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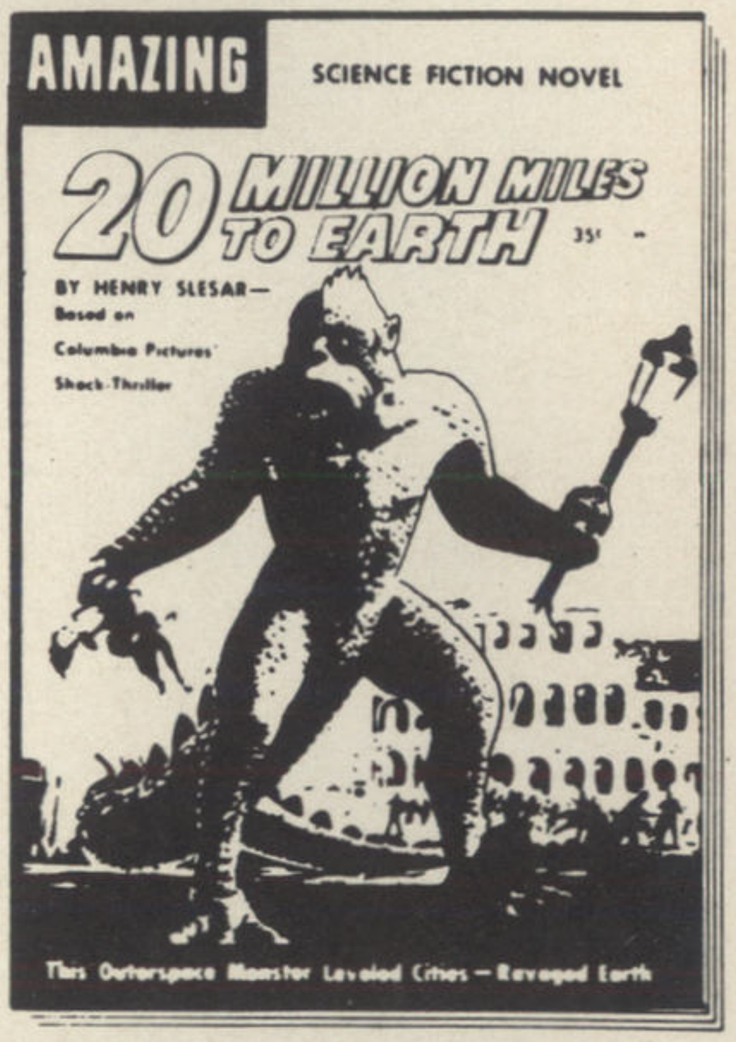

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BY THE EDITOR

Suppose you opened your daily paper tomorrow and read this banner headline: WASHINGTON ADMITS FLYING SAUCERS ARE FROM OUTER SPACE! What would your reaction be? You probably can't say without going through the actual experience, but you'll certainly agree that it would be a momentous release. Such small things as atomic missiles and the Cold War would be forgotten. As a matter of fact it would probably be the most important single headline since the invention of type.

We are not of course predicting any such headline, but you've got to admit that it is not beyond the realm of possibility. Many solid, sane people are completely convinced this is the case—are expecting the headline hourly, and instead of diminishing, public interest in saucers is increasing every day.

It was with this thought in mind that we decided to devote an issue of our companion-magazine, *Amazing Stories*, to this great riddle. A Special Flying Saucer Issue. It will be somewhat in the nature of a forum with the sole purpose of getting all the pros and cons between two covers. The writers we have invited to participate span the range from *it's completely ridiculous!* to, *it's absolute living fact!* For instance, Ray Palmer claims the government is suppressing facts. He will tell us why. Oliver Ferrell, managing editor of *Popular Electronics* considers the outerspace theory completely untenable. You'll learn his reasons.

So be sure and reserve an October issue of *Amazing Stories*. That's October—on sale September 8th. Become a saucer expert yourself with one evening's easy reading.—PWF.

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COFFIN RUN

By LEE CORREY

If you're a space pilot, the ship you ride in is your bride; blast-off is the honeymoon, deep space, the bridal bed. And hear this!—if you have no love for your sleek, steel beauty, stay off the starways.

THE captain would like to see you," the voice on the phone had said.

Commander Tom Krause didn't ask why. After you'd been in the Space Force for eleven years, you knew enough to keep your eyes open and your mouth shut.

"Hi, Tom! Come in and have a seat!" Captain Warren Olson told him. "Do you know Dr. Van Noy?" He indicated a large, big-boned, middle-aged man who rose to his feet.

"How do you do, Doctor?" Tom greeted him, shaking the man's outstretched hand. "I'm Commander Krause . . ."

For one terrible moment,

the searing blast ripped at his metal.

"I know. It's a real pleasure to meet you at last, Commander." Van Noy's voice was pleasant and friendly. He resumed his seat as Tom shuffled across the floor, barely lifting his feet from the carpet.

As the pilot slid heavily into a chair, he noticed that something was wrong. He could sense it from the underlying expression on the operations officer's face and from the detached, nervous way he was playing with his desk calendar. So Tom asked, "What's the hot skinny, Captain?"

The operations officer glanced up at him. "How would you like to fly the Needle, Tom?"

"The Nuclear Needle? The *Hiroshima?*" Tom's eyebrows shot up. He ran his hand through his snow-white hair —hair that was prematurely grayed from the primary cosmic radiation of outer space.

"None other," Olson told him.

"Don't ask me silly questions this early in the morning. What happened to Lew Bascomb? Did he chicken-out on you?" the pilot wondered.

"No, I wish it were that simple," Van Noy put in. "Lew Bascomb is dead."

Tom jerked his head around. "How's that?"

"Lew Bascomb's dead," Olson repeated, taking a cigar out of his desk drawer.

"How? When?" Tom wanted to know.

"You'd never believe it," Van Noy said. "He tripped over one of his son's roller skates in the dark last night and broke his head open on the edge of the gravestone he uses for a coffee table. Died on the way to the hospital."

Tom licked his lips. He had known Commander Lew Bascomb. The man had been a youngster in the game of rocket driving. He had been one of the bright laddies who had grown up with the space stations swinging around overhead, one of the ones who had studied the books that Tom had helped write. He'd been a newcomer in space, one of the new breed. Tom hadn't seen him lately; the man had been on TDY at places with such exotic names as Sandia, Knolls, and Santa Sussanna. But he was a rocket driver, a blast pusher, a brother in arms, a member of the lodge. He had flown the most dangerous machines men had ever made . . . and died after tripping over a roller skate on the verge of the biggest thing in his life.

"I'm sorry," Tom said sincerely. "How's his family?"

"Mashed flat. Broken up. We're the ones in bad shape."

"You?"

"The Space Force is committed to supply a pilot for the operational tests on that ship," Olson said flatly, striking a kitchen match and holding it in front of his cigar. "Bascomb was it."

"So? Why ask me, then, Captain? Call in the second team . . ."

"You *are* the second team," the operations officer said as he lit the cigar.

"You mean . . . Bascomb didn't have an understudy, a supernumerary?"

Olson blew out the match and tossed it into a small rocket chamber he used for an ash tray. "Tom, you know as well as I do what the manpower situation is around here. We're even short of janitors. Let's quit chewing vacuum; I'm going to have to pull a man off the go-board . . . and that man is you if you want to make smoke with the Needle." The operations officer was speaking part of the bitter truth that had plagued the rocket business for nearly thirty years: shortage of men. When the Vanguard program had opened the era of space, the rocket men had been shorthanded. They stayed that way. It was the proverbial Red Queen's Race. The shortage of technically trained people which had existed at mid-century was still a shortage. The demand continued to outstrip the supply. As a greater number of people were trained, technology had forged ahead and gobbled them up in its relentless progress and expansion. Only automation had helped to save the whole works.

"Sorry," Tom apologized. "I just like to get filled in on things. But who thinks I can fly a nuclear pot? I'm strictly an old juice jockey. I'm no expert . . ."

"I think you are," Van Noy put in.

"Sure, I got a degree once, Doctor . . . It was roughly equivalent to a major in Advanced Beetle Tracking. I got in through the door here by playing by ear and flying off carriers when we still had them."

"I still say you're qualified," Dr. Van Noy reiterated himself. "Don't be so damned modest. I've got a project that's stalled right now because of no pilot. Warren says you're the man. So does your record. And so does my observation of you here this

morning. Krause, you impress me as a man who can fly anything with a nozzle under it. Do you think Olson here will fly the coming nuclear ships with men who have their doctorates in nuclear physics? Hells Bells, no, he won't! He'll have to use old juice jockeys. And he says you're the best he's got." Van Noy stopped suddenly as though he had said more than he had intended. Tom could tell there was pressure on him.

"Van is satisfied you can do the job, Tom . . . or I wouldn't have asked you in the first place," Olson said, puffing his cigar and exhuding clouds of white smoke. "As I asked you earlier, do you want the job?"

Tom looked at them both. Out there on the launching pad was a ship which had never been flown, a ship with a radically new power plant in her tail. "I won't take it to Lunar without the best checkout you can give me, Van Noy."

"We wouldn't expect you to do it otherwise."

"Then let's go look at it. I've never seen it close-up."

"You're going to get the chance, Tom. Come on."

She was the first of her kind. In the clear morning sunlight, she reached her silver nose cone toward the sky. But no matter how much the impression of her height was accentuated by her slim, wingless form, it was readily apparent that she did not come to the three-quarter mark on the sides of her chemically-powered sisters sitting in adjoining areas.

The words "S. S. *Hiroshima*" were lettered on her sides, words that brought back the memory of the first application of nuclear power. Now that power had found another useful form.

There were no radiological signs around, but that did not mean that men were not taking precautions with the new power plant. Her launching area was revetted with high, thick concrete and earth barricades and baffles. Scram lights and signals were everywhere.

"She's pretty," Tom observed as they walked toward her from where the jeep was parked. "Don't tell me they're scared of her, though."

"When she works right, she should be as harmless as a kitchen stove," Van Noy told him. "But you wouldn't take chances with a new ship, either, would you?"

"Nope."

The three of them picked up dosimeters and clipped them in their shirt pockets before entering the revettment. Inside, there were dozens of men working on the loading tower and around the base of the ship. Van Noy walked up to one of these men and hailed him. "Good morning, Prochek."

A little man wearing a wicker baseball cap and incongruously large dark glasses jumped at the sound of the scientist's voice. Then he turned, saw who it was, and relaxed. "Good morning, Doctor . . . Captain. Where's Bascomb this morning? He was supposed to be out here thirty minutes ago to run through Class Four emergency procedures with me. We need every minute."

Van Noy said the two words, and the color drained from the little man's face as his mouth fell open. Olson went on to fill in the details. It took the little man a moment to recover his voice.

"But who . . .?" he began.

"Doug, we're sliding the test date. Three weeks. That's all we can afford . . ."

"But, Doctor, the Laboratory's been riding our necks to get this thing off! Three weeks will . . ."

"You will have to break in a new pilot," Van Noy reminded him.

'Prochek, this is Commander Tom Krause," Olson performed the introduction. "Tom, this is Doug Prochek, test conductor and flight engineer."

Tom rammed out his hand, and the engineer shook it flaccidly. As far as Tom was concerned, Prochek looked too much the part of the narrow-chested young genius. His skin was pale in the bright sunlight—pale because nuclear engineers normally lived in a world of massive concrete walls and windowless buildings. There was no basis to the rumor—the stories told by other engineers who had hairy ears and long, wooly britches—that nuclear engineers lived under rocks to see the light of day only when they ventured forth to blow up a new "thing." Tom's mental calibration of the man included a bachelor who did not smoke, did not drink, and spent his spare time fiddling around with quantum mechanics. He knew the type—the brain boy, the quiz kid, the man with all the answers. The pilot didn't dislike that kind of man, but merely preferred to stay away when possible. He felt it would no

longer be possible for several weeks at least.

"What do you know about nucleonics?" was the first thing that Prochek said to him.

"Nothing," Tom admitted, "except to pay attention to the radiation counter and the dosimeter."

Prochek whirled to face Olson and Van Noy. There was a nervous, worried look on his face. "I'm sorry, Doctor, but this man won't do. I don't have anything against him personally; I hardly know him. But the pilot of this ship must have had extensive training in nucleonics. It's absolutely imperative!"

Tom resisted an impulse to shove the man's face in. It wasn't what he had said; it was the way in which he had said it.

It was the operations officer who replied, "*I'm* sorry, Prochek, but your request is denied."

"But as test conductor, I have the right . . ."

"We're short of pilots," Olson told him sharply.

"Doug, Commander Krause is the best that is available," Van Noy added smoothly. It was evident that he had handled this man before. "He can fly it if he is checked out. He'll have to do, Doug."

"But . . ."

"We do *not* have time to train another man . . . and you know it!"

Prochek looked as though he were about to stamp his foot. He did the next best thing by throwing down the sheaf of papers in his hand and stalking off with the words, "Then you can count me out! I quit! I will not stand by and see an untrained pilot wreck this project! I have worked too long and hard on it!"

Van Noy rubbed his chin. "Excuse me," he said, "but I'm not going to let this project get wrecked because of personalities." So saying, he strode after Prochek's retreating form.

"Sorry, Tom," Olson apologized.

"Forget it. You run into a certain percentage of jerks in any line of work."

"He's not a jerk . . . not by any manner of means."

"If I were Van Noy, I'd tell him to go climb a rope."

Olson shrugged. "Maybe. But look at what losing just one vital man is going to do to things. Think you can get along with him?"

"I'll try."

Tom twisted and turned in the narrow bed with the pres-

sure of the springs supporting him. Out beyond, it was not like this. A man could get a good night's sleep in free fall or even under the weak pull of Lunar. But here on Earth, Tom felt as though he were fighting high gee every second that he lay there. It was almost intolerable. Usually he could arrange things to pick up his sleep in free orbit, one of the space stations, or in Dianaport. He disliked White Sands. The place was hot, dry, desolate, and had high gee.

Furthermore, the transient quarters in which he lay had all the personality of a bank vault.

He couldn't sleep because of something else, also.

Prochek had come back under Van Noy's urging. And a rough working agreement had been struck up. Tom would fly it as long as Prochek did his job right. But the [illegible]ot did not really trust the vitriolic little engineer. Wild temperament has no place in a ship of space.

But Prochek was a minor detail. Far more important was the *Hiroshima* and what Van Noy had told him about it.

She was the answer to practical space travel . . . and such a simple answer, too. So simple that it had taken fifty years to work it out. Altogether, the nuclear power plant was so simple that Tom didn't see how it could work. It was too different from a chemical rocket engine. But the thing that had stuck in Tom's mind was the thing he was interested in: her performance.

The *Hiroshima* was a constant gee ship. For the shakedown to Lunar, she would pack on 1.1 gees . . . and hold them all the way, flipping over in mid-flight.

Non-stop to Lunar in three hours!

"Three hours!" Tom sighed. Why, it took four long days on the fastest schedule the chemical ships could make!

"Three hours! Great Globular Clusters, that doesn't give you *any* time to make or correct mistakes!"

Tom sat down the next morning and ran out a step-by-step integration of the trajectory. It had been worked out before, but Tom did it himself anyway. It was not that he mistrusted the people in the astrogation section; he just knew that space was big, but not big enough for mistakes.

When he finished, he saw

some things that worried him, so he sought out Prochek. He found the man in the bunker adjoining the launching area. "Isn't this flip-over velocity a little high?" he asked the engineer.

"What's wrong with it?" Prochek asked as he glanced up from a bench covered with scribbled paper.

"Four hundred miles per second, that's what's wrong," Tom told him with quiet emphasis. "At that velocity, there's a slight matter of micrometeorites. A piece of sand could hole that ship, and it wouldn't be pretty. Four hundred m.p.s is a slug of kinetic energy."

"I didn't set up the specifications for the trajectory, Commander," Prochek told him. "That is one of the test conditions I was told to carry out . . . and the *Hiroshima*'s capable of doing it."

"I think somebody had better be worrying about it."

"Look, Commander, go up and see Van Noy. I can't straighten you out right now." Prochek reached quickly for a piece of paper then grabbed a thick, black notebook. "I have more important things to do."

Again, Tom submerged the urge to part Prochek from a few teeth. Not only was the man unapproachable, but he was totally unco-operative when you did manage to get near him.

But Van Noy was a different, more amenable person. "Certainly we took that into account, Tom," the graying man told him as he smiled easily. "I'm glad you picked it up, however. And I also see that you've worked out the trajectory step-by-step. The long way home; you could have let the ASTROLAC do it for you in one-tenth the time."

"I sort of like to do this sort of thing for myself, Van."

"Don't blame you a bit." The project engineer took out his pipe and proceeded to fill it from a limp, well-worn pouch of tobacco. "I wouldn't worry too much about micrometeorites. We ran an investigation of the meteor probability curves. From the characteristics of the ship's velocity curve, she will be at those extremely high velocities for a very short time only at turnover." He sat back and lit his pipe. It snarled at him with every draw, but he was relishing it. "If we had anticipated trouble or an unfavorable meteor hit probability, we could have easily chopped

the velocity curve at any point beyond escape velocity."

Tom nodded. "Simple. Then we could mash down to Lunar at the same boost for the same length of time... roughly."

"Roughly, yes. But this ship is a gee ship, not a thrust ship. Thrust is not constant; acceleration is. No mass ratio problems to contend with. Just a few adjustments for change in gravity well depth."

Tom folded his notes and slipped them into the hip pocket of his shorts. "Now why didn't Prochek give me the hot skinny like that?"

"Troubles with Doug already?"

Tom told him what had happened. Then Van Noy remarked, "Doug's a good man . . . one of the best we've got. Conscientious. Hard worker. He's probably taken more interest in this project than anybody. He's wrapped up in that power plant, Tom."

"Is he scared of it?"

"No, not at all. It's just the only thing he has."

"No, no, Krause!" Prochek screamed. "This is not one of those overgrown refineries you've been driving! This is a nuclear rocket! You don't make a correction by kicking it in the teeth! You must treat it gently! *Gently,* do you hear?"

Tom put his temper under the control of his better judgment and sat calmly back in the pilot's chair. Prochek had been jumpy all day while they ran through the Phase One flight correction dry runs. Although he had his own baliwick to take care of, Prochek had watched Tom with a pair of narrowed eyes, ferreting out every mistake the pilot made and then chastising him for it. And each little incident upset him even more. This, as far as Tom was concerned, was almost the final straw. It was next to impossible to get along with the little man around and in the ship. "I'm sorry, Prochek," he tried to apologize in order to head off any argument at this time. "The cookbook said nothing about it."

"When will you learn to listen to me? That manual hasn't got everything in it!"

"Well, it's the only thing I've got to go by," the pilot told him bluntly. "You're next to no help."

Prochek's face got red and he jumped from his seat. "Krause, I thought you were supposed to be a rocket pilot! I don't think you've got what it takes to fly this ship! If you

can't do as I tell you, I will not stand by and see you risk this ship; I'll . . ."

At this point, Tom also rose from his chair. In the crowded confines of the control deck, he didn't have to move very far to back the engineer into a corner formed by two racks of automatic controls. With his jaw set, he glared up at the nuclear engineer and growled, "Prochek, it's time you listened to me. I was driving rockets while you were in diapers and didn't know a combustion chamber from a chamber pot. I'll admit you know your nucleonics, and you know more about the Needle here than I'll ever learn . . ."

"Don't call her that! She's the *Hiroshima!*"

"I don't care what's she's called. The S.S. *Unbearable* would be just as good," Tom fired back levelly. "I wanted to learn about this ship and what's in her tail, but I had to go by the books. You wouldn't take the time or the effort to explain it to me correctly.

"Furthermore, let's get one thing understood right here and now. If you've never been in a deep space pipe before, allow me to point out that I have been delegated the authority as captain of this torch. As captain, I am also project officer. You are both flight engineer and test conductor. The relationship between us is a matter of policy which was worked out long ago. I'm not going to get pigheaded about it, but *I'm* running this show and this ship . . . not you. Now, shall we start this dry run again? I want to have at least two good run-throughs on everything including emergency procedures before I try driving this beast . . ."

Prochek glared at him, his thin face getting redder by the second. Finally, he mumbled something unintelligible, whirled on his heel, and clambered down the access ladder toward the lock.

Tom sat back down to wait. Prochek would be back. And if not, Tom could care less at that moment. Van Noy and Olson wouldn't put up with temperament, not at X minus three days. So the pilot spent the time in further study of the cookbook, a typed manuscript with liberal write-ins in longhand and many corrections and strike-outs.

When Prochek did return some thirty minutes later, he was glum. Without a word, he slipped into his seat, and they commenced dry runs again.

The preparation of any rocket for its first flight is a gut-tearing job, and the *Hiroshima* was no exception to this. Her pre-flights were entirely different, but the rest was the same. Van Noy had left for Lunar in order to be on the landing end of the trajectory to assess the flight data. This left Tom more or less in charge with Olson giving him a very welcome hand.

The day before lift, Tom spent most of his time going over the ship as carefully as he could. The morning of the flight, he got up, took the antidote for the sleeping pills, had a big breakfast, and went out to the launching area. He found Olson there.

"How does it look, Warren?" he asked casually. At this point, all formality between one step in rank had vanished. It was no longer necessary.

"They're just topping off the reaction mass," the operations officer replied with equal unconcern which was as forced as the pilot's casualness.

"Sorry I wasn't here sooner."

"Never mind. You needed that sleep. You've got a big job to do today." Olson grinned. "Besides, I know what a rough sweat it is for you to sleep here."

The fuelling crew finished their work high on the loading tower and pulled the lines free of the ship with care. Methane fumes drifted in the air and frost crumbled off the lines as they were moved. The chief of the fuelling crew lumbered down the loading tower ladders with his protective headgear under one arm. Looking like a man dressed for vacuum, he waddled up with his seamless plastic fuelling suit hampering his movements and his big boots clumping on the concrete. "She's topped, Captain. Here are the readings."

"Thank you. Better get your gear stowed and go through decontamination," Olson told him. "You and your boys were up around the red line for quite a while."

The chief technician grinned. "You bet. But my dosimeter says only 80-r."

"Get a wash-down anyway," Tom remarked as he took the checkoff sheets from Olson and proceeded to enter the reaction mass figures.

"C-g looks good, Tom," Olson muttered as he looked over the pilot's shoulder.

"Within six inches. Ship dry weight came out a little low, however. We'd better fig-

ure on adding a few more pounds of lead up forward, but I'll have to figure where. I want that c-g as close as I can get it. The C-sub-m-alpha on this pot is low, and I want to make sure she stays right side up on her way through the atmosphere."

"Dead load is being struck down right now," Olson pointed out. "Prochek is in the ship supervising."

"Get him out of there," Tom snapped. "He has no business fiddling with that. He's got to figure his thrust program on the basis of these figures, and that's a hell of a lot more important right now."

"Take it easy, Tom. You're getting jumpy."

"Getting? *You are!* So was that fuelling chief!" Tom pointed out, his glance darting up at the operations officer. "What are we running? An ulcer factory? This is no time to get nervous, Warren. But ten to one I know what most of the cause is. Let's get Prochek out of that ship and in the bunker until time to go aboard for blast. Let the ground crew do its job without interference . . ."

Not that Tom wasn't a little bit nervous himself, but it was mostly an inner nervousness. He kept glancing at the red checkerboard painted around the stern of the ship. The reactor was hot now. His inexperience with the invisible death which hung around nuclear power plants was, as he knew, the thing that was making him nervous.

Olson was fully qualified to make the final arrangements, so Tom took Prochek by the arm when the engineer came out of the ship. "Come on, Prochek. We've got a few things to check. And I need a cup of coffee."

The engineer held back. "Look, Commander, I have a million things to do out here! I can't take time for a cup of coffee . . ."

"You have your thrust program to work out."

"It's complete. I ran off a series of curves for various loads. All I have to do is feed the proper tape into the thrust controller."

"That's good. But you can still use that cup of coffee and you can help me with the mass distribution calculations while you're drinking it. Come along."

"But . . ."

"But, nothing. If you want an order, I'll give it."

"You can't order me! I'm not one of your space bums! I've got that ship to look out for! I . . ."

"You can do nothing more here. Come along. I want some help. From now on, it's a matter of keeping your water cool, Prochek. You'll eventually learn to trust your ground crews and to make a pre-flight inspection instead of hanging over their shoulders while they try to do their jobs. What's the matter? Don't you trust the people you've trained?"

The pilot disliked having to handle people with kid gloves. But right now, it was just a part of a bigger job. He had put his personal enmities behind him. He was strictly professional now, and his professional manner of calm, cool, precise command further infuriated Prochek who did not and could not understand.

When the time came, Tom found himself sitting across the control deck from the engineer. The sweep hands on the clocks swung around relentlessly. The control deck seemed lonely to him as he went through his pre-boost check list. But there was no large crew here; automatic machinery performed most of the work aboard the *Hiroshima* and allowed the ship to be operated by only two men, a further concession to the shortage of men along the spaceways. Moreover, Tom felt no strong bond with the man who sat across the deck from him; he might as well be driving this one solo.

He went through his procedure methodically. Each of his movements was made with studied precision and sureness. On the other hand, Prochek was nervous and flighty. Tom had expected it.

The old tension was still there, however, both inside and outside the ship. Tom sensed that as he always did. On the control deck, he could throttle his own tension but not the anxiety of Prochek. Nor could he reach out and steady the hands of the men who watched—other pilots, engineers, VIP's, various unnamed people who had worked on this ship, and the other curious onlookers who watched behind the fence and the revettments because they knew something big was about to happen.

"Four minutes," Tom announced to Prochek and over the radio net to the project control bunker.

"Four minutes," a voice echoed in his headphones. "Area is cleared."

There were no ports on the control deck, so Tom switched on the aft TV monitor and

panned it around the area. He was used to relying on vision for this, so he used the monitor more than necessary mainly because it made him feel better.

His board was still switched to TEST, but all function lights were green. In the background, a steady clicking emanated from the control deck radiation counter. He fingered his mike and spoke softly, "White Sands Traffic, this is Space Force XN-1 on the ramp and ready for blast as per filed flight plan. How do you read me? Over."

"Space Force XN-1, this is White Sands Traffic. I read you five-five," another hollow voice came from his headphones. "You are cleared to raise on flight plan. We have your time running at three minutes, thirty seconds. Stand by to receive a green as soon as we clear a chopper hovering over your area . . ."

"Traffic, this is XN-1," Tom snapped back. "Will this cause a hold? Repeat: will this cause a hold? Over."

"Negative, XN-1. Keep time running. The chopper is clearing."

Probably some nitwit news photographer, Tom decided. "Three minutes . . . Mark!" he snapped.

"Three minutes!"

Autopilot tracking. Gyros caged. Ship pressure holding. Radar beacons in solid. Control deck count steady and low. It looked good. But he asked without turning his head, "Prochek, report! How does it look there?"

"Reactor to pre-lift heat," the engineer replied, his voice shaky and high. "We are still topping pressure from the ground."

"Will we have enough aboard by blast?"

"We should."

"Two minutes! Stand by to unlock!"

"Two minutes!" said his headphones.

"XN-1, this is Traffic. You are in the green. You are in the green. Space Station Four reports your beacon is skipping there, but it is solid here. Telemetering is in solid. Over."

"Roger, Traffic, and thank you." Everything looked good, Tom decided. In any event, nobody was taking chances. Critical information on the ship and power plant performance was being telemetered to White Sands, two space stations, and Lunar in order that any disaster could be reconstructed and thence lead to improvements in the next ship. It was not a pleasant

thought, but one Tom could live with.

"All boards to FLY! Engineer, your board is unlocked. Prepare to light off. Sixty seconds . . . Mark!"

"Sixty seconds!"

Tom steadied himself and turned command of the ship over to the autopilot . . . but his hands rested on the manual over-rides. And his mind was trying to reach everywhere in the ship, feeling out the radars by which he would have to astrogate, trying to sense the operation of the strange power plant in the tail, and listening for the normal sounds of operations which were still new to his ears. He was flying this one by the seat of his pants . . . but whoever flew this ship for the first time would have had to do the same.

The amber lights of the linear counter on the autopilot panel were winking out one by one as the final seconds fell away.

The power plant repeater dials before him began to move up, to change, to vibrate. The lights on his Christmas tree winked, some green, some red, some amber, some white. The pattern was familiar and normal.

Then it hit him.

Something was wrong! He didn't know what it was, but something was not right. The instruments before him told him nothing. It was some sort of sixth sense that came to him from his years in deep space.

But he was in a new ship. His mind raged over it, caught in a momentary null of no-decision. Was something really wrong? Or was he just imagining things?

As he frantically tried to make his decision, time ran out on him. The autopilot flashed a big red "O" in his eyes.

