

A WORLD CALLED VICIOUS ..Hate,The Password;Blood,The Prize

THE MOON STEALERS . . . Is Luna Safe From Thieves?

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BY THE EDITOR

The Customers Do The Work

I chanced upon your article about a "system" for winning at roulette, (May '57 issue of *Fantastic* "Low Man On The Asteroid"), and to say that it intrigued me is putting it mildly. It gives rise to all kinds of fanciful conjectures as to the immutability (?) of the laws of chance. (There's a paradox in that sentence somewhere.) At any rate, I'd be most grateful to receive from you the "system" so that we may feed it to our IBM machines and let them carry the progression forward until they find the flaw in it.

I am enclosing a little problem for the edification of your readers, if you see fit to use it.

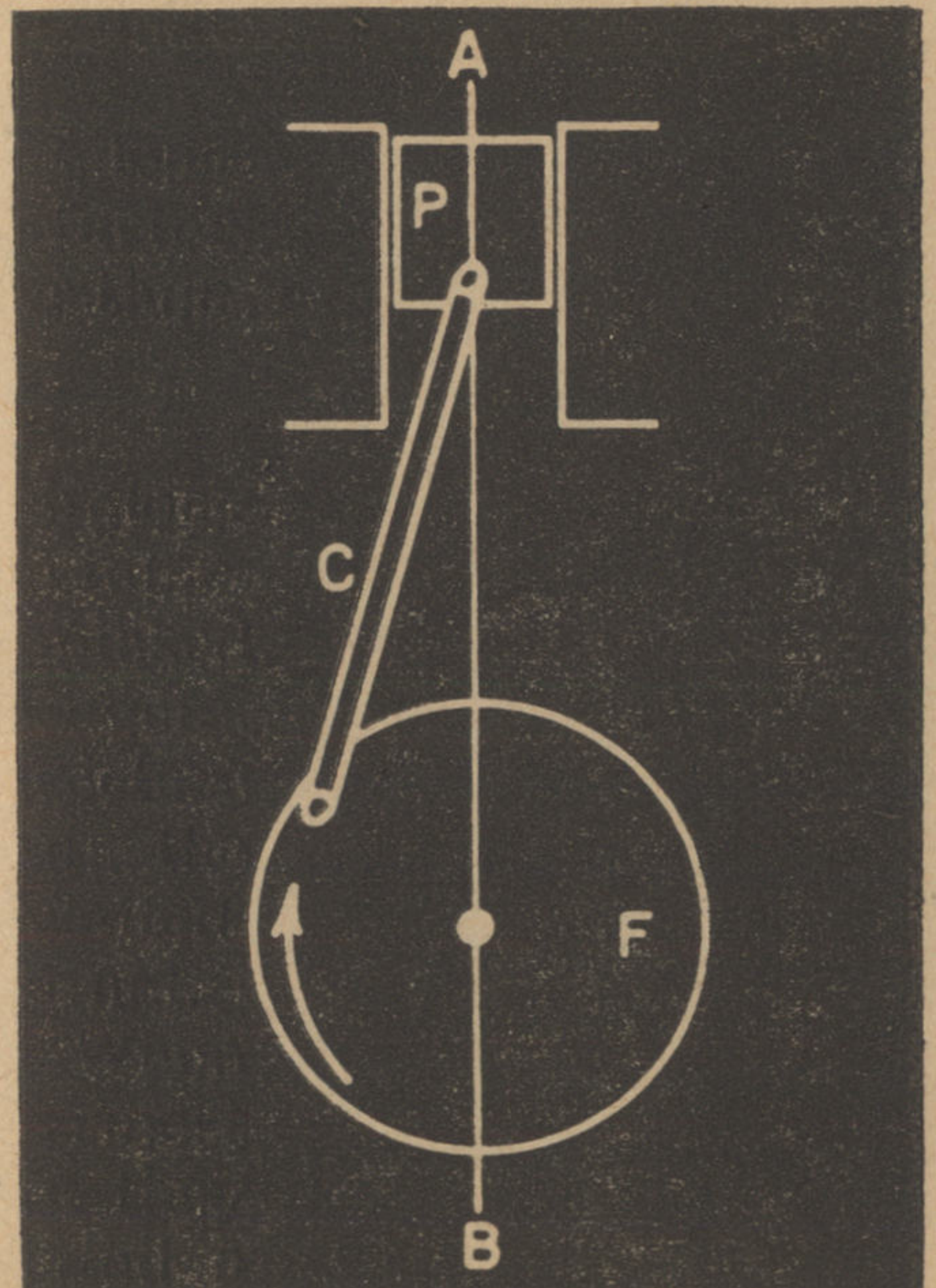
"P" is a piston moving up and down in a cylinder, being connected by con-rod "C" to flywheel "F," which is rotating at a constant speed. Question: Does "P" stop at the top of the stroke before it starts down? (Since this is a theo-

retical problem, we will assume there is no play in the bearings and that the rod "C" has no stretch or compression in it.)

You'll get some surprising replies if you hold up the answer for one issue.

Harry Sowle
Automation Institute
San Francisco, Calif.

Ed: Answer next month.



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THE MOON STEALERS

By E. K. JARVIS

Things were going fine with the tides, with romance, with the after-dark world in general. Then along came these hijackers who said, "Sorry, but we need your moon."

BARNEY IDALLA was one of those men the Greeks idolize. He was broad and heroic of stature, fair of face, sinewy of muscle, and a hell of a man with a blastbeam. Barney was, in fact, a perfect specimen of Terran Male, 3277 A.D.

So, it was with as much amazement as a Perfect Terran Male could show, that Barney received the tri-D newscast of the theft of the Moon. He sat there and listened to the unctuous voice of the newscaster, having cut the sight-image off to rest his eyes in the dark of his den, and



part of tomorrow's world!

grew more astonished by the word.

He listened and the old itch grew in him once more as his anger mounted and he touched the angle of right thigh and leg where the blastbeam had always swung on its stiktyte. He could hardly believe his ears, at the words the announcer spewed, but knew if he heard them over the Trans-World hookup, they must be truth.

I never should have quit the Service, he thought ruefully.

He did not get to hear the finish of the broadcast; the pinging of his vid brought him away from contemplation of the tri-D newscast. With an annoyed hesitation, deciding finally that the newscast would be repeated in more detail later, he snapped off the tri-D and went to the vid. He palmed it on—and snapped to rigid attention.

“Commander Altgens!” he said tightly, staring into the round screen.

“Good evening, Idalla,” replied the image of the steel-gray man before him. “I trust I did not interrupt anything important.”

“Nothing, sir.”

“Stand at ease, Idalla. Good gods, man, you *are* in your own home.”

Barney Idalla smiled slight-

ly, enjoying the presence—even if by vid—of his ex-commanding officer in the Space Service. He studied Commander Lawson Altgens, and was pleased to note the old man’s face had not changed much in the year since he had mustered out. The face was still block-cut from some fleshy equivalent of feldspar, ruddy and square. The same gray patina across the chin, from the commander’s inability to get a really close depilating. The same tight gray cap of tight little curls that lay high up on the forehead, and came down in extra-long sideburns. That was the commander.

Except for the eyes.

Tired and old eyes; eyes that had seen more flares in space, more suns from the edge of more planetary systems, than any man alive in the Service. Eyes surrounded by many fine tracery lines, like a million little barriers against his sight’s invasion. But a warm, full mouth.

“You look the same, Barney,” the commander smiled.

Barney Idalla hurried to answer in kind. “I was just thinking the very same thing, sir.”

The commander gave a jaunty, half-rueful chuckle.

"Me? Oh, sure, sure, Barney. Nothing changes the old ships. A barnacle-scrape once in a while, and a good fuel-up every night, and they run till they fall apart."

Barney could catch the same ironic edge to the commander's voice. The same one he had always had.

"That's, uh, that's what I wanted to talk to you about, Barney," said the commander. He rubbed the side of his nose in a nervous gesture. He was hedging, and Barney knew it. "You free for a drink?" Fuel-up meant one thing to the commander: hi-Scotch and lager.

