blended with horror and he looked uncertainly toward Miss Chase, as if seeking a protector.

"He is an N-462," she repeated.

I gathered he was too far down the ladder of protocol to speak to me directly, and that if I had been an experienced government career man I'd have known what an N-462 does. I let it pass.

I WALKED on down the hallway to my office, went in, and sat down behind my desk. The top of it was clear. There were no mountains of work piled upon it to make me look frantically indispensable to the continuance of the nation.

It told me, plainly, I was expected to build up my own fortress.

I had met my staff. I thought lonesomely, longingly of my staff back at Computer Research; a staff really busy doing necessary things, and at the same time dedicated to keeping my fortress intact for me. Apparently I did not yet have a private secretary. Apparently an official was permitted to choose his own.

Yes, of course, that would be it. And particularly for a bachelor. To make it easier for the F.B.I. to run its customary check on his sex practices. I would send for Sara.

I wondered which of my present staff was an undercover agent. Probably Miss Shirley Chase. Her breeding lines were unmistakably Mid-West out of New England, the classic picture of self appointed conscience for all mankind. I would have to watch my step around Shirley.

And thereby measured the real depth of my ignorance.

For eventually it turned out to be N-462; who wasn't really an N-462 at all. The gaffes that I had already pulled had sown the seeds of doubt in his mind about me. With that slow, patient, inexorable thoroughness of the truly great undercover man, he was to prove me only a Mister Ralph Kennedy, not the Doctor Kennedy at all.

An impostor!

CHAPTER 5

OF COURSE I was not naive enough to think that all the men around Washington played the national con-game of using the tax-payers as their own private herd of domestic animals with the same insouciant delight as Dr. Kibbie. His was the true gambler's attitude; that it is more fun to play for high stakes than for low, and not without status value among those who know the game; that sometimes you win, sometimes you lose; but basically you play just because there isn't anything else to do.

Nor were all others of the Dr. Gerald Gaffee stripe; academic theoreticians who had read a few books written vaguely about political science, listened to a few hours of even more vague

professorial comments about it; and thought this was what governing a nation was all about.

Nor were the remaining all of that arrested mental development at the level of the twelve year old boy which manifests itself as the military mind. Most of my scraps with representatives of the Pentagon in the past were really seated in my disgust, tinged perhaps with a touch of horror, that grown men not only could allow their mental and spiritual development to be arrested at that juvenile age of running in gangs, hero worshipping, losing one's identity in marching conformity, hiding immature fears and weaknesses behind the bravado of brass and braid; but actually advocated this pitiful deformity as a way of life for others; and, indeed, brought all the weight and power of their massive gang disapproval to bear upon any who wished to outgrow such juvenile levels of value.

I knew there were still others. Not many, of these, for there was not room for many; and the sheer ferocity at this level kept their numbers from multiplying. To these Power was an end in itself, a compulsion, an addiction. Perhaps their need and fright was greatest of all, for only by acquisition of Power could they still their doubts that they were any different from the common domesticated herds of people. Only by applying and directing the aims of Power could they insure their own security. It had always been. It did not matter what the surface system of government was called in the fad notions of the time. There are those who milk, and those born to be milked.

Perhaps, in the still hours of the night, such men needed defense against an even greater enemy—their own intelligence. For that terrifying question hovered eternally just beyond recognition by their conscious minds, constantly threatened to verbalize itself in an unguarded moment: "What is the purpose of it all? What if there be no more purpose to human existence than to grass, or stone, or louse? How, then, could my ego ascend over others?"

I HAD not met such men. I did not expect to meet them. One doesn't. I might meet their boys, sometime—Congressmen, Senators, various administrators. Yes, I would surely meet their boys if I became any kind of threat to their husbandry.

There didn't seem to be much danger of that. Even in this unbelievable fantasy of official Washington, where everybody was PooBah, I couldn't seem to get into the spirit of things. I was nobody—and I knew it.

And yet . . .

I had seen how such men and their boys behaved when their counterparts over in Russia had tried to rustle some of their cattle from the pastures, or even scheme to highjack the lot of them—those fat, meaty cattle. I had seen what happened to those who got in the middle of this little private war over who shall milk them.

Now if there were . . . aw, ridiculous, of course . . . but, say, if there actually were beings who came from the stars; and if there were intentions of taking over the whole pasture and all the cattle in it.

Well!

I am Dr. Ralph Kennedy, Director of the Department of Extraterrestrial Vocational Research, Division of Extraterrestrial Psychology, Bureau of Extraterrestrial Life Research—with the secret mission of keeping them from doing it.

Right there in the middle.

CHAPTER 6

THESE two little pieces of the jig-saw puzzle came to my attention much later; too late to be of any use. Although, in all honesty, even had I known these happenings in the Sheridan House, they would have carried no meaning to me. Only through hindsight would I have seen any connection between the reactions of a bellhop and The Black Fleet with the Red Ray. Later, the boys told me of their decision made in room 842, but had I actually been listening I doubt my reaction would have been much different from that of the bellhop.

Chronologically, however, the puzzle pieces fit in here.

Sheridan House, New York, was a moderately fashionable hotel on 64th Street, just off Central Park. The Night Manager, a shade more fashionable than even the hotel, was pleased with the evening. All was serene, and he was at his best in Serenity.

It was unfortunate that the bellhop had to mar the serenity. It was unfortunate that a hotel had to have bellhops.

In the late, late evening this bellhop shuffled across the lobby from the elevator and showed a pronounced list in his walk. There was a stringent rule that bellhops not drink on the job. The Night Manager pursed his lips ominously, and waited behind his hotel desk.

The bellhop leaned forward in his walk and made groping movements with his hands. There were large drops of sweat on his forehead, and his eyes protruded like those of a deep sea fish suddenly hauled to the surface. When he reached the desk, he leaned his stomach against it

and released his breath in a long, slow, fizzing sound.

"Jeez . . ." he breathed heavily.

The Night Manager stiffened further at this breach of manners, but he withheld reproof in the shocked realization that there was no alcohol in the generous waft of breath which came across the desk.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded. But his curiosity somewhat softened the intended tone of discipline.

The bellhop gulped and swallowed another mouthful of air.

"I—I better go home now."

The Night Manager's right eyebrow arched in skepticism. This was more familiar ground. Bellhops were always finding some reason why they couldn't finish out their shifts on slow, tipless nights.

"Must be my eyes, or my stomach," the bellhop whispered, awe-stricken. "I don't feel so good. Could I—uh—sit down somewhere?"

The Night Manager nodded toward his own office. He followed the bellhop and watched him collapse into a chair.

"What's the story this time?" he asked, and knew that curiosity had become ascendant to disbelief.

THE story came out in breathless spurts. A bar service call from 842. One Manhattan, one Old Fashioned. He had knocked on the door, quietly because it was getting late. He must have heard the command to enter. Must have heard it, although he couldn't remember hearing it. Anyway he entered. He didn't enter no rooms unless he was asked. Musta been asked.

"All right. All right!" the Night Manager prompted.

"One guy was sitting on the edge of the bed. Musta been a special bed, like some guests have to have, because it didn't sag none. I put the tray of drinks down on the table without looking around for anybody else. I'm just waitin' for my tip, see, and this guy's actin' like he don't know why I'm hangin' around for. You know the old cheapie routine, and then—It couldn't be my stomach, could it?" the bellhop broke off to plead.

"Never mind! We can do without your stomach."

"The bathroom door opens. I'm expectin' to see a dame. But this thing comes out."

"What thing?"

"This purple thing. Sort of a purple light in the shape of a whirlwind, or maybe water going down the drain."

"Then you have been drinking after all," the Night Manager exclaimed in disgust.

"Honest, Mr. Thistlewaithe. That's what it looked like. A pur-

ple whirlwind. It came floating across the room toward me and turned into about four other guys. Just like that! So help me! Next thing I know, it's only one other guy. But it's like a picture that's been exposed four times without moving only a little. One guy, only I could count him four times if you know what I mean."

"I don't. And I don't think you do."

"That's when I got outa there. He can have his lousy tip. Me, I'm sick at my stomach. I'm seein' things. Maybe it's my stomach, I think. Maybe it's . . ."

Mr. Thistlewaithe breathed a sigh of relief. Nothing to spoil his record of competency on his nightly report to top management. This was elementary; purely elementary to any student of psychology, and every hotel employee is at least that.

He faced the bellhop with a glow of anticipation. Now he could demonstrate why the bellhop was only a bellhop, while he was a Night Manager.

Reaching far back into the unfortunate lad's Freudian infancy, Mr. Thistlewaithe took off with a running start, sprinted through a sophomore psychology class at Columbia, soared through a pocketbook course in hallucination, spread his own theories concerning double brain lobe nonsynchronization and/or nerve synapses breaking circuit and instantaneously reclosing to create illusion of superimposure of memory upon memory; came down to earth again with a few digs about the effects of alcohol upon kidneys creating swimming sensations before the eyes; and broke the running record with dissertation on the shooting lights effects of cirrhosis of the liver.

A terrible thought struck him just as he breasted the finish line, and his voice trailed off. For although Mr. Thistlewaithe might be an accomplished avocationist in psychology, he was primarily a Night Manager. And it is his business to know the hotel floor plan, floor by floor; to know which rooms are occupied and which are not. And he was pretty sure that room 842 was empty. He rushed out of his office to the key rack. There were the two keys. He sped over to the empties list. The room was empty. He riffed through the day's registration cards. None showed a check-in to 842.

He turned and stared suspiciously at the bellhop.

The bellhop was not grinning.

IN 842 The Five, unregistered guests, were communing. They had correctly sommed this structure as shelter for travelers, and this room as unoccupied by any such travelers; but it had not occurred to them that one

must register and pay. They could not yet grasp the idea that anywhere in the universe a life-form could actually expect repayment for extending hospitality to a stranger. Indeed, the entire concept of commerce was still beyond their grasp. They knew of cannibalism, of course, but to find intelligent life feeding upon each other. . . .

"What is this stuff you've chosen from the list of refreshments our host offers?"

"Basically alcohol. Its purpose is to deaden the senses."

"Why should any intelligent life wish to deaden its perceptions?"

"Oh, I don't know about that. If I were human, I think I might want my perceptions deadened permanently."

"You **may** have a point there. But then, have we found the intelligent species yet? In none of the random samples we've sommed. . . ."

"No concept of atomic science. Yet, vague knowledge that other planets of this little solar system have been reached. But really not much interest in it, and no knowledge at all of how it was done. Well, a vague recognition of space ships, but no appreciation whatever of how they work, or how to build one."

"Yet space ships are built."

"So there must be an intelligent species, somewhere."

"Perhaps merely masquerading as a human being?"

"Why would they want to do that?"

"That's only one of the things we don't comprehend, yet."

"Our four Black Fleet strikes have come to nothing."

"I som only the vaguest telepathy communication in this species. Random, disorganized and undirected flashes."

"But they do have electronic communication. Highly organized. Why weren't the visits of the Black Fleet electronically communicated?"

"We're in for quite a problem. We've always thought intelligence was characterized by the communication of knowledge. Here we find the emphasis is upon concealment of knowledge."

"The strikes of the Black Fleet were known. They were witnessed. We saw to that. I sommed the correct emotional reactions to them from the witnesses. I think we were correct in striking only remote spots where no damage to intelligent life. . . ."

"First rule: We cannot harm intelligent life."

"First question: How do we know we've found some?"

"Our theory breaks down. We assumed unintelligent responses to the Black Fleet might be due to a lower order of species in remote areas, that the more intelligent might concentrate. . . ."

"This is one of the most intense concentrations. Would you say there was any qualitative difference of intelligence in the attendant who brought us these drinks and those who witnessed our strikes in remote areas?"

"The same horror of the unknown."

"The same ability to cope with their environment barely well enough to stay alive."

"The similarities are endless. The differences are nil."

"We have not yet contacted intelligent life."

"These artifacts all around us show a high order of intelligence."

"There must be two species."

"For some reason the lower order is keeping the evidence of our visit from the knowledge of the higher order."

THEN we must make our strikes close to the areas of high order artifacts. We must smoke out the intelligent species which conceals itself."

"It may take some doing. That concealment is extraordinary. None of the individuals we have sommed acknowledge intelligence beyond their own."

"That's not the only thing we have to solve. If we are to masquerade as one of them, we've got some practice to do. They haven't negated gravity, for example. I sommed the attendant's surprise that the bed didn't sag under your weight."

"We can't afford that kind of error. If that one will detect such minor defects, think what a high order of intelligence might see."

"No more appearing as purple whirlwinds, either."

"We thought it might shock him into revealing knowledge of where the intelligent ones are to be found. That perhaps he was conspiring to conceal their presence. That perhaps they were intelligent enough to expect us and deemed it prudent to hide from us until they looked us over."

"That would be natural enough in the survival mechanism—if they were that intelligent. Surely their logic would tell them that when they started stirring in their egg it would be noticed—and investigated."

"But the attendant showed no knowledge of such a conspiracy of concealment."

"Certainly we will have to run the risk of accidentally harming intelligent life, by bringing our phenomena of visit out in the open."

"Meantime, let's practice the role of the human. Now on this matter of gravity, for example. . . ."

"Yes, an artifact must sag when we sit on it. The carpet must show footprints when we walk on it."

"We're going to have to give

over searching for the intelligent ones, at present, and concentrate on simulating the human life, instead of the intelligent one."

"For the present, then, we'll accept the most popular art form representation of humans as our model. I think we need to get out and around a bit more, get a little better idea of what is acceptable to humans. If the intelligent species is masquerading as human, he may not reveal himself to us unless we do the same. Perhaps he is concealing himself from the human, as well as from us. Perhaps he will reveal himself only when we are suitably disguised so he may reveal himself to us without, at the same time, revealing himself to the humans."

There was a murmur of agreement, and The Five merged into one invisible vortice of radiant energy. They soared through the interstices of molecules in the outer wall.

THE Night Manager, backed by the House Detective and the Dubious Bellhop, knocked discreetly on the door of 842. There was no answer. He knocked again, although his developed hotel sense already told him the room was empty, that there was no guest or intruder asleep, passed out, or refusing to answer.

He unlocked the door.

Across the room, in the far wall, he was horrified to see a three foot spiral of radiation scorched paint. He saw a line of footprints, the carpet nap ground to a powder. He saw a deep sag, reaching almost to the floor, on this side of the bed.

These guests had been even more destructive of property than normal—and they hadn't registered, or paid, or paid their bar bill. How was that going to look on his report to management?

It was well for us that the House Detective thought this phenomenon was sufficiently outre to bring to the attention of Space Navy, Bureau of Extra-terrestrial Psychology.

It was too bad that Pentagon red tape prevented the communication from reaching our department until it was too late.

Although, I still don't see what I might have done about it.

CHAPTER 7

DR. KIBBIE proved right. Time was indeed precious.

I had a scant month to get my program of becoming an important man into motion. Because Central Personnel was on a kick of accumulating evidence to show how much they were contributing to economy-in-government, they kept cutting my requisitions for more employees in half—and


Virgil
Finlay

tallying up the savings to prove how efficient they were.

I endeared myself to them by doubling, tripling, quadrupling my demands, and the mushrooming numbers of people they refused to let me have would make this a banner year for them.

As it turned out, I was able to hire only two thousand five hundred and sixty-nine people and seven hundred and seventy two PhDs, in that month. My separation of the two species of employees is conscious. The PhD seems determined to separate himself from the human race; and the human race, in equal disdain, is more than agreeable. Why should I antagonize anybody through attempting to join them together again?

Once or twice Shirley did murmur some objections. Since there was more paper work involved in hiring or transferring an employee than any other employee could handle, the department had become so overburdened with handling the process that it would surely capsize and sink. I gave her the usual governmental solution to that problem: If there was too much work involved for the people in her department, then we must simply hire more people. Also, hadn't we better set up a special committee to investigate the amount of work involved?

She shuddered and pointed out that she was working night and day to administrate all this, as it was, without taking on an investigating committee. But her heart was not really in her objections, for she was able to walk the streets again without dodging former friends who played the numbers game of importance in Washington in the same way the Hollywood climber drops names.

Sara had given me no problem. When she heard I wasn't coming back to Computer Research, she took it for granted I wouldn't be able to run the government without her help.

Even Space Navy seemed a little relieved to find Sara on the scene. I was a bachelor, unattached, and Dr. Kinsey had pointed out a few things about bachelors in their late thirties. F.B.I. had not succeeded in finalizing its investigations into my secret sex practices—maybe because I hadn't had any.

Dr. Kibbie was delighted. In common with most governmental officials, he hadn't really had any idea of how enormously much two billion dollars actually is; and he wasn't sleeping well nights, worrying about how he was going to get rid of it all in time for the next appropriations. Now this seemed to be heading toward a solution. He began to bring his various department heads around to show what was being done in other yards; and

they began, appropriately, to hate me.

