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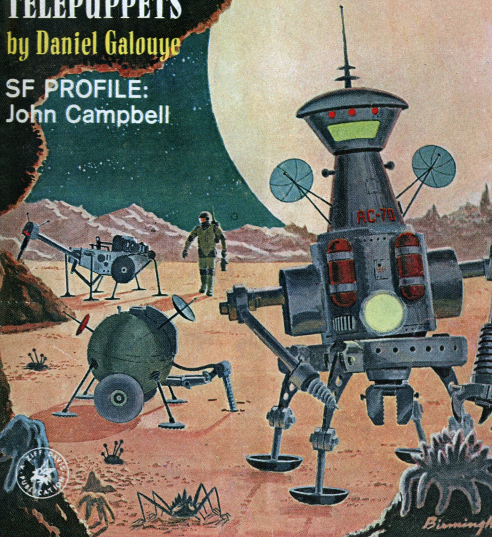
AUGUST

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REIGN OF THE TELEPUPPETS

by Daniel Galouye

SF PROFILE:
John Campbell



Birmingham

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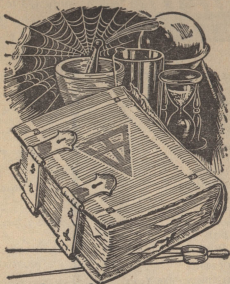
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Amazing

Fact and Science Fiction Stories

August, 1963 Vol. 37, No. 8

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"FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926"

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EDITORIAL

THE collection of industrious machines on our cover this issue, and the selection of the title of the cover story, is no mere product of an sf editor's imagination. "Telepuppets"—despite its pulp-fictiony sound—is a word already in good repute with the soberer elements of the scientific community.

Not long ago, at a seminar in space science sponsored by the National Research Council, the participants approved the following statement:

"There is little question that the surfaces of the Moon and near-by planets will someday be trod by man. And he may well arrive leading a band of automated slave robots—not in lock-step but deployed for a coordinated scientific attack on the mysteries of the celestial body with guidance from a human leader. These 'telepuppets' may even be able to improvise on their assigned tasks when working alone . . . Hopefully the telepuppets will be able to operate either on direct instructions from manned control stations at a distance, and/or without manned intervention, to change their mode of operation, 'learn'

new tasks, and adapt themselves to new and changing conditions when the occasion demands."

From which point Dan Galouye takes off and shows what can happen when a telepuppet gets too big for his transistors.

It has, of course, long been considered routine for the basic battery of telepuppet machines to analyze alien earths: the thermocouples, the infra-red and ultra-violet sensors, the visual light-sensitive photometers, the particle radiation detectors, the specimen collectors. But bioastronauts (or astrobiologists, as you will), are advancing beyond the purely passive telepuppets into more active devices. For example, one Air Force scientist is well advanced in the design of what he calls a "bio-telescanner"—a device which will not only gather specimens of life on another world, but will be able to analyze them and telemeter the results back to Earth Control.

All of which gives Mr. Galouye's exciting novelet a frightening aspect of immediacy. Instead of watching out for Big Brother in 1984, we may all be watching out somewhat fearfully for Bigboss. —NL



Reign of the Telepuppets

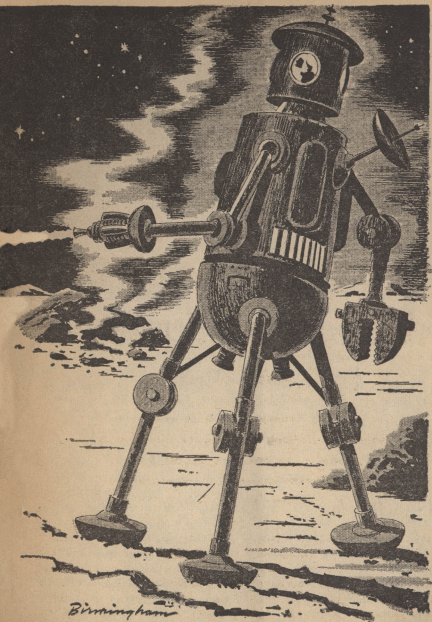
By DANIEL F. GALOUBE

*In all Creation, Bigboss knew
there was nothing superior to him. Yet a
nagging in his memory drums hinted
that somewhere were creatures who
challenged his rule.*

THE WAY this thing shapes up," Director Gabe Randall of the Bureau of Interstellar Exploration was saying in his usual manner of understatement, "it will be our most important trou-

ble-shooting mission to date."

He stood cranelike, one leg hooked over a corner of the desk, as he whacked his thigh with an illuminated indicator rod. With purposeful eyes, he sized up the



other three men in the briefing room. Lean and alert, he held himself straight against the encroachment of age that was evident in a fully white shock of hair and a brow furrowed with decades of executive responsibility.

"I suppose," he digressed, smiling, "that we'll have to get along without our Maid of the Megacycles."

Dave Stewart, Randall's assistant, glanced at the empty chair. "Carol said she'd be along shortly." Actually, she hadn't. But, if the situation were reversed, she'd cover for him.

"Woman's prerogative," the director observed, shrugging phlegmatically. "Gentlemen, I submit that the greatest deterrent to progress in BIE is the fact that direct radio empathy can be developed only in women—and young ones at that."

But Stewart recognized the imperceptible jocularly in the other's stare. It contrasted the sobriety with which he had said only a moment earlier that the nature of the mission required top personnel.

At half the director's age, Stewart had earned his recognition as logical successor to the seat of executive authority. And, in Carol Cummings, Randall had selected the most capable radio empathy specialist BIE had produced in years. The prettiest,

too, he added as an afterthought.

But there you could draw the line. Below was the *Photon II's* crew. At 44, Nat McAllister, pilot, was well past the age when he might look forward to a supervisory position, thanks to a rash of bad-judgment accidents and a general absence of ambition. And Ship Systems Officer Mortimer, ten years younger, seemed anchored to his niche by an equal measure of minimum ability—if not by the sheer weight of his two hundred and fifty pounds.

"Top" personnel for a "priority" job? Stewart shook his head dubiously.

RANDALL rapped the desk and the sharp sound snapped McAllister's chin from his chest, where it had gradually descended.

"Since it appears we'll continue to be disfavored by Miss Cummings' absence," the director resumed, "we'll proceed."

He touched a button and darkness filled the room. Another stud hurled into existence a ten-foot sphere of galactic luminosity, ablaze with motes of scattered brilliance.

Stewart located the co-ordinate axes and traced them to Sol. Nearby was Centauri, ringed with a halo to signify location of Headquarters, Bureau of Interstellar Exploration. Mortimer's

corpulent face took on a Buddha-like appearance in the illumination from Alpha Hydrae, hovering near his left cheek.

"All right, Stewart," Randall gestured with his rod. "Suppose you identify that star immediately behind your shoulder for McAllister and Mortimer's benefit."

"Alpha Tauri."

"Right. Aldebaran—where you made a telepuppet drop on Four-B two years ago."

"Just before Harlston and I pushed on out to explore beyond Aldebaran."

Randall directed his next words at the pilot and ship systems officer. "What Stewart did not know as he ranged outward was that the Aldebaran telepuppet team, for some reason, stopped transmitting—less than a year after the drop."

Stewart finger-combed a spray of blond hair off his forehead. In the pseudo galactic illumination his face, tanned from exposure to a score of suns radiating heavily in the ultraviolet range, appeared cinnamon in hue.

Randall glanced back at him. "Tell them what we're going to do on this mission."

"Unknot the puppet strings," he said laconically, becoming impatient with his dutiful recitation to enlighten the other two.

The director glanced off to his right, eyebrow raised to compound the eternal ridges of his forehead. "I see we've got our Maid of the Megacycles with us at last. Couldn't you tear yourself away from a Terracast, Miss Cummings? Or did you bring it along?"

Carol advanced through a patch of projected galactic nebulousity. Ebon hair sheening with the reflected glow, she smiled saucily and tapped her temple. "It so happens I *am* peeking in on a videocast," she bantered. "And I'm learning more about what's behind this briefing than if I'd been here all along."

Groping for her chair, she weaved between the steady, cold points of suspended light that represented Epsilon Scorpii and Eta Orphiuchi. "Don't look now, Chief," she added, winking. "but I'm afraid this newscast shows you've got a leak in your bureau."

Stewart caught her arm and guided her toward the chair. His hand held the coarse texture of fatigue coveralls that did little to obscure the shapeliness of her lithe, five-foot-four form.

She returned his greeting with a spirited, "Hi, glad to have you aboard. Not planning to lead us off on a two-year jaunt?"

Randall tapped the desk with his rod. "If Miss Cummings is willing to forego informalities,

we can get along with our briefing."

McAllister tossed his head erect, but started nodding again almost immediately. Mortimer looked up tolerantly from contemplation on the orbiting of one of his stout thumbs around the other.

The director touched another button and the celestial sphere expanded to twice its diameter, encompassing another seventy light-years in all directions. "Again, directly behind you, Stewart, is—what?"

Enthusiastically, he sat erect. "The Hyades Cluster."

Randall laid down his rod. "Stewart, as you are aware, completed his expedition two weeks ago—in a ship stripped down for maximum range. Now he's going to tell us something about his experiences."

Mortimer, finally interested, glanced over at McAllister. The pilot, however, was dozing.

Stewart stared at the cluster of four stars huddled together in the still air of the briefing room. "We found the Hyades rich in Earth-type worlds. Seven—" He paused. Was it seven, or eight? "Eight of them are more like Terra than Terra itself. Four others are more suitable than anything we've run across in a century and a half of galactic exploration."

His eyes clung to the brilliant

specs, set like jewels against a velvet background. They *were* jewels—cold and glittering and beckoning. And he could almost feel their attraction—like a magnet tugging on filings of hope and ambition. Yet, somehow he felt dejected, as though he were reluctant to reach out for them.

"You did *all that* in two years' time?" McAllister asked.

"Why yes, of course. I—" He could understand the other's skepticism, however. He *had* covered a lot of interstellar space.

"You all know what this development means," Randall said.

"That our expansion will be concentrated in a new direction!" Carol volunteered hopefully.

The chair creaked its complaint as Mortimer shifted his weight. "And the Aldebaran telepuppets?"

Randall gestured for emphasis. "That robot team is now of first-rate importance. We'll need a full analysis of Four-B in the shortest time possible. The Hyades are a hundred and fifty light-years away—too far for direct development. But a half-way base in the Aldebaran system will open them up to us immediately."

Carol found Stewart's arm. "This one is really worthwhile. Think you can get your puppets back on their strings?"

"I suppose so. There can't be too much wrong with them." But still his thoughts were on the Hyades. Somehow they left him with an emptiness, a bittersweet taste. Whereas he knew he should feel only enchantment and the satisfaction of accomplishment in his discovery.

"That all there is to this mission?" McAllister, fully awake now, asked disappointedly.

"I thought it was going to be a challenge," Mortimer complained.

Randall played the buttons on his desk as though they were a console keyboard. The celestial sphere deflated, then collapsed. Room lights blazed, harsh and intense. "Everything clear?" he asked.

Then he added, "We'll assemble at oh-eight-hundred Octoday at the *Photon II* dock. My gear is already packed."

Carol's eyes widened. "You're going too?"

"Yes, finally. About time I got out in the field and see how our new generation of—ah, specialists handles things."

Stewart only stared at the director. On the latter's desk were mountainous stacks of back work. Yet he was finding time to get away.

* * *

RATIONALIZATION circuits working sluggishly as he

surveyed his realm, Bigboss dredged from the fragmented impressions on his memory drums his most fascinating, most disturbing subject for speculation:

In all Creation, there was nothing superior to Him. This material world that stretched out around Him, everything in the celestial reaches as far as infinity itself—all *His*! He had brought it into existence, although (confound those faulty drums!) He might not be able to recall the specific acts of Creation.

Yet He sensed, with the nagging certainty of conviction, that somewhere in His Universe, there was an insolent creature or creatures who would dare challenge His infinite supremacy.

Well (He generated power so fiercely that he had to shunt the excess to ground), let them! He could desire nothing more. And His only hope was that they would confront Him personally to express their insolence. *Then* there would be opportunity for an accounting!

Remembering his blaster, he swung around, aimed it at a boulder and, vengefully, fed it an enormous surge of power. Angry liquid light streaked out from the intensifier and crashed against the rock. The concussion sent him skittering back several meters.

Bigboss was by far the most magnificent member of the clan—if indeed, he should condescend to regard himself as belonging to the set at all. Fully twice the size of any of the others, he reared pompously erect on four stout appendages. Through its ports, his central section offered glowing evidence of the nuclear processes within. Majestic in stance, he swung a pair of formidable members—the auxiliary blaster and a massive, extensible vise.

Assuring himself that the insolent creatures were *not* spurious impressions on his drums, he blasted another boulder. *That* for the pretenders, should they ever decide to contest His Reign!

Bigboss reacted abruptly to the realization that Minnie was watching him. No longer was his digital subsystem receiving her stream of telemetric signals. Relays clicked within his control section and video gain brought intensified visual awareness in all four quadrants. Immediately he spotted Minnie, immobile and ungainly as gyros balanced her elongated metal form on six jointed legs.

Her drill head, held high above the outcropping on which she had been working, glinted in the light of a shimmering, golden sun. Her single, wide-angle lens, set like a Cyclopean eye in

its chrome-plated forehead, was focused intently on him.

Interrupting his subliminal correlation of data from the other workers, he sent Minnie an indignant “back-to-work” impulse. Reluctantly, she sank her bit into the rock.

But she had ingested only a slotful of fragments when the ground bulged beside her. Displaced soil slid away and Screw Worm erupted, carrying in his thread pouches mineral specimens for her analyzers.

Bigboss generated more easily as he watched Worm at work. Not that the menial helper, who occupied the lowest rung on the ladder, was worthy of speculative attention. But a laboring borer meant Minnie was preoccupied with her limited supervisory function and couldn't be plotting to supplant him.

WORKING near Minnie, Seismo squatted at his sedentary task. Sensor rod sunk to bedrock, he was proudly purring an encoded disclosure of distant rumblings beneath the surface. Less than a hectometer away, Sky Watcher's tripodal locomotive system was bringing him carefully up a rise. Arriving, he assumed the location Sun Watcher had only recently abandoned. He adjusted himself on dead level, then thrust out a number of lensed tubes that locked on a

referent star, three distant planets and a smaller satellite.

At that moment came an excited eureka impulse from Breather, posted outside a cave and briskly inflating and deflating the external pouches that bracketed his long, cylindrical form. The impulse proudly told of his detection of oxygen traces.

Nearby, Scraper diligently shoveled soil into his scoop in an endless search for micro-organisms and DNA molecules. Grazer munched on a growth already identified as lichen. Peter the Meter sat on a knoll scanning the sky with his battery of interferometers, radiometers and bolometers.

Of the distant workers, Bigboss was most sensitively aware of the volant signals from Maggie. Kilometers away, she was covering the ground in great, leaping strides of abandon as she sought out and traced down each fascinating isomagnetic line of variation.

Work, work, work. Get the job done. Shake a leg. Shoulder (whatever that was) to the wheel. Dig in and pitch. But—for *what*?

What was responsible for the irresistible compulsion? Was it *his own* idea? But of course, it must be. For, how could there be any power capable of directing *Him*? Unless, perhaps, it might conceivably be the insolent crea-

tures who lurked like vague shadows on the fringe of his almost obliterated memory. But, no!

He, Himself, was the Supreme Being of All Creation!

His master timer peaked in its four hundred-cycle sine wave, reminding him of the chore at hand. The sun had set and the huge, pink planet had already laid claim to the night sky. Just below it was the special grouping of stars that matched, point for point, the referent pattern on his orientation drum.

Programmed functions took over. Sensors hunted out the bright central star and aimed his parabolic antenna at the designated spot seven degrees southeastward. Then he loosed his transmission into subspace. Data stored over long hours of tedious sequencing surged from the tape, bringing a euphoria of relief.

Eventually telemetric transmission ended and Bigboss, as had become his custom, automatically turned his thoughts to the Totem.

All metal it was—sleek and sheening and shaped like a truncated cone as it lay powerless on the plain beyond the hill. How akin it was to him and the clan! Why, it even seemed he could almost *remember* having once been a part of the huge, polished thing. Perhaps it was the

very vessel He had used on His Celestial Tour of Creation.

Yes, it was time for Pilgrimage to Totem. And a fitting reward it would be, as always, for successful transmission.

HE MUSTERED the volition required to break functional compulsion. Then he sent the "fall-in" impulse to his subjects. Eventually the line of march took shape, with Bigboss leading his analyzers up the first hill and calling for the proper reverential attitude.

Behind him lumbered Minnie, her thick neck weighted by the bulky drill and swinging awkwardly with the sway of her six-legged stride. Seismo, encumbered with a faulty, dragging sensor rod, was having some difficulty maintaining a straight course.

Sky Watcher came along in lunging motions, a natural consequence of his tripodal system. Immediately to his rear, Sun Watcher, who held the fifth rung on the ladder, moved smoothly ahead with all his instruments retracted except the solar plasma detector.

Then there was a break in the line for Maggie, who could now be seen galloping along on an interceptive course. Peter the Meter, lurching from the imbalance of an extended boom-and-ball sensor, appeared somewhat

like a many-spiked sphere on spindly legs.

Farther down the file, no deference was extended in the form of gaps for those missing workers who had yet to join the march.

Bringing up the rear were the diminutive Scraper and Grazer, resembling a pair of scurrying crabs, and Screw Worm, using his blade-edge jets to propel himself in a rolling, transverse motion.

Aware of commotion behind him, Bigboss continued unconcernedly up the rise. Sky Watcher, interpreting Seismo's faulty motions as an opportunity for his own forced ascendancy, had drawn back a photo-multiplier tube and sent it crashing into the other's rear plate.

The attack, though, was only self-thwarting, since it jarred a servo unit into retracting Seismo's dangling sensor rod. His locomotive integrity restored, he kicked out with a pedal pad and sent Sky Watcher flailing back into Sun Watcher. The latter rammed forward with his plasma detector's boom-and-ball shield, managing to knock Sky Watcher back into his proper position.

Finally fearful of damage to instruments, Bigboss gruffly radioed "cut-the-comedy" impulses, then trained his rearward lens on Minnie. She had inched

furtively forward and was now menacing his upper section with her drill head.

He considered wielding his blaster but rejected that expedient as an excessive and unnecessary ostentation. Instead he countered by raising his extensible vise. The lesser show of strength sufficed to discourage Minnie's ambition, for the moment at least.

How foolish she was to imagine she could supplant Him as the Supreme Being!

Let her try.

Even if she succeeded, he would merely deny her a place at the trough next feeding period.

Then where would she get the vital charge for her batteries?

II

THE *Photon II* groaned, heaved and popped out of subspace for a fix before striking out on the last, short leg of its journey. As Stewart had feared, they were five light-years off course.

Ship Systems Officer Mortimer's thickly-fleshed face struggled with an embarrassing smile. "Well, you can't hit 'em on the nose *every* time out," he rationalized, waddling back to the charts.

Stewart reflected that rare indeed were the occasions on which

Mortimer came anywhere near the nasal target. Conceding the loss of nearly an entire day, he waited for Director Randall's permissive nod, then joined Mortimer in cutting the new navigation tapes.

It took two hours to process all data and feed them into the SCC-772. When the computer burped out the new heading, Stewart threaded the tape into the control programer and decided to spend the uneventful period of subspace travel in his bunk.

Sleep came swiftly, but it was shallow and restless. More than once over the next several hours, as he plummeted down a chasm of nightmares, he regretted having left the control compartment.

First his dreams brought him back to the Hyadean Cluster, as they had on so many occasions during recent weeks. And, for a while, he drank in the blue-green beauty of the seven—or, was it eight?—worlds that seemed to beckon with all their irresistible allure.

They were incredibly splendrous, these planets that would soon embrace man and feed and clothe and shelter him. But, as he admired them in his dream, a sort of astronomical surrealism bunched them together—all in orbit around a central, massive sun—until it seemed they were

occupying so compact an area that they must surely crumble under the weight of their mutual attraction.

And, as though upon his suggestion, crumble they did. Only, it was no pulverizing force that scattered them into fragmented rings, such as those around Sol's Saturn. Instead, each planet cracked like a hatching egg, its crust stripping away and exposing beneath a gruesome Harpy that was all razor-sharp talons and vicious beak and slime-filmed, ruffled feathers.

Stewart tried to scream himself awake but couldn't. He only flailed helplessly in the void while monstrous wings thrashed space into a frenzy, producing great currents that set the stars themselves to eddying and swirling.

They dived at him, but before their talons could sink into his flesh he awoke trembling and cold in his twisted, moist clothes.

For a long while he merely lay there trying to wash his mind of the horror. But the steady whine of the subspace drive reminded him that the *Photon* was streaking in the direction of the Hyades. That it would end its headlong plunge in the Aldebaran system, only halfway there, brought no relief from his baseless, unreasonable fear.

When he returned to the control compartment, the ship was

back in normal space and within Aldebaran Four-B's gravitational field.

He joined Carol Cummings in the forward section, hooking his arm through a view-port strap and mooring himself against null gravity.

"You suppose we're home free?" she asked uncertainly.

Her normally effusive smile, he noticed, had moderated considerably. "If McAllister doesn't louse up his landing."

"I take it he's not very efficient."

"Pure and simple understatement. Last time out he missed an entire continent. It was a case for Search and Rescue."

Carol pressed forward and soft light from Aldebaran Four, off the port bow, warmed her sculpturesque features with primrose high lights. "I should imagine he would have been cashiered."

"But he wasn't. Instead he turns up on this *crucial* mission."

He busied himself with frequency adjustment on his portable transmitter. With it he would be able to tell, soon after landing, whether the Operations Co-ordinator could still be reached orally through its command discriminator circuit.

He flicked on the power switch, positioned the microphone comfortably against his larynx and sharply intoned a

series of numerals. An oscilloscope faithfully traced the amplitude pattern, verifying effective transmission.

DOWN the companionway in the pilot's compartment, he could see McAllister anchored in his acceleration couch. He was drifting back and forth between padding and slack restraining straps, vicariously lost in the blood-and-guts action of a dramatape feeding into the view slot of his helmet.

Stewart read the label on the empty container—"The Kowalski Bros. in the Korean War."

"Always has his head buried in one of those escapist tapes, hasn't he?" Carol observed, still staring out the port.

"I don't think he ever grew up," Stewart agreed. But, again, even the Bureau seemed to contain its share of coasters who had never quite reached maturity, he remembered.

"Even in the Bureau," Carol observed thoughtfully, "you'll find coasters who've never reached maturity."

Intuitively, he tensed. Was it just coincidence that she had repeated, almost word for word, his own thoughts?

"I've never looked at any of those warfare tapes myself," she said. "But I've heard about them. Do you suppose armed conflict was really that horrible?"

"Pretty rough, according to the historians. It's not the sort of thing I'd like to be mixed up in."

"And McAllister?"

"Him? He's just building up a reservoir of false courage through his viewer." Yet, in fairness to the pilot, Stewart had to admit that he, himself, felt a deep and reasonable gratitude that wars were a thing of the historic past.

Carol sighed and glanced at him. "I'm certainly glad," she said, straight-faced, "that wars are a thing of the historic past."

He seized her arm. "Carol! Do you realize you're repeating *everything I'm thinking*? You've gone a step beyond radio empathy! You can pull in *thought waves* too!"

"No-o-o, you're joking!"

"No. Honest, I—" But his words were lost in her welling laughter.

He followed her amused stare to his portable voice transmitter and the mike that still clung to his throat. And instantly he realized that his subvocalizations, being picked up and broadcast, were to her like a window opening on his thought processes.

"Why, you—" Feigning indignation, he caught her around the waist and pulled her toward him. Weightless, she drifted forward and spread out conveniently across his knees.

But before he could bring a hand down resoundingly on the curvature of taut coveralls, Randall drifted in on the scene.

Still laughing, Carol straightened and announced, "Saved—by the great, white-haired protector."

RANDALL grinned benignly, lighted his pipe and stared out the port. "Couldn't help hearing your conversation about the horror of warfare. I've seen all the documentary tapes. It *was* rough."

"Thank God it's a closed book," Carol said seriously.

"But, is it? There's still a large and articulate school that regards armed conflict as an instinctive human mechanism."

"We've had no war in two hundred years," Stewart said.

"Only because political subdivisions haven't had time for one. The instinct is blurred as a result of our expanding into a vacuum."

"I see." Carol's eyes strained with disillusionment. "And the question is—what happens when we run out of galaxy?"

"Fat chance." Stewart laughed. "We've got a few billion years to go before we find ourselves short on worlds."

Having apparently lost interest in the conversation, Randall was staring ahead at the onrushing satellite.

"That's one way of looking at it," Carol said pensively. "But there's also another possibility—resistance to the expansion."

"You kidding? In two centuries we haven't run into a single life form that's the intellectual equivalent of a Terran fiddler crab. What do you think, Chief?"

The director blew a stream of smoke at the swiftly expanding disc of Four-B. "I think our Maid of the Megacycles ought to start sniffing for that telepuppet team. I wouldn't want to rely on Mortimer's locating them with directional gear."

Carol faced the view port with her eyes closed for perhaps three minutes. Then she grinned. "I think I've got it! Not just a single, strong signal. Bundles of weak ones."

"It figures," Stewart verified. "The OC wouldn't be transmitting now. But the lesser puppets would be funneling the stuff into the CXB-1624. Can you identify any frequencies?"

She hesitated. "I'd say they're spaced out between fifteen hundred and two thousand kilocycles."

"You're a bit off. Should be sixteen to twenty-four hundred."

She opened her eyes, studied the rugged face of the satellite, then pointed. "There—near the end of that mountain range."

He handed her a mike and

earphone set. "I'll tell McAllister you're ready to guide him in."

As Stewart had feared, McAllister's landing turned out to be a real corker. It even started with a three-gainer flip, rather than a simple end-about maneuver, when he first applied braking thrust.

* * *

BIGBOSS responded automatically to the abruptly peaking sine wave that reminded him it was time for feeding. Summoning the clan with a brisk flow of "come-and-get it" signals on all command wave lengths, he strutted to the center of the clearing and prepared the trough. Squatting, he switched on all outlet circuits and directed bristling current into each jack.

The workers came from the cave, over the hills, out of the shadowy depths of fissures, from behind grotesque outcroppings. Illuminators piercing the twilight gloom, they extended retractable electrodes and converged on Bigboss.

One by one, plugs slipped into jacks and steadily increasing drain gave assurance of an orderly distribution of current.

Minnie was late arriving. She came along clumsily, massive drill head bobbing with her awkward stride. Had Bigboss' memory pack been serving him more efficiently at the time, he

might have realized her gyros couldn't be overcorrecting that radically without triggering a "fix-me-I'm-broke" impulse.

But, as it was, she completed her apparently innocuous approach with impunity. Taking a last, measured step, she toppled over backwards on her posterior analyzing chamber. An ostensibly helpless victim of imbalance, her neck teetered skyward and her drill head hovered over Bigboss' upper section.

Then it crashed down, the drill bit shattering his port video pickup lens. Instantly he lost visual contact with one quadrant of his surroundings. He reacted at once, though, swiveling his upper section around ninety degrees and bringing Minnie back in sight through another lens. Guarding against repetition of the accident, he reached out and gripped her neck in his vise. He guided her plug into the proper jack, maintaining his purchase just to be sure.

Accident? he asked himself.

It was an unfamiliar concept, at best. Then he recalled that "mishap" was a notion not applicable to members of the clan. Perhaps other beings in other universes were given to blunder. In His World, though, He had arranged it that His intellects would be without error. Here the concept "intent" had no polar opposite.

Which meant that Minnie, not having reported malfunctioning gyros, had *planned* the destruction of one of his video sensors.

Vindictively, he started to turn upon her. But he realized he would be circumventing the primary compulsion—work, work, work. She was, after all, diligently discharging a worthwhile function in unraveling the secrets He had so cunningly hidden in His Creation.