"Sure, I suppose so, Commander."

He did not add *What's behind it, Commander*, but merely waited for the grised veteran to feed him another straight line.

"Well, then, how about an hour from now? The Lights. You know where it is, Barney?"

"How could I miss?" It was the largest hi-bar in the city.

"An hour okay?"

"An hour's fine, Commander. Just fine."

"Barney—"

Idalla fidgeted his big, supple hands, out of sight of the vid screen. He did not like to see someone as basically as-

sured, as deserving of assurance, as solid as the commander — worried. "Yes, Commander."

"You, uh, you been enjoying your leave from the Service?"

Barney was about to answer, but a second's thought made him realize he had heard an inaccuracy in the question. He ran it through again: *You been enjoying your leave . . .*

"I guess you forget, Commander," though he knew the commander did not forget things, "I'm not on leave. I was mustered free a year ago."

The commander shook his head. "Not so, Barney. Neg. You're in . . . we need you."

Barney Idalla protested loud, and half-intelligibly, but the commander cut him off. "Come on and have that drink, Barney."

"But, Commander, I—"

The vid went milky, and a few seconds later the pert, Irish face of an attractive young vid-model focussed in. She inquired, "Call letters, please?"

"Forget it," Barney snapped, flicking her out.

He went back to the relaxo and slumped into it for a long second. It was reasonably apparent, even to a guy who had been out-Service for a year.

Whatever had spurred Commander Altgens into having him recalled, probably was tied in with the portion of a newscast he had heard. This moon business. But there was no sense getting a half-classified report from the tri-D, garbled by some newscaster's opinions, when he could wait one hour and have the commander give him the straight dope.

He pushed himself to his feet, sighing, and rubbed the back of his head. At the base of the skull, where the little nodule rounded out. It hurt again. It had not hurt in over a year, but now it hurt. He was going back into the Service; involuntarily.

He protested to the silent walls on his way to the dressing-cube to change into full-medal Service regalia. If he was going to see that old war-horse, at least he'd see him in uniform. The uniform had grown slightly tight about the chest and hips.

It was an effort to look majestically regal . . . but he made it.

The Lights was an airborne plate, a block in diameter, suspended thirty feet above the glistening circular top of the 540 pylon, 45th and Broadway, New Yorkport. The city

—from the air—looked like a glass beard, all stubble of buildings thrusting up into the clear blue sky of Manhattan, till the sky was cut off by the Dome. As the city was tall aboveground — thousands of pylons that had long since replaced skyscrapers and squat, ugly buildings—so it went deep into the bowels of the Earth. For every two-hundred-storey pylon that braced against the sky, there was a two-hundred-storey freight and business building beneath. The surface and the upper air were reserved for residence in the sun, and for recreation.

Recreation such as that provided thirty feet above the 540 pylon.

The plate was five feet thick, and was anti-graved to float unmoving like a lily-pad on a quiet pond. And there it stayed. Access could be gained by stepping into an invisible "drawing sphere" at the top of the 540 pylon, and being sucked up through the access port in the bottom of the plate. Then you were off the Earth, and in a fabulous night club, with no walls, no ceiling, and only the stars whirling silvery high above, and the faint gleam of the Dome the only things standing between you and those stars.

There on the plate was a hi-

bar that stretched nearly around one-half of the plate, serving any drink a mnemonic-circulated robo-mech could comprehend. The dance floor was a refracting mirror of such unusual capacities, that it seemed the dancers whirled in nothing but empty space, suns whirling with them, no tables and no bar and no headwaiters at all—just space and eternity, surrounding, enclosing, enveloping romantically.

But once the dancer had left the surface of that mirror, he saw the tables and the bandstand (with its celebrated mnemonic orchestra, pitched to sub- and super-sonic subtleties) and the faint gleam of the pressure bars that invisibly circled the rim of the plate, keeping the customers from plummeting over two thousand feet into the synthopark that surrounded the base of the 540 pylon.

And of course, above the plate, in the night sky, washed by the ever-flowing breezes from nowhere, the Lights flickered and pulsed and beat in a magnificent array of colors. Chromatic wizardry imprisoned in almost-sentient blobs of lighter-than-air substance. Fed by undetectable spore-dust blown by air conditioners in the force-field-tight plate area, the Lights moved

slowly back and forth, up and down, never leaving the above-plate area, always lighting the dance floor just so, always fascinating. Always—the Lights.

To boot, the robo-mechs never watered the hi-drinks.

Barney Idalla came up through the drawing shaft, the fringes of his dress epaulettes ruffling in the draw-stream, and was helped out of the circle of suction by the *maitre de*.

“Good evening, Major Idalla,” he said in a thick French accent, pronouncing Major, *may-shuuure*.

“Good evening, Armand. Has Commander Altgens shown up yet?”

The slim, dark seal-like head pursed itself tightly, and nodded. “*Oui*, Major. He is already seated. Follow me, *s’il vous plait*.” Sleekly, he spun and oozed between the tables.

Barney took pleasure in the current pattern of the Lights. They reminded him of a memory of night when he was thirteen in Kansas, and light and color were more than now. That was why he often came here. The floor show might be overpriced and in smutty taste and poor, but the Lights were always fabulous. As he followed Armand, he felt the eve-

ning breeze, controlled, ruffling his soft yellow hair. Nothing could be bad news tonight—not even being called up to Service again.

His face darkened, however, when he saw the commander.

The commander was getting himself studiously polluted, on more than hi-Scotch and lager chasers. He was using an asensi bulb, and spraying it into his nostrils more often, and with much fuller squeezes, than any man his age had any right to be. He did not even look up as Armand brought Barney to the table.

Armand coughed softly, politely, and murmured, "Major Idalla eez 'ere, Commander—" he left it dangling.

Commander Altgens made a broad, drunken gesture with his free hand, slurring, "Sid-down, Barney, siddown n' lemme feed ya the whole buncha my troubles. Siddown boy, siddown, siddown, siddown . . ."

He sprayed the asensi bulb into his nostrils again, and shivered convulsively as the alcoholic narcotic mist sifted down through his system, spreading out to the tips of his ganglia, firing his body with unbelievable sensations. It was not healthy to overuse the asensi bulb.

Barney muttered, "Hi-Rye and water," the straight way. Armand nodded understanding and threaded away. Barney sat down, and stared at his ex-commanding officer.

"How d'I look, Barney boy?" the commander asked thickly.

"Like hell, sir," he replied.

Altgens chuckled sardonically. "Ooo, you are so right. I stink, Barney boy. I stink to Altair . . . and Altair won't have me there . . ."

He went off into another small fit of shivering, finally burying his head between his arms, the hand holding the asensi bulb dangling over the edge of the table. Barney reached over and calmly pried it loose, dropped it on the tray of a passing waiter. A moment later Altgens straightened up and saw it was gone. "Oh. Gotta get a fresh bulb, Barney. Call the waiter for me, willya?" Barney ignored him. A moment later a waiter brought the hi-Rye and water, in a two-section hot-glass; the Rye steaming and the water chilled. Barney pulled the separating wall and shook a spoonful of sugar into the Rye-chemical mixture. He took a soft sip first, nodded to himself that it had been flavored properly, and downed a large sip.

Altgens watched him stonily for a moment.

"I need a soberizer, Barney," he blathered.

Barney nodded. "Affirmative."

"Get it for me, willya, Barney boy."

Barney dialed for a soberizer on the table console, having to clear and re-dial in mid-dial because the raucous Mambolito beat of the orchestra threw him off the combo. In a few minutes, the waiter glided up, clicked to indicate payment was desired, took it, returned change, deposited the soberizer, buzzed THANK YOU SIR OR MADAME and ground away for a new circuit imprint of its new table-direction.

Barney sprayed the soberizer ampoule into the commander's nostrils, and waited.

The soberizer took a good deal less time to rectify the commander's drunkenness than he had taken to induce it. In ten minutes he straightened around, his eyes unglazed, his speech became coherent, and the inevitable itching that came with "asensi bends" set in. Coming out of an asensi pitch too fast brought on an effect as did coming up out of water too swiftly.