The nuclear power plant caught with a sharp blast that was quite unlike the Bronx cheer of a chemical rocket. It was sudden, quick, positive, explosive in its brissance. Its sound was a rip and a scream heard through conduction of the hull members. The gases flung from the stern at velocities measureable only in terms of miles per second piled up against themselves in brilliant shock nodes as bright as the sun. And this pure, raw energy took hold of the *Hiroshima* with a firm hand.

To Tom, it was as though he had stepped onto a rising elevator. There was a sudden slight pressure which persisted. On the monitor screen, he

watched the ship clear her ground tackle with awesome slowness. Water from the pad wash-down sprays blanked the camera lens with rippling sheets of water, and the next thing he saw was the ground falling slowly away. It was a strange sensation for a rocket pilot. He had never watched takeoff before. The *Hiroshima* did not seem to be rising; it was the earth which was moving.

According to his panel presentations and the Christmas tree, everything was working perfectly. The moments after blast for any spaceship are always ones of particular danger, and, even though the *Hiroshima* had not risen very far, a crash from this altitude could completely destroy her. Fingering his mike, he asked Prochek, "Can you give me a preliminary report?"

The engineer had his face buried in the rubber hood of an oscilloscope. He pulled it out in a quick motion to peer at his instruments, then snapped back into the hood. "Reactor performing normally," his muffled voice reached the pilot. "Coolant jacket temperature down just a hair. Mass flow rate off zero-point-four percent. Thrust down a like amount. Now leave me alone until I get some adjustments made!"

Tom pursed his lips, wondering what it had been that had touched him with apprehension just before light-off. Whatever it was, it was too late now. He ran through several emergency procedures in his mind, trying to pick one that might be workable under their present situation of close proximity to the ground. Finally, he touched the talk switch on the mike. "Traffic, this is XN-1. We are under way. Blast was as scheduled. Request permission to clear this frequency and switch to assigned project frequency. Over."

"Roger, XN-1, this is Traffic. You are clear of the area. Radars are in automatic on you, and your signal is solid. Stand by for any further reports on Foxtrot frequency. Traffic clear."

Touching a button on the communications rig, Tom went on, "Needle Project, this is XN-1. How do you read? Over."

"XN-1, this is Needle Project Command Alpha. We read you fiver. Can you give us a preliminary report? Over."

"Command Alpha, lift is proceeding normally," Tom told them in his professional,

bored radio voice. "Z-dot acceleration reading one-point-zero-niner-five. How does our telemetry read? Over."

"Telemetry in solid and confirming your verbal report. Have you any indication of why the mass flow rate and thrust are down?"

"Negative, Command Alpha. Negative."

"Project Command Beta from Lunar requests by relay that the flight engineer take steps to boost thrust level," Command Alpha at White Sands told him.

"Roger, Alpha. Wait one for engineering report. Pilot requests a read-back on trajectory data for cross-check purposes."

There was a moment's pause. The apparently simple trajectory of the *Hiroshima* required a greater degree of tight instrumentation than the more complex flight plans of standard rockets. 1.1 gees doesn't sound like much, but it builds up in a hurry to velocities which strain the best of trajectory determination methods. Ten minutes after blast, the *Hiroshima* was 1,100 miles up and moving with a velocity of 19,000 feet per second. She was rapidly approaching the velocity where, if her motor quit, she would continue to rise forever into space; she would have reached escape velocity.

The men on the ground took their computer readings and transmitted them verbally to Tom. Two of the space stations had picked up their beacon by now, and their information was being fed into the mill. Small corrections were going to be necessary; the gravity field of the Earth is not the constant, perfect field it should be in theory.

While Tom was kept engrossed in his piloting—it was piloting, and *not* astrogation; there's a difference—Prochek worked with his equipment in a frenetic manner. Fifteen minutes after lift, he reported that the minor malfunction of the power plant had been corrected. Then he began to move about, checking this and noting that and writing things down on his clip board.

Finding that he had to stay with the ship almost constantly, Tom paid little attention to what Prochek was doing. He thought to himself, "They need another man here, a real skipper, a man who isn't tied down by details of operation." He made a mental note to include this in his post-flight report. Another thing he would put on the squawk sheet was a complaint about the

chair cushions; they were a little hard on the base of the spine at 1.1 gees after a time.

Velocity was building up quickly, and distance was mounting even faster. He made direct contact with the two space stations which had their radars on him, and worked out his position by radar triangulation both with the small ship computer and by tables. This he compared against the data from the radar interferometers. It checked. There was only one trouble: it was too slow. It told him where he *had* been. He had to extrapolate that into a set of figures that told him where he was at that instant. Something would have to be done about that; the old, slow methods of astrogation and piloting were outstripped with this ship. New methods would have to be incorporated.

He spent nearly seven minutes rechecking the flip maneuver that they would perform under power at the turnover point. It was a complex skew curve, a tricky maneuver that Tom had mastered with the tiny space taxis around space stations, but had never done in a full size ship.

The ship was coming up on X-plus sixty minutes, time for Tom to raise Command Beta on Lunar and time for him to make one of the piloting checks. As he was preparing for this, he suddenly felt his weight drop to zero.

The booming swish of the nuclear power plant fell to silence.

"Emergency One!" Tom yelled, hitting the alarm switch and swooping over his panels in an attempt to discover what was wrong. His first thought was micrometeorites and a series of holes in the reaction mass tanks which would kill the head pressures for the pumps. "Propulsion failure! Prochek! Where are you?" He found he was the only man in the control room.

The little engineer climbed awkwardly through the aft hatch, clinging to every handhold as he went. His face was white and Tom could see that he was trying to keep from retching. Little beads of sweat stood out on his forehead and began to trickle down.

While Prochek was fighting his way to his station under the zero gee that was obviously alien to him, Tom slapped the mike switch. "Command Alpha, this is XN-1. We have experienced a propulsion failure. Repeat: we have experienced a complete propulsion

failure. Ship is now in free orbit. Over."

The voice from White Sands came over his headset slightly garbled by solar static. "Roger, XN-1, we read you. Telemetry indicates failure at fifty-eight minutes, fourteen seconds due to failure of the reactor coolant system which activated the safety shutdowns. Can you confirm? Over."

"Wait one, Alpha." He turned to Prochek. "Well?"

Prochek was holding onto his chair with one hand and working with his power plant instruments and controls with the other. There was no color in his face. "Wait a minute. I—I'm trying to find . . ."

"Wait, hell! We have exactly thirty-two minutes to find that trouble, correct it, and resume thrust again, Prochek!"

The engineer convulsed, then vomited. Tom resisted the momentary impulse to tear the man away from the power plant controls and try to do something himself. But the pilot knew better. He *had* to stand back and let the engineer do his job . . . if he could do it. No drop-sick injections had been put aboard; no one had anticipated that the ship would enter free orbit and have one of the crew fold up. The plain fact that *something* had to be done prompted Tom into action. He swam out of his chair and went over to the engineer. "Prochek! Get hold of yourself, man! Grab that chair and open your eyes! Stare at your controls! Concentrate on them! Calm down and don't jerk your head around! Do as I tell you!"

The autonomic "storm" which causes drop-sickness is, in many ways, psychologically akin to hysteria. And, as in handling hysterics, a sharply given command or other external shock is enough to break it. With a visible effort, Prochek got control of himself. After a moment, he managed to blurt out, "It . . . It's just like falling endlessly!"

"And that's just what we'll do unless you get this stove smoking again!"

Prochek wiped his mouth with an expression of distaste. Then he forced himself to concentrate on his instruments. As he probed for the cause of the failure, his color began to return. His mind was temporarily off his physical miseries, but Tom kept a close watch on him. The pilot had seen many a man panic under similar conditions . . . and panic was *not* the thing

which was most effective right then, not as long as Prochek still had his facilities.

"I—I can't seem to locate . . ."

"It's there! Control Alpha reported telemetry showed the reactor coolant systems," Tom prompted him.

In thirty seconds, Prochek looked up slowly. "Secondary by-pass in the reactor coolant system. That metering valve must have hung up. How much time do I have to fix it?"

With a quick look at the clocks and a mental calculation, Tom told him, "Roughly twenty-nine minutes if we're going to slew the ship and pick up the same boost again."

"I can make it . . . I think. Can you help me into a pressure suit?"

The pilot was taken momentarily aback. "You've never been in deep space before?"

"Never."

"Then why are you asking for a pressure suit? You can't handle one of those things, and you'll never manage to make it aft outside the ship if you haven't done such a thing before." Tom was thinking of the first time he had gone outside. The shock of seeing the vastness of the stellar sphere with its unblinking millions of lights everywhere—above, below, all around—is almost like a nightmare at first. There is absolutely no sense of direction, even with the sun as a reference point, at least not the first time out.

"If we get back from this coffin run I'll practice in a wind tunnel. Meantime, I've got to go outside. That valve can't be reached from inside the ship."

"Is it behind the shielding?"

"Yes."

"Then you can't go back there anyway. The place is hot."

"If I don't stay there longer than fifteen minutes, I can make it."

"Then you won't make it, not in an unfamiliar suit and in free fall to boot," Tom told him bluntly. "Tell me what to do."

Prochek stared at him. Then he shook his head slowly. This made him dizzy, but he kept on, "Get me that suit, Commander. As captain of this ship, you can't go yourself, and you once made it very certain and clear that you were the captain. We haven't got time to sit here and argue, Krause. If I don't go back there and go right now, *we'll lose this ship!*"

Tom got the suit. It was a

quick and dirty job to instruct him on the basic essentials; fledgling spacemen had a full four-week course on the Mark 5 suit that Tom stuffed Prochek into, but the engineer did not need to know the details, only how to stay alive in it for less than thirty minutes.

But the little man still did not look well; the free fall was telling on him. *He must be holding himself with sheer will power!* Tom thought as he observed the engineer's reactions. *He's one of the type who can never get used to free falling!* "Now, if you get into trouble," he told him, "I'll come after you. Don't get free of the ship. Keep a line secured to one of the pad eyes on the hull at all times. Got that?"

Prochek arranged the tools around the belt of the bulky suit which hung in folds around him. His voice came hollowly from the helmet, "Got it. How much time?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Give me a count-down over the radio, will you?"

"Right. And take this dosimeter." The pilot pulled the slender tube out of the charger and clipped it across Prochek's shoulder straps.

After the engineer went out the lock, Tom suited up also, but left his faceplate open. "Command Alpha, this is XN-1," he reported over the command net. "The trouble has been diagnosed as a faulty metering valve. The flight engineer has gone out and back to make repairs. Over."

"This is Command Beta!" Tom recognized Van Noy's voice coming from Lunar. "Prochek is *where?*"

"Prochek is outside and going aft."

"Tom, that unit is lethally hot!"

"Prochek knows it. He has a dosimeter along. He figured he could stay fifteen minutes behind the shield."

"Can I talk to him, Tom?"

"Wait one. I'll patch you over."

"Krause, how much time do I have?" Prochek's voice cut in.

"Sixteen minutes, Prochek. I have you patched in with Beta on Lunar . . ."

"Doug, this is Van Noy! How long have you been aft of Station 357?"

"About a minute."

"Then you've got six minutes left! Whatever gave you the idea that you could stay back there for fifteen minutes and live? That's too long, and you know it!"

"Shut up! Don't bother me with that! I'm taking off the

tail door now to go in for a look . . . There, tail door is off. Wearing this suit is like working in boxing gloves. How is the time?"

"Fifteen minutes to blast, Prochek. Get in there and get out in a hurry. I want a flight engineer to help me land this pot, so pay attention to what Van Noy tells you!"

"Shut up, I'm busy! For the record, that valve looks fine, but the actuating link over to the servo slave has condensed moisture on it. Might be from a small leak in the steam system, but probably was condensed on there on the ground. In the test stand runs, we never ran into this trouble, but the heat transfer out here in vacuum is a lot less. The links are frozen."

"Got some silicone grease?"

"Not this trip," the engineer told Tom. "How much time do I have left before blast?"

"Thirteen minutes. You've been back there for four minutes. How do you feel?"

"Fine! That trip back outside the hull made the whole flight worth it! Damn this suit! I just lost that box wrench, and when I grabbed it bounced out the tail door. I'm going to try the screwdriver on this cotter key . . . Got it! But I'm going to have to break the link if I can. I haven't got the wrench to take it off . . ."

"Twelve minutes, Prochek."

"I'll be out in another five. Let me concentrate on this work instead of the talk . . ."

There was silence over the net for a full minute. Then Tom told the engineer, "Prochek, eleven minutes. I've got to start swinging the ship. Don't let the motion confuse you."

"Doug, this is Van! Get out of that tail! Repeat: *get out now!* You've been back there for six minutes! That's 200-r you've soaked up!"

No answer. Tom snapped, "Prochek, answer me! Are you okay?"

"Yes, yes! There! Got it! I'm on my way out!"

"Don't leave tools back there!"

"Do you think I'm really as crazy as that, Krause? I'm out . . . This damned door won't go back into place! It seems to have warped!"

"Let it hang loose, Prochek!"

"*No, sir!* That door acts as partial shielding while on the ground! Hey! What are you doing to the stars?"

"I'm swinging ship. Don't worry; you won't fall off!"

"It makes me dizzy! Ugh! Nothing to push against!"

"Nine minutes to thrust! You've been back there for eight minutes!"

"Fine! I'm on my way forward! . . . Oops! I've fouled my line! It's under a corner of that tail door!"

"Cut it off!"

"Huh?"

"Cut it off and hold onto the free end!"

"I'll try . . . What is this stuff made of?"

"Nylon with strand steel core."

"I can't dent it with these side cutters!"

"Un-snap from it and swarm along it forward! Don't let go! Eight minutes!"

"Coming forward now. Get ready to cycle that lock when I get through it. Then I would appreciate it if you would help me get out of this iron maiden."

At six minutes to thrust, Prochek was through the lock. By three minutes, Tom had him out of the suit and was towing him forward to the control deck. The pilot folded him into his chair. "Let's get moving! How do you feel?"

"Fine! That view outside the ship is really something! I never realized how big this place is. Uh . . . I'm going to have to light off on a cold unit, Krause."

"Is that bad?"

"No, but it's not good. It may be a little rough, and she may hunt around on the accelerometers for a minute or so until it steadies."

"Okay, smoke it on command, then! We'll have to fly the rest of the way on a combination of dumb luck and radar vectoring anyway."

Two minutes. Tom got busy in a hurry, leaving Prochek to do his own job on the power plant. "Command Beta, this is XN-1," he snapped into the mike. "Failure has been taken care of. We're standing ready to resume power phase." He didn't wait for an answer. With the astrostat, he checked alignment once again, put the autopilot back in control, and, by the grace of many long years of experience in doing the same thing with chemical ships, finished setting up for thrust just in time to chant," "Brace for acceleration! Three . . . two . . . one . . ."

It was a jolt. The power plant built up to thrust almost at once. The 1.1 gees jolted Tom up and down his spine. And it held.

"Fine business, Prochek! She smokes! How are you feeling?"

"Better now that we have a

floor again! Now keep quiet. I've got to nurse this thing along by hand for the next hour."

So did Tom. His autopilot data was now invalid. He piloted, operating from the radar interferometer and the doppler externally and the accelerometers internally. He worked silently.

He had to fly it in to within a hundred kilometers of Dianaport before the ground approach system took command. They came booming down out of the black sky with Tom busy cross-checking their slow descent on automatic by doing a bit of visual conning. It was a good thing he did, too. The ground system computers were geared to ships landing with higher accelerations, and their programs were just a shade off since they tended to hunt slightly on the slow ship. Tom felt the landing jacks touch long before they took the weight of the ship, and he called for a cut.

Only when the ship stopped rocking as the jacks locked up did he realize what he had been through. He felt whipped, beaten, groggy. Sweat was running down his armpits and back under the bulky pressure suit.

Turning to Prochek, he said, "On dirt. Secure all inflight operations . . ."

The engineer nodded glumly.

"Are you *sure* you're all right?" Tom asked anxiously.

The little man nodded, but it was apparent something was wrong. He started to get up from his chair, then sat down again. His face lost color, and, even though they were no longer in free fall, he vomited.

Tom bit his lip. In a single co-ordinated movement, he swung down the access ladder to the lock deck, picked up Prochek's pressure suit, and peered at the dosimeter which he had forgotten.

The dosimeter read 600 roentgens.

"Well?" Tom asked as Van Noy came back into the anteroom.

The scientist dug out his pipe and, in violation of the hospital rules, lit up. "He's sick, Tom."

"I know that. How bad is he? Will he make it?"

Van Noy sat down and crossed his legs. "600-r is a bad dose, Tom. We can always figure on losing about 50 percent of the people who take that much."

"Isn't there anything anybody can do?"

"What's your blood type?"

"Zero, I think."

"He can use it."

"What do they do, run a complete blood exchange?"

"No . . . just keep pumping it to him in hopes they can keep up with the destruction of the blood cells in his body."

Tom stood up. "Where do I go to give it?"

Van Noy motioned to him. "Sit down for right now. There's plenty in the blood bank, for awhile. Besides, you'd go out like a light if you tried to give a quart, Tom. You're almost dead on your feet."

The pilot said nothing.

"Go on to bed, Tom. There's nothing you can do for at least a day."

"I don't think I could sleep."

Puffing slowly on his pipe, Van Noy studied the little rocket pilot. "I was under the impression," he finally said slowly, "that you didn't like Doug Prochek. You did a nice job with him, though. I've got to hand it to you on that count. You made a real team . . ."

Tom shook his head. "We didn't team. Prochek was there because it was the only thing he had in life. I was there because I like to fly rockets. No, we didn't team, Van . . . because of me."

Van Noy raised his gray eyebrows with a querulous look. "I don't understand you, Tom."

"You're not in the Space Force, Van. We aren't geniuses; the Space Force doesn't pay enough or offer the right environment for geniuses or even men with good savvy. Space Force pay is only a gratuity against the day when a man is expected to give up his life out there. That's why they say you've got to be crazy to be a rocket man in this outfit. I didn't team with him because I've been in the Force too long, and I've developed the prevalent dislike and distrust of anybody who's a 'brain.'

"Scientist? To those of us who herd heaps of sky junk around, scientists are those ivory-tower boys who sit and dream up the stuff that we have to eventually work the bugs out of to make it practical. We don't trust the stuff that comes out of the labs, Van. We never have. And we don't trust the people; we think they're odd."

"They are, you know."

"Yes, but aren't we all? I don't know a thing about Prochek other than what I've learned about him in the past few weeks. I still don't like him, but I do respect him,

Van. He's different, but he's still a human being just like me. It was a rather rude awakening, believe me."

"Did you ever wonder, Tom, why I chose Doug for this project?" Van Noy suddenly broke in. A nurse scuttled down the corridor next to the waiting room, threw a frown at Van Noy and his pipe, thought better of it, and went on her way. "He's temperamental, vitriolic, and nervous. But he's the best man we had . . ."

"Because he loved that ship like a woman," Tom put in.

"Yes, he did. But to understand why, you have to appreciate the fact that it's the only thing he has."

"Why? What makes him so devoted?" Tom wanted to know. As far as he was concerned, a spaceship was a beautiful piece of equipment that would do what he wanted it to do and take him to the strange, alien places which were fast becoming the new ports of call on a new frontier.

"He got a good heavy dose like this once before, Tom. About 450-r's worth. It did things to him . . ."

"Oh . . ."

"That ship was his life because everything else is futile for him, Tom. It's something almost on the subconscious level with him."

"I wish someone had told me sooner. It helps explain the man."

Van Noy shrugged and dug out another match for his pipe, which had gone out in the interim. "It wouldn't have done much good. I'm not a student of human personality, Tom, but people don't readily accept the fact that a man is what he is because of external forces which make him that way, regardless of whether he likes it or not. It's always the other way around; the man himself gets blamed for what he is. Most people won't even give him E for Effort in trying to overcome it . . ."

The nurse that had shuttled down the corridor a few minutes before returned to the waiting room. Van Noy watched her, expecting to be read off for an infraction of the rules as only a hospital nurse can do it. But the woman merely said without eyeing the pipe, "Mr. Prochek has asked to see a Commander Krause. Do you know him, Dr. Van Noy?"

"He's right here," the scientist said, indicating the pilot.

"Would you come along please, sir?"

Tom followed the nurse

down the corridor. The hospital in Dianaport was much like any hospital anywhere else—long, quiet corridors, silent doors, nurses and internes shuffling quickly and quietly up and down, and the ever-present smell of ether, antiseptics, and disinfectants. The nurse led him through a door, and he saw Prochek.

The engineer looked even more pale under the white lighting. A bottle of deep red fluid was hung over the bed with a yellowish tube leading down and under the sheets. Tom stepped over next to the bed. "Hello," he said flatly, searching for something to say. "You did a good job out there . . ."

Prochek grinned weakly. "But it rather knocked me for a loop. Looks like I'll be in here for a bit, Commander. I just wanted to make sure you'd take good care of the ship."

"Sure, I will, Prochek. Don't worry about it. The *Hiroshima*'s a sweet chariot, believe me, to have only one malfunction on a maiden voyage. You're damned right I'm going to take care of her."

"Good. I'll be back, so don't let anybody get welded to that flight engineer's chair."

Prochek's grin softened, turned shy. "It's kind of funny, Commander. After a while a ship like the *Hiroshima* becomes human—in your mind that is—comes to life. You've—you've almost got to be in love with her." He flushed suddenly. "That sounds pretty silly, doesn't it?"

Tom grinned back. "I can't speak for anybody else but to me it's the most sensible statement I've heard today."

THE END

CALL ME ZOMBIE!

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

Phil Marsh came home to find a new set of laws. No man his own master; no freedom; no individuality. A world of puppets. So Phil had a mission—to find the puppeteer.

THE troop-train let Phil Marsh off at Grand Central, and he stood in the midst of a jostling mob of his ex-buddies, wondering whether to call Marylin or not. She wasn't expecting him until Friday; it was only Wednesday, now.

Someone nudged him. Harry Davenport. "Let's go get a beer," Davenport said. "Our first as civilians again."

"No. My wife—"

"Your wife can wait. She isn't figuring on having you come home till Friday, anyway. Give the gal a decent amount of time to say goodbye to her boy friends, huh? What's a few more minutes?"

Marsh scowled. "I don't like jokes like that—"

"Jakes? Who knows?" Davenport said. "Strange are the ways of servicemen's wives."

Marsh heaved his duffel-bag higher on his shoulder and glared coldly at Davenport. He and Davenport had been drafted around the same time and had spent two years in the same outfit; still, Marsh felt he hardly knew the tall, hard-faced man at his side. And suddenly he didn't want to know him any more. There was something *about* Davenport—

"So? You coming for a beer with me?"

"The hell with a beer. I'm going home. I haven't seen my wife in two years, and I can't get home soon enough."

Davenport's cold eyes twinkled. "I'm warning you, you better call first. You never can tell what you'll find if you

What evil genius was running the show?

come popping in on her like that!"

There wasn't room in the crowd for Marsh to hit him. Angry, he shouldered his way through the mob, went past the cotton-candy booths and the newsstands, found fifteen cents in his pocket and bought a token. At least *that* hadn't changed; they were talking about raising the fare to twenty cents, but they hadn't.

The new fluorescents made the IRT track incredibly bright and airy, though they showed up all the dirt. Marsh stood all the way into Brooklyn, got off at his old station, walked the familiar five-block walk to his house. It all looked pretty much the same, though he didn't recognize any of the kids playing out in front.

He paused for a moment outside the house, fumbling through his civilian belongings for his house-key, still angered at what Davenport had said.

He knew Marylin better than that. Grinning in anticipation of her surprise, he ran up the stairs, jiggled the key into the lock, and opened the door.

"Hey! Guess who's home, Marylin! I—" His voice died away.

She was standing in the middle of the floor, stock-still, eyes open, mouth gaping, looking very much like a department-store-dummy version of herself. Marsh had never seen anyone so dead-looking and yet so alive.

It was as if she had been turned off when he went away—and hadn't been turned back on yet.

No more than a fraction of a second passed before she was awake and smiling warmly, but that fraction of a second was enough. Life flowed back into her; the change was apparent. But Marsh felt a cold chill as she skipped across the floor to wrap herself jubilantly around him.

"Phil! Phil! You said Friday, and it's only Wednesday! Darling, I was going to have the place all fixed up to surprise you, with ribbons and streamers and things—but I guess this is a much better surprise—isn't it?"

"Of course," he said, without any warmth at all. His mind kept going back to the thing he'd seen when he opened the door—the puppet-Marylin who'd awakened into the real one when she realized he was watching her.

He couldn't help thinking of Davenport's warning—*you never can tell what you'll find*

if you come popping in on her like that. Maybe, Marsh thought, Davenport hadn't been talking about possible infidelity. Maybe it was something uglier and deeper and more horrible than that.

Marylin's hand brushed his cheek lightly. "I can't believe you're really back. My mind is sort of geared to Friday—I was counting the days and the hours and tomorrow I was going to start counting the minutes."

"They processed us through quicker. That was all there was to it. The Friday discharges gained two days—and we even get paid for them!" Marsh tried to smile, but the thought of—*that*—dampened his lightheartedness.

"You seem strange," Marylin said. "Cold . . . almost frightened. Is there something wrong? Darling, two years . . . I hope they didn't do anything to you!"

He jerked out of his strange mood with an effort. "No—it's just being home, that's all. And thinking." He looked around. "The place is fixed up nice. You've been taking care of it for me."

And it looks just the way it did when I went away. Complete to the cigarette-ashes in the ashtray, and the dishes in the sink.

Like a stage-set, he thought weirdly. *Stage-sets don't change unless someone changes them.*

"There's beer in the icebox," Marylin said. "Your favorite brand. I was stocking up for Friday."

"Let's go have some, then. My throat feels pretty dry."

He followed her into the kitchen. He was remembering something else, now—a long discussion he had had with Harry Davenport, a year or so back. He had forgotten about it. But now, as if triggered, it rose to the front of his mind.

It wasn't long after Basic, and they had been stationed in Germany on a do-nothing post where the chief activity was drinking the dark German beer (very tasty) and ogling the passing German frauleins (very hefty).

Marsh and Davenport had had an afternoon to kill in Hamburg; they were serving as chauffeurs for some of the brass, and while the high-level conference went on across the street the chauffeurs were free to cool their heels until wanted.

They were in one of those German combination hotel-bars and pickup-joints, drinking authentic Bock beer and

saying very little. Marsh hadn't been in the Army long enough to be used to the idea of being separated from his wife, and he was lonely and not very talkative. Being with Davenport didn't help; the big man always seemed half a million miles away and frosty as the top of Everest. Marsh knew hardly anything about him, despite constant contact with him.

But then a German girl came waddling along, the kind who looked to have grown fat and healthy on a diet of sauerbraten and beer. She was young—twenty-five or thereabouts—and might have been pretty with fifty less pounds aboard. Marsh stared broodingly at her. Her fat smiling face bore no sign of intelligence.

And after her came another, and another. Pleasant plump girls who seemed to be cut from a cookie-tin.

"Look at them," he said. "Waddling along ten or twenty an hour, and all of them alike. Like so many puppets without strings, moving along a fixed path and not knowing what the hell for. Damn, I'm getting philosophical in my old age, huh?" He swilled down more of the dark, rich beer.

But Davenport looked at him, cold amusement in his face. "Maybe they are."

"Huh? Are what?"

"Puppets. Like you said."

Marsh shook his head in confusion. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's an old theory of mine. That most of the world's people are *golems*—dummies, with no real life of their own. That just a few of us are really alive, and the rest of us just toys, playthings to give an appearance of reality to the world surrounding the real few."

A gust of cold wind blew suddenly into the streetside cafe. Marsh shivered a little. "Dummies? Puppets?"

"Yeah. Why not?"

"Of course," Marsh said, "*We're* among the real people, you and me. Or else we would never be talking about it like this."

Davenport chuckled. "I don't know about you. But *I'm* real."

That conversation, nothing but a beery bit of time-passing speculation then, now took on a sharp-focussed immediacy.

Marylin was bustling around the kitchen, taking two cans of beer from the refrigerator, opening them (a little spray of beer frothed up

at her, the way it always did), pouring them carefully, so as not to put heads on them, into the tall pilsener glasses Marsh had bought one day about three years before.

She looked real.

The freshness of her smile, the whiteness of her teeth, the trim little figure and the yellow-brown hair—

Real?

Or the work of an ingenious puppet-master?

Sweat beaded Marsh's face. He said, "Marylin—when I came through the door a little while ago—I thought there was something funny about the way you looked."

"Funny? Why, what could you mean?" She efficiently cleared away the empty beer cans and set Marsh's drink on the table before him.