Everything was normal—for Washington, that is.

I HADN'T really believed it, but I found my own importance was beginning to increase proportionate to the numbers of people I was hiring. Of course I was too far down the echelons to be noticed by any news reporters, to say nothing of being mentioned by any commentators; but various other minor executives were beginning to nod when we met in the halls, and even chat with me a little in the cafeteria. Guardedly, of course; and with a roving eye to make sure they were being observed by those even lower in the chain of echelon than we; and not being observed by any higher who might be inclined to place them at my level if they were seen talking to me.

Indeed, I was, at this point, still so far down in the lower levels that I hadn't felt even a remotely indirect pressure applied by one Mr. Harvey Strickland.

Of course I knew there had to be a Mr. Harvey Strickland. I had seen too many wholesome, frank, good boys, who always do what they are told, parlayed from City Councilman to the apex of government or near it in a few short years, to doubt the existence of a Harvey Strickland somewhere behind the scenes writing the script and pulling the strings.

There is always a Mr. Harvey Strickland.

This, a summary of the state of things at the time The Black Fleet struck again.

CHAPTER 8

THE first announcement of the attacking Black Fleet came over the six o'clock evening analysis-of-our-troubles program. I was sitting alone in my suite at Washington's exclusive Brighton Hotel—paid for out of Dr. Kibbie's two billion as temporary quarters while my status was being clarified.

The announcement broke with stunning suddenness, in the middle of a routine analysis of the commentator's opinion of the country's opinion of the current administration as reflected in the stock market. The commentator was pausing for the Idiot's Reminder, out of camera focus, to catch up with his rapid fire delivery, when the fax machine beside his desk suddenly went crazy.

The bell jangled urgently, the machine began to chatter and a message began to roll.

The young, scholarly commentator took one quick glance at the lead sentence. He leaped to his feet and swallowed hard. When he started to read, his voice cracked and broke. A quick wit-

ted cameraman moved in for a closeup on the fax paper, so the televiewers could read the message for themselves.

"An Air Defense Command outpost has sighted a large fleet of unidentified black, disc shaped projectiles sweeping toward the Capital from the general direction of lower Chesapeake Bay."

I cocked an eyebrow and looked at the screen sardonically. All right, so it was a government commercial telling us we should be scared enough to pay the higher taxes congress was contemplating. I could anticipate the following lines: "All citizens are urged to start digging their bomb shelters at once. The Civilian Defense Command must begin considering the appointment of regional commanders—now! Air-force anti-interceptor anti-missile anti-missile anti-missiles must receive the highest priority for research since the Black Fleet is now within a few miles of us and coming fast!"

The Black Fleet!

I gasped. It hadn't registered. Some stupe had leaked the information out of our department after all. Dr. Kibbie would be fit to be tied.

So I had failed in my first mission—in a government of the people, by the people, for the people—and the people were going to find out anyhow.

There had been a longer than normal pause while the commentator kept looking off to one side. He turned back to face the audience.

"We take you now to our own Bobby Lovelace, news analyst directly at the scene," he informed us.

"Oh sure," I said, in disgust. "Ham it up boys. Long as you've let it out, milk it for everything it's got."

There was the usual flickering on the screen and a new face appeared. No doubt their own Bobby Lovelace. His eyes were distended, his face pale, his hands trembled.

"Evil!" he was mouthing in a whisper. "Horrible! Unclean! You'll see when they get there. I can't talk about it. You'll see for yourselves." He waved his hands in negation before his face. The camera moved off him and the screen blanked out.

"Oh come now, fellows," I exclaimed aloud. "That's hamming it up too much. Even for television."

BUT my skepticism was jarred when, from far down Connecticut Avenue, there drifted the faint, strange sound of a pulsating siren. Nearby, police whistles begin to shrill, stop, shrill again, stop, shrill again—the best that could be accomplished on short notice to sound an air raid warning.

"This is going pretty far," I murmured.

But it must have had its effect on some, for in the adjoining suite the sounds of a cocktail party for some petty senator faded to a strangled, waiting silence.

For the first time, I felt unease; as if there were something in the atmosphere.

"Good God," I breathed. "Don't tell me that even I am responding to such Hollywood hokum!"

The screen came on again, and we were back in the Washington studio. The young commentator, whose face still reflected his first shock, had had a little time to collect himself; but he had to try three times before he could light a nonchalant cigarette. The cameraman must have been assigned an acting part, also, because he was having trouble keeping the newsdesk and fax machine in focus.

The fax machine was still. And that stillness was even more compelling than its frantic activity had been.

"They've put a good director on this production," I said, still aloud. "I think I'll watch it—might turn into a pretty good show after all."

And then, to my astonishment, I was beginning to wonder if it were staged, after all. Perhaps it was the tenseness in the atmosphere. The air was heavy, stifling. I got up out of my chair and walked across the room to open the french windows which let out upon a private balcony. There were no street noises. In this neighborhood it was always quiet, subdued in the genteel manner; but there was always that distant throb of a city inhabited by people who were more than one quarter alive. Now there seemed to be a sound vacuum.

I walked back and sat down again before the television.

The commentator picked up a sheet of his script, looked at it with an air of wonderment, then he raised his eyes to the camera again.

"Well," he said simply. "I guess we'll just have to wait this out together."

I caught myself nodding in agreement.

"Good work," I said approvingly. "Damn good work." But somehow, now, my persistence in regarding it as fiction seemed the tawdry unreality, instead of, as usual, the production.

We waited it out together.

I began to wonder if I should try to get down to my office at the Pentagon, but checked the impulse by asking what I would do after I got there. If this did prove fiction, that kind of response could make any official a laughing stock. If it were not fiction. . . .

I swallowed.

I LOOKED at the commentator again. He was still sitting. He shrugged. He looked down at his script. He looked up again. He flicked the script he had been reading before the announcement.

"Seems silly to go on with this drivel, now," he said.

I think that blasphemous statement convinced me more than anything else. That, and nothing happening. For the first law of entertainment is that something must be happening every minute, every second.

Outside, another siren began to take up the wail.

The fax machine started to chatter again. Now the commentator was able to read the message as it appeared. His voice was clear, but tense.

"Bulletin . . . London . . . Unknown projectiles in large numbers are approaching up the Thames from the Channel Coast. . . .

"Bulletin . . . Tokyo . . . Missiles maneuvering at high altitudes near Yokahama. . . .

"Bulletin . . Moscow . . . Antimissile missiles released against enemy projectiles . . . last warning to United States . . call off attack . . . or we will press button. . . .

"Bulletin . . . Omaha . . . last warning to Russia . . . call off attack or we will press button. . . .

The machine stopped abruptly.

The commentator stared at it, uncomprehending.

After a few seconds it chattered out another very brief message.

"Projectiles now over Washington."

I stood up, uncertain, dazed, pondering the habit of getting my information from the screen versus going to see for myself. As if coming out of sleep I shook off the stupidity and, in a kind of reluctance, forced myself to walk over to the french windows and out upon the balcony.

The July dusk had blended into night. Stars were clear and bright in the moonless sky. Street lights had been shut off in accord with some dusty, moulded plan of the past, but at the distant shopping center a neon glow suggested store owners hadn't been told about it; or maybe they were straining for one last sale before being blown to Kingdom Come.

Over downtown Washington, some eight miles to the Southeast, a weird, red haze was forming in the sky. Swiftly it swelled, and grew, and took shape; with formations of tongues of flame. And now the whole sky was a mass of red, leaping flames.

Out of the flames, as if against a backdrop on a stage, there silhouetted the dead black discs.

My gorge rose in revulsion, I

fought for detachment; to still my atavistic fears; to remind myself that man had created the dread forces of Evil out of his own sick imaginings, even as he had created the forces of Good out of his noble aspirations. It did no good. This was materialization of something basically, inherently Evil, no sickness of the imagination.

Something seemed to go awry with my time sense. I seemed suspended in a kind of time vacuum, a new realization of how much we depend upon it for the sense of continuity. I could not tell whether things were happening simultaneously, instantaneously, or with long lapses of time in between.

THE discs were maneuvering now at dazzling speed, sharply wheeling in one direction, veering with incredible violation of momentum's laws in another. Breaking, scattering, one moment in quantum particle randomness; the next in circle, in boxed, or V, or straight line formation; obeying some principle-pattern all their own, without meaning to me, to us, to man.

From the Earth crimson fingers of anti-aircraft fire reached up for the projectiles.

The night was slashed into flaming, criss-cross patterns of white and red tracer missile lines. But I saw no disc hesitate, falter, fall. At times of randomness some seemed hurtling toward Earth, and yet a second, (a moment? an hour?) later, when they flashed into some unexpected formation, none were laggard from wounds, none a hairsbreadth out of line.

Perhaps our barrage was missing its target entirely, perhaps deflected by some force we could not know, perhaps passing through without harm. Who could know?

At times, some single disc, plunging downward toward me, toward us all, with crushing speed, and sending me cowering back against the window frame, seemed almost to fill the whole sky, incredibly huge, incomprehensibly massive; yet later (how much later?) no more than a black pinpoint against the flaming yellow and crimson sky. For they were maneuvering in depth as well as across the vault of our sky—in third dimension. And, for all we knew, in some mathematical fourth, as well?

For surely no power on Earth had a science which could violate the laws of inertia with such impunity. And if not of Earth, then what Earthly logic could we calculate to apply?

We ceased streaking our futile anti-missile missiles at them now. The discs dominated the sky, alone.

And then, as if man were realizing in that peril that the hu-

man brain might, after all, creatively function on the spur of the moment to prove superior to the planned patterns of mechanical brains, and with some antiquated tools at hand prove yet superior to modern instruments; Air Force interceptors came up and into the sky.

As if to complement their tiny V, the discs formed a mighty V to stretch across the sky. I felt a sob quicken my throat, admiration of such incredible bravery; shame that I was sometimes sardonic and cynical of man.

"Goddam," I heard myself saying over and over. "Goddam, goddam." That such courage should be so futile.

THE blur of my grief for man streaked the lights. The clutches of wing missiles soared out ahead of the interceptors, the sonic booms shocked and roared and made puny the sounds of firing. Puny, too, the little V as it approached the apex of the gigantic one, but, goddam, how brave!

The points of the tiny and the great merged. Our small was lost in the huge, swallowed in flaming radiance.

But when the vast V wheeled away, majestically, the interceptors could be discerned once more; yes, there they were, zooming wildly, as if out of control, into space.

Yet not out of control, no. I felt my caught breath return, hurting, when I saw them reforming into attack groups. Section by trained section they peeled off, in traditional patterns preserved out of a long dead past, they hurled in sonic booming speeds toward the giant V. Small groups of us, attacking theirs, Them. At the sides of their apex instead of its point, cutting loose at them with ear numbing barrages, and using the very forces of recoil to pull the interceptors up and out of their screaming power dives.

And against all our unleashed might, not one single projectile wavered from the huge formation.

Crouched there on the balcony, my back cowering against the solid window frame, the only seeming solid thing in a boiling fluid world of noise and motion and light, I watched the fight go on.

The fight?

There was no fight. There was Man, spewing all his power, all his might, all the fierce, aggressive product of his brain and hand against his enemy. How had we known it enemy?

But there was no fight.

For the discs were not striking back. No red ray corruscated down and down to melt our City into flowing stone.

My senses numbed.

There had been not even falling shrapnel, broken pieces of missiles fired from our own at them. It was as if some unknown vacuum cleaner, electro-magnet, sucked up the debris of battle as it occurred—to keep our people safe and our streets clean.

Spent interceptors returned to Earth, new waves of others arose to take their place—no less brave, no less determined.

IGNORED now by the discs, they spent themselves in turn. The great V no longer paid us the compliment of wheeling massively to meet our charge. Rather now it seemed bent on some purpose of its own, without regard.

Yes, the farther ends of the angle lines were curving inward, bending, bending inward until at last they met. A cloudiness appeared in circle at the center, and at its center an incredibly bright spot of pure crimson light. The cloudy haze coalesced, solidified, striated.

A monstrous, pupil pierced and piercing, bloodshot eye looked down upon the city.

I later learned it was the common experience of each human being in the city, but at that moment I was convinced the piercing gaze seemed directed upon me, into me, through me.

The eye, at first stretching almost from horizon to horizon, was smaller now. Now it filled but half the sky. And this before I had realized it was shrinking at all, so firm its hypnotic gaze. But now that I had realized it, the shrinking was accelerated; the eye was going away from us; out into space.

Yet even to the last, that piercing pupil penetrated me, impaled me upon its malevolent beam of light.

And then it, too, winked out.

The flaming mists of the sky cleared. In the distance, over Rock Creek Park, I could see the last interceptors returning to Earth.

There seemed no triumph in their flight.

The sky was clear and black. The stars shone bright—and cold. No longer friendly stars, twinkling the planets at us as if with amusement at the foibles of man.

No longer friendly sky, velvet soft and comforting.

There were Things out there.

Our tiny Earth was spinning through that cold, remorseless vacuum, alone.

And nothing to hide behind.

CHAPTER 9

FOR three days the Black Fleet appeared, and disappeared, and reappeared. Over every major city of the Earth. The Black Fleet? The many, many Black Fleets. So often, simultaneously,

in so many places that the wildest sort of reckoning could not estimate their number.

Now there was no thought of nation against nation, man against man; man taming other men to his service, submission, his pattern of the only Right.

Now the discs had reappeared over New York City once more. But this time their pattern was different. They did not appear, play out their ominous and meaningless formations, wash the Earth below them in a stinking miasma of revolting, evil dread; and then to disappear.

They stayed. For seven hours now they had hovered and circled endlessly; as if they waited for momentous signal known only to them.

The city below seemed virtually dead. On appearance, at noon this time, having seen them several times before, the New Yorker had cocked an eye heavenward, shrugged and gone about his business. But the fleet had stayed, and as if somewhere a valve had been opened to let off the steam, the city slowed, and died.

No one knew where or how it started, but through the long afternoon the feeling grew universal that this time they meant business. This was it. And the waiting grew intolerable.

The waiting grew intolerable for Mr. Harvey Strickland.

He sat, robed in his purple dressing gown, on his high backed and carved throne chair, there in his penthouse, atop one of his many newspaper buildings. He watched the television wall, and curled his lip in fury.

It wasn't going over. With his expert, uncanny feel of mass reaction, he knew his organization was missing fire. They went through the motions of the formula, but too many of them were like that first announcer of the projectiles. Too many of them considered the stuff they spoke and printed as mere drivel. He'd fired the guy, of course, for letting the public see that he considered it so much nonsense, and ordinarily this would have been enough to make the rest of his organization men dig in with added display of enthusiasm, smacking their lips to show how much they enjoyed eating the crap. But they weren't.

And the people weren't buying the crap.

Instead of watching his television screens and reading his newspapers for their interpretation, the goddam people were seeing for themselves!

His radio and television channels were blanketed with Harvey Strickland's own subsidized exorters who pled, stormed, raged and threatened the people to get down on their knees, bow their heads in humility.

His scornful lip lifted from his lengthened, yellowed teeth. Humility! He knew it, the Harvey Stricklands had always known that humility was the basest, most ignoble, unworthy posture a man can find; but it was the formula which had brought man back to groveling in the dust again and again. Subservient to the Harvey Stricklands, serving their ends.

The formula just wasn't going over!

The goddam rabbits sat in their warrens and cowered from the hunters above them—and the hunters, this time, were not controlled by Harvey Strickland. There should be line up and clamor for self destruction.

HE pushed his massive body, groaning under the weight of fat, out of his throne chair and began to pace the floor in sudden fury. Goddamit, he'd missed his cue. He should have set up a scapegoat, a whole bunch of scapegoats. He should have manufactured some victims for the majority to persecute. Hell, that was the simplest formula in the book. With just a little twist of words, any minority group could be made to look responsible for the Black Fleet. It always worked.

And he'd slipped on it.

He knew damn well humans would never go out and tackle anything stronger than they were. They had to feel they were in the majority. Oh they were strong on crusading for perfectly safe subjects, these humans; but they had to have something weak and running in fear before they'd change over from rabbits to dogs and run baying after it in furious, frenzied chase.

But, goddam it, he hadn't had time. Nobody had tipped him off to expect the Black Fleet. What was the matter with that Pentagon? Why hadn't they tipped him off? Wasn't it their business to know, to anticipate? And weren't they completely dependent upon him to shape the mass mind for them?