The commander scratched wildly at the circlet of his

uniform collar, and grinned engagingly across at Barney Idalla. "Good evening, Major."

"A good evening to you, Commander."

"I was sozzled."

"You stank, sir."

"I need a drink."

Barney dialed out a hi-Scotch and lager. They waited in semi-silence, asking of each other's health only, till the robo-mech brought the drink, and the commander had mixed. After he had taken a deep pull at the glass, they both eased off, and the commander assayed the man opposite carefully.

"How long have you been out now, Barney?"

Idalla jiggled the forestick in his glass, and answered, "About a year, sir. I mustered out after the Negel III revolution, remember? That was one of the conditions I took on that job."

Commander Altgens chuckled with amusement. "You know better than that, Barney. The Service is as sneaky a branch of the armed forces as Earth's spawned in three thousand years. You know damned well our word means nothing." Barney nodded.

"So . . ." he drew the word out, as though it were his unpleasant duty to spring the

news now, "I hate to tell you this, Barney, but you are hereby re-commissioned in the Space Service, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. You'll be ready for assignment tomorrow night."

He settled back in the relaxo with his hi-Scotch, and studied the changing pattern of the Lights, overhead. The band blared away in front of them; they ignored it.

"You don't let a guy enjoy himself for long, do you, Commander?" Barney, getting mad, downed his drink in one gulp.

Commander Altgens slid forward to the table, aimed a finger at him. "Look, Barney. I don't appreciate this any more than you do. I have no say-so in the matter. I'm nothing but an errand boy tonight—and I assure you there are many more *vital* places I should be than here. But StratComm says a man is needed for the job; a particular *kind* of a man; so they put Datavac on it . . . and she came up with you.

"That's why they got me out of a high-strategy meeting to break the news to you. Because you weren't just another space-gyrene, Barney, and because you're vitally needed. But don't put the

blame on me, just because I was friends with you and they decided I could break the news more easily."

Idalla ran a thick finger around the inside of the glass, sucked the finger dry. "Sorry, Commander."

Altgens waved it all away with one movement.

"Now. Would you like to know what this is all about?"

Barney continued to stare into the glass, for no good reason but that his eyes were fixed there. "I imagined it was tied to this moon-theft business."

"Affirmative. That's precisely what it's tied to. I don't know how much you've heard about this thing, we've been carefully vague in our news releases."

Barney settled back for a long story, and dialed another drink. "I only know a half-dozen or so merchantmen were blasted out of space when they tried to make their regular daily landing at Thyneport in the Mare Imbrium, yesterday and day before. And I know whoever ruined *them*, have set up some sort of blockade we can't get through, and have cut all communications with our babble-sheds and bases there."

The commander nodded. "I see you were able to sift

through the superfluous information and garblement to get the truth of the reports. That's good; shows you have not grown soft in that year." Barney remembered the snugness of his uniform, and fidgeted self-consciously.

The commander went on. "Well, there's a lot more to it than just that, of course. We hesitated several days to see if we could clear it up ourselves, before we went to Dativac and got your name. It's pretty serious, Barney.

"They've literally, actually, stolen the Moon from us."

Barney Idalla took his drink from the robo-mech, and nearly dropped it at the commander's words.

"Oh, come *on!*" he cried, "you're joshing me, sir."

The way he used *joshing* made it a dirty word.

Commander Altgens shook his head. "No, it's a real threat, Barney. A lot more serious than you might think, just because we haven't mobilized our entire fleet, and stormed out to do battle. They have got us effectively cut off from Luna, and they *must* have killed every thynite worker in the mines, because nothing short of death could *stop* those crazy rockhogs from storming out and taking over anybody who barged in.

They've locked us out of Luna, effectively cut off our thynite supply. That's how serious it is."

"All our thynite? What about the Earth stockpiles?"

Altgens shook his head sadly. "Low, Barney. Too damned low. Maybe so low even if we lick this thing in time, we may have a disastrous lag from mine to smelter.

"They must have known how low we were, choosing just this time to steal the moon, because in a few months, the Earth can die—our entire industrial system is based on thynite power—and they can walk in to gobble it up easily."

Barney caught the flicker of a yellow Light as it passed overhead, stirring a memory of a cornfield, but he said, "Who is this you keep referring to as *they*? Who are they?"

Altgens rubbed a hand across the back of his neck, angrily, as though he were being punished for deeds he had not committed, as though he were suffering for circumstances he had not promoted. "The Revector. They came back from the other side of the Gulf. How they were able to get through the nets and the doggie-guards we will never

know, but they're in the System again, and . . . well . . . they've got the moon."

"The Revector," Barney nearly upset the table. "You're not serious? They were chased out of the System a couple hundred years ago by the Service. Where in the hell could they have come from, sir?"

Altgens shrugged his thick, sloping shoulders. "We hope you'll find *that* out for us, too."

Barney paused.

Worriedly, he replied, "You seem to think I'm taking space again, Commander. You assume I'm going out there to find out what the scoop is. What if I refuse?"

Altgens shook his head resignedly. "Neg, Barney. There is *no* refusal." His voice grew deadly: "Look, boy, don't buck, because this isn't just top-ech stuff . . . once in a while you can blue or buck out, but this is straight from the top—I mean the *top*—and Datavac backed it. You go out tomorrow night; rain, snow, sleet, hail or little green apples. That's final."

Barney Idalla snorted angrily.

"What's the assignment?"

"You'll know by tomorrow night. You'll know everything, because by tomorrow night

the contact we're looking for will have come through, and we'll have more information."

Idalla leaned toward the older man. His face grew very serious, very strained. "Commander . . . I—was I chosen because of—well, you know what I did in the Service . . ."

Altgens nodded, and his face, too, grew tight. "I'm afraid that's it, Barney."

Idalla looked into the glass. Softly he spoke to it. "I didn't want any more of that. I had the course, you know. There won't be any of that in what I'm going to do, will there?"

The commander spread his hands. "No way of knowing, Barney, but I suppose so."

Idalla rubbed a hand over his mouth, a mouth that had abruptly gone dry. "If I have to read the mind of one more terrorized alien, I'll burn *myself* before him."

He dialed up a new drink.

It was the first of many that night.

And he did not bother with a soberizer.

The moon was covered with a fog.

The surface of the moon was clear, and high in the sky that had never known cloud or bird or wind, the fog swirled grayly, coating the dead satellite like a shroud. From Earth,

no one knew the moon's surface was clear, but everyone who had even a low-power telescope knew the fog was there. And by the night after Barney Idalla met the commander, everyone knew the situation was serious. The Revectorers were back, and all spaceflight was halted, all flights grounded, all personnel on 24-hour ready alert. But no one went into space, till the theft of the moon was put to rights.

The press of Earth openly conjectured how this would be handled, but no word was forthcoming from the offices of StratComm, and no word was forthcoming from the Service, and the President could not be located for a statement. So the peoples of Earth went about their daily chores: they laughed, and they washed their faces, and they worked and loved, often casting glances over their shoulders at night, staring at that strange globe in the sky. The moon that had once been yellow and bright, but which now was a glowing ball of off-yellow-gray.

They watched, and were frightened, for every schoolchild knew the legend of the Revectorers and their march toward the Solar System, two hundred years before. Moth-

ers had used them to get children to bed many times: "If you don't go to sleep, the Revectorers'll get you!"

So now the fairy tale nightmare had come true. The Revectorers were back... and they had stolen the Moon. And Earth was dying for need of thynite.

No one on Earth saw the sleek, superfast little one-man spacer leap free of Salt Flats Spaceport, that next night, and no one saw it plunge out from Earth toward the fog-hidden bulk of the Moon. For had they, and had they known the combined forces of Earth had sent but one man to defeat the Moon-stealers, they would have been even more frightened.

For what could one man do against the might of the legendary Revectorers?

Even such a man as Barney Idalla, the hero of the Negel III revolution. Even an alien-telepathist? What could he do?