He groped for words. "I mean—you looked sort of *vacant.* Like an empty body someone had hung up to dry. I almost got the feeling you had been standing like that for two years, ever since I was drafted. That you've just been carefully designed as a toy for me. That you aren't real at all, Marylin. Not *really* real."

She looked searchingly at him. "Phil, let me touch your forehead. You must have caught something when you were overseas. Malaria, or something that affects the brain."

He shook her hand away.

Maybe I am *crazy,* he thought. *Brain-fever. This is no way to be talking to my wife ten minutes after coming home from Germany.*

But Davenport's mocking words bit into him, drifting back clear and sharp.

He sipped his beer.

"Phil—"

"Eh?"

"Those things you said a minute ago. You were kidding, weren't you? It's just some crazy thing, some joke you heard overseas. About being *real.*"

"Oh—yeah, sure. Sure, kid. Don't listen to me too seriously. The sight of you makes me a little slaphappy, that's all."

But he was thinking: *If there's just a few of us real ones and Marylin's only a puppet, I ought to be able to turn her on and off whenever I felt like it. What good's a toy you can't turn on and off?*

He thought about it a while. Turned it over six different ways in his mind, while Marylin carried away the empty beer glasses, washed them, moved around the kitchen tidying things up. She looked real, lovely, desirable.

He decided to test it.

"Marylin?"

"Yes, Phil?"

"*Stop*. Just stop. Freeze. I'm turning you off like the puppet you are. Pretend I never came back from the Army. Pretend you're still frozen here, waiting for me."

He expected her to giggle scornfully, or to get angry, or to react in any one of the ways Marylin would react to such a ridiculous request. But she didn't do any of those things, though.

She froze.

One minute she was Marylin, smiling, breathing, lovingly grinning at him. A minute later she was the slackjawed empty thing he had seen when he came in, rigid, vacant-eyed, drained of all life and personality and motion.

He walked up to the thing that had been his wife and gently touched her forehead. It was cold. The warmth that had been Marylin was just part of the illusion.

Illusion. He felt chilled.

"Come out of it," he said hoarsely. "Wake up, Marylin. Unfreeze."

It was as if a light-switch had been turned; she awoke, life flowing back into her.

"What was that you said, Phil? I'm afraid I didn't quite hear yo—"

"*Freeze.*"

She froze again. On, off. Flick, flick. Just a puppet.

Marsh walked to the window and looked outside. It was just an ordinary Brooklyn afternoon, kids coming home from school, a punchball game going on in the street, a young mother rocking her baby to sleep across the way where it was sunny, a policeman directing traffic at the big intersection up ahead.

He looked back at the empty Marylin. He wondered how much of the world was illusion, how much real. He wondered how he had stumbled into this nightmare.

I would have been better off if I never met that devil Davenport, he thought bitterly. *He started me thinking about this. If I hadn't started it I'd still be happy, still have Marylin. And the whole damned world.*

Almost without knowing what he was doing he slipped on a jacket that had hung in his closet two years, walked past the frozen Marylin-thing, past his abandoned duffel-bag, and out the door. He didn't bother locking it.

He started down the stairs. A creaking sound came from below, and a fat figure round-

ed the balustrade on the second floor. Mrs. Giovanetti, the landlady.

Her round little eyes beamed as she caught sight of him. "Why, Mr. Marsh! You weren't supposed to be back till Friday, and I was going to bake a cake for—"

"Freeze," he said. "Turn yourself off."

Mrs. Giovanetti seemed to slump into herself and stood lumplike on the stairs like a potato sack. Shuddering, Marsh walked around her and continued on down. He wished he *had* come back on Friday. If he hadn't caught Marylin by surprise that way, this wouldn't be happening.

He came out into the bright clean sunlight. A boy and a dog came by: the boy about eight, dirty-faced, the dog a wire-haired terrier that didn't like being held on its leash.

"Hey, kid."

"Yeah, mister?"

"I'm tired of you. Stop being alive."

The boy became a statue of a boy. And the terrier stopped straining at the leash and froze, just like that, leaning forward with its tongue half out.

Marsh kept going.

The delivery boy bringing up the groceries—a pimple-faced teenager who was probably worrying about the draft himself. Marsh froze him, extracted the pseudo-life with a word.

The policeman waving the cars on became a blue-clad statue. The cars obediently stopped; Marsh stepped off the sidewalk and came over to the driver of the first car.

He was a balding man in his fifties. He leaned out the open window and Marsh froze him. A Buick behind them started to honk. Marsh made the honking stop.

A cold sort of numbness grew in him as he moved on down the block, heading toward the subway. His feet were taking him on; he had no idea of where he was going, or why. But it took just a word to drain life from the puppets he met.

At the corner newsstand, an old woman was sitting behind a stack of newspapers. Marsh put down a dime, picked up a paper, and froze her. He took back his dime. The newspaper had all the usual news, the crises and the Presidential statements, the UN debates and the baseball scores. The Dodgers were in third place, battling for second. The President was returning from his vacation, smiling, tanned, healthy-looking.

"Is it all a game?" Marsh asked out loud. "Played out for my benefit only? *Am I the only real one?"*

It looked that way.

"What's that, Mister?" a passing truckdriver asked. "You got troubles?"

Marsh froze him too.

He moved on . . . on through this world of stringless puppets that danced out their dramas for him. He wondered if it went on this way all over the world, or just where he was. He had been in Germany, seen the frauleins and gulped the bock beer. Was Germany frozen in pseudo-death now that he was in America? For that matter, did people freeze every time he looked the other way?

There wasn't any way of finding that out, he thought.

I'm the only one that's real. In the whole damned world.

It was a shocking, numbing realization.

He reached the subway; busy shoppers jostled past him as if they didn't know he could stop them in their tracks with a word, or perhaps a thought or a sour look. Marsh scooped change out of his pockets and scowled when he saw he had no tokens. The line at the change-booth was ten or twelve people long.

But there was an easy solution. He moved up the line, freezing them as he went, and reached the front. The change-booth keeper was staring popeyed at him.

"You can freeze too," Marsh said. He reached into the booth and took a token for himself. What did stealing fifteen cents matter now? What did *anything* matter?

It was like moving through a world of soap-bubbles that popped at his command.

The uptown express came along, crowded. Marsh stepped inside and rode silently to Manhattan, listening to the conversations going on all around him, to the flapping of mouths with no meaning intended. Bitterly he glanced from one face to another. Behind the flickering eyes, behind the faces and the smiles—*nothing*, he thought. *Just emptiness.*

The train arrived at Grand Central. Marsh stepped out, stuck his head back into the train, and said, "I'm tired of all of you. *Stop!"*

Conversation died away. Marsh left the train, conscious of the trail of demolition he was leaving behind him, knowing that none of it mattered at all.

It was funny, he thought, how your world could fall

apart like this. Your nice, normal world, with a pretty wife and a house in Brooklyn and your army discharge papers in your pocket, becoming nothing but puppettry and illusion. Soap-bubbles.

He stepped out of the subway station at Madison and 42nd. Traffic whizzed by; busy people were heading home for dinner. The streets were jammed.

Marsh cupped his hands and yelled, "Anyone who can hear this, *stop!* I order you! Me!"

Within a radius of twenty feet or so, all life stopped. He was surrounded by a circle of statues, of tree-trunks that had been people.

He walked down 42nd, heading westward, stopping all life as he went. The spectacle of New York's busiest street silent, lifeless, clotted with New Yorkers frozen where they stood, was awesome, almost terrifying.

For what? Why was all this done? he asked. *And am I the only real one?*

Times Square was thronged with people, thousands of them ebbing forward toward the subway kiosks. A barker was huckstering for a sightseeing tour of the city. With sudden inspiration, Marsh froze him and snatched his megaphone from his numb hands.

Veins stood out on Marsh's throat as he yelled his command to the thousands in Times Square. And they began to stop; the toys ceased moving.

All except one.

Marsh waited, and a nerve in his cheek began to quiver. A tall, casual-looking man was weaving his way through the clusters of stiffened pedestrians, his face grim, his lips clamped together.

It was Harry Davenport.

Marsh let the megaphone drop and waited for Davenport to approach.

"Look here, Marsh—you can't go about doing this! You're wrecking the whole show! I've followed you up all the way from Brooklyn. Do you have any idea how much confusion you've caused?"

"It's your fault," Marsh said accusingly. "If you hadn't kept that mouth of yours shut—"

"Oh, come now."

"Don't give me that! If you had shut up, I wouldn't ever have found out about this! The world was a nice place. I liked it. And now look what you've done!"

"Couldn't you always turn everyone back on again,

Marsh? It's no harder than turning them off."

Marsh scowled unhappily. "And could I live with them any more, knowing they were all just puppets? No, Davenport. I'll turn the whole damned puppet show off." He waved his arms, encompassing all of Times Square. "The whole world will be just as frozen and as dead as Times Square. Dammit, this didn't have to happen."

Davenport said, "You made it happen. You didn't have to take me seriously."

"Well, I did. And I'll turn *you* off too. Go on—freeze!"

Marsh waited. But Davenport did not freeze. He continued to frown grimly, to breathe, to blink his eyes.

"It didn't work," Marsh said. "You're the first one it hasn't worked on. That means—you must be real, too! So I have to share the world with you? How many of us are there, Davenport?"

The tall man shook his head sadly. "Only about a dozen, Marsh. We found out about . . . things, and we created things for our own amusement. We didn't expect you to become so violent when you found out the truth. But your destructiveness has been, in its way, amusing. We tire of it, though."

"So what? What can you do to stop me?"

"A great deal." Davenport looked very sad. "There are different levels of realness, Marsh. The lowest you see around you—people with no life of their own, who can be turned on and off at will. Then there are those who are truly real. And then a third kind, intermediate, whom we create for special diversion. Such as you. But you've overdone your job. We can't have you upsetting everything."

"Me? You're crazy!" Marsh burst out. "I'm just as real as you are, and—"

He never finished the sentence. Shrugging his shoulders sadly, Davenport spoke the words that would turn Marsh off.

THE END

TRAVELING MAN

By HENRY SLESAR

Teleportation means going some place instantly—not waiting for a train or a bus or even a jet-transport. It's easy to see what that would do to the transportation barons but we're more concerned with what would happen to the passengers. Take Mel Purvey. Teleportation landed him, stark naked, in a police station, wearing the label of sex maniac. And Mel just wasn't that kind of a fellow.

MEL PURVEY leaned over the zoo railing and exchanged sympathetic glances with Rudolph, his favorite lion. Rudolph was getting used to Mel by now. They shared a silent communion every lunch hour, recognizing in each other the same caged, despairing spirit.

"Poor fella," Mel sighed. "I know just how you feel."

There was a spiritual brotherhood between the man and the beast, but there were differences, too. Rudolph was thick in the chest and shoulders, and Mel was short and frail. Rudolph's mane was lush and golden; Mel's was mouse-brown and stiff as a hairbrush. Rudolph's sad eyes dreamt jungle dreams; Mel's eyes dreamt of all the world.

He sighed, and turned away from the cage. It was after one o'clock, and the Barbizon Magic Novelty & Supply Company, where Mel was employed as assistant sales manager, was firm about office hours. He quickened his pace down the road that led out of the park to 59th Street, walking so fast that he barely heard the voice of Tina Temple, calling out to him.

"Say, wait a minute!" Tina laughed, holding down the white beret on her head and running after him. "What's your hurry, Mel?"

"Hi," Mel said weakly. He was uncomfortable with Tina, ever since his marriage to Lois Livermore. Mel had dated Tina for almost two years before Lois came into view and changed his ideas about women. Tina was pretty, bright-

eyed, and diminuitively sexy. But when Lois entered Mel's life, Tina's radiance dimmed. Tina was popcorn, and Lois was caviar. Tina in a sweater had the charm of a coed cheerleader. But Lois in a sweater—

"What's the big hurry?" Tina repeated. "Wasn't Rudolph in his cage?"

"Oh, he was there, all right," Mel said. He had confessed his secret communion only to Tina; not even Lois knew about it. "I tossed him some nougat. He's still crazy about it."

"One of these days they'll arrest you for feeding that animal. But I think it's rather sweet."

"Well, he deserves some fun. Caged up like that, wishing he could go back to the jungle—"

"Same old Mel. Still dreaming of far-off places. I thought marriage would change you." She looked at him wistfully.

"Nothing'll change me," Mel said bitterly. "I better get back to the office, Tina. I can hear the whip cracking."

He entered the Barbizon Company building meekly, and the receptionist frowned meaningfully at the clock. When he reached his own cubbyhole, a six-foot square cluttered with desk, filing cabinet, and swivel chair, he shut the door behind him and pretended to be immersed in work. But the gray walls, as usual, began to move in on him. Mel gasped claustrophobically, and threw open the door again, just in time to startle the man who was poised to knock.

"Oh, pardon me," Mel blinked.

"Quite all right," the man said. He was tall and ascetically thin, his long head hairless and smooth as a plum. He smiled ingratiatingly, and introduced himself as "Omar Ferguson. You're Mr. Purvey, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I telephoned you this morning. I'm from Ferguson's Fun Shop."

"Of course," Mel said. "Won't you come in and have a seat?"

The tall man looked around the tiny office, and managed to jacknife himself into the armless wooden chair alongside Mel's desk. He put the suitcase he was holding on his lap, and folded his bony hands over it.

"Well, sir," Mel said, "I'm sure we can be of service to you. As I told you, the Barbizon Company carries the most complete line of magic stunts,

This would be a very short trip—right into the pool.

tricks, novelties, party favors—"

"Yes, I know. I have the catalogue." Omar Ferguson beamed at him, and took something out of the suitcase. Mel stared when he saw it. It was the Barbizon catalogue, all right, but the oldest, moldiest, dustiest, dogeared catalogue he had seen in all his life. The pages were crackling and yellow, the illustrations faded, the print almost illegible. Mel peered at the cover. It was the very latest edition. But what had happened to it?

"My," he laughed feebly. "You need a new catalogue."

"This? Oh, yes. I suppose it isn't in very good condition." The tall man chuckled, almost to himself. "But it'll do. I'm particularly interested in the items I've checked. The Chop-A-Man's-Head-Off Trick. The Bending Teaspoon. The Rubber Chocolates. The Abracadabra Marked Deck. The El Bango Cigars. The Vanishing Panties. The Rope Trick—"

Mel began jotting down the items as Ferguson reeled them off. When the list was completed, the length was extraordinary. He totaled up the wholesale value, and said:

"That's one thousand dollars and fourteen cents. Two percent off for cash, of course. I'll make out the order."

"Oh, dear." The owner of Ferguson's Fun Shop suddenly looked distraught. "I just remembered something."

"What's that?"

"I can't pay for these things."

"Can't pay? I don't understand."

"I didn't bring any money with me. Just a few uranies in my pocket, but I don't suppose they have any value here."

"What are uranies?"

"These." Ferguson reached into his pocket and extracted three coin-shaped bits of metal. Mel examined the strange markings on them, and read the numbers 2173, 2154, 2179.

"They look like coins," he said.

"Exactly," Ferguson nodded. "They are not, however, negotiable in your time. Of course, they may have some value as a curiosity. Sort of antiques in reverse." He giggled. "Antiques are my hobby, you see. When I stumbled across your catalogue in that old shop in New New York, I simply had to timeflop myself here. I suppose there'll be a terrible rumpus on the Other Side about it, but I simply couldn't resist. Chop-A-Man's-Head-Off Trick! Delicious!"

Mel Purvey listened to this monologue without grasping its essentials. When it finally penetrated, he slid his chair back and trailed a hand towards the telephone. He had met screwballs before, but Omar Ferguson looked and talked like the President of them all.

"Oh, dear," the stranger said, seeing Mel's predicament. "I suppose I've said too much. You see, this is my first timeflop, and I don't know my way around. Besides, the Bootleggers arranged this trip for me. Highly illegal, of course, but a *real* collector will dare anything. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Not exactly," Mel choked. "You mean you're from the future?"

"Ferguson's Fun Shop, founded 2048, the oldest magic and novelty shop in New New York. But I'm afraid my trip has been in vain. If you *insist* on cash payment for this merchandise—" His face suddenly brightened. "Unless you'd care to make a trade?"

"Trade? What kind of trade?"

"Well, I have a suitcase full of things. Nothing terribly valuable, but you might enjoy having them. The Little Jiffy Watermaker, for instance. Indispensable for desert travel. Interested in that?"

"I don't think so," Mel said, mouth open.

"Steak pellets? Pocket clothes-presser? Solar energizer? Teleportable?"

"Teleportable? Tell me, what is that?"

"Wonderful device. Entirely replaced the automobile, you know. You simply *think* of the place you want to go, and there you are. Here." Ferguson reached into his shirt collar to extract an octagonal metal disc, about the size of a half-dollar, strung on a thin gold chain. He took it off and handed it to Mel. "Its retail value is quite high on the Other Side. I'm sure it will be a fair trade."

Mel jiggled it in his hand. "You mean I can go *anywhere* with this thing around my neck? Just by *thinking* myself there?"

"Of course. You can try it out if you like. Just hold it firmly in your hand, close your eyes, and think."

Mel looked skeptical, but slipped the chain around his neck.

"You'll come right back, won't you?" Ferguson said. "I don't have very much time."

"Sure," Mel said. He grasp-

ed the disc with his right hand, shut his eyes, and thought hard about the zoo he had visited that noon hour.

When he opened them, he was looking into Rudolph's surprised face. The lion set up a roar of bewilderment that brought a zookeeper running towards the scene.

"What the hell," Mel said, looking around him wildly. The zookeeper was shouting something about annoying the animals, and Rudolph was whimpering fearfully in his corner. Mel grasped the octagonal disc again, shut his eyes, and thought. When he opened them again, he was back in the office chair.

"It's amazing!" he gasped.

"Ah," Ferguson nodded.

"I was at the zoo! Just like that!"

"I'm glad you're pleased. Then is it a trade?"

"You bet it is!" Mel bent over the desk and began making out the order. He was so excited, he ignored completely the fact that he was trading merchandise that didn't belong to him. "Where do you want the shipment?"

"Just have them send it to the Hotel Gramaphone, Room 404. I'll be there all day."

"I'll call the stockroom," Mel Purvey said, in a happy daze.

It was hard for Mel to control his impulses throughout the rest of his workday. The little octagonal disc swung on his neck temptingly, but he resisted. He left the office promptly at five, and treated himself to a taxi ride home.

When he let himself into his three-room apartment in Queens, he almost giggled aloud with anticipation. Wait 'til Lois heard about the Teleportable!

But before he had the chance to tell her, Lois said:

"For Pete's sake! It's only five-thirty! What the hell are *you* home for?"

She frowned at him from an imperious height. Lois was half a head taller than Mel, even in her bedroom slippers. She clutched the houserobe around her stunning figure and tapped her foot angrily.

"I'm sorry, sweetie," Mel said. "But I couldn't wait to get home tonight. I have the most terrific news—"

"Well, I've got news for you, too. I've been feeling perfectly *lousy* all day, so don't expect anything to eat."

"Gosh, I'm sorry to hear that, Lois. But wait 'til you hear—"

"What's more, I promised Adelaide that I'd come down to her apartment tonight for

an hour or so. I didn't expect you until seven. And if you think I'm going to disappoint her—"

"No, of course not," Mel said, crestfallen. "But if you could just wait a few minutes—"

"Say, what's all the excitement? You didn't get a raise or something, did you?"

"No—"

"I thought not. Well, whatever it is, we can talk about it later." She went to the door and opened it. "Tuna fish," she said.

"What?"

"There's some tuna fish in the cupboard. Help yourself."

"All right, sweetie."

Mel wandered into the living room when she was gone, and had to push aside a collection of newspapers, underclothes, ashtrays, candy wrappers, and movie magazines to sit down on the sofa. He sighed deeply, and fingered the little octagonal disc around his neck. He wanted to tell *somebody* his good news, but he had so few friends.

Then he had an idea. He grasped the Teleportable, shut his eyes, and thought about the Crow's Nest . . .

". . . Hey, buster! Stop shoving!"

The burly man in the leather jacket glared at him. Mel blinked, and looked around the barroom. He was wedged between two truck-drivers, and both of them were looking at him murderously.

"Where'd *he* come from?" the other man said. If anything, he was burlier and beefier than his friend.

"I dunno. You know these skinny little guys. They sneak in on you, like those little foreign cars." He laughed loudly, and shoved Mel out of the way. They continued their conversation, and Mel went to the other side of the bar.

"Hi, Harry," he said to the bartender.

"Hiya, pal! Ain't seen you in months!"

"Not since June," Mel said sadly. "I got married in June."

Harry nodded understandingly. "What'll it be, Mr. Purvey? The usual?"

"Of course."

Harry turned to the gleaming formation of bottles in back of the bar. He returned, frowning and shaking his head.

"Sorry, Mr. Purvey. All out of Old Curiosity. They gotta shortage on the stuff. Ain't seen a bottle for weeks."

"Shortage?"

"Yeah. The salesman told

me they ain't shippin' the stuff from Scotland no more. How about some Black and Tan?"

"No, thanks," Mel said gloomily. "You know how I feel about Old Curiosity. Best damn whiskey in the whole world . . ." Then a small dawn broke over his features. "Hey, I know! I'll bring back a bottle from Scotland!"

"You'll what?"

"I'll go to Scotland and bring back a bottle. Right now. It comes from a little distillery in the lowlands, place called Kinchiespey. So long, Harry—"

"But Mr. Purvey!"

Mel reached into his shirt and withdrew the Teleportable. He grasped it firmly, closed his eyes, and thought about heather and bagpipes and peat bogs and . . .

. . . he was standing on the rise of a low-lying hill, looking down at a collection of rude wooden buildings, dominated by a faded sign that said: KINCHIESPEY. There was a river flowing picturesquely behind it, the long funnels of the distillery reflected in the smooth-running waters.

"Scotland!" Mel breathed, looking around him in wonderment. Night had already fallen here, and the moon was bright.

He trotted happily down the hillside to cover the distance to the doorway of the central distillery building. A workman in grimy clothes put down the barrel he was holding and said:

"What kin I do for ye?"

"Pardon me. I was looking for—I mean, I wonder if you can tell me where I can get a bottle of Old Curiosity?"

"Are ye daft, mon? This is Kinchiespey Distillery. If ye want to drink, gae to the tavern!"

"You don't understand," Mel said. "I'm from America, and we're not getting any Old Curiosity any more—"

"O'course not!" the night watchman chuckled. "Old mon McWillikers won't send another *drap* to ye. Not since his daughter run off wi' that Hollywood mon. He's swore to cut America off for good!"

"Really? What a shame—it's my favorite whiskey. Where is old man McWillikers? Maybe I can talk him out of it."

"Small chance o' that. But if ye want to know where he is, gae to McWillikers Castle. Over there."

He waved his hand towards a stone building, squat and turreted, on a distant hill. It

didn't look much like the castles in Mel's storybook memory, but he shut his eyes, grasped the Teleportable, and thought about it.

"Hey!" the watchman cried. But by this time, Mel was . . .

. . . standing in front of an open fireplace, in a great damp room hung with armor and huge banners, the firelight throwing weird, jumping shadows on the floor.

The old man in the rocking chair leaped up, white as an undershirt. His broad craggy face looked frightened and guilty at the same time, and his enormous white mous-taches quivered.

"W-w-w-here?" he said, his eyes rolling around the bridge of his nose. "Where did *you* come from?"

"Don't be scared, Mr. McWillikers. I'm Mel Purvey, and I'm from America—"

"America! I should ha' known it! Scarin' a old man half out o' his wits. What are ye doin' in my house?"

"Listen, Mr. McWillikers, I just came over to get a bottle of Old Curiosity. It's sort of a favorite of mine, and the man at the distillery told me that you weren't shipping it to the United States anymore—"

"Not another drap!" the old man stormed. "Not another drap to that miserable place! Not until my daughter come home! You hear me? Not until Annie come home!"

"Where's Annie now, Mr. McWillikers?"

The old man's face went grave, and he sank feebly back into his rocker. "Some Godforsaken place called Hollywood. It was an American took her away from her puir father."

"What American?"

"His name's Gilbert Gilberry. Him and his movin' picture people came to Kinchiespey last month. They were makin' a movie called *Scotch on the Rocks*, and they gave Annie a wee part. The next thing I know, she's talkin' about goin' to Hollywood, to be another Greer Garson or somebody. I forbid her! But she left me anyhow." He wiped his eyes. "The puir lass! I'd give anything to have her wi' me again."

"Gee, that's too bad," Mel said earnestly. "Maybe I can help, Mr. McWillikers."

"Help? How?"

"Maybe I can bring her back home."

McWilliker's eyes brightened. "Ye do that for me, lad? I'd be grateful to ye forever! I'd supply ye with Old

Curiosity for the rest o' your life!"

Mel was beginning to enjoy this. "Well, I'll try, Mr. McWillikers. I'll try my best!"

He reached for the octagonal disc, closed his eyes, and . . .

". . . Say, pardner, that's a pretty good trick. Let's see you do it again."

Mel looked up, and kept on looking. The speaker wasn't the tallest man Mel ever saw, but he was definitely the tallest *naked* man. He looked about him, and saw that the Teleportable had dumped him into as lavish a Turkish bath as Hollywood could offer. The steam was already penetrating his clothing, making them damp and uncomfortable. "Excuse me," he gulped, and started for the exit.

"Whoa," the tall man said, collaring him. "Let's not rush off, pardner. What's the big idea?"

"Nothing," Mel squirmed. "I made a mistake. I was looking for somebody—"

"Who?"

"Man name of Gilberry. Gilbert Gilberry."

"Gilberry? You mean the movie guy?"

"That's the one. Do you know him?"

"Yeah," the tall man said languidly. "I worked in a couple of his pictures. My name's Hoot Hamilton. Ever hear of me?"

"I'm afraid I don't see many westerns. But can you tell me where to find Gilberry?"

"You a friend of his?"

"Oh, sure," Mel lied. "I'm a *very* good friend."

"Uh-huh," the cowboy said. "That's all I wanted to know, pardner."

The tall man reached out, and Mel found himself lifted three feet off the ground, one big hand at the seat of his pants, the other twisting his coat collar around his neck. He started to yelp, but to no avail. The cowboy carried him bodily to the kidney-shaped pool, swung him back and forth for a moment, and then heaved. It was only eight-feet deep, but it felt as big and as wet as the Pacific Ocean.

"Help!" Mel sputtered. "Help!"

The cowboy looked down at him and laughed.

"What's the big idea?" Mel screamed. "What's the idea?"

"Ah hate that fella Gilberry," the tall man said. "And any friend of his is an enemy of mine. So long, pardner." He turned and stalked off.

Mel thought he was drown-

ing. Then he remembered the Teleportable, grabbed for it, and shut his eyes . . .

". . . *Eeek!*" Tina Temple screamed.

Mel Purvey, sopping wet and dripping all over the hooked rug in Tina's one-room apartment, said:

"Please, Tina! You've got to help me—I'm in trouble!"

"But where did you *come* from, Mel? I mean, I just turned around for a minute, and *there* you were. And the door's locked! How did you get *in* here?"

"I can explain," Mel gasped. "But I've just got to get dry—"

"Well, how did you *get* so wet? It's not raining, is it?"

"No, but it's pretty damp in Hollywood."

Tina's pretty eyes widened. *"Hollywood?"*

"Listen, Tina, I'll have to explain later. I've *got* to get dry first. You know how easily I get colds—"

"Of course, Mel. Look, you go behind that screen and take off all those wet things. You can cover yourself with a blanket until you're dry, and I'll build up the fire . . ."

Mel came out from behind the screen a few minutes later, shivering and miserable inside the blanket. They sat around the fire, and Mel told her the whole story, beginning with the visit of Omar Ferguson. Tina listened in sympathetic silence while he talked, and the only point she questioned in his recitation was:

"But, Mel—why did you Teleport yourself *here?* Why didn't you go home?"

Mel blinked at this. "Gosh, I don't know. I just shut my eyes and the first place I thought of was your apartment. I guess I was afraid to show up sopping wet in *our* apartment. You oughta see how upset Lois gets when her carpets get dirty. She raises holy hell if I spill *anything*—"

Tina pursed her lips. "That is silly. As soon as you're dry, you Teleport yourself right home, Mel Purvey. Don't forget—you're a married man. How do you think it would look to *other* people?"

"I never thought of that," Mel blushed, suddenly aware of his nakedness. "But I *can't* go home yet, Tina. I promised Mr. McWillikers that I would bring his daughter back."

"Oh, *darn* Mr. McWillikers. It's none of your business about his daughter, is it?"

"Well, I promised." Mel stared moodily into the flames.