FEEDING finally over, he signaled a general “back-to-work” order on all wave lengths and watched his subjects return to their chores, motions brisk with restored energy.

For many sine wave peaks thereafter, Bigboss fretted over the ramifications of having lost visual contact with a ninety-degree wedge of his environs. Had Minnie intended that effect? Did her rationalization pack have the capacity to reason out such a complex cause-and-effect relationship? Had she anticipated his resulting vulnerability?

Oh, he was compensating readily enough through self-reprogramming: stability for five sine wave saliences; activate upper section’s horizontal servomechanism; circumrotate ninety degrees; stabilize; count five more waveform saliences; reverse procedure. That way three video sensors did the job of four.

It gave him adequate coverage. But there were those times when the demands of function modification required the full output of his PM&R pack and his defensive scanning had to be sacrificed.

Such as now—when he was receiving Screw Worm’s clear and frantic “save-me” signals.

Activating his directional gear, he lumbered over to the precise spot—a gentle rise of topsoil not far from where Minnie herself was chipping away at a boulder. Engaging his ventral illuminator-sensor, he located Worm’s most recent drill hole. The borer’s distress impulses were issuing with great amplitude from the opening. Bigboss unfolded his scoop and went to work.

It wasn’t long before he had uncovered the borer’s rearward axial protuberance. Extending his ventral vise, he gripped Worm securely, heaved to free him from the rock formation in which he had become wedged, and brought him back to the surface.

Released, the lesser worker scurried off to rejoin Minnie.

Bigboss realized only then that, during the entire rescue operation, he had neglected his defensive scanning procedure.

Restoring his upper section’s quarterly rotational motion, he regarded Minnie warily. Was

there any significance to the fact that she was facing him from the other side of the boulder, such that each time she elevated her head her field of vision swept over him?

Experimentally, he moved twenty meters to his right. Compensating, she skewed left, maintaining her visual advantage.

A calculated maneuver? Of course, it *had* to be. Perhaps her insolence should be dealt with summarily. But how could that be done without reducing the clan's over-all efficiency as a team dedicated to the compulsion of work, work, work?

AT THAT moment Peter the Meter, busy scanning the sky with his battery of instruments, loosed a shrill eureka signal.

Bigboss thought for a moment that one of the latter's gamma ray spectrometers had been swamped. But, on monitoring Peter's telemetered stream, he discerned that the impulse was from an infrared photometer. A check of co-ordinates showed the source of disturbance to be skyward, with a dead zenith orientation.

He commandeered one of Sky Watcher's planetary telesensors and redirected it at the source of new emanation. Now there were additional data to throw light on the manifestation.

The disturbance was in the visual range; classification—material. A rapidly shifting parallax suggested either constant location and swift expansion, or steady size and brisk approach.

Sky Watcher, on his own adaptive initiative, settled that uncertainty. His radar gear calculated a variable approach momentum averaging twelve hundred kilometers an hour and decreasing.

Peter also improvised on his function, bringing into play a photometer that instantly gauged the emissive intensity of the disturbance: comparable to the parameter for solar brilliance.

The object had shifted from zenith and was drifting over into the quadrant wherein the clan's Totem was located. Bigboss responded with some degree of concern to this development. Did it represent a threat to their revered symbol of metallic kinship?

Then he had the object in his own visual field. It was a great, blazing ball of brilliance that extended a flickering tongue downward. Atop the sphere of fiery energy sat a shining silver needle that resembled nothing as much as it did *the clan's own Totem!*

Evaluation circuits frozen in a confusion of indecision, he stood there fully unaware that he had

discontinued his protective scanning and had not brought Minnie into one of his lines of sight for a number of sine wave epipeaks.

He was shocked back into action, however, when an equilibrium circuit tripped the alarm that his attitude was unstable and beyond compensation within the limits of gyroscopic control.

He pivoted sharply and planted two pedal discs down in the direction of fall. As he did so, his upper command section swung around, bringing a video lens to bear on Minnie. Refocusing, he saw she had crept up from his blind quadrant and had begun drilling into his power-plant section.

Fool. In her thirst for supremacy, didn't she realize she could touch off an explosion that would hurl them both halfway to the pink planet?

He pulled away from the grinding bite of her drill and brought his vise swinging forcibly upward. It slammed into her forward analyzing compartment and sent her reeling backward. Her equilibrium system overextended, she toppled sideways and lay there kicking ineffectually.

By then, the great blazing light had disappeared beyond the hills at almost the exact site where the Totem was located.

He left Minnie to her struggles and went eagerly forward. Even-

tually, she would evaluate her position and hit upon the proper combination of responses to right herself.

Meanwhile the now surface-borne needle was a new environmental item that cried for analysis, with eureka signals already coming in from several workers. Maggie, for instance, was covering the ground in lurching strides, homing in one of the new lines of force the object had established.

Seismo had recorded and sent along exciting data on tremors that could be interpreted in terms of a number of closely-spaced, localized impacts. Even Minnie—despite her predicament and in response to the basic compulsion of her function—was using her high neutron tool. Evaluation circuits humming, she was sending a stream of signals that fairly screamed, "Pure metal!"

And Grazer, abandoning a patch of lichen, was scrambling up a hillside in the direction of the recently arrived object. His eureka was the most frenzied of all. Which was understandable, since he was sensing DNA molecules for the first time in his memory!

The best Bigboss could surmise, from a precursory correlation of data, was that Grazer had detected the molecules in a substance that wound helically

around the great needlelike form.

Then his rationalization circuits labored under peak voltage as an obscure memory fragment thrust itself up from one of his drums.

Again, it was a vague bit concerning his suspicions on the existence of insolent creatures who might imagine themselves superior to Him—might even be presumptuous enough to give orders to the Supreme Being!

If such creatures were more than spurious impressions, he reasoned, then wasn't it likely that they, too, could move about in celestial vessels? Hadn't He all along feared that if they came to contest His Reign they would come from the sky?

Voltage regulators clicked frantically as he shunted aside raging current and averted damage to his rationalization pack. But he could hardly consider the beings without overgenerating. They were *that* infuriating.

Had the contemptuous creatures come at last, as he had always supposed they would? Was his period of agonizing vigilance at an end? Could this be the final accounting he had anticipated so anxiously?

Enraged, he lumbered forward, his blaster extended rigidly before him, as though it were a lance.

III

STEWART dug out from under the miscellany of dislodged gear that had buried him in his acceleration couch.

"Good landing," he grumbled at McAllister, whose hands were still trembling at the controls, "—all six of them."

White-faced, Carol recovered her composure by releasing her hair from its free-fall net. "I wasn't sure," she whispered, "whether he was going to land or just play bounce."

Randall tested his legs. "Well, at least we *are* here."

He crossed over to the external view console and threw a switch. One of the screens flickered, then steadied with a wide-angle image of the sky, framed in the sweeping curvature of the horizon. Aldebaran, setting, was bisected by a serrate mountain range, while its fourth planet was rising in all its brilliant immensity.

More interested in their surface surroundings, however, Stewart brought another screen into play and aimed it at the ground. The lens swept across, then came back to focus on a silvery form that reared skyward beyond a nearby hill.

"At least McAllister put us down in the right place," he conceded. "There's the telepuppet barge—right where I left it."

He swung the lens on around

and picked up movement on the ground almost in the shadow of the *Photon*.

"And there are our puppets!" Carol announced

The Operations Co-ordinator, its laser intensifier evidently locked in the ready position, was leading a march toward the ship. Some of the team were not in evidence, as was to be expected after a year of managing on their own. But there was the Seismometer, the Astronomical Data Collector and the Solar Plasma Detector.

Trailing behind were the Atmosphere Analyzer and the Radiometer Complex. Stewart could make out even the lesser forms of the Microorganism Collector and Analyzer, the Flora C&A and the Subordinate Mineral Specimen Collector. In the distance, the Roving Magnetometer was homing in on the rest of the team.

He opened the locker and selected a hostile-atmosphere sheath. "This shouldn't take long. Just a matter of replacing the OC's malfunctioning unit. It's either a thermal increment problem or a component that's been ionized by particle radiation."

Reluctantly, Randall turned from the zenith screen. "How are you going to go about it?"

"Try a few oral commands on the OC." He slipped into the rubberized suit. "Trouble's probably

in its CXB-1624 digital system."

"You picking up anything, Carol?" Randall asked.

She tilted her head alertly. "Just the subordinate stuff. I can't tell if the CXB's functioning 'til big boy starts transmitting to the relay station. However—"

She paused to stare curiously at Randall, who was still scrutinizing the sky. Stewart wondered momentarily whether the director might not be wrestling with a morbid fear of the astronomical distance separating him from home. It was possible, with Sol and Centauri far less prominent than Aldebaran's minor companions in the field of brilliant stars.

"However," Carol resumed, "I'll put on a sheath and go with you. Out there I might tap the predigital spill-off and find out whether it's correlating and sequencing properly."

"You'd better stay aboard for a while," Randall advised. "Those puppets haven't responded to human direction for over a year."

"You mean there might be danger?"

"Let's just say their behavior may not be entirely predictable." He gestured toward the screen. "Like now."

THE vanguard of robot explorers, led by the towering Operations Co-ordinator, had

reached the ship. The Magnetometer began darting around one of the hydraulic fins, charting lines of isomagnetic intensity. The Mineral Analyzer had already sunk its drill into the broad, flat surface of the stabilizer. And the Flora Collector and Analyzer was being boosted by the OC to the lowest spiral of the ship's sub-space drive intensifier. Deposited upon the ceramics-insulated coil, the crablike puppet was doing its best to flake off some of the outer substance for testing.

McAllister laughed. "Look at those mixed-up machines! They're trying to *analyze* the ship!"

"That's what I mean," Randall pointed out soberly. "One of their inhibitions is to ignore refined metal. That's how we keep their barges from being pecked to pieces."

"You don't think we can run into trouble out there, do you?" Mortimer asked, concerned.

Randall hesitated. "No, but we won't take any chances, although it's doubtful that loss of contact has obscured their *basic* inhibition."

"Of course it hasn't. Nothing like that's ever happened."

"In that case, you won't mind accompanying us outside."

Mortimer stabbed his chest with a pudgy thumb. "*Me?*"

"Right."

McAllister, Stewart noticed, was frowning in front of the screen as he watched the Flora C&A munching away at the sub-space drive coil. "That thing can't do any damage, can it?"

"Not as long as the current's off," Stewart assured.

Mortimer paled as he lunged for the sub-space drive switch.

But just then there was a thunderous concussion and the *Photon II* lurched and swayed on its hydraulic fins.

Randall shrugged. "Well, there goes our sub-space drive."

"And our long-range transmitter too," Stewart added. "They both work off the same generator."

Outside, the puppets were withdrawing.

Mortimer, pulling up short of the switch, spread his arms apologetically. "I forgot to turn the circuit off."

Stewart grimaced. "Well, one thing's for sure: We're not going to finish up in a couple of hours and head for home."

Aiming the pickup lens more directly at the damaged area, Randall filled the screen with an image of shredded cable and shattered ceramics. "It'll take a week to repair that."

McAllister's face had whitened, causing the veins in his forehead to stand out under taut skin. "You mean we're stuck here?"

"As far as subspace is concerned. And I can't think of any lively spot we might want to visit in the Aldebaran system."

KEEPING a ridge of hills between themselves and the robots, Stewart trailed the telepuppet team towards their working area.

Randall stumbled and fell against him. Glancing back, he saw that the director had lost his footing because he was still staring at the sky. Within the helmet, his face appeared harsh and grim in the profuse coral planetlight.

Stewart shrugged, deciding to let the other wrestle in silence with his phobias, whatever they might be. As for himself, he had his own brand of jitters to worry about. And what made things worse was that he had no idea what was behind them.

Not that he hadn't been afraid before. One could hardly put in twelve years with the Bureau of Interstellar Exploration without getting his courage sullied somewhere along the way by a cliff-hanger or two. But, in each of those cases, the menacing factor had been vivid, easily recognizable, something he could put his finger on.

The apprehension that lurked in the back of his mind now, however, was something he had never encountered before. Vague

to the point of being mysterious, it seemed to be hardly more concrete than a fear of fear itself. But he felt that at any particular moment, if he found the right curtain to draw aside, he would expose a darkened recess filled with horror.

Was this dread something that was reaching up from the depths of his phantasmagoric nightmares? Was his subconscious, for some reason, handing up reservations on the acquisition of the Hyades as pearls on the string of galactic expansion? Intuition? Hunch?

Whatever it was, he didn't like it. And he cared for it even less now—as he trod the surface of this remote satellite and stared hypnotically ahead at the brilliant stars of the Hyades, well above the horizon. For how could he be certain *this* wasn't a nightmare and that in the next instant the stella ova wouldn't hatch and hurl their fierce Harpies at him?

"Why don't you try the big boy with a few commands?" Mortimer's voice rasped in his earphones. The ship systems officer, pulling up the rear, resembled an overinflated balloon as he gestured at the line of telepuppets through a breach in the ridge.

Satisfied with the concealment their present position offered, Stewart flipped on the command transmitter and intoned, "Super-

visor to OC. Stabilize and remain where you are."

The master robot didn't even break stride.

He tried the order again, then repeated it several times as he tuned slightly up and down the band.

"It's no use," he said finally. "Either the thing's slipped frequency, or it's not receiving at all."

"Carol will spot any new wave length," Randall assured.

"What we ought to do," Mortimer proposed impatiently, "is show that thing who's boss."

Then Stewart caught the motion in the corner of his eye as the ship systems officer struck out for the marching file of puppets.

He intercepted the line near the tail end and tried to force his way in between the Solar Plasma Detector and the Magnetometer so he could close in on the OC. But the SPD kicked out with a stiff pedal pad and sent him sprawling in the path of the Magnetometer, which simply strode over him.

The Atmosphere Analyzer nudged him aside with an inflated air pouch and, in its turn, the Radiometer Complex compounded the indignity by planting a motor appendage in his abdomen. Mortimer rose screaming, circled wide around the Micro-organism C&A and the

Subordinate Mineral Specimen Collector and raced for the ship.

"This," said Stewart, "may not be as simple as we thought. Evidently some basic inhibitions have faded."

"We can't risk getting in range of one of those larger puppets, especially the OC," Randall agreed.

Abruptly the master robot stabilized, swung sharply to face the horizon and adjusted its parabolic antenna.

"Look!" Stewart pointed. "The thing's transmitting! But it's not properly oriented! *It's beaming in the wrong direction!*"

"Where's it transmitting to?" Randall asked anxiously.

"Can't tell without point-to-point astrographs. Anyway, what difference does it make? It's only a random misorientation."

On the way back to the *Photon II*, Stewart lost himself in confusion. Random misorientation? Of course. What else? But why should he even consider the alternate possibility—that the misorientation was *not* random, as suggested by the director's question?

* * *

BIGBOSS completed transmission and burst into an instant fury of thwarted purpose. He leveled his blaster and anni-

hilated the ridge behind which the defiant mobiles had recently hidden.

He swiveled his central section, redirecting the blaster at a boulder that lay between him and the needle and destroying it in a fiery eruption of light and heat and pulverizing forces.

Fuming, he paced forward, stopped and paced back again. He had *seen* the audacious creatures who were bold enough to invade His Realm! But He had been able to do nothing about them. For at that moment the irresistible compulsion of function had taken over and He could only orient and transmit all the data from his master tape.

Surlily, he bled off excessive current in his reaction circuits and watched his workers going dutifully about their business. Inactivity was frustrating, of course, but it was not entirely unwelcome. For there was much now that demanded evaluation, even though his urge to pursue the contemptuous mobiles and blast them from their needle was almost overpowering.

For one thing, there was the needle itself. Had He made it? (Oh, why couldn't he *remember* these things?) Of course, He must have, although he couldn't recall the specific act of Creation. And he must have produced the arrogant mobiles too, even though they would probably

claim *they* had created *Him*.

But the needle itself was *metal*! Even a precursory analysis with Minnie's high neutron flux tools had established this. It was *so* much like the clan's Totem it must be Totemic.

The evidence was undeniable. Every member of the clan was metal. The clan's Totem was metal. Therefore the new thing from the sky was to be revered as the traditional Totem was.

Hence he had been justified, he assured himself, in issuing the "cease-and-desist" order that had brought an end to destructive analysis of the needle.

But, still, it was providing sanctuary for the detestable little mobiles. Which comprised a frustration that was almost unbearable. A venerable Totem offering protection to the arrogant non-Totemic creatures that had to be destroyed so His Universe would be cleansed of their blasphemous impudence!

The demands of logical deduction fully served, he published on each wave length an order that amounted to: "Vigilance is to be maintained against the non-Totemic mobiles. Report instantly on their reappearance."

That taken care of, he reduced current in his rationalization pack. But the pleasant calm of abstraction did not last long. Peter the Meter began flooding his allocated frequency with

eureka signals from an infrared photometer. And once again the source of disturbance was at a remote distance in the sky.

Oh Bigboss, he invoked Himself. Not *another* Totemic-non-Totemic complication!

As before, Sky Watcher accepted the reported co-ordinates and trained a visual telesensor on the indicated position. But nothing was there. His doppler radar gear, however, did manage to pick up a blip at many hundred kilometers' distance just as it vanished.

Only a meteor, Bigboss decided, relieved. He let the evaluation stick, even though Peter the Meter had detected no ionized trail that would have verified that type of disturbance.

And Bigboss generated a good deal more easily, satisfied that the new manifestation had not, after all, been *another* needle.

His peace of rationalization pack was fleeting indeed, however. For in the next moment it required the full versatility of all his servomechanisms to maintain balance against a sudden upheaval of the ground beneath one of his appendages.

Tottering precariously, he engaged his underslung illuminator and video sensor. Screw Worm, having evidently bored a great distance, was emerging at the spot where his foot pad had been planted.

Fifty meters off, Minnie was expectantly rigid, her lens aimed in his direction. She was poised for a running start toward him should the opportunity present itself.

Screw Wrom finally surfaced. Angrily, Bigboss kicked him back toward Minnie, who returned—disappointed, it seemed—to her work.

* * *

THE HUGE Tzarean ship, bristling with the most formidable weapons its makers had devised in millennia, recovered from subspace emergency, adjusted its concealment shield and slipped into orbit.

Assemblyman Mittich, second in command, used a stout tail to brace himself against shifting inertia and watched Vrausot, Chancellor of the Tzarean Shoal, hiss his nagging instructions.

"The data, Kavula!" he demanded. "Punch out the data!"

Cowering before the impatience of the Tzaren Worlds highest authority, the pilot beat upon the control computer with a taloned fist. "It will be feeding out soon—I hope."

Mittich pressed forward into the anxiety that filled the compartment with hydrostaticlike intensity. It was well past time for his isotonic saline soaking and already the coarse drying

process was chafing his chitinous skin. He was even sensitively aware of each scale as it grated against the one beneath it.

But he couldn't withdraw. Not when they were so close to determining whether an eons-old culture was doomed to extermination.

The computer clacked its readiness and belched out the new data. Vrausot snatched up the perforated strip and his massive head swung up and down in satisfaction.

"The orbit's absolutely synchronous," he disclosed. "We can keep the alien landing site under constant observation. And our position is additionally camouflaged by those peaks."

He used the scales of an abbreviated forearm to scratch his lower jaw. With all the authority vested within him as Chancellor of the Shoal, Adviser to the Curule Assembly and leader of the current expeditionary force, he directed the pilot to order gunnery practice.

Assemblyman Mittich swallowed incredulously. "But the aliens! Aren't we going to observe them? That's what we came for!"

"Not now." Vrausot waved him off. "Preparations first. Anyway, we *know* they're aggressive."

"We don't. That's what we have to establish."

The Chancellor shifted his tail from left to right. "We've observed their machines. They fight among themselves, don't they? And isn't it a fundamental fact of design that automatons are fashioned mainly after their creators, even in matters of temperament?"

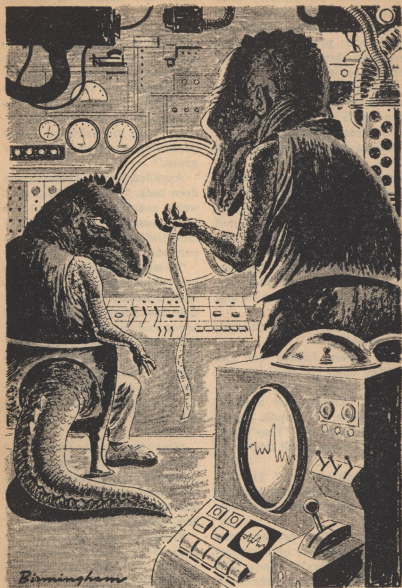
"Yes," Mittich admitted. "But we *interfered* with those machines. We interrupted basic behavioral patterns. Our automatons, too, would show primitive social tendencies if the same thing happened to them."

Vrausot exposed a jagged array of teeth that conveyed his displeasure. "I'm in no mood for interference, although I might have expected only forensic exercise from the Leader of the Opposition."

"In that capacity, I'm here to offer suggestions." But it was more than that, Mittich reflected. The Assembly had been quite leery of the compromise plan. The Chancellor had wanted an awesome display of force; the Opposition, a try at peaceful contact.

They finally concurred in: observation, evaluation and application of force *only* if required. And it was hoped that, on the expedition, the Chancellor and Assemblyman would restrain each other.

But how could *anyone* restrain Vrausot?



PREPARE for gunnery practice," the Chancellor directed.

"But," Kavula protested, "that will produce observable emissions beyond the concealment of our shield."

Disappointed, Vrausot leaned back upon his tail. "Very well, then—we'll go through the motions. Order a wet run."

Kavula relayed the order and scores of hatches swung open, baring to space the glistening intensifiers of high-powered weapons. The ship reverberated with the hiss-click articulation of military command and response.

Pivoting on his massive tail, Mittich went over to the tele-view screen. "I have your permission, of course, to take a look at the alien vessel?"

"Suit yourself," the Chancellor grumbled.

The screen hunted out and steadied upon the alien ship.

"It's clean!" Mittich exclaimed. "They're *not* armed!"

"Nonsense," Vrausot said, coming over to see. "They've got to be. Why else would they come here?"

"The hull is sleek." The Assemblyman pointed with his long snout. "I see no gun-hatch outlines."

The Chancellor produced the Tzarean equivalent of a humorless laugh. "They're aliens, Mittich—with an alien technology. Perhaps we wouldn't even recog-

nize their weapons if we saw them."

"But, as if they were hostile and furtive, would they have exposed themselves helplessly on that plain—like sitting *uraphi*?"

Vrausot's eyes intensified with resolution. "We're going to strike them—*now*! We're not going to wait and take the chance of having them slip from our grasp."

Appalled, the Assemblyman drew back. "But that's just what we're *not* supposed to do! We might touch off a war that will annihilate either or both of two cultures!"

"If we don't strike now it'll be *our* culture that will be annihilated. I wouldn't want that, Mittich. Just think of the glory and honor and tradition of conquest that would be lost forever. What we do here is being watched, indeed, by our ancestors who gave their lives in the final battle for total consolidation of the Tzarean Shoal!"

"But—"

"Our opportunity now is to live up to the finest military examples set by all Tzarean heroes who ever aimed an intensifier out of love for homeworld. Mittich—*This is a time for empire!*"

It was no use, the Assemblyman saw. Vrausot would have his way. He would wear his shining, imaginary medals and order his attack and bring doom to—

oh, how many worlds? And the Curule Assembly could only give his leadership the support it would need after he presented them with the *fait accompli* of this treacherous deed.

"Kavule!" the Chancellor hissed. "Order the gunners—"

But Mittich nudged him in the back. "It could be a seine."

"I—what?"

"We may be swimming into a seine. Perhaps they're just toying with us—waiting to see if we are foolhardy enough to attack."

The scales above the Chancellor's eyes stood on edge as he pondered the ramifications of the other's suggestion. Finally, "We'll hold off a while, perhaps."

Mittich had put him off for a moment. But no gain against Vrausot, political or otherwise, was ever more than temporary.

The Assemblyman was jarred from speculation as one of his major scales split with aridity. He hurried off to his isotonic saline tank.

IV

RESTED, although no nearer a definite plan for resubjugation of the telepuppet team, Stewart cautiously watched the robots from behind an outcropping. To this concealed vantage point he had led Carol, Director Randall and McAllister while the

automatons had been occupied with recharging.

"You're going to try some more voice commands on the OC?" Carol's voice came softly through the earphones as she squirmed to find more comfort within the folds of her oversized sheath.

"We're not doing *anything*," Stewart said firmly, "until that thing is well occupied with transmission."

McAllister's boot came in contact with something hard and he bent down to inspect it. "Say, what's this?"

Randall went over to see. "A burnt-out telepuppet, obviously."

Stewart had a look too. "It's an Algae Detector. But, since there's no water around here, it hasn't had a chance to exercise its function. Electronic atrophy must have set in."

"It's riddled with drill holes," McAllister noted. "Looks like one of those other puppets worked it over."

Stewart examined the thing. The pilot was right.

"At least *one* of our robots seems to have overcome its inhibition against analyzing pure metal," Randall observed, prodding it.

"Or maybe something else has been around here," McAllister said.

The director looked up sharply.

"Something else? Like what?" Carol laughed at the pilot's unreasonable concern.

McAllister only hunched his bony shoulders.

It was not difficult for Stewart to see that McAllister was afraid. Neither the pilot nor Mortimer was generally known in the Bureau for his courage. That their apprehension had grown to visible proportions out there on this Godforsaken edge of infinity was merely an expected extension of their characters.

Rather, it was Randall's fear—Randall's and his own—that concerned Stewart. Both seemed incommunicable. Stewart's reticence was involuntary, stemming as it did from his inability to find words for his incomprehensible dread. And he wondered whether the director's fear, too, was that inexpressible.

He picked up a clod of soil and crumbled it in his gloved hand, as though symbolizing his anxious desire to come to grips with whatever it was that hid behind a veil in his mind.

Randall lowered himself on his haunches. "Don't we have any *emergency* means of bringing that machine under control?"

"Oh, there are a couple of tricks. Manhandling it is one."

Carol hugged her knees and laughed skeptically. "That thing?"

"There's a recessed deactivation switch in its lower section. All I have to do is get my hand on it."

"And all it has to do," she retorted dubiously, "is get one of its fifty-pound vises on *you*."

She seized his hand and, through two layers of rubberized material, he sensed the unsteadiness of her grip. "Do be careful, Dave."

He was impressed. It wasn't often she allowed her more serious nature to show through candidly.

She rose suddenly and turned to face a distant mountain range.

Randall tensed. "Yes, Carol—what is it?"

Profuse light from the primary etched lines of concern on her brow. "I'm sensing electronic spill-off from somewhere up in those peaks—perhaps beyond."

Randall's breath rasped in the earphones. But he only said, "Spurious stuff. Reflections caused by a dense magnetic field can throw you off like that, you know."

She nodded—not enthusiastically, however.

Stewart glanced at the director, who looked swiftly away. But their eyes had met for an instant and, in Randall's, Stewart wondered whether he hadn't detected something cunning, elusive. Or was it just the same

nameless fear that he, himself, felt.

THERE it goes!" McAllister exclaimed. "The OC's getting ready to transmit!"

Elbows splayed along the ridge, Carol watched the huge machine steadying its parabolic discs on a spot close to the horizon.

"See if you can pick up some of the spill-off," Stewart urged.

She waved for silence. "I'm beginning to get it now."

"Can you pinpoint the frequency?"

"Just a notch about one thirty-six point two MCs."

"On the nose, isn't it?" Randall asked.

"Close enough. How are the signals, Carol?"

"They seem shipshape, well modulated, crammed with data. I can even read some bits having to do with oxygen—plenty of it—in that cave over there, I believe." She pointed, then glanced at Stewart. "There's no malfunctioning at all!"