Really, what the hell could *anybody* do?

It was cramped in the single-seat scouter, and even more crowded than normally, for they had jury-rigged a higher power-to-input ratio drive, which had burst through the rear of the pilot's

compartment. Ordinarily, it would have been a handicap, but on such a short hop . . . the Moon, and back, they hoped . . . it made little difference.

Barney Idalla slumped in his webbing, and stared morbidly at the gray face of the Moon, growing larger in his vision. Whatever the Revector had done to the Moon, with that fog, it was a thynite-encrusted cinch it wasn't for defense. The fog was for concealment, the ships that crouched, panting, in space around the Moon—*they* were for defense.

It was obvious the Revector had not stolen the Moon just to cut off Earth's thynite supply. Though it was also fairly obvious that had been a big consideration; the Revector had no love for Earthmen, particularly after the ignominious beating they had taken two hundred years before, and the running-out they had taken, too. But there was something else. Some other—more important factor—besides the death of their old enemy Earth, that would bring them back to this section of the Galaxy, scene of their greatest defeat. Something had driven the Revector back, and that something

had made them steal the Moon from Earth's raw material storehouse.

A recent scene slid onto the viewscreen of his mind. He was back in the briefing room with Commander Altgens, and the three top men of StratComm, preparing for the flight. Getting last-minute information.

"I'm on my own."

The stocky, dark man with the false teeth, the one called Bradenlex nodded. "Precisely. We can't give you a plan of attack, because we don't know what the situation is up there. Every ship we've sent out has been knocked out."

Foss, of the DepSpace, added, "What they're doing up there is hard to say, with that fog covering them, but we've gotten Datavac to conjecture that they're mining thynite.

"Again, for what I don't know. But for some probably damned good reason, the Revector now need larger amounts of thynite than they can obtain in their own System, wherever it might be."

Barney accepted these explanations, then asked, "What can you tell me—stuff that isn't in any history book—about the Revector?"

Altgens and Herrold of DepSec both began speaking at the same time, and stopped

awkwardly, chuckling with inbred tenseness at each other. It was the first laughter that had invaded the pre-flight session. Altgens deferred to the nearly-bald DepSec officer. "Go ahead, Jack. You've studied them a lot more closely than I have."

Herrold spread his hands. "Not really a deuce of a lot to tell, since we don't know as much as we'd like to know. They're humanoid, of course, I'm sure you knew that. But unlike Earthmen, they have a highly-developed sense of honor." He grinned at the way he had undersold his own race. "What I mean is, if they tell you they'll do something, nothing can stop them from doing it. A Revector promise is a bind. No power on planet can make them break a promise . . . usually, not even death, because they'll transfer the promise to a reliable party.

"But along with that, they had an overly-developed sense of duty and insult. The least little thing could set them off to a duel or to complete a revenge for some minor insult."

Altgens chimed in, then. "They're a fierce and dedicated people, with really too much drive for their own good. That was why we had to chase them out of the Sys-

tem—and it wasn't as easy as we make it sound; it was one hell of a war, from what I've been able to read—because there just wasn't room enough for two such aggressive races in the Solar System.

"We were lucky enough to win, that time. Now, I don't know."

The scene faded in Barney Idalla's mind. He was the one chance for survival the Earth had, and they had staked everything on him. With the spaceship ambush set up around the moon, an Earth fleet could not hope to defeat the Revector.

But one man, equipped as Barney Idalla was equipped, had a good chance. Particularly, Barney Idalla. Hero of the Negel III revolution.

In which the alien telepenthists were the victory factor. To the tune of thirty-five thousand dead Negelians.

They picked him up long before they sent out the interceptor patterns. They picked him up on the view-fingers, and the tracery of vectors criss-crossed itself in the tracking tanks. They waited, for they knew they had nothing to worry about. When Idalla passed the outermost line of doggie-guards, they rang the jerry-signal, and a

red alert flashed in the ready rooms. The pilots dropped to their ships, and the ships were blown free of the mother vessels.

They were totally unprepared for the Earthie ship to skirt the doggie-patterns; they were completely amazed when the Earthie ship dodged the first line of interceptors; and they grew worried when the Earthie ship set up a broken-field flight trajectory that would bring it alongside—or dead onto—the flagship of the Revector fleet.

But they could not stop it.

Out of silent space it homed, ducking, weaving, turning like a fantastically agile football player, till it broke through into the clear, and before they knew it, precisely, the Earthie was under their guns, and still coming.

How did he break through the nets, the Revector In-Charge telepathed his next-in-command. The answer came back mentally, We have no idea, sir. The Revector navy was stopped. Stopped, for the Earthie vessel had managed to come within cross-fire range, and any burst turned on it, was as likely to strike one of their own ships. For a long, space-moment, consternation was the order in the Revector control sections.

Then, the mental call came through.

From somewhere outside themselves, from the deeps of space, a new, a different mental voice spoke—ringing clearly across the surfaces of their minds. Every wiper in the hold, every astrogator behind his plot boards, every server and scummie in the galley . . . and most important, every In-Charge, heard the voice.

I've come from Earth. We don't fear you—as we did not fear you two hundred years ago. But why should there be a war between us, when I can solve your problem for you . . . can you see the reason in that?

The In-Charge hesitated. How did the Earthie know what had happened back there, back beyond the white line of the twin galaxies? How could he know of the Pordeks, and the cloud they had brought with them? The cloud that could be dispelled only by huge quantities of thynite. The thynite his robo-mechs now mined on the face of Earth's moon. How could he know, and the lightning answer lanced in at him—

I know. Let me talk to you.

The Revector In-Charge stroked the lumpy tip at the end of his single antenna, and wondered. There had been

changes on Earth, since they had been here last. Their own telepathy had been an important factor in the previous Earth-Revector war, though they had never been able to read the Earthie minds; now somehow, the Earthies had evolved to where they could pry beneath the thought-barrier and read Revector minds. This was an added factor, perhaps a devastating one. What can I do? thought the Revector In-Charge, rolling up his three multi-faceted eyes in consternation and wonder.

Nothing, came the reply, *I'm coming aboard. Open your receptacle hatch.*

The Revector In-Charge made a futile, helpless tentacle-motion to his MechChief, and the receptacle hatch slowly irised open.

The Earthie ship rose, and entered the belly of the mammoth alien flagship. The hatch closed. Idalla was in.

Now, the work began.

The conference room was a null-grav hollow in the center of the ship. Outside the sphere that was the room, layer upon layer of deadening material and bomb-blanketing equipment made the wall eight feet thick. An enemy, brought to this room, could expect to damage the ship not at all—

should he plan sabotage. An enemy brought to this room could expect one thing, one thing precisely.

Talk.

And that was all Barney Idalla wanted.

Across the middle of the sphere, a clear plasteel plate separated the two sections of the null-grav room. The Revector In-Charge hung floating in his half, staring across at the Earthie in the other section. He had, of course, seen old stereographs of what Earthmen looked like, and had read the compiled histories of the old war, but this was the first live one he had ever seen at close range.

The thirty thousand Earthies who had been mining Thynite on the Moon when the Revector fleet had appeared, had died so soon after, and so completely, that not even bones had been left for study. Had study been desired. Which it had not, of course.

So the Revector In-Charge hung airily, and stared fully at the creature across from him. He was not able to interpret it as another Earthie would, to be sure, interpreting the creature across as:

A man, large-boned, horse-faced, with tightly crewcut blond hair and a set fix to the mouth. A man, with small eyes

set hidden in deep pockets of secretiveness. High cheekbones and a dark skin. A troubled area of little lines between those dark, knowing eyes.

The alien could not describe Barney Idalla like that.

But Barney Idalla could describe the Revector.

A pterodactyl with multifaceted eyes set close together over the spiked beak; one thick antenna rising from between the eyes. Two thin arms emerging from the armpit beneath each of the atrophied membraned wings. Opposed thumbs.

Naked. Sexless. Alert. Deadly.

They talked, out of politeness. They watched their words, out of caution.