The knock on Tina's apartment door startled him almost

out of the blanket. The girl put both hands to her mouth in fright.

"Miss Temple? You in there?"

"It's my landlady!" Tina gasped. "Mel, you've got to hide! If she ever sees you like this—"

"Where'll I go?" Mel said frantically, looking around the one-room apartment, his clothes scattered everywhere. Tina began to gather them up hurriedly, tossing them behind the screen.

"Disappear!" she said. "Vanish! Use that telething, for heaven's sake!"

Mel gulped hard, and his hand closed over the Teleportable. He shut his eyes, and wished himself back in Hollywood . . .

. . . When he saw where he had landed, he closed his eyes again and began to pray.

It was a dressing room, and it was filled with more undraped women than Mel could have seen in a lifetime of peeping. The moment he appeared, they set up a Wagnerian chorus of shrieks and screams, and began dancing around the room, snatching up clothing.

"Please!" Mel said. "I'm sorry—"

Then he realized that the blanket had slipped from his shoulders, and was lying on Tina's hooked rug back in New York. He was as mother-naked as the rest of the room's occupants.

"Help!" a busty blonde, her charms poorly concealed by a four-inch square of handkerchief, screamed lustily. "Rape!" a redhead cried, diving into a filmy robe. "Police!" a brunette yelped, rushing upon Mel and pounding him with the end of a soft slipper.

He grabbed for the Teleportable around his neck, but for the life of him couldn't concentrate on another destination. By this time, the girls had descended on him with a barrage of impromptu weapons, and he was grateful when the dressing room door exploded open, and two shirt-sleeved stagehands rescued him.

They carried him out, not too gently, and Mel pleaded with them to understand.

"You gotta listen! It was all a mistake, an accident—"

"Sure, pal, sure. Hey, Willie, get a cop—"

"No, no!" Mel shouted. He tried to reach for the Teleportable, but his arms were pinned behind him. Somebody threw a raincoat around him, and he struggled gamely. But it wasn't any use. In another

five minutes, one of Hollywood's finest had Mel in tow, manacled and helpless, and on his way to the precinct.

The desk sergeant looked like an old character actor. He listened to the complaint without interest.

"Sex fiend," he yawned. "Happens all the time. Search him and put him in the freezer."

"Search him?" the cop said. "He's nakkid, Sargeant."

"Search him anyhow, Finster. It's the rules."

The cop shrugged. "Okay, Sarge." He looked at Mel's scrawny figure with puzzlement. "Only thing he's got on him is some kinda locket. Let's have it, pal."

"No!" Mel said.

"Let's have it!"

The chain and the Teleportable were in the sergeant's hands before Mel could do anything about it. He groaned as he saw his one source of salvation disappear into an envelope.

"Please," he said, with tears of vexation in his eyes. "Can't I make a telephone call?"

"Sure, pal. You're allowed one call. Over there."

Mel went to the desk phone, trying desperately to decide on whom to call. He couldn't ring Lois—she'd never understand. Tina couldn't be much help either, not in New York. The only name that rung a bell was Gilbert Gilberry. He dialed information and got the number. He held his breath while the phone rang in Gilberry's house.

"Hello?" It was a woman's voice.

"Hello, is Gilbert Gilberry there?"

"No, I'm afraid he's oot."

"He's *oot?*"

"Ay, he's oot."

"Is this Annie McWillikers?"

"Ay! Who's this?"

"Annie! I'm a friend of your father's. I just came from Castle McWillikers in Kinchiespey. My name is Purvey. Mel Purvey. And I'm in trouble!"

"Ay, that sounds like my father's friends."

"Listen, I'm in a North Hollywood precinct station, and I need help. Do you think you can come down here?"

"Well, I dinna know for sure. Mr. Gilberry said for me to wait for him, and I dinna want to go oot."

"You've got to help me!" Mel pleaded. "For your father's sake!"

There was a pause. "Well . . . all right. Do ye need bail money?"

"Ay. I mean yes. Bail money and clothes, size 32. All kinds of clothes. Underwear, socks, shoes, pants—"

"What kind o' trouble did ye say you're in?"

"I'll explain when you get here. God bless you, Annie!"

They led him to his cell, and provided him with a sloppy set of fatigues to wear. He slunk into a corner, hoping that Annie McWillikers would keep her promise.

She did. In two hours, the most curvaceous redhead Mel had ever seen came striding forcefully into the station house, a market basket full of clothing under her arm. She paid up the hundred-dollar-bail without a whimper. Half an hour later, she was escorting Mel out of the precinct. The clothes she had provided were a poor fit, but they were clothes—and most important, Mel had his Teleportable back underneath his shirt.

"I don't know how I can thank you," Mel said.

"Ye can thank me by explaining. How do ye come to know my father? And what were you doin' in hoosegow?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Annie, your father sent me here to talk to you."

"About what?"

"About you running off with Gilberry."

"I didna' run off! It's strictly business, ye know. Mr. Gilberry is goin' to put me in the movies."

"*That* old gag?" Mel said. "Why, you don't believe *that*, do you?"

"O' course, I believe it! Mr. Gilberry just happens to be the head of Magnanimous Productions. Ye can go back to my father and tell him I'm all right. Good-bye, Mr. Purvey."

"But listen—"

"Ye're wastin' breath. I know where I'm going! So you can just be on your way!"

The gorgeous Scot was already whistling for a taxi, and her plaid skirt was swinging into the car before Mel could say another word.

He looked after her unhappily, wondering what to do next. He began to walk the streets of Hollywood, still bright with California sunshine. It was still daylight in California, and he was amazed to think about how much had happened in so few hours.

"What the hell," he said to himself. "What am I doing all this for? Why don't I just go home?"

He thought about the office, and wondered what they would think when Omar Ferguson's order was discovered.

And as for Lois—what was she thinking?

"I better go back," he told himself.

He reached for the Teleportable, and . . .

He opened his eyes in his own living room. There wasn't any sign of Lois, but there was plenty of evidence that she'd been there. Her clothes were strewed everywhere. Her extensive collection of lipsticks, perfumes, powders, and creams cluttered every table-top in sight. He walked into the kitchen, and saw a three-foot stack of unwashed dishes in the sink. Then he went into the bedroom and looked at the unmade bed.

Mel sighed, walked to the desk, and took out a blank sheet of paper. He wrote:

"Lois. Will be out of town until tomorrow. Love, Melvin."

"There!" he said. "Now I've got time to straighten things out."

Then he remembered the office. It was nine-thirty, New York time, but he knew that old man Barbizon would be hard at work still. The old man began his workday at noon and rarely finished before midnight. If he went to the office now, he could probably explain the disappearance of the merchandise. After all, he was a valued employee.

He reached for the Teleportable.

Mel found himself just outside of Mr. Barbizon's office on the seventh floor. There was a crack of light beneath the door, so he knew that his guess had been correct. The old man was working, but he obviously wasn't alone. There was another voice too.

He heard his gruff bass saying:

"He's a crook, I tell you! A crook! A thousand dollars worth of goods—"

"But Mr. Barbizon," someone said placatingly, and Mel recognized the voice of the sales manager, Mr. Conklin. "Let's give him a chance. After all, Mr. Purvey's been with us a long time."

"Oh, yeah? Then maybe he's been waiting for the chance! Maybe he's been planning this for *years!*"

"Well, he didn't get away with *much*, Mr. Barbizon. It's not exactly the crime of the century—"

"Did you call his home?"

"I've been trying all evening, Mr. Barbizon. There isn't any answer."

"Aha! What did I tell you? He's skipped town, the crook.

He took the thousand dollars and skipped town!"

Mel swallowed hard. Should he go in and explain? Then he realized that explanation would be difficult indeed. He *had* given Ferguson the merchandise without payment. He *was* a crook.

The office door opened.

"Purvey!"

Mel stared at the two men in the office. They stared back with their mouths open. Mel mewed something pitifully, grabbed for the Teleportable and closed his eyes gratefully.

He was back in Hollywood.

He knew where he was the moment he saw the battery of lights and cameras aimed his way. He whirled around, and ducked as a wooden chair came flying at his head. It struck behind him, shattering the elaborate barroom mirror, decorated with Gay Nineties inscriptions. Then two men in dusty Western outfits came tumbling in his direction, pummeling each other with their fists. Somebody yelled Hollywood-type words like "Cut!" and some short, Anglo-Saxon words that were much older than Hollywood.

"Get him off the set!" the director shrieked. "Get that guy outa here!"

A couple of prop men heeded the director's orders, and Mel found himself being propelled through the studio. He protested only feebly; he was getting used to this kind of thing.

Finally, they pushed open a studio door and dropped him outside.

"Say," a familiar voice drawled. "Don't I know you?"

Mel found himself craning his neck. It was Hoot Harrison, the man from the Turkish Bath, this time fully clothed in Western gear. He was leaning against the studio wall, rolling a casual cigarette with one hand. Mel shrunk back from him, remembering his last, wet experience with the cowboy.

"Please," he said. "I'm not really a friend of Gilbert Gilberry. I was just looking for a girl that was with him—"

"What girl's that? And how come you're always poppin' up around the place?"

"Her name's Annie McWillikers," Mel said, ignoring the second question. "She's from Scotland. Gilberry picked her up there when he was making a movie."

"Scotland, huh? Yeah, that fella Gilberry ranges far and wide for his poontang."

"Say, what have *you* got against him?"

"Who, me? Nothin' much.

He just busted me up with my wife, that's all. Him and that fancy movie company of his."

"You mean Magnanimous Productions?"

"Yep. He uses it as a come-on for dames; oldest gag in the world."

"That's what *I* said," Mel told him. "Poor Annie! Do you know where I could find Gilberry now?"

"Sure. Whenever the sun goes down, you can bet your boots old Gilberry's back home in the parlor, puttin' the squeeze on some new filly. If you want to find him, that's the place to go. 200 Beverly Road."

"Thanks," Mel said earnestly. "I've got to save this girl before it's too late—"

"Maybe she don't want to be saved."

"Well, her father does!"

"Okay, pardner. But if you're thinkin' of crashin' the party, you better think twice. I tried it myself once, and I didn't get very far. That coyote's got so many enemies in town he keeps a couple of tough boys around the place. With hardware, too. He's got the whole place rigged with alarms."

"I'll get in," Mel said grimly.

He reached under his shirt for the octagonal disc.

"Hey!" the cowboy said, to nobody.

Mel opened his eyes and looked at the biggest, plushiest, downiest bed in his experience. It was easily ten feet long and fifteen feet across, and could have comfortably parked two helicopters and a Piper Cub. A blue, fluffy comforter was over it all, and there was a dozen pillows scattered everywhere. The light fixtures overhead were directed by a control panel set into the headboard. The ceiling was mirrored. It might not have been the best *sleeping* bed Mel ever saw, but it certainly was the best—

"What are you doing here?"

"Huh?" Mel said, turning to the doorway. There was nobody there. He realized that the voice had come from behind the bedroom door, and that the question had not been addressed to him.

He walked to the door and put his ear against the wood.

"I mean it seriously," the voice said again. It was a man's voice, smooth as syrup. "What's a girl like you doing here? You know I'm a bachelor. What's more, you know my reputation with women. And I'm sure you're not naive enough to fall for that 'get you in the movies' gag . . ."

Obviously, the speaker was Gilbert Gilberry. Mel was eavesdropping on his Seduction Routine No. 12—the "straight - from - the - shoulder" approach.

"I dinna understand," Annie McWillikers said. "Ye told me I could be another Greer Garson, Mr. Gilberry. Ye promised me—"

"Now look, Annie. You and I are intelligent people. Both of us have been around."

"Not I! I never left Kinchiespey, but once, and that was only to Glasgow. *Please,* Mr. Gilberry."

"Now, Annie, I just wanted us to get more comfortable."

"Ay, that's all right. But there's plenty o' room on the other side of the sofa—"

"Can't you be a *little* bit friendly?"

"Ay, friendship is fine. *Stop* it, Mr. Gilberry. Ye've got such *cold* hands—"

"You can warm them, Annie."

"Ye'd do better with a fire."

"*You're* a fire, Annie. You're a bright red flame—"

Mel frowned. What an operator this Gilberry was!

"Just don't frustrate me, Annie," Gilberry said hoarsely. "It's bad for my health. My analyst told me."

"A good physic is what *you* need, Mr. Gilberry. Now you *stop* that. This is my best dress!"

"I'll buy you a thousand dresses!"

"Ye will *not!*"

"Annie—"

"Let go!"

It was obviously the moment for Mel to interfere. He flung open the door dramatically, and Gilbert Gilberry, a hatchet-faced man with wavy black hair, looked up from his labors and stared at him.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Why, Mr. Purvey!" Annie gasped. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Take your hands off her," Mel said.

"What?"

"I said take your hands off her! I'm a friend of Annie's father."

"Go to hell," Gilberry scowled. "She's here of her own free will. Aren't you, Annie?"

"Ay. But I'm leaving of my own free will, too."

"Oh, no you're not!" Gilberry said, in nasty tones. "Not after all the trouble *I* went to! And as for you, Scurvey, you better get out of here before I ring for help."

Mel hesitated, remembering what Hoot Harrison had said about Gilberry's guards. Then

he squared his shoulders and said:

"Come on, Annie. We're getting out of here."

"I warned you," Gilberry snarled. "One of my men will be here in two minutes. They could *shoot* you for breaking and entering. And nobody could blame me."

Annie gasped in horror as Gilberry hoisted himself from the couch and pressed a button on the wall. The action set off a clanging throughout the house. She got up and ran to Mel, crying:

"He'll do it, Mr. Purvey. Ye better go!"

"Not without you," Mel said stoutly. "I promised Mr. McWillikers—"

In another moment, there were heavy footsteps in the hallway outside. Mel looked towards the door, swallowed hard, and had an idea.

"Hug me!" he told the girl.

"What?"

"Hug me!" he cried. "Tight! I'll get us *both* out of here!"

Annie looked doubtful, but there was conviction in Mel's voice. She threw her arms around him, and Mel reached for the Teleportable.

"Get him!" Gilberry shouted, as the door burst open. "He's a burglar!"

But Mel wasn't stealing anything but Gilberry's evening entertainment. He shut his eyes, tightened his grip around the gorgeous Scot in his arms, and thought about Scotland . . .

They were in Castle McWillikers, in a great square room heavy with draperies, and Annie's arms were still tight around her rescuer.

"We're home!" she said, overjoyed. "We're home, Mr. Purvey! How'd ye ever do it?"

"It was nothing," Mel said, flushing at the pressure of her body against his.

"I can never thank ye enough!" Annie glowed prettily, and squeezed herself even harder against him. Then she lifted her head and planted a kiss square on Mel's mouth.

"Aha!"

Mel was afraid to turn around when he heard the gravelly exclamation behind him. But Annie McWillikers left no doubt as to where the *aha!* came from.

"Daddy!" she cried. "Your Annie's come home again!"

"Ay," McWillikers said ominously. "Ye've come home, all right. And I see ye haven't changed a wee bit. Who is this mon?"

"It's me," Mel said, turning to him. "You remember, Mr. McWillikers. I was here

awhile back, asking about Old Curiosity. I promised to bring Annie back home to you. And here we are."

"Ay," McWillikers said, his brow still dark. He drew his bulky houserobe around him and tugged at his moustaches. "Ay," he repeated. "And here ye'll stay. I'll be postin' the banns in the morning."

"Posting the what?"

"The banns. We'll just have a simple weddin'. We're plain folks here, m'lad; none of your Glasgow fanciness, just a simple ceremony."

"Wedding?" Mel said blankly. "Somebody getting married?"

"Ay," McWillikers said. "Annie."

"Annie?"

"Ay. And so are ye. Ye'll make a fine couple."

Mel looked wildly at the girl, and she lowered her eyes shyly.

"You're crazy!" he said to the old man. "I can't marry anybody—"

"Ay, but ye will. Ye didna think it could be otherwise, did ye? Huggin' an' kissin' my Annie in her own bedroom that way?"

"Bedroom?"

Mel looked around him. Sure enough, the description was accurate. The Teleportable had dropped them squarely in the middle of Annie's McWillikers' bedchamber.

"But you can't do this to me! I can't marry Annie!" I can't marry anyone. I'm already married—"

"Don't gi' me that, young fella. We got ways of dealin' with the likes of you in Kinchiespey! Remember that English fella, Annie, the one from Perth?"

"Ay," Annie giggled. "He looked so *funny* all tarred like that."

Mel groaned, and then remembered the Teleportable.

"Stop him, Daddy!" Annie said. "Don't let him get hold o' that thing—"

But it was too late. He grabbed the octagonal disc, squeezed it, shut his eyes, and . . .

He was in Tina Temple's apartment, and Tina rose out of bed to scream:

"Help!"

"Quiet!" Mel whispered. "It's only me, Mel."

"Mel! For heaven's sake—what are you doing here?"

"I just got back from Scotland. I was almost a bigamist, Tina!"

"Do you realize what time it is? If my landlady had any idea—"

"Please, Tina!"

"Why don't you go *home*,

for heaven's sake! Why do you keep coming here?"

Mel looked at her shyly. She was sitting up in bed with the sheet pulled protectively up to her throat. She wasn't doing too good a job of concealing herself. Her white skin and the tumbled dark hair around her shoulders made her look prettier than Mel had ever seen her.

"Gosh, I don't know, Tina. The first place I thought of was here. But you're right, I guess. I really should go home."

"You certainly should!" Tina said vehemently, and her voice quivered uncertainly. Mel realized that she was beginning to cry, and he wrung his hands nervously.

"Well," he said. "So long."

He fingered the Teleportable, but without completing the routine that would take him away.

"Gosh, Tina," he said at last. "If you only *knew* of all the trouble I've had. I've been half-drowned, arrested, attacked, threatened—and I'm even being accused of robbery!"

"Robbery?"

"Yes! Remember Omar Ferguson? I gave him a thousand dollars worth of merchandise in exchange for the Teleportable, and now Mr. Barbizon thinks I stole it. In a sense, I guess I did."

"Well, can't you give it back?"

"Impossible. Ferguson no doubt is back in the future by this time. And all the merchandise with him.

"No, he isn't."

Mel blinked stupidly. "He isn't? How do you know?"

"Because he was here—tonight."

"Here? What was he doing here?"

"He was looking for you. He said he'd tried everywhere to find you. He went to the office and took your address book, and he's been checking every person in it. Including me!"

"But what does he want?"

"I don't know. He said he'll be at the Hotel Gramaphone, in Room 404. He said it's very urgent that he see you."

This time, Mel's hand was firm on the Teleportable.

"I better see him," he said, closing his eyes. "So long, Tina . . ."

Omar Ferguson leaped from the easy chair and cried:

"Mr. Purvey! Thank goodness you've come!"

Mel looked around. The hotel room looked more like a warehouse, stacked high with as strange an assortment of

merchandise and souvenirs as any tourist ever had collected.

"My antiques," Ferguson said mournfully. "Lovely, aren't they?"

"I don't know," Mel said doubtfully. "Looks like you're operating some kind of black market ring. What do you *want* with all this junk?"

"Junk?" Ferguson looked hurt. "It's not junk at all, I'm a serious collector. Why, do you realize how *extensive* my collection will be on the Other Side? I'll be the envy of the entire Antique Society! *Nobody* has a genuine electric razor—we no longer shave you know. And as for these nylon stockings—*real* nylon, think of it!—and this ballpoint pen, this stapling machine, this can-opener, and look—a genuine street sign, Forty-second Street and Broadway. I had a *lot* of trouble getting that. And look at these—"

"Please," Mel said. "It's all very nice, but I've got to get home. What did you want me for?"

"Oh, that." Ferguson's long face grew sadder than ever. He slumped back into his chair and said: "I'm afraid I'll have to return your merchandise."

"What?"

"Sad, but true. The Court on the Other Side has commanded me. I have to give everything back . . ." He looked at his booty with misery in his face.

"I don't understand. Why give it back?"

"Because. It's forbidden to transfer past property to the future, according to the Timeflop laws. They've arrested the Bootleggers who arranged my journey; that's how they found out. Now I've got to restore everything to the original owners."

"That's wonderful!" Mel said.

Ferguson looked startled.

"Oh, not about you, Mr. Ferguson. I'm sorry about that. But I could sure use that merchandise."

"Take it," the collector said, with a desolate wave of his hand. "I'm afraid it's rather bulky—"

"Don't worry. I'll take it back piece by piece if I have to!"

"You could use the Teleportable, of course. *I* always use it for bringing home Christmas packages."

"Of course!" Mel lifted one of the Barbizon crates, shut his eyes, and wished himself into the stockroom of the Barbizon Magic Supply & Novelty Company. It was dark when

he appeared, and he stumbled over a crate of marked cards. He put down his burden, reappeared in Omar Ferguson's hotel room, and lifted the second crate.

In less than ten minutes all of Barbizon's property had been restored, and Mel was about to take his leave of the antique-collector from the Other Side.

Then he remembered the Teleportable.

"Gosh," he said. "I guess you'll want this back now."

"Want what?"

"The Teleportable. You traded me for it, you know. Guess you have the right to take it back."

"Oh, dear, no," Omar Ferguson said. "The Court merely said to *return* everything. Not to be an Indian Giver. You can keep it, my friend."

"Yippee!" Mel exploded, leaping at Ferguson and pumping his hands happily.

He reached for the octagonal disc, shut his eyes, and wished himself safe and snug in his own bed . . .

There he was.

Mel sighed contentedly, and reached over to put his arm around Lois's sleeping form on the other side of the bed.

The sleeping form grunted, and rolled over.

"Wha' you want?"

"Huh?" Mel said.

"Wha' you want?" the man repeated, looking at him blearily. He was a big man, judging from the enormity of his head, and his scowling face was heavy with sleep.

"Er, who are you?" Mel said.

"Who are *you?*"

"I'm Mel Purvey."

"Who?"

"Purvey. Is this 21-45 Queens Parkway?"

"Yeah."

"Apartment 5B?"

"Yeah."

"The *Purvey* apartment?"

The man blinked his eyes until he was a little more awake. Then he got carefully out of the bed, and bent over to examine Mel's face more closely.

"Purvey?" he repeated.

"Yes," Mel said. "You know, I have a pair of pajamas just like that."

"You do?"

"Yes. Only mine fit better."

"These *are* a little small," the man said.

"Yes," Mel said sympathetically.

Lois walked into the bedroom, her splendid figure bare, carrying a decanter of Old Curiosity.

"Wake up, you lug," she said. "I want another drink."

"Hello, Lois," Mel said.

"Erp," Lois said, and dropped the decanter on the bedroom carpet. It was the first time that anything had been dropped on the carpet that didn't set Lois off into a fit of angry hysteria. Mel looked at the widening stain with interest.

"Melvin!" Lois's voice was choked.

"Melvin?" the man said, looking at him.

"Melvin," Mel said pleasantly.

"Mel, you've got to let me explain—" Lois was gasping and spluttering like a drowning woman.

"Never mind," Mel said cheerfully. "I really don't mind, Lois. I don't mind at all. As a matter of fact, I'm really rather relieved."

"Thattaboy," the man approved.

"Yes," Mel said. "Excuse me." He drew back his right arm, rolled the hand into a fist, and popped the stranger on the chin. The man looked surprised, but not very hurt. Mel rubbed his aching knuckles ruefully.

"Melvin," Lois said dramatically. "I want a divorce."

"Okay with me," Mel answered. "You can start for Reno tomorrow morning. As a matter of fact, I'll arrange for your transportation myself . . .

It was three months later.

Mel Purvey was leaning over the zoo railing, enjoying his traditional communion with Rudolph, the homesick lion. Only this time, Mel was accompanied by Tina Temple, looking bright and happy and prettier than ever. Her eyes were sparkling almost as much as the ring that Mel had just slipped on her finger.

"Oh, Mel," she said. "I just *can't*."

"What? But Tina—you know you love me. Don't you?"

"Of course I do, Mel. I always have. Even when you married that—that woman. But I just can't marry you with things the way they are."

"I don't understand. What's wrong with things? I'm a bachelor again. I'm making good money. I'm the best darn traveling salesman the Barbizon Company ever had. And what's most important—I love you, Tina."

"I know that, Mel. But it's just—well, it's the Teleportable."

"What about it?"

"As long as you have that thing around your neck, I could never be sure of you.

You'll always want to hop off to Siam or China or Scotland or someplace. It's too much of a temptation, Mel. I don't want that kind of husband."

"But, Tina—"

"I've made up my mind, Mel. As long as you have the Teleportable, I won't marry you."

Mel Purvey looked at her imploringly, his mind weighing the situation.

Then he sighed.

"All right," he said. "If that's the way you want it."

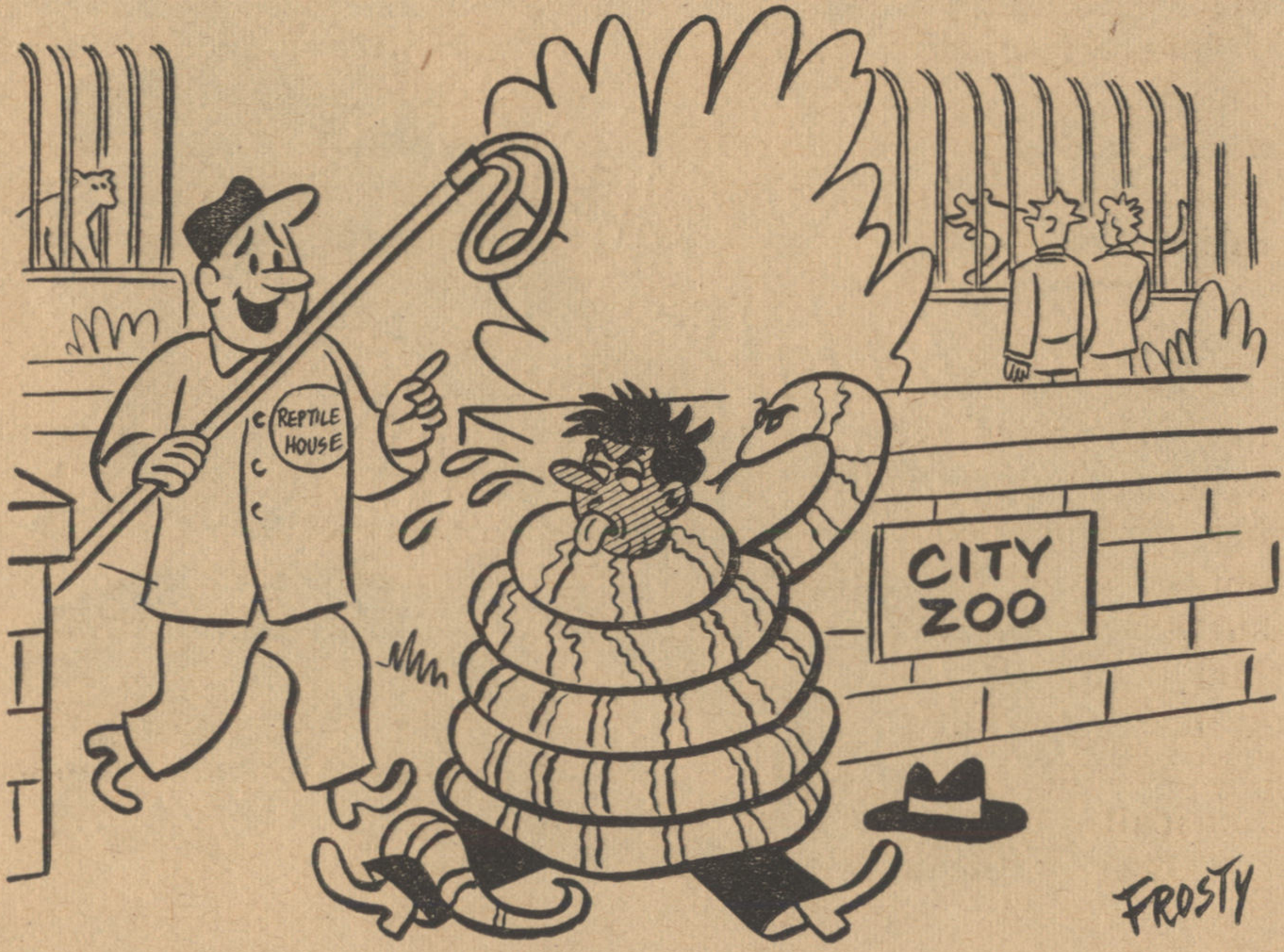
He reached around his neck and took off the gold chain. He looked fondly at the little octagonal disc, and then at the sad eyes of Rudolph, the zoo lion.

"Here, pal," he said.

He tossed the Teleportable into the cage. Rudolph sniffed at it suspiciously. Obviously, it didn't smell much like nougat, but he took it between his gigantic jaws. They saw him swallow hard, and look surprised.