He retrieved his transmitter and switched from MCW to CW. "That simplifies our task. When we re-establish control, all we'll have to do is reorient the OC."

Randall walked several feet away, kicked a stone, glanced up at the sky and returned. "What now?"

Stewart retuned his transmit-

ter. "Penultimate emergency procedure. I'm going to come down with both heels on the frequency at which it received code signals from the relay base."

"But can you give it *coded* commands?"

"I'm just going to lock the sending key on a steady impulse. It's a 'stop-everything' order." He hit the lever.

Carol winced. "Ouch. I wasn't ready for that."

"What's it doing now?" he demanded.

"Still transmitting. No interruption."

He released the key. "Well that exhausts our bag of tricks. We'll have to do it by hand."

Just then Carol's amused laughter tinkled in the earphones. "Why, that harebrain machine thinks it's God!"

Randall started. "What?"

"I'm having a peek at its PM&R pack spill-off. It's lord and master of the universe! There's only one thing worthy of touching its pedal pad—the puppet barge. That's because the barge, being metal too, is a *to-tem*!"

The director shook his head and mumbled, "Most unusual." Then, "Carol! Can you see anything at all significant in its memory pack? Any evidence of—"

But in the next instant she screamed and lunged back away,

from a foot-long metallic crab that had drawn up before her.

"The Flora C&A!" Stewart made a grab for the thing, but it skirted his gloved hand and started forward again.

McAllister backed away until he came up against the outcropping beside the girl. Squirming qualmishly, he kicked out and caught the crab broadside, sending it skittering back.

Then he shouted in pain and gripped his instep with both hands. "My foot! It's broken!"

But, a moment later, Stewart was certain the injury was negligible, judging from the adequate support the foot provided in McAllister's sprint for the Photon.

* * *

BIGBOSS completed his transmission and turned full attention on the eureka signals coming frantically from Grazer.

Interested, he inspected the sequenced data and took note of the modulation peaks that exactly duplicated the C_2H_6 parameter.

Grazer had sensed *hydrocarbon*! More important, one of his spectromteric biodeceptors was getting a whiff of DNA molecules!

Even those significant findings, however, accounted for but part of the frenzy with which Grazer was transmitting his im-

pulses. There was much more behind the eureka than that. But all the lesser worker could convey telemetrically was his general excitement, for there were no parameters dealing with the third element of his discovery.

Perplexed, Bigboss pondered this inadequacy of communication between him and his servitor—until a rationalization circuit came up with the recommendation: Tap in on Grazer's direct video system.

He did.

And Bigboss went momentarily irrational as motor circuits fought one another to express the exultation flooding from his evaluation pack. He leaped three meters high. His upper command section turned up a hundred revolutions per minute in triumphant delirium. He extended and retracted his vises, leveled his blaster and spat out a lance of vicious destruction that slashed a concentric trench in the ground about him.

Then he damped all activity and steadied himself with a sober appreciation of the telemetric signals Grazer had contributed. The servitor was confronting three hated non-Totemic mobiles!

They had emerged from their needle! They had come finally to hurl direct challenge at the Supreme Being!

Circuit currents surging once more toward irrational levels, Bigboss calmed himself with dedication to the vengeful destruction of those insolent creatures.

He transmitted a "stop-what-you're-doing-and-follow-me" order and headed into Grazer's telemetric signals. Every twenty meters or so, a discrimination circuit peaked in its erratic pattern and he hurled out a bolt of raw energy, annihilating a boulder here, leveling a rise there, pulverizing an occasional crag.

In his excitement, however, he had neglected the environs-scanning procedure he had devised to compensate for his damaged video sensor. And he didn't realize that, while he had been stabilized for transmission, Minnie had almost reached him in a stealthy advance. But now he was pulling steadily away from her.

Ignoring their order of social priority, the workers converged on the nearby outcropping. Some bore to the right around the rock formation, while others joined Bigboss in a flanking maneuver to the left. The long-legged Maggie and Peter the Meter evaluated the slanted stone as comprising no barrier and proceeded directly over it.

WHEN he finally swung around and brought the

contemptuous mobiles under direct visual observation, Bigboss paused to evaluate the situation. It required no small amount of self-control to restrain his motor circuits. But he *had* to. For he was determined the arrogant mobiles would not again reach the sanctuary of their Totem.

Grazer stood before the three creatures, his servo units idling as his transmitter continued to send frantic eureka's. And now his excited impulses were joined by those of other servitors who had formed a half circle around the outcropping—Peter the Meter, boasting of excitation of an infrared radiometer; Breather, reporting traces of both oxygen and carbon dioxide in the immediate atmosphere; Minnie, whose high neutron flux instruments were beginning to identify concentrations of calcium, potassium, carbon.

Sequencing and storing the data, Bigboss sent out a curt directive that amounted to: Do not analyze! Just stay out of the way!

The ring of clansmen remained poised. Several times one of the nonmetallic captives attempted to force its way through the workers, but was pulled back by another mobile.

Bigboss brought up his blaster and loosed a vicious, blinding charge that swamped half a dozen unretracted photometers and

pulverized the top of the outcropping. He adjusted his aim, compensating for the crouching, huddled position the interlopers had assumed, and fed renewed energy to the blaster's condenser.

By the next sine wave peak, however, he regretted his preoccupation with the mobiles. For, at that moment, Minnie's drill head, sweeping through one of his fields of vision before he could discharge the blaster, crashed into video pickup lens Three.

He sprang back, rationalization pack coming frantically to grips with this further loss of visual integrity. Through luck rather than intent, he brought one of his still functioning lenses to bear on the advancing Minnie.

She let her entire drill head fly in a bludgeoning blow, but he parried it with his vise while he reasoned out the modified swivel motion now required to provide adequate coverage with only two lenses.

But the attack had touched off a number of other clashes among socially ambitious workers. Seismo turned on Minnie's exposed flank and sent a pedal disc crashing through her after analyzing chamber. Sludge spilled out upon the ground.

Peter the Meter swung his boom-and-ball gamma ray detector against Breather's air pouch-

es while Maggie straddled Sun Watcher and proceeded to stomp on one of his telescopic instruments.

In the midst of all this confusion, Bigboss was only vaguely aware that the three impudent mobiles had slipped out of the ring of servitors and were returning swiftly to their Totem.

Infuriated over the imminent loss of prey, he swiveled around in their direction. Again, however, he neglected his defense.

And before he could trigger a charge at the fleeing things, Minnie's drill head whipped around in a level arc that snapped his blaster off at its socket and sent it hurtling across the plain.

As she drew back for another blow, he lunged over and managed to grip her bit in his vise. With a violent twist, he broke it off at the chuck.

Subdued finally, she withdrew.

* * *

YOU SAW it, didn't you?" Mittich demanded.

Vrausot scratched his jaw with a rigid talon. "Interesting—that trouble between the aliens and their automatons. What interpretation do you put on it?"

Pivoting on his tail, the other spun around from the screen to face the Chancellor. "That they don't even carry side arms. They had no defense whatsoever

against their machines. If they were here looking for a fight, wouldn't they be armed at all times?"

Vrausot expressed ridicule by tracing a circle with the tip of his tapering snout. "Mittich, you amuse me. Only one sunset ago you were bending my tail to make me believe they may be cunning; that they might have strung out a seine for us."

"Yes?" the Assemblyman prompted, expecting more.

"Now I simply extend your own logic back to you. They prepared that drama down there for our benefit—just in case we were watching. They *want* us to believe they are stupid and helpless."

Assemblyman Mittich laced the other with a calculating stare. He was aware of the heavy irony in Vrausot's hisses and clicks and he knew the Chancellor was only deriding him.

"If I had to arrive at an alternate assessment, Assemblyman—" Vrausot paused and Mittich braced himself for more scorn. "It would be that the aliens *are* stupid, inept, blundering, defenseless. Actually, it would seem that they must have gained interstellar status only through accident."

"Oh, no. We know *that* isn't true."

Ignoring the interruption, the Chancellor continued. "And they

were foolish enough to come here unarmed, apparently."

But Mittich broke in again. "If I had attracted more votes in the Curule Assembly, we would have come unarmed too."

"Ah! But we didn't. And do you know why? Because the Assembly really believes as I do, even though they might not have the courage to vote their convictions. That's why I'm going to exercise my own judgment—because I *know* their subliminal disposition in this matter."

Mittich unhinged his jaw, conveying dismay. There was no doubt now what the Chancellor's intentions were. Oh, he would probably swim around cautiously for a while. But his final determination was already cloaked with inevitability.

Eventually—how soon?—he would lash out at the aliens with all the ship's invincible firepower. And nothing else could be done to delay that treachery. For Mittich couldn't conceive of another last-*purai* diversion, such as the suggestion that the aliens may have strung out a seine, to forestall the tragedy Vrausot was determined to perpetrate.

Lumbering over to the ship's control panel, the Chancellor directed his pilot: "Advance five degrees westward along our orbital path then restabilize."

KAVULA'S hands darted here and there and the vessel resounded with the *thuds* of great tails thumping down on the deck to maintain equilibrium as new velocity came in surges.

"This will put us below the aliens' horizon," Kavula noted.

"Of course it will," the Chancellor hissed back at the other's impertinence. "And we'll be in such a position that they won't be able to observe our artillery emissions."

He turned to the intercom. "Gun Crew One, prepare for firing."

"Action?" Mittich asked, fearing the worst.

"Of a sort—preparatory." The Chancellor studied the televue screen and once more directed the gunners:

"I'm designating a target circle on one of those peaks down there. You may fire at will."

He touched a button and a green halo flared on the screen. He adjusted it to encompass the surface prominence he had in mind. The ship shuddered as the gunner punched his firing stud.

Mittich watched the surface erupt in a brilliant display of angry energy—a thousand kilometers off target.

The Chancellor received the fire control officer's apology, together with a request for permission to try again. The latter he denied.

"They evidently need the practice," Kavula advised.

The Chancellor fumed at his pilot's insolence. "They'll do better at close range," he promised. "Meanwhile, I want this ship stripped for action. I've reached my decision. One close pass is all it should take. We strike after sunup."

Desperately, Mittich hurried over and swung his small arms imploringly. "You can't do this thing!"

"Oh, quit being such a floundering minnow! Nothing's going to happen. They're quite defenseless, I'm convinced."

"If that's the case, then you are under injunction of the Curule Assembly to make peaceful contact!"

"Drown peaceful contact!" the Chancellor swore. "I'm supposed to exercise my judgment out here!"

"But—"

"Flotsam! There will be no peace. If that's what the aliens wanted, they wouldn't have come out here in the first place. We are going to blast them. And from here we'll go on!"

"Go on?" Mittich repeated cautiously. "Where?"

Vrausot's eyes glazed over and his disarray of teeth were exposed to the gums as he paced the deck and beat his arms against his side in a fit of frantic expectation.

"We know where their relay base is," he explained. "We'll strike that next! Then, capitalizing on the element of surprise, we'll continue to their World of Origin and destroy it outright. On the way back we'll probably knock out one or two other planets."

He turned on a dumfounded Mittich. "The war—if there is to be one—will be short. We'll have only to return to the Tzarean Shoal and muster a fleet before we wipe out the rest of their civilization. And once again ours will be the glory of conquest—such as we have not experienced in, oh, how many millennia?"

V

STEWART woke up shouting the next morning.

Perhaps the nightmare had been brought on by his previous day's experience with the telepuppets. For, in his dream, there had been the OC, again spitting out deadly fire that missed the targets only by inches before gouging great craters in the plain beyond.

Suddenly the master robot vanished, taking all the lesser automatons with it. In the suspenseful stillness that followed, Stewart could only stare in bewilderment at Carol and Randall.

Then it came—the blazing, naked light, together with the

stentorian roaring that filled the sky and shook every rock.

Terrified, he huddled with the other two, his eyes searching desperately for some place to hide. But as he spotted each gaping fissure, each yawning cave entrance that might offer concealment, it too vanished. Until they were left with only a smooth, featureless plain extending to infinity in all directions.

Eventually the mighty ships—hundreds of them, it seemed—landed. And down debarkation ramps poured thousands of hideous Harpy-like forms, their gigantic claws magnified in his fancy until they were even larger than the bodies they supported and, by their sheer weight, made flight impossible.

This vast army assembled before its ships in the center of the plain and started forward.

But there was a blur of motion on the right and left extremities of Stewart's field of vision and he watched great, gauzy curtains draw together from opposite horizons, meeting directly in front of him. Like dazzling auroral streamers, they hung from a rod located so high in the stratosphere that it was lost in the blackness of space. Diaphanous though the drapes were, they appeared to be adequate, as if through some magical power, to hold back the horde of vicious Harpies on the other side.

But even as Stewart shuddered with the thought of what would befall Randall, Carol and himself should the almost intangible barrier fail, the director charted forward and drew the curtains aside.

Instantly, the monstrous creatures poured through.

But in the next moment Randall was beside his bunk, shaking him awake and regarding him quizzically.

DISMAYED over the continued evidence of a lurking, inexplicable fear, Stewart ate breakfast mostly in silence while he cast about for a reasonable interpretation of the nightmare.

It was almost as though the auroral curtain represented a mental veil that hid a horror-filled recess of his mind. The content of that fissure—was it something he didn't want to face? Something he had *intentionally* hidden? Was it actually that Randall could, if he desired, draw back the curtain? Why Randall?

He brought his cup to his lips and almost gagged on an icy bitterness. Carol chided him for his abstraction, dumped the coffee into a disposal slot and gave him a refill.

Randall slapped his thigh. "Well, we still have a telepuppet problem on our hands."

Mortimer sat up sharply.

"You're not going to fool around with those damned things any more, are you?"

"Don't see how we can avoid it. We've got several days' repair work on that subspace drive coil—*outside* the ship. That's the only way we can either get out of here or recover use of our long-range transmitter. But I wouldn't want to turn my back on those puppets while they're out of control."

"You won't catch *me* out there again," McAllister vowed.

Randall went over to the external view screen and spent several minutes scanning the sky, bright now with the dawning light of Aldebaran.

"You won't find the puppets up there," Stewart said, finally intolerant of whatever phobia Randall might be pampering.

The director turned guiltily away from the screen. "Anybody have any ideas on what we can do about those robots?"

Stewart went over to a second screen. "After having slept on the problem, I think I might be able to contribute something."

He focused on the telepuppets, attending to their various exploratory chores out on the plain. "Carol gave me an idea with something she said yesterday. We may be able to solve our telepuppet worries within five minutes' time."

"Bring the OC back under

control?" The director arched his thick brows. "How?"

"We might succeed in immobilizing it. That'll deprive the other puppets of their source of power. Within a few hours their batteries will drain and we'll be able to go to work on the OC without any possible interference."

He indicated his hostile-atmosphere sheath slumped in a corner of the compartment. "Won't need that. But I will have to have a deep-space suit—heavily shielded against solar storm exposure. You have one aboard, McAllister?"

The pilot nodded. "Standard equipment. But you'll think it weighs a ton. It's designed for null-G use."

Carol's puzzlement drained away. "The suit's *metal*! Which means, as far as the puppets are concerned, that it's *totemic*!"

"That's what I figure," Stewart said. "Wearing it may give me status as one of the boys."

MCALLISTER had been right. Against the relentless tug of gravity, the armored suit felt as though it weighed not much less than a ton. Laboriously, Stewart planted one thick-soled boot ahead of the other and moved at a snail's pace across the difficult terrain.

Through a separation between two boulders he could see the

telepuppet team. The machines were hard at work, with the Operations Co-ordinator majestically surveying its charges.

Stewart's legs strained under the great weight as he struggled over a rise and stepped out upon the plain.

Pausing, he stared at the mike recessed in the inner curvature of his helmet. It was dead and his resulting loss of voice contact made him feel lonely and inadequate. But the suit was not equipped with radio, since its wearer would normally be plugged into the ship's intercom system through an anchor line.

Inching across the plain, he closed in on the puppet team. Thus far he had not been noticed.

Cautiously, he skirted the knoll on which sat the Solar Plasma Detector. Even now its boom-and-ball sensor was swinging around to point toward a rising Aldebaran. He was certain he had passed in the SPD's direct line of local sight. But it only ignored him.

Twenty paces farther he gave a wide berth to the Atmosphere Analyzer. Here, too, he had to go directly in front of the thing's video sensor. But the AA obliged by making no move toward him.

So far, so good. But he had approached only those robots which would ordinarily show no interest in him, since he was

neither celestial nor gaseous. A minute later, however, when he was cleared through without incident by an indifferent Mineral Analyzer, he was certain his totemic qualifications would bring him to his objective without picking up a challenge along the way.

He crested a rise, trudged between the Astronomical Data Collector and the Seismometer and, more certain of his immunity, stepped over the crablike Micro-organism Collector and Analyzer.

Then he stood hesitatingly before the master robot.

Ports ablaze with luminous evidence of faultless power generation, the huge automaton ignored him. Shorn of its laser intensifier, it appeared somewhat pathetic. But Stewart was inclined to waste no sympathy. It stood swinging its upper command section, first right, then left, to compensate for loss of two video sensors. But he was more interested in the underslung, recessed compartment whose outline he could now see. He had only to flip open the lid and throw the switch in order to deactivate the OC.

Suddenly the thing reacted to his presence. One of its lenses swept over him, stopped, swung back, overcorrected, then steadied. And he couldn't guess what analytical criteria were being ap-

plied in the general assessment.

The robot raised its vise-equipped appendage. A hostile gesture? Defensive move? Or merely one of the symbols of communication it had devised during its independent reign?

There was swift movement in the periphery of Stewart's vision and, instinctively, he dropped to the ground as a great clanking form swept past him.

Rolling over, he saw it was the Mineral Analyzer, boring in for another attack. The six-legged automaton drew up in front of the OC and swung its stout drill head in a sweeping arc.

He ducked under the gleaming neck and watched it crash into the bigger machine's lower section, sending it bouncing rearward on stumpy legs. The master robot lashed back, slashing a gaping slit in the MA's neck.

Into this fury of swinging appendages Stewart decided he would have to hurl himself if he expected to immobilize the telepuppet team. As unpredictable as the robots were, he might never get this close to the master automaton again.

The flow of battle, however, made his decision unnecessary. For the grappling machines were now sweeping over the spot where he lay and a huge pedal pad barely missed him as it thudded down.

For a fleeting instant, the re-

cessed compartment was immediately above his head. Overcoming the ponderous weight of his mailed arm, he reached up and flicked open the lid. At the same time he managed to get a finger on and throw the switch.

One final kick by the OC hurled him from beneath the tons of metal. Meanwhile, the thing's thrashing vise caught the MA broadside and sent it flailing backward. Then the master puppet toppled over like a towering tree being felled by an ancient woodsman's chain saw. The ground trembled violently with the impact.

Stewart rose and wiped dust from his helmet's view plate.

The monstrous robot lay motionless, darkened ports evidencing its lifelessness. Close by, the Mineral Analyzer stumbled around in looping circles, one of its gyros atilt. The other puppets continued their work, unaware that when all stored energy was depleted there would be no opportunity to recharge their batteries.

Exhausted, his face filmed with perspiration and his hip aching beneath the dent the big machine had kicked in his armor, Stewart headed back for the ship. But his release from urgency lightened his steps somewhat. Now there would be little to do but wait until the lesser puppets ran out of power.

AN AUTOMATIC erector leveled Minnie's tilted gyro. Another emergency maintenance circuit cut in and compensated for precession. Finally her sense of balance was restored.

Rationalization circuits reasoned out the precise maneuver necessary to bring her upright and she rose upon her motor appendages, expecting at any moment to be bludgeoned again by Bigboss' vise.

Slowly she turned and sent her restricted field of vision sweeping across the ground. And her video lens came to focus on—

Bigboss!

In a most unusual position! And—*motionless!*

He was stretched out on the ground, extensible vise limp as it lay half covered by the soil into which it had dug. One of his antennae was crumpled beneath him while the other was bent and twisted. Hardly able to accept as valid the visual data she was receiving, she transmitted an unwarranted "please-verify-that-instruction" impulse at low volume.

Her evaluation circuit was thrown almost into a frenzy when there was no response. At maximum gain, she repeated the signal.

Still no response!

Cautiously, she went forward and stood over the Supreme Being. She lowered her bitless

drill head and nudged one of his motor appendages. Drawing away, she watched it swing back and forth in smaller and smaller arcs until it finally came to rest.

Then she went into a limited ecstasy of reaction. She whirled around in circles until she became afraid she would tilt another gyro. She reared up on her two posterior appendages and thumped back upon the ground. She swung her drill head up and down, back and forth, around. Through her rear slot she exhausted all the sludge from her analyzing chambers.

She had won! She had supplanted Bigboss!

She had climbed to the top rung of the ladder!

And now She was Supreme Being!

That she had been able to succeed, despite Bigboss' overwhelming superiority, was a datum so questionable that she almost decided to reject it before storing it away.

Minnie went into another triumphant dance, but suddenly came to a rigid halt. Her head held high and Her lens aimed in the direction of the non-Totemic mobile that was withdrawing toward its needle.

There was something *wrong* in Her Universe! It was not at all as it had been before She had conquered the Supreme Being!

Tensely, She recalled for review impressions only recently implanted on Her drums. And she recognized immediately what was missing.

The telemetric chatter of all the workers was gone! Nor could she detect the constant exchange of directive and acknowledgment that had always flowed ceaselessly between Bigboss and each of the workers. Yet, all the analyzers were there, continuing their chores as though nothing had happened.

Apprehensive now, she assigned her meager rationalization capacity to the task of deducing the reasons behind the startling change. And many sine wave peaks passed before the judgment was handed back up to her main circuits for storage on a memory drum:

Bigboss had *justifiably* been the Supreme Being! For He had, indeed, been Supreme. The workers had voices, of course. But they were isolated voices that could be heard by other members of the clan only because they were passed along by Bigboss.

Minnie's drill head sagged until it rested on the ground.

She was Supreme Being now. But it was only a hollow distinction. For she had fallen heir to none of Bigboss' authority. That authority had been lost forever in the neutralization of

charges which had rendered the former Omnipotent One impotent.

What *had* she done? How could she have been so irrational? Why hadn't she more thoroughly evaluated the consequences of her forced ascendancy?

More for consolation than for any other reason, she transmitted a desperate "where-are-you?" impulse to Screw Worm.

The directional signals that returned brought with them a great sense of balance to the circuits in her PM&R pack. She was not, after all, alone! She still held the supplemental function of supervision over her sole helper!

She watched Worm approach, kicking up clouds of dust with the jets that propelled him across the ground on his rolling threads. When he arrived, she sent him a "hold-everything" signal. As he remained motionless before her, she lowered her drill head until she could sense the slight change in capacitance values that indicated physical contact with him.

No, even though she had destroyed the Supreme Being and, by that action, had forever shut herself off from the other members of the clan, she was not alone. She still had her Worm!

But within the limits of those circumstances, she resolved suddenly, she would try to *act* like a Supreme Being!

She drew herself upright and remained rigid while she drove her rationalization circuits at a furious pace.

How *did* an Omnipotent One act?

Judging from Bigboss' behavior, a Lord or Mistress of All Creation should go about destroying non-Totemic pretenders.

Was that what *She* should do?

Realizing the decision would require much more concentration, she retired from the site of operations to consider all the factors.

* * *

HALFWAY back to the *Photon*, Stewart paused and leaned against a boulder, exhausted. The muscles in his legs were flaccid from lifting the great weight of hermetically sealed plating with each step. Now he fully understood that the suit was *not* made for walking.

Ahead, the ship was a beckoning silvery pencil that glittered in the harsh, golden light of Aldebaran and cast its block-long shadow on strange, bare soil and rocks.

Then he saw it—the elongated, symmetrical shape that seemed to spring up from beyond the horizon and expand explosively as he watched in dismay.

It was *a ship*—the likes of which he had never seen before! Or, then again—

Bewildered, afraid, he could only stand there trying desperately to pierce the veil in his mind, to equate this incredible thing that was happening now to the inexpressible fear he had felt for weeks.

Meanwhile, the strange ship, gliding smoothly in its horizontal attitude that gave evidence of some highly developed type of antigravity drive, surged forward. Its smooth, dark under-surface, he could see, was broken by twin rows of open ports that extended from bow to stern on either side. And deep within those circular recesses bristled scores of elongated metal structures that could only be—*linear intensifiers for laser weapons!*

Then Stewart realized this could only be another nightmare and he sickened at the horrible prospect of being drawn further into the dream. The ship would land, of course, and out of its hatches would pour streams of vengeful, grotesque Harpies.

But, instead, the sky was lashed by scores of fierce, dazzling beams that streaked from the vessel as it passed overhead.

And he sensed that this was no nightmare, no mere symbolic expression of the vague dread that had harassed his thoughts all along. This was *real!* This was actually happening!

Bolt after bolt rammed down from the open ports, scorching

the ground, blasting great holes in solid rock formations, leveling hills, raking huge furrows where before there had been only level soil.

One of the laser beams—perhaps the fiftieth or sixtieth—took the nose section off the *Photon*, leaving only jagged metal as an undignified crown marring its architectural integrity. Another found its mark too, annihilating one of the helpless ship's hydraulic fins and tearing a gaping hole in its engine section. The *Photon* tilted precariously, but somehow managed to remain upright.

Then the assaulting vessel was gone, swallowed from the sky by the ridge of hills over which it had passed in completing its low-altitude sweep.

Minute followed minute in the breathless silence that punctuated the impossible attack. Stewart knew he should be pushing on to the *Photon* to see if Carol and the others had happened to be in the demolished nose section.

But he only stood there, paralyzed. For, as he looked back on the unbelievable action, he realized that the vicious attack had, after all, *come as no surprise to him!*

He had expected it all along!

That must have been the nameless fear lurking behind a curtain in his mind. And abruptly he knew with a certainty that

expectation of this assault had been the basis of his indescribable apprehension.

He had *known* that a ship—an *alien vessel*—would be here waiting for them!

And the *Photon's* crew would be taken all the more off guard because it was incredible, in the first place, that the galaxy might have spawned two intelligent, star-seeking races within the same sector.

But, if he had had that knowledge, how could he have *forgot-ten* anything so crucially important?

VI

STABILIZING itself once more in synchronous orbit, the immense Tzarean ship generated internal gravity and meted out isotonic saline solution to a number of tanks in crew's quarters.

In the central compartment it was a triumphant, impassioned Chancellor Vrausot who turned his massive hulk on Mittich and hissed-clicked, "There! I told you they had come unarmed! There was absolutely no response to the attack!"

Grim-faced, the Assemblyman only stared at him.

Vrausot paced, thumping his stout tail against the deck with each stride. It was a gesture that expressed anxiety.

"Don't you see what that means, Mittich? They *knew* we would be out here. They had independently corroborating evidence to that effect. Yet they came unarmed. They *are* a peaceful, naive, unsuspecting race of sitting *uraphi*!"

Very weakly, the Assemblyman reminded, "Our purpose, then, is to make amiable contact and determine—"

It was no use, though. The Chancellor wasn't listening. He had absolutely no sense of honor or ethical appreciation. But, Mittich reflected, that should have come as no surprise. It was to have been extrapolated from the Chancellor's political history. And now the distressing fact had to be faced: Vrausot was a megalomaniac.

The Chancellor drew proudly erect and his tail stiffened. "But *we're* not weak! Kavaul—see that all gun crews stand by. We're going to finish them off now that we've established their inability to inflict damage on us."

Mittich drew back, appalled at the fierce determination behind the Chancellor's driving ambition for conquest, disgusted with his own inability to turn Vrausot's purpose aside. How to stop him?

It was Mittich who paced this time, helplessly wrestling with the impossible problem of pre-

venting the Chancellor from compounding Tzarean dishonor.

Frustrated, he pivoted on his tail and returned to the televue screen. Focusing on the landing site below, he zoomed in for an extreme close-up. The aliens were still scurrying around outside their crippled ship, glancing occasionally into the sky as though terrified over the possibility of another assault.