And why hadn't his own direct organization men been on their toes, and even without warning, put the formula into motion without waiting to be told? Hell, he'd trained them well enough. They'd been pampered and spoiled with the high wages he paid them, the silly little status levels he'd granted them, to the point that they would sacrifice anything, anything at all to keep their position. That was his technique. He'd seen to it that all his independent editors, on both side of every fence, siad what he wanted them to say: the pro faction coming out strong, the con faction advancing such weak arguments against that even a child could see the only possible

Right way to look at the question. Every damn one of his free and fearless commentators and columnists said exactly what he wanted them to say. They didn't get hired unless their past opinions showed they could be trusted. They didn't work for him if they didn't go on freely and independently coming to the conclusions favorable to Mr. Harvey Strickland. Hell, they couldn't work anywhere if they didn't do that.

So now, in a real emergency, they'd sat on their overstuffed duffs and let the Black Fleet take over without making one move to capitalize on it to strengthen his position.

ANGRILY, he waddled over to the television monitors, and flipped the switch to turn them off—a symbolic destruction of them all. He turned to do the same thing to the battery of fax machines lined up along the wall, but paused to read the latest messages.

The same thing was happening everywhere, over all the large cities of America, over every large city in the world.

Everywhere, the discs hovered, and wheeled in formation, and waited.

An unbidden doubt tried to force its way into his mind that there might be no opportunity in this to tighten his hold on the mass mind still more; that this might be something beyond his capacity to turn to his own advantage. He shook his massive head angrily, and shrugged off the weakness. He would not allow such an idea to take full form in his mind. He would be no better than the goddam rabbits he despised if he did.

But there could be no doubt about one thing. The Black Fleet was getting ready for the kill. And he didn't see one single angle for getting in on the winning end of it, somehow.

If there were only some way he could get next to the projectiles, deal with them. They must want something. There must be minds inside those discs. And where there were minds capable of all this, there were also minds capable of working the angles. Capable of dominating the whole Earth in three days, as these were, they should also be capable of recognizing one of their own, and his right to be in the pot—himself, accustomed to dominating, one Harvey Strickland.

So if they wanted to dominate the Earth, why didn't they deal?

Why weren't they putting out feelers?

A new thought crept in to horrify him. What if they had been doing just that? Hell, they could have taken over that first night. So what else could be the meaning of all that pointless appear-

ing and reappearing? What if they were hovering there now, from noon until near dusk, waiting, waiting for him to respond to their feelers?

And he didn't know how!

The frustration, exasperation pumped powerful shots of adrenalin into his blood, made him forget to wheeze and groan in protest against gravity pulling at his fat. His rage sent him waddling, almost running, out to the garden surrounding his house on top of the building. He watched the fading sky, followed the projectiles—as if by the very power of his eyes he could make them take notice of him, come to him, deal with him.

They wanted to control the people, didn't they? They hadn't killed any of them off, so they must want them preserved for some end. Well, he controlled the people. He owned 'em. They'd have to come to him in the long run.

Or did they figure to just highjack the lot of them, right out from under him?

UP there among the circling, black discs, there wasn't a single anti-missile missile; not one. Not even a goddam interceptor. There wasn't any sound of anti-aircraft fire. They'd given up trying to fight. When it was all over, the people would clean up the mess, and hope. He snorted in disgust as his mind gave him the picture of the terrible and futile patience of people who can't do anything but try—and hope.

Goddam it! Why didn't his phone ring? He'd put in another call to Washington. Why didn't the operator get him through?

The heat of his anger, the residual heat of the day even at this height of a hundred stories up, made him loosen the purple robe which swathed his rolls of fat. He walked over to the parapet surrounding his penthouse garden and looked out over it, a hundred stories below. But the goddam ants weren't crawling around on the threads of streets to amuse him as usual. There, to one side, the East River was a silver ribbon that partly encircled Manhattan. He had once thought of it as a silver ribbon around a tinsled Christmas package—all for him.

Above him arose the transmitter tower of one of his New York television stations. It was a symbol, too, a royal scepter, if you please; more powerful and more commanding of subjugation of men's minds than that of any king who ever lived. The sight of it, still standing there, pointed at the projectiles as an accusing finger points at God, telling him to mind his manners and do as he is told or the people will dismiss him as casually as they

have dismissed so many other gods in the past, the sight of it restored his calm, his confidence of his power and destiny.

He looked at the projectiles again, and this time calculatingly, with detachment. Let them send out their feelers he didn't know how to answer. Let them strike, let them dominate, let them take control of Earth. In the long run they'd have to come to him. Because you can't control the actions of men unless you control their minds.

He chuckled sardonically. Every conqueror in the past had found out the same thing: You can't control a country without help from the people, some people, of that country. So when these conquerors tried to take over, and work through the men already established, they'd find out something. Something Harvey Strickland already knew: That when a man sells his independence of thought for money or status, without realizing it he also sells his capacity for independence of thought; and like the wornout columnists and commentators he must play the same old record over and over, because he has no capacity for taking a fresh point of view.

All through the whole structure there were men who had sold out to him; and when these conquerors tried to use those men, they'd have to turn to him.

Yes, whoever was back of these projectiles would have to come to him in the end. He looked up at them, still hovering above. He laughed loudly again, then turned confidently and waddled back through the French doors which led from the garden to his office.

AT his desk he sat down heavily, picked up the phone, and grinned in visioning the instant apprehension of the man on the switchboard down in the bowels of the building.

"Got that call through yet?" he demanded.

"N-n-no, s-sir," the man stammered.

"Quit chittering. Why haven't you got Higgins?"

"Well, sir, his staff says that since he is Senate majority leader he is in a big meeting at the White House, with the general staff, and they won't. . . ."

"Oh, shut up. Gimme the Washington operator, one with some authority."

"Supervisor," a voice chimed into the receiver.

"This is Harvey Strickland," he said. "Break a circuit and put me through to the White House."

There was a very short delay.

"Yes, Mr. Strickland," she came back on the line with the words. "Right away."

Almost immediately the White House switchboard answered.

"This is Harvey Strickland," he said again. "Get Senator Higgins on the phone for me."

"He is in a meeting with the President, the Cabinet, the General Staff, and the Heads of the Department of Extraterrestrial Psychology . . ." she began.

"I said this was Harvey Strickland," he enunciated slowly, ominously.

"Yes, sir. I know who you are, sir," she said. Then doubtfully, "I'll see, sir."

He shifted angrily in his chair. Someone would pay for this inconvenience.

"This is Tom Higgins, Harvey," a voice came through.

"Well, how about it?" Strickland demanded.

"No decision yet, Harvey," the Senate Majority Leader answered apologetically.

"What! Why, goddam it, what're you guys doing down there? You go back to that meeting and tell them to use an H-Bomb on those projectiles and no more nonsense about it. Damn it, Higgins, you hear me?"

Tom Higgins' voice drifted to him then, old and weary.

"Yeah, Harvey, I hear you."

"Well then, get back in there and goose them pinhead generals off their fat duffs!"

THERE are a lot of angles to this thing, Harvey." Higgins' voice seemed to grow stronger. "We've got a couple of experts on extraterrestrial psychology testifying. A Doctor Kibbie and a Doctor Ralph Kennedy. Kibbie doesn't know anything, he's just a promoter. But Kennedy talks some sense. He says there's something odd and peculiar about the behavior pattern. I don't know, he says a lot of things, but he does point out one thing you can't get around, Harvey. They haven't hurt us yet. That's an angle, you know."

"Angles!" Strickland shouted. His voice was high and shrill. "Don't give me any stuff about angles. Don't give me any of that professor talk about peculiar patterns of behavior. I know what the goddam angle is. I know what they're waiting for. They're waiting to hear from me. That's what this is all about. And I'm gonna give 'em an answer. The answer is gonna be the H-Bomb. They're gonna find out I got a little trick or so of my own. Drop that goddam H-Bomb on them. That's all I want."

"Look, Harvey," Higgins tried to reason with him. "The discs are over big cities. A whole city would be wiped out—a million people or more."

"Who cares?"

"Well, now, Harvey . . . public opinion . . ."

"Public opinion? For Chrissake, who you think tells the public what its opinion is? God-

damn it, Tom, gimme a week with my newspapers and my television and radio stations—and you've got any kind of public opinion you want to ask for. You know that. You know how you've been elected all these terms. And if the President has forgotten . . ."

"But all those innocent people . . ." Higgins said, almost with a groan.

"All those innocent people," Strickland mimicked. "So what'll happen? Hell. You know what it'll do, well as me. It always does it, any kind of trouble. It sends 'em back to their beds to breed faster, to make even more people than was lost. Far as opinion goes, them that don't get hit will shrug it off. They weren't hurt, so why squawk. Them what do get hit won't matter. Look Tom, you gotta take the broad view of these things. You tell them generals to stop shillyshallying around, listening to college professors, and get back to doing what they're suppose to do. Drop that H-Bomb, and stop arguing."

"Okay, Harvey," Higgins answered faintly. "I'll tell them how you feel."

"Whoa! Back up! It doesn't make any difference how I feel. See? I'm just a newspaper man. I just print the news. I don't make it. I got to tell you this again? Something you learned thirty years ago?"

"But Harvey! Something as big as this. They won't drop the H-Bomb on my sayso. Something big as this, Harvey, maybe you've got to come out into the open. . . ."

"And if I do, how'm I going to mold public opinion? I'd be an interested party. And if I can't mold public opinion, you'll all go down the drain."

"Maybe we should, Harvey. Maybe we should."

"Now you look here, Tom," Harvey Strickland took a negotiating tone. "This is not your decision to make. You're not a military man. You're not trained to make the kind of decisions a military man has to make. So it won't be your decision. It'll be their decision. All you have to do is remind them they're military men.

"Remind them to go back and pick up on their West Point training, and places like that. Remind them to stop thinking about people and start thinking about troops and forces. Troops and forces don't bleed, you know. They're just tactical problems on blackboards.

"Remind them about those conversations they used to have; where they used to speculate on whether the lower orders actually had any nerves and feelings. And the lower orders being anybody who didn't go to West Point, or the like. If they've de-

veloped weak stomachs, tell them to start thinking about maps and forces and calculated risks, the way they were trained. Hell, they're trained to be killers, so what's stopping them?

"You understand me, Tom?"

"I'll tell them, Harvey," the voice sounded sick.

"Yeah," Strickland said contemptuously. "I thought you would."

HE put down the receiver and rubbed his hands together. He didn't resent having to blow some steam into his men once in a while. It was a reminder of what they would be without him.

They wouldn't decide to use New York as the test city, of course. Because he was in New York.

And they wouldn't decide to use Washington, because they were in Washington.

It would be some place like St. Louis, maybe. There'd been a strong, unaccountable anti vote in St. Louis last election. Maybe he'd better give some more thought to replacing some editors and station managers out there. Then he chuckled. He was forgetting. There wouldn't be any to replace after a few minutes. If they decided on St. Louis. Maybe he'd better call Tom and tell him to use St. Louis. No, better not. Let them make the decision.

He touched a button beside one of the jeweled lights along the ledge of his desk; and knew it was like touching a raw nerve to make the man at the other end jump out of his chair and start running to the elevator. All these buttons were nerve endings, the nerves reaching down through the executive offices from penthouse to basement, even down to the sub basement where giant presses thundered day and night to grind out read-and-repeat public opinion.

Precisely in the number of seconds it would take for his secretary to rush from his office, give the special signal to the elevator reserved for express trips to the penthouse, and the operator to make the pickup and full speed to the top, the elevator door in one wall of his office opened. From the door there stepped a gray, gaunt man who walked resolutely across the wide expanse of floor between the elevator and the desk.

This was Miller, Strickland's personal secretary.

Forty years ago, Miller had been a college hero, the most popular man on the campus, the president of the senior class, the president of the united fraternity council. That class had also contained one Harvey Strickland, not a college hero, virtually unknown on the campus, and president of nothing.

Miller had been the man voted most likely to succeed. Strickland had received one vote—his own. But he had known, even then, that his vote counted more than all the rest.

The friendless hours of Strickland's college years were not lonely. He was busy accumulating information about each of his classmates, their families, their friends.

The dossiers grew thick with facts and notes. They contained the essence of every chance contact he made. They contained records of invitations not issued to him, and the refusals of his. They contained details of the contemptuous refusals of girls. They contained every honor each classmate had received. And every honor which he, himself, had not received was an insult to be revenged—someday.

The dossier of Miller was thickest of them all.

Oh, that senior class scattered after graduation, like a flock of giddy butterflies. He could not keep track of them all, and in later years it had cost him a fortune in detective agency fees to trace them all. A fortune well spent.

HE had had one advantage over them. They'd ridden, sheltered and in comfort, on society's protection-of-youth train. They expected to go on riding, in equal shelter and comfort. They knew nothing else. But he had had to slog it out, step by weary step, all the way. He knew the score, and began to cash in on it long before they began to get the hint that there even was a score. And that it wasn't added up the way their professors thought.

Lost in the melee of living in an adult world, fully realized only by him, was a certain statistic. For some odd reason, only one man in that senior class had succeeded in life. For everyone else, after the first few years of promising bright success, everything seemed to go wrong. Whatever they grasped seemed somehow to turn into dust in their fingers. They never knew why.

Other men, lesser men, might have been tempted to let them know the prime mover behind the scenes, remind them of the cuts and slights and indifference, remind them they had backed the wrong horse, ignored the right one. This was not the Strickland way. This was the most delicious part of his triumph; that they never knew why. To believe that their failure was their own inadequacy was the deeper satisfaction; for if they had known their failure was not their own doing their self respect might have been preserved.

This was the real power of secret rule through secret dos-

sier, established as governmental and industrial policy a hundred years before. This was the source of his indescribable pleasure indefinitely prolonged; to take the place of wife, children, home, friendship.

He looked now at Miller, gaunt and gray, over sixty, standing there before him, a clerk-servant, patiently waiting to be instructed, apparently beaten and resigned. The man should be happy to have this job at all. It was the first one he had been able to hold for more than a few months in all those forty years since school. He should be glad to have found a haven at last, where he could get the same paternal protection on which he had grown dependent in those years in a psycho ward; where the psychiatrists had finally convinced him to accept and adjust to the idea that he simply didn't have the stuff of success within him. That being a college hero had been only a fluke of adolescent misjudgement, based in nothing more than a handsome face, a charming personality, and the backing of once wealthy parents. Parents who unaccountably lost all their money, and position, and never knew why.

IT did not occur to Strickland, then, that his contempt for Miller had, on occasion, made him underestimate the man; that more than once Miller had stood patiently at his elbow while he worked the combination of the vault which held all those secret dossiers. That as his personal secretary, Miller knew his movements so well that he knew when it was safe for him to work the combination he had seen and memorized, enabling him to find out why.

Strickland let him stand, a moment longer, passively; then dictated an announcement to him that the government was about to take dramatic action against the enemy. Then as an afterthought, he added, "Have the agency compile the usual data on a Dr. Ralph Kennedy, some goddam title like Extraterrestrial Psychologist. The agency can find him. He's big enough to be invited to the White House for consultation on the psychology of the enemy. He gave me some trouble. Damn near had the general staff convinced they ought to wait until the enemy . . . Never mind, just tell the agency to get on it."

He waved a negligent hand then, and Miller walked back to the elevator which was waiting for him in the floor below, out of earshot but handy. Strickland turned to the fax machine and began watching the sweep hand of the clock to see how many seconds it would take for the announcement to show.

It hit the special bulletin to all communication mediums machine when it should. Regardless of what might be going on elsewhere, his machine was still functioning as it should. It backed up his confidence that even if the rest of the country, the rest of the world, was going to the dogs; he was still in position to grind out the easy to repeat slogans which would jell into public opinion, made to order.

Less than two minutes after reading his bulletin on the fax machine that the government was going to get off the dime and act, Higgins' call came through from Washington.

"Okay, Harvey," Higgins said in a voice which seemed drained of all life. "They made the decision you want. They're going to put H-Bomb warheads on some anti-missile missiles. They've got 'em stored in ordnance depots around, labeled 'Experimental Eplosives'. That's so the local commands won't guess what they really are, panic, and try to get out. They couldn't decide which city to use first. The President made the decision. I expect he remembers the way the last vote went. He's got that kind of mind. So it's St. Louis.

"If we fail there, then next is Detroit; then Toledo; then Dallas. God have mercy on us all. God have mercy on you, Harvey . . . and on me." The voice trailed away.

"Splendid, Tom," Strickland said heartily. "You always deliver. I'll personally watch it on my television monitors."

If the Senate Majority Leader appreciated this special consideration he was getting, he didn't acknowledge it.

HE turned to the network monitor to watch St. Louis go out in a blaze of glory, hoping to catch a glimpse of the actual explosion before the screen would go blank and dead. Instead of St. Louis, he saw one of his goddam panty-waist announcers driveling along about the formations over New York, as if that were important.