The Earthman, conscious of effect, swooped in the null-grav room, and brought himself up short by a hand-bar. He held on, and nodded gravely at the Revector. "Captain," he said formally, in introduction.

His acknowledgement was picked up and returned in the rasping yet sibilant tongue-sounds of the Revector. "My name is Ississul," the Revector In-Charge replied. "How are you called?" The voice came over the speak-grille in the

wall, clearly, slightly metallic.

"Idalla, Barney Idalla," the Earthman answered, noting in passing the similarity in names, yet the utter difference in sound. In even the small things, there was no doubt, the Revector was not like Earthies. It was better that way. It is easier to hate and scheme against that which is different, that which is unfamiliar.

"How do you know of the Pordeks and their dream-cloud?"

Barney Idalla hesitated. It was obvious they knew he was a mind-reader, but were they aware how few of his breed Earth had thrust forth? Probably not. "By the same method I got through your interference net. I read your minds; the minds of your pilots, the minds of your astrogators, the minds of you and your staff. I read your mind now. Completely."

"You know my race can only read each other, not aliens," the Revector reminded. Its fanged, beak-mouth did not open as it spoke, for the voice-box evolution had provided it, also provided it with egress under the scaly ruff of the neck. Its cold, reptilian eyes stared, a million facets that were each a snake's eye. Bug eyes in the face of a pre-

Dawn monstrosity. Father image of all nightmares.

"I know. I also know you are not a fool."

The Revector seemed not to notice the comment, but its antenna dipped slightly, recovered.

"I know you won't fight a war you *must* lose. Two hundred years ago we beat you with just our wits and muscles. Now we have this, too," he said, tapping his head. "Can you stand against it, when no ship can maneuver without being mentally overtaken? Can you fight a war when your every operation is evident to us at the moment it is to you? Secrets? You have none."

The Revector's spindly arms came up, smoothed at the lumpy, scaled crown of his head. "You know why we needed the thynite."

"Yes; and why you murdered thirty thousand Earthmen to get it. I ought to let the Pordeks finish you all."

The Revector kicked off, and floated around the section several times, ruminating. "What can you offer?" he said, sliding to a stop, gripping the hold-bar with a webbed foot.

"Why should I offer anything? I could order you out,

and if you didn't leave, blast your armada out of space—"

The Revector interrupted harshly. "We'll be blunt, Earthman Barney Idalla. We'll be blunt, and I'll tell you your bluff hasn't worked. If you could have blasted us, you would not have allowed ships to be vaporized by my fire. Your ships came up, remember, Earthman Barney Idalla? But I have no way of knowing how many like you exist on Earth.

"I'm willing to listen to reason, but war would still be war. What can you offer?"

Barney bit his upper lip. The Revector was by no means a fool. He knew the situation, and yet he had taken the wise course.

"Open your mind to me," he said, though it was unnecessary for the Revector to bother; Barney could read him clearly. "Give me what you know of the Podeks."

Revector thought. It was complete. Just as the Earthmen had been visited by an invading race, so had the Revector been invaded. Their entire galaxy had been enveloped by a cloud of mind-numbing properties. The entire galaxy, from one billion light-year end to the other, had been sent into the deeps of the cloud. And on every

planet of the Revector galaxy, the minds were deprived of thought, and were turned over to nightmares. Dream-fantasies that were killing hundreds of Revector every hour. The Podeks had come from somewhere, anywhere, nowhere—what the hell did it matter?—they were there! The Podeks were behind the cloud, and they were after no tiny stake like a moon. They were after the greatest stake of all.

A galaxy.

The Revector's galaxy. And on a billion worlds, the race was dying. Horribly, painfully, slowly, in the grip of dream-nightmares that took their prey with ferocity and terror.

In the grip of that terror, the Revector had done only what they *had* to do.

Thynite, it had been found, after painfully hopeless experimentation, when released into the atmosphere of the planets in fumes, could stem the effects of the cloud. But thynite was scarce in that far galaxy. So the Revector, pressed for time, so pressed they could not afford to stop and run tests on every empty satellite and every uninhabited planet, remembered where one moon hung, almost entire-

ly composed of the mineral they needed.

Earth's moon.

That had been the reason for the theft. Outside the Revector ship, hanging near in space, beneath a camouflage fog, the Revector robo-mechs were feverishly mining all the thynite they could find. It was death for them, for the entire race, or the death of Earth. Survival.

Barney Idalla could not despise them. He had seen the brutality of Earth, during the Negel III revolution, when it had been a matter of death for Negel III or death for Earth. He had seen how the aliens had died, then, he could not despise the Revector for killing thirty thousand Earthmen busily mining the moon.

He could not hate them, but he could hate the race that had driven them to it.

As if to cap his feelings, the Revector In-Charge swam to the plasteel window between them, and his utterly alien reptilian features seemed impossibly to change, to soften, if that was possible. "We didn't want to come here." The alien's thoughts were even more vivid than his words, which Idalla ignored. We had life and we had home and we had peace after centuries of running, the Revec-

tor thought, crying inside. We had all that, and we did not want this. How can we be released?

Idalla interrupted the staccato burst of thought. "If you trust me, and leave the Moon when I've succeeded, I can help you."

The Revector stared helplessly. Fatigue told in his thoughts. Have I any other choice? I must trust you. A war at that end, and a war at this end? Never; we could never come out of it whole. I'll have to trust.

"I trust you. You have my word. My honor goes with you. What do you want us to do?"

Barney sent back the mental message. *I want you to wait. Allow a supply of thynite to go through to Earth; we need it now, Ississul.*

Give me one of your ships—a scout—set with the proper co-ordinates for your galaxy. Then wait, that's all. I'll return within ten days. Ten days can make little difference. Wait ten days, and then you'll be able to return to your home. The Podeks will be gone.

The Revector nodded agreement, but his mind said: How can he do what we could not? A strange Earthman, a totally strange, strange man, but

what can he do, that we can't do? How can he succeed where we failed? What has he?

"The ability to read alien minds, as I read yours," Barney answered. Wondering within himself if it would be enough.

He came out of inverspace at the juncture point of the coordinates that had been set into the Revector ship. Though he had been uncomfortable all during the trip (for the Revector were not built to Earth comfort specifications, and there had been no seats in the ship), his mind was alert, and his blood sang for action.

It was like the old days in the Service.

Then he remembered the dead aliens, and his mouth tightened down again. He fell toward the smokey radiance that swept across the viewrama of the scoutship. The smokiness that was the cloud enveloping the Revector galaxy. Barney Idalla lay back in the gravityless ship, lay back as though he were doing a gainer, with arms spread out—crucified—legs together, head thrown back, body arched, eyes closed . . .

. . . and sent his mind out
out
out

and caught at something. The mind went out, and down, and through that cloud of the Podek's making. It penetrated, reaching, and came to grips with an alien mind. A revolting picture of a female Revector being eaten by worms struck back along the neural chain, and he cut connection quickly, finding himself sweat-drenched and shaking. The female Revector had been swallowed up in a nightmare fantasy. A fantasy so horrible, her mind had been rotting away as it had progressed along the path of the dream.

The contact had been made on the fourth planet out from a blue-white dwarf the Revector called Flan. The entire planet bubbled with such dreams.

Barney tried to find a focus-point of the madness, a central spot of it all. There was none. The cloud covered the galaxy from star-end to star-end, completely. It was not being pumped into space from Podek ships . . . it was not being renewed or aided in any way. It was merely there.

Idalla knew he must drop down, must drop down onto one of those worlds in the Revector clusters and find out for himself what the Podek's

scheme. The Podeks. That was still another thing; the Revector In-Charge had been able to tell him almost nothing about the Podeks. What they looked like, where they had come from, what they did, or why they were doing this thing to the Revector.

The Podeks were a complete mystery. The only thing the Revector In-Charge had been able to tell Idalla was that before the cloud had completely drowned the galaxy, an all-wave broadcast had come through from deep space just at the edge of the Coalsack, saying the Podek was coming, that the Revector were doomed, and they could surrender later, that no surrender would be considered now. The Podek liked to see the fun of an invasion.