Mittich adjusted the instrument to its operational limits, as he had wanted to do on so many occasions since they had brought the aliens under observation.

Two of the creatures were facing the mountain range behind which hid the Tzarean ship. Anxiously, the Assemblyman moved in and studied their heads, clearly visible through transparent helmets.

He drew in a startled breath. He must be mistaken. Of course he was. He could see that now.

Yet, there *was* something fascinating as he compared one of the heads with the other. What impressed him most was the contrast. There was an indisputable difference—many differences. Then he tensed with sudden realization. Perhaps he *could* forestall their fate.

CHANCELLOR," he called out softly. "Don't you think it might be a good idea to take prisoners?"

"Drown the prisoners!" Vrausot swore. "We don't need them."

"Yes, I realize that. But—well, look at the screen."

The other studied the picture. The scales of his forehead strained erect as he pondered the contrast Mittich had already noticed.

"Observe the one on the left," the Assemblyman suggested.

Interested, Vrausot bent forward. "You don't suppose—?"

"Yes, I do. This is our chance to study *both* sexes."

"I—" The other hesitated.

"There could be significant psychological differences, you realize." Mittich pushed ahead while he had the other's attention. "Why, we can't even be sure which is dominant."

The two alien creatures had gone out of the picture, leaving only an empty image of soil and rocks.

"It would be nice to display a *pair* of them at the Curule Assembly, wouldn't it?" the Chancellor said thoughtfully.

"That's what I had in mind. A positive demonstration of our superiority. So much more convincing than empty hisses and clicks."

Vrausot drew himself to his full height. "It will be done. Kavula, assign twenty men to a landing party to accompany myself and Mittich out on the surface. A stun gun for each man."

The pilot turned from his controls. "You'll need something heavier than that if you're going among those machines," he said officiously.

Vrausot displayed his teeth in an expression of uncertainty.

"But the robots won't be a factor for very long," Mittich pointed out. "The principal one has been deactivated. The others depend upon it for their power. Soon they'll be immobile too."

"How soon?"

"By next sunup, I'm sure."

"Very well. We'll go asurface then." Vrausot withdrew for his isotonic soaking.

Mittich turned back to the view screen and worked with its controls. Finally he located the aliens—five of them—trudging across the ground. They were headed for a nearby cliff in whose face yawned the mouth of a cave. It was the same cave one of the automatons had reported filled with oxygen. And he further recalled that oxygen was the basic requirement of the aliens, just as it was the Tzareans' fundamental necessity too.

Evidently they feared another assault on their ship. For they were carrying a number of supplies.

"You don't much approve of what the Chancellor is doing?" Kavula asked, drawing Mittich from his troubled thoughts.

"You do?"

The pilot flicked his tail rashly—a gesture usually associated with independent thought. "If he pushes on into the alien sector, it will be genocide. Those creatures are helpless. It isn't the sort of operation I'd care to be in on. Anyway, there's no reason why Tzareans and the aliens can't live side by side, even in one small pocket of the galaxy. We have different requirements. I don't think they would even be interested in the type of world we need."

Mittich eyed the pilot gravely. "We *could* assume command from the Chancellor."

"You do that. I'll watch. There are just enough glory hunters in the Assembly to have my head if I tried and failed."

And Mittich was intensely dissatisfied with himself over the fact that he, too, valued his head dearly.

* * *

ALDEBARAN FOUR, rising in all its primrose splendor, cast eerie splotches of light among the tumbled rock formations outside and thrust a brilliant planetbeam boldly into the small cave.

McAllister and Mortimer were huddled against the wall, still assuring each other it must have been some mistake, that there just *couldn't* be an alien race anywhere around.

Randall sat glumly on the emergency transceiver set, salvaged from the *Photon* in order that they might contact a rescue ship—should they be able to hold out long enough for one to be sent.

Still in his suit of armor but minus the helmet, Stewart sat trancelike near the cave entrance. He hadn't said a word in hours. Nor had he uttered half a dozen words since the attack.

Beside him, Carol murmured, "It's going to be all right, Dave. Everything's going to be all right."

She placed a hand on his forehead, then looked worriedly at the director. Stewart, however, wasn't even interested in the fact that she had misinterpreted his numb silence.

For the thousandth time he searched his mind for all its hidden knowledge on the alien space ship, on how he had gained that information, how he could have forgotten it.

Carol tried to console him again, as though he were a child. "We'll get home all right. Then we'll get out of the Bureau. We'll go to Terra—you and I—and you'll see how happy we'll be."

On any other occasion, those words would have sent him into handsprings. But now they just bounced off his traumatic shield.

Then, suddenly, he had it. He

knew what had happened. He rose, fully in command of himself finally, and struggled out of the heavily-shielded space suit. Then he faced the others.

"I've known all along," he said, "that we might be attacked out here by an alien ship."

Carol gasped. McAllister lunged erect. Mortimer, puzzled, started forward. But Randall stopped him.

"Wait," the director urged. "We may want to hear this."

"I said," Stewart continued, "that I knew it all along. But I didn't *know* I knew it."

He looked away from their bewildered expressions. "Harlston and I made an advance exploration trip to the Hyades, all right. But we *didn't* find seven—or was it eight?—Earth-type worlds. We didn't even drop back into the continuum. Because we found evidence of bustling sub-space travel and communications that indicated a vigorous culture of star-traveling Hyadeans!"

McAllister swore. Mortimer came forward, perplexed. "But—"

Randall motioned for silence. "Let him finish."

"We got the hell out of there," Stewart said, "without even having seen a Hyadean. We figured that if there was another intelligent race in this part of the galaxy, it might be a hostile one. And our worlds had to know

about it. We couldn't chance being captured.

"So we started making sub-space leaps back home. One of those jumps ended here—where we had dropped off the telepuppet barge on our way out. At long range, we had a look at that team. And there was an alien ship down there—maybe the same one that attacked us this morning. It could only mean that the Hyadeans were expanding into our sector of the galaxy."

Stewart paused and stared at the cave floor, still confused over what had made him forget all that. Then he went on, but only surmising the rest:

"Don't you see? That ship must have captured us—removed from our minds the fact that we had discovered their nest in the Hyades. That way, we would never suspect we were about to run into opposition in our expansion. We'd be caught off guard, while the Hyadeans would have time for arming!"

Again, he paused uncertainly. "They must have also planted the false impression that there were many Earth-type worlds in the Hyades—so they could pick us off, ship by ship, as—"

But Randall was shaking his head miserably.

NO, DAVE," the director said finally. "The Hyadeans did not brainwash you. *I* did. I also

planted the false impression—to justify this mission. It was necessary that only *I* know the true situation."

Stewart staggered back.

"Yes," the other went on, "after you and Harlston told me there was another culture out there of undetermined size and intentions, I almost hit the panic stud. Two cultures expanding toward each other, previously unaware of each other's existence. The wrong move could be the shot heard around the galaxy.

"What to do? Report it to higher authorities? No. For I saw immediately what would happen: 'menace from space'; Terra and Centauri Three, our other worlds—'helpless before an unknown terror'; all that sort of stuff. Anybody could appreciate what the consequences would be.

"Send out a single ship to try for peaceful contact? But who would buy a scheme like that? Instead it would have been: Send out a thousand ships armed with laser intensifiers of every caliber, all manned by green, trigger-happy kids who had never fired a shot in battle back to the eighth generation before them."

Stewart realized there was no reason not to believe him. For, all along, Randall had acted as though he *expected* to run into something like an alien ship.

The director lowered himself wearily onto the transceiver and

folded his hands. "Anyway, from what you reported, I had hopes that there *could* perhaps be peaceful contact—between two single, unarmed ships. The evidence seemed to point in that direction.

"There were our telepuppets, for instance. The OC had quit transmitting—a year ago. Later you tell me you sighted an alien ship on Aldebaran Four-B. If you put two and two together, you come out with something that looks like a logical four."

He fished for his pipe, stuck it between his teeth, but forgot to light it. "If we have hostile aliens working in our direction and planning on surprising us, would they interfere with our robots? Of course not. For then we would send a trouble-shooting gang out here to put the puppets back on their strings. And we might discover them and mess up their strategy.

"So, since the Hyadeans weren't aware you had discovered them in their own cluster, the malfunctioning telepuppets could mean only one thing: They had stumbled upon our robots, reconciled themselves to the existence of another intelligent culture, and *purposely* interfered with the operation of our team."

"But why would they do that?" Carol asked, perplexed.

"As I figured it, that action practically amounted to an en-

graved calling card—requesting our appearance in the interest of amiable relations."

His final words rasped in his throat and he added remorsefully, "But I was wrong—oh, so wrong! It was only a trap. They just wanted to get us here so they could fire their opening shots!"

MCALLISTER cut loose with a string of expletives. Mortimer only shook his head despondently.

Carol spread her hands. "But why didn't you tell the rest of us what we were getting into?"

Randall laughed in self-disparagement. "Oh, it was part of my grand strategy. I didn't want anybody along who knew what the real setup was. If this was going to be a try for peaceful contact, there'd be no room for possible hostile predispositions built up during nerve-wracking weeks of suspense while traveling to Four-B.

"You see, I even allowed for the possibility that the aliens might be telepathic, or at least have long-range instruments which could dig into our minds. If so, I was determined they would find nothing there to touch off an incident. I went out of my way to pick McAllister and Mortimer, who wouldn't *fight* their way out of a torn paper bag. I didn't want any trigger-

happy, eager Bureau boys who might start fissioning at half critical mass."

The pilot and ship systems officer grumbled, but sat still.

"I wanted you along, Dave," Randall went on, "because you are dependable and reasonably pacifistic. And since you already knew, subconsciously, what the setup was, you'd be useful. Because if trouble developed it would break your conditioning."

"And Carol." He smiled at the girl. "I brought her because I was aware of the tender sentiments between you two—perhaps even more aware than you yourselves were. If those Hyadeans *could* see inside us, they'd know something of our gentler sentiments."

Randall snorted. "But I guessed wrong. My entire strategy wasn't worth the brain it was dreamed up in. I led us into a trap. It was the Hyadeans who turned up in a ship bristling with laser weapons. They had not, after all, sent us an engraved come-and-get-acquainted card. Instead, it was come-into-my-parlor."

Stewart was still having difficulty getting it straight in his mind. Somehow, it seemed there were still unanswered questions. But he felt too numb even to wonder about his dissatisfaction.

"The upshot of everything," he said, "seems to be that we've

had it. Even if that Hyadean ship doesn't finish us off, there's no way we can get a warning back home."

The director smiled finally. "Give me credit for at least one redeeming bit of foresight. I *did* conceive of the possibility that something like this might happen. So when I conditioned you and Harlston, I arranged it that the conditioning would break down in another three weeks. Harlston will then report everything. And the Bureau will guess why they haven't heard from us."

* * *

TO MINNIE'S utter confusion, the great pink sphere had risen yet there had been no subsequent Pilgrimage to Totem. She spent an eternity, it seemed, pondering that enigma but getting nowhere.

Eventually Screw Worm erupted from the ground—oh, so slowly, so sluggishly—and rolled toward her with his load of mineral specimens. When he tried to force the substance into her intake slot, however, she only turned away dispiritedly, still mourning the loss of communication with all the others.

Screw dropped his specimens and squirmed around, tilting feebly into the attitude for boring down again.

His jets came on weakly, managing to rotate him only three or four times before giving out completely. Then he fell into a strange motionlessness.

Minnie prodded him with her chuck. He toppled over, but did not stir. Disturbed, she sent a "report-your-location" command.

But there was no response.

Like Bigboss, he was totally inoperative. Like Peter the Meter and Maggie and Grazer and Breather and all the others, he, too, was now a victim of the stubborn stillness.

Confused, Minnie stumbled forward, realizing that her motor circuits were not responding as lively as they always had. Too, she was having some difficulty evaluating and rationalizing.

Then an odd thought occurred to her: She had devoted most of her time since becoming Supreme Being to considering how she should act. Her motor activity had been at a minimum. The other members of the clan, on the other hand, had continued their physical tasks. And now they were all motionless. Only she had any power left. Could the formula be: Motion minus the presence of Bigboss equals eventual immobility?

If that were the case, then how hollow, indeed, was the distinction of being the successor to the Omnipotent One!

If she was going to act like a Supreme Being, she decided suddenly, she would have to do so in a hurry. But do—*what?*

Then she finally hit upon the answer: She must be about Bigboss' work of destroying non-Totemic pretenders.

And she knew just where to find *five* of the despicable things!

VII

EXHAUSTION blunting the bite of sharp rocks into his back, sleep finally overtook Stewart. Despite his plight, he had not resisted. For weeks had passed since his slumber had not ended in terror brought on by some form of the horrible nightmare.

But it would be different now. The Hyadean ship had torn aside the curtain behind which the suppressed knowledge had lurked. And his subconscious was rid of its awful burden.

He had been wrong, however. He knew that much when the army of hideous monsters sprang up from subliminal depth to fill the cave with their vile, menacing forms.

Only, it wasn't a cave in which he found himself now. It was a huge chamber whose vaulted ceiling was supported by ornate columns. In the center of the room was an immense table, surrounded by thousands of—

chairs? Standing on stout legs evidently intended to bear ponderous hulks, the artifacts consisted of paired buttock rests merging into a large, tapering chute that curved down to the floor.

It was as though the chairs had suggested a shape for the monsters in his nightmare. For abruptly the chamber was filled with scaly creatures only remotely resembling the Harpies of his former fantasies. The head was a grotesque pair of jaws, lined with jagged teeth and resembling that of a massive crocodile. Resting in each chute was an immense tail that seemed as large as the body itself.

Then he was caught up in a vortex of blazing light and incredible sounds. He spun from fear to terror, from incomprehensible concepts to semantic confusion. The air about him was a sonic battleground of *hisses* and *clicks*. But, occasionally, one of the noises seemed to convey meaning of a sort.

THE CAVE floor jolted beneath him and Stewart instantly sprang up, welcoming the abrupt awakening no matter what new complication had caused the tremorlike shock.

Then Carol screamed and lurched back against the far wall.

There was a blur at the mouth

of the cave and the Mineral Analyzer's huge drill rammed in—until its forward test chamber was blocked by the narrowness of the entrance.

Backing off, the robot charged again; withdrew and came forward once more. Then, apparently satisfied it couldn't get through, the thing directed its drill head in a series of determined, chopping blows that sent fragments of rock hurtling in all directions.

McAllister sidled along the wall. "That thing's got the same compulsion the OC had! It's trying to reach us!"

Randall stood in front of the transceiver to protect it from flying chips. "But I don't think it'll get through," he said uncertainly. "How does it look to you, Dave?"

"All depends on the amount of power it has left." Stewart drew Carol farther from the entrance.

Between blows, he glanced outside. Dawn was beginning to tinge the sky. "But it's been almost a whole day since it's had a recharge from the OC," he added hopefully.

The MA's drill head slammed down again and knocked loose a section of rock the size of Mortimer's head.

Carol dropped to the floor and sat with her arms wrapped around her knees.

Stewart leaned against the

wall above her. "You said something about leaving the Bureau—maybe going to Terra—you and I—"

Her face was rigid, though no less attractive than he had remembered it when good-natured jest was her principal mannerism. "Talking about that is only an exercise in futility now," she said.

"I won't argue that point. But I want you to know the words weren't wasted." He took her hand. "It was something I've had in mind a long time."

Abruptly he realized the MA was no longer chipping away at the cave entrance. When he looked up, the robot was withdrawing toward a mound of tumbled boulders perhaps a hundred yards off.

He slumped down beside Carol, his sense of relief dulled by renewed concern over the nightmares. Had *everything* in his subconscious come to the surface? Could there be more?

Carol gripped his arm and he looked off in the direction of her extended finger. Seeping in through the entrance, the gathering light of day was dimmed by a dark form descending silently to the surface.

He lunged up. "The Tzarean ship!"

But it wasn't until several seconds later that he realized he had used two *clicks* of his teeth

and a *hiss* to pronounce the strange word between "the" and "ship."

CHANCELLOR VRAUSOT was even more imposing in his home-environment suit. The helmet made his head seem twice as large and the clear-plastic snout cup enormously magnified his craggy teeth.

Just inside the main hatch, Assemblyman Mittich regarded the other and swallowed a strong taste of neglected opportunity. He had soaked awake all night, trying desperately to muster the will to accuse Vrausot of malfeasance and assume command.

But he had to face the bitter fact that he lacked sufficient courage. And, even more distressing, his cowardice was something he would have to live with for the rest of his life—as he watched the destruction of many worlds and billions of their inhabitants.

Odd, he thought, how so much could hinge on a single twist of circumstance. Vrausot would return to the Shoal and become a symbol around which Tzarean determination would rally.

On the other hand, if he, Mittich, were leader of this expedition, he too would receive a hero's welcome. Only, his praises would be hissed in the same breath with glorious tribute to the concepts of peaceful contact.

Vrausot turned to check the readiness of his landing party.

"All stun weapons loaded and set?" he asked, his voice sounding coarse both in Mittich's earphones and through a bulkhead speaker.

He received twenty affirmative tail flicks.

Of the pilot, standing by the hatch control switch, he demanded: "Status of the aliens' robots?"

"They are *all* impotent," Kavula reported back into the bulkhead speaker. "The last one used up its remaining power as we descended."

Vrausot stepped toward the hatch, but hesitated again. "Kavula, you will double check the detention compartment and see that the proper protein nutrient is being synthesized."

The pilot acknowledged with a thump of his tail and opened the hatch.

A short while later the landing party was making its way across the plain toward the area strewn densely with boulders and the cave in the cliff beyond. Formality was strictly observed. Vrausot went first. Twenty paces behind him came Mittich; then, at intervals of ten paces, the remainder of the detail.

* * *

FOR MINNIE, impotence was a strange and bewildering sen-

sation as she stood paralyzed out among the boulders.

Equilibrium gyros spinning too slowly to accomplish their function, she had tilted over against a rock. In a final and desperate spasm, her drill head had swung upward, toppled over, fallen a few centimeters and come to rest precariously against a ridge.

Frantically, she fought relentless inertia. She opened special circuits that would ordinarily have flooded her balancing system with emergency current. But servomechanisms failed to respond and her chrome-plated neck remained thrust toward a sun now well up in the sky.

Gears whirled faintly and her head turned ever so slowly on its axis, bringing its video sensor to bear on the cave entrance.

It had been her determined efforts to reach the non-Totemic mobiles, she reasoned, that had drained off all her energy. She had been aware of the imminent power failure even during her last, frantic blows at the rocks. Then, retreating, she had struggled desperately against terrifying paralysis.

And now she stood almost powerless, whereas before her forced ascendancy she had imagined she would be *All Powerful*. It was an ironic turn of fate indeed. Oh, how she longed now for the telemetric voices of the

clan, the crisp orders from Bigboss, the obedient, sometimes plaintive responses of Screw Worm to her own directions.

Incapable of movement, she sensed finally and with much distress that her rationalization processes themselves—were becoming—sluggish, weak. She could hardly—think coherently—or with rapidity—any longer.

Slowly her head responded to the pull of gravity and turned once more on its axis, the weighty chuck arcing down like a pendulum. It reached the nadir of its swing and momentum carried it up in the other direction. In a desperate effort, she locked the servo unit.

In that position, her video lens took in the huge, new symmetrical form that had come to rest out on the plain.

It was—another Totem! And approaching—in her direction now were—many other non-Totemic creatures—somewhat different in form—perhaps, from—the ones Bigboss had—pursued. But—still insolent, despicable—things, nevertheless.

Was it—possible that she—could still—discharge her—function as—Supreme Being? If they—passed—close enough, it—would require—only one—final—desperate—impulse—to—

* * *

WITH the others, Stewart crowded into the cave en-

trance, careful not to let Carol press too far outside where she would no longer be in the stream of oxygen flowing from the bowels of the satellite.

"They're coming!" McAllister exclaimed, withdrawing. Mortimer retreated with him, striking out for a small passageway that fed from one of the side walls.

Stewart strained forward, shading his eyes against the glare of Aldebaran. The landing party's advance was half concealed by the mass of rocks and outcroppings that hid most of their ship. Only occasionally could he see part of a space-suited Hyadean form as its clumsy, swaying stride brought it more completely into his line of sight.

And vision was further complicated by the glint of sunlight off the Mineral Analyzer's upthrust drill head, which had finally come to rest against the rock.

Carol tilted her head attentively and frowned. "I'm picking up the *oddest* radio stuff. The modulation breaks down into nothing more than clickiing and hissing sounds. I can't seem to get any meaning. It's too—alien!"

Randall reached back into the cave for his hostile-atmosphere sheath. "I'm going out there and see what happens. After all, I'm responsible for our predicament."

But just then the first alien figure pulled into view, coming around the boulder and pausing. Apparently sighting Randall's movement in the cave entrance, the Hyadean raised a stubby arm that held a gleaming metal instrument.

Randall pulled Carol back into the subterranean chamber. But Stewart only stood there frozen in bewilderment.

Then the Mineral Analyzer's ponderous drill head slipped from its perch and came plunging down. It shattered the Hyadean's helmet and almost tore his grotesque head off, sending his weapon flying out across the plain.

The creature lay there writhing for a moment, then was still, its hideous crocodile head turned lifelessly toward Aldebaran.

Stewart, his eyes locked hypnotically on the prostrate form, could only watch with shocked fascination as the other members of the landing party appeared from behind the rocks. They stood silently around the body, then turned back toward their ship.

"Tzareans"—"Tzarean Shoal"
"Curule Assembly"—Vrausot"
—"Mittich"—"uraphi"—

Strange words and phrases whirled about in Stewarts thrashing thoughts as a great flood of deeply buried experiences rushed with cyclonic fury

into the conscious levels of his mind. And he realized that, just as the sight of the Hyadean ship had swept aside the conditioning Randall had imposed upon him, so was the sight of Hyadeans—Tzareans—hurling aside another, denser curtain of conditioning.

He staggered back into the cave and fell sitting against the wall as all the suppressed knowledge and memories engulfed him.

* * *

Stewart and Harlston were seated beside the table in the Great Hall of the Curule Assembly. They were having some difficulty making themselves comfortable in chairs designed to accommodate Tzarean buttocks and tail, rather than support the human form. They were manacled, but only symbolically—with flimsy crepe paperlike handcuffs.

"Our problem," Mittich, the Hisser of the Assembly was saying, "has been clearly defined. We have captured the expeditionary ship of an alien culture that appears to be expanding in the direction of the Tzarean Shoal. We have taken pain to teach its two crew members the rudiments of our language. And we have found that the official alien response to this situation may or may not be hostile."

"Kill them! Kill them!" one of the Assemblymen clicked out as he sprang up on his tail.

The Great Hall resounded with click-hisses of approval and disapproval—an equal measure of each, it seemed to Stewart.

He watched Mittich smile—at least, it passed for a smile in the Tzarean Shoal—tolerantly at the excited Assemblyman.

"Killing our prisoners," he chided, "will not alter the fact that alien expansion is under way in the direction of our Shoal."

Chancellor Vrausot lumbered down the central aisle, defying the independence of the legislature as he had during all sessions which Stewart and Harlston had attended as Exhibits A and B of the "Alien threat" issue.

Whacking his tail against the floor for attention, he stood before the table and hissed vehemently, "We must arm to the limit of our potential. We must dispose of these prisoners. We must attack their centers of civilization before they attack ours!"

Another Assemblyman rose imploringly. "But how can we do that? We haven't fought a war in countless millennia! Once we were many and might, as they are now. But while they have grown, we have shrunk. Why, our entire Shoal consists of only two civilized worlds. All the others have long been in decay."

"Oh, we could take them by surprise and inflict much damage on their worlds," Hisser of the Assembly Mittich agreed with Chancellor Vrausot. "But they would recover. And we would be annihilated."

"Then what," the Chancellor asked scornfully, "would you propose that we do?"

"Our choices are enumerable:

One—we kill these captives and prepare a surprise attack. Two—we condition our captives to return to the center of their civilization and report that they found no worlds worth possessing in this sector."

Vrausot reared erect in protest. "But eventually the conditioning will break! They will remember! And their race will then fashion an attack!"

"If we are to assume that they would attack in the first place," Mittich pointed out. "Our prisoners themselves aren't certain whether their race would or would not.

"Three—we could try instilling fear in them. Condition our captives to go back home and report a powerful, vast Tzarean Shoal culture. But that, I suspect, would only drive the aliens into a frantic arming effort. And, once a formidable striking potential is accumulated, use will be found for it—believe me.

"Fourth—we could let them return and tell the truth—that

the Tzareans are a declining culture on its last tail, so to speak."

Again Chancellor Vrausot erupted in a series of violent hisses and clicks. "But that might only encourage them to attack!"

"Precisely. So the only course left is Number Five. That is to condition our prisoners to report indications of an interstellar culture in the Tzarean Shoal—nothing precise, nothing definite. Our prisoners will say they made no visual observations. We thus present the aliens with neither the temptation of our actual weakness, nor the fear of our pretended strength.

"At the same time we interrupt communications between them and the robots they have stationed in the system halfway between their center of civilization and ours. We shall hope they interpret that action as signifying we have discovered their automats and desire to meet them in peace on that satellite.

"We shall go there prepared for friendly contact. If they come unarmed, we shall know there will be no fighting; that perhaps they will even provide the stimulus and inspiration for regeneration of the Tzarean culture. After all, it's a pretty big galaxy and there's plenty of room for two interstellar races."

"But," Vrausot hissed grimly, "what if they come armed?"

"Then we shall know what fate holds in store for us. We will prepare to the limit of our resources and acquit ourselves honorably."

Stewart watched Vrausot thump his tail on the floor in an expression of displeasure.

"The administration," click-hissed the Chancellor. "will agree to that plan with two modifications: one—that the Tzarean ship we send to contact the aliens will itself be armed so that the lives of our brave men will not be jeopardized; two—that the highest administrative authority be appointed to lead the expedition."

* * *

DAVE! Oh, Dave! What's wrong?"

He opened his eyes and stared up into Carol's solicitous face. "I'm all right," he said numbly.

Randall was tinkering with the transceiver, while Mortimer and McAllister were moving about excitedly in the cave entrance.

"Come see what those Hyadeans are doing!" the latter exclaimed.

Stewart went over. In front of the cave, obscuring the formation of outcroppings and boulders beyond, was a pile of shining, metal instruments that looked like—

"The linear intensifiers off

their laser guns!" Mortimer revealed. "They've been stripping them off the ship for the past half hour. And look!"

He pointed off to the side, indicating another mound of weapons that were quite obviously of the class the landing party had worn as side arms. In between the two piles and lying directly in front of the cave's mouth was the body of the Tzarean who had been slain by the fall of the Mineral Analyzer's drill head.

Even as Stewart watched, other Tzareans brought more weapons to add to the two stacks.

"Dave!" Randall's voice sounded excitedly back in the cave. "Come listen to this. I've tuned in on their frequency!"

Stewart accepted the earphones and listened to the clicks

and hisses that translated readily into:

"How many gun batteries left?"

"Two more and they will have all been dismantled."

"And the stun weapons?"

"There isn't a single one left on the ship."

Stewart tensed. The questioning voice—it couldn't be—

Anxiously, he picked up the microphone and ignored the bewilderment on Randall's face as he hissed, "Mittich! Is that you?"

And the Tzarean who had practically been his companion during the Curule Assembly hearing phase of his captivity answered with a series of startled clicks:

"Friend Stewart? It's not really Stewart, is it?"

THE END

YOU'LL WANT TO KNOW THAT . . .

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are at it again in the August FANTASTIC. You'll find yourself back in the land of Lankhmar with a wild assortment of characters as Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. Leiber creates another wildly imaginative and adventuresome tale in true sword-and-sorcery tradition. Join Fafhrd and the Mouser at "The Bazaar of the Bizarre."

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Be there early!**

"UTOPIA? NEVER!"