He felt a quick surge of anger until he realized the network couldn't know something was going to happen over St. Louis. He pulled the phone toward him, to tell the network to switch over to St. Louis; but an afterthought made him pull his hand away without lifting the receiver. Just in case, just in case there ever was enough opposition to amount to anything, and just in case some treacherous traitor in his own outfit told them he'd switched them over to St. Louis before the explosion . . . before, meaning he'd known in advance. . . .

He would have to deny himself

the pleasure of watching his orders carried out.

Never mind, there was another way. There'd have to be some kind of communication between the projectiles. Those circling overhead would know their St. Louis formation had been wiped out. They'd go streaking west to concentrate on the attack. That would tell him, just as well.

He wanted to go out to his roof garden again, to be watching them at the instant they heard; see their confusion, see them go. But he also wanted to stay by his fax machines and television monitors because Kansas City, maybe as far away as Des Moines, they'd pick up the explosion and report it.

The conflict of desires made him furious and he pounded on his desk in frustration that he couldn't be both places at the same time.

The minutes ticked slowly away. The fax machines were still reporting nothing beyond the paralysis of the big cities, the fear, the foreboding, the total helplessness.

Goddam it! Why did the military have to be so slow? Them and their red tape! Now if it was under his control—if it was his organization, St. Louis would have been destroyed in five minutes and his stupid minions would be back clicking their heels and asking what he wanted now, sir. But the goddam military. He thought of the handsome, lean, virile young officers. He turned lived with rage. Handsome, lean and virile he had never been.

And then he chuckled softly. There would be handsome, lean and virile ones manning their stations at St. Louis. They would be putting Explosive X in their missiles, not knowing, never knowing, that in another instant they would be handsome, lean and virile no longer.

It was fully dark out now. Here in New York. It would still be light in St. Louis, but it was dark here. There was a red glow around the discs, but nothing like the flaming skies of the first night.

Twenty minutes passed, then one of the fax machines began to jangle loudly, to call attention to the special news, as distinct from filler stuff.

It would be the far machine to make him get up from his desk!

But it was date lined, St. Louis! That couldn't be!

The message rolled out before him. The local anti-air attack services had decided to try a secret explosive not yet tried against the projectiles. But the anti-missile missiles had failed to function. There was no accounting for it. They just didn't function. Not one would fire.

The X Explosive was being

loaded into interceptor jets. It would be taken by human pilots directly into the formation of the enemy and released. Upon request of their commanders, suicide volunteers had stepped forward to the last man.

The machine fell silent.

STRICKLAND sighed in relief. So that was the reason for the delay. Well, it simply prolonged the pleasure of anticipation. He'd look at it that way. The suicide boys would do the job. Too bad there hadn't been time for his local organization to get television cameras on the scene.

More minutes passed. He remained standing at the machine. He didn't really expect it to register another message. How could it, when the H-Bomb let go? But another city, on this or some other machine, depending on which line was clear. He waited. Still more minutes passed.

The machine jangled again. And again date lined St. Louis.

"Interceptors return to base. —30—"

"What do you mean, end of message?" Strickland roared. "Goddam it, you're fired out there, whoever you are!"

But another machine began to jangle, and pulled him away from the silent one. Detroit was reporting the same failure of missiles to fire. The same suicide pilots to take the X Explosive to the enemy. Then the same silence, the same waiting.

And the same report that the interceptors had returned to base. But this reporter, apparently more enterprising, gave out with more.

The pilots were obviously out of their minds.

"I couldn't trip the release," one of them was babbling, according to the fax machine. "The automatics wouldn't function on proximity. I didn't bring her back. She brought me back. Something took over the controls of the ship. I didn't land her, she landed me."

In sheer fury, Strickland kicked the machine, and tears formed in his eyes at the hurt to his foot.

Sheer funk it was. Sheer yellow funk! Goddam! What an investigation this would make when it was all over!

A moment to sober his mood. A moment's thought.

The mind in the projectiles hadn't let him respond to their feelers! They hadn't let him wipe out a few of their ships, just to show them he could do it. They weren't opening negotiations with him. They didn't play the game according to the human rules. If he were willing to sacrifice a million or so of his own pawns, they should have been willing to sacrifice theirs. That

was the way the game was always played before the big boys got down to serious business of dividing up the pot.

For the first time he allowed the doubt to take form. The doubt that they might need him, after all.

His contemplation was interrupted by a clear, piercing note. It was like a trumpet; no, more like a bugle call. It came through the French windows. It flooded the room with its warm, golden sound. He whirled away from the fax machines and rushed to the garden outside.

The last, lingering notes seemed to flood the whole city.

HE stumbled out to the edge of the garden, to lean against the parapet while he gazed up into the heavens.

There were the projectiles, seeming to draw together now. But high above them, apparently so high they still caught the light from the sun below his horizon, a new set of ships had appeared. Each an iridescent globe. They flew in a wing formation, a vast wing. It was like a wing of shining pearls.

They came closer. They began to shade into iridescent blue.

And like the star sapphire, even at this distance he could see the symbol on each of them—a shining white cross of radiant light.

CHAPTER 10

JUST before the trumpet flooded Washington with golden sound, we were on our way home from the White House conference. The plan was for the Space Cadet driving our staff car to drop Sara off at the building where she shared an apartment with Shirley, then to leave me at my hotel.

The summons to the White House conference had hit me with a gulping surprise. It shouldn't have. For three days now, and a good share of the hours in the two nights, our department in the Pentagon had been swarming with brass and braid trying to get a line on the psychology of our enemy. Which was natural enough, since that was supposed to be our job.

Dr. Kibbie was a bitter disappointment. He plain funked it. There was no other interpretation. On that first morning, after the evening strike, it became abundantly clear to me that in spite of all his talk about the rumors of the Black Fleet, he hadn't really believed in it—that he merely used the rumors to further his con game.

The other department heads in the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Psychology responded characteristically. In common with government bureau heads generally they could talk learnedly about

the problem so long as it was kept at a distance, but displayed a complete helplessness to cope when it pushed its reality into our faces.

Somehow, without intending it, I found myself covering up for them, rationalizing their vagueness into something which sounded at least remotely sensible, taking on the burdens of soothing irate and insistent generals and admirals which Kibbie and his other department heads were shunting in my direction. Without intending it, I was rapidly becoming the answer-boy. Only I didn't have any solid answers, either.

Word had got around about my previous dealings with psychological oddities. This seemed to make me an authority on alien psychology. Perhaps the experiences had helped. Perhaps, without realizing it, I actually had developed—well, if not an open mind, one which was at least cracked.

DR. Gerald Gaffey, Harvard's gift to the science of vocational guidance for extraterrestrials turned out to be astonishingly useful. He was surprisingly adept at speculative extrapolation. He proved a valuable assistant because he had the capacity for picking up the vaguest speculation, expanding it and rationalizing it until it made sense.

That he was probably quite wrong was in itself an asset. The human mind, somehow, seems much more attracted by the false than by the true; and, being wrong, therefore, we were able to satisfy the brass and braid, and send them on their happy way.

Being wrong in so many ways assisted me in another respect. Since the wrong answers differed so widely in their substance that they couldn't all be the right wrong, I began to doubt the rightness of any of the wrongs. A little more time and I would have begun to doubt the reality of the ominous discs overhead at all.

It was in this mood that I talked at the White House conference. There, in that sound proofed room, presumably not bugged by more than a half dozen foreign powers, although certainly bugged by our own secret services who would record each word spoken and try to confound its author twenty years later if he began to give trouble, the reality of the maneuvering discs overhead seemed less believable, and the smell of their Evil seemed not to penetrate.

I had almost convinced the general staff and the President that since we hadn't yet been hurt, only frightened, and didn't really know these things were our enemy perhaps our best course was to do more sampling,

collating and correlating of statistics, to learn more about them —particularly since we had already shot everything except our ultimate weapon against them without effect.

It was then that Senator Higgins had been called out of the conference. When he came back, I could see at once that I had lost. With a few terse words, spoken through grim lips which hardly moved, he pointed out that the enemy discs were hovering over every major city of the world, that they were in a position to strike the killing blow without giving us the chance to defend ourselves; and that it was the height of irresponsible cowardice to wait until they had done it.

IT was the semantics of "cowardice", of course, which turned the tide. Better-to-be-cautious - and - alive-than-brave and-dead was not a concept of speculative extrapolation comfortable to the military mind. The President, after a shrewd look at Higgins, and an apparently correct interpretation of the message he read in the Senator's sick eyes, switched polarity with the practiced ease of a winning politician, and added his argument that it was time America recaptured its leadership of the world, that other nations were faltering in the face of duty, and that once more we had opportunity to be First.

I was preemptorily dismissed with the implication that in the face of all this opportunity I had counselled cowardice, which was no more than might have been expected from a civilian. (As a working arrangement it was conceded that I had some kind of commission in the Space Navy, but no one knew, yet, the exact status).

I did not know of the general staff's decision to use the H-Bomb until later.

I picked up Sara from the Entourage Waiting Room, and we left. We were being driven by our respectful Space Cadet down an almost deserted street when the trumpet called up yonder.

With the first note he crimped the wheels sharply over to the curb, braked the car to a halt, and with a gasped, "I gotta report to the Parade Gound" he slid out of the car and started running down the street. Apparently his Pavian response to a bugle call was in good working order, and apparently it has not been contemplated in his conditioning that he might ever be so far away from the parade ground when the bugle called that driving an automobile might have got him there faster. Naturally, since if he were that far away he couldn't hear the bugle call, could he? So the one-to-one re-

sponse of "Run when you hear the bugle" had been deemed sufficient.

All this was the merest flash in my mind, as Sara and I climbed out of the car, for the golden notes flooding us filled us with an ecstacy to drive out every other thought.

We stood there on the curbing and gazed upward into the heavens.

There were the projectiles, dimly red in the night sky, seeming to draw together now. But high above them, apparently so high they still caught the light from the sun below our horizon, a new set of ships had appeared. Each an irridescent globe. They flew in a wing formation, a vast wing. It was like a wing of shining pearls.

They came closer. They began to shade into an irridescent blue.

And like the star sapphire, even at this distance we could see the symbol on each of them —a shining white cross of radiant light.

"Oh, Ralph," Sara breathed. "How beautiful!"

"Come on," I gasped and pulled at her arm. "Get under cover. They're going to attack the projectiles!"

I knew, I don't know how.

STANDING in doorways, under awnings and canopies, leaning out of windows, the other people knew, too. We ran, as people run in a drenching rain, to take shelter under an archway which led into an arcade of shops. Yet, no more than there, joining some others, we turned and craned our heads to look upward again. The protection of the arch was of less value than the sight. We stepped back out into the clear where we might see the whole dome of the sky. All thought of personal safety was lost in the sheer, blinding wonder of the spectacle above. We were dimly conscious that the other people, too, were creeping out of hiding places, to stand in the open streets, rapt in awe.

The vast wing of irridescent globes, at first so high it was like a piece of jewelry set with pearls, sapphires, opals, was now close. They were swooping downward, but without spin, twist, or obvious force. Somehow this movement without thrust of force heightened the illusion of their serenity. The symbol of their crossed, white lines gleamed brighter now, telling us it was not an effect of the distant sun, but a glow which came from within them, a radiant purity of purpose.

Yet the red projectiles had not been thrown into panic and confusion by the sudden appearance. Now it became clear to us people in the streets below why the discs had hovered and waited

over the city all these hours. Through some source of their own, they must have known that the radiant globes were on their way to attack them. Sharply, with its own effortless burst of speed, but this time sinister rather than serene, The Black Fleet, black in the day and dull ember red in the night, veered off in a long arc of flight; hurtled westward; formed into tight combat units of four or five ships each; faced around to meet the challenge.

We had first thought it was the flight of cowardice, now we realized it was the viciousness of the cornered rat.

Down in the streets below the people murmured their thoughts and hopes and fears to other people, man spoke to man, neighbor to neighbor, without first calibrating the number of pigment cells per square inch of skin or demanding status credentials. The ground swell of conviction grew that this was not the first time these two alien forces had joined in battle. Had Milton in his dreams of Heavenly Hosts and Satan's Minions been visited with some reality of this long ago and far away? We knew, everyone knew, this was one of a long series of such engagements.

There was no question of whose side we were on, who we hoped would win, must win.

There grew the conviction this was the decisive encounter. This was to be no hit and run skirmish, settling nothing. No, this was it.

Either The Black Fleet must be vanquished or it must be driven so far away that it would never return to threaten Earth's people again. Where were the scoffers now who doubted that the universe had been constructed solely for the benefit of Man, and that Man, as its Supreme Achievement, must not be harmed?

On came the star sapphire globes, huge now that they were near, leveling their dive enough to offset the enemy's shift to the west. It was obvious that the new path of descent would hurtle them headlong into the discs in a few seconds more.

Long tentacles of blood light flickered out from the projectiles, the darting tongues of snakes. In and out they flashed, so many they surrounded the discs, creating a deadly, protective screen of twisting, corrosive fire.

As if they could not stop, or had a courage beyond human comprehension, the vanguard shock unit of the globes smashed into the fire-tipped tentacles. And the impact flooded the streets below with a sound of molten steel being poured into icy water. There was a flare of intolerable blindness.

And when our eyes cleared and we could see again. . . .

There was nothing left of the first wave of globes.

As if it possessed but one throat, one voice, from the city below there was one long groan of anguish.

HEROICALLY, the other globes did not hesitate.

Another wave plunged into the writhing tentacles. This time the blinding flash seemed less. Perhaps, expecting it, we slitted our eyes against its coming? This time the destruction of the new wave of globes seemed not instantaneous, nor did they wink out completely. This time there were vapor clouds billowing white against the black heavens as the second shock unit more slowly disintegrated. It was destruction, but not so easy; perhaps no more than the force of an ordinary atomic bomb. The mushrooming clouds of vapor, boiling upward, seemed the same.

A third wave of globes came in. Ah, the courage, the guts! From the streets of the city there was the murmur of wonder, hope renewed.

The discs did not waver in their defensive formation. They seemed to draw a little closer together. A screen of dead black against the lighter sky flickered first, then joined ship to ship.

We groaned in despair.

Our despair was realized.

This time there was no sound of molten steel in icy water, no billowing clouds of vapor, no blinding flash of light. At first touch of the shining globes against the dead black blood screen, the globes were no more.

Yet not in vain. Now we saw one solitary globe still alive, coming from another direction, taking advantage of that instant when the Black Fleet had concentrated all its defensive screen against the wing of onrushing globes, somehow getting behind, inside the defensive screen.

To loose a violet white radiance.

And for a long, interminable, hopeful instant, the radiance persisted. We saw four of the black ships explode into poison foetid gobbets of rotten offal.

The other discs wavered, then the pack swarmed all over the gallant, lone globe. And still the hopeful instant endured the squirming nest of blood black tentacles.

And then hope died.

The radiant light faltered, flicked. The globe surface seemed eaten away like swimming spots of black on an aged bubble.

Then, like the bursting of the bubble, it, too, was no more.

WE clung together there in the street, Sara and I, drawing human comfort from the con-

tact, staring upward, completely engrossed in the titanic battle—the incredible heroism of the globes—the incredible power and malignancy of the discs to withstand them. The ache of our shoulders and necks was as nothing in the throat pain of our apprehension.

It seemed not to occur to anyone, then, to wonder that the air about us was still fresh and clean, that we had felt no atmospheric shocks, that there were no falling objects of debris, that even the scaberous gobbets of offal from the exploded discs had somehow disappeared before reaching Earth.

High in the heavens, another wing of pearls appeared.

"This time they must win, they must!" Sara was moaning.

As with the previous wing, this one sank toward Earth and battle.

Then hesitated!

Wavered in indecision!

Then seemed to withdraw. A long, wailing groan from the city below seemed surely enough to reach up to them. How high can a prayer fly?

"No-o-o! Oh-no-o-o!" Sara was echoing the groans of despair all about us. "They can't fail us now!"

"They won't!" I exclaimed in complete certainty. "You'll see!" And then I added something all out of context with how I felt, how we all felt. Something which filled me with self loathing, made me despise myself. "The script calls for it." I said.

And fortunately no one heard me. Not even Sara.

And I was right.

As the jeweled wing faltered, seemed about to break apart in confusion, the discs shot forward, lured out of their protective formation, blazed their blood red rays outward for the kill.

And a score of the globes, darting away in all directions, as if utterly demoralized, suddenly reversed direction at incredible speed, and converged upon the now scattered discs. From high above, wing after wing of globes swept in until the sky was filled, crowded with darting globes and discs, enjoined now in mortal conflict of individual duel.

As if some protecting screen of our own had rotted and burst now, all at once, our own atmosphere was sulphurous with choking gasses. We felt the blasts of heated air sweep down. Yet, after our first panic flight back to protecting overhangs, our first surprise that we still lived, not unendurable.