In another moment, the lion had vanished.

"Happy hunting," Mel said sadly, and led his fiancée out of the park. **THE END**



"Thanks for stopping him, mister. You've been a big help."

The trick cigar blew Carter's chance for success right out the window.

INHERITANCE

By O. H. LESLIE

A world turned sterile. No more infants. Gradual depopulation. Thus did science face its greatest challenge. Alfred Millsong was a scientist and he solved the problem; but only to be faced with a bigger one: Who would he permit to inherit the earth?

THE counterman flopped the dirty cloth between Arthur Millsong's elbows. Arthur cleared his throat, and repeated his question with a little more assertion.

"I said, wasn't that a five I gave you?"

"Look, mister." The counterman squeezed the rag over the sink and glared. "Coffee and doughnut's two bits. You give me a one. I give you seventy-five cents."

"I thought it was a five." No, Arthur said to himself, I *know* it was a five.

The counterman frowned. "Maybe you'd like to see the manager."

"Oh, no!" said Arthur quickly. He couldn't afford a scene, even in a place like this. There were Chemco people here probably, having their morning coffee just like himself.

"My mistake, I guess," he said, forcing a smile. He picked up his cup and gulped the rest of the coffee down. It was still too hot, and he grimaced as the steaming liquid hit his throat. He picked up his change, hesitated, and then decided to leave the usual dime.

As he entered the revolving doors that turned into the wide, cool lobby of the United Chemical Building, he did some rapid figuring. Quarter for coffee, a dime tip, sixty-five cents out of a five-dollar-bill—that meant he was out four dollars and thirty-five cents. Plus the fact that he had taken a cab to work that morning after oversleeping—

let's see, that was a dollar and a half, plus sixty-five cents—

"Hey, Millsong!"

It was Big Carter, one of the two filial executive heads of the company. He was at the building newsstand, wearing the white shorts that were, in Arthur's view at least, pretty ridiculous for a grown man. But nobody every snickered behind Big Carter's back.

"Want a paper?"

"No thanks," said Arthur.

"Interesting reading these days," said Carter, walking towards the elevators. Arthur stepped up manfully to his side, but couldn't match his long-legged stride. "Big obstetrical meeting in Ottawa," Carter continued, reading as he walked. "Bet those guys are *really* worried." He chuckled.

"It's quite a problem," said Arthur tentatively.

"Not for me, boy!" Carter laughed loudly. "I got all the kids I can use. You met my Ralphie, didn't you?"

"Yes." Arthur recalled the meeting, and the memory was painful. Ralphie was a big boy of thirteen, and Big Carter had dramatized his size by a laughing comparison with Arthur's own five-feet-six.

"And as for grandchildren —well, I'm not ready for that *yet!*" Carter guffawed as he entered the elevator and nodded to the operator. The operator tipped his cap in deference to the executive, but didn't seem to even notice the presence of the researcher.

"Yes, sir," said Carter, rocking on his heels as the elevator shot upwards to the Chemco Research Laboratory on the 34th floor. "My little family circle is complete, Arthur. But you're a slow starter, aren't you, boy?" He nudged Arthur in the short ribs. "Ought to get yourself a *frau,* Mister Millsong. Stop running around with those wild women of yours."

"Me?" Arthur gasped. "Why, I never—"

"Come on, come on," Big Carter winked. "I heard about those wild parties you go to—"

"It's just a club," protested Arthur. "Just a friendly little social club. But they're all nice people—"

"Sure, sure!"

The elevator stopped and the two men got out. In parting, Carter stunned Arthur with a blow on the back that almost toppled him off his feet. The big man meant it to be friendly, of course. It was his mark of camaraderie, of good personnel relations. But as Arthur Millsong went into

the air-cooled laboratory and exchanged his street jacket for an antiseptic white smock, he wondered: Why does he have to hit me so hard?

The morning hours went quickly. Arthur became absorbed in the tricky business of isolating amino acids. These undisturbed moments in the laboratory were peaceful ones for Arthur. The cheerful bubble of fluids in the retorts, the hiss of the Bunsen burners, the far-off murmurings of traffic noises in the street below—these were sounds of contentment, lulling him into that good feeling of usefulness and security.

Then, at eleven o'clock, the loudspeaker crackled, and the crisp voice of Miss Dana sounded through the room, calling for a meeting of the research staff. This was a sound that Arthur didn't like at all.

With a sigh, he removed his smock, replaced his coat, and followed the other staff members down the corridor and into the impressive office of Hugo Redbush, Research Supervisor.

Redbush looked mysterious. Redbush always looked mysterious, with his heavy black eyebrows and piercing, myopic gaze. But this time, there was an intensified air of secrecy about the way he nodded them into the chairs surrounding his desk.

"How are you, Millsong?" he asked, embarrassing Arthur by singling him out for attention.

"Fine, Mr. Redbush."

"Keeping busy?"

"Yes, sir. I'm working with Mr. Hinton's protein group."

"Do you enjoy working with Mr. Hinton's protein?"

Mr. Hinton, a tall cadaverous man with a solemn face, broke out into an unexpected giggle. It became the signal for general amusement among the researchers, and Arthur shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"What about that, Mr. Hinton? Taking our Arthur under your wing?"

"Trying to, Mr. Redbush," smirked Hinton, winking at Miss Culver, the lab assistant.

"See if you can get him out of his shell, will you," smiled Mr. Redbush. "Maybe mix him up a batch of monkey glands."

They all laughed again, Miss Culver so hysterically that she had to wipe the tears from her eyes with a tissue. Arthur joined in the merriment with a weak smile, but the point of all the humor escaped him.

Then Redbush's plastic features melted into sternness.

"Well!" he said. "That's enough of that. Now we've got business to talk over. Serious business."

The researchers looked serious.

"Here," said Redbush, picking up a bound manuscript from his desk, "is a secret and confidential report from the front office." He held it across the desk towards Arthur. He automatically reached out for it, but Redbush jerked it back.

"Uh-uh," he said. "I said secret and confidential. But it concerns all of us and the work we're doing."

He placed the volume on his desk and arose. He walked to the wall, and pulled down the glossy black chart with its complex diagrams of the carbon atom with closed-chain and open-chain compounds. It was a handsome chart, and Redbush was proud of it. But it seemed to have no actual bearing on the subject at hand.

"You've all been reading the papers, no doubt," the supervisor said. "You know what Topic A is these days. What you *don't* know, perhaps, is how truly grave the situation is."

He went back to the report and riffled through the pages with his thumb.

"This contains an official United States Special Census Report, made at the request of a hush-hush senatorial committee about eight months ago. Since then, of course, the subject of sterility has become more or less a public debate. But believe me, if this report were ever published, we'd have a national panic on our hands."

Redbush looked up as the office door opened.

"Oh." The man in the doorway looked at the assembled researchers. "Pardon me," he said. "Thought you were alone, Mr. Redbush."

"Come in, come in, Mr. Carter," said Redbush cheerfully.

The man the office referred to as Little Carter beamed back at the supervisor and came into the room. If anything, he was bouncier and more aggressive than his brother, despite the fact that Big Carter had him spotted by some five inches.

"Project X?" said Little Carter as he took a seat.

"Yes, sir," said Redbush. "Just telling the boys about it."

"Carry on," said Carter, with a wave of his hand.

Redbush threw back his shoulders and said: "The United Chemical Company is destined to play a great role in this new world crisis."

Little Carter, sitting with his eyes closed and the tips of his fingers pressed together, smiled approvingly.

"The United Chemical Company has an opportunity to solve what may well be the greatest problem ever faced by humanity. And we can do it right here, in our own laboratory."

Little Carter nodded.

"We won't be the only people working on this important project. There will be thousands of research departments assigned to the task. Including, I might add, all of our major competitors. So you see, we have a double responsibility in this situation—to see that mankind solves this terrible problem, and to see that Chemco is the company that deserves the thanks."

"Excellent, excellent!" said Little Carter.

The supervisor glowed. "Now, you may ask—*what* project?" Redbush looked directly at Miss Culver, for some reason. "The answer is *babies*." If he was expecting Miss Culver to blush, he was mistaken. "You are already aware that there has been a marked decline in the nation's birth rate, a decline which first came to the attention of the country's medical authorities back in September. Before long, however, it will become apparent to the entire world that our generation is probably one hundred percent sterile."

The room buzzed. Redbush held up his hand for silence.

"The condition appears to be more than temporary. So, needless to say, there is much cause for alarm. And, needless to say, there is only one direction in which hope lies. Research, gentlemen. Research, research, research!"

"Excellent!" said Little Carter.

"We are going to set up a task force within the company, devoted exclusively to the job of researching this sterility problem. There'll be many long briefing sessions, both here and in Washington, so this group must be prepared to spend long hours in work and travel. A lot of spadework has already been made on the subject, and some of our own experiments gear in quite nicely with it. Mr. Millsong—"

Arthur looked up.

"You'll recall, perhaps, the work you did last year in con-

nection with the Mittinger Virus study?"

Arthur blushed. "Yes, sir."

"Seems to be some thinking along those lines in the initial report. Oh, very roughly, of course. But you might dig up that paper of yours and send it around to me."

"I believe you *have* the paper, Mr. Redbush. Remember? You said you thought it was a lot of poppyc—"

"Never mind," said Redbush testily. "We'll talk about it later. Right now, I want everybody to stand by in the laboratory for our decision about the task force group. When we make our selection, those people named should report immediately to the conference room. Understand?"

"Yes, sir!" said the researchers in chorus.

"Very well. That will be all for now, then. But remember!" He stopped them from leaving. "Not a word of this outside the office. This is top secret information!"

"Yes, sir!" they replied.

"Excellent!" said Little Carter.

Back in the laboratory, Arthur tried to concentrate on his work, but found it impossible. He was too anxious to know if he would be assigned to the project, and he was far from sure that it would be desirable. He loved his job, all right, and the problem would be particularly exciting to him if he could revive his virus experimentations. But the idea of long hours and travel—going places and meeting new people — he wasn't sure he liked that. And besides, there were the Over 34 Club meetings. He hated to miss them, any of them . . .

Miss Dana's voice came over the loudspeaker.

"Task force group assigned to Project X now posted on bulletin board."

They crowded around it. On the bottom of the list of eight names was his own: MILLSONG, ARTHUR.

Arthur hurried down the steps of the IRT subway. Nine-thirty already! The first briefing session had been a long one, and all through the lecture Arthur had squirmed, thinking of the Club meeting that began at eight that evening.

It would take him a good three-quarters of an hour to get there. That would make it ten-fifteen, or even later. He hoped that Margaret would still be—OOPS!

"What's the big idea, buster?"

"Sorry, sir. I didn't see you."

"Didn't *see* me?" The man that Arthur had collided with looked incredulous. He was bigger than Big Carter, and much beefier. "You oughta wear glasses!" he pronounced.

Arthur tried to move on down the stairs, but the big man stopped him by a grip on his shoulder. "It's you little guys cause all the trouble," he frothed. "I oughta lean on *you* a little—"

"Please!" said Arthur. "I said I'm sorry—"

The big man snorted and pushed the other away. "Okay, okay! On your way, buster!"

Arthur hurried away, still shaken by the encounter. His train was just pulling in, and gratefully, he entered and took a seat in a secluded corner.

But when he arrived at the headquarters of the Over 34 Club, his confidence was somewhat restored. The lights were still burning brightly in the brownstone windows, and he could hear the quiet, happy sounds of the club members at their evening activity.

He could picture the familiar scene in his mind. The red-and-blue bunting hung along the walls; the card tables set to one side, with old Mr. Dougherty presiding as usual at the whist game. There would be a record on the battered phonograph, probably Wayne King or Guy Lombardo, and a few couples would be performing an orderly two-step over the polished floor. There would be the usual punchbowl (non-alcoholic, of course) and a set of heavy cut-glass tumblers. Margaret would be there, with her soft voice and gentle Madonna smile, talking to the Club members about books and plays, Beethoven, Strindberg, and John Dewey (her idol, for Margaret was a grade-school teacher).

The whole vulgar world would be shut out behind the Clubroom door, and Arthur's real world, the world of thoughtfulness and kind words would surround him, warm his heart, suffuse him with the idyllic happiness he craved so much.

He knocked on the door and walked in. Jackson, a studious bookkeeper, greeted him with a handclasp. Miss Fewsmith, a librarian, smiled her welcome, and then Arthur was encircled by the Club members, poking gentle fun at his lateness, inviting him to the raspberry punch, urging him to join in the card games or

the chess tournament or the dancing.

Then Margaret appeared, and the moment was complete in its perfection. Almost wordlessly, they began to dance.

"Did you have a good day, Arthur?" she asked. Arthur, holding her in his arms and moving in easy rhythm across the floor, forgot that his day had been disturbing and often depressing, and replied:

"I had a wonderful day!"

The summer passed. The maternity wards emptied, and the staffs assigned to other duties. Obstetricians left their offices early, studying eagerly the discouraging reports from their associations. Macy's in New York, Filene's in Boston, and many other stores abandoned their infants department. Ivory soap began to feature teen-agers in their advertising. Weddings became fewer, and divorces more frequent.

And the research went on.

At the United Chemical Company, this top-secret memorandum went from the office of Supervisor Frank Redbush to the executive offices of Big and Little Carter:

TO: Messrs. Carter

RE: Filtrable Virus Study

In connection with our recent discussion, I am herewith attaching a paper I have prepared for your perusal on the corollary between the gene structure and the virus structure. A great deal of work has been done previously, but I believe the new findings outlined in my paper will produce some interesting speculation on the cause and possible cure of the condition we are researching in Project X. As you know, some of our people are already operating along these lines, and some rather intriguing experiments have been conducted by Mr. Millsong. However, I believe Mr. Millsong's premises are somewhat immature and radical, and I suggest that he be transferred to another division of the task force. I will be happy to personally take over his work, if the contents of this paper convince you that there is merit in my approach.

Little Carter read the attached sheets and scribbled "Excellent!" on his copy of the memo. Big Carter read it and scrawled a virile "O.K!"

Arthur looked dumbfounded when Redbush told him the news.

"But Mr. Redbush!" he argued. "I thought the work

was coming along well. I mean, we haven't shown any positive results yet, but I hope to induce the sterile condition in the guinea pigs sometime this month—"

"Now, Arthur," said Redbush placatingly. "We have to leave personal considerations out of this. You've done valuable work. Very valuable. Now we need you in another phase of our study."

"But I'm really *on* to something, I think." Arthur's voice cracked with disappointment. "You know that crystallized virus I produced last week? Well, we put it through the centrifuge, and—"

"Arthur!" It was a time for sternness. Redbush's brows met in a solid threatening line. "I believe this is in the best interest of the company," he said. "Your experience will be very valuable in our radiation studies."

"I don't *know* anything about radiation!" the little man protested. "In fact, I don't go along at all with the radiation theory. As I said in my paper, Mr. Redbush. I believe it's the result of this new infection, this new virus condition. I mean, there's so much medical evidence—"

"I know all about the evidence!" snapped the supervisor. "But I also know what's good for Chemco and what isn't. Do you think *you* know better, Mr. Millsong?"

"No, sir, but—"

"But what? If you're such a great organizer, Millsong, why aren't *you* the supervisor, eh? You've been here fifteen years, haven't you?"

"Sixteen," said Arthur miserably.

"Then let's not have any more argument. See Mr. Brubaker this afternoon and he'll update you on his group's progress."

Redbush turned on his heel and left.

Arthur stood there dumbly, looking crushed. Miss Culver noticed his stupefaction, and always fond of a good joke, she approached him gingerly from the rear and said:

"Boo!"

Arthur jumped. His flailing hand struck an Erlenmeyer flask, and the yellowish contents sprayed over his sterile white coat, spotting it with bright splotches.

Miss Culver laughed appreciatively, but Arthur took no offense. He suddenly remembered something he forgot to ask Redbush. He raced after the supervisor and halted him at the door.

"Mr. Redbush!" he panted. "One more thing—"

"Yes?" said the other coldly, looking critically at the soiled smock.

"My paper. The one on filtrable viruses. Did you read it?"

Redbush looked thoughtful. "I *think* so," he said musingly. "But I'm not really sure. I'll try to get around to it, Millsong. Meanwhile, you see Mr. Brubaker. All right?"

"Yes, sir," said Arthur dully.

Winter came. Nursery furniture sold at the price of firewood. Infant photographers turned to cheesecake. Baby food manufacturers concentrated on a "geriatric" line. Pravda hinted that America was somehow responsible for the world's sterility. The UN urged the formation of a world committee on the problem.

And the research continued.

At the Over 34 Club, Arthur Millsong poured the contents of his aching heart out into Margaret's sympathetic ear.

"I just don't believe it's a radiation effect," he told her. "I know that's the immediate popular reaction. But this virus thing—this infection that everybody got last year—"

"But, Arthur," she said quietly, "it's nothing more than a little cold. I had it last Fall, and it was gone in a week. Penicillin . . ."

"I know," Arthur replied. "But I believe there's a relationship. If I could have only continued my experiments, I might have found the answer." Arthur looked pensive. "Well, maybe I'll find the answer anyway . . ."

"How do you mean, Arthur?"

"Oh, I've been fooling around at home. You know that little lab set-up I have in the garage."

"Wouldn't that be wonderful?" said Margaret. "I mean, if you discovered the solution all by yourself?" She was thrilled.

"Well," said the researcher, "I guess so. But it would still be the property of Chemco. Not that I mind that—"

"Of course not," said Margaret primly. She gazed off into the distance, not even seeing the quiet couples dancing before them. "The Millsong Vaccine," she said dreamily, and with conviction.

"Gosh," said Arthur.

"I'd be so proud of you," she said, looking up at him with melting eyes. "We might even . . ."

Arthur cleared his throat. "I don't suppose you'd care to

see my laboratory?" he asked. "It's pretty messy and all—"

She clapped her hands together. "Oh, Arthur, I'd love it! I don't know much about organic chemistry, but I'm sure it would be fascinating!"

"Really?" Arthur's face shone. "Well, we could do it whenever you say. Tonight, even."

"Let's!" said Margaret. "I'm sure the others won't miss us for a while. And tomorrow's Saturday, so I don't have to worry about school."

They quickly agreed, and in the next hour, they walked into the rather unsterile headquarters of Arthur Millsong's home laboratory.

"Now this," said Arthur, "is a Chamberland filter. And this," he said, holding up a murky test tube, "is a crystallized virus, the tobacco mosaic virus."

Margaret looked, but without understanding.

"But here's what I'm pinning my hopes on," said Arthur, exhibiting another test tube. "I managed to bring this culture home from the laboratory before Mr. Redbush took over my experiments."

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure." Arthur peered at it. "But I hope—only hope, mind you—that I've isolated the virus that caused the sterility."

"Oh, Arthur!" Margaret hugged herself with delight.

"I'm not *certain*, you understand. I *am* sure that it's the virus that infected everybody last year. I collected it in connection with some other work I was doing—long before this sterility question came up. But I have no proof yet that it *causes* the sterility. But I'm testing it—"

"How?"

"Well, by vaccine therapy, and some serum. Using guinea pigs. Look."

He guided her over to an embankment of wire cages.

"See that one?" he said. "I call it Redbush." Margaret giggled. "I've infected it with the live virus and made attempts at—" he blushed. "At impregnation," he concluded hastily. "So far, the guinea pig hasn't given birth, but that doesn't prove anything conclusively. I can't really conduct a controlled experiment under these conditions. If I only had the use of the laboratory—"

He went over to another cage. "I call these Little Carter and Big Carter. They were inoculated with the same virus and the—experiment repeated. No births developed.

I thought I would make a chromosome analysis, but I don't have the equipment. However, I made the assumption that they *are* completely sterile, and I've injected one with autogenous vaccine, and the other with serum. Now we'll have to wait and see."

He indicated the rest of the animals with a wave of his hand. "I've done pretty much the same thing with all of the guinea pigs. Some of them have just been *fed* the serum like water, to see what happens. I figured I should try everything."

"They're so cute," said Margaret, walking past the many cages and smiling tenderly at the animals. "Look at this funny one with the crinkly nose. And look at this one—it looks like my Uncle George!" She tittered. "And this one I *really* love. It's so *tiny!*"

"Which one is that?" asked Arthur, coming over to the cage.

"That wee little one in the corner. Poor little thing," crooned Margaret. "It looks so frightened. Just like a little baby."

Arthur peered into the cage. He straightened up suddenly and reached out for Margaret's hand. He squeezed it, hard.

"Margaret," he said reverently. "Margaret!"

Redbush's heavy brows formed a thundercloud over his eyes as Arthur Millsong spoke. Finally, he shook his head and said:

"Poppycock, Millsong. Pure poppycock."

"But Mr. Redbush—"

"The virus theory has been abandoned by everyone. There just isn't any practical evidence that there's a connection—"

"But if we can isolate that particular virus and see. We'll be able . . ."

Redbush snorted. "There isn't any to isolate. The bug is gone, understand? There hasn't been a case of that particular infection in ten months. Where are we going to find any more?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Mr. Redbush. I became interested in that virus long before the sterility problem arose. I was using it in my Mittinger studies."

"Brubaker tells me that he's making good progress on the radioactive investigation," said Redbush, trying to change the subject. But Arthur was aflame with his argument.

"But Mr. Redbush! You saw my notes. You performed

some of my experiments. You must know—"

The supervisor slammed the desktop. "I got *nothing* from your experiments, Millsong! I tell you the whole virus thing is out the window! Now get back to work and forget it!"

Arthur moistened his lips and made one more try.

"You don't understand," he said patiently. "I've made some experiments at home, and I've gotten some astounding results."

"Millsong!"

Redbush stood up, his eyebrows a black accent on his frowning face. "Millsong," he said, "I've always felt sorry for you. "You're one of the peculiar breed of people that always gets kicked around in this world. You'd rather be stepped on than fight back. Well, I'm sorry for you, and I'd like to help you all I can. *But I won't let you get out of line.* Do we understand each other?"

Arthur shook his head unbelievingly. "You won't even listen to me," he said. "And I've got this serum. The only thing that can help."

"That's enough now, Arthur."

"But it works," the researcher wailed. "It works just by taking it internally. I've tested it—"

"Mill . . . song!"

"All right, Mr. Redbush." Arthur stood up. "All right, sir. I'm sorry I troubled you."

He went out the door, still shaking his head, looking at the ground. He didn't even see Big Carter as he came down the hallway, and the collision was inevitable.

"Hey!" cried Big Carter. "What's the big idea?"

"Sorry, Mr. Carter," Arthur stumbled. "I seem to be bumping into everybody these days."

"Well, keep your head up!" Big Carter snapped. "Look alive, boy! You're dead on your feet!"

"Yes, sir."

"Show a little of the old moxie, will you, Millsong? You get mousier every day!"

"Yes, sir," said Arthur.

"All right then." Big Carter har-rumphed, tugged at his plaid vest, and moved on down the hallway.

When Arthur re-entered the laboratory, he went directly to his table and sat down on a high stool. His eye caught an object in front of a flask. He reached down and picked it up.

It was a cigar. There was a tag attached which read: "TO THE PROUD PAPA, WITH LOVE FROM THE STAFF."

Arthur looked at it in puzzlement. Was he being ribbed?

Hinton came over to him and said: "Congratulations, old man. Hear you're the papa of a new guinea pig." He laughed.

Miss Culver said: "We didn't know if it was a boy or a girl, but we got you a cigar anyway." She giggled.

By this time, a half dozen of the researchers were crowding around Arthur, grinning foolishly. Brubaker said: "Go on, smoke it, Artie." He held out a match, and Arthur automatically took the light.

It was a mistake, of course. The explosion startled Arthur so that he fell off the stool. The laughter was so general after that, that Little Carter, passing by the lab door, had to poke his head in to see what was happening. When he was told the story, he smiled tightly and said: "Excellent!"

The subway guard pushed Arthur rudely through the doorway. A woman passenger struck him with the tip of her umbrella, and then glared at him as if the blow were his fault. When he took his seat, a heavy-set man in a bulky raincoat shoved him to one side and rattled his newspaper in Arthur's face.

On the street, a truckdriver screamed an epithet at him as he started to cross against the light. A traffic cop shouted at him. The waitress in the little diner where he took an occasional meal was so vexed by his indecision with the menu, that she stomped off and didn't return for twenty minutes. Nothing, absolutely nothing was in his favor.

As he trod the stairs to his apartment, his landlady shrieked at him for not wiping his wet feet on the doormat. He went into his room and turned on the radio, and was berated by an announcer for not taking care of his stomach valves. He left the house as soon as he changed his shirt, and treated himself to a cab ride to the Over 34 Club. He gave the driver the usual fifteen-cent tip, and he accepted it with a contemptuous: "Sure you can spare it, bub?"

Then, the gross world was behind him.

Once more, he was in the sheltered calm of the Clubroom, among the kind, gentle people he loved and understood.

"Is everything all right?" asked Margaret concernedly.

"Fine," said Arthur. "Just fine, now." He nodded pleasantly to old Mr. Dougherty,

who looked up from his cards and grinned. He waved at the librarian, the bookkeeper, the publishing-house reader, the art supply salesman, the ladies from the tea-shop and the dress store.

"My, you're wet," said Margaret, steering him over to the raspberry punch.

"You really should take better care of yourself," she clucked. "I'll bet there are holes in your socks, too."

"There are," Arthur admitted. "I've got a drawer-full of socks that need mending. And there are a lot of other things I need, too." He reached out for her hand.

"Most of all, I need some*one*. Someone like you . . ."

"Margaret," he said tenderly. "I need a wife."

She blushed. He clasped her hands together. "You know what I'm saying, Margaret. I should have said it to you long ago, but I guess I just didn't have the nerve." He swallowed hard. "I love you," he said feelingly. "I want you to marry me."

"Oh, *Arthur!*"

She started to throw her arms about him, but then remembered that they weren't alone. Instead, she smiled happily at him, misty-eyed.

"One little addition," he said gaily, "and then we'll get everybody to drink a toast to our happiness."

"Addition?" Margaret watched him remove a vial of amber fluid from his jacket pocket. "What is it, Arthur? It's not—not *whiskey?*"

"Certainly not!" Arthur answered. He uncorked the vial and carefully poured the contents into the raspberry punch. He began to stir it in thoroughly. "It's something new I've discovered—something that will give our lives a wonderful flavor . . ."

"Are you sure it's all right?" she asked.

"Of course. Nothing was ever *more* right, Margaret."

Arthur turned towards the other members in the room. "Hey, everybody!" he called. "Come over here. We're going to drink a toast to another pair of newlyweds!"

There was a great shout of joy from the Club members as they circled the engaged couple. They clapped Arthur on the back, kissed Margaret (who blushed deeply) and even shed a few tears.

Arthur lifted his glass high, and spoke.

"Fellow club members," he said, "here's a toast! To everybody here and their happiness. A toast to the Meek!"

THE END

"The Wheel" controlled Earth, so if you wanted the honor of helping man it, you had to give up plenty; your friends and loved ones, your soul—even part of your brain. But take these things away from men and what do you have left? Only a group of——

TAILOR-MADE KILLERS

By IVAR JORGENSEN

DAVE closed the door behind them quietly. He took one brave breath and plunged into his confession.

"Pop—I've volunteered for the Wheel."

His father sat down on the bed, and the springs groaned. Or was it the old man?

"I've gone through all their tests," Dave said hurriedly, not looking at him. "And I've been rated A-1. Colonel Danvers made the original recommendation. I have an appointment next week to appear before the UN neurophysiologist's commission."

The old man looked older still, and his lips moved without forming words.

"It's no good trying to talk me out of it, because I've signed the release and everything. If all goes well before the board, I'll enter Johns Hopkins around the middle of December."

He bit his lip. "You're the first one I've told, Pop."

Finally: "You haven't told your mother?" The old man looked bewildered. "You should have told your mother," he said dreamily. "She'll be very upset about you're not telling her, Dave."

"I'm telling *you*, Pop!" He spoke savagely. "I wanted you to know about it first. Do you understand?"

The old man shook his head. "She'll be terribly upset. You know how this'll upset her."

He stood up, and now there was fright in the eyes he turned on his son.

"What are you telling me?" he said. "Do you know what

Their faces were cold—their hatred deadly.

you're saying, Dave?" His tone became angry. "Do you think it's a joke, this Wheel business? Do you know what they'll do to you first?"

Grimly: "I know, Pop—"

"What do you mean, you know? Is that what you want to be? A living dead man? A monster?"

"Cold fish, Pop," Dave said tightly. "That's what they're calling them these days."