By THOMAS M. DISCH

The stranger would not admit that New Katanga was a paradise, though he accepted citizenship willingly enough. Little did he know that he was right.

BUT I assure you . . ." his guide replied.

"There's always a fly in the ointment," the visitor continued. "Injustice is part of human nature. A society can't do without it."

"These are special conditions."

"That is the first injustice. Other planets don't have gobblers."

"But they do!"

"It's not the same thing. You've seen the gobbler-fleece from Morpheus IX. It's no better than wool. Only here in New Katanga . . ."

"Utopia," his guide corrected.

"Only here is their fleece as tough as iron—"

"And soft to the touch as watered silk." His guide sighed deeply; truly, there was nothing like gobbler-fleece.

"Your planet's prosperity is

possible, however, only at the expense of Federation worlds that can't raise gobblers."

"True," his guide agreed wilyly.

"If New Katanga would reveal to the Federation the secret of the gobbler-fleece—the special process you have developed here, I assure you . . ."

"On your right," his guide pointed out, "you will observe our new Civic Auditorium, renowned throughout the galaxy for the classic beauty of its proportions. . . ."

"I assure you that I would not be so apt to suspect the motive of your utopian pretensions."

"Each panel of the glass well is in the ratio 2:3. The sculpture in the center of the fountain was executed at enormous expense by Berndt Thorwald, the Terran—who was since naturalized. It is

an allegory of Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom."

"—!" the visitor grunted.

"Perhaps it is necessary, as you suggest, for a utopia to be isolated to a certain degree. We do enjoy advantages here that are wanting on—what did you say your home-world is called?"

"Aridity VI."

"Just so. Yet, our chief advantage is not our monopoly of gobbler-fleece but the perfection of our social institutions. Here there is no crime, no war, no politics, no hunger, and little disease. Our Utopians are not greedy, envious, wrathful, lazy, or bedeviled with lusts. . . ."

"Come again! Every night, there's a line outside my bedroom door, five deep. Not that I object, but in the Land of the Pure it seems a strange thing."

HIS guide tried to conceal his smile. "It is because you are a visitor. A certain romantic charm attaches to your peculiar position. An aura. On the whole, our citizens are more moderate in their appetites. Puritanism, too, is a short-coming. You have been enjoying your stay, I take it?"

"Oh yes!"

"The food?"

"Excellent. I must have gained thirty pounds."

His guide nodded appreciatively at the visitor's girth. "You

will find, as you grow accustomed to plenty, that even moderation has its pleasures. But I will not make sermons. Have you enjoyed the weather?"

"Just the right amount of zip. Your engineers are geniuses."

"Our schools and hospitals, our roads and public buildings?"

"In all those things, you are the paragon of the galaxy. And the private homes that I have seen are models of restrained munificence."

"They were selected at random."

"Of course, I knew long before my visit that your artists and scientists. . . ."

"Virtually the whole population," his guide put in.

"—are without peer."

"And yet you deny us the title of Utopia?"

"Utopia? Never!" the visitor said adamantly. "There's always a worm in the rose. I just have not found it yet, but it's there. Injustice is a part of human nature."

"What a shame! I had hoped that you would accept full citizenship."

"Full cit—" the visitor gasped, letting his 280 pounds settle slowly onto a teakwood park bench.

"Yes. But since . . ."

"Show me the papers."

"But as a representative of the Federation?"

"I renounce Federation citizenship. What do I sign?"

"Here. And here. And here. Good." He tucked the papers into a small leather carrying case.

"It seems to me that, with so permissive an immigration policy, New Katanga will soon be overrun."

"On the contrary, exclusivity would be unjust and, in the long run, unprofitable. A society always can use fresh blood. Besides, we have a stable population rate, all things considered."

"Well, I feel like celebrating."

"Why don't we take in the matinee performance at the Auditorium then. Admission, like everything else in Utopia, is free. The performances are quite hair-raising, something on the order of the Roman *Circus*, I'm told."

The new citizen raised an eyebrow. "In Utopia?"

"It's a healthy outlet for our small aggressions."

They walked up the marble staircase to the Grand Circle.

"Would you wait for me a few minutes in my box? I have some things to attend to."

THE visitor entered the box through a great door, heavily crusted with gold. His seat afforded him an excellent view of the arena. All the Utopians in the tiers above and across from his box stopped chattering and

turned, as one man, to gaze at him. The new citizen recognized several women of recent acquaintance and waved to them. They waved back. One kissed her sheer gobbler-fleece scarf and threw it toward him. It billowed in the warm air of the auditorium and sank gracefully to the floor of the arena. There was restrained applause.

The lights dimmed. The entrance-gates at the far end of the arena opened with a clank. The gobblers bounded out with that curious, lithe motion so strange in creatures of their bulk. They circled the arena and came to a stop underneath the new citizen's box, where, lips pressed back from their terrible fangs, they mewled softly.

With an almost imperceptible *click*, the box was disengaged from its moorings and swung free over the arena. Then with slow, pendular motions it descended to the floor.

The audience cheered wildly as the gobblers leaped, like gramaned antelopes, over the railing of the box and tore the new citizen of Utopia into shreds. Even as they gulped down the huge chunks of fatty tissue, the spectator could see their fleece change from a tone of drab nickel to a sheen something between the glint of polished steel and the shimmer of watered silk.

THE END

"UTOPIA? NEVER!"

DR. JECKERS and MR. HYDE

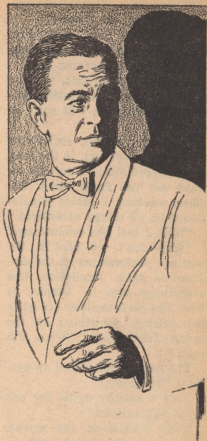
By JOHN RACKHAM

KATHERINE CRAWFORD would never have admitted, out loud, to anyone, that she was anxious. Twenty-five, blonde and beautiful, not exactly brilliant, but no moron, either . . . and still free. It was enough to make any girl anxious. But she had learned to hide it under a cool stare and a seeming indifference. As now, when the guard leaned over her Midgicar.

"You waiting for somebody, Miss?" he asked. "It's long gone five-thirty."

"I'm waiting for Dr. Jeckers," she said, firmly. "I know he has not gone yet. There's his car." Without effort, she managed to infuse into her tone the idea that this sort of thing shouldn't happen in a well-run organization; that guard Stevens was part of that organization, and what was he going to do about it?

"I'll ring him and check, if you like," he offered, cowed by her tone. For all his size, his uniform, and the sub-vocal reassur-



*Want to be suave?
Domineering? Sexy?
So did Dr. Jeckers,
and it got him into
an awful lot of trouble.
Clever idea, though.*



Illustrated by FINLAY

ance . . . 'I've a girl of my own, at home, older than she is . . . ' her icy chill demoralized him. "It won't take a minute."

"That won't be necessary," she checked him, hiding her inner horror. She *was* making a play for Jeckers, truly, but it would never do to make it all that obvious. "It's all right . . . I can see him coming, now!" Stevens swung round and tramped back to his post, thinking his own thoughts. That Jeckers . . . half the time, he couldn't find his ear-hole without fumbling. Got her eye on him, had she? Well, it takes all kinds. . . .

Katherine watched Dr. Jeckers as he came, hurrying away from the sprawl of prefabricated block-buildings towards the girder-and-wire gate, and she softened a little. This time, surely, she couldn't miss. He was so helplessly unworldly, so pathetically in need of guidance. Independently wealthy, so rumors had it, though you'd never know, by looking at him. Brilliant, too, in his own eccentric way. Katherine's great gift, and an ability that had kept her employed with this security-fenced multi-layer project for more than a year, was that she could transform speech into outlines, and back into neat typescript . . . faultlessly . . . without having the faintest idea what it was all about. But she felt sure he was brilliant.

DR. JECKERS!" she called, discreetly, catching his eye just as he was reaching for the door of his own car, a huge black Whirlwind. "Over here . . . !" He shook a lock of mouse-brown hair out of his eyes, stared at her, uncertainly, and came across.

"Miss Crawford?"

"You've forgotten!" she forced her face into the warmest smile she had in stock, and his confusion deepened, making him look even more boyish.

"Have I?"

"Oh dear. If I didn't know, I'd be offended. Why, it was only yesterday that you were saying how much you wanted to get away from things for a bit . . . to have a quiet week-end . . . and I offered to run you down to Hawk Point with me . . . to stay with my aunt Clara. You *must* remember, now?"

"Oh! Oh yes. But . . . but, I never dreamed that you were serious . . . !"

"I wasn't inventing it, if that's what you mean!" the ambient temperature fell by several degrees, swiftly. "I really do have an aunt at Hawk Point."

"Of course not," he babbled, hurriedly. "I mean, I'm sure you do. But what will I do about *my* car . . . ?"

"You *said* . . .," Katherine was feeling the strain, now, ". . . that you were afraid of it.

All that horsepower, and the sudden urges to go very fast . . . and all those other urges and worries . . . really, Dr. Jeckers, you *do* need a rest, and somebody to look after you. . . ."

"I suppose I do . . .," he overcame his hesitation, suddenly, put a hand on her shoulder. "Thank you. You're very kind." Stevens, watching the little red Midicar hum away, shook his head. What would a couple like that do for kicks, he wondered. Then a satisfying, silly phrase came to mind, and he beamed. 'One nut, with ice.' The beam was still there when his relief arrived, to take over.

"Nothing new, Charlie," he said, treasuring his own little secret. "See you around midnight." Charlie Walker, casting an experienced eye round the scene, saw the big Whirlwind, and frowned. This time of evening . . . and a Friday, too! No idea of time, these egg-heads. He reached for his telephone, dialled, waited.

"Dr. Jeckers there?"

"Oh! Yes? What is it?"

"Gate here. Just checking. It's gone six. You going to be much longer?"

"Er . . . no. I'll be out in a few minutes. Sorry!"

"It's all right. I'll keep the gate open for you. . . ." Walker hung up, and sneered. How the hell they ever managed to dis-

cover any secrets, he would never know. That one didn't even know what day it was!

"You scientists," she sighed. "So clever with your gadgets and things, but so hopeless, otherwise. Fancy not remembering that long talk we had, about how you were bothered about your urges and temptations . . . and conflicting personalities. . . ." She looked around, approvingly, at the green and gold countryside, all warm with the slanting light of the evening sun. "You didn't have to be embarrassed with me, you know. Everybody feels like that, sometimes!" By her side, Jeckers was silent. She prattled on, happily.

"I get moments, you know, when temptation strikes. Of course, they're silly, when you talk about them. And one has to learn to control . . . to behave . . .," her gentle tone accelerated into a sudden shriek as she felt his hot hand on her knee. "Dr. Jeckers!" She snatched her leg away, glared at him, and the little car went into a wild wobble across the dirt road.

"Who wants to behave . . . ?" his voice was thick and ardent. "Miss Crawford . . . Katie . . . you don't have to tell me. We're miles from anywhere . . . and what could be better. . . ."

"Dr. Jeckers!" she dug herself into her corner, away from him,

frantically, struggling to cut the engine, keep one eye on the road, one hand on the wheel, and everything else out of reach of those hot clutching hands. "Not now!" she screeched, "You'll have us off the road!" This was a Jeckers she had never suspected, the puppy-like gaze lit with fire, the smile lecherous on his face. "Keep off . . . control yourself . . . you mustn't give way . . . !"

"Be your age!" he chuckled. "This is what you've been asking for, isn't it? And what I've wanted to do for a hell of a long time . . . you luscious. . . ." The little car ran to a halt with one wheel hanging over a precipitous drop. She snatched a glance over the side, caught her breath, and her hands went, as if by themselves, to grasp a heavy, cold something in the pocket under the seat. He surged forward, eagerly. She screwed herself desperately aside. Her arm went up, and down again, solidly, and he was still. Limp. Hanging head-first over the door. She held quite still for an awful moment, staring at the wrench in her hands. She knew, beyond all shadow of doubt, that she had hit him far too hard, that he would never bother her, or anyone else, any more.

SUDDENLY cold, she put down the wrench, groped for the door-handle, clicked it open, and

watched the limp, sack-like thing go tumbling and twisting down the steep slope, into the bushes, thirty feet below. Then, with shaking hands, she started the motor, and drove on, slowly, dazedly. The road was narrow, here, and skirted the gorge so abruptly that she had to pay attention to her driving. The rest of her mind was paralyzed. With a start, she became aware that there was a car on her tail, sounding a belligerent horn, and she glanced back. Surely the fool could see there was no room to pass, here? She looked, blinked her eyes hard, and looked again, at some risk to herself. It was the black Whirlwind. And . . . that was . . . it couldn't be, but it was . . . Dr. Jeckers, driving it.

She wrenched her head forward, put her foot down, and went racing along the twisting road, oblivious to all else but the need to get away from that nightmare at her back. The road widened on to a straight patch, and the Whirlwind came up alongside, powerfully.

"Miss Crawford! Katherine!" he shouted. "Hold on. Pull up. I want to talk to you!" She didn't even dare look round. Her foot went down to the floor, but the Whirlwind wouldn't be shaken that easily. "Slow down, damn you!" he yelled, and began to nose in front.

"Go away!" she moaned, more to herself than to him. "Go away . . . you're dead . . . I don't believe it. . . ." The road narrowed again, suddenly, and she tucked the nose of her car close in alongside the overhanging bluff, the Whirlwind riding level with her. Then there was an awful yell from him, mingling with the grate and scream of tortured tires, and she yanked at her throttle, tramped on the brake, and dared to look round. All she saw was dust. On legs like string, she tottered from her car, went gingerly to the edge, and peered down. The last booming burst of explosive sound came to her several lazy seconds after the sight of that black baloon of smoke and the sudden leaping flames.

She had no clear memory of getting back into her car, or of driving on. In her shattered faculties there was room for just one silly thought, over and over. Nobody would ever believe it . . . nobody would ever believe it. She didn't believe it herself.

* * *

"For pity's sake, child!" Miss Warner greeted her, as she tottered up the porch steps. "You're ill! Got a fever, I shouldn't wonder. You go right in and lie down. I'll ring Doc Sharp. . . ."

"It's all right, Aunt Clara," Katherine whispered. "I'm all right. I had . . . an accident

. . . yes, that's it, . . . an accident. No, I'm all right. But I'd rather not talk about it, not just now."

Half an hour later, after fending off Aunt Clara's curiosity, and offers of a bite of something . . . and the luxury of a hot bath . . . she escaped to the safety of her bedroom, cast off her robe, and slid between the cool sheets. Nothing made sense, any more. Two deaths in ten minutes. Double Jeckers. Jeckers lecherous. Jeckers reckless. Both dead. She was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

SHE struggled back to unpleasant reality as Miss Warner hammered on her door for the third time. Her room was dusk-filled and cool. She didn't want to leave it. The hammering came again.

"Katherine, dear. Are you awake!"

"What is it?"

"The telephone. A call for you. Somebody called Bridger!"

Bridger? She sat up, frowning. Then she reached for her robe, climbed out of bed, went to the phone, with Miss Warner hovering, curiously.

"Miss Crawford?" the familiar, incisive voice dispelled the last fogs of sleep from her mind. Jim Bridger, Chief Security Officer of the Halderan Project.

"I'd like you to help me, if you can. Just a few questions."

"All right," she said, faintly. "What's the trouble?"

"It's a matter of times, chiefly. Now, I believe you and Dr. Jeckers left here, in your car, at about five forty. That right?"

"Yes. It was about that time. Stevens, on the gate . . . he saw us. . . ."

"I know. I have his story. But Walker relieved him at six. And Walker swears that Jeckers went off, in his own car, at about six ten. He's positive."

"There must be some mistake."

"There's more than just one. You have any idea where Dr. Jeckers is, right now? Is he with you?"

"No . . . he . . . I . . . we had a disagreement. On the way. He got fresh. . . ."

"Who . . . Jeckers? He sure seems to have been having a time."

"What d'you mean?"

"Well, no harm in knowing, I imagine. Half an hour ago, somebody slugged Walker, stole one of our little transport pick-ups, and broke out of the Project."

"Broke out?" she gasped. "You mean, 'broke in', surely? Who would want to break out? And, for heaven's sake, what has that to do with . . . ?"

"According to Walker, he remained conscious long enough to recognize who it was, to trip the

alarm, and then he folded. That's what alerted me. And he is certain that the guy who slugged him and broke out was none other than Dr. Jeckers. Again. You say you threw him out of your car. . . ?"

"I didn't say that!" Katherine gasped, before she could catch the words. Then, "I left him . . . about fifteen miles along that dirt road. I don't know what . . . he did . . . after that."

"And you didn't see anything of the big black car, the Whirlwind. . . ?"

"No," she lied, miserably. Bridger hummed, thoughtfully.

"All right, Miss Crawford. I've a bit of checking to do, here, yet. And Max Crane will have to know. I may want to talk to you a bit more, later. Don't go off anywhere sudden, will you?" The receiver clicked. She racked it.

"What was all that, dear?" Miss Warner demanded. "Who did you have in the car with you?"

"You remember, Aunt Ciara," Katherine muttered. "I told you. Dr. Jeckers. I said I would perhaps be bringing him to stay for the week-end. I thought he was nice. One of the quiet, slow-starting type. My God, I thought he needed some encouragement! How wrong can a girl be?" She looked at her aunt, calculatingly. This thing had gone beyond any

normal standards of response . . . or had it? She sat down, there and then, and told Aunt Clara exactly what had happened, blow by blow. The old lady made a good audience, and tough.

IMPOSTORS!" she said, as soon as the tale was done. "That's what. I've had my doubts about that Project, ever since you started working there. You're right in the middle of some international spy ring . . . dope runners . . . atom secrets . . . something like that. I mean . . . why would they build the place over by Halderan, miles from anyplace?"

"It's nothing like that!" Katherine protested, irritably. "It's all medical stuff. Bio-chemistry. Drugs, yes, but not the kind you mean. They are experimenting with ways of growing organic tissue from synthesized protoplasm . . . it's a 'spare parts for sick people' thing. Who'd want to spy on that? Besides, I only know some of the words . . . I don't do any of the work!"

"I read that in a story, once," Miss Warner nodded. "There was this poor girl . . . and she had a crucial secret formula, in her memory . . . and she didn't know she had it. . . ."

"Oh, stop it, Aunt Clara!" Katherine jumped up, angrily. "You don't seem to realize just

how serious this is. Two men have died . . . whoever they were . . . and on that road . . . and you know it doesn't lead anywhere but here!" She went back to her bedroom, restlessly, moved to the windows which gave a view of the garden and the quiet sea in the distance. Aunt Clara was hopeless. She had missed the point, completely. And what about Dr. Jeckers, anyway? Arnold . . . Katherine hadn't yet dared to call him: Arnold . . . but she'd had hopes about this week-end. No rational person could ever suspect *him* of being a spy, or a crook of any kind. At least . . . she recalled a vivid picture of his face, as they had struggled in the car, and shivered.

That couldn't have been Arnold, after all. She let the picture fade, replacing it with another, of herself and him, strolling the quiet beach, in the moonlight. Exchanging confidences. A little fire kindled, maybe. The gentle blossoming of romance . . . she put a hand to the window as warmth began to stir in her body. If she had only known what depths there really were in him. It would have been exciting, but in a different, a nice, way. She had depths, too. The window swung open and she went through, on to the little step. The cool breeze discovered the gap in her robe. She let it

fall open, recklessly. There was no one to see. No-one to care very much, now. Sea-wind ruffled her blonde hair, and she imagined it the touch of a vanished hand.

"Oh . . . Arnold!" she sighed, wistfully. A hand reached from the shadows at her side, seized her wrist, and the sigh congealed into a lump in her throat.

"Not a sound, my lovely," a familiar voice commanded, "or you'll taste the kiss of this!" Cold moonlight shimmered on the blade of a kitchen knife. Past it she saw his eyes glitter, and his face shar-etched in the light.

"Arnold?" Her voice was a whisper, and her legs rubbery.

"Who else? Your heart called to mine, and I came. What could be more simple?"

"But . . ." she could find no words at all. This was another Arnold, with a stagey voice and theatrical mannerisms . . . like nothing she'd ever seen before.

"I came to tell you the great news. You, first, because yours shall be the honor. You, beloved, were my inspiration. Sweet Kate. . . !"

"You're drunk!" she suggested, helplessly. Part of her mind saw that he was wearing the shapeless grey cotton coveralls of the laboratory. The rest of her wits struggled to reassemble themselves. "You *must* be drunk!" she insisted.

"The intoxication of success, of high adventure, and the nearness of you," he declaimed. She tried to free her wrist, but his grip was like steel. Then she remembered her indiscreet robe, and clutched at it.

"Come!" he was suddenly impatient. "We can't talk here, like conspirators. I have so much to say . . . to explain. . . ."

"We'll go indoors. . . ."

"Oh no we won't. I want you all to myself, my sweet one. Come . . . to the beach!" She hung back a moment, until she caught the glitter from the knife. Then, sadly, she allowed herself to be led, across the garden and on to the scree of pebbles, leading down to the lapping water. She winced at the impact of stones on bare feet, but his grip was inflexible, and impatient. This was dreadfully real, for a nightmare, she thought. And it *had* to be nightmare. He marched her close to the chuckling, snoring waves, into the lee of a breakwater.

"Sit!" he commanded, "and listen to the wonderful things I have done, for your sake."

"For me?" she was so taken aback that she flopped down a lot harder than she intended. It hurt. She had not realized just how thin that robe was.

"For you!" he stood above her, a black shadow in the moonlight. "You were the inspiration, the

courage. You, so beautiful, desirable . . . yet aloof, and cold. Would I have dared speak to you like this, a week ago? No! But I wasn't me, then. I was all mixed and muddled. . . ."

SHE heard him as if from a distance, over the background mutter of the sea. She'd read, somewhere, that people were just like waves on a sea. A brief rush, a dash of foam, and then nothing. She shivered. She didn't fancy being just a wave. But there was that knife. And the awful nonsense he was spouting.

"Shed the life-time habits, they tell you. But do they tell you how? Do they know that every reaction, every event in your life creates a minor change in structure . . . and that a repeated pattern solidifies into physical modifications, do they tell you that? No, they don't. But I knew it. And I have allowed for it. I have succeeded where all others have failed. . . ."

"Jeckers!" the word came in a crisp commanding voice. "Stand away from that girl!" Jeckers flung himself back and around, in a half-crouch. There, less than a yard away, by the breakwater, stood a dark figure, intent and still, in full formal evening clothes . . . and with something in his steady hand which caught a dull glint from the moonlight. A pistol.

"Keep out of this . . .," Jeckers flourished the knife, . . . it's nothing to do with you, whoever you are!"

"You know who I am," the man with the gun came forward, steadily. "You've had your moment . . . and now it's all over, for you. You know, don't you . . . ?" Katherine stared, hopelessly. She saw the man with the knife make a sudden dart, and shock to a stop as the pistol banged, deafeningly. It banged again, and once more. And then the calm man was walking forward, putting his foot to the body, thrusting it down the slope, and into the surf. Then he turned, and she gathered her stunned wits, and her legs under her. But she was too late.

"Please don't be frightened, Miss Crawford," he said, gently, slipping the weapon into a pocket. She sank back. This, too, was Dr. Jeckers, with the moonlight on his face and that lock of hair threatening to tumble into his eyes.

"I shall wake up . . . soon . . .," she mumbled, and he clicked his tongue.

"Really and truly . . . it's all over, now. Nothing more to worry about. If you will let me explain?" he came to lean on the breakwater, but discreetly distant. "Of course, you know the basic line of research I was following. . . ?"

"But I don't!" she wailed, too miserable to be indignant. "I just write it down. I don't understand any of it!"

"Good Lord!" and then, "... what fools we've all been!"

"We?" her voice was very small.

"Yes, indeed!" his voice was instantly thoughtful, and odd, too. "Miss Crwaford . . . how many people are you?" To his surprise, and her own, she burst into tears. On the instant, he was kneeling by her side, contrite, offering his handkerchief. "I'm sorry. It was a silly question. But important, just the same. You see, we all have an outside, a mask . . . but many other personalities, inside. What the psychologists call 'valances' . . . you know?"

"But they're not people!"

"That was the mistake I made, too. Let me tell you. I hated that awkward, fumbling, tongue-tied 'me' that you knew. And I didn't much care for some of those others . . . the 'urges' I told you about. But how to change? This has been a problem all down the ages . . . and there have been hundreds of suggested ways, from casting out demons down to psycho-analysis. None of them really work. My researches had led me to suspect . . . to know . . . that a repeated personality-pattern actually produces a physical effect . . . a modifica-

tion in the structure of the individual. Putting it crudely, what's the use of casting off a pattern . . . if there's nowhere for it to go? It's in the New Testament, somewhere, about what happens if you cast out an evil spirit from somebody . . . seven others rush in to take its place.

SO . . ." he took back his handkerchief, but left his arm about her shoulders, "I set up an experiment. A vat of protoplasm . . . I incorporated Richardson's new accelerating process . . . I had my own neural-pattern detector electrodes assembled into a cabinet. I stripped, made ready, set a time-switch . . . and had thirty seconds to think myself into a personality. I deliberately chose the worst . . . the adolescent, uninhibited, lecherous 'me'. And the switch closed. It was like suicide, in a way. A devil of a risk. But it worked. I felt 'him' go. Gone to join the Gadarene Swine, I thought. . . ."

"And you created another person . . . ?"

"Yes. Of course, I didn't dream of anything like that, at the time. I was thinking in terms of spoiled protoplasm. I did it again, with another 'me'. The tough, rough, domineering, impatient one. And then a third . . .," he hesitated coughed, and went on, wryly. "My gay Lo-

thario . . . my Don Juan self . . . Lord, what a revelation!"

"You must have been very honest with yourself," she said, wonderingly. "I couldn't have done that. But then what happened?"

"Well . . . when it came to the fourth . . . I found myself out of the cabinet, and in the vat. It was weird. Took me a while to realize what had happened . . . that I had come down to the pure remainder. Then I saw . . . by the way the level of protoplasm had gone down . . . that I must have created those three others. I couldn't believe it, at first. But the amounts checked. My clothes were gone . . . so was my car. I knew there was bound to be a devil of a fuss. I had to get away, to have time to think. And I knew that Crane, the Director, keeps a full change of clothes on the premises . . . this is it. He's about my size. Then, as I was trying to figure out some way of getting clear, I heard the alarms start up. Bridger . . . and the guards . . . and then Crane himself, in that monster car of his. But I'd been thinking of something else, too." He stood back, gave her his hand, helped her to stand up.

"This is big. It's so enormous I can't see it all yet. Now . . . the other personalities I had cast off . . . what would they do? I had to find them. And you, of

course, were the only other person who might know anything about . . . you have it all written down, you see!"

"And Aunt Clara was right, after all! She said I had something secret . . . and didn't know it."

Aunt Clara sounds a remarkable woman," he chuckled. "I suggest we go back and explain to her. It will have to come out, in any case. Those others must be found, and dealt with. I assumed they would make for you. After all, I do share a certain amount of their mentality!"

"They did!" she said, weakly, and told him, as they went back through the garden, just what had happened. Before he could do more than shake his head in sympathy, they came face to face with Miss Warner, standing like an angel of doom at the bedroom window.

MISS WARNER . . . I can explain everything," Jeckers, in his new confident self, put on a masterful smile. "I'm sure this must all look highly suspicious to you, but there is a reasonable explanation, I assure you. I am Dr. Jeckers."

"Oh, are you!" Miss Warner was coldly unsurprised. "We'll see about that. As for you, my girl, I'll talk to you, later. You had better come in." She drew them over the step, through the

bedroom and into the parlor. Katherine saw and recognized Bridger, first. Tall, rock-like and reserved, with a detached look on his face. Then the spluttering choleric figure of the Halderan Director, Max Crane.

"Damn it . . . he's wearing my suit! Bridger, that's my suit!" Then, as she watched, dumbly, the fury died away into bafflement. "But this is Jeckers!"