And then somehow to increase our sense of participation, identification with the battle.

The dueling battle endured. How long? How long?

Time had ceased to exist. Body need had ceased to exist.

SOMETIME during the night (perhaps in early morning hours?) the arena of battle moved toward the west. Now it was centered no longer over the city. Now it was fading over the horizon.

Now it was gone.

"We're not to know how it comes out?" Sara murmured plaintively, querulously.

"We'll know," I said strongly. And this time caught my following, despicable remark before it left my throat. "This is the intermission."

I started to say, "Let's go out into the lobby to get some popcorn," but had sense enough to change it into something rational.

"However it comes out, Sara, you and I will have a hard day at the Pentagon tomorrow. We may get no sleep, but we should try to find something to eat. We have to keep going."

We were lucky that the thought occurred to us before it had to many others. We stood up, stretched our aching muscles, and with stiff, unwieldly legs we threaded our way through the dazed and huddled groups of people to the community kitchen. We hadn't expected to find any attendants on duty, but the cybernetic cooking machinery was apparently unresponsive to the battle going on over our heads. Nor had there been a complete breakdown in supplying the machines with the raw produce.

Coins in the beef stew slot produced the usual containers. We sat at tables in front of the kitchen television set.

A montage program was in progress to bring us up to date. Everywhere the battle was the same. Everywhere it had moved away over the horizon to the west. What we had seen here in Washington had been witnessed over every large city on Earth. No one commented on this strange coincidence.

For all her usual sharpness, Sara seemed not to have caught it either. I held my peace. I was a cynical so-and-so. It was not the first time I had found myself out of step with the prevailing mood. I had learned my lesson long ago. I knew something of mob reaction, I'd seen it. I knew how little it took to turn an overwrought, tense collection of individuals into a ravening mob, all acting in one accord of insane fury, possessed by a super-entity created through interaction and feedback of emotions, given brief life of uncalculated power, taking possession of the individuals, turning them into body cells of the entity, playing out the tragic role before the individual mind could recoil in horror from its acts, shatter the group accord and destroy the entity—after the deed had been done.

I held my peace and kept quiet.

BUT I no longer believed. I no longer believed that anything we had seen was real. I didn't know what it was. I had no idea of any power which could produce an illusion of instantaneous world-wide scope; nor, as say, the purpose of doing it. I was convinced only that it wasn't what it seemed, that it was an illusion. That it was some kind of universal brainwash.

I looked sharply at Sara. I looked at the handful of people who had also thought of food and strayed into this kitchen. All of them were following, straining to follow, the words of the television commentator. All of them completely hooked.

How had I escaped? Why was I immune to the bait? Was it because a long and heavy career of working with great numbers of people, handling them, manipulating them, causing them to respond in the manner I chose—and discouraged and sickened with them because they did respond, because they had too little critical judgement of manipulative patterns to prevent them from responding—had this given me an insight? Was it that? Or was it some basic flaw in me, which moved me ever so slightly out of phase with my own kind; never again to be as one with them?

How well I understood the contempt of the politician for his constituents, the advertising man for those who bought his product, the entertainment producer for those who became enrapt with his creation. And yet, were not these shaped and debased as much by those to whom they pandered, as were their masses shaped and debased by them? By striving to pander to the widest appeal, the lowest common denominator, did they succeed in anything beyond lowering and debasing even that?

I knew some of the writers and producers around Hollywood. I was not particularly critical of them for giving the public what it demanded. Anything for a buck had become the national way of life. But I had been horrified that although they maintained a superior attitude, and a condescension toward the low level of the public mind, their own taste and critical judgement became debased by their output until they, themselves, began to think it was good. They, themselves, became the victims of their own illusions.

Why was I immune? I could not even join with these!

We were breaking apart the dessert container, when a cacophony of voices from the street penetrated the open door and overwhelmed the voice of the television commentator.

"They're coming back! Ah-h-h! They're coming back."

OUTSIDE, on the street again, we saw it for ourselves. Yes, they were coming back.

In spite of the thoughts I had had, sitting there in the kitchen and watching the others while they watched the television, in spite of this I felt my pulses quicken, my heart began to pound, a choking gladness. There was something in the atmosphere to which my animal responses quickened even while my intellect held back—and the emotional responses began to erode, to wash over, to drown critical judgement.

Yes, they were coming back. And I lifted to them, eager to meet them. Everyone was on his feet now, with their eyes turned toward the west, straining toward the west.

But as the battle forces drew closer, the rising hope and excitement changed again to dread and despair. The globes were pitifully few now, so pitifully few. Still outnumbered. Still outpowered. Still having only one weapon superior—their incredible courage.

Now we could see the projectiles make their move, almost as if we could enter that evil, alien mind, we could see them make their decision that now it was time to move in and crush the radiant globes—utterly. So, like an angry den of snakes, squirming and writhing, they swarmed all over the globes, innundating them.

And still a few, a pitiful few, of the globes escaped somehow. Escaped, but not to flee. Escaped, but only to turn and reengage their enemy.

They began to win.

The faces of the people in the street were slack with awe. Their glistening eyes were sick with hope denied, hope still struggling to hope. To despair again and again, all through the night, and now, with the first breath of silver in the Eastern sky to see the tide turn. Dared they hope? This time, if despair swamped it once more, the very roots of hope would die.

Yet hope they must.

AND now I knew.

What I had not known before. Why the constituents voted in the politician. Why they bought the advertiser'sproduct. Why they even supported Hollywood's shabby little travesty.

Better to have hope and faith that sometimes . . . maybe . . .

Than none.

Now I knew the meaning.

The deed proved the virtue. The virtue proved the deed.

If your heart is pure, your cause is just, your strength is great, and your purpose firm;

you can overcome the obstacles in your path to reach your heart's desire.

This was the essence of all religion, all philosophy, all education, all science, all man's striving. If man did not believe this, then there was no meaning to anything. Without this belief, nothing mattered, man was nothing.

There was a hunger, a craving hunger in man to be reassured of it, to be told it again and again. He could not get enough of the telling. He became the willing, the eager victim of those who traded in the hunger, sickened in knowing he was being victimized, humbly supplicating to be victimized again, because maybe . . . this time . . .

Even the shoddy, shabby trivialities of Hollywood, the nasty little shyster tricks of writers and producers in stringing together meaningless story formula. Even these, for they, too, promised. . . .

THERE, above us, it was being played out once more. Never had the forces of right and evil been so obviously enjoined. Never had evil been so near to triumph, nor good so valiant in near vanquishment. Never had heart and strength fought with such firm purpose in just cause.

Now the obstacles were being overcome.

For others, in other longitudes, the space suspended Earth turning in the sun's light as it does, and yet all this happening simultaneously, the battle must have been fought from dawn to dusk in the brightness of day, from morning until evening, from noon until midnight, from afternoon until the low ebb.

FOR us, there in Washington and along the Eastern seaboard of the United States, it seemed to have a special meaning.

For the turning point came with the first streaks of silver up the morning sky.

And confirmed for us that this time our faith and hope was justified as the sky grew in light.

All at once we knew that, this time, the battle would not reverse itself again. With so few of the globes remaining, and the hosts of evil discs which seemed to spawn still more to take the place of those destroyed, we did not know why or how the tide of battle turned.

But turned it had.

And with the first golden ray of the rising sun, the discs streaked away from the globes in cowardly fear. Their passage through the upper atmosphere came back to us in a scream of insane, craven terror.

And after them pursued the globes.

NOW we could see them no more. Only here and there were bursts of flame brighter than the sun's light, gouts of red fire like opened arteries of blood.

The sun bathed the city streets in its warmth. Now the people who had watched all through the night began to move sluggishly about, as if wakened from a dream. They looked at one another, as waking members of a family might, and for the moment the close affection of family replaced the endless, irritated, sibling bickering among them.

I looked at Sara. Her face was drawn with weariness, and I suppose she saw the same in mine. But I doubt she found the same contentment and fulfillment in my eyes as I read in hers.

There seemed nothing to say. The magnificence of what we had seen obviated all comment, all evaluation. It needed no interpretation of meaning. Not to most, whatever complex wonders and doubts I might feel.

This was not of Earth. That much was clear. No group of men, no nation could have staged this production.

They had come from the stars.

They had come, but not in the way I had imagined they might, someday. I had thought they would come, if they ever came, in reason and rationality, beyond selfishness, beyond passion, beyond falseness. They had come, instead, in fire and passion, in war and destruction, spewing forces at one another beyond comprehension.

And completely phony!

A staged production, specifically for our benefit. A magnificent production, beyond all the wildest hopes of our own showmen—and as phony as anything that ever came out of Hollywood, where they prefer the phony even when the real, the rational, the believable would do the better job.

Yet what kind of alien mind could so accurately assess the human response as to know it would respond favorably to the phony where it might reject the real? How long had they been studying us without our knowledge? How deeply had they dug into us? They had used the very basic drive which had brought man up out of the slime to reach for the stars—faith in the triumph of virtue. To gain?

What? What did they plan to gain?

Or had we become so disillusioned in our ideals that we could contemplate no motive beyond self-gain?

There was nothing to say beyond the trivialities of routine.

WELL, Sara, things will be popping today around the Pentagon. And if I remember right, we are the authorities on

extraterrestrial psychology."

"Supposed to be," she agreed with reservation. "Do you really understand all this? Well enough to tell the staff what it is all about."

"Not that well," I said. "Just well enough to say right now that we can expect visitors shortly. From the globes, not the discs. Not well enough to know what they want from us. But well enough to know that we'll give it to them, whatever they want. They've seen to that."

"Well naturally we would," she said reproachfully. "After what they've done for us. Who could hold out or bargain? What with? And who would want to?"

"Still," I said, "they'll be pounding on my door; I mean Earth-men, not Star-men. I don't expect ever to get within shouting distance of the Star-men. But the Earth-men are going to want me to brief them on how the Star-men's minds work."

"You think you can do it?" she asked doubtfully.

"Hell, no," I said frankly. "But, just the same, we ought to be getting to work. Which means digging up some kind of transportation."

We walked back toward the community kitchen, and as we passed we looked inside. A taxi driver, we could tell by his cap, was nesting a mug of coffee between his hands, warming them as he drank the liquid to warm himself. We went in and sat down at his table.

"We work at the Pentagon," I said to him. "We're trying to get to work. You willing to drive us?"

As if unwilling to take his eyes away from the visions of remembrance, he merely stared.

"This is Dr. Kennedy," Sara explained. "He is an officer in the Space Navy Bureau of Extraterrestrial Psychology. He is needed at the Pentagon. You must drive us there."

That did the trick. He leaped to attention.

"Is your cab parked nearby?" I asked.

"About a quarter block up the street," he answered.

"Lead the way," I instructed.

By comparison with the still dazed people on the streets, he was as sharp as a tack. We climbed into his cab.

"You do know where the Pentagon is," I said, as he pulled away from the curb.

He looked reproachfully at me through the rear view mirror.

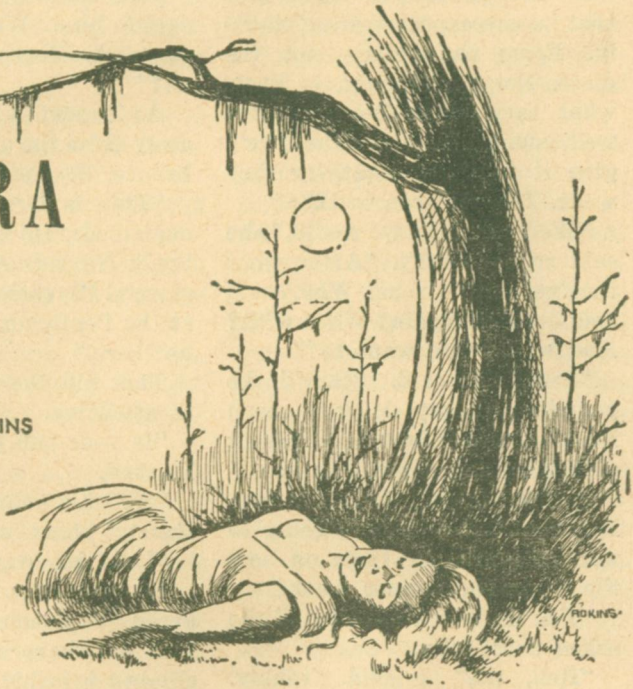
(To be concluded next month)

This novel will be published by Doubleday & Co., Inc. under the title of "When They Come From Space." It will be a February selection of the Science Fiction Book Club.

Miriam deFord has given a good deal of thought to crime and criminology of other times and spaces (see Editorial). Now she turns her talents to constructing a "true crime" of the future—and its solution. Herewith, then, a criminologist's lecture-report on:

THE AKKRA CASE

Illustrated by ADKINS



By MIRIAM ALLEN de FORD

DELIBERATE murder being so very rare a crime in our society, an account of any instance of it must attract the attention not only of criminologists but also of the general public. Very many of my auditors must remember the Akkra case well, since it occurred only last year. This, however, is the first attempt to set forth the bizarre circumstances hitherto known only to the authorities and to a few specialists.

On February 30 last, the body of a young girl was found under the Central Park mobilway in Newyork I. She had been struck on the head with some heavy object which had fractured her skull, and her auburn hair was matted with congealed blood. Two boys illegally trespassing on one of the old dirt roads in the park itself stumbled upon the corpse. She was fully dressed, but barefoot, with her socsandals lying beside her. An autopsy showed only one unusual thing —she was a virgin, though she was fully mature.

Two hundred years ago, say, this would have been a case for the homicide branch of the city police. Now, of course, there are no city police, all local law enforcement being in the hands of the Federal government, with higher supervision and appeal to the Interpol; and since there has been no reported murder (except in Africa and China, where this crime has not yet been entirely eradicated) for at least 20 years, Fedpol naturally has no specialists in homicide. Investigation therefore was up to the General Branch in Newyork Complex I.

The murderer had stupidly broken off the welded serial number disc from her wristlet—stupidly, because of course everybody's fingerprints and retinal pattern are on file with Interpol from birth. It was soon discovered that the victim was one Madolin Akkra, born in Newyork I of mixed Irish, Siamese, and Swedish descent, aged 18 years and seven months. Since it is against the law for any minor (under 25) to be gainfully employed, and there was no record of any exemption-permit, she had necessarily to be a student. She was found to be studying spaceship maintenance at Upper Newyork Combined Technicum.

People who deride Fedpol and call it a useless anachronism don't know what they are talking about. It is true that in our society criminal tendencies are understood to be a disease, amenable to treatment, not a free-will demonstration of anti-social proclivities. But it is also true that every member of Fedpol, down to the merest rookie policeman, is a trained specialist in some field, and that most of its officers are graduate psychiatrists. As soon as Madolin Akkra's identity was determined, it was easy to find out everything about her.

THE circumstances surrounding her in life were sufficiently odd in themselves. Her mother was dead, but she lived with her own father and full younger sister in a small (only 20 stories and 80 living-units) co-operative apartment house in the old district formerly called Westchester, once an "exclusive" settle-

ment but now considerably run down, and populated for the most part by low-income families. Few of the residents had more than one helicopter per family, and many of them had to commute to their jobs or schools by public copter. The building where the Akkras lived was shabby, its chrome and plastic well worn, and showed the effects of a negligent local upkeep system. The Akkras even prepared and ate some of their meals in their own quarters—an almost unheard-of anachronism.

The father had served his 20 years of productive labor from 25 to 45, and the whole family was therefore supported by public funds of one sort or another. When the Fedpol officers commenced their investigation by interviewing this man, they found him one of the worst social throwbacks discovered in many years—doubtless a prime reason for the bizarre misfortune which had overtaken his misguided daughter. To begin with, the investigators wanted to know, why had he not reported his daughter missing? To this, Pol Akkra made the astonishing reply that the girl was old enough to know her own business, and that he had never asked any questions as to what she did! Everyone knows it is every adult's responsibility to report any deviation by the young more serious than the mischievous trespassing by the boys who had found Madolin Akkra's body, and who at least had gone to Fedpol at once. The officers could get no lead whatever from the girl's father.

To find the murderer, it was of first importance to establish the background of this strange case. Access to the park is difficult—has been difficult ever since, more than a century ago, the area became a hunting-ground for thieves and hoodlums, and was transformed into a cultivated forest and garden preserved for aesthetic reasons, and to be viewed only from the mobilways above. (The boys who found the body are, of course, proof that the sealing-off of the park is not entirely effective—but surely only a daring and agile child could insinuate himself under the thorn-set hedges surrounding the park, or swing down to the tree-tops from the structure above.)