"No. No, this is crazy!" The old man looked at the floor and jerked his head wildly, until the sparse white hairs scattered over his forehead. "This is terrible, Dave—"

"Pop!" Dave's voice ached. He grabbed the thin stems of the old man's arms and held on tight. "Pop, listen. It's not the end of the world. This is something I have to do. Something I've always wanted."

"No! I know what you want, Dave. You're my son, isn't that right? I know what you want!" With surprising strength, he broke from his son's grasp and flung his arm outwards towards the aspiring spaceship model. "This. This is what you want, Dave! Space! The Moon! The Stars! I know you, Dave—"

"But, Pop—the Wheel is the first step—"

"No." The energy left the old man, and he sat down weakly. "No, Dave. The first step is here—" he tapped his forehead. "First, they cut out of you every part that means anything. Then—the Wheel—and . . ."

"I know all that, Pop," Dave pleaded. Then his back stiffened and his voice grew cold, and Army-formal. "The anti-thalamic operation is mandatory. I knew that when I volunteered. It's not so bad as you think. I'll still be Dave Dominique—"

The old man looked up, and his eyes were those of a man already in mourning. "Will you, Dave?" he said softly. "Listen. I've seen those—those cold fish from the satellite station, too." He put his hand on his chest. "A bad heart is not so good to have, Dave. Believe me. But to have no heart at all . . ."

His head bobbed on his thin neck, and he lifted his hands to support it.

Dave's arm reached out to his shoulder. "Pop," he said. "Stand by me now. Don't let me down."

The old man didn't answer.

"I'll have to tell Mom now. Did you hear me? I'm going to tell her now. Will you come with me?"

His father shook his head,

hiding the look of anguish on his face.

Anna was the last to hear.

They flew to the Chandelier Restaurant in Hartford, Connecticut, the scene of their first evening together two years before. The night was sharp and clear, and the stars outside the copter were scattered like gems on a jeweler's tray. Anna snuggled against his shoulder, wordlessly romantic throughout the flight. When the satellite station crossed her line of vision, she watched it with detached interest, and when it had passed the horizon, she kissed Dave lightly on the cheek, for no other reason than impulse.

He dropped the copter deftly on the roof of the restaurant, and they entered the dining room a few minutes later.

"It's just the way I remembered it," the girl sighed. "Isn't it lovely, Dave?"

He mumbled an absent-minded reply. When they were led to their table, he took his chair before the waiter had time to seat his fiancée. She noted the lapse with amusement.

"Well! Two years is certainly a long time . . ."

"What's that?"

Her eyes were tender. "Never mind," she said. "Look—why don't we order everything we had that first night?"

He smiled distantly. "I don't think I could remember."

"Well, I do," she said. She shut her eyes, and counted off the courses on her fingers. "We had Maine oysters, West Indian Callaloo soup with crab, antelope steak, and—let's see, Pommery Brut Champagne, 1968—"

"Whoa!" Dave laughed, for the first time that day. "Prices have changed in two years, you know."

"Yes," she said primly. "But you were drawing second lieutenant's pay two years ago, too. Captain." She put her hand over his and gave a gentle squeeze.

"Okay. Guess we can afford to shoot the works once in two years. But after we're—" He paused, and his expression changed. "Guess we'd better order," he finished curtly.

After the dessert dishes had been cleared away, he made his announcement.

She sat in silence when he told her, stirring the cream in her coffee aimlessly.

He lit a cigarette with nervous fingers, and waited for her reaction.

When it came, it surprised him.

"I don't believe it, Dave."

"What?"

"I don't believe it. I don't believe Colonel Danvers and the rest of them would accept you."

"What do you mean?"

"You're not like the others!" she said vehemently, her spoon clanged against the saucer. "You're—you're too *human*. Your family is too important to you. And you're engaged." She raised her eyes to his. "You are engaged, aren't you, Dave?"

"They *have* accepted me, Anna," he said painfully. "There's no question about it. My appointment before the UN neurophysiologists is strictly routine."

She shut her eyes and shook her head. "No. It's not possible. They've only taken single men. Men without attachments—"

"That's not the issue any more, Anna. That part's over with. I volunteered. I was recommended. I was accepted. That's all there is to it."

She was silent for a long while, her lovely red mouth drooping disconsolately.

"It's like a death sentence . . ." she said at last.

"No, Anna."

"It is! You know it is! If they kill your emotions, they kill you, Dave!"

"That's not true."

"Why do they have to do it? Why must they be so cruel?"

He didn't reply. He sipped the remainder of his coffee, and then stabbed out his cigarette. Then he said: "Anna. What's happened to Canada?"

"What?"

"Where's Canada?" he said intensely. "Why are there glaciers in the St. Lawrence? Remember that little boarding house in Quebec, Madame Jolicouer's? Where is it now? What's happened to all those people in Manitoba? And Nova Scotia?"

"Dave!" She turned her head away.

"Remember the week end we went fishing in the Laurentians? You can't catch anything there but radioactive death now, Anna."

She looked so distraught, that a waiter rushed to her side and inquired if she were ill. Dave sent him away impatiently.

"The man who did that to Canada was named Douglas Merchant," he said. "He was a brilliant student of M.I.T. He was captain of his class, and the nicest guy you'd want

to meet. He went with flying colors through four different psychological studies. He loved football, babies, ice cream, apple pie. He hated phonies, bullies, bigots. Girls liked him a lot, and he liked them, too, in a nice, healthy, lusty way.

"He could take a drink or not take it. He didn't smoke or curse, because he never got the habit of either. He was an Eagle scout, and a Boy's Town Mayor, and he won a civic medal for saving the life of a kid in a Wisconsin forest fire. He was so well adjusted to the world, it hurt."

"Don't go on, Dave." Anna's eyes were wet.

But he was relentless. "Douglas Merchant was assigned to the first crew of the UN-1. He was brilliant, efficient, loyal. And he had enough of the small boy in him to get a big bang out of being in space."

Dave paused, and his hand tightened around the water glass.

"He was up there for a year and a half. Then he pulled the trigger. Not at Canada, you understand. That was only chance. He was aiming at everything—at the whole spinning, writhing, rotten world."

Dave swallowed hard.

"He meant to complete the job. But he was stopped. We can thank God for that, anyway."

"That poor man . . ."

"Yes. Poor Doug Merchant. The greatest criminal in human history. The saddest creature ever born of woman . . ." He looked at the table cloth. "But he was no freak, Anna. That's the point. The investigation that followed showed that clearly. Practically every member of that crew was out of balance in one way or another—"

"But the shock of what happened," Anna said. "That could have done something to them. Isn't that possible?"

"Perhaps," Dave answered. "But the world couldn't afford to take the chance. One more Doug Merchant, and—"

"Then why don't they abandon it?" Anna said hotly. "Why don't they blow up the whole miserable project? Get rid of that horror up there—"

"It's too late for that," Dave said. "It's part of the Earth now, Anna. It affects the tides of men just as surely as the Moon affects the seas . . ." He sighed, and slumped in his seat. "And besides," he continued. "It's working beautifully now . . ."

"Yes. With dead men at the controls."

"No, you're wrong! They're not dead men, Anna. If anything, they're—" He paused. "Well, supermen, if you're not afraid of the word. Men guided by pure reason, logic, thought. Men without that—that monkey of emotion on their backs—"

She looked disgusted. "Cold fish . . ."

"All right, cold fish!" Dave said angrily. "Call them what you like. But look what they had to sacrifice. Look what they had to give up for us—"

"What are you trying to tell me? That I should be proud of you for your decision? Is that it, Dave? Proud that you'll stop loving me—or hating me—" The words choked her, and she buried her face in her napkin.

"Anna . . ."

She looked at him blankly. "When, Dave?" she said.

On December 16th, 1989, Dave Dominique entered the Space Medicine Division of Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Colonel Danvers, his superior and his friend, accompanied him, but excused himself from the interview Dave was to have with Dr. Smollett, the head of the department.

Smollett was business-like. He appraised Dave with professional eyes as they shook hands, and seated himself in front of the officer's medical and psychological records.

"Well, now," he said. "Just how much do you know about the anti-thalamic operation?"

"Not too much," Dave said. "I've heard a lot, and read a lot, of course. Plenty about it in the Sunday supplements."

Smollett grimaced. "Worst place to get the truth about it. It's not nearly as Frankensteinian as they'd have you think. You'll learn the details in our orientation periods, but I'll give you a rough idea."

He went to the blackboard in the room, and lowered a chart from its roller.

"You might say the whole thing started with phrenology," he said. "You must have heard of them. The old bump-readers—"

"But they were quacks," Dave said.

"Many were quite sincere," Smollett said. "But they led us to the school of thinking that human faculties were partitioned physically in the brain. We got the practical evidence of this when the surgeons decided to invade this *sanctum sanctorum*—a well-known sawbones named

Cushing, for instance. In 1936, the International Neurological Conference — the forerunner of the board which passed on you last week—met in London and got a sort of 'seal of approval' to the idea.

"Then we got our new instruments—the devices invented by Moniz, and Freeman and Watts, the fellows who developed the prefrontal lobotomy. They're the grandfathers of the anti-thalamic operation."

He pointed to the cross-sectioned brain diagram on the chart.

"This is the thalamus, here—the very seat of human emotions. This little area is responsible for all the love and hate, the fear and anger, the passions and insanities of man. Over it lies the cerebrum, or roof brain, the home of the intellect; the cerebrum has raised man above the thalamus-dominated beasts." He smiled humorously. "Yes, even the worm has a thalamus—which gives us something in common besides our ultimate rendezvous. . . .

"No—the anti-thalamic operation doesn't completely destroy the thalamus. That's suicidal. But what we have learned to do is partially separate the functions of the thalamus and cerebrum. The process is complex in procedure, but basically simple. The idea is to physically separate the thalamic brain tissue from the cerebrum. We do this by inserting a microscopically thin layer of a metallic, non-conducting fluid."

Dave paled, and his hand went to his throat.

"You're thinking that the operation may fail," Smollett said. "It can. The failure means death. However—we haven't harmed any Wheel volunteer yet, so you can rest easy. And as for your intellectual powers—you'll find that they will increase, as the brain compensates for losing its thalamic influence."

Smollett went back to the table. "I think I've unnerved you enough for today. Now I think you should learn something about your agenda here—"

"There's just one thing," Dave said hesitantly. "Is it true that—" He looked shamefaced.

"Is the effect permanent?" Smollett spoke sadly. "As far as we know—it is."

Dave Dominique squared his shoulders.

"What next?" he said.

Three weeks later, the

space taxi *Gremlin* arrived without ceremony at the invisibly-spinning turret of one of the Wheel's two landing stations. The pilot slipped the small craft easily into the jutting cornucopia, and waited until the rubber clamp had sealed it into the airlock.

He had only one passenger, and he didn't like him.

Dave Dominique was aware of the contempt; the pilot was a plain-speaking man, and pro-thalamic. But Dave didn't care; likes and dislikes seemed vastly inconsequential. The trip to the satellite had been made in virtual silence, the only conversation aboard directed towards the man's loathing of the cold fish volunteers he served.

"You're home, pal," he said now, watching the needle of the oxygen gage move slowly towards the safety mark. "The reception committee will be waiting for you."

"Thanks," Dave said.

"For what? It's my job."

A motor inside the turret whined to a halt, and Dave's stomach did a dive.

"You get used to that," the pilot said gruffly. "When they stop the counter-motion, we start feeling the Wheel's gravity—such as it is. Well, get your gear together. I don't want to stick around here any longer than necessary."

The front doorplate opened, and Dave followed the pilot into the spinning doughnut itself.

There were three of them waiting for him, and the handshakes they proffered were mechanical and cheerless. They wore the cold white uniforms standard on the Wheel, and their faces were browned and hard, and vacant as plaster images.

"I'm Greer," one of them said, stepping to the forefront of the trio. His jaw was immense, and his eyes glittered like glass. He wore the insignia of UN Colonel. "These are Lieutenants Fletcher and Holtzman."

"Sign me out of here, Colonel," the pilot said. "I've got to be going."

Greer looked at him without expression. "Won't you take rations with us?"

"I'm not hungry."

"As you say." Greer took Dave by the arm. "Come on, Captain Dominique," he said. "We'll give you the fifty-cent tour." But he spoke without humor.

The three-man commission led the new crew member throughout the Wheel. The

inspection took less than an hour, including the curt introductions to the men at their stations. There were familiar faces among them, too: Paul Chavard, of Observation—a young, fresh-faced officer whose digestive and carnal appetites had been the butt of many OCS jokes back on Earth—Paul Chavard, whose frozen features and steely eyes were fixed perpetually on Ground Zero on the Earth beneath, and who greeted Dave Dominique like some intrusive stranger.

There was Mitch Brody, now a Major, whose responsibility was the Wheel's analogue computer on the top deck. Mitch had a crush on Anna once; Dave recalled his greedy eyes on her when they double-dated at college. But Mitch had no questions for Dave about Anna now.

There was Jack Holyoke, of Communications. Could he have forgotten the old days and the good times? That ham radio set-up they had shared in Philadelphia, and that neo-Orson Welles invasion program they had broadcast? Remember the cops, and that stuffy judge, and the look on your father's face when he bailed you out, Jack? But Jack Holyoke didn't—or did, and no longer cared.

"You'll be on standby assignment for six weeks," Greer told Dave. "We'll get you familiar with every phase of the Wheel's operation, so you can fill in adequately in case of emergency. Then you'll get your permanent assignment to Observation."

"I understand."

"Good," said Greer. "Now you can return to your quarters. Ration time is at 1700. Lights out at 2400. You start your training cycle in the Meteorological section tomorrow; Captain Rochester will show you the ropes. All clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good luck, Captain."

"Thank you, sir."

Greer turned to leave.

The six weeks went quickly.

He learned the new science of meteorology as practiced at this unique vantage point, observing atmospheric changes hours before their effects were known on the planet beneath. There was an exciting moment when he participated in the search for a missing rocket transport; the telescopic eyes at their command located the wreck in the Bering Strait. There were no tears shed at the Wheel over the death of

the five hundred passengers aboard.

He spent three days observing celestial phenomena, and saw the birth and death of stars. A year ago, the beauty and majesty of their movements would have brought moisture to his eyes. But all eyes were hard and clear and dry aboard the UN-1.

He learned every detail of the mechanisms which kept the Wheel in space; learned them through the clean sheets of blueprint and statistical data, and through the dirty business of crawling through ducts and among pulsating machinery.

He was educated in the function of Communications aboard the satellite, and found the radio simpler to operate than the obsolete equipment he had once toyed with as an amateur CQ.

And he learned his way around the device the crew called the Trigger. It was simple; terribly simple.

He learned other things, too.

He learned to keep his mouth shut during working hours, and to keep conversation to a minimum at other times, too. He learned that mention of affairs and events and people back on earth was a subject lacking in interest aboard the satellite. He learned to be coldly efficient—the perfect automaton, in the perfect mechanism, in the perfect world.

The lessons came hard, and Dave Dominique wondered: How long before the antithalamic operation really took hold?

One day, two months later, Paul Chavard of Observation spoke to him on a subject other than official business.

"Coming to the meeting tonight?" he said.

Dave looked at him curiously. "What meeting?"

"I thought Greer had mentioned it to you. The meeting in Locker 9. I know you're invited."

"I hadn't heard about it," Dave said. "What's it about?"

Chavard smiled thinly. "What do you think?"

"I don't know. What kind of guessing game is this?"

"No game at all, Dominique," the other said icily. "You come to Locker 9 after rations tonight. You'll see what I mean."

"All right," Dave said.

He went back to the screen. Ground Zero was San Francisco. It was raining. Market Street would be bobbing with umbrellas. The waters of the

bay would be brooding darkly. The spires of the Golden Gate would be shrouded in mist . . .

That "night" he reported to Locker 9, where three-quarters of the Wheel's crew had gathered.

The meeting appeared to be formal, and Colonel Greer sat in chairmanship, his massive jaw thrust forward atop his linked fingers.

"Sit up here, Captain Dominique," he said. He waved Dave to a seat up front. "You're our guest of honor, you know . . ."

Dave looked puzzled. "No. I didn't know."

Without preamble, Greer said: "Give him the manifesto."

A document was placed in his hands, and he began to read it. The first phrases made no sense to him, as he felt their watching eyes upon him. He read them over three times before their meaning became clear; then he sped through the rest of the curious manuscript until he reached its inevitable and alarming conclusion. He stared at it, no longer conscious of his silent audience.

He looked up from the paper to meet Greer's stony gaze.

"What you have just read," the Colonel said dryly, "is merely the summation of a major work now in preparation. We are all the authors of that work. What chapter do you think you could write for us, Captain Dominique? Maybe more than one."

"I don't understand—"

"What could be clearer?" Paul Chavard said quietly.

"Can you argue against what we say?" Greer said. "You've been anti-thalamic less than three months. Do you recall enough of your emotional past to find reason for denying the truth of our manifesto?"

"No," Dave said slowly. "It's not that. It's just—the surprise of all this—"

"Exactly," said another officer. "A surprise long awaiting the world, Dominique. And it's ready and waiting now."

"Come now," Greer said smoothly. "Argue, Dominique. Tell us why we are wrong. Tell us why Reason can't triumph over Emotion — anyplace, anywhere — on any battlefield—"

"Battlefield . . ."

"Use your head, Dominique," Chavard grated. "Not the bloody battlefields alone —although we'll stand up there, too."

"Have you ever read Whitehead?" asked Greer.

Dave shook his head.

"This is a passage from our main work, courtesy of that gentleman." The Colonel read from a paper in his hand, his voice a dull monotone. "'. . . a social system is kept together by the blind force of instinctive actions, and of instinctive emotions clustered around habits and prejudices. . . . There is then opportunity for Reason to effect, with comparative speed, what otherwise must be left to the slow operation of the centuries, amid ruin and reconstruction. Mankind misses its opportunities, and its failures are fair target for ironic criticism. But the fact that Reason too often fails does not give fair grounds for the hysterical conclusion that it never succeeds. Reason can be compared to the force of gravitation, the weakest of all natural forces, but in the end the creator of suns and stellar systems—'" Greer looked up, and out to the viewport of the locker with its bright patch of infinity. "'—those perfect societies of the Universe.'"

"Are we making sense, Dominique?" Chavard said.

Dave turned to him. "Yes. Yes, God knows. But this—" He tightened his grip on the sheets of paper in his hand and stared down.

"Remember what they say about love, Dominique?" The speaker was Mitch Brody. "They say it's blind, don't they?" Dave thought of Anna, and wondered if Mitch spoke bitterly. "Well, that goes for all emotions, doesn't it? Blind!"

"Blind," Greer said. "And blind men are guiding those pitiful blind creatures down there. You'll have to admit that's true, Captain. You can't deny the history of the world."

"And now there are men who are not blind," Chavard said. "Now the shades have been lifted—"

"You're one of them, Captain Dominique. You see things now as few men have seen them before."

"There have been men of Reason always—" Dave said.

"None like us," said Chavard.

"None with such clear rights to the throne," said Greer.

"And none with the clear means."

Dave looked around the room.

"Think about it," Greer said. "We've all had time to

get used to the idea. You will, too."

"I'll think about it," Dave said.

He thought about it. And three hours later, he slipped out of his berth and made his way down the passageway towards the Communication center.

The controls were set for automatic reception of emergency messages, but the machinery was quiet, and the operator nowhere to be seen.

He beamed in Washington quickly, and the voice that answered was bored and sleepy until he made his plea for instant contact with Colonel Danvers, and used the words: "life or death."

"Dave? Is that you?"

"Yes, yes! Listen, Colonel Danvers—listen—"

"Wait a minute; I want this recorded. Go on, Dave."

"Listen, this is no good. I'm not like them up here. The operation was a failure. It hasn't worked—"

Danvers sounded relieved. "Is that all?"

"No, no, keep listening. It's worse than that. They have ideas. All of them. About themselves and about Earth—"

"What do you mean, ideas?"

"They want power, Colonel. They believe it's their right—as the only true men of reason—"

The door to the Communication locker was opened.

"Dominique? Is that you in there?" It was Jack Holyoke.

"Get someone up here fast, Colonel," Dave said desperately. "Come up yourself if you can—"

"What are you doing?" Holyoke said, wide-eyed. "Who're you talking to?"

Holyoke suddenly sensed the situation. He sprung forward, and reached out to dissolve the connection between the Wheel and Earth. But Dave caught his wrist in mid-air. His right arm came up in a practiced arc, and the hard side of his palm cracked on the white collar of the communications officer. Holyoke slumped forward, groaned, and collapsed over the controls.

"Dave! Dave, are you there?"

"I'm all right, Colonel. But I mean what I say. The whole satellite's full of Doug Merchants! Do you understand what I'm saying?"

The Colonel's answer was brisk. "All right. Stay out of trouble and we'll despatch a ship immediately—"

Dave laughed brokenly.

"Out of trouble? It's a little late for that. I walked into trouble the minute I walked into that operating room at Johns Hopkins—"

"You did, Dave. But not the kind you mean. There was no anti-thalamus performed on you, Dave. Do you understand?"

He stared at the receiver stupidly.

"Can you hear me, Dave?"

Unbelievingly: "Yes. Yes, I hear you—"

"You went in and out without being touched. We gave you a harmless dose of drugs to make you feel like something had happened. We wanted you to look genuine cold fish."

"But why? Why?"

"For a call like this, Dave," Danvers said grimly. "Just for a call like this. To find out if we could whether Operation Cold Fish was success or failure . . . to find out if there were a terrible joker somewhere in the deal . . ."

Footsteps sounded in the corridor outside.

Dave shot a look towards Holyoke's unconscious body, and decided quickly to get rid of it. He went over to him and slipped his hands under the officer's arms in the start of a half-nelson. He dragged him towards the door, and shoved the limp form outside. He saw it slide in a heap to the polished floor as he clanged the steel door closed.

Then he went back to the receiver.

"What's happening there, Dave?" The Colonel's voice was worried. "Are they after you? Do they know you're calling?"

"I can hold them off," he said determinedly. "I've got something they don't have, Colonel. I'm *angry*, see? I'm mad as a wet hen!"

He laughed suddenly, with satisfaction, with relief, with pure, unreasoning joy.

THE END

OUR APOLOGIES

The cover on the July issue of FANTASTIC, while credited to Ed Valigursky, was really the work of Leo Summers. (By the way, is that oversized lobster haunting your dream?) Our error in not crediting Leo was a deplorable oversight and we hereby make amends to the best of our ability. Okay, Leo?

SPORTS AROUND THE WORLD

Americans pride themselves on their knowledge of sports, but there are some widely played games which have barely touched the shores of the Continental United States. You'll find a lot of them here. Count 5 points each time you score a right answer. If you rack up an 80 total, you're really an expert. If you get them all, you should write a book on the subject.

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1. The national game of Canada is **(ice hockey—lacrosse).**
2. The first race horse to win more than $1,000,000 was **(Citation —Whirlaway).**
3. A game first played in Debtor's Prison in England which later became associated with the aristocracy is **(racquets—fencing).**
4. The baseball player with the highest lifetime batting average was **(Roger Hornsby—Ty Cobb).**
5. The last bareknuckle boxing champion of the world was **("Gentleman Jim" Corbett—John L. Sullivan).**
6. A game which originated centuries ago in India is **(polo—badminton).**
7. The pitcher who fanned the most batters in his career was Walter Johnson of the **(Washington Senators—St. Louis Cards).**
8. The outstanding professional golfer of the 1920's was **(Walter Hagen—Bobby Jones).**
9. The first horse to win the Triple Crown (Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes) was **(Man o' War—Sir Barton).**
10. A famous 24-hour endurance contest for racing cars is held each year at **(Le Mans, France—Monte Carlo).**
11. Since 1950, the Davis Cup has been won most often by **(United States—Australia).**
12. The first woman to swim the English Channel both ways was **(Gertrude Ederle—Florence Chadwick).**

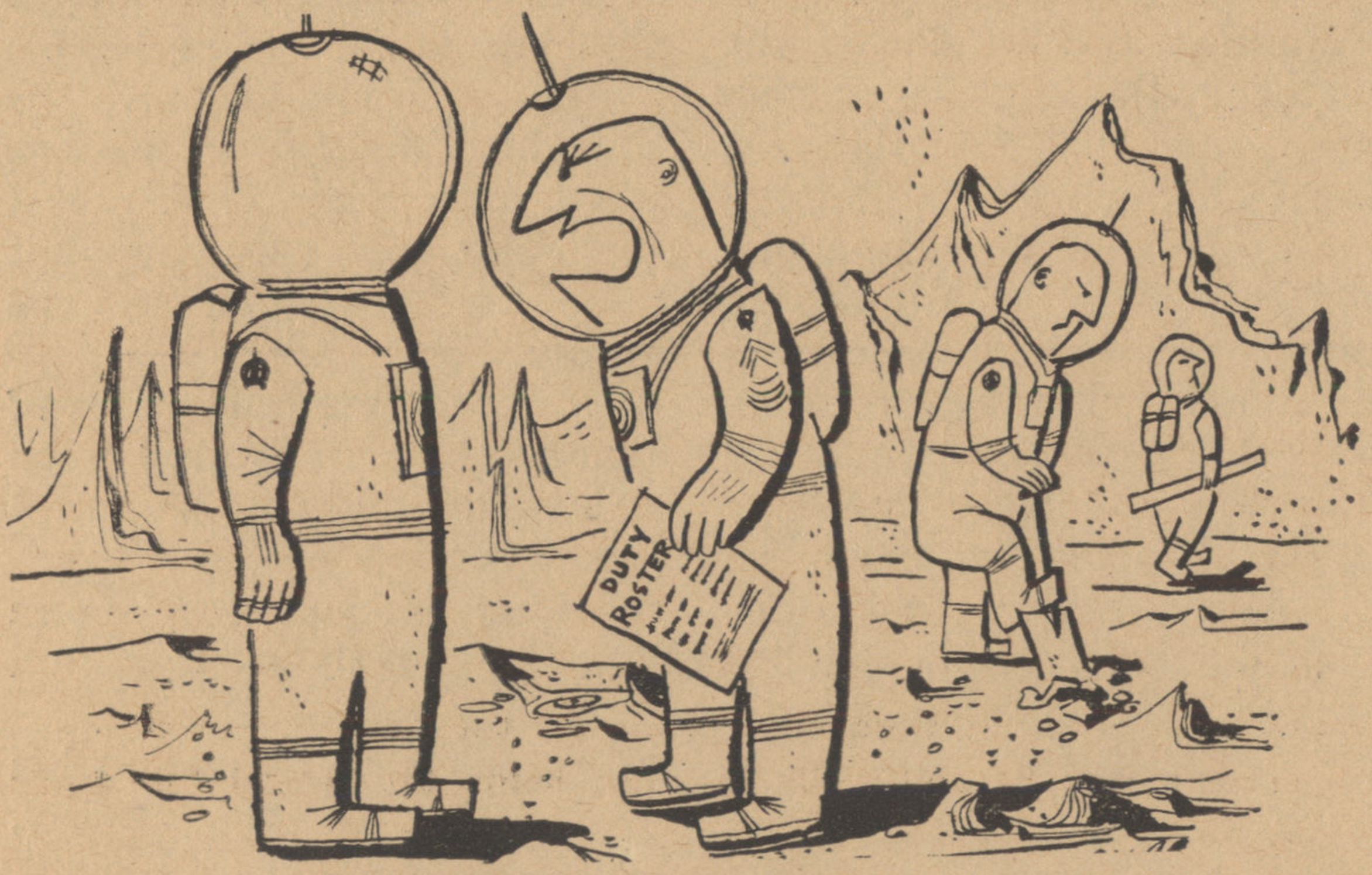
13. A racket game popular in Cuba is **(jai-alai—squash)**.
14. Bowling originated in **(England—Germany)**.
15. The modern Olympic games were first held in **(1896—1892)**.
16. The current world chess champion is **(Botvinnik—Reshevsky)**.
17. The college football coach with the longest service was **(Amos Alonzo Stagg—Glenn "Pop" Warner)**.
18. Babe Ruth, home-run king, hit **(641-714)** in his lifetime.
19. The America's Cup yacht racing trophy has been **won by** England **(once—never)**.
20. A Scottish game played on the ice is **(curling—hurling)**.