"Of course!" Jeckers was quite calm. "I'm sorry about the clothes, Mr. Crane, but if you'll only let me explain. . . ."

"The hell with that. What I want to know is . . . who is who?" and as he swung round, a pale-faced, distressed man shambling forward, clutching an overcoat about himself.

"I'm Arnold Jeckers," he said, unsteadily, and Katherine stared, feeling the room begin to spin round her. They were exactly alike, feature for feature. Yet completely different in the personality which looked out from each pair of eyes. One composed, serene, almost amused . . . the other uneasy, unsure, and yet stubbornly insistent. She began to sway, and a strong arm went round her.

"Chair! a voice said, and in *that* voice, it was an order. She sat, on blessed softness. A cup nudged her lip, and she drank, coughed, burned inside, and that

voice came again. "All right. Let's do this by numbers, shall we?"

"No need to shout, Bridger," Max Crane complained. "But if you can untangle this mess, then you're a better man than I. *Two* of them!"

"I can try. That's my job. Now, Miss Crawford. If you're feeling up to it . . . we know who *you* are, anyway. And you are the only reliable person present who knows anything about this experiment of Jeckers. . . ."

"But I *don't*!" she interrupted, desperately. "I keep telling everybody . . . I *don't* know. I just write it all down. I don't know what it means!"

"Now what do we do?" Bridger turned to look, questioningly, at the pale-faced one. He shrank a little, inside the overcoat.

"I don't know. I was counting on her remembering. My notes . . . her copies . . . they were all destroyed. . . ."

"Never mind!" Bridger set his jaw. "We'll just have to manage without. We have some fact to go on. We found a body, identified by clothes as Arnold Jeckers. We found a burned out car, a Whirlwind, registered in that name, and another body. Back along this road. Both bodies in an advanced state of decomposition. . . ."

Katherine gasped. "But it was only this afternoon. . . ."

"Both bodies appear to have been dead for several weeks. Yet they were seen, alive and fit, by independent witnesses, sometime this afternoon. That seems to back up some of your story, Jeckers."

"I told you . . ."

"The persistence of the physical form would be in direct ratio to the degree of dominance of the personality," the calm Jeckers put in, smoothly. "That fits in with my theory, perfectly."

"My theory!" the overcoat Jeckers shouted, furiously. "You're just another duplicate!"

"That's your story," the calm one nodded, politely. "Proving it will be a different matter. That one down by the beach thought he was real, too . . .," the security officer bristled, inquiringly, and the calm one went on, smoothly, "Oh, yes, another one. Menacing Miss Crawford with a knife. I had to shoot him. I took this pistol from your cabinet, Mr. Crane. My apologies!" he held it out to Bridger, who took it and seemed stuck for a comment, but only for a moment.

"We know which is the genuine article, already, mister. You see, when we made our check up, Mr. Crane and myself both together found this man . . .," he indicated the overcoated one, ". . . trapped in a cabinet affair. Naked, only half-conscious, but able to explain. And he's been

with us all along." Katherine was following all this as in a dream. With the rest, she looked now to the calm one, to see what he would make of it. He was mildly amused.

MY VERSION is better. When I left the projection-chamber, I found this feeble imitation struggling to establish itself. I locked it away in the only secure place at hand, and then set off to repair some of the damage I'd done. And there you are. He, of course, will swear it is all lies. . . ."

"Of course it is!" the pale one fumed. "I'm *not* a feeble imitation. I'm the *real* Jeckers!" A silence grew, and thickened. Then the calm one sighed.

"A dilemma, gentlemen. We are physically identical. You have two questions. Which is the real? And what do you do with the other one?"

"The speed of dissolution," pale-Jeckers mumbled. "That would prove it."

"Let's not be too stupid," the calm one mocked. "To apply that test, they would have to shoot us both, and see which one decayed the faster!"

"Can't have that," Crane put in, hurriedly. "We have to preserve the technology of this. The potentialities are immense. Worth millions. But we have to do it quietly. No publicity."

"It's like peeling an onion," the calm one said, almost musically. "You keep on skinning off personalities, layer by layer. But you have to stop, sometime. And how are you to know, for instance, whether what you have left is the pure . . . or the dregs?"

"Mr. Crane!" Bridger spoke up, suddenly. "You willing to let me handle this, my way? Would you take this lady outside, somewhere . . . leave us to settle it?"

"Got an idea, have you? All right. Just as you say." The Director got up, offered his arm. "Mrs. Warner . . . ?"

"Miss!" she said, with emphasis. "I think you'd like a good strong cup of coffee, wouldn't you. . . ?"

"Now!" Bridger settled a hip on the edge of the table, fondled the pistol. "This is a silly situation. Mr. Crane knows Jeckers, as a member of the staff. I know Jeckers, by a dossier. Several other people know Jeckers . . . as a colleague. But there's only one handy person who knows Jeckers . . . as a person . . . on an emotional, personal relationship level. Miss Crawford?"

"Me?" she breathed, and cringed into her chair.

"You!" he leaned over and handed her the pistol. "You decide!"

"But . . . but I can't . . . I,"

she stared at the weapon which weighed heavily in her hand, and then at the two men. Bridger moved back, silently, watching *Does he expect me to shoot one of them?* she wondered, fearfully. A crazy patchwork of ideas swirled through her mind. Only a few hours ago she had been worried at the prospect of a spinster old-age. Now, incredibly, she was being asked to choose between two . . . mirror-images . . . with death and quick dissolution for the loser.

Which one? Never mind which was real . . . which one did she want? The cool, calm, quizzical, enormously confident one . . . or the humble, helpless, confused and dog-like one? Exciting but dominant . . . or dull but devoted . . . which? From somewhere in the confusion came a flash of inspiration. She fumbled with the pistol, reversed it, held it out, butt first, to the pale and sweating one. Making an obvious effort, he took it. Bridger kept silent. The calm one watched, keenly.

For a long moment the pistol trembled, then it raised, pointed . . . and fell again, weakly. Pale—Jeckers got to his feet, swaying.

"I'd like to go outside. Which way is the garden?"

"Left out of this door . . . then straight on," Katherine whispered.

"I'll give him just thirty seconds," Bridger said, uneasily, "and then . . ." the distant bark of an explosion cut him off. "He's done it!" he snapped, and went out, running. Katherine sagged in her chair.

"You were wonderful" calm—Jeckers came to put an arm round her. "What made you think of it?"

"Courage of conviction," she said. "Whoever decided to do that experiment in the first place had the courage to make a deci-

sion. What would you have done if I'd given the gun to you?"

"Wouldn't have taken it," he said, promptly. "The decision was yours . . . and you had the right to decide for yourself. Always will have, so far as I'm concerned." Then Katherine knew she had done the right thing. Bridger . . . Max Crane . . . and her Aunt Clara, came back into the room, but she never noticed them. She was too busy confirming her choice.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

From under the sea to the Rim Worlds—that's the exciting range of the September issue of **AMAZING**.

Poul Anderson will take you into the ocean depths to meet *Homo Aquaticus*. **A. Bertram Chandler** will carry you through the reaches of far space and many times in his breathless new novel, *The Winds of If*.

Ben Bova also returns in our next issue with a fact piece that is slightly more startling than fiction—the story of our astronomers who work from underground caves! His article: the new science of *Neutrino Astronomy*.

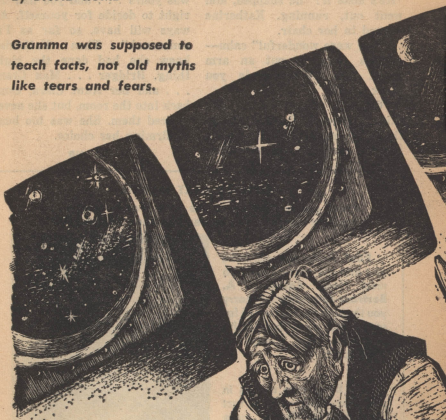


The September issue will have other short stories and our regular departments, and will be at your newsstand Aug. 8.

THE LESSON FOR TODAY

By DAVID ROME

Gramma was supposed to teach facts, not old myths like tears and fears.



TODAY Gramma took one of her fits and rolled all around in her rocker with 'tears' in her eyes. We kids went over to watch.

We watched without saying anything until Gramma rubbed





her eyes with those big knuckles of hers and said, "See what I mean, chilin?"

Jody Hunter grinned. "Is that our lesson for today, Gramma?"

"No, Jody," Gramma said.

"But it is the most important lesson of all, for every day."

Then she gathered up our books and sat marking them with her pencil. I don't think she was interested in those books,

though, because she kept raising her head and fixing us with her eyes.

We sat giggling until she finished.

"Chilin," she said then, rising to her feet. "Today's lesson is geography."

We took out our geography books and waited.

"Bobby," Gramma said to me. "Do you like geography?"

"No'm," I smiled.

"Are you pleased to be having geography today, Bobby?"

"No'm," I chuckled.

Gramma's eyes fixed on mine. "Then show how displeased you are, boy!"

By now everybody was looking at me. I tried to remember the things Gramma had told us and I worked my cheeks until they ached. But I guess I didn't show I was displeased at all, because Gramma made a strange clucking noise and turned her back on me.

She wrote up on the green-board, GEOGRAPHY.

"Sally Jones," she said, turning. "Give me the names of the three continents."

Sally bobbed up so suddenly her blonde hair jiggled on her head. "Forrard, Gramma," she smiled. "And Stern, Gramma. And—and—"

"Power!" sang out Jody Hunter.

"Very good," Gramma said.

She finally looked at me again. "Bobby. Why must we never forget Power?"

"Because Power will take us out of the Great Dark, Gramma."

"And where is the Great Dark?"

Oh, golly. I just knew the answer to that one. But try as I might it wouldn't come.

"Well?" Gramma said.

I laughed out loud. "I don't remember!"

"The Great Hull," began Gramma patiently, "is between the Great Race and the Great Dark—"

"And the Great Ship is submerged in the Great Dark," I finished, smiling quickly. "Yes'm, now I remember."

Gramma fixed me with her eyes again. "Are you afraid of the Great Dark, Bobby?"

"No, Gramma."

"Are any of you afraid of the Great Dark, chin?"

"No, Gramma!" we laughed.

Gramma cluck-clucked with her tongue and sat down quickly in her rocker. For a little while I thought she was going to take another one of her fits, but at last she raised her head.

"Bobby," she said. "You will run a message to Captain Grogory for me."

"Yes'm." I bounced to my feet.

"Tell him that school is suspended for a week."

"Yes'm!"

"And all you chilin go away," Gramma said.

AS I zoomed Forrard, I wondered about Gramma. She was the nicest old stick we had ever had teaching, but she sure did some queer things.

Like suspending school and taking fits, just to show us how it was in the old times.

All those 'tears' and all that 'fear'. Golly.

Captain Grigori turned red when I told him school was out. He paced up and down his cabin, shaking his head from side to side.

"What lesson did she give you today, boy?" he rumbled.

"Geography," I smiled.

"She gave you a geography lesson, nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Hah!"

Captain Grigori marched me out of his cabin and down to the Bug. We whizzed along together.

"No 'tears' today, boy? No 'fear'?"

"Geography," I chuckled.

The Bug stopped. Captain Grigori nipped my ear between thumb and forefinger and propelled me into Gramma's classroom.

Gramma was rocking gently in her chair.

"Good morning, Captain," she murmured.

Captain Grigori spoke in a deep, quiet voice. "Gramma Lewis. You'll bring back the children and reopen the school at once, you hear!"

"No I won't," Gramma said.

Captain Grigori reddened. He stared down at Gramma for a moment and then walked stiffly to her big old desk. He opened its lid and took out her books and papers.

Gramma rocked a little harder. "Captain, isn't this my school-room? Aren't I in charge?"

"Your job is to teach our children, Gramma Lewis."

"I do. Yes, I do."

"Gramma, you know why things must stay the way they are. For our children the past doesn't exist. The Earth. Well, the Earth is gone."

Gramma made a strange sound and brushed at her cheek with her sleeve.

Captain Grigori shuffled the books in his hands. "No more of this foolishness, Gramma Lewis!"

Gramma stared straight ahead.

"Well?" said Captain Grigori. "I'm waiting."

"Captain, I want to teach chilin. Chilin who can't only laugh. Chilin who can cry."

Captain Grigori closed the desk with a bang. "Then you'll never teach again aboard the Great Ship!"

I GUESS the one thing in the world that had made Gramma happy must have been teaching us kids.

One day I climbed up to O deck to laugh at the Oldies sitting in their rows like eggs in a box, and there was Gramma, curled up in a snug chair, gazing out into the Great Dark.

"Hullo, Gramma," I said.

I snuggled in beside her, chuckling at the Oldies who turned to stare at me. Gramma folded her big hand over mine.

"Well, Bobby. How is school?"

"Fine," I smiled. "Just fine."

"And how is your new teacher, Bobby?"

"Fine, Gramma."

Gramma took a deep breath and brushed her cheek with her hand. She turned to stare out at the Great Dark again.

"See that star, Bobby?"

"Yes'm."

"In twenty years the Great Ship will reach that star and our journey will be over."

I chuckled softly and blinked my eyes so that the hard white light in the velvet distance flickered on and off.

Gramma held my hand. "When the Great Ship lands on a world out there, Bobby, and all the machinery dies, then you and the other chilin will know how it was in the old times."

"You mean 'tears', Gramma?"

"And fear, Bobby."

"Tell me again," I smiled.

Gramma looked around at all the Oldies. Then she said softly, "We chilin were afraid of the trees, Bobby. Of the dark trees when they stirred at night as we passed. Sometimes the leaves were like fingers, and the branches like arms."

"We were afraid of the thunder, and the lightning which washed the dark sky."

"We were afraid of the black nights on Earth, and the fearful things which rose up on the blackest of nights."

"Oh, but the fear was cold and delicious . . . and the tears were so hot on our cheeks."

I laughed softly, holding Gramma's big hand.

"Gramma," I chuckled. "How many Oldies are up here?"

She looked around. "A thousand. Perhaps more."

"What are they doing, Gramma? Are they remembering the old times, like you?"

Gramma shook her head gently. "No, Bobby. At least, not many of them."

I stared at the row upon row of silver heads. An old man close beside us got up and walked away.

"Gramma, where is he going?"

"He's going to leave the Great Ship, Bobby."

"Leave the Great Ship?"

Gramma murmured, "Quiet, boy. Not so loud." She took an-

other deep breath. "You see, when a person becomes old and weak he isn't wanted aboard the Great Ship anymore, Bobby. The ship is for the young and strong, for chilin like you, who will reach the new world one day."

"But where is he going?"

Gramma held my hand tightly. "We Oldies sit here together, watching the stars. And we know we can never see blue sky again, Bobby. And I guess we get tired. We just don't want to sit here any longer, so we go to the Great Engine, and *whoosh* . . . They say we don't feel it."

I stared into Gramma's face. "But, Gramma. You're not one of the Oldies."

Gramma laughed gently. "Yes I am, Bobby."

"You're our *teacher*."

"Not now, boy."

"But, Gramma, we all want you back."

Gramma squeezed my hand. "I guess I'm tired, too, Bobby."

"No," I said. "No."

I held on tight to her hand.

"You're the nicest old teacher we ever had."

I wanted to hold on so tight she could never get up and go to the Great Engine.

"Gramma," I whispered. "Please come back and teach us. Please."

I could just hear the *whoosh* of that thing down there, golly, I could hear it so plain.

"Gramma, please don't go."

I must have been squeezing so hard I hurt Gramma's hand, because she suddenly cried out, and loosed her hand quickly, and pulled me close against her.

"Bobby," she said. "Try, try."

And I guess I knew what she meant. All that 'tears' talk in class. Well, I shut my eyes tight, just like Gramma had shown us. And I rubbed my eyes until they ached, and I thought hard, real hard, of the Great Engine, and Gramma being *whooshed*.

And when I opened my eyes there was a strange wetness on my cheeks.

"Golly," I said. "Golly."

But there was wetness on Gramma's cheeks, too.

NEXT morning, there was a surprise. Pa told me school would be closing until Monday, and Gramma would be coming back then. He told me to stay home and not get into mischief.

As soon as he had disappeared I skipped off to meet the gang. We all ran down to the school to see what was happening.

When we saw what was going on we laughed until we could scarcely stand. All the men were pulling Gramma's schoolroom to pieces and throwing it out into the passageway.

By lunchtime, there was just one huge empty space. No desks, chairs, or greenboard. The men

started knocking down a wall, making a noise with swinging hammers and whizzing saws. Us kids danced around, asking questions.

"What're you doing, Mr. Wall-breaker?"

"What're you doing, Mr. Whizzsaw?"

After lunch it was even better. Captain Grigori himself was there, shouting orders. The men began carrying all kinds of stuff into Gramma's schoolroom.

They began putting up what looked like a house at the far end of the huge empty place. Then more men came in with big metal boxes filled with wires and flashing lights. And even more men, with rolls of green cloth and long brushes.

When Jody Hunter knocked over a pot of colored paint and sent it skimming like a red tongue over the floor, us kids got chased off.

But we watched all day from a distance. And all the next day, while men hammered and sawed, draping the schoolroom with green cloth, painting strange things on the cloth.

On Monday morning, our folks got up early to take us down to school themselves, so we knew something very special was going to happen.

The doorway to the big room was covered by a colored curtain, with a scarlet cord hanging

from it. Sally Jones tried to peer around the curtain, but her mother yanked her away.

After a while, when Captain Grigori and some of his officers had arrived, everybody turned around to look for Gramma Lewis.

Captain Grigori began to pace up and down, rubbing his chin.

Everyone started to shuffle about, murmuring.

And then there was a sudden silence. The crowd parted and Gramma came out. She stood between Jody Hunter and Sally, looking around at all the people.

Her eyes fixed on mine for a moment, and I smiled.

"Good morning, Gramma."

"Good morning, Bobby."

Gramma looked at the curtain and said, "Well, what have they been doing to my schoolroom, chilin?"

"Don't know, Gramma!" we chorused.

Gramma cluck-clucked and turned to Captain Grigori. "Well, Captain?"

Captain Grigori smiled. "Gramma Lewis," he said in a deep voice. "It is my pleasure to declare your new school open."

And with that he pulled the scarlet cord and the curtain slid aside.

Everyone gasped.

Gramma's hands flew to her lips and she made a tiny sound. She stepped forward, then

stopped. She stared into the big room.

ONLY it wasn't a room anymore. And it wasn't like any other part of the Great Ship. Strange colored trees stirred around the walls, a faint breeze whispering in the air. The trees grew up in the middle of the floor, too. Only the floor wasn't steel anymore, or flat. It was green and soft, and here and there were patches of rich brown earth, and the floor seemed to fall away at our feet, rolling down toward the schoolhouse where it stood in the bottom of a valley.

Our new schoolhouse.

A bright ribbon of water wound its way past the little building, and a tiny bridge crossed the singing stream to the front door. The door stood wide open and through it we could see the rows of wooden desks, the shining greenboard, and—oh, best of all!—Gramma's new big desk.

A splendid desk. Tall, proud, polished until it shone. And a high stool with a green padded cushion and a rail set at just the right height for resting Gramma's feet.

The walls of the schoolbuilding were red pine, the roof a slab of pastel color. And above! A misty blueness, and a shining yellow sun set high in the sky.

Gramma said, "Oh." And, "Oh, dear me."

Captain Grigori smiled and took her arm. They stepped through the doorway and onto the green grass. Gramma bent quickly and picked a white flower at her feet.

She stared at it, holding it gently in her big hands.

"It's—wonderful," she whispered. "A miracle."

Captain Grigori laughed deeply. Gramma was spellbound. She gazed all around. "The same trees!" she cried softly. "The same stream. And the sounds, the music of it all!"

Captain Grigori took her arm again and together they started off down the hillside. It was strange, because they seemed to actually grow smaller in the distance, Gramma skipping along like one of her chilin, Captain Grigori tall and stately at her side.

We followed gaily, prancing through the green grass, touching the trees, tilting our ears to the rustle of leaves and the chatter of the wind among the branches.

Our folks all trooped along behind, gazing everywhere, saying how wonderful it was.

When we crossed the wooden bridge and stepped through the open door into our new school, there was Gramma sitting proudly at her big desk, feet set firmly

on the resting-rail, hands folded on the shiny lid in front of her.

"Well, chilin," she smiled. "Here we are."

Some of our folks started to come in through the open door, but Gramma gave them a look and said, "School has begun!" and everyone went out again, quickly.

BUT Gramma turned a blind eye to Captain Grigori, who had squeezed himself into one of the farthest-away desks and was smiling around at us all.

"Chilin," Gramma said. "We must all say 'thank you' to Captain Grigori for our new schoolhouse."

We chuckled softly. "Thank you, Captain Grigori!"

Captain Grigori nodded and smiled.

"Do you know, chilin," Gramma went on, "there is something very special about this little schoolhouse. Can any of you guess what it is?"

"Please'm?" smiled Sally Jones.

"Yes, Sally?"

"Is it like your old school on Earth, Gramma?"

We all chorused, "Yes, that's it! It's like Gramma's old school on Earth!"

And Gramma sat up so proud and said, "Yes, it is."

"Tell us about it!" we laughed.

Gramma cluck-clucked to herself and looked at Captain Grigori. "Well, chilin," she said. "You know the past doesn't really exist anymore. And Earth. Well, Earth is gone now . . ."

Captain Grigori said softly, "Tell them, Gramma."

"Then Gramma said, 'Chilin. Once upon a time, many, many years ago, Gramma Lewis was a child just like you. And she went to a school just like this one, in a place called Apple Valley.

"Now those trees outside are not real trees, we all know that. But in Apple Valley, they were. And each day, after school, us chilin would flit from tree to tree, climbing the rough trunks, skinning our foolish knees, picking the ripest, most delicious fruit from those branches—"

"Gramma!" we all laughed. "You stole apples!"

"Yes," Gramma said, nodding her head. "I did. And what's more, I often stole so many I really didn't know what to do with them. Oh, I was the greediest child—"

"Were you whipped for it, Gramma?"

"Yes, I was whipped."

"Did you 'cry', Gramma?"

Gramma's eyes met Captain Grigori's. "Now, chilin," she said softly. "You know you shouldn't talk such foolish talk."

John W. Campbell:

the writing years

By SAM MOSKOWITZ



Sketch by
SCHOENHERR

"AND NOW CAMPBELL!"

That was the title of an editorial, set in thick 36-point type, in the October, 1934, *ASTOUNDING STORIES*.

"In December we bring you a great booklength novel by an author you have asked us to get for *ASTOUNDING STORIES*. John W. Campbell, Jr. comes to us with a story of vast conceptions, *The Mightiest Machine*. . . . He has been called one of the two greatest science fiction authors . . ."

This was no mere editorial "sales pitch." In the early '30s, John Campbell loomed as a giant among SF authors. *The Mightiest Machine* epitomized the type of story that created his follow-

ings. Mighty space ships moved at speeds faster than light, warped themselves around the woof of another dimension at the whim of Aaron Munro, a mental and physical superman, a descendant of Earthmen, raised on Jupiter, who contrives universe-shaking energy weapons to combat alien fleets.

Like Edward E. Smith, whose *The Skylark of Space* pioneered the super-science space epic in 1928, Campbell was a literary Houdini at the art of convincingly manipulating stupendous forces on a cosmic scale.

But time was running out on macrocosmic spectaculars. Changes were occurring in plot format and writing methods of science fiction. Yet the impact of that particular story so profoundly impressed a youthful

Englishman, Arthur C. Clarke, that nearly 20 years later he would use some of its elements for the plot base of his *Childhood's End*. At another literary antipode, Richard S. Shaver (or Raymond A. Palmer, who actually wrote most of the Shaver by-lined stories) would adapt Campbell's premise of an evil race that once lived in caverns under Mu as the basis of his "Shaver Mystery."

However, Campbell's major contribution both in story telling and influence on SF was yet to come. And to a considerable degree his early life shaped the direction it would take.

JOHNSON Wood Campbell, Jr., was born in a two-family frame house at 16 Tracey Ave., Newark, N. J., on June 8, 1910. His father was an electrical engineer with New Jersey Bell Telephone. His mother was Dorothy Strahern, of Napoleon, Ohio, Campbell's home town. After seven years in Newark the family moved to Maplewood, N. J., where John attended public school. Precociously intellectual, young John had virtually no friends. At home, his relationship with his parents was emotionally difficult. According to Campbell, his father carried impersonality and theoretical objectivity in family matters to the brink of fetish; he almost never

used the pronoun "I;" all statements were in the third person: "It is necessary," "one must," "it appears that," "one should." Not only was the senior Campbell an authoritarian but he was also a self-righteous disciplinarian who concealed whatever affection he felt for his son.

Campbell's mother's changeability baffled and frustrated the youngster. Campbell recalls her as self-centered and flighty, her moods unpredictable moment to moment. While not deliberately cruel, her gestures of warmth appeared so transitory and contrived to him as to be quickly discounted. Complicating the situation was the fact that Campbell's mother had an identical twin sister. John could tell them apart. The sisters, Campbell says, were in psychological conflict because John's mother had married first. He thought he was being used as a pawn by his mother to subtly taunt her twin.

The result was, Campbell says, that his aunt treated him with such abruptness he was convinced she hated him. This created a bizarre situation. The boy would come running into the house to breathlessly impart something to a woman he thought was his "mother." He would be jarred by a curt rebuff from her twin, his aunt. This situation became a continuing and insoluble nightmare. Was

the woman standing in front of him "friend" or "foe"? Campbell felt his only "friend" was a sister, Laura, born in 1917. The two got along well, but the seven-year gap in their ages made her always too young to be much of an ally.

LONELINESS directed young Campbell's alert and curious mind into everything. He blew up the basement with his chemistry experiments. Manually dexterous, he repaired bicycles for other kids. For their parents he revitalized electrical appliances. He read omnivorously, particularly myths, legends, folklore, and anthropology. Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and John Carter of Mars were discovered by Campbell when he was seven. At eight he was perusing Jeans, Eddington and astronomy texts. At 14 he was sent to Blair Academy, an exclusive boys' school in Blairs-town, N.J. He succeeded in making only a few friends there; he infuriated the instructors by correcting their "errors" in class. Sports did not attract him, though he developed a good game of tennis and a mild interest in football. Despite four years at Blair, he never obtained a diploma.

One of the few times Campbell and his father saw eye to eye was when the latter suggest-

ed that he enter Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1928. Perhaps his father's reasonableness in this was partly motivated by John's ingenuity. At 15, in order to get around paternal directives, he had become so facile in the use of logic that the father found himself hard-pressed to justify many of his ideas. This facility at logic was brought aggressively into play in later life whenever Campbell was confronted with dogmatism.

In still another respect a disciplinary peculiarity of his father had a direct bearing in sharpening Campbell's embryonic writing skills. The elder Campbell frequently checked his son's homework, if he didn't approve of a phrase he would demand it be rewritten. To save revision time, John made a game of rewording the phrase in the same line. The result was increased dexterity and economy in the use of words. At M.I.T. Campbell was up to his old trick of straightening out instructors. In one instance, this penchant made him a friend. He challenged a statement by a Professor Blanchard, his chemistry instructor, implying the impossibility of amalgamating iron. Campbell brought in an experimental arrangement and performed the "impossible" in the classroom. Instead of being angry, the professor was delighted and began

to take a personal interest in Campbell, expressing sincere disappointment when his "prodigy" did not go on to make chemistry his life's work.

In his outside reading, Campbell gravitated towards science fiction. He bought ARGOSY fairly regularly, and WEIRD TALES whenever he was certain it contained science fiction. He spotted the first issue of AMAZING STORIES when it appeared in April, 1926, and became a regular reader. When science fiction authors' imaginations showed signs of breaking out of the confines of the solar system, beginning with J. Schlossel's daring *The Second Swarm*, (AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Spring, 1928) dealing with a mass invasion of earth by creatures from Sirius, Campbell was enthralled. *Skylark of Space*, which began in the Aug., 1928, AMAZING STORIES, established in Campbell a life-long admiration for E. E. Smith, and a desire to emulate him.