If the victim had been killed elsewhere, how was her body carried to the spot where it was found? Both murderer and corpse would have had to penetrate unobserved into an almost impenetrable area. Could the body have been thrown from above? But if so, how could the remains of a full-grown girl have been transported from either a ground car or a copter on to the crowded mobilway, brightly

lighted all night long? She must have gone there alive, either under duress or of her own accord.

The first and most natural question, to Fedpol, was: who did have access to the park? The answer was, the gardeners. But the gardeners were out: they were all robots, even their supervisor. No robot is able to harm a human being. Moreover, no robot could have brought the victim in from outside if she had been killed elsewhere. The gardeners never leave the park, and they would repel any strange robot from elsewhere who tried to enter it. And one could hardly imagine a sane human being who would go to the park for a rendezvous with a robot!

IT WAS Madolin's little sister, Margret, who interrupted the futile interrogation of the surly and resistant Pol Akkra and provided the first clue. She caught the eye of the investigating officer, Inspector Dugal Kazazian, and quietly went into the next room, where Kazazian followed her after posting his assistant with the father.

"I promised Madolin I would never tell on her," she whispered, "but now she's—now it doesn't matter." She had loved her sister; her eyes were puffy from weeping. "She—she'd been going to Naturist get-togethers."

Kazazian almost groaned aloud. He might have known—this was the first time they had been linked with murder, but it seemed to him that in almost every other affair he had investigated for the past few years, the subversive Naturists somehow had crept in. And if he had reflected, he would have suspected them already, since there seems to be no school or college which does not harbor an underground branch of these criminal lunatics.

I need hardly explain to my auditors who and what the Naturists are. But to keep the record complete, let me say briefly that this pernicious worldwide conspiracy, founded 50 years ago by the notorious Ali Chaim Pertinuzzi, is engaged in an organized campaign to tear down all the marvelous technical achievements of our civilization. It pretends to believe that we should eat "natural" foods and wear "natural" textiles instead of synthetics, walk instead of ride, teach children the obsolete art of reading (reading what?—the antique books preserved in museums?), make our own music, painting, and sculpture instead of enjoying the exquisite products of perfected machines, open up all parks and the few remaining rural preserves to campers, hunters and fishers (if any specimens worth hunting can be found outside zoos), and what

they call "hikers"—in a word, go back to the confused, reactionary world of our ancestors. From this hodgepodge of "principles" it is a natural transition to political and economic subversion. No wonder that the information that Madolin Akkra had been corrupted by this vile outfit sent a chill down Inspector Kazazian's spine.

IT explained a great deal, however. The Naturists profess to oppose our healthy system of sexual experimentation, and Madolin had been a virgin. The weird family situation, and her father's attitude both toward her and toward the Fedpol, aroused suspicion that he too was affiliated with the Naturists, not simply that Madolin had flirted with the outer edges of the treasonable organization, as a "fellow-seeker," without her father's knowledge.

Suppose the girl, fundamentally decent and ethically-minded, had revolted against the false doctrine and threatened to betray its advocates? Then she might have been killed to silence her—and what more likely than that, as a piece of brazen defiance, her murdered corpse should have been deposited in the only bit of "natural" ground still remaining in the Newyork area?

But how, and by whom?

THE first step, of course, was to fling a dragnet around all known or suspected Naturists in the district. In a series of flying raids they were rounded up; and since there no longer exist those depositories for offenders formerly known as prisons, they were kept incommunicado in the psychiatric wards of the various hospitals. For good measure, Pol Akkra was included. Margret, at 13, was old enough to take care of herself.

Next, all Madolin's classmates at the Technicum, the operators of her teach-communicators, and members of other classes with whom it was learned she had been on familiar terms, were subjected to an intensive electronic questioning. (Several of these were themselves discovered to be tainted with Naturism, and were interned with the rest.) One of the tenets of Naturism is a return to the outworn system of monogamy, and the questioning was directed particularly to the possibility that Madolin had formed half of one of the notorious Naturist "steady couples," who often associate without or before actual mating. But day after day the investigators came up with not the slightest usable lead.

Please do not think I am underrating Fedpol. Nothing could have been more thorough than the investigation they under-

took. But this turned out in the end to be a case which by its very nature obfuscated the normal methods of criminological science. Fedpol itself has acknowledged this, by its formation in recent months of the Affiliated Assistance Corps, made up of amateurs who volunteer for the detection of what are now called Class X crimes—those so far off the beaten path that professionals are helpless before them.

For it was an amateur who solved Madolin Akkra's murder—her own little sister. When Margret Akkra reaches the working age of 25 she will be offered a paid post as Newyork Area Co-ordinator of the AAC.

LEFT alone by her father's internment, Margret began to devote her whole time out of school hours to the pursuit of the person or persons who had killed her sister. She had told Kazazian all she actually knew; but that was only her starting-point. Though she herself, as she had told the Inspector, believed that the murder might be traced to Madolin's connection with the Naturist (and though she probably at least suspected her father to be involved with them also), she did not confine herself to that theory, as the Fedpol, with its scientific training, was obliged to do.

Concealed under a false floor in her father's bedroom—mute evidence of his Naturist affiliation—she found a cache of printed books—heirlooms which should long ago have been presented to a museum for consultation by scholars only. They dated back to the 20th century, and were of the variety then known as "mystery stories." Margret of course could not read them. But she remembered now, with revulsion, how, when she and Madolin were small children, their mother had sometimes (with windows closed and the videophone turned off) amused them by telling them ancient myths and legends that by their very nature Margret now realized must have come from these contraband books.

Unlike her father and her sister, and apparently her mother as well, Margret Akkra had remained a wholesome product of a civilized education. She had nothing but horror and contempt for the subversive activities in the midst of which, she knew now, she had grown up. The very fact, which became plain to her for the first time, that her parents had lived together, without changing partners, until her mother had died, was evidence enough of their aberration.

But, stricken to the heart as the poor girl was, she could not cease to love those she had always loved, or to be diverted from her resolution to solve her sister's

murder. Shudder as she might at the memory of those subversive books, she yet felt they might inadvertently serve to assist her.

It was easy to persuade the school authorities that her shock and distress over Madolin's death had slowed up her conscious mind, and to get herself assigned to a few sessions with the electronic memory stimulator. It took only two or three to bring back in detail the suppressed memories, and to enable her to extrapolate from them.

ONE feature of these so-called "mysteries" that came back to her struck Margret with especial force—the frequent assertion that murderers always return to the scene of their crime. She decided that she too must plant herself at the spot where her sister's body had been found, and lie in wait for the returning killer.

It would be useless to try to obtain official permission, but she was only 13, as lean and agile as any other child, and if boys could evade the hedges and the robot gardeners, so could she. The audiovids had displayed plenty of pictures of the exact scene, and Margret knew where to find it. But an inspection of the hedges showed her that it would be easier for her to get in from above, at night—a likelier time also for her prey.

She located a place where the trees grew almost to the mobilway and shaded a section of it between the lamps. Perched on the stand-pave and watching for a pause in the stream of gliders-by, she dropped lightly into a tree and climbed down to the park beneath. Hiding from the gardeners, she made her way to the bushes where the boys had discovered Madolin.

For nearly a week, fortified by Sleepnomer pills, Margret spent every moment after dark in this hideaway. It was a long, nerve-wracking vigil: the close contact with leaves and grass, the sound of the wind in the trees, the unaccustomed darkness away from the lights above, the frightening approach of wild squirrels and rabbits and even birds, the necessity to stay concealed from passing robots, kept her on edge. But stubbornly she persisted. And at last she was rewarded.

It was not late—only about 20 o'clock—when she heard a scramble and bump not far from her own means of access to the park. It was not the first time since her watch began that she had heard other adventurers, invariably small and rather scared boys who dared one another to walk for a few feet along the dirt paths, then in a panic rushed back the way they had come. But this time the steps came directly toward her—human foot-

steps, not the shuffle of a robot.

Hidden behind a bush, Margret saw them approach—two boys of about her own age. And then, with a sickening lurch of her heart, she recognized them. She had seen them, acclaimed as heroes, on the videoscreen. They were the two who had found Madolin. She could hear every word they said.

"Come on," one of them urged in a hoarse whisper. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Yes, there is," the other objected. "Ever since then, they've got the gardeners wired to describe and report anybody they find inside the park."

"I don't care. We've *got* to find it. Give me the beamer."

MARGRET crouched behind the thickest part of the shrubbery, her infra-red camera at the alert. The tape-attachment was already activated.

The second boy still held back. "I told you then," he muttered, "that we shouldn't have reported it at all. We should have got out of here and never said a word to anyone."

"We couldn't," the first boy said, shocked. "It would have been anti-social. Haven't you ever learned anything in school?"

"Well, it's anti-social to kill somebody, too, isn't it?"

Margret pressed the button on the camera. Enlarged enough, even the identification discs on the boys' wristlets would show.

"How could we guess there was a human being there, except us? What was she doing here, anyway? Come on, Harri, we've got to find that thing. It's taken us long enough to get a chance to sneak in here."

"Maybe they've found it already," said Harri fearfully.

"No, they haven't; if they had, they'd have taken us in as soon as they dusted the fingerprints."

"All right, it's not anywhere on the path. Put the beamer on the ground where it will shine in front of us, and let's get down on our stomachs and hunt underneath the bushes."

Grabbing her camera, Margret jumped to her feet and dashed past the startled boys. She heard a scream—that would be Harri—and then their feet pounding after her. But she had a head start, and her eyes were more accustomed to the dark than theirs could be. She reached a tree, shinnied up it, jumped from one of its limbs to another on a higher tree beneath the mobilway, chinned herself up, and made her way out safely.

She went straight to Fedpol headquarters and asked for Inspector Kazazian.

The frightened boys were picked up at once. They were brought into headquarters, where they had been praised and

thanked before, and as soon as they saw the pictures and heard the tape-recording they confessed everything.

That night, they said, they were being initiated into one of those atavistic fraternities which it seems impossible for the young to outgrow or the authorities to suppress. As part of their ordeal, they had been required to sneak into Central Park and to bring back as proof of their success a captured robot gardener. Between them they had decided that the only way they could ever get their booty would be to disassemble the robot, for though it could not injure them, if they took hold of it, its communication-valve would blow and the noise would bring others immediately; so they had taken along what seemed to them a practical weapon—a glass brick pried out of the back of a locker in the school gym. Hurled by a strong and practiced young arm, it could de-activate the robot's headpiece.

When, as they waited in the darkness for a gardener to appear, they saw a figure moving about in the shrubbery bordering the path, one of them—neither would say which one it was—let fly. To their horror, instead of the clang of heavy glass against metal, they heard a muffled thud as the brick struck flesh and bone. They started to run away. But after a few paces they forced themselves to return.

It was a girl, and the blow had knocked her flat. Her head was bleeding badly and she was moaning. Terrified, they knelt beside her. She gasped once and lay still. One of the boys laid a trembling hand on her breast, the other seized her wrist. There was no heart-beat and there was no pulse. On an impulse, the boy holding her wrist wrenched away her identification disc.

Panic seized them, and they dashed away, utterly forgetting the brick, which at their first discovery one of them had had the foresight to kick farther into the shrubbery, out of view. Sick and shaking, they made their way out of the park and separated. The boy who had the disc threw it into the nearest sewer-grating.

The next day, after school, they met again and talked it over. Finally they decided they must go to Fedpol and report; but to protect themselves they would say only that they had found a dead body.

DAY after day, they kept seeing and hearing about the case on the videaud, and pledged each other to silence. Then suddenly one of the boys had a horrible thought—they had forgotten that the brick would show their fingerprints! . . . They had come desperately to search

for it when Margret overheard them. Kazazian's men found it without any difficulty; it had been just out of the gardeners' regular track.

In view of the accidental nature of the whole affair, and the boys' full confession, they got off easy. They were sentenced to only five years' confinement in a psychiatric retraining school.

The suspects against whom nothing could be proved were released and kept under surveillance. Pol Akkra, and all the proved Naturists, were sentenced to prefrontal lobotomies. Margret Akkra, in return for her help in solving the mystery, secured permission to take her father home with her. A purged and docile man, he was quite capable of the routine duties of housekeeping.

The killing of Madolin Akkra was solved. But one question remained: how and why had she been in Central Park at all?

The answer, when it came, was surprising and embarrassingly simple. And this is the part that has never been told before.

Pol Akkra, a mere simulacrum of the man he had been, no longer knew his living daughter or remembered his dead one. But in the recesses of his invaded brain some faint vestiges of the past lingered, and occasionally and unexpectedly swam up to his dreamlike consciousness.

One day he said suddenly: "Didn't I once know a girl named Madolin?"

"Yes, father," Margret answered gently, tears in her eyes.

"Funny about her." He laughed his ghastly Zombie chuckle. "I *told* her that was a foolish idea, even if it was good Nat—Nat-something theory."

"What idea was that?"

"I—I've forgotten," he said vaguely. Then he brightened. "Oh, yes, I remember. Stand barefoot in fresh soil for an hour in the light of the full moon and you'll never catch cold again.

"She was subject to colds, I think." (About the only disease left we have as yet no cure for.) He sighed. "I wonder if she ever tried it."

THE END

The Mars Snooper

By FRANK TINSLEY

Get ready for the latest thing in space transportation—the convertible Mars rocketship, model 1971.

MANY students of space travel believe that in making the Moon our primary objective we are fooling around with the wrong heavenly body. Mars, they contend, offers a far more rewarding study. And, they say, in her closely circling twin satellites—Phobos and Deimos—Nature has provided perfect box-seats for the show.

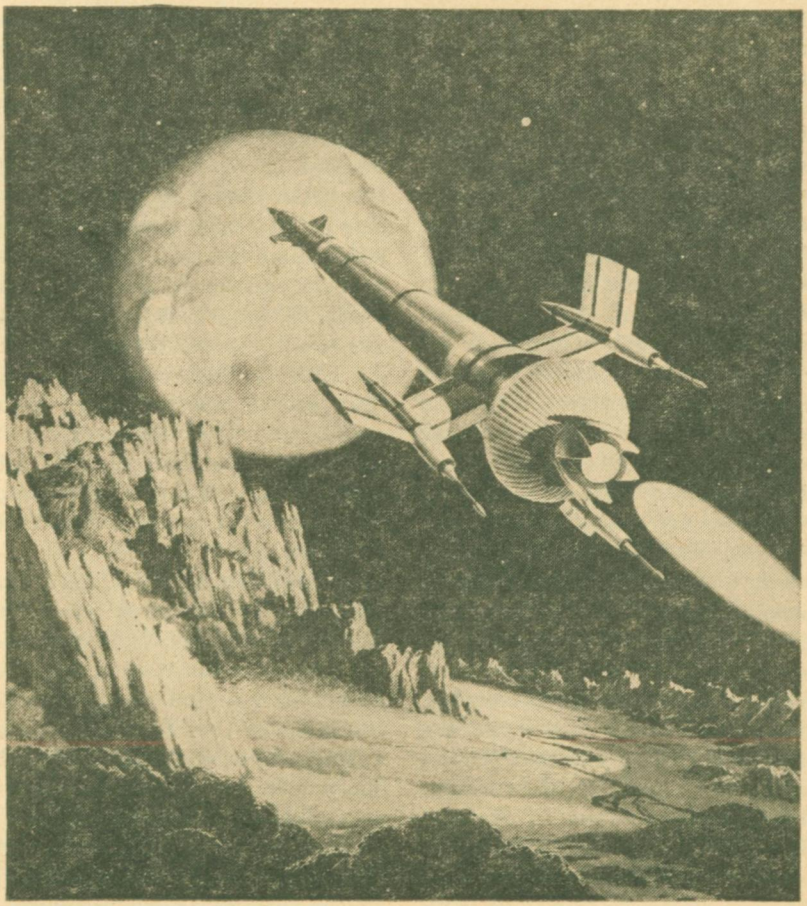
Actually, the performance put on by our nearest planetary neighbor could be a lot more interesting and profitable than the Lunar one. For Martian conditions parallel Earth's far more closely than do those on the Moon.

For instance, the red planet's day is only a half-hour longer than ours; due to the similar inclination of Mars axis, she has a full range of Earth-like seasons. Mars' gravity is slightly more than one-third of ours, as compared with the Moon's one-sixth. Martian temperatures are more equable, too—noon-hour readings of 50 degrees F. have been recorded in the equatorial regions—and there is even a tenuous trace of atmosphere. As a result, the presence of lichen-like life is probable. With the advent of spring warmth, a green sheen that may well be vegetation replaces the retreating polar ice cap. All in all, therefore, Mars seems a far more likely spot than the Moon for a first stopover on our pioneering space trips.