Then the cloud had rolled across space, and had begun to pour out its nightmares.

Barney Idalla heaved a sigh, for there seemed no way he could gain access to the presence of these Podeks. They were staying away from the cloud, from the galaxy, from everything.

The message seemed to indicate a childish race, foolhardy and with too much bravado, but even as he thrust down and out again and again, to

the planets in the galaxy, he knew the Podeks were not there.

He had to go down. To the cloud. Into it, and stay.

Was there any sense to that? To get caught up in that cloud-sickness, that madness, that thought-leprosy that ate away the mind as the victim dreamed? Was there sense?

He cast out again.

The Revector ship in which he hung floating passed through a trailer film of the cloud. Passed through slowly, and the nightmare came to Barney Idalla:

*THOUGHT BEAT NOW
RIP DOWN DOWN DOWN
DOWN!!!*

All tumbled and jumbled and ruptured and captured and slinking and thinking and stinking to returning and burning while churning and the little gray cells parted, met and melted together like mercury as the heat struck, and the dream came flashing, hissing, hissssssssssssssing:

He was in . . .

. . . The arena. And behind him, the blood-hungry crowd screamed in a guttural tongue, their mouths dripping, their eyes like pinpoint diamonds, driven into fleshy red masks of desire and death. The smell of blood rose up to choke him,

stinking in his nostrils, stinking mixed with the sand of the arena. The sun beat down from the yellow sky. Bright yellow, so bright it ran like molten gold and hurt his eyes. Before and behind and around him the high gray brick wall of the arena rose up to imprison him. He was cut off from everything; from Life and from Decency, and from the ground that sloped away to grass and meadow. No meadow at all, but sand that was the color of sand and dark splotches that were not sand, but were dried blood. Bits of bright cloth, and bits of flesh lay in the sand . . . mixed and wet and covered with particles of yellow sand.

Barney Idalla stood spread-legged, the brilliant colors of the arena crowd in his eyes, the golden rectangle of the shield on his left arm, the curved weight of the heavy sword in his right.

Behind him, the girl moaned and rose up on one arm.

He turned and threw her a half-smile; in that smile was the bit of energy to keep on living, though her body was beaten and her dress was ripped and death walked toward them. He smiled at her, and she stared back dumbly.

He turned back, feeling the collar of the shattered space

helmet twist on his neck. The ship had crashed, and the arena had taken him, and he was here in Imperial Rome. For a moment he thought he was in a dream, but that was foolish . . . this was reality.

As real as the giant Nubian who bent and came toward them, the ensnaring net in his hands, ready to tangle Barney in its mesh, ready to strangle him, ready to rape the girl who lay in the sand. The giant Nubian came forward, his beetled brow drawn down almost to furry eyebrows and black slits of sight. He swung the net through the air over his head. In the hot Italian sunshine it flickered and whipped and flew, and came down. It rocketed heavily onto Barney's sword-arm, and he felt the sword being dragged from his fingers as the net took it to the sands.

Then the Nubian was on him. The hairy, sweating body pressed hotly to him, and he felt his ribs being crushed in a grip that threatened to erupt a pillar of blood from the top of his skull.

The shield was between them, and Barney pressed it upward, forcing it under the Nubian's neck. The slave's head went back, back, back, and Barney was whipped side-

wise as the big man let him free.

He fell to his knees, and his glance went to the stands of cheering Romans—

—where a bright ball of orange sat in the stands, its eyestalks waving, its tendrils slapping happily at its scales.

Then the Nubian was on him again, and the shield was torn from his arm. The arm felt bloody and wet and numb. He was gripped again by those arms, and the strength squeezed from him. His face went red, and black spots danced crazily in his vision, and he let out a scream that pierced the cacophony of the arena.

He brought his head down, near the giant's face, and let the jagged collar of the shattered space helmet lie under the big man's neck. Then he ripped up!

The sharp, razored edges of the helmet ripped through hair and flesh and grated over bone. The Nubian's jugular was severed instantly, and he cried out a froth of blood. It ran over his lips in a thick scarlet stream, and he dropped Idalla, clutching big hands to his gashed throat. He staggered two steps, reeled and took another half-step, astonishment on his billowing features. His eyes rolled up, his hands fell, and his head

went back. The blood pumped heavily, steadily, and he fell with a crash.

Little puffs of sand-dust rose, and motes turned lazily in the Italian sunshine. Even the crowd was still.

Barney staggered to the girl, and lifted her to her feet. Blood reddened the front of his spacesuit, but she did not seem to mind, as he dragged her close and kissed her anxious, hungry mouth.

The crowd roared its approval, and a thousand thumbs went up, and the bright ball of orange turned its death-ray on him, in his moment of victory, and burned him hideously, to a pile of cinders, falling wispily from the girl's arms.

He was in . . .

. . . The hold of a spaceship. Pinned beneath half a hundred plastic cases of farm implements, bound for Ubanzag. They had piled over when the meteorites pinged through the ship, and only their side-to-side wedging had saved him. Even so, they were slipping, slowly, inexorably, and he was being crushed. He could barely breathe for one crate was over his lungs, and a second was pressing in from the sides. His ribs were raw and he was certain several were

broken. Another carton had his legs firmly pinned.

Blood ran down his side, warmly, stickily.

He gasped for breath, and stared up as the crate directly over his head—held aloft by two others, one on each side—slipped sidewise another inch. He could read the block printing sprayed on its side:

1 DOZ
ELECTRO-PLOWSHARES
W/ROBOT WEEDER
1 DOZ

It was a huge crate.

It slipped another inch, grating silkily against its plastic neighbors. Idalla started to struggle and lancets of pain spanged through his body. His ribs ground sharp edges against one another. He almost passed out with the pain. Then he started squirming. He got one leg bent up at the knee, and found that the box on his lungs was not quite resting on him; that it was the combined pressure of the box from the side that was doing it to him. He eased *toward* it, and it slipped down on the opposite side, wedging tight, and leaving plenty of space to wriggle free. He dragged at his leg, still pinned, and brought it out slowly, not disturbing the precari-

ous balance. Then he was free. He started to rise, slipping out from beneath the sliding crates over him, and the ball of orange came into sight through a large space between the crates, and pulled the trigger of a blastbeam gripped in its tendrils.

The beam caught him high in the chest, and he felt his flesh expanding outward, his gut erupting, blood and bone splattering the plastic crates.

He fell back, and one up-swept arm slammed the crates.

The balanced one slipped, fell, and crushed his head to a pulp, instantly.

He was in . . .

. . . a manhole. With rats eating his body, nibbling at his insensitive fingers, feasting on the wet slippery masses that had been his eyes. When the orange ball appeared and laughed.

He was in . . .

A block of ice. Melting it away with his blastbeam, when the ball of orange with the antennae shoved him into the flaming pit.

He was in . . .

A different situation every few seconds, horribly, over and over, dying and dying and dying again and again as the orange ball killed him and . . .

. . . The ship plummeted toward the brazen face of a Revector planet, and Idalla knew what he had to do. Knew what the key was. Obviously. The orange ball. That was the one constant in every nightmare. Was that a Podek? Was that a symbol, a sign? What?

He fell toward the world, and realized he had been diving all through the dreams. His brain felt as though it had been squeezed between strong fingers, as though something had been beating at it. The rotting process had not gotten a foothold—perhaps because he was an Earthie, and a telepath at that. He released his mind, and drove it out and down to the planets below and above and beyond him. The orange ball had to be there somewhere.

His mind fastened on it. It was on the softly green world beyond the orange sun off to the right of the brazen planet below.

He struck for the world, and came in a swooping arc through the cloud. The planet blossomed up and he followed the mind-drag of thoughts to the orange ball.

It was in a field of yellow weeds outside a huge glass city on the softly green planet. The ship came swooping in,

and he set the trackers on the blastbeams to the coordinates of the thoughts.

The orange ball was reveling in the dream agonies.