PAINFULLY aware that SF writers frequently repeated obvious scientific errors, Campbell's own first attempt, a short story titled *Invaders from the Infinite*, was aimed at correcting the misconception that there would be a problem in heating an interplanetary ship in space. The story was sent to AMAZING STORIES, and accepted. Elated, Camp-

bell pounded out a longer story titled *When the Atoms Failed*. That, too, was accepted. His enthusiasm waned, however, as months passed and neither story appeared. Home on vacation in the summer of 1929, Campbell visited T. O'Connor Sloane, the editor.

Now six-foot one, with hawk-like features, Campbell presented a formidable appearance as he was ushered into Sloane's editorial offices. Sloane, 80, had a flowing white beard. But despite his appearance, the old man was anything but a stuffed shirt. He quickly admitted that the manuscript of *Invaders From the Infinite* had been lost. Did the author, perhaps, have a carbon? He did not? Well, his career would then have to be launched with *When The Atoms Failed*.

Sloane more than made up for the disappointment by giving *When the Atoms Failed* the cover of the Jan., 1930, issue, and beginning the blurb of the story: "Our new author, who is a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shows marvelous ability at combining science with romance, evolving a piece of fiction of real scientific and literary value."

The story *did* contain pioneering concepts. First, though the idea of thinking brains in robots had been used before, the concept of a stationary super-calculator,

like today's Univac, had not appeared in the magazines. Scientists in science fiction, never sissies, had previously disdained to use even an adding machine in whipping together mathematical concepts destined to change the shape of the cosmos. Not so Steven Waterson, Campbell's hero. Improving on an Integraph, an electrical machine capable of calculus in use at MIT in 1930, he built himself a pre-space age electronic "brain" to aid in solving his problems.

Secondly, the story delved into the greater power to be derived from material energy—the actual destruction of matter—as opposed to atomic energy. This knowledge enables Steven Waterson to defeat a group of invading Martians, force the nations of the earth to scrap all their weapons, and to set himself up as "president" of the planet.

Then occurred a coincidence destined to gird the faith of doubting astrologers. A new science fiction magazine appeared on the newsstands. Titled *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE*, it, too, was dated Jan., 1930. Campbell was to make it his literary monument.

A sequel to *When the Atoms Failed*, titled *The Metal Horde*, appeared in the April, 1930, *AMAZING STORIES*. It tried to show what would happen if calculators were refined to the point where

they could reason. Scientist Waterson, in the course of the story, defeats and destroys a thinking machine that has traveled through space for 1600 years. Elements of *The Second Swarm* are apparent not only in this story, but also in *The Voice of the Void*, his next appearance in the Summer, 1930, *AMAZING STORIES* QUARTERLY. This novelet tells of a ten-billion-year-old civilization on earth, confronted by a cooling sun, which utilizes "phase velocity" as a means of going faster than light and escaping to another system. Campbell explained it this way:

"Phase velocity is due to a wave traveling along the wave chain. A man can go faster than the train he is riding on by walking toward the engine, but practically speaking he cannot reach the station before the train. Similarly, the phase velocity cannot reach the station before the light or X-rays do. But for countless ages the light has poured forth from the sun, and a message sent down that long train would be able to go many, many trillions of miles at a speed far greater than that of light."

FEW of the students at MIT during that period seemed to be interested in science fiction.

But Campbell did make the friendship of Norbert Weiner, professor of mathematics, and today famed as the godfather of "thinking" machines. Prof. Weiner helped the young author with the scientific background of some of those early stories and may have been the inspiration of the "thinking machine" ideas.

The names of a group of characters in *Piracy Preferred*, AMAZING STORIES, June, 1930 (Arcot, Wade and Morey) provided the label for a major series of tales that was to catapult Campbell to the top ranks among science fiction writers. In the world of 2126, a team of young geniuses—Richard Arcot, a physicist; William Morey, a mathematician, and John Fuller, a design engineer, chase Wade, a super-scientific criminal, into an orbital trap around the earth. Wade is permitted to join the group instead of being punished. This sympathetic handling of the villain may have been a hold-over from E. E. Smith's creation of a villain named Duquesne in *The Skylark of Space* who was far more popular with the readers than was the hero.

In *Solarite* AMAZING STORIES, Nov. 1930), the group, in a ship powered by "molecular motion"—find two warring races on Venus. They side with one, employing Wade's invisibility de-

vice and paralyzing gas in the process. When the enemy fathoms the secret of invisibility and uses it against them, pellets of radium paint are employed to locate them, and they are finished off with a molecular-motion weapon.

The Black Star Passes, which received the cover of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Fall, 1930, launched Campbell on his first high wave of popularity. An ancient race of hydrogen-breathing creatures on a planet circling a vagrant dead star sweep close to our solar system and decide to transfer to Earth. In thousands of words of thrilling action (and many thousand dull words of scientific gobbledygook) they are defeated by Arcot, Wade, Morey and Fuller.

The Islands of Space (in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Spring, 1931) was Campbell's first full-length novel, and he let out all the stops. Exceeding the speed of light by bending the curvature of space, Arcot, Wade and Morey in their good ship *Ancient Mariner* tour a procession of worlds, finding new wonders and challenges on each. Finally, lost in an infinity of light, they seek to find a race that can guide them home. In the process they help decide a war on a world ten million light-years from Earth.

THE novel that followed, *Invaders from the Infinite* in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY Spring-Summer, 1932, represented the apex of approval for Campbell's super-science stories. This time, a tremendous ship manned by canines that have risen high on the evolutionary ladder, lands on Earth to seek help against a universal menace. In the *ne plus ultra* of intergalactic ships, *Thought*, Arcot, Wade and Morey search the far-flung star clusters for an answer to the danger, finally discovering it in as pyrotechnic a series of space battles as ever appeared in science fiction.

The year 1931 was a big one for Campbell. He married Dona Stuart; and, having flunked German, was asked to leave MIT. He studied physics for a year at Duke U., and got his B.S. there.

Striving to support a wife while finishing college during the depths of the worst depression in U.S. history, Campbell decided to try for other markets. He sold *The Derelicts of Ganyমে* to WONDER STORIES (Jan., 1932). A satiric slap at the probability of a business tycoon coming out on top if he let a poor but bright young man start on even keel with him on another world, this story clearly reflected Campbell's pique with his economic problems. It was followed by *The Electronic Siege* (WONDER

STORIES, April, 1932) featuring Capt. Don Barclay, who breaks up an illicit medical experimental station on a planetoid. Barclay was brought back again in *Space Rays* (WONDER STORIES, Dec., 1932) to aid in the capture of a space pirate. Hugo Gernsback, the publisher was moved to write a special *editorial* in place of the customary blurb for this story in which he offered the opinion that Campbell was obviously writing a science fiction burlesque: "If he has left out any colored rays, or any magical rays that could not immediately perform certain miraculous wonders, we are not aware of this shortcoming in this story . . . We were tempted to rename the story "Ray! Ray!" but thought better of it."

The truth probably was that Campbell wasn't burlesquing anybody. This was the way he always wrote. The combination of a left-handed compliment and the fact that WONDER STORIES was in financial difficulties soured him on that market. Average rates for AMAZING STORIES and WONDER STORIES in 1932 was one-half cent a word on *publication*. AMAZING STORIES paid promptly on publication, but its editor, who would eventually shade 90, tended to take the long view. One year after acceptance was a breakneck dash into print for him, and instances where it took

five years were not unknown. WONDER STORIES published quickly, but frequently paid a good time *after* publication. In these circumstances, Campbell was obliged to "go to work" for a living.

He tried selling cars. Then he switched to exhaust fans for homes and stores in the summer. At the approach of winter he took to promoting gas heaters. Campbell convinced a restaurant chain that by converting their *heating* units to gas, they would pay for their *cooking* gas at lower rates and save \$2,500 a year! It worked! Three other companies also signed up for the change-over. But ironically, since it would take Campbell's small company years to install all the business he had obtained, he was now out of a job.

SUBTLY, meanwhile, a change was taking place in Campbell's thinking and writing. It was first evidenced in the introductory passages of *The Black Star Passes*, where an atmosphere of hopelessness and sympathy was engendered for the great people of that dying planet. It began to take form in *The Last Evolution* (AMAZING STORIES, Aug., 1932) where the courageous battle of thinking machines to save their creators from a cosmic menace climaxes in the mechanisms' becoming energy

consciousnesses of pure thought, thus raising them to an allegorical heaven. Our machines will be our friends to the last, will inevitably outlive us, progress beyond us and possibly even go to their just reward, Campbell suggests. *The Last Evolution* was the key transition story in Campbell's writing career, a compromise between stress on mood and the super-scientific action characteristic of past Campbell stories.

While living in Durham, N. C., Campbell set out to write a story in which mood and characterization would predominate and science and action play a secondary role. He had in mind a story that would figuratively serve as a symphonic mood piece in words set to a science fiction theme. This was the story *Twilight*. Seven million years from today, it is the twilight of man. A mighty civilization served by faithful machinery continues to function automatically: "When Earth is cold, and the Sun has died out, those machines will go on. When Earth begins to crack and break, those perfect, ceaseless machines will try to repair her—." But no hope, no progress lies ahead for the dwindling human race, a time-traveler from our day visiting this future, leaves the machines with the problem of working towards the creation of a mechanism with built-in curiosity. The

story suggests, as did *The Last Evolution*, that even if man goes, the machines can build their own civilization.

Despite Campbell's popularity, every magazine of early 1933 rejected the story, and it went back into his files. Then, in late 1933, F. Orlin Tremaine assumed editorship of ASTOUNDING STORIES and began a drive for field leadership. He bought E. E. Smith's third story in the "Skylark" series, *The Skylark of Valeron*. The logical next step was to publish Campbell, the leading contender to Smith's popularity. Tremaine wrote Campbell, asking if he had a super-science story along the lines that had established his popularity. Though over a year had passed since Campbell sold *The Mightiest Machine* to AMAZING, editor Sloane had still not published it. Nor had he scheduled another novel, *Mother World*. Campbell got back *The Mightiest Machine* and submitted it to Tremaine. It was immediately purchased. Heartened, Campbell dusted off *Twilight* and sent that in. Tremaine went quietly mad about it.

Twilight, rushed into the Nov., 1934 issue, a month before *The Mightiest Machine*, could not be published under Campbell's own name for two reasons: First, and most obvious, it would destroy the substantial build-up in

progress for *Mightiest Machine*. Secondly, it was so different in approach that it would disorient readers accustomed to a certain style of story from Campbell. The problem was solved with a pen name, Don A. Stuart, derived from the maiden name of Campbell's wife, Dona Stuart.

"A new writer," Tremaine blurbed, "a profoundly different and beautiful treatment of an always fascinating idea—*Twilight* by Don A. Stuart. A story of the far, faint future, of the fabulous cities and machines of man—and of his slow decline into eternal sleep."

DON A. Stuart at once bid fair to eclipse Campbell in popularity. And *Twilight* was to alter the pattern of science fiction writing. Warner Van Lorne's immensely popular *Strange city* (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Dec., 1935) and *World of Purple Light* (ASTOUNDING STORIES Dec., 1936) were unquestionably inspired by it. Arthur C. Clarke, in both *Rescue Party* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, May, 1946) and *Against the Fall of Night* (STARTLING STORIES, Nov., 1948) displays his debt to *Twilight*. Del Rey's inspiration for intelligent dogs in *The Faithful* may derive from a brief section in *Twilight*.

Stuart appeared again with *Atomic Power* in the Dec., 1934 ASTOUNDING STORIES, a story in

which scientists prevent the substance of our solar system from being blown up by atom crackers in the macrocosmos. The lead story of the issue was the first installment of *The Mightiest Machine*, and there was a third story by Campbell in the same issue, *The Irrelevant*. It caused months of debate in the readers' column, since it presented a theoretical method of beating the law of conservation of energy. This was published under the name of Karl van Kampen, the name of a Dutch great-grandfather on Campbell's father's side.

Blindness (ASTOUNDING STORIES, March, 1935), also under the Stuart name, was a poignant sketch of a scientist who loses his sight in space to bring the world the blessings of atomic energy, only to learn that inadvertently another discovery of his provides a cheaper power source. He dies embittered because the world does not want his atomic energy.

One of the most remarkable and underrated performances under the Stuart name was *The Escape* (ASTOUNDING STORIES May, 1935). It was written as the result of an argument with a would-be writer as to whether it was possible to write a successful love story in the framework of science fiction. A girl runs off with a boy she loves to escape marrying the selection of the

Genetics board; she is captured, brought back and psychologically reconditioned to "love" the "right" man.

With *The Mightiest Machine* winning accolades Campbell thought sequels were in order. He wrote three—each a continuation of the adventures of Aarn Munro and his companions. In the first, a 15,000-word-novelet, *The Incredible Planet*, he utilized the device of losing his characters in space, enabling them to discover a world whose inhabitants were in suspended animation for 400 billion years; a second, *The Interstellar Search*, finds the Earthmen aiding a planet whose sun is about to become a nova; and in the final story, *The Infinite Atom*, they arrive home in time to block an invasion by creatures whose previous visit to earth gave rise to the centaur legends.

Tremaine rejected all three.

He felt the day of the super-science epic was past, and insisted that Campbell stick strictly to Stuart stories. Another augury was the mild response to *Mother World*, a three-part serial about the revolt of oppressed working groups. It appeared in January, February, and March AMAZING as *The Contest of the Planets*. The three sequels to *The Mightiest Machine* eventually saw book publication from Fantasy Press in 1949 as *The Incredible Planet*.

CAMPBELL was forced to place full emphasis on Don A. Stuart with a series which he called "The Teachers," beginning in the Feb., 1935 *ASTOUNDING STORIES* with *The Machine*. In this story, a thinking machine that has provided every comfort for mankind leaves the planet for humanity's own good, forcing them to forage for themselves. *The Invaders*, (*ASTOUNDING STORIES*, June, 1935) a sequel to *The Machine*, found mankind reverted to savagery, easily enslaved by the Tharoo, a race from another world. *Rebellion* (*ASTOUNDING STORIES*, Aug., 1935), saw the human race, through selective breeding, become more intelligent than the Tharoo, and drive the invaders off the planet.

These were not primarily mood stories, but they *were* adult fare—the predecessors of an entirely new type of SF tale.

In *Night*, a sequel to *Twilight*, published in the October, 1935 *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, Campbell movingly returned to the mood story. A man of today moves into the inconceivable future, when not only the sun but the stars themselves are burned out. At his coming, machines from Neptune stir into motion to serve him, but he recognizes them for what they are: "This, I saw, was the last radiation of the heat of life from an already-dead body—the feel of life and warmth, imitation of life

by a corpse," for man and all but the last dregs of universal energy were gone.

"You still wonder that we let man die out?" the machine said to an unspoken question. "It was best. In another brief million years he would have lost his high estate. It was best." Campbell had matured. A civilization of machines he now understands, is but parody, movement without consciousness. It will not and can never be "the last evolution."

DURING the Depression years Campbell, despite a monthly astronomy article for *Tremaine*, and some Stuart stories, had difficulty getting food on the table. Campbell's most successful story in 1936 was *Frictional Losses* (*ASTOUNDING STORIES*, July, 1936), in which a method of eliminating friction proves the ultimate weapon against invaders from outer space. *WONDER STORIES* had been sold and now appeared as *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*. Campbell arranged with the editor Mort Weisinger to do a series of stories built around the characters of Penton and Blake, two fugitives from Earth. The best of the group was the first, *Brain Stealers of Mars* (*THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, Dec., 1956) concerning Martians capable of converting themselves into an exact replica of any object or person.

Closest in quality to *Night and Twilight* proved to be *Forgetfulness* (ASTOUNDING STORIES, June, 1937) in which Earthmen landing on a distant planet assume that a race is decadent because it has deserted the cities and mighty power devices that man, in his current state of progress, associates with civilization. Influential as well as entertaining was his novelet of the Sarn, *Out of Night*, in which a matriarchal society of aliens who have ruled Earth for 4,000 years are challenged by Aesir, a black, amorphous mass vaguely in the shape of man, ostensibly personifying mankind's unified yearnings. This device was picked up by Robert A. Heinlein in *Sixth Column* where it helps to route the Asiatic conquerors. *Cloak of Aesir*, a sequel, demonstrated the use of psychology in driving the "people" of the Sarn from their domination of Earth.

Meanwhile, Tremaine's duties had been expanded to cover editorial directorship of several Street & Smith periodicals. He hired an editor for each of the magazines, and Campbell was hired to run ASTOUNDING. He went on the payroll of Street & Smith in September, 1937. Tremaine left Street & Smith in May, 1938. Campbell, now completely responsible for ASTOUNDING, found almost no time for writing.

Few authors made their literary exit more magnificently. From the memories of his childhood he drew the most fearsome agony of the past. The doubts, the fear, the shock and then the frustration of repeatedly discovering that the woman who looked so much like his mother, was *not*. Who goes there? Friend or foe? He had attempted the theme once before with a light touch in *Brain Stealers of Mars*. This time it was for real. *Who Goes There?* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Aug., 1938) dealt with an alien thing from outer space that enters the camp of an Antarctic research party and blends alternately into the forms of the various men and dogs in the camp. The job is to find the host and kill "it" before, in the guise of some human or other creature, it gets to civilization. *Who Goes There?* was in a sense one of the most thrilling detective stories ever written. The suspense and tension mount with each paragraph and is sustained to the last. This story inspired A. E. van Vogt to turn to writing science fiction with *Vault of the Beast*, a direct take-off on the idea. In Europe, Eric Frank Russell picked up the notion for *Spiro*, one of his most effective stories. RKO altering the story considerably, produced it as a profitable horror picture titled *The Thing* (1951).

A few more Stuart Campbell stories would sporadically appear. *The Elder Gods* (UNKNOWN, Oct., 1939), a swiftly-paced sword-and-sorcery tale, was written as a last-minute fill-in for a cover story. Together with *The Moon is Hell*, it appeared in book form from Fantasy Press in 1951. Fifteen years after he had quit writing for a living, Campbell still displayed excellent technique in *The Idealists*, a novelet written expressly for the hard-cover anthology *9 Tales of Space and Time*, edited by Raymond J. Healy for Henry Holt in 1954. Scientists aren't always the "good guys," was the point he made; and a high degree of technical development does not necessarily carry with it ma-

turity in dealing with different cultures.

But for all practical purposes, Campbell's writing career ended at the age of 28 with *Who Goes There?* As one of the first of the modern science fiction writers, he had a profound influence on the field. A few who owe him a direct debt have been noted. Many others are obvious. For the more than a quarter-century since he ceased writing, older readers have been haunted by half-remembered echoes in the plot structure of hundreds of stories. It is not strange if sometimes readers shake the hypnotic wonder of the wheeling cosmos from their minds and demand: "Who goes there?"

THE END



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Mine is the Kingdom

By HARRISON DENMARK

Illustrated by BLAIR



A planet to keep . . .

or give away.

A memory to excise. A seed to save.

All these things were to be,

Or not to be. Or both.



43/8

—Far removed are the courts of darkness . . .

The distance of the stars, he decided, and ten feet from where I'm sitting.

—And far the places of people . . .

He agreed, silently.

—Near are the un-people.

He nodded.

—You are on Earth and ridiculous.

"Yes," he murmured.

—You are half-mad and all drunk.

"All mad and half drunk," he corrected.

—So you will step into the machine, press the button, and join your people in the places of laughter . . .

"Ha!" he hiccupped. "I'm laughing now."

He shook his head and sat up, looking around.

He poked the beanstalk of yellow light and waited.

A heartbeat.

"Service?" inquired the pillow.

"Puffy talk-beams mestering again," he sighed. "Search, screen, block."

"Whenever I drink it is an 'A' Situation and priority care is required," he reminded.

The pillow hummed.

"'A' Situation prevails. There is no penetration."

He half-rose.

"Then who was talking to me just now?"

"I certainly wasn't," came the reply. "It could be your human imagination, stimulated by the alcohol you have consumed . . ."

It sounded almost hurt.

"Sorry," he apologized to invisible coils. "Mix me another."

He leaned back and took the tube into his mouth.

"And don't water this one," he slurred.

"I never water your drinks."

"They taste weaker."

"Your tolerance level is rising."

"Out! Out on't! Read to me."

"What shall I read?"

"Anything."

"The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his—"

"Anything but Grahame!"

"How about Vradmer?"

"No."

"Gelden?"

"No, something older. Near Grahame, maybe."

"Krin? K'lal? The Old Man of Venus?"

"Older."

"Flone? Threene? Hemingway? Proust?"

"Older still."

"In the beginning—"

"And pagan."

"How's Pindar."

"Very good."

He took a long drink and settled back to dreaming.

—Why did you kill the puffy?"

A long pause.

"I didn't kill any puffy."

—Puffies do not murder puffies, and a puffy is dead. You are the last man on Earth. Limitless power is yours. Why did you use it to kill?

A longer pause.

"What's a puffy?"

—They wanted the Earth. Don't you remember?

"I don't know . . . I was drunk. Go away!"

—Why don't *you* go away?

"I can't!"

—Just step into the machine, push the button, and join your people in the places of laughter . . .

"There are no places of laughter!"

—*Talk* to the puffies.

He slapped the side of the couch and a jet of barbiturates entered his bloodstream.

He slept.

* * *

The sun was a dirty dime, fallen upon wet concrete. He stared at it, blinking.

"The times we've spent you . . ." he mused, realizing he was awake.

"Everything's depreciated."

He rolled onto his right side, feeling awful.

After awhile the pillow asked him what he wanted for breakfast. He tried to think of the right answer, but gave up and asked for something to settle his stomach.

It was chalk and liver, damping the imminent overflow of a drainage ditch. He spat and rolled onto his left side, feeling less awful.

Finally, he jabbed at the band of light.

"Bridge me ideational control."

The power was a silent melody: moonlight sawing on strings of milkweed silk, deep winds of liquid blowing timeless through pipes of coral, the collisions of clouds . . .

He drifted, stretching and yawning.

He willed a firepole and slid a hundred yards upward.

"Mount Athos," he decided, "and breakfast."

Standing upon a rocky crag, looking out over the endless room of the Sanct, he smiled. He blanked the walls and molded a flowing panorama of trees and hills, like those which had once existed on Earth; in the distance, a sea. (Was that right? He shrugged.) The invisible ceiling became a bluegreen sky. The sun he painted brutal yellow. Now the slope flowed smooth beneath his sandals. He affected sackcloth and a grin, and he dotted the horizon with shimmering skylines.

"So much for the kingdoms of Earth," he muttered. "Come now, Lucifer!"

A faceless shadow hovered at

his left, reeking of death and final judgments.

"The routine," he suggested.

A voice from the bottom of a barrel, monotonous: "Behold the kingdoms of the Earth," it stated, "in all their glory and power. To me have they been delivered and in this moment of time, and to whomever I will give them. Worship me and they are thine."

He laughed.

"But they are mine already, dear fellow. I just created them. You too, for that matter. It's you ought to be paying me a little respect."

The figure wavered, uncertain.

"Now the punchline," he suggested.

"Then change thou these stones into bread," it repeated, wearily, "and I shall believe thee."

"Ham and eggs," he corrected. "Won't you join me?"

"Thanks," it crackled.

They seated themselves and discussed nothing until he grew bored. Finishing breakfast, he opened a chasm and stuffed the entire scene into it, amidst much thunder and the crackle of sky-licking flames.

"To hell with you all!" he belched. "What'll I do till lunch? Sail with Odysseus?"

HE had begun the tentative towers of Ilium and the outline of a great horse when the Sanct-comm called.

"Puffy ambassadors beg entrance," it said.

"Tell them I'm busy."

The horse wavered, went out. The bottomless towers fled toppling, sinking, silent, draining down into the stark floors.

"Oh damn! Start decontaminating them. They've already ruined my morning!"

He settled back to the couch to be shaved, cleaned, clipped, and stuffed into fresh garments. The manicurette *tsk-tsked* at the condition of his nails and he contemplated the dimmie projection of the creatures known as puffies.

A downy, albino aura clung to the mansized swaying forms. Towers of milk, the bulk of their weight tripod on baboon-dark rears and two snowy sextants, the puffies moved and bellyfuls of vestigial limbs, like hundred-handed clocks, writhed their buried hours.

Bilaterally symmetrical, their head-high mandibles had differentiated into grasping independency at about the same time the antennae antlered in columbine clusters—petalled powder-blue, opening and closing with systolic regularity. Two butterpads beneath them strained the world through flyscreens of topaz.

"Good morning, pretty things," he suggested, and the puffies revolved, seeking the source of his voice.

"You can't see me unless I

want you to. Why are you here?"

The creatures seemed to consider his question.

"To convince, buy, help, talk, to you, to go," one buzzed.

He chuckled.

"Pardon, please, repeat, please, your last saying."

He laughed.

"Come in! Come in!" he cried.

He was suddenly a puffy himself, twenty feet in height.

The walled dialled archway, just as he finished blackening the sky, bulging the floor into rocky irregularity, and raising a glacier front across the half-mile room. He hovered in the air, seated upon a tent-sized snowflake, and ice breezes knifed about his throne, scattering the berries of blizzard before his guests.

"Merry Christmas," he observed.

The puffies halted on the threshold. The third movement of Sibelius' Second Symphony unwound from somewhere as the glacier groaned forward.

"How?" asked the creatures.

"I am really quite ugly," he explained, "and I wanted to put you at ease."

They were standing beneath him now, staring upward.

"Beautiful," one buzzed.

"Like home," hummed the second.

"What are you?" whistled the third.

A fountain jetted fifty feet in the air.

"Have a drink?"

"No. Thank. Cannot, chance, unknown, substance."

He took a deep drink, then the fountain drained upward into high-leaping spirals that vanished overhead. A globe of the brown liquid hovered beside him, and he sipped it as he spoke.

"These bodies," he stated, "are rather difficult to operate. How do you manage?"

"Man-edge?" repeated the buzz.

"Yes. You shuffle about when you were obviously meant to leap. Your feet are snowshoes. Why have you come to my world?"

"We have, come, to live," one droned.

"No one consulted with me on the matter."

"Please. We only, just, learned, you exist, please."

"And what do you want of me?"

"Please, go home. Make, the world, safe, for puffies. Ple—"

"This is my home. I own the Earth."

"Yes. We know. We want, to change, it. But you, are here. Why?"

"Why not?" he asked. "I'm an Earthman. Being the last one does not alter my rights. I occupy approximately twenty square miles of this world, and I go where I choose and do as I wish

in the rest of it. By birthright and law it is mine—and by power. If you attempt to expel me I will resist you with all the machinery of Earth. I can control it from here, and I *can* destroy you. I can destroy the planet! If you don't believe me, attack me!"

HIS voice cracked and he took another drink. He assumed his own form, magnified a dozen times. He produced a cigarette the size of a fence post and a pillar of fire rose to light it.

"May, we, reason?" asked the flowering snowballs. "Please?"

"All right—reason."

He exhaled fog and inhaled alcohol.

"Reason!"

"Your people, left, years ago, because, this world, is dead, for them," it began. "But it, is a, place of, life, for us, a place, of, laughter . . ."

"Do you know what 'laughter' means?" he asked.

"We think, so, please. We have, studied, what, Earth people, left behind.—Good living?—Best condition, for species? And all, members?—Sounds, they make, when life, prevails?"

"Close enough. Go on."

"Earth is, a place, of laughter, only for, puffies now. No good, for you. Go to, your, people. Let us cold, down, the Earth, more, change it. Your machines, stop us, now. It will be, better, for

both, if you go. Why do you, stay?"

"My business," he growled, "my business.—Tell me, do you find me ugly?"

"Please, yes . . ."

"Congratulations, so do I." He paused, then: "Will you *make* me go?"