According to Astronomy Professor Jan Schilt of Columbia University, the 35-million-mile hop to Mars requires only slightly more fuel than our present projects for circumnavigating the Moon. In both cases, the principal expenditure occurs in breaking out of our Earthly gravitational field. Should a Lunar

landing be made, more fuel is burnt in setting down, and still more—one-sixth of the Earth escape requirement—in the homeward take-off. While a similar touch-down on Mars, itself, is twice as expensive in fuel, a landing made on either of her miniature moons would be almost fuel-free.

DEIMOS, the outer satellite, is only 12,500 miles from the mother planet, which looms in the Deiman sky almost nine times as large as our Moon appears to us. If we prefer a still closer observation post, the nearer moon, Phobos, is a scant 3,700 miles away from Mars. From this vantage point, Mars' mass virtu-



Reproduced by courtesy of the American Bosch-Arma Corp.

ally fills the sky, and the most detailed views and photos are possible. Both of these satellites are tiny—only about ten miles in diameter—and consequently, have a negligible magnetic field. A spaceship could float in to a feather-like landing, and take off again with little more than a shove of the pilot's foot. At Deimos' orbital speed, this ten-pound push would start the ship back toward Earth at 3,000 miles an hour!

Such a trip is not, however, as easy as it may sound. Proper timing is essential and much intricate planning must be done due to the celestial mechanics of the two planets. While Mars' speed around the Sun is roughly equal to Earth's, it revolves at a greater distance. Therefore, its orbital path is almost twice as long as ours. As a result, the two planets line up on the same side of the Sun every two years and two months. The ellipses they describe are such that at its apogee, Mars is 60,000,000 miles away from Earth and at its perigee, around 23,500,000. The Martian orbit is quite eccentric however, and every 15 years when both planets' perigees coincide, they come much closer and are only a little over 35,000,000 miles apart. The last of these neighborly nods occured in September, 1956. The next is due in 1971. So you see that there must be a definite time element involved in planning the most economical trip. Predicted on fuel expenditure and elapsed time, a medium-priced visit would require a two-year stop-over. The really cheap, tourist-class excursion, entails a between rocket wait of 15 years!

While more costly in fuel, the two-year version is perfectly practical for preliminary voyages of exploration. It does, however, pose a host of presently unanswered technical problems. Our spaceship must escape from Earth and travel to Mars during the brief period of orbital incidence. There, its crew must land safely and eke out a rather precarious existence during a complete, 26-month orbital circuit (less, of course, transit time.) As Mars approaches perigee, they must then take off again and return to home base.

All this requires a nicety of astrogation and load calculation. The ship must carry enough fuel to attain Earth and Martian escape velocities, and for power-on landings. To this must be added further allotments for flight, maneuvering, and a reserve supply. The physical and psychological reactions of the crew constitutes a formidable problem in itself. They will be exposed to severe accelerations, periods of weightlessness, long confinement and the strains of survival in an alien

environment. Of course, we have already amassed a certain amount of experience in these fields—Arctic and Antarctic winter camps, long submarine voyages, etc. But while atomic sub crews have weathered several months of submersion at a time, on Mars, a minimum of two years is involved!

Then come the multiplicity of engineering headaches connected with such a flight. We have to find workable answers to problems of countering frictional heat, armoring the ship against solar radiation, developing dependable interplanetary guidance equipment and techniques for safe landings in varying gravitational fields. Add to these the million and one bottlenecks of air supply and circulation, food production, structural and landing gear design, auxiliary and primary powerplants, and you can easily see why we don't start tomorrow.

A VARIETY of methods have been proposed to overcome these difficulties, most of them involving a breakdown of the voyage into a number of stages and vehicles. The first stage is usually a ferry hop in a conventional chemical rocket to an Earth satellite station. There, our astronauts transfer to a true "spaceship" for the interplanetary leg of their trip. This cosmic craft may be propelled by chemical fuels, atomic energy, or several types of electro-rockets drawing their power from solar heat or light. Upon arriving in the neighborhood of Mars the spaceship circles the planet in a high orbit while the explorers descend to their destination in still another ferry which has been towed along like a ship's tender. All in all, the round trip involves two planetary take-offs, two landings, and four changes of vehicles!

The illustration on page 125 shows a simpler concept of interplanetary travel based upon current developments in atomic propulsion. Instead of a number of vehicles employing a variety of powerplants, this concept calls for two distinct types of propulsion to be combined in a single vehicle and fed by a single atomic heat source. These are a nuclear-fueled rocket for space cruising, and a trio of nuclear ramjets for Earth take-off and airplane type flight upon return to our terrestrial atmosphere. Let's take a look at how this team is harnessed together.

As you know, a rocket or jet engine works on the reaction principle, ejecting a continuous, rearward flow of gas under pressure. It is the reverse, gun-like kick of this constant explosion that produces forward thrust. Back in 1687, Sir Isaac Newton

first published this principle in his celebrated "Laws of Motion", stating that "every action has an equal and opposite reaction". Thus, the forward thrust generated by a rocket exactly equals the foot-pounds of its exhaust gases. Jet engines provide the gas flow by gulping in vast quantities of air and then passing them through a compresser. This stream of air, containing large amounts of oxygen, is fed into a combustion chamber, mixed with fuel and the mixture is ignited. Tremendously expanded by the ensuing explosion, the gas vents itself at high speed through an exhaust nozzle. Chemical rockets follow a similar procedure, except that lacking air in their passage through space they must carry their own oxygen for combustion. Or, in the case of solid-fuel rockets, the necessary oxygen is combined with the fuel in advance.

THE atomic reactor, on the other hand, does not rely on the combustion of fuel and oxygen. It produces only flameless heat. As a gas exhaust is necessary to make a rocket work, some form of "operating fluid" must be provided. One of the lightest and most compactly storable mediums for this purpose is hydrogen, and our spaceship carries a large supply in liquified form. This is stored in a long, cylindrical tank that separates the tail reactor from the crew cabins in the nose, and forms the body of the ship. Thus, in addition to its propulsive function, the hydrogen doubles in brass as a protective radiation shield. When the throttle is opened, its own pressure forces the hydrogen into the rocket's "combustion" chamber. Here it is expanded by the intense heat of fission and exhausted through a rearward nozzle in conventional style.

The advantages of this system are apparent. Instead of a heavy fuel load, plus oxydizer, we carry only a pound or two of plutonium, good for several years of continuous "fizzing". The saved tankage can be given over to more hydrogen. Even this may eventually become renewable in flight, as current research indicates the presence of considerable free hydrogen in space. If this proves to be true, the gas can be scooped up and compressed to provide unlimited propulsive power.

So much for the space leg of our Martian journey. An entirely different set of conditions are encountered in taking off and landing at our Earth base. Inside the mantle of terrestrial atmosphere, oxygen-laden air is available as an operating fluid and there is no need to sacrifice our precious hydrogen supply. Under these circumstances we switch to a sec-

ondary propulsive system—our ramjets. Returning to Earth, these are used as flight engines in circling the globe for a landing. Coupled with a set of ultrasonic, W-shaped wings, they permit our ship to fly like a high-speed airliner. Under complete pilot control, it can proceed to its specially equipped home base and make its approach run. Then, with the ship positioned in a vertical attitude above its pad, we pop stabilizing parachutes and switch back to the rocket to brake our decent. The switch is easy. Equipped with separate sets of plumbing for rocket and ram-jets, the heat exchanging medium can be valved from one to the other. Both operate from a central atomic pile which provides heat for both space and atmospheric flight. While the system may sound complicated, it really is simple.

OUR spaceship is designed to fly in two directions—nose first as a space rocket, and tail first as an ultrasonic airplane. To avoid contaminating its Earth base, the vehicle is launched nose up, by an outsize chemical fuel booster of the Saturn type. When the first stage burns out and returns to Earth, a second stage ignites. This consists of three, solid-fuel units mounted on the spaceship's wing-tips. These bring the ship to escape velocity and are dropped in turn. With its main fuel load of hydrogen intact, the vehicle heads for its destination, coasting on a pre-set course. En route, it tumbles end for end at a calculated rate, generating a degree of centrifugal force approximating Earthly gravity.

Nearing Mars, gyroscopes check this rotation and the ship approaches the planet tail first. Several options now present themselves. Using its rocket in reverse, the spaceship can brake its cruising speed and fall into an orbit around Mars, itself. Or it can brake still more and come in for a landing on either of the Martian moons. Tripod legs, extending downward from the ram-jet intake cones, serve as a self-levelling landing gear. A third option, more expensive in hydrogen consumption, is to land on Mars for immediate exploration of its surface.

On the return voyage to Earth our spaceship takes off under rocket power and accelerates to cruise velocity. Power is then cut off and the vehicle coasts for the major part of the journey. Approaching Earth, the gravity-inducing rotation is again checked and a tail-first attitude assumed. Again the rocket comes into play, braking the ship to a safe re-entry speed. This can be fairly high, due to the design of its "tail cone." The latter is a blunt,

heat-shedding shield of the ablative type, corrugated to double its effective area. As the ship gradually slows down and the atmosphere thickens enough to use, the atomic heat is switched from rocket to ram-jets. "Petal" doors now fold inward to enclose the rocket nozzle in a streamlined housing and our spaceship becomes a heat resistant, high speed airplane, whose ultrasonic, M-shaped wings are also fitted with ablative leading-edges. The three small control fins projecting from the nose end of the vehicle function as flippers and rudder, and permit the plane to head for its base under normal flight controls. There the rocket is switched on again to brake vertical decent.

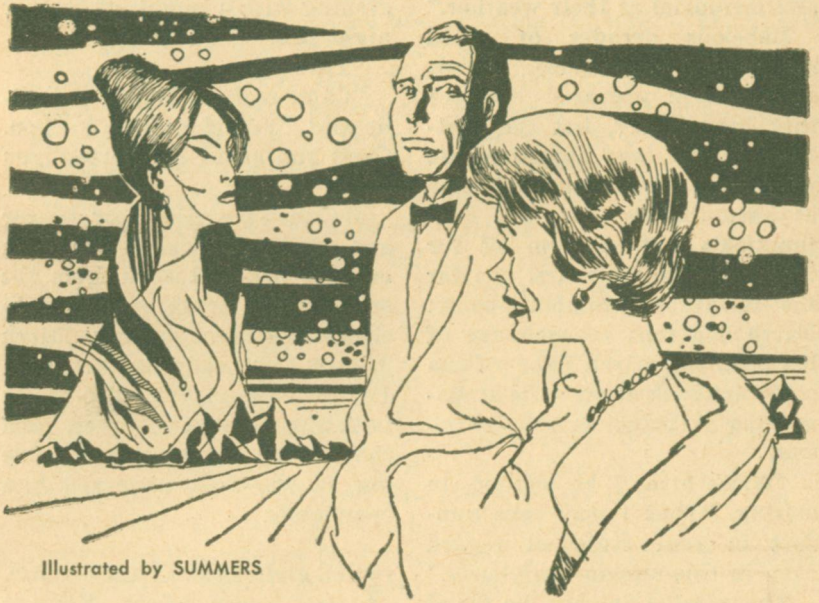
So our first Snooper will return from Mars and her moons, laden with invaluable data, geologic and atmospheric samples, and photographs of a clarity that is literally out-of-this-world. The long debated questions of canals, life forms and environment have been resolved and we can plan intelligently for the succeeding steps of Martian exploration. The voyage has taken anywhere from one to three years, depending on the power and speeds available.

Time is now of the essence. The Russians have taken advantage of celestial mechanics and have recently launched a vehicle to probe Venus. The orbits of Earth and Mars will approach a state of favorable opposition in 1971. Let's make sure that by then, American ships and powerplants will be ready to take advantage of it.

THE END

INCONSTANCY

By ROGER DEE



Illustrated by SUMMERS

The trouble with a Martian-Terran romance is that it has to buck things like tradition. Up on Mars, when they sing "If you were the only girl in the world," they really mean it.

HIS first day on Earth promised to be even worse than Mirrh Yahn y Cona had feared when he left Yrml Orise y Yrl, his fiancee, to become Mars' first interplanetary ambassador. The frenetic bustle of Denver spaceport, his ominous spiriting away through screaming hordes of spectators, left him bewildered and uneasy.

Alone in the first brief privacy

of his Denver Heptagon apartment, he ideographed a facsimile transmission to Yrml at once. "I long for you already," he said. "And for the serenity of home. Earthpeople are as barbarous and mercurial as their weather."

Babelous decades of taped newsreels and video serials should have prepared him for that inconstancy, but the first-hand reality was appalling. He would gladly have returned home at once, before planetary conjunction's end cut him off for two interminable years, but for the inevitable stumbling-block: Earth had sent an exchange of her own, and Mirrh Yahn y Cona could not back down without disgracing his planet as well as himself.

"Write often," he pleaded, in closing. "That I may take comfort in your steadfast regard even in this simian hurlyburly."

The missive finished, he found time remaining before Ellis, of Diplomatic, arrived to switch on the multisensory projection of his last evening with Yrml. The projection had been cubed in a Privileged Couples nook complete with real plants and hermetically sealed fountain, and near its close the two of them had sung the traditional Song of Parting from the ancient *Tchulkione Serafi*.

Ellis arrived all too soon, trailing an aura of Scotch, diplomatic enthusiasm and geniality.

"No time to waste," Ellis said briskly. "Little enough of it before you leave us, and you're going to see Earth from pole to pole. The three of us begin this evening with a sample of Denver night life."

"Three?"

"Came early to brief you," Ellis said. "Found a guide for you. Can't run about unescorted, you know."

He answered the door buzzer and admitted a young woman in evening dress. Rushed from the spaceport in what amounted to cloak-and-dagger secrecy, Mirrh Yahn y Cona had until now seen Earthwomen only on video and at indistinguishable distance, and the sudden appearance of this one in the flesh unnerved him completely.

THE girl was small and slender, well under Mirrh Yahn y Cona's athletic six-foot height. She was warmly and roundly vital with a stunning abundance of life at which the two-dimensional simulacra of recorded soap-opera could only hint.

"Miss Leila Anderson," Ellis introduced her. "Member of Diplomatic, so it's all in the family."

She took the hand that Mirrh Yahn y Cona raised as if to defend himself.

"I'm to see that you aren't bored to death here among stran-

gers," she said. "All work and no play isn't good for anyone. Especially," she said to Ellis, "for one so handsome. I didn't dream he'd look so—

"So Terran," Ellis finished before she could say *so human.* "And why not? We're from the same original stock, separated ages before our history begins. Martian annals run back for millenia, did you know? Gold mine of information, settle problems our experts have puzzled over for centuries."

"I am not truly representative of my people," Mirrh Yahn y Cona said with some bitterness. "A special case, reared from birth for this assignment."

The multisensory projector swung into the *Tchulkione Serafi's* Song of Parting. Mirrh Yahn y Cona's resonant baritone, operatically assertive above Yrml's reedy soprano, filled the room. He shut off the machine abruptly, feeling a sense of desecration that the tender scene had been bared to alien eyes.

Still he felt a puzzling premonitory twinge of guilt when the projection collapsed. Yrml had been infinitely desirable when the sequence was cubed; why should she now seem so sallow and angular, so suddenly and subtly distant?

"Remarkable voice," Ellis said. "You could make a fortune with it here."

"It was lovely," Leila Anderson said. "Could I hear the rest of it some time?"

"No." He realized his curtness and added, "It is the Song of Parting for lovers. Very personal."

He found that he was still holding Leila's hand, and dropped it hastily. Ellis, who had risen high in Diplomatic for good reasons, stepped competently into the breach.

"Night duty calls," Ellis said. "Let's be off."

A DIPLOMATIC limousine without insignia took them to a nightclub large enough, and dim enough, to promise anonymity. On the way a quick summer shower left the streets wet and glistening and turned the night into a many-scented freshness that was sheer fantasy to one accustomed to the sterile air of sealed underground ways.

The rain had ended when they left the car, but the brief moment outside, under a vast openness of night sky empty except for dispersing clouds and speeding white moon, struck Mirrh Yahn y Cona suddenly cold with too-familiar panic.

They had found their table before anyone spoke.

"Agoraphobia?" Ellis said, in frowning concern. "I should think you'd be conditioned against that, with all the time

they've had to prepare you."

Leila Anderson put an impulsive hand on the Martian's.

"I'm a touch claustrophobic, so I know how it must be." She shivered. "To be buried under all those tons and tons of—"

"Immurement is security," Mirrh Yahn y Cona said. "The ultimate stability."

"You'll get acclimatized," Ellis said. "It takes time."

He broke off to peer through the gloom beyond the dance floor. "Good Lord, there's Ryerson of the *Post*, camera and all. If he recognizes me he'll know who Mirrh is and—"

"Yahn," Mirrh Yahn y Cona corrected automatically. "With us the second name is impersonal. First is used only by loved ones."