He pressed the blast stud. Power erupted from the guns, and a great crater opened where the field had been. The thoughts that had exulted in death and rotting suddenly cut out. The sky cleared, the cloud evaporated, as though melted away by the gathered suns of the Revector galaxy.

Idalla skirted low over the field, staring at the charred crater, with its glassy edges where fusion had turned dirt to emerald-colored glass. The orange ball was gone, and the cloud was gone, but that was not the end of it.

Idalla had received the thoughts of the alien . . . the Podek. The *only* Podek. He knew it had been a lone-man operation. The Podek had been a psychopathic member of its race; had fled its own clusters, to invade the Revector's home.

It had wanted power. It had wanted the emotional thrill of seeing minds rot out with the death-dreams. And the Podek

had sent the Revector to Earth to steal the Terran moon. But it was over now.

Idalla swooped into the sky, feeling a little sorry for the orange ball. It had never known health, so it had never quite realized the chain it had started. The Revector scoutship headed back through inverspace toward Earth, to deliver the word to the Revector In-Charge.

But it would be different now.

The Podeks were still out there somewhere. Now there was a common enemy. The Revector and the Earthies would meet and talk and learn to exchange. It had to be.

The only other way out was destruction, eventually.

Barney Idalla did not think it would come to that.

The Revector was smart . . . and the Earthies were getting smart. And he had a hunch Altgens would listen carefully when he proposed the idea of an alien telepathist school.

Hell, he couldn't keep on doing *all* of Earth's work, could he?

THE END

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A WORLD CALLED VICIOUS

By JAMES A. COX

COME on, come on. On your feet, you lush."

The hand was none too gentle on his shoulder and the strange voice was much too shrill and insistent. Besides, Jason Meredith decided, the light still hurt his eyes, even if it was dimmer and yellow instead of blinding white. Why didn't they leave him alone?

The hand slapped his face sharply, and the voice insisted at him again in curious, thin-edged tones: "Let's go, buster! Snap out of it!"

Jason growled his irritation and opened one eye cautiously. In the pale golden beam of what appeared to be car headlights he could see that it was night, that he was flat on his back in the middle of the road, and that there were several

Jason wanted to charge it off as a dream. Was this true, or had he been teleported into the sickening cruelty and evil that would be the shape of things to come?

shadowy figures now moving around him while at least one bent over him, shaking him and shouting at him.

Good Lord, Jason thought groggily. Did they run over me?

Slowly his brain began to clear. Lightning, he thought. I was down in the cellar and the lightning— He struggled to his elbow and peered all around.

"Is that you, Al?" But no, Al's voice didn't sound like that. Neither did Paul's or Barney's.

Then Jason remembered. It *had* been lightning, and he had been in the cellar when it struck, fixing the television set.

He had leaned his shotgun against the cellar wall and glowered at his wife, Edna,



The things out of a nightmare were bent on vengeance.

for insisting that he fix the broken TV before leaving with Al and the boys on their week-end hunting trip. When her sturdy legs trembled indignantly out of sight through the kitchen doorway he cursed his carelessness, for he was more angry with himself than with her. A stocky, balding 34, with a smear of freckles across his sharp nose and ears that were somewhat larger and more protruding than necessary, Jason had the look of a cheerful, impish cherub. And his personality fit smoothly into the glove of his appearance — anger didn't stay with him long, and he loved his wife with a sympathetic mixture of teasing, patience and understanding.

She was right, he admitted, about the television. He *had* promised to fix it. And she was right about the lonely week-end for her. Jason knew that all her seeming irritation was based on the fear that he would be hurt in the annual autumnal buckshot barrage. But she could have reminded him earlier. Or she could have called the repair man.

A distant rumble of thunder broke Jason out of his reverie. He looked at his watch. Six forty-five. He'd have to get a move on. The boys would be coming in fifteen minutes.

The thunder sounded again, closer and louder. Jason sighed and reached into the dark interior of the television set. A gigantic bolt of lightning ripped through the gloom outside, close by, crackling ominously and pouring a blinding white light through the cellar windows. The electric lights flickered and died. The television set shivered like a live thing, screeched hoarsely and spit out a puff of acrid smoke.

In a half-crouch, his fingers fused to the TV's innards, Jason froze for a moment, then fell stiffly to the floor. His outflung hand struck the shotgun, sending it clattering down alongside him. The searing white light burned on his eyeballs for an eternal second, then everything went black.

"Ah, thatsaboy," the thin-edged, strange voice was saying. "Ooopsadaisy! On your feet and we'll give you a little hair of the dog—"

Another voice, deeper and with a tone of command, interrupted. "Let's go, will you, Putt? Roll the lush into the ditch and let him sleep it off. He's got no business here anyhow. This is hunting territory."

"That's just it, Booth. He's got a gun." The metallic voice giggled. "Besides, you should

see the lovely ears on him. Man! What a shame he's not a nonconf."

"Okay, okay." The deeper voice spoke with a rasp of irritation. "Throw him in back with the gear and let's get going."

The physical shock of being dragged by his armpits across the rutted road and dumped rudely into the back of a car jolted Jason into full wakefulness. He groaned as the doors slammed and the car lurched forward. But he fought off the desire to pass out again and dragged himself to a sitting position. "Oh, my aching head," he moaned, cradling it tenderly in his hands as the automobile bucked and bounced along the road. "What hit me?"

The three dim figures in the front seat glanced around. "Ho!" spoke up the giggler. "Welcome back. Did you fall out or did you get so stinko your friends tossed you out?"

A new voice sounded, coming from the head in the middle. "You sure must have tied one on, mister." The voice was light and boyish.

Jason grunted and closed his eyes for a moment. "I guess I do look pretty far gone. But it wasn't liquor. All I remember is being down my

cellar, and then a granddaddy lightning stroke blasted me right through the wall—"

"Must have been a pretty big bottle to hold all that lightning, mister," the boyish voice said mildly.

Jason did a slow burn while they laughed. Then the man at the wheel glanced over his shoulder, cursed as the car bounced to its springs in a deep hole, and said, "No hard feelings, mac. We know how the stuff can sneak up on a man. But you got to be more careful out here. This is no place to get lit up—not if you want to come back in one piece. This is nonconf country."

Jason started to protest hotly, but choked it off. There was that word again—nonconf. Somebody had used it before, when he was still groggy, and it hadn't registered completely. Here it was again, but it still meant nothing. *Nonconf. Nonconf country.* A tiny blade of panic stabbed him. They could laugh, whoever they were. But the last thing he remembered was the lightning striking when he was in the cellar. And since he wasn't in the cellar now—or any other place that looked even remotely familiar—where in the name of sanity was he?

The man behind the wheel was still talking in his deep, solemn voice. "—and you're welcome to join us, providing you haven't got any more of that liquid lightning with you. We're not playboy hunters. And we can't afford to have anybody larking around and fouling things up. Otherwise we'll drop you off wherever your camp is. Suit yourself."

Jason considered. There wasn't much choice. Something screwy was happening to him, and he didn't have the slightest idea of where he was or how he had gotten there. These men laughed at his story, but accepted him at face and clothes value—as another hunter. And they might not be quite so friendly if he insisted on a story he couldn't blame them for ridiculing—except that he was sitting here as proof. He told himself to keep his mouth shut and play along, at least until he found out where he was.

"Okay," he said quietly. "I guess I'd just as soon string along with you."

"Fine," the driver said. "What's your name, mac? I'm Booth, professional hunter, class one. Giggling Gertie over there—" He jerked a thumb to the right which Jason caught silhouetted for a moment in

the dim light of the dashboard. "—is Putt, but don't let his cackling fool you. He's a dead shot and class one, too. The youngster here is Wemby. He's a novice, first time out of the reserve, and a hell of a good kid."

"My name is Jason." If one name is good enough for them, Jason thought, that's all I've got. "And, uh, I guess I'm a novice, too."

"What do you mean, 'guess'?" asked Putt sharply. "Don't you have a permit?"

"Well, yes and no," Jason lied quickly. "I did, but it was in my wallet and now I can't find my wallet. I must have lost it back where you found me."