★

ANSWERS

1. *Lacrosse*—a game of Indian origin, was named Canada's official game by legislative act. Ice hockey also originated in Canada. 2. *Citation*—passed the $1,000,000 mark in 1951 for a total of $1,085,760. Whirlaway only reached $561,161. 3. *Racquets*—it was revived in 1822 at Harrow and rapidly became one of the most exclusive of games. Fencing, of course, did not originate in a prison. 4. *Ty Cobb*—lifetime record was .367. Roger Hornsby, a great natural hitter, holds the record for one season .424. 5. *John L. Sullivan*—won his last defense of the bareknuckles title in 1889. Corbett defeated him for the first title with gloves under Marquis of Queensberry rules in 1892. 6. *Badminton*—goes far back into the past, while polo is less than 100 years old. Polo has been given a long history by a few historians, but according to the most reliable evidence it was first played by British officers in 1862 who got the idea from the wild riding of a hill tribe of Indians. 7. Walter Johnson struck out 3,497 batters while playing for the *Washington Senators* between 1907 and 1927. Largely because of Johnson the Senators even won the pennant in 1924 and 1925. He also holds the record for shut-out games—113. 8. *Walter Hagen*—During the '20's, he won the P.G.A. tournament five times and the British Open four. Bobby Jones was, of course, the greatest amateur. 9. *Sir Barton*—in 1919. Man o'

War, considered by some the greatest American thoroughbred never ran in the Kentucky Derby, but won 20 out of the 21 races in which he competed. 10. *Le Mans*—its 24-hour endurance race is considered by European car manufacturers one of the best advertisements for their sports cars. 11. *Australia*—has almost a clean sweep since 1950, the United States winning only in 1954. 12. *Florence Chadwick*—completed this feat in 1950, 1951. Gertrude Ederle was the first woman to swim the Channel one way. 13. *Jai-alai*—Squash is an international game similar to racquets. 14. *Germany*—it is very ancient and originally was part of a religious ceremony. 15. *1896*—Baron de Coubertin conceived the idea and 9 nations competed the first year. 16. *Botvinnik*—Reshevsky of America is sometimes regarded as an unofficial Western champion since the Iron Curtain has prevented his competing for the world crown with the Russian Botvinnik. 17. *Amos Alonzo Stagg*—coached for 57 years (1889-1946, including 40 years at the U. of Chicago). Pop Warner comes in second with 45 years. 18. *714*—is the Babe's all-time record. 19. *Never*—it was won by the United States yacht *America* in 1851 and has been successfully defended against a whole series of English and Canadian yachts since. 20. *Curling*—it is played with a stone pushed over the ice, but skates are not worn. It is a major sport in Scotland.



"O. K. Perkins, I know you're in there."

PHOENIX TREATMENT

By HARLAN ELLISON

The thing that doomed them was new as tomorrow but their reaction to it was as old as time: "Lash out blindly! Let panic and destruction rule. Death to all!— Even to those who can save us!"

THEY'RE scared to death, Dr. Lestino, and you're doing your best to get them to kill you!" Ben Giles thumped his fist on the lab table, stared across imploringly at the white-smocked bio-chemist.

Lestino bit his lower lip, watched the big Townsman pace the lab. "Is that so, Ben?" he answered calmly.

Giles turned on him, a momentary flash of anguish in his eyes, as though the other's calmness had infuriated him. "You know damned well it is! Why are you doing this?"

The bio-chemist made no move to answer, and Giles turned away again in frustration. His voice came through, braided with fury.

"Dr. Lestino, when you brought me in, I was an ignorant Townsman. I ran with the rest of them, and I had the fear of the Plague. I wanted to burn this laboratory down as badly as the rest. But you've shown me you're *not* monsters . . . at least up till now. I've wanted to work with you, but now . . ." he let his hands motion vaguely, as though willing the precise words into being, ". . . now I just don't know! Do you want them to burn you to the ground?"

Lestino fingered the inch of beard at his chin, stared down at his shoe tops and mumbled something.

"What did you say?" Giles asked nervously as if afraid of what he'd heard.

"I *said,* Ben . . ." and his voice strengthened oddly, "perhaps. Perhaps, I said.

They worked desperately as the maddened townsmen advanced.

Perhaps I *do* want them to burn us to the ground."

It was a moment after the doctor had closed the lab door behind him that Ben Giles realized what the little biologist had meant. He had meant —simply—he wanted the fear-crazy Townsmen to raze the Plague Laboratory—to kill everyone inside.

Ben Giles turned back to the microscope, a gnawing uncertainty feeding in his belly.

The laboratory stood on a hill, next to what had been the town of Coshocton, Ohio—before the Plague. Before it had begun, they had been working on the immunization of human beings against cosmic radiation; but after their fellow scientists across the Earth had decided plague-virus might be an effective war-weapon, they had switched research.

Now they worked on an antidote for the bestial Plague. They worked with what little they had left—short amounts of supplies and long amounts of determination — because the world was now P.R.

P.R. Plague-Ridden, and only one-twentieth of the population left alive to suffer with it. Every day someone went screaming out of the town, screaming because his windpipe had begun to close down on him. Screaming because his eyes had begun to puff in their sockets. Screaming because he knew he had contracted the Plague, and his fellow Townsmen would be stalking him shortly with deer rifles.

It was contagious through personal contact—that had been proven by time. But eventually, it seemed, everyone's resistance broke to the onslaught of the Plague, and they came down with it.

Bit by bit, segment by dying segment, the people were going under. And while they could not strike back at the nameless Plague, they *could* strike back at those who had spread it.

The scientists.

The damned, doubly-damned, forever and ever, over and over damned scientists. With their test tubes, and their microscopes, and their petri dishes, and their hands of death.

The scientists were a reminder. But more than that, they were terrifying. The Townsmen had never quite understood all that gobbledegook about chemistry, and micro-organisms and other words, even longer. It was a breath of the unknown, and

they had already seen the hell it could bring!

The Townsmen had done everything they could: they'd shot the army men, they'd cut themselves off from the other towns, they'd gone back to the land—so God would smile on them again. But it wasn't quite enough. There was one more thing.

The scientists had to go, by God! They had to go!

The only thing was . . .

. . . they *might* have something worse than the Plague. They might throw it if caution wasn't used. So the Townsmen made their tentative gestures of hatred and retaliation, but did not make the full power of their terror felt.

The alarm bell rang through the two-story lab, dragging the men from their bunks, shaking to awareness those dozing on duty.

"They're coming again!" Dyas screamed through the intercom. The voice blasted hugely through the white corridors, "They're coming with bricks again! Get the hell away from the windows or they'll clobber you!"

Ben Giles pounded through the hall, into the lounge. He was the last to arrive. The other nineteen were there. Lestino and Gail Fulton, Mercer and Don Vicic, all of them, watching with wide eyes as the crowd of Townsmen surged up the hill from the square, the noon sunlight flashing off the scythes and squares of plastibrick they carried.

"Maybe I can stop them—" Giles began, grabbing Lestino by the shoulder. "Maybe they'll listen to me. I was born in the Town. They know me!"

Nelson Diamond, the immunochemist, sneered down his thin face at the tall Giles. "Don't be a fool, man. Ever since they learned you understand bacterial growth, they have feared you worse than us! You're a changeling, man. They'd as soon stone you to death as *look* at you!" He laughed, and the others nodded their heads sadly in agreement.

"But they'll—"

"No buts, Ben," Lestino calmly removed the big man's hand from his arm. "That's the way it is. They want to harry us, and no one can stop them."

The crowd had reached the edge of cleared ground, where the trees had been stripped away, where the grass had been dug out, where dead ground made a circle around the building.

The scientists had done

that two months before, the first time the Townsmen had tried to burn them down.

"Why do you keep aggravating them?" Giles demanded of the silently staring group of scientists. "Why? Dammit, what have you got to gain? They might leave us alone if you'd stop antagonizing them!"

No answer was forthcoming, and Gail Fulton turned her slate-gray eyes away at his words. Arnold Switzer moved a step toward her, and put his arm around her shoulders. Ben felt his face go hot, and his fists clench as Switzer moved to the girl's side.

The crowd stopped at the edge of the cleared space, and Ben could see Big Dad Terry in the front, a huge rock in his sun-tanned hand, his pudgy face sweat-streaked with dirt.

Yaneger, the man who ran the blacksmith shop—though he had been a used car salesman before the Plague—cupped his hands to his mouth, screamed, "You devils! We're gonna getcha for killin' them calves! Ya slit the throats of ten of our best calves, and we're gonna kill ya! S'help us God, we'll make ya sorry ya ever started . . ."

Big Dad Terry cut him off, shoving him back irritably. Yanager had always talked too much. As though it were a signal, they all let fly their missiles.

Rocks and heavy pieces of plastibrick crashed around the lab.

One chunk of metal tubing sailed across the dead space, and smashed through the lounge window. The scientists ducked as the missile whined over their heads and smashed with a violent sound through the glass case housing the oscilloscope.

"Oh, Lord no!" Allen Vicic moaned, getting off his hands and knees, rushing to the case. "They've splintered the scope! Those crazy maniacs! I'll kill every one of—"

In two steps the tiny Lestino was beside him. Two sharp cracks across the face, and Vicic settled shaking into silence.

"You'll do *nothing*, Allen. Nothing at all, is that clear? Until later. We'll see about it later. If you want to do something, you can come with us on the raid tonight."

Ben Giles sat up on the floor; beside him the splintered shards of the window glowed in the slanting light of the afternoon. "Raid? *Raid?* You're not going on another one of those terror

missions! For the love of God, don't you see you only make them hate and fear you more! Leave them *alone;* do your work in peace if you must, but leave them alone!"

The scientists stared at him momentarily, stared back at each other, and turned away. Giles let his head slump into his blocky hands, the lank brown hair falling over his forehead.

Why was I cursed with this mechanical, idiot's knowledge of science? he tormented himself. *I'm a Townsman, I should have stayed with them. If it wasn't that I thought I could help clear up this Plague, and if it wasn't for* . . . he stared at the huddled mass that was Gail Fulton . . . *I'd go back to them! Why? Why are they doing this?*

Another bulk crashed through the window, showering glass over them, and he flattened against the rug.

"We'll getcha evenchally!" the scream came from outside.

The attack wore on for another hour, and when it was done, the Townsmen went back down the hill, their arms tired. Five windows had been broken, the scope was ruined, Minton Ashley had suffered a slash across his forehead, and Ben Giles felt the eating thing in his belly starting on the main course.

Ben stopped Gail Fulton in the upper corridor, drew her into the blackview specimen room. In the slanted light of the enlarged specimens in their light-squares, he saw the strange, strained expression on her attractive face.

Her dark hair was unkempt, almost for the first time since he'd known her, and her slate-gray eyes were red and tired.

"Gail," he began fumblingly, "I—I don't know what's going on around here. Why are they doing this? They're just getting the Townsfolk more enraged every day.

"Why, why don't they just conduct their experiments in peace, and leave the people alone?"

She had been holding a clipboard close to her chest, and now put it down on a dissecting shelf, took Giles' hands in her own, warmly.

"Ben, Ben, Ben," she said, almost wearily, "there's *so* much you don't understand."

His temper flared briefly. "Don't treat me like a child, Gail! Understand? Understand what? That they aren't putting their full efforts to solving the Plague Problem? That they'd rather go out and terrorize the neighborhood,

slitting calves' throats, burning down what little crops there are? Understand *that?* If that's what you mean, then, *yes,* I guess you're right. There *is* a lot I don't understand!"

Her eyes looked up at him imploringly. She tried to phrase her thought, but stammered into silence. Then she turned around and took the clipboard from the shelf, said, "I've got to go out back, Ben. It's my turn to draw water. Come with me, we'll talk."

They left the blackview specimen room and walked down the corridor to the rear stairwell.

They walked downstairs and unlocked the rear door of the laboratory. The well stood close by the back door.

"Ben, get the bucket, will you? It's inside there, under the staircase.

"Look, Gail, forget the water for a minute, will you? I want to talk to you. There's something going on here, and I want to find out what it is. Lestino, and Vicic, and all the others—you, too—you're not maniacs . . . why all *this?"*

She shook her head, walked past him, taking the bucket from beneath the stairwell. "We can't forget the water, Ben. No more than we can forget . . . *anything."* She waved her hand around at the countryside.

Ben Giles stared out across the land for a moment, and knew what she meant.

These scientists, even more than the people of the Town, —and Towns across what was left of the blasted world—felt the horror of the War. They felt in part responsible for what had come to pass. Their responsibility was greater, and they wanted to atone for what their brother scientists had done.

Ben knew they could not forget what had happened.

"Then why this tormenting of the people?"

"Ben," she asked, attaching the bucket to the hook, "when was the last time you did a day's work without dropping a retort or a test tube?" The well sheave squawked and creaked as she let the bucket down into the water.

Ben stared at her uncomprehendingly for a moment. Then he spread his hands, said, "What's that got to do . . ."

"No, I *mean* it, Ben," she interrupted, looking at him intensely. "How long ago? Aren't you constantly nervous, aren't you always at jumping point?"

He moved his hands in be-

wilderment. "Well, what does that have to do with—"

"Answer me, Ben." Her dark eyes were intense.

"It's been a long time, Gail. Every day. You know we've got a problem with glassware. You also know I've been experimenting with glass-blowing to do our own. But what's that got to do with the raids?"

"Ben . . . I know I shouldn't be telling you this, but—"

"Gail!" They both spun at the voice.

Nelson Diamond, the thin-faced immunochemist stepped from the building, his eyes narrowed. Anger leaped in the air, and he stepped over to the fair-haired girl, took the well-rope from her hands, bringing the bucket up quickly.

"I think you'd better come in now, Gail, I've got a few slides I want you to catalog."

Ben stepped between them quickly, taking the bucket from the hook, staring down at Diamond.

"Gail and I were talking, Nelson. I'd like to hear what she has to say."

"Gail said just about enough, I'd say."

"I—I thought he should, should *know*, Nels," Gail tried to explain.

Diamond took her by the upper arm, started to lead her back into the building. Ben set the bucket down on the well rim with a splash that slopped water across his boots, and smacked the immunochemist's hand from the girl's arm. "I think you'd better go inside, Diamond. You're not wanted here right now."

"Not *wanted?* Look who's telling me! The little Townie. Why the hell don't you go back to your witch-hunting buddies out in the swamps? Nobody wants you here, Townie—"

Diamond swung heavily, and Ben ducked, allowing the drive to go over his shoulder. Then he swung his weight hard, and brought a fist up from the hip.

The crack spun Diamond around, sent him reeling backward. He hit the edge of the well, and began to slip over. For a frantic moment he flung his legs, and the bucket fell over the edge of the well, a moment later splashing in the water at the bottom.

Diamond held a hand to his face. His lip was split at one corner, and a thin, watery trickle of blood streaked his chin.

Before Ben knew what was happening, Gail had moved in front of him, and her hand

slashed across his eyes, palm flat. The pain lasted only a moment, but in that time she began helping Diamond to his feet. They closed the back door of the laboratory behind them.

The Townsman stared after them for a long moment.

Then Ben started to retrieve the bucket from the bottom of the well, fishing at it with the lowered hook.

"Now, who wants to go on the raid tonight?" Dr. Lestino stood before the blackboard in the auditorium. The nineteen remaining members of the staff sat in the two front rows, and hands went up quickly.

"This won't be as easy as the others," he added warningly. "First of all they know we're coming . . . or at least they suspect we're coming, and this time we're going to steal a baby."

"A baby!"

Ben Giles leaped to his feet, looked around him as though he were going mad and hadn't heard properly. "Are you all out of your minds? Are you insane? What do you want to steal a child for? They'll kill us *all!* Stay here tonight and work on a plague-antibiotic . . ."

Murmurs and whispers and a shouted, "Sit down, Ben!" made him all the angrier.

"I came in from out there, and I thought you men knew what you were doing . . . but *this*, this is insanity! What's the matter with you? Have you been affected by your own viruses?"

Dr. Lestino looked severe, then weary, by turns, and motioned Giles to be seated. "You're out of order, Ben."

Gail leaned over from her chair, and placed a hand on Ben's arm. "Please, Ben," she whispered, but he shrugged her away. She had gotten angry at him for slugging Diamond—well, let her *stay* that way. He didn't want any scienie woman anyhow!

Scienie. He caught himself abruptly. He hadn't used Town lingo since he'd come here. Was he starting to think like a Townsman again? Was his faith in these people riddled with doubt now?

Scienie?

He raised his hand for the raid volunteers. He *had* to know.

Lestino noted the raised hand, and looked thoughtful for a minute. "You want to go with us, Ben? I thought you were set against these raids."

Ben mumbled something, then said, "I—I want to see what you're going to do. Per-

haps I've misjudged these raids, and I'd like to—"

Lestino was shaking his balding little head. "I'm afraid not, Ben. Your reason is a bit too transparent. You stay here tonight."

He went on to select three others for the raid.

Kotsky, Diamond, Lestino, Dyas and Berkaholtz were going out that night, when the final selections had been made.

Lestino turned to the blackboard and began sketching a rough lay-out of the countryside. Finally he drew a square, put an "X" through it, and drew curving lines from the lab to the "X"ed house. Then he put the chalk in the tray, slapped his hands free of the chalk dust, and turned back to the group.

"The house belongs to Big Dad Terry. He's been running the Town for the last three years, since he killed the Mayor. He told everyone the Mayor was P.R. and there wasn't any objection. Since then he's been head man, so I think it would be smartest to steal *his* baby."

Ben sat transfixed. It was clear now: they were insane. Fooling around with Big Dad Terry was the final outrage. When the Town got wind of it, they'd be up here with torches, and the lab would go to the ground in smoke.

Lestino continued talking, assigning the positions to his raiders, and discussing the best ways to get into the house. Ben sat very still, letting his mind tumble the facts. They tumbled crazily, and he felt a throbbing begin behind his eyes.

They were crazy; they *had* to be! But he couldn't let them do this. When they went out tonight, they would have a sixth raider with them.

Ben was determined to stop this madness before it caused the destruction of the lab.

The raiders slid up to the weather-beaten house on elbows and thighs. They dragged themselves along silently in the dirt and underbrush.

The moon was covered with scudding gouts of clouds, and shadows lay thick in the darkness. The house rose up before them gray and shapeless. The windows had long since been shot out, and re-boarded with two-by-fours. But a coal-chute opened to them, and three of the five men slipped down the trough, disappearing into the house.

Five minutes later Ben, hidden in the stand of mulberry bushes near the road, saw them emerge from the

side door. Lestino came first, holding a blanket-wrapped shape in his arms. He carried the baby carefully, and the five began to move away from the house.

Ben leaped out and hissed at them, "Stop! I didn't think you'd go through with—"

Then big, slope-shouldered Kotsky was on him, swinging a meaty fist full at Ben's face. The ex-Townsman ducked and the blow grazed his cheek. He came up belly-high to the scientist, driving all the power of his body behind the blow. The fist sank into Kotsky's fleshy middle, and the man *whoofhed* with the drive. He sank backward, and then the other four were running.

Suddenly Ben began yelling. "Terry! Big Dad! They've got your baby!" and the house erupted kerosene lamps and people. Dimly Ben saw Kotsky get up, swing on him, and then the pain exploded in his head, and he sank onto the grass, hearing footsteps running back toward the lab.

Hearing booming voices screaming, "We'll burn ya down, you murderin' sciennies!"

Then the silence of darkness ushered in unconsciousness.

He awoke painfully to see a crowd of Townsmen surrounding him. One of them was holding a flaming torch, and he said, "Let's kill him right now!"

Big Dad Terry stepped into Ben's view, and spoke quietly. "Shut up, Henderson. Ben was the one called me out. He was trying to stop 'em."

The big man stooped over and grasped Ben by the underarms. He heaved the tall Giles to his feet, and steadied him.

"Where'd they take my boy, Ben?"

Ben Giles felt flickering pains snapping at the inner lining of his skull. He couldn't quite focus properly, and his first words were muted by coughing. "They took him back to the lab, Terry. I was . . . I was a fool to go to them. I—I . . ."

He couldn't finish, but he had no need to, for the big man put his arm around Giles' shoulder, said, "That's okay, Ben. We're glad you saw the truth. Now you can help us burn those sciennies to the ground!"

Ben felt a shift in his mind. Did he want to burn them down? He wanted to get away, yes, but burn the place down? He started to protest, but the body of men began moving, and someone thrust a torch into his hands, and he was running with them.

Off to his right he heard Big Dad Terry screaming, "Get the baby out first! Don't hurt my boy, but burn that stinking scienie lab to the ground!"

The hill stretched up before them as the torches flickered strangely against the night sky. The squat block of the lab reared from the crest of the hill, and no lights were on inside. The men fanned out, and Ben felt his blood quicken as he was caught up in the maneuver.

Is this what it's like? Running with the pack. The thought flashed quickly in and out of his head, like light flickering up a neon tube. Is this what it's like to have no mind of my own? But I have to do it, don't I? They're animals, those men. They didn't have to steal a—"

And then a shout from his right, and a man stood tall in the night, with his arms thrown up, and he was screaming, "The baby! I found your kid, Terry! Over here!" and they were holding up the baby, which had been abandoned along the road to the lab.

Then the rumble of death grew louder in Ben Giles' head as they streamed forward to the lab . . . across the cleared space that had been stripped bare so fire would not carry across to the building.

Up to the white stucco and steel reinforced building, and the sound of glass shattering, and Big Dad Terry screaming through the flames.

"Bernie! Conners! Jack and Fred! Get your deer rifles ready! Any of 'em set foot out, *plug* 'em!"

Then the laboratory was a streaming redness atop the hill, and the sound of splintering glass, and rending metal, with all at once an explosion that rocked the top floor of the building, sending brick and plastic and steel fragments showering across the dead space.

That was the supply room, Ben thought, and they're all in there . . . all of them . . . Gail and Dr. Lestino . . . and Diamond, he wasn't such a bad sort . . . and Gail . . . and . . .

They had to club him to keep him from running back up the hill, into the burning building.

The Townsmen stood watch over Ben, sprawled at their feet, to prevent him from killing himself. "They're all dead, and it's the best thing ever happened to the Town!" Yaneger yelled over the roar of the fire.

They watched happily as the building burned to the ground, as it finally fell in with a roar, and the bare skeleton of the structure collapsed.

The next day, when the ashes had cooled some, they came around with pickaxes and hoes, and swept over the rubble. It had burned to the ground, and not one piece of accursed scienie gadgetry was left.

And no lousy, killing, baby-stealing scienies, *either!*

Nightmare . . .

A glass tube blown up so big it was a laboratory and the mirrored faces of Gail and Lestino and Nelson Diamond and the monkey-wrinkled face of Berkaholtz and all the rest; a month gone into the ashes and the nights of amber and gray and swirling, swirling around the building like flames, flames, flames that ate and roared and the squeak of the well sheave as it lowered him, Ben Giles, into the utter blackness at the bottom of the fire and the laboratory atop the hill sinking, sinking, sinking as he spent his days with the clods of the Town, working the fields, and listening to Big Dad Terry and Yaneger and the rest who looked on him still with partial suspicion, but knew he was really a Townie at heart, "Good old Ben, knew he'd come back to us when he saw what beasts those scienies were," as he tossed and spun and writhed in his sleep while the building burned and tumbled and thumped its girders and its beaming about him till one heavy metal beam struck him across the shoulder and hit him hard and he was rising, rising, with incomprehensible total heaviness from his sleep, and he could not breathe as though the ashes were covering his face and mouth and the warmth and the pressure and.

Awake . . .

To stare into the bright pinpoint eyes of Dr. Lestino.

To see the faces of Diamond and Vicic and three others.

To know the dream had ended and yet here they were.

To understand that they had come back from the flaming grave into his hut to haunt him.

To realize with a dreadful certainty that there were no such things as ghosts, and that these were men . . . alive!

To watch the hand lift from his mouth.

To feel the shout building in his throat . . .

. . . and to see the rag descending toward his nose . . .

. . . to smell the chloroform . . .

. . . and to sink back almost immediately to the dream.

When he awoke, it was dark. He coughed, breathed deeply but tentatively to make certain there was no more chloroform in the air, and struggled to raise himself. He was lying on a mattress of some sort, with the cool metal edge of a bed frame under his right hand.

As he pulled himself up, the heaviness of sleep dropping away like mud, a light flashed on, blinding him.

"Sorry we had to abduct you that way, Ben," said a voice to his left. The light had blinded him, searing out of the darkness that way.

Slowly his eyes adjusted, and he realized he was in a tiled-wall room, lying on a bunk. And the walls were lined with shelves. On the shelves were beakers, retorts, racks of test tubes, petri dishes, glass tubing, flagons, vials, crucibles, and a twisting stack of mortars, set beside a heap of pestles.

He tried to swing his feet off the bunk, and someone held them on the bed firmly, by the ankles. He looked toward the foot of the bed and saw Dr. Lestino, stern-faced and serious.

"Our stockroom," the little scientist explained, indicating the wall shelves with a nod of his head.

"But—I—where—"

"You'll know soon enough, Ben. Try to stand up now. I think Gail wants to see you."

"Gail—? I—I saw the laboratory burn down, saw the frame collapse—you were all ki—" his tongue clogged in his mouth.

Lestino was shaking his head. "Nothing of the sort, Ben. We're all alive. All of us. And we want to talk to you."

He helped the tall Townsman to his feet, just as the door sighed open on its pneumatic runners. Gail Fulton, in a lab smock and carrying the perennial clipboard of test sheets, stood there, framed by the neon walltubes of the hall, and a grim tightness of expression.

Ben felt as though the room was whirling about him, as though someone had decided to rip the nerves from his body, leaving a spinning hulk.

He *had* seen the laboratory burn to the ground. *Had* seen the Townsmen poking and tossing the rubble, making certain no instruments of scienie horror were left. So if

there had been no *instruments*, how could *humans* have come out of it?

Then he wondered: why had there been no instruments? Why no slag, no crumpled metal, no charred bodies?

A formless picture began to take shape, with the outlines of the P.R. Earth at its edges, and the Town and the laboratory near the center. But there were still too many things he didn't know, too many things that didn't fit in, that were illogical, frightening.

"Ben . . ." the girl's voice was searching.

"I . . . thought you were . . . dead, Gail." His mouth was dry. His words came slowly.

She came into the room, and Lestino released Ben's arm. He sat down again on the bed, heavily. Without drawing attention to himself, Lestino left the storeroom. Gail sat down on the bed beside the Townsman.

"Ben, I want to talk to you."

"Oh? I thought I was the lab pariah."

"Ben, *stop* it! That was all part of the plan. The fight with Nelson was staged, and so was my anger. We had to get you infuriated at us, get you back to the Town."

"You aren't reaching me, Gail."

"You'll understand it all in a while. They've got the group assembled in the salon, but I stopped by first to tell you something."

"Which is?"

"You're probably the most valuable man in the world now, Ben. In your hands rests the fate of the P.R. Towns, and of everybody in this laboratory . . ."

"Yes, about this 'laboratory.' Where *am* I? What *is* this?"

She stopped him with a raised hand. "You'll know all that soon, Ben. But I want to impress this on you—more than just my feelings for you personally—there's more at stake here than just one person.

"You can be our downfall, Ben, or you can be a savior. It's up to you, and I don't expect you to make a decision till you know all the facts, but just remember one thing . . .

"Just remember the phoenix."

"The phoenix?" he repeated in amazement.

"The bird that burns its own nest, then rises from its own ashes. The analogy fits in this case, Ben."

He began to say something, but the door sighed open

again, and Nelson Diamond stood there. He smiled, and walked into the room, extending his hand in friendship. Ben stared at the hand, but made no move to accept it.

Then he said to Gail, "Well, let's go, if we're going."

He stood up slowly, willing his body to obey his demands. He wouldn't show weakness before these two. Or *any* of them.

They walked down the long white hall, the neon walltubes casting an even off-white glow on everything. Ben marveled at the place. It was sturdily designed, and a much more impressive laboratory than the one which had been burned down.

As they passed one room, the door sighed open and he caught a glimpse of a blacklight viewing chamber, as Berkaholtz came out. He had stopped wondering about how these people had avoided the fire. They had done it; they were here; there was no contesting that—now he had to find out what was behind it all.

The door slowly closed, and he stared openly at the marvelous construction and facilities of the room. It had the blacklight viewing room of the previous laboratory beat right down the line. Clearer translation, larger images, more brilliant colors, detailed charts and facilities to interpret them.

Whatever they had done, they had constructed themselves a wonderously efficient working-place.

Then they reached the light-blue door set at the end of the hall, and it swung open for them. They were in a salon, tastefully decorated, soft music relaxingly carried across the carpeted room. Relaxer chairs, a fully-stocked bar, and the full complement of the laboratory, sitting around smiling at one another, talking. Behaving not at all the way corpses should.

Lestino sat on the high table, his short legs inches from the carpet. He pursed his lips, arms crossed, eyes steady on Ben Giles in a comfortable relaxer. The rest of the lab staff clustered near in chairs and leaning against the walls.

"Ben," Lestino began, speaking slowly but carefully, as though summarizing not only for the Townsman, but for himself as well, "how much work did you get done on the Plague while you were with us?"

"I don't understand."

"How near were you to

cracking the virus bases, how much actual constructive work did you do toward the goal?"