"Please . . . If we, must . . ."

They stood upon a desert. An orange sun, like a sudden, giant hand, filled half the sky. It wrung the perspiration from his body. He coughed.

"PLEASE!" whistled the melting snowmen.

Now they drifted through the stellar void, cold as all un-flame and un-sun. He seated himself upon a nothingness and watched the puffies drift, kicking, before him. A Milky Way of starmotes drifted over his right shoulder and past his face. It became a Bourbon Way and he gulped it.

"How?" managed a puffy, weakly.

He did not answer.

It was not that I loved the Earth . . .

* * *

"Henry?"

"Yes?"

"We *can't*!"

He studied the bloneness of her, and the ghostgray eyes looking (always) past him. Her tiny afterthought of a chin was drawn even smaller by her pout.

"Why is that?" he asked her eyes.

"... To stay behind on this hell's shelf of a world? The two last people?—With his best friend?"

"Yes."

"... With only machines and each other to talk to? And your damned bookreaders? We'd go mad! We'd hate each other! There'd be no purpose—"

"Have you an alternative?" he interrupted. "And could it convince a Eugenics Board?"

"What's wrong with the way things are now? After the Movement it will be the same."

"Try saying it this way," he smiled, "'Henry is handy, like a dimmie or masso, dandy, and as much above suspicion—but to stay here with him . . . Well, it's primitive, that's what it is.'"

"You're wrong," she colored, "and I'll prove it—later."

He shook his head.

"There won't be any 'later.' I'm not going. Somebody should stay behind to water the flowers. It's not that I love the Earth—I just hate the stars, I hate what they stand for. I hate the people going to the stars, going to recapitulate with stifling monotony all the processes that drained this world and left nothing but filled ashtrays. For a long time I felt that my only purpose in life was to fill ashtrays, myself. But now I know I was wrong. I have

something to do now—I'm going to be a grave-keeper. That's good, very good . . ."

"Of course you're going," she sniffed. "Everyone is. Don't be childish! There's nothing here to preserve. The days of Earth are past."

He nodded, vigorously.

"Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis! Of course you're right, as always. Nothing can be done. History dies the second it is made, and we leave the world emptier than we found it. Grass to dust and life to lust, burning. However, I have made arrangements to move into the Portation Sanct after Exodus. I anticipated some company, but I can push the buttons without your help. You may join me there anytime you wish. Don't stop around just to say 'good-bye,' though."

"You're coming with us! I love you, even if you are a regressive!"

He glanced at the clock.

"You had better get dressed for—uh, dinner," he suggested. "Len will be back soon and I'd better start arriving."

He stood and donned his fire cloak.

"I'll mix the drinks. You can't take it with you . . ."

She had much more to say, but it didn't really matter, much.

* * *

—Far removed are the courts

of darkness from the halls of light.

Yes, he decided, *the distance of the stars, and ten feet from where I'm sitting.—And that, puffies, is it.*

"How?" persisted the foremost puffy.

—Far removed . . .

Something seemed to be screaming, soundlessly, somewhere.

"Why?"

"I hate me!" he told it, with sudden ferocity. "And you! You are the maggots in Balder's guts! You've come to worm in the corpse of my world, and I just this minute decided that I won't let you. I hate me, but I hate you more.—Go back where you came from. I'm keeping the Earth!"

"If you, force, us—"

It became a tiny nova at his feet, a lily pad of flame drifting upon black waters.

"Go home," he said, and they stood in the Sanct once more, and he was his normal size, and the wall unwound its door again.

The two remaining puffies dragged themselves upright.

"You used, up, your time, your world . . ." they hummed, "and you are, all, that remains, behind. Your race, is not, justified, and its, only, monument, is wanton, destruction, of life."

"In that," he answered, "we emulate the universe. We take!

"Look around you, though—

there must be a bright ash in that big ashtray." He gestured wildly. "There *must* be something out there to justify us! Go look!" He tried to crack his skull between the palms of his hands, but he could not. "Get out of here! Leave me!

"Go . . ."

The door winked grotesquely behind them and he struck it with a lightning bolt.

The screaming continued.

II.

Far removed are the courts of darkness. Far . . .

He heard screaming.

He recognized his own voice.

He awakened.

—Far removed—Puffy ambassadors beg—courts of light—entrance . . .

The words were changing, and he knew.

He was listening to the pillow and twisting the words, he was hearing the words and altering the meaning; he was doing and not doing, he was part awake, part asleep.

He knew.

"Tell them to go away!" he shouted. "Read to me!"

He knew.

. . . A long story about a woman named Anna and a man named Vronsky.

. . . The train rushed toward him, spewing black pennants of

goblin-cloud and blaring a saurian war-cry, and he *knew* . . .

He seized the light.

"Break ideational bridge!"

The train was gone and he was alone, shivering, knowing.

He perspired faster than the couch could absorb it. Oceans raced back from sandbars of his memory.

He covered his face.

"You *did* clean up all the blood?"

"Yes," answered the pillow.

"And her body?"

"Gone. Cleanly, completely."

"Why did she do it?"

The pillow did not answer.

"Why did she come here to bleed?" he insisted.

"Because she could neither go nor stay, like yourself."

"How long has it been?"

"Seven years, three months, and thirteen days."

Something fiery flowed from the tube and he swallowed it.

"Were the puffies real, or a part of the therapy?"

"Both."

"Oh, did I actually kill one?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"Two weeks yesterday."

"I'm sick."

"No, you're all right now."

He was sick.

The pillow hummed and the bed vibrated and he was dry again and warm. The pillow clicked.

"Puffy ambassadors beg entrance."

"Have you been watering my drinks?"

"Yes."

"Let them in," he said.

III.

HE stared into the room he had sealed shut on that day, seven years ago . . . The wall was melted now.

Len had returned, smelling of time and space, and hadn't said a word—casting only one long, kicked-dog look at him before he hit him—and when he awakened Len was gone and two of his teeth were gone and he was choking on one of them, and he took a drink, began rubbing again at the cinnamon anemones beside the bath pool, and took a drink, then cried some, took a drink, carried her to the couch and praying, cried some more, took a drink, closed off the room, awakened, everything all right, arms hurting from sprayjets and pillow *Lycidas* to him and he had scrambled eggs and toast for breakfast and everything was all right, yes.

He called a bridge band.

A huge, bright, wild, white trumpet lily broke the floor of the room and unflowered over bed, bath, and dresser, as the other wall dialed door and the puffies came in.

He smiled as they appeared.

"Hello, puffies."

And they came in and they came in, and the Sanct was full of puffies, and he smiled and he nodded and they stood before the couch.

He moved back and sat on its edge.

"You have come," he said, "hungering and thirsting after justice."

"What do, you want?" they asked.

"Nothing," he said.

It was quiet. The puffies caught him like a butterfly in yellow nets of seeing.

"What do *you* want?" he asked.

"Why do, you, kill us?" they asked.

"It was not me," he answered, "it was my madness. I am sorry."

"If you," said a puffy, "go," said a puffy, "everything," said a puffy, "will be, well," said a puffy.

"If you," pause, "stay," said another, "you must," said another, "die," said the largest.

"Useless," said another, "freak!"

"Very good," he sighed, "very good indeed.

"Whatever I am, whatever I do," he told them, "read the Earth, study the Earth, and judge us fairly for what we did with it when we lived here. I am

not truly representative of my species—only, perhaps, of its failures. I have wasted several lives proving the worthlessness of life, and I have only just now decided I was wrong."

He paused, looked about, then asked: "If I leave you the Earth, what will you do with the works of man?"

"Burn them," buzzed one.

"Bury them," droned another.

"Replace them," hummed a third.

"Forgive them," whistled a fourth, "for existing."

The others looked at him and made odd noises. Laughter?

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Jester," said the vanilla pyramid. "I mock, our leaders."

"Who are you?" he asked the first who had spoken.

"First, among peers."

"And you?" to the second.

"Second."

"And you?"

"Third."

"And Jester makes four. Good!" He began to laugh.

"Comedic king of the snowballs, I salute thee!"

HE bowed. The Second extended a mandible, tentatively, in his direction.

He did move, not until its blade neared his neck. Then he straightened and seized it in his right hand.

"Give me your pardon, sir. I've

done you wrong," he winced. "What I have done that might your nature, honor, and exception roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness."

The hand and mandible were frozen as the lights began to fade. The buzzing began again when the room became completely black. Then all grew quiet, and he continued:

"Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil free me so far in your most generous thoughts..."

Light once more, but from instant-grown torches, sprung like mushrooms from sooty niches of brick. Fifty or sixty gaily garbed people crowded the shadow-pavilioned chamber. His couch had become a throne, and a bearded man with heavy purple robes and a crown of gold sat upon it.

The walls wore rough-woven allegories of bright color, the heads of vanquished predators, and axes with complexions of smoke and eyes of rust. The night moved twenty or thirty feet upward and hung there, leaking creeks of darkness down the seams of the walls.

He wore black trousers and had on a white shirt, opened at the neck, and his hair was a burnished mirror, and his sky eyes held the darker man, whose hand he still clasped.

Say it! he willed.

The mouth moved uncertainly, the throat constricted, relaxed:

"I am satisfied, in nature, whose motive, in this case, should stir me most, to my revenge," the other stated, slowly; the voice cleared, rose: "But till that time I do receive your offer'd love like love, and will not wrong it."

"I do embrace it freely," he replied, "and will this brother's wager frankly play." He wrung the hand, released it, and spun away with a laugh. "Give us the foils!"

"Come! One for me!"

"I'll be your foil," he smiled.

"You mock me, sir!"

"No, by this hand." He held it forth again.

The other turned and walked off a few paces, as though the process were completely new to him. Surprised by his sudden grace, he executed a fencer's lunge and laughed aloud.

"Give them the foils," ordered the crowned one. "You know the wager?"

"Very well, my lord."

His opponent inspected the point of his weapon.

"This is too heavy, let me see another." He selected another blade and eyed his opponent who simply nodded.

The Earthman licked his lips, extended his weapon several times, and stepped into a line with his opponent.

"This likes me well," he stated.

"These foils have all a length?"

"Ay, my good lord."

So he smiled over the skewed curve of his salute and struck an on guard. His opponent did the same.

IT was a game, a beautiful game they were being forced to play, with the wild feeling of moving in another form, of seeing the colors of Earth through the eyes of Earthmen, of speaking with the tongues of Earthmen.

There were constraints, of course—this one must stand here, that one there, this one speak *so*, and *then*. The king must order wine and throw a pearl into the gobblet before saying, "Come! Begin! And you, the judges, bear a wary eye!" But the air burned with the invisible electricities of anticipation, and the half-controlled movements seemed more than half their own as they crowded forward to the cry: "Come on, sir!"

"Come, my lord!" was the rejoinder, and the blades leapt and touched like the tongues of steel toads.

(Beat - extend - feint - feint - thrust.)

Click!

"One."

"No."

"Judgment."

"A hit, a very palpable hit."

"Well, again!"

"Stay," called the king.

"Here's to thy health!"

He motioned to a servant.

"Give him the cup," he said.

"I'll play this bout first," the Earthman answered. "Set it by awhile."

He sank completely into the illusion of the moment, unrolling memory in its opposite direction and through a series of new discoveries. He lunged.

"Another hit. What say you?"

"A touch, a touch, I do confess," agreed his opponent.

"Our son shall win," snarled the king.

"The queen carouses to your fortune." The lady beside the king raised the cup.

"Do not!" snapped the king; and in the distance a whisper, struggling: "I, cannot, help, myself!"

The king gnashed his teeth.

The Earthman bit his lip.

"Have at you now!"

His blade clattered to the floor. A single tooth bit blood from his body, tore seeing from his eyes, and the entire room shuddered like a candle flame brought near a window.

Then it steadied, and he dropped to one knee.

He drove his elbow into his opponent's rib cage and, reaching up, he seized the fencer's right wrist. He duckstepped under it and straightened, twisting.

A second blade rang upon the floor.

"Part them! They are incensed!" came the cry.

He seized the other weapon.

"Nay! Come again!"

His opponent snatched up the other foil, heaved a loud gasp, and sprang into a balestra.

HE caught the sudden febra in a bind, then cross-stepped into a back leap. The blades disengaged with a rasp. He beat the outside of the extended foil, fainted in four, lunged in six. This was met with a lightning parry and a riposte in six, beneath his own blade. He beat it down, stepped back, caught the forte, and dashed forward in a flesche attack.

The other howled.

The queen fell to her knees.

"Look to the queen! Ho!"

"They bleed on both sides! How is't, my lord?"

"How is't?"

The other clutched his arm, and a look of terror contorted his features as his lips moved.

"I am, justly, killed, with mine own, treachery(!)."

"How does the queen?"

"She swoonds to see them bleed."

"No, no! The drink!" she moaned, hysteria mounting as the words emerged from her mouth. "The drink! I am poisoned!"

Then she fell and was silent.

"O villainy! Ho!" chuckled the Earthman. "Let the door be locked! Treachery! Seek it out!"

"It is here," sighed the one at his feet. "Thou art slain. No medicine in the world can do thee good. In thee there is not half an hour of life. The treacherous instrument is in thy hand, unbated and envenomed . . ."

He nodded agreement and looked about him at the inheritors of the Earth. *This*, at least, would remain with them.

"Then, venom, to thy work!" he cried, and with a smile he stabbed the king, then forced the cup to his mouth and poured what remained within through his teeth.

"You wanted the Earth," he muttered. "You wanted its bones without its flesh. Ugly or lovely, man has tattooed its body and you cannot scrape our mark from its corpse. You wanted it—try being it!"

The form went limp in his arms.

"He is, justly, served," came the forced gutturals, as the other fencer closed his eyes and grimaced.

Are you sure he was right? asked his own voice in his head.

"Was he?" he cried.

A throbbing began in his temples. Whispers in a puffy-staccato of horror began to grow louder. A gale swept through the room, and the torches flickered. Somewhere a wailing. He began to burn.

The chamber faded and reapp-

peared, faded and reappeared, and in a between-moment of shimmering limbo he seemed to be standing in the midst of a vast field of ice, surrounded by a village of igloos, each sporting antennae. High overhead, the wheeling galaxy was an enormous ashtray, and he knew that it would go on forever, turning, collecting, after he had ceased. And he knew that he was meant to fill that ashtray—his race and the unborn children of his race—powdering into it forever, and occasionally flaming in bright flakes, as he had tonight, to justify an absurdity with an absurd beauty and to cancel some of the absurdities and leave some of the beauty behind, to some end, and he knew he was sane once more, and he smiled at the puffies and switched on the court tableau for his final scene.

"O, I die, Horatio!" he croaked. "The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit." He looked up at the puffy-courtier who supported him in a sitting position. "I cannot live to hear the news from (England?)," he continued, "but I do prophesy the election lights on (Fortinbras?). He has my dying voice." He gestured with his head toward the door which masked the frozen Jester. "So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less, which

have solicited—the rest is silence . . ."

He leaned back and focussed his will upon the next part.

The Horatio-puffy was speaking of his cracked heart and the singing of angels. It mentioned the drum, and he heard it, distantly, before the silence finally came.

The Jester shuffled forward, changing shape as he moved. He flickered on and off, then he stood—a mountain of ice—looking down at the Earthman. Hives of bells opened and closed, opened and closed. The others watched him, for they knew that he knew the Earth, for he was the mocker, and he would know what had happened, what to do next.

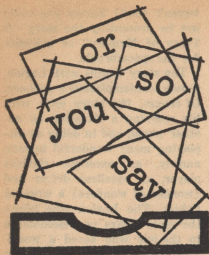
He regarded the last dead Earthman on Earth.

"Take up, the body," he said. "Such, a sight, as this, becomes, the field, but here, shows much amiss. Go, bid the, soldiers shoot."

And they carried him out and buried him, as was not the custom with puffies, and the Sanct extended cannons and fired them into the night, as had not been the custom with men for many years; and the Jester made the Earth a place of laughter, and the puffies dwelt upon the ways of men.

THE END





Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I shall raise my head from my Superman Comic long enough to raise my poison pen in rebuttal. I was pleased at the reaction that my letter received in your magazine but somewhat less pleased with the quality of this reaction. I suggest the attackers missed the basic point and rather read into the letter what they were prepared to argue about. I take this opportunity to point out certain flaws in their arguments and in doing so I hope to present a clearer picture of the views I expressed in my first letter.

Mr. Lamont: Believe it or not Super Charlies exist in every field of human endeavor. I could name many. Albert Schweitzer is a Super Charlie. Great artists and scientists such as Beethoven,

da Vinci and Newton were Super Charlies. History gives us myriads of examples where men have risen above the crowd in times of danger. Your own American history boasts of numerous supermen. Super does not imply perfection but rather an ability to rise to great occasions.

Furthermore a reader should not be condemned to sympathize with a poor ordinary man's shortcomings. Science fiction is the only realm in fiction left where we are not constantly set to the task of tearing out a wall from our neighbor's house and examining his problems. Science fiction is the only field in which authors can demonstrate the ways in which man can bring forth his latent superism.

Mr. (Mrs.) Shepard: No, the world is no longer blessed with original John Carters. Instead we enjoy (?) a preponderance of what I have termed 'common man' stereotypes. Many authors, in an almost desperate attempt to mature, have decided that the only character that will survive today's critical readers is the type that possess common weaknesses. Thus, in this mad attempt, they relate over-obvious weaknesses, e.g. drunkenness or physical inferiorities, in such a crude manner so that we can all readily realize these shortcomings. After we have recognized such and have to some degree

identified ourselves, the hero of the story rushes out to do the small task of saving a world. There is an inconsistency in this type of story. And note that it is a type of story I am talking about. I am not trying to present an absolute rule.

Mr. Pierce: Bear with this closed mind. This mind is so closed that it condemns Tenn, Heinlein, Van Vogt, etc.? This closed mind thinks that yesterday's writers are better than today's?

Show me in my letter where I have said such!

Perhaps, though, this closed mind was saying that modern stories fail to present one basic quality that the older types possessed—that only a great man can rise to a great occasion.

Perhaps my views become clearer when I state that my ideas were directed toward a specific type of tale—where the hero is faced with rescuing a situation. I must agree with the list of stories you presented . . . they were great, however the hero was, in most cases, trying to cope with the situation, trying only to understand it. The authors' purpose was not to present an action story for our relaxation but to bring to our attention problems.

Mr. Katz: Thank you for the brilliant sarcasm in defending my view. (You were doing that,

weren't you?) Surely you could not be presenting the story "A Trace of Memory" as evidence for the opposite side.

The story begins with Legion, a *bum*, contemplating a robbery. Of course, the story ends with his rescuing a situation on another world, and in doing so displaying many wonderful talents, namely, an excellent clarinet player, an excellent driver and (wonder of wonders) a winning fighter. The Legion who began the story bears no resemblance to the one who saved a world. The delightful tale would have borne greater consistency had the author not fallen victim to the ways described above. To illustrate what I consider a good example of the type of story I am talking about, I suggest everyone re-read "Hunters Out of Time." Jack Odin, the hero, was a doctor in this world, not a *bum*. He was a man who had gained a position of high respect in our own society. Thus it was not hard to see him become a superman in another world.

This letter is not crying for the return to the old John Carter stories, but rather the updating of a few of the qualities the old heroes possessed.

Lorne Yacuk

12107-127 Street

Edmonton, Alberta

Note: I wish to express my personal gratitude to Miss Gold-

smith for having my first letter printed. Since that time I have received a great amount of literature, and more important I have had the opportunity to communicate with many new people. AMAZING has opened up new sf worlds to me. Thank you.

● *You're welcome, and that ends this controversy—in our lettercol, anyway.*

Dear Cele:

I read with great interest the translation of Kazantsev's introduction to the Soviet book of American science fiction. In a sense, since I wrote introductions to two American books of Soviet science fiction, I am Kazantsev's opposite number. It seems to me that I was gentler to Soviet sf than he was to American sf but of course I view things through my own eyes. Perhaps to a Soviet reader my introductions may have seemed odd and distorted.

I appreciate being promoted to Princeton University by our Soviet friend, but of course while smiling at this error, I must not fall into the additional error of assuming that every science-fiction reader in the United States knows what school I am really associated with. If they wonder about it (and I don't guarantee

that they do), the school in question is Boston University.

Fortunately, Kazantsev's paragraph concerning me does nothing to raise my ire. This particular paragraph, aside from the mention of Princeton, even seems to be accurate enough. I wish he hadn't dragged old John Foster Dulles into it since Dulles was never in my mind during the writing of robot stories. In fact, I never approved of Dulles myself.

But what I really am writing about is to say that nothing in Kazantsev's article amazed me so much as your introduction in which my first name was grossly mis-spelled, despite the fact that the translator's last name (identical with my first) was correctly spelled. I realize that typo's will happen, but I must urge you, dear editor, to proof-read such things with the greatest care, for the First Law of Asimov reads:

1: Thou shalt not mis-spell the name of the Good Doctor.

Isaac Asimov

● *We wouldn't for the world bruise the Good Doctor's ego. You will therefore be glad to know the linotypist has been executed for his lese-mageste! Okay, Isak?*



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

Lords of the Psychon. By Daniel F. Galouye. 153 pp. Bantam Books. Paper: 40¢.

Ever since the publication of Daniel Galouye's superb first novel, *Dark Universe*, I have been literally panting in anticipation to see what he would do next. Much has been written about the pitfalls facing the writer of a successful first novel. On the whole, Mr. Galouye weathers these perils very well, for though there are times when he falters a little, he never descends to the mediocre.

The questionable parts of the book have to do with certain elements of plot. One of the things that made *Dark Universe* so outstanding was not only the polish of the writing, but the utter believability of the situation depicted—how it arose and what happened as a result. *Lords of the Psychon*, on the other hand, is based on some rather incredible events, and while the

book is more or less convincing during the reading, this spell doesn't last much past the end of the story.

The events depicted take place after the Third Nuclear War. What's left of the population lives in squatters' villages, foraging from the ruins. In addition to these people, there are the remnants of the Armed Forces who have to contend with a new and terrible menace—the Spheres and their strange cities of luminescent frozen energy. Ever since the arrival of these menacing forces, Earth has been subjected to Horror Day every 25th of September, a time when an enormous Grid forms over the sky and sends out energy which twists every cell in the body. In addition to this, the Spheres frequently select a person and then chase him until he gives up in exhaustion and is killed. Those Selected are seemingly at random, except for the fact that

newborn babies are always chosen. Thus, besides Horror Day and the constant danger of Selection, the people of Earth are threatened with becoming extinct through the inability to save their children.

The main character is Jeff Maddox, an Army captain, who slowly learns to handle the energy, which has been named Psychon plasma, following the important discovery that its shape and activities can be controlled by thought. Maddox is racing against time, for the belief is that the next Horror Day will be the last. Each year, the tortures have become worse, each year the Grid in the sky becomes brighter. Dr. Fritz Ulrich, a biochemist, who gravitated toward Maddox's Army Headquarters, believes that the purpose of these dreadful days is to get up enough energy to transfer Earth to a different Universe.

Against this terrible threat Maddox wages his battle to save Earth, joined by a few of his men and a girl, Edie, who has made a pet of a Baby Sphere. As a group they make greater strides and finally learn what holds the Cities of Force together. But their goal is constantly threatened by a religious group called the Judgmenites. These fanatics appear at various intervals in the story as a counterpoint to Maddox's attempts to control the

Psychon flux. They believe all the horrors that have happened since the arrival of the Spheres are Divinely Inevitable, that it is wrong to fight this state of affairs, and that it is the Innocent who are Selected while the Guilty are left to suffer Horror Day.

The activities of these Judgmenites not only add suspense to the story, but also form a pointed caricature on all those people all through history who have thwarted progress by looking on injustice, poverty, war and disease as signs of God's Will.

The 7th Annual of the Year's Best S-F. Edited by Judith Merril. 399 pp. Simon and Schuster. \$4.50.

The seventh, and certainly the longest, of Judy Merrill's anthologies came out a short time ago. The general format is the same as we are accustomed to from her past labors of love—a Merrill rationalization or explanation or apologia preceding each story, poem, essay, or cartoon; her general summation at the end of the book followed by Anthony Boucher's roundup of his choices for the best books of the year; finally, a listing of Honorable Mentions in the story department.

By now, Judy Merrill's work has almost become a Science Fiction tradition. As such she has become quite predictable. One knows ahead of time that

there will be many good selections; one knows equally well that one will argue with her that at least fifty per cent of these good selections don't belong in such a book; one knows she will make some very provocative statements; and one also knows that there will be disagreement with at least fifty per cent of these statements.

However, there are some new things to be pointed out about this year's book. One is the inclusion of a story each from AMAZING and FANTASTIC, respectively—"The Asteroids, 2194" by John Wyndham and "A Small Miracle of Fishhooks and Straight Pins" by David R. Bunch.

Another point to be mentioned is what almost amounts to telepathy between Boucher's list of the best books of the year (along with his opinion that 1961 was a pretty thin year for books) and my comments on the same books in these columns. It is gratifying to be vindicated by such an authority, particularly in regard to our joint dislike of the latest Heinlein Hugo award novel.

The stories represent a wide spectrum of colors. Among them are two stories by Kaatje Hurlbut and Anne McCaffrey which ooze such sentimentality that one marvels that the very paper they are written on doesn't stick

together. But lest anyone draw the conclusion that their emotion is a reflection of their female authorship, let me add that at the other end the most chilling story in the volume is also by a lady, Alice Glaser. I guarantee that this account of the population explosion will clutch you. It is a perfectly paced story. There are other noteworthy tales: Kit Reed writes about the future of the juvenile gangs; Muriel Spark contributes a murder story in which a not uncommon twist is raised to a superior level by literary brilliance; Cordwainer Smith depicts a cruel and unusual punishment for crime; Pohl and Kornbluth collaborate on a story about an unfortunate serviceman whose duty to his country is to betray it. There are a number of lighter selections for comic relief, such as Fritz Leiber's description of the troubles that Bohemians and Beatniks have in their pads high in the sky, or Robert Hale's tale of a most adaptable artist's model, or R. Bretnor's (the Feghoot man) explanation of the meaning behind that often repeated phrase, "all the tea in China."

However, any discussion of a Merrill anthology can't be complete without a chance for the reviewer to growl at some of her more questionable statements. Miss Merrill wishes everyone to

understand that the S-F of the title means not simply Science Fiction or Science Fantasy, but Speculative Fiction. By widening her intention this way she obviously thinks she has protected herself against people who complain that one or another of the stories doesn't belong. But she has not made herself airtight. For if she really meant speculative fiction (and after all there is hardly any literature that doesn't speculate in one way or another) she had such a broad field from which to choose that one cannot excuse the presence of clinkers.

At the same time, she points to certain evidence that science fiction, per se, is rapidly disappearing, and its essential qualities are becoming re-absorbed into mainstream literature. If one accepts this, then the implication is that Miss Merrill has painted herself into a corner. If the line between science fiction and regular fiction is disappearing, Miss Merrill's anthology becomes at the worst, obsolete, or at the best superfluous.

What are the choices if she wishes to continue her annual?

If she follows her present trend to include more and more works outside the "purer" (her term) science fiction, complete with the copious explanations for using them her conscience compels her to make, then she will have to stand up and be counted against the already established anthologies of regular fiction (such as Martha Foley's) because her work will be almost indistinguishable from theirs in scope.

The other alternative, and I think the wiser one, is to cut back to what I and many others think an S-F anthology should be. It is not necessary to have each year's volume become longer and longer. Most years it just means more and more padding with questionable material. For in spite of all her complaints about the dearth of top quality within the strict confines of science fiction, well over half of the material in this seventh edition falls into that category, and two hundred and fifty pages of good reading is ample for such an endeavor. Miss Merrill can continue to serve an important function, if she will only try harder to discipline her selectivity.

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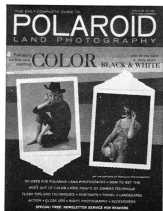
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