"Yahn, then," Ellis said. "If Ryerson tumbles, he'll want pictures and an interview. Yahn will be lionized before he's ready. Can't publicize him until he knows the ropes."

"You'd better skip," Leila said. "If we all go, he'll spot us for sure."

"Right." Ellis shoved some money at Leila. "Call me at my office when it's safe."

When Ellis had gone and their waiter had brought drinks, they faced each other across the table, Yahn visibly on guard and Leila with the beginning of speculation in her eyes.

"Maybe it's better like this, without protocol," she said. "Yahn, can you—do you dance in our gravity?"

He was bitter again. "Remember my training. I am taller, stronger and more freakishly agile than any Martian—including my fiancee—has been for thousands of years."

Her clear look made him ashamed and he added, "With us the dance is an art form only. Here the intent seems different."

"It is," Leila said almost grimly. "Finish your drink, Buster. You're going to need it."

HE NEEDED several before the evening was finished. The Terran dance in its limited variations offered small challenge; Yahn mastered it with an ease that delighted Leila and brought tacit envy from other couples. The cocktails may have contributed to his own mixed reactions, lending primitive tactility to Leila's pliant response.

Neither of them, when Ryerson of the *Post* went away with his camera, considered calling Ellis.

"I don't often enjoy my work so much," Leila said. "Let's not spoil the evening with diplomacy, shall we?"

They left the Diplomatic vehicle for Ellis, rented an agency car and drove through the charged serenity of the night into the

mountains. They talked the Moon down and the Sun up. Nothing took place that might have shocked a reasonably tolerant duenna, but by dawn they had reached the sort of understanding that comes spontaneously or not at all.

"The biologists who tailored me to Terrestrial standards," Yahn said, "did their work too well. I find myself more Terran than Martian."

The immovable obstacle, of course, was Yahn's obligation to Yrml, who would be waiting with enduring Martian patience for his return. Leila went into that matter later with Ellis, not so much to enlist his dubious sympathies as to clarify the bristly problem in her own troubled mind.

"Martians use our broadcasts as a standard of judgment," Leila said. "And you know where *that* leads. The more prominent the people in the newscasts, the higher the divorce rate. The more popular a video serial, the greater its emotional shilly-shallying. To Martians we're the last word in fickleness."

"I know," Ellis agreed. "Our cultural geometry was always triangular."

"Exactly. So how can Mirrh-Yahn break the news to his dry little fiancee back home? We're accustomed to inconstancy and to incontinence. We sing corny songs about girls who write jilting letters to their men in service. Our opera flaunts Perkinses and Mesdames Butterfly, and the fact that we enjoy them shocks the ascetic pants off the Martians. Did you know that their population control quota demands a strictly equal sex-ratio, so that there's never more than one boy for one girl from the beginning? Mirrh-Yahn simply hasn't it in him to leave Yrml dangling. He'd feel a renegade for the rest of his life."

"*Mirrh*-Yahn," Ellis noted. "Obviously he's willing enough, if you're on a first-name footing."

"I can't call him Yahn any longer, like a stranger. Mirrh-Yahn is a compromise."

Ellis rummaged in his desk and brought out a personnel folder. "Dossier on J. Frederic Thomas, our young man on Mars. Maybe we can turn up an angle through him."

The exchange ambassador's folder was neither interesting nor helpful. J. Frederic Thomas stood revealed as a dwarfish scholastic type, complete with massive glasses and receding hairline.

"He looks more Martian than Terran," Leila said. "Is that deliberate?"

"Mars sent us a man specially bred to fit into our culture, didn't they? Simple job here to turn up a Martian type. Matter of fact,

J. F.'s reports show he fits in up there like a native."

"Check with him, then," Leila said. "Though I can't imagine what help we can expect from a wizened little stick like that."

LEILA was wrong. J. Frederic Thomas—who quite predictably, being paired off with the only unattached female on Mars as his cicerone, had immediately found himself caught in the same thorny dilemma that gouged his opposite number on Earth—was eager to help. The result of Ellis' inquiry was a swift letter from Yrml Orise y Yrl to Mirrh Yahn y Cona; a letter which Ellis turned over in duplicate, one in Martian ideograph, the other a translation, to Leila.

It broke Yrml's engagement to Yahn for the excellent reasons that J. Frederic Thomas was not only more Martian in physique and deportment, but also possessed a fine reedy tenor which blended ever so better with Yrml's soprano in the less poignant duets from the *Tchulkone Serafi.*

"The man never lived," Ellis pointed out, "Martian or Terran, no matter how relieved he might be, whose ego wouldn't need attention after a letter beginning *Dear Yahn.* Shall I let it go on through the mails, or will you —"

Leila answered him on her way out. "Don't bother," she said.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, JULY 2, 1946 AND JUNE 11, 1960 (74 STAT. 208) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF AMAZING STORIES, FACT AND SCIENCE FICTION published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1961.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required by the act of June 11, 1960 to be included in all statements regardless of frequency of issue.) 51,110.

MATTHEW T. BIRMINGHAM, JR.
(Business Manager)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 19th day of September, 1961.

[SEAL]

WILLIAM PROEHMER, Notary Public
State of New York, No. 41-8446350—Queens County. Cert. filed in New York County.
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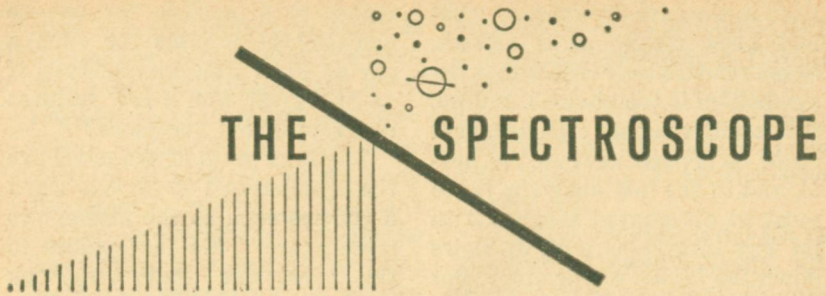

By S. E. COTTS

DARK UNIVERSE. *By Daniel F. Galouye. 154 pp. Bantam Books. Paper: 40¢.*

With the publication of his latest book, Daniel Galouye has gained an even stronger foothold for himself in science fiction history. His previous work gave evidence of an original mind. This novel is even fresher, which seems too good to be true in an age when originality in any field of endeavor is in short supply. Here we are introduced to a civilization complete with traditions, mores, and a mythology which is as unique as any that SF has come up with so far. Yet, it doesn't occur in any far off exotic place but right on Earth (or rather in Earth), in a series of cave worlds.

The long-dreaded eventuality of a nuclear war finally came, but not before the survival of some of the population had been planned. Underground sanctuaries had been built to be sealed off from the poisoned atmosphere. Ironically enough, these never would have been possible without the development of nuclear power, the same force that had destroyed Earth's original homes. Food was supplied by a type of plant that functioned through thermosynthesis instead of photosynthesis. In most of these seventeen sanctuaries, everything worked as planned: institutions were preserved and handed down, and everyone knew where they were and just when it was safe for the descendants to return to the outside world. But in one unit, the machinery didn't sustain itself, and the members had lost their ability to maintain it. They fled deeper and deeper into the caves leaving knowledge and reason behind. A new religion sprang up, and the descendants' hearing developed to replace the eyes rendered useless because light no longer existed.

Dark Universe, then, is the story of those survivors who

lived in the cave darkness of what had been meant as a retreat. Some readers may object that the symbolism is too obvious. Indeed, it is really the only criticism that could be leveled against the novel, and in the last analysis, it too must be discounted because it in no way interferes with or slows down the action of the story, but merely adds another facet for us to enjoy.

MOON OF MUTINY. *By Lester del Rey. 217 pp. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $2.95.*

The title of this book is for the birds, and the story isn't too much better. It bothers me to say this because much of Mr. del Rey's work is worthy of higher respect. But once again I question the need for such a type of science fiction—that which is meant for a juvenile audience. All the teenagers I know who are science fiction minded are such voracious readers that they have become very precocious in their tastes and wants. They would consider Mr. del Rey's book beneath them, I suspect.

The story features a poor misunderstood whippersnapper of eighteen or twenty who turns out to be the biggest hero since the boy who stuck his finger in the dyke. If he were an engaging "Huck Finn" type one might accept his incredible exploits in the spirit of fun. But del Rey never makes this possible for us—no empathy *is* possible for such a one as Fred Halpern. Perhaps if he had given him a few failures along with his successes?

The best parts of the novel are the explanations of various moon activities such as the attempt to mine there. This fact points to the conclusion that the book would have been better off without an attempted story line at all, somewhat after the manner of the essays covered in the following review.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE SPACESHIP. *By Arthur C. Clarke. 189 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 50¢.*

This Clarke opus contains the kind of pieces into which Lester del Rey should have turned his *Moon of Mutiny.* It is an anthology of non-fiction pieces which have appeared in various magazines (mostly non SF ones). Though the sugar-coated style in some of the articles is a bit cloying, still the book is a fine example of how far up a writer's imagination can go while still keeping his feet planted firmly on solid factual rock. Clarke still holds first place for his virtuoso extrapolations from the known to the unknown. The subjects are varied—climate control, laboratory synthesis of living matter, space exploration—and to all of them he brings not only knowl-

edge but zest. However, there is no getting away from the fact that they would have been written a bit differently had they been meant primarily for the edification of us addicts rather than the popular market. I find this rather bothersome, for Clarke has always been one of the most lucid and interesting of science fiction authors and need not condescend to anyone. That, it seems to me, is for lesser men.

In the back of the book, Clarke says that he has seen so many of his predictions come true that now in his forties he feels like an unemployed prophet. Well, may I humbly suggest that all he needs to do is to turn out another book like *Against the Fall of Night* or *Childhood's End* and he can become a prophet in full employ. I've been getting grey waiting for one. After all, there are many other competent non-fiction writers around (albeit not so many *interesting* ones), but there are very few fiction writers with a poet's tongue. Therefore, those who have one are under an almost sacred obligation to use it.

P.S. By the way, there is a blurb on the back cover from *The New York Times* that ought to give everyone a chuckle. The *Times* is original enough to tell us that *The Challenge of the Spaceship* contains more startling ideas than a bushel of science fiction. I didn't credit that newspaper with such a sense of humor!

NO MAN'S WORLD. *By Kenneth Bulmer. 128 pp. Ace Book. Paper: 40¢.*

If you're looking for plain uncomplicated entertainment, this short adventure story by Kenneth Bulmer ought to be the thing. By this I don't mean that the plot is uncomplicated; simply that it has no pretentions to being other than what it is—a story of inter-galactic intrigue featuring not one or two but three mysterious women. A touch of humor enlivens the proceedings further in the description of what amounts to an intergalactic social register. This register is not based on people but on whole planetary systems. A person who comes from a ten or fifteen-planet cluster is practically beneath notice, while one from a cluster of thousands is king of the roost and can take all kinds of liberties. The Untouchables of India were subject to fewer prohibitions than the person from a weak system. All of which goes to prove that science may progress but the hunt for a status symbol will never stop, and a snob will be a snob no matter what the century.

On the other side of this Ace Double Book is *Mayday Orbit* by Poul Anderson, a minor trifle

peopled with some amusing warriors and nomads of the planet Altai who are descended from the inhabitants of the frozen Steppes of Asia.

MAN AND DOLPHIN. *By Dr. John C. Lilly. 312 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. $4.95.*

This review ought to be entitled "More About Dolphins" since dolphins aren't newcomers to regular readers of *Amazing.* They played the leading role in the August issue: they were featured on Emsh's cover, in John Jakes' story, "The Highest Form of Life," in NL's editorial, and in my review of *The Voice of the Dolphins* by Leo Szilard. Dr. Lilly's book, *Man and Dolphin,* was most likely the stimulus behind a lot of this activity for he has been working with dolphins for a number of years. The book is his account of what he has done so far and what he hopes to prove in the future. It is illustrated with photographs and contains figures, tables, appendices and a bibliography—in fact all the impedimenta that usually mean dull going. This is not the case here, however. Though the book is as complete as could be wished, Dr. Lilly's own "love of the chase" carries the reader along quite painlessly.

The main portion of the book is devoted to the experiments conducted with the dolphins in an effort to clarify (and ultimately prove or disprove) his working hypothesis—that "until the brain reaches a certain size, language as it is known by normal humans is not possible, and conversely, that if a brain is above a certain size, it has the capability of learning a language." Among the various studies Dr. Lilly has pursued in line with these ideas are charting the various areas of the dolphin brain, teaching the dolphins to participate in the testing (pushing levers with their snouts, etc.), and trying to understand their communications with each other, to name but a few. In the appendices he deals at some length with the physiology of dolphins and with experimental definitions and ways of detecting intelligence.

Dr. Lilly is aided in his Virgin Islands laboratory by his wife and six children as well as other staff members. I certainly wish him well in his quest, and he can take comfort from the knowledge that no matter what the final outcome, he has added immeasurably to our "dolphinabilia." However, without meaning to sound like a "Gloomy Gus," I would like to say that on the basis of the evidence presented in his book, Dr. Lilly's facts and results do not seem to match the implications inherent in his hypothesis.

(*continued from page 6*)

hardly call this humorous.

Your Classic Reprints in AMAZING & FANTASTIC are OK the only goof so far being "Ship of Darkness"—easily labeled "Van Vogt's Worst"

Ken Winkes
Arlington, Wash

• *Our blood curdles easily.*

Dear Editor:

I see by your September issue that several readers object to the serials, a battle that has been fought for many years. First, allow me to state, editorially, that I'm on your side, if you have one; that a story, however long or short, if it is good, should be published and that the entire contents of the magazine should not be devoted to it.

I have always been an advocate of the longer story, especially the novelette or novella which other magazines seem to have forgotten. While short-shorts and short stories are fine, many times there are plots which simply cannot be molded into these forms of writing. Are we then to forsake the plot, the characters just because they won't conform to what we arbitrarily demand? That, I think, is wrong and that stories, regardless of length, should be written, published and read. The novelette is a particularly good literary form for science fiction where more attention must be paid to background, an important factor in any s-f story.

Readers Sam Jason and Mrs. Ruth Buskey have taken a negative attitude and instead of making use of the serial, they have chosen to neglect it entirely. They are not only hindering the science fiction media in general, but I feel they are cheating themselves when, because it is a serial, they simply won't read it. Form, alone, is a poor basis for judgement.

However, I think I have a solution. I do not read serials in part. That is, when a serial is begun in one issue and is to continue for three issues, I wait until I have all three copies before I *begin* reading. Then, I can read the entire story from start to finish with no serious interruptions and which allows me to become emotionally engrossed and intellectually fascinated before the last paragraph. Length should be dictated by the story, not by the amount of time we wish to spend reading it.

H. James Hotaling
4637 S. W. Condor St.
Portland 1, Oregon

• *A well-spoken argument for the pro-serialites, among whom we number ourselves. It's the* story *that is primary, not its length. Our aim is to vary our*

table of contents and include issues with serials, some with complete novels, and some with two or more novellets.

Dear Editor:

The Vance story in your October AMAZING STORIES was somewhat of a disappointment. Oh, it was written well enough, but it was the setting and the main idea of the story that I didn't like. To put it briefly it was political and too involved with present day situations. Political jobs have no business being printed in a *good* sf mag., therefore, I hope never to see another featured by you. Jack Vance can do better, though, for back around 1950 he was really producing good stuff for *Thrilling Wonder* magazine and its companions.

The rest of the issue was much better—more to what I'd expect from your company. The profile of Bradbury was very good, and I'm already looking forward to the December Leinster profile. Two others I'd like to see profiled are Sturgeon and Matheson. I'd also like to see a story by either in AMAZING, but I'm not getting my hopes up too high.

"Try to Remember," by Frank Herbert, was good. And one thing sure, it had more to say, in the way of themes and philosophical statements, than any novelet I've ever read.

Four covers by Schomburg in two months—you've really got him working overtime. By the looks of the November cover in the "Coming Next Month" section, Schomburg is at it again. But I'm not complaining, he's a very good cover artist.

Also, I was glad to see your reprint series back again, after a two month break. When I first saw the illustration to "The Hungry Ginea Pig" I thought it would be just another of the all-too-common monster type stories the movie makers like to get hold of. But it had a new type of twist I've too rarely seen used. I hope you keep them running in both AMAZING and FANTASTIC.

I must admit I am surprised to see your price is still only 35¢. If it comes to be a choice between raising the price or lowering your Quality, don't hesitate to boost it a nickel or so.

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

● *The way international politics is becoming so closely linked to science—moon-shots, rocket power, world communications, fission and fusion, etc.—it seems to us the political aspects of s-f are something no magazine can afford to overlook. Don't you think the Herbert novelet was just as "political," in its own way, as the Vance was?*

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