Ben fingered the side of his face in thought. "Why, I—I don't know. I catalogued a great many . . ."

Lestino cut him off. "No, I don't mean routine manual effort. I mean constructive, inventive work of an exploratory nature. Now be frank, Ben." He smiled sharply.

"Very little."

"What you mean is *none,* isn't it, Ben?"

"Well . . ."

"None," Lestino said abruptly, firmly.

"Yes, I guess you're right. But what's that got to do with—"

"Look around you, Ben. There are some of the finest minds in the field of bacteriology—or what's left of the field—here. Not one of them has come up with an answer, a glimmer of a solution, *nothing!* There was a reason for that, Ben. A damned good reason."

Nelson Diamond walked over to the tiny doctor, added, "Have you ever tried working in a steel stamping mill, Ben? Where the noise level is so high it filters down into your blood, and you find you're dropping things; you're not thinking properly; just wasting your time and effort?

"That's what it was like here. There was a constant harrying, a constant outside source always battering against us, always setting us on edge."

The picture was beginning to take color and form.

Lestino went on, quickly, "The Townsmen feared us, Ben because we were scientists, and *because* they feared us they wouldn't come right out and burn us down . . . kill us. They were afraid we might have something worse than the Plague that we'd toss if they bothered us too much.

"But they wanted us away from here. And they had a campaign to do it. They threw rocks, and they staged rallies, and they set fires, and they made it hell for us to get out and hunt or get food from our fields. So we raised hydroponic stuff, and we killed rabbits at night in groups of ten or more, so they couldn't surprise us.

"Still there was no end to it. We were a constant reminder to them, Ben, and they had just enough hatred to worry us like a rag in a dog's mouth. Enough to harry and

drive us to nervousness, but not enough to do us in.

"So we had to make them burn us down, Ben. We had to make them kill off the scienies on the hill, so we could work unhampered, solve the problem unbothered."

The picture snapped into focus completely, and he realized what a fool he had been.

"Where are we?" Giles asked.

"There's a studiedly heaped pile of rubble cemented atop a trap door in that rubble, Ben. Under that door is where we are. We've been building this place since long before you joined us. We couldn't be sure of you, Ben. Couldn't be certain you wouldn't revert to Townie fear and let out our secret.

"But we needed you. We needed your talent, and we needed you as a liaison man to the Town."

Diamond joined in. "We started those raids to get them mad at us; mad enough to burn us down, Ben. Then when they thought we were gone, we could work in peace, down here."

Ben thought of something, said, "Why didn't you just go away?"

Vicic laughed roughly. "Where? Where can we go, Ben? First of all, would they let us get away? Wouldn't they try to kill us before we could move, to keep the scienie devils from spreading?

"And even if we *did* get away, how could we move all the equipment? When was the last time you saw a truck, or even a car, that worked?

"And where would we go? It would be the same story in every Town, Ben. No, we were stuck here, and we had to make our situation more tenable. This was the only way."

"But . . . but . . . why didn't you tell me, why couldn't you let me be a part?"

"We couldn't trust you, Ben," Gail Fulton answered levelly.

He knew what they meant. There was much more at hand here than personalities. They couldn't take a chance on a turncoat Townie.

He sank lower in the relaxer, his head dropped to his hands. "God, what a fool I was! I could have had you killed, following you on the raid . . ."

"No, Ben," Gail interrupted. "That's the way it was planned. We were sure you'd follow them, and that was what we wanted. We could only hope you would follow

your nature and call an alarm.

"That would put you in good with the Townsmen again . . . and we needed you in the Town, Ben."

He didn't look up. He felt the futility draining down through him, and somehow, he wanted to cry. He wanted to let them know he was sorry, so sorry, for being a fool. But that was what they'd wanted. They had *wanted* him to be a fool, to make an ass of himself.

He began to straighten, in anger.

And then he remembered Gail's words in the storeroom: *Just remember the phoenix.*

Vicic was speaking. "We want your help, Ben. We want you to get us food. And meat. We can't hunt now . . . we're down here for the duration. Till we solve the P.R. situation. We need an outside man, Ben. Both to get us meat, and to ready the Townsmen for what's coming."

Lestino slid off the table, came to him, raised the tall Townsman's head.

"Ben, there's a great deal of death on the land now. We may be the *only* ones who can solve this problem. And we need someone out there to let the Townsmen know we aren't monsters.

"We need someone to act as intermediary; for the time when we solve the problem and come back. We'll need you then, Ben. Badly. More than anyone."

Ben looked up.

He saw their faces around him. The strained anxious expressions, the tenseness in their bodies. He knew they would have to kill him—here and now—if he refused, but somehow there was no inclination to refuse.

These were good men. They weren't martyrs, or heroes, but they were dedicated, and they had taken the only logical steps to solve this problem.

And they wanted him. They wanted him to help them beat the Plague, take the stain of death from the people and the land.

And, oddly enough, his was the easy part. All he had to do was risk his life to supply them with meat, and information, and prepare the people. Yet his was the easy end of the arrangement.

He looked up at Dr. Lestino, and smiled.

And thought of the phoenix.

THE END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ACCORDING TO YOU...

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Three cheers for Andrew Reiss on his letter published in the June '57 issue of *Fantastic.*

He wrote, and I quote, "I think that all of the stories in *Dream World,* and some of the stories in *Fantastic* and *Amazing* are simply vehicles for sex to sell the magazine, though every so often you print some good stories:"

If Mr. Reiss is like me, he has skipped several pages in many stories in order to avoid such sex references. We can only skip so many pages before we lose the point of the story. The trouble is, the situation is now intolerable.

I write this, because I like science fiction, but not sex stories. I quit *Dream World* before I got started, and I just bought and threw away the last issues of *Fantastic* and *Amazing.*

I have a small solution. You have two magazines that try to straddle the fence, (impossible!) and *Dream World,* almost by admission in your advertising, slanted toward the sex addict. How about a fourth one, with just good reading in it? Better yet, clean up the first three.

Linus Boehle
8 W. School St.
Bonne Terre, Mo.

● *This letter, we feel, rates a thoughtful and serious reply because it deals with a subject of basic significance. No one will ever find the perfect answer to sex in commercial magazines because opinion varies so radically. Therefore, each publication must stand or fall on editorial judgment in this matter, and we naturally have*

some views on the subject. Experience has shown us that the soldest belief one can have is a belief in the moral concepts of Mr. and Mrs. Average—a pattern to which all of us pretty well conform. The Average family buys this magazine, along with many others, every month, and they have told us and every other publisher and editor serving them that they do not want pornography. They have stated this so clearly that only an idiot could fail to get the message.

Thus, the problem is taken out of the realm of this editor's personal ideas on the subject whatever they may be. The public—leaving out the unclassifiable fringe—does not want filth. Yet, some publishers are still pushing obscenity onto the newsstands. Why? Because they are interested in the quick buck that almost any shoddy enterprise can return and are willing to function without benefit of pride in their publication. Few if any of these harbor any illusions as to permanency of operation. But the other end of the problem must be considered. Because sex can be handled disgustingly do we turn our backs and refuse to recognize its existence? Do we burn the great masterpieces of literature that lean on this basic motivation for their very existence? We do not. We consider the times—the period in which we happen to live. We recognize the fact that, while obscenity is as futile as it was two thousand years ago, and just as objectionable, the modern attitude on sex is far different than is, say the Victorian period—or even in the so-called wild "Twenties." Sex is accepted more casually, more openly, and—let's face it—more wholesomely. The Average family has made a decision in this respect also, and we interpret their directive thus: "Sex is a part of our daily lives and our daily lives include entertainment, so we want sex in our magazines." And if you think publishers have turned a deaf ear, look at any one of the big slicks. Not long ago one of the most respected of these published a story about a man who returned to his home town to aid a girl he had previously seduced. It seemed her brother was accused of a shocking sex murder. And it was a darned good story, too.

So that brings us to the point of editorial judgment—to where we must declare ourselves, and this is our declaration. We put sex into Fantastic *because our readers want it. We will make every effort to keep it acceptable by modern standards and we know that if we miss, our readers will make a point of communicating with us in a recognizable body. So far, they haven't done so.*

Dear Editor:

"Satan Is My Ally" was a humdinger of a *Fantastic* science fiction story. A nice commencement and ending for once. Get some-

body else to do the illustrations, though. These were the worst yet. All through the whole issue none of the pages were really worth looking at. Maybe one. I got a great kick out of the little tennis ball and racket at the bottom of page 120.

"Scientific Mysteries"—slight improvement for the month.

Anxiously awaiting Slesar's "A God Named Smith." If it's anything like "A God Named Kroo," I'll enter my subscription.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

● *You've read "A God Named Smith" by now, James. What did you think of it?*

Dear Editor:

The May issue of *Fantastic* was greater than ever. Every story was a gem of fantasy, which gripped one's imaginative mind up to the last word. Reading about people living in impossible situations brightens the everyday problems that arise in the course of our daily lives.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

● *July issue coming up, Mr. Brandt, and it's an even greater one.*

Dear Ed:

Why all the sex? I think *Fantastic* has some of the sexiest stories in science fiction. Most of these stories could be better without the sex. Others are no good anyway.

There is only one s-f magazine that I know of that sells for 25 cents and that is *Science Fiction Quarterly*. Why can't you do the same? How much would it cost you to decrease 10 cents a month? If you think it's too much you could increase your pages a bit or have 25 cents to subscribers only, $3.00 a year instead of $4.00.

Leslie Gerber, who I know outside of your letter department, said "My Robot" was a darned good story and it wasn't. It was a good plot but Isaac Asimov did a better story with it in "Robbie," I think that's the story's name. Ask O. H. Leslie if he read that one and thought he could improve it. Another used plot was "Attic For Rent" which has a plot similar to Henry Slesar's "Brainchild" in another magazine.

There has been quite a debate on whether you should continue

running serials. I'm against it. A buyer should be able to pick up a mag. on the newsstand and not worry about buying future or back issues. I don't think *Amazing Science Fiction Novels* is a necessary mag. You could run a full-length novel in an issue of *Amazing* or *Fantastic* once in a while to make the long novel readers happy.

"A Pattern For Monsters" is a natural for a movie. In fact I thought I'd be seeing it on the screens as I read it. "It Sounds Fantastic, But . . ." was a major part of the magazine. Your cartoons, better than *Madge* and *Tales*.

George Wells
Box 486
River Avenue
Riverhead, N. Y.

• *We wish* Amazing *and* Fantastic *were big enough to run a complete novel, but there just isn't room. Plenty of room in* Amazing Science Fiction Novels, *though. As to your observations on sex, we hammered out a really long-winded reply elsewhere in this section.*

Dear Editor:

The May *Fantastic* was fair. Only one story which could rate an "A" : "Satan Is My Ally." "Vengeance of Kyvor" was good for a serial, but I don't especially like serials. I used to, but when all of them came at once—no thanks. Ellis Hart was good this time, for once. Glad you're monthly.

Ed Gorman
119 1st Ave., S.W.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

• *No more serials, Mr. Gorman. But don't miss the new* Amazing Science Fiction Novel—*"20 Million Miles To Earth," now on your newsstand. A real shock-thriller for a miserable little 35¢.*

Dear Editor:

I agree with Stephen Sala, you need more cartoons. But I think you need a wider variety of artists, although often thumbing through this issue I did see a couple that were not by Frosty. I haven't got anything against Frosty, but us struggling young 'tooners have got to stick together. Come to think of it I may even send in some of my dismal work. That Cartoon Gallery sounds like a great idea.

I like longer fiction, but not as serials. *Amazing Stories Science Fiction Novels* sounds like another good idea.

I like departments but not so many of them. I like to see a few departments, but I think the principal thing is more and better stories.

I think all in all you have the best s-f magazines on the market when it comes to readability and to good stories.

Valliant Corley
613 South 12th Ave.
Durant, Oklahoma

● *You're right about the story being the thing, and trying to balance an issue with just enough features but not too many, is a real highwire act. We think we've just about got it. So far, the majority of our readers seem to agree.*

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the April issue of *Fantastic* very much. I do wish you wouldn't run serials as our dealer almost never has the same magazines twice in a row and I miss out on the endings, beginnings or something. It's very annoying.

I rate the stories as follows: "Bottle Baby," "The Vengeance of Kyvor," "The Unemployed," "A Night in Benny's Bar." "Abe Lincoln-Android" had a surprise ending that wasn't a surprise at all and it tied with "Graygorth" for worst. I hate pure horror in the Poe style, but if its by Sturgeon it's not so bad.

Sue Moore
401 West Minnehaha Parkway
Minneapolis, Minnesota

● *As you of course know, serials have been discontinued. But our first* Amazing Science Fiction Novel *is now on the stands—"20 Million Miles To Earth." So you just beat your dealer over the head until he gets you a copy—unless he already has.*

Dear Editor:

When I first suggested that you publish a magazine devoted to new writers I did not mean that you should publish just anything that came along and let it go at that.

If, and I take it you're not, you were going to go along those lines of helping fresh writers you would also run comments and criticisms from other writers, pro or budding, as well as the average reader who has read the material. This would then help the novice to grow into a polished writer.

A new writer would also have joined some fan organization and have his works published in a fanzine of some sort. You might say that fans don't care, but fans are people and enjoy s-f

as much as the old foggies who sit behind solid gold desks and throw their efforts away without any assistance. It all boils down to a desire to enable the aspiring young writer and fan to get a chance to see his work in print, have it criticized and give him the opportunity to improve.

I'm a loyal reader of *Fantastic*. And notice: even the first three letters of that title show that you should be for fandom.

H. R. Frye
408 Alleghany Rd.
Hampton, Va.

● *We get your point on this and sympathize wholeheartedly, but our original rebuttal still seems pertinent: If young people want to write, there is ample help and encouragement already in existence. There are several very good magazines devoted entirely to writers, and one of the major aims of these mags is to get beginners started. So any effort we could make in this direction, even if economically feasible, would only add to an amply-serviced field.*

Dear Ed:

Fantastic for May was a pleasant surprise. After a very good April issue, I didn't expect you to repeat, but you did, and most admirably. Definite tops in this issue was Garrett's conclusion of "Vengeance of Kyvor." A very good yarn and handled the best of any Burrough's type story since Howard Browne's last Tharn novel. Mark this down as a frantic plea for more of the same at the earliest possible moment.

Val's cover was quite good (shades of *Weird Tales*) as were Finlay's interiors.

Herbert E. Beach
210 West Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

● *Oh, ye of little faith! Each succeeding issue of* Fantastic *always tops the one before. Wait until you see the next one. And by the way—this Howard Browne you mention; who's he?*

●

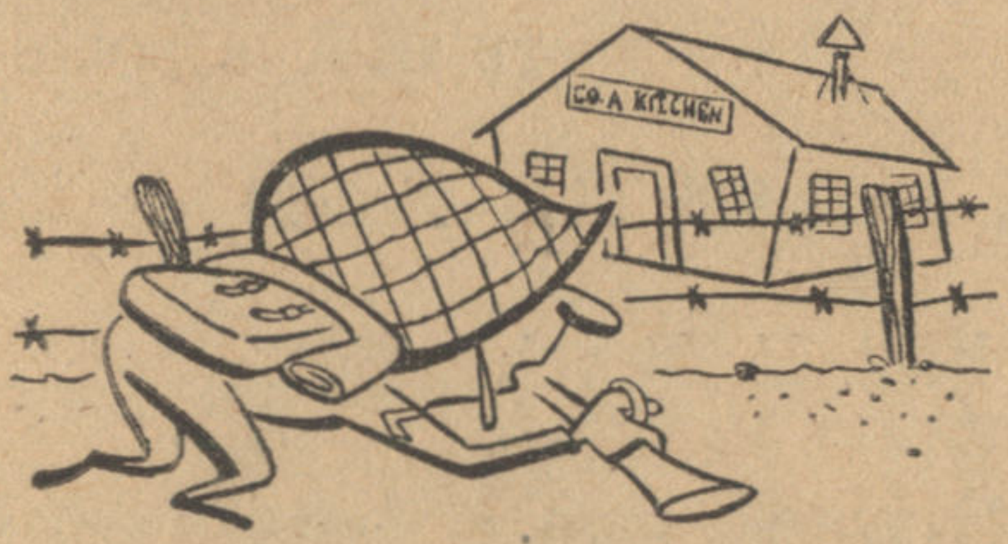
It Sounds Fantastic, But . . .

It Was an Accident

A 55-year-old garage superintendent has been carrying a .22 calibre bullet in his heart ever since he was accidently wounded at the age of thirteen or fourteen by a bullet from his cousin's rifle.

Milton Gorzatt of Kansas was practicing "quick draws" as he had seen in the movies when his gun barrel got stuck in his holster and went off, wounding him in the leg.

An army private lost an eye when a bottle of vanilla extract, left on a kitchen stove, exploded and a piece of glass hit him in the face.

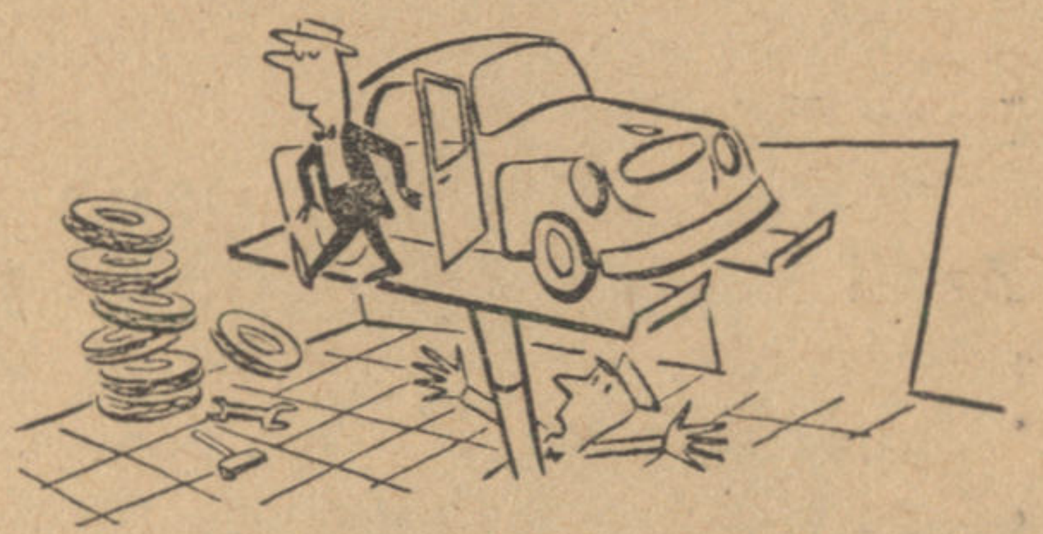


A fifteen-year-old driver in Illinois drove his car into the rear of a truck. Police who charged him with not having a driver's license said he was wearing ice skates while in charge of his vehicle.

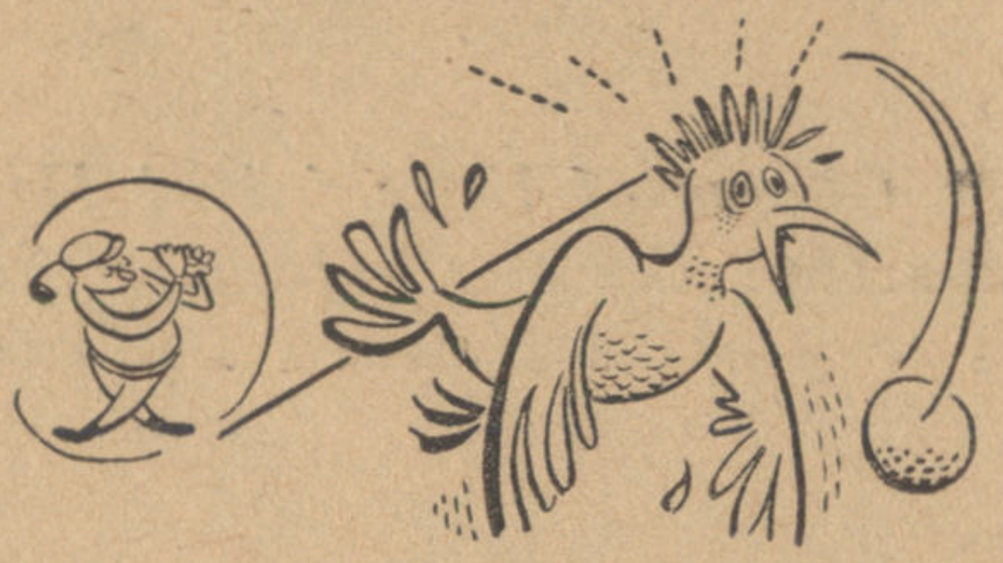
In June of 1956 in Gonzales, Texas, a truck loaded with chicken feed became stuck in the middle of the town when the asphalt paving melted in the 100-degree heat.

A Nova Scotia man was seriously injured by flying rock when a bolt of lightning set off a dynamite blast at a quarry.

A customer sued an Oklahoma service station operator for $20,000 for injuries received when he stepped from his car and landed on his head. He didn't know the car had been elevated on a grease rack.



A youth with an air rifle fired a bullet across the Rideau Canal near Ottawa knocking out a front tooth of a ten-year-old boy on the opposite bank but not injuring the boy.



An RCMP constable at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan was playing golf when his ball struck a woodpecker in flight, killing it.

R. S. Cragg

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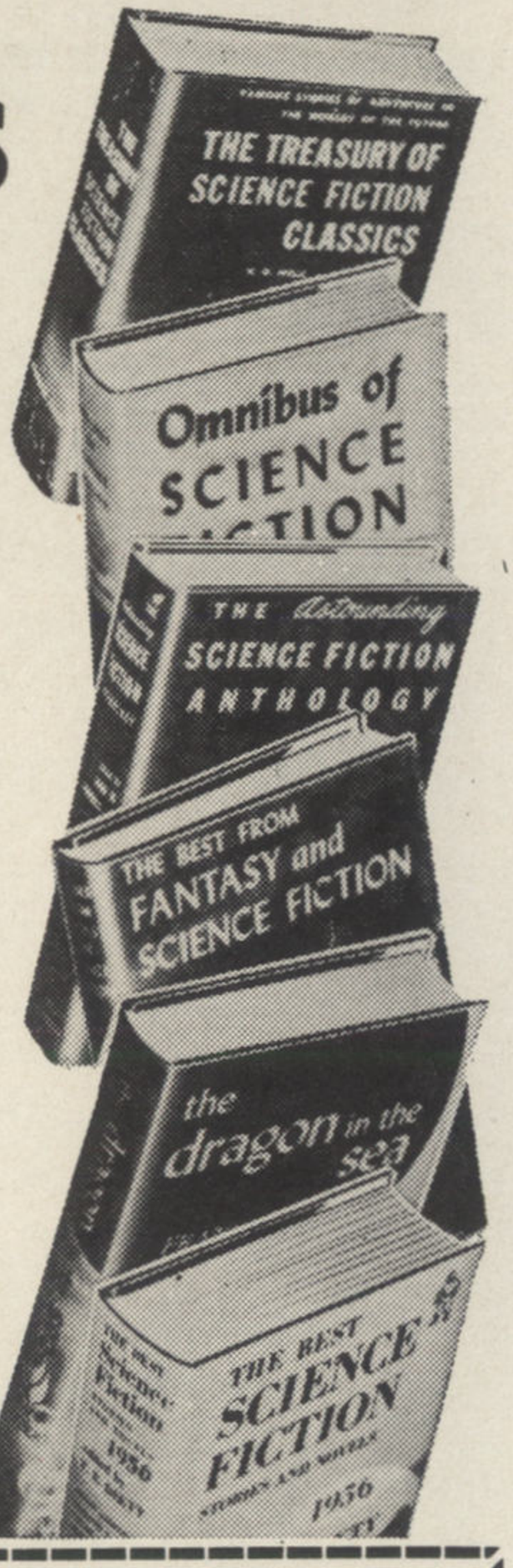

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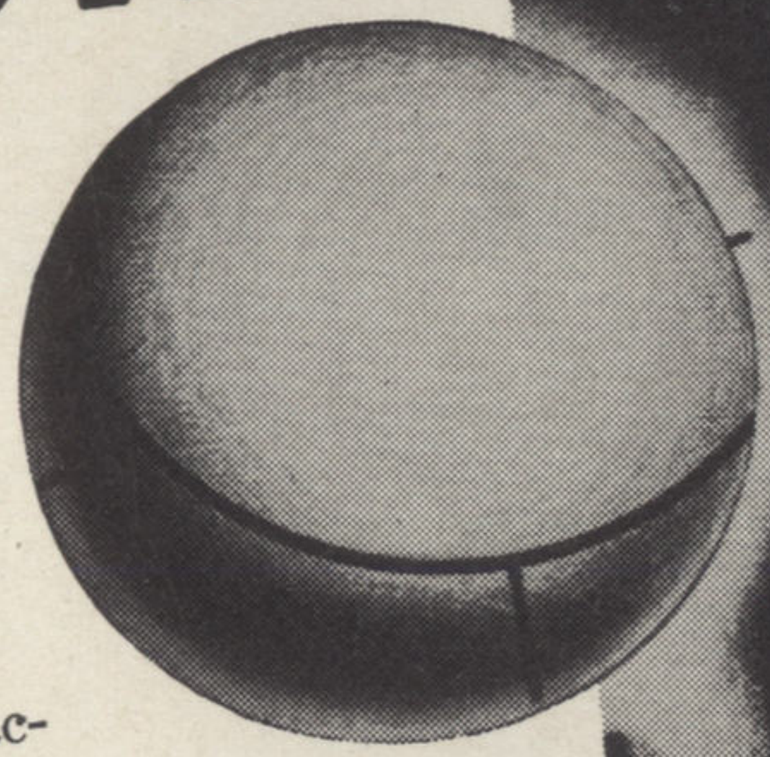

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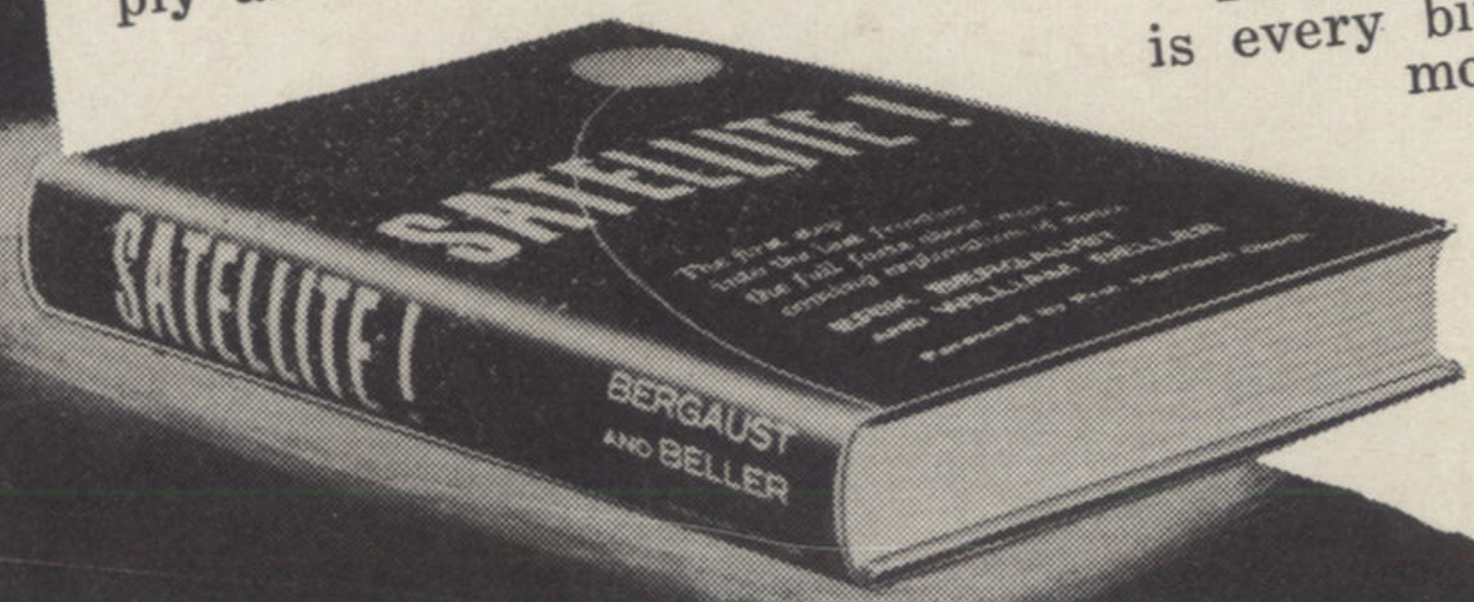

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