"Tough. But it's too late to go back for it now." Booth turned the car into a narrow forest trail and turned off the engine, leaving the lights burning. "Here we are. Let's get the gear unloaded and a fire going. I'm starved. Wemby, break out those lanterns."

As they piled out of the automobile Booth pulled Jason aside. "You realize that you're officially ineligible to hunt if you don't have your permit, don't you?" he asked softly.

Jason mumbled something and the deep voice continued, "But since you're a novice you will want the experience, so if

you'll promise to keep your mouth shut I'll close my eyes. There hasn't been a warden nervy enough to come out here in years."

Jason thanked him effusively, but then Booth added, "Of course, you'll have to let us claim the bounty for whatever you shoot. But the experience will be worth it, and I'll put in a good recommendation for you if you shape up at all. Agreed?"

"Bounty?" Jason was confused. "What—?"

"Listen, friend," Booth interrupted harshly, "take it or leave it. What the hell are you griping about? If we hadn't picked you up a renegade non-conf probably would have come along—and those pretty pink ears of yours would be laying in the bottom of some hunter's bounty bag right now. You don't know when you're getting a break. Now what do you say?"

Jason stared hard into the darkness separating him from the other man, wondering if this was supposed to be a joke—he had teased tyros himself—or if he had misunderstood. An unpleasant suspicion began to form in his mind. Remembering his resolve of before, he said quickly, "Why, sure, Booth. That's fine with me. And by the way,

I think I forgot to thank you guys for picking me up. That was real decent of you." He remembered now how he had heard this same Booth's voice telling Putt to roll him into the ditch. He shuddered. A dangerous man.

"Okay," Booth said shortly and tramped off to the clearing a few yards away where Wemby and Putt had the fire started.

Jason picked up a roll of bedding and fell in behind the big man. Nonconfs and ears and bounties. This dangerous man, Booth, whose face he had never seen, and a giggling fool who was a dead shot. He took a firmer grip on his shotgun and decided that he was no longer interested in where he was or how he got there. All he wanted was to get home.

Sitting by the campfire with a plate of nondescript hash and beans on his lap, Jason covertly studied the men who had befriended him.

Wemby, on his right, was a chunky, healthy-looking boy of about 17 with a quick smile and lank black hair. Across from him sat Booth, mopping up his beans with a slab of bread and swallowing huge gulps, apparently without chewing. He was truly a big man, massive shoulders and

hands, with a full head of soft white hair surmounting a strong, curved hatchet of a nose that split cold blue eyes and a heavy, brooding face. As he sat with his legs crossed in front of him, his stomach sagged paunchily on his lap. But Jason had watched him working in the firelight, setting up a shelter, and he knew the fat was deceptive.

I don't like the way his lids always seem to cover his eyes halfway, Jason thought. Hard, and probably ruthless, but I think I'd trust him farther than old Giggles over there.

The third man, Putt, was small and slender. No trace of beard darkened the smooth whiteness of his skin, and his brownish hair showed only slightly from under the tight red woolen cap he was wearing. Putt, the giggler, reminded Jason of a sleek, shifty cat, nibbling at his food with feline disdain and curling up his nose at it. But the thing that bothered Jason most was the way he stared, unblinking, through pale hazel eyes that showed no amusement—even when he was giggling.

Putt caught his eyes and Jason quickly looked away. He was more afraid of Putt at this moment than he had been of Booth before, in the darkness by the side of the car.

But Putt called out to him. "Where you from, Jason?"

"Oh, from the city." Jason had gathered from earlier conversation that the men all came from a large city nearby called Aldington, and since he had no idea what other municipalities there might be in the area, he decided to seek safety in the only name he knew.

"Yeah, but from what part?"

"Main Street." That was a gamble. But every town should have a Main Street. Sound more definite. "Down towards the—" He almost said southern, but checked himself in time. "—lower end."

It passed. The men didn't seem to pay much attention.

Then Wemby, to Jason's relief, changed the subject. The young novice had been too excited to do more than play with his food, and now he pushed the tin plate away and began plying Booth and Putt with eager questions.

Jason could have hugged him. It was slow, tedious work, nodding his head now and then and trying not to act too ignorant, nor too knowing, but at last he was getting some idea of what was going on. And as he listened, the suspicion that had been born

in him grew and developed into horrified reality.

At first he had only the vaguest idea of what nonconfs were—this fact seemed to be taken as common knowledge. He gathered that they were creatures of considerable intelligence but inconsistent fighting ability. Originally they seemed to have been docile enough, but for some reason, which Jason never got clear, the city authorities had decreed them dangerous and called on all citizens to help eradicate the nuisances.

In those early days, which Jason calculated to be no more than eight to ten years before, almost the entire population of the city took part in gigantic nonconf hunts. Men and women, even children, left the city with their picnic baskets for a week-end in the country. They carried only stones, cudgels and coils of rope, for at that time the nonconfs more often than not submitted passively—although with much mournful howling.

But in recent years renegades from the main nonconf bands had begun to fight back. They plagued Aldington and the surrounding countryside, savagely attacking unwary travelers and even making wild, screeching raids into the city itself. The family hunters

had no stomachs for hunting this type of quarry, even though a desperate city council offered free licenses for hunting with firearms and substantial bounties for nonconf ears.

As a result, a new breed of professional nonconf hunters developed. Some, employed by syndicates, worked at it full time. Others were independents, such as Booth and Putt, hunting on week-ends and holidays, and saving whatever money they could for the day when they could start a corporation of their own.

Jason's suspicion was pretty well developed by this time, and the queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach was threatening to erupt. But what he heard next still came as a violent shock. Despite the thousands killed, the nonconfs were not exterminated because the hunters did not choose to exterminate them. "Don't be stupid, Wemby," Putt had said, and this time no giggle broke the hardness of his voice. "Why should we ruin a good thing? Even the renegades are getting on the gravy train. There's money in this racket if you play it right and set up an organization like Cornell's over at Fanith Bridge, or like the one Pennet

and Wills just started on the other side of the river. Can you imagine the bounties those farms are bringing in?"

Jason gulped and lost the tight control he had been holding over himself. "Farms? You mean stock farms?" He knew there was revulsion in his voice, but he couldn't keep it down.

"Sure," said Putt, his giggle returning. "Where you been, Jason? Cultured ears, right off the assembly line. Breed 'em and weed 'em. You have to hand it to those guys—that's real efficiency."

The boy Wemby looked puzzled. "But how can you keep a thing like that secret? Doesn't the city council have a law or something?"

"Cornell and Pennet and a few more like them own city hall," Booth said in his somber voice, between puffs on a black pipe. "And Putt and I are going to own a piece of it soon, too. We've got just the right spot picked out—up behind the Number 3 Power Plant in that big pasture near the river. And we've got working arrangements with a couple of smart renegades. You boys shape up right and we might bring you in, but you have to play by our rules." He looked meaningfully at Jason. "You don't want to spend the rest of

your lives chasing renegades, do you? Not when you could have easy money falling into your laps — along with as many pretty nonconf wenches as you want?"

Wemby blushed, and Jason recoiled as if acid had been squirted in his face. The suspicion had become fact. He felt sick, and ducked his head to hide it.

"Look at the two blushing violets," giggled Putt. His eyes were glistening and saliva showed on his parted lips. "Just think, you two. Every time you bed down with one of those hefty non-conf babes it's like putting money in the bank." He cackled obscenely at the joke and repeated it, dreamily. "Yessir, just like putting money in the bank. What I'd like is a harem that turned them out in liters. One little, two little, three little nonconformist brats—all of 'em money in the bank."

Booth and Wemby laughed, and Jason pushed out a weak chuckle. But he had only one thought: to get away from these ghouls as quickly as possible. He knew he would have to be careful—perhaps it was only his imagination, but he had the feeling that Putt was eyeing his ears entirely too much. He decided to wait until

they were all bedded down for the night and then slip away. He wanted no part of the hunter's life in this world. He'd rather throw in with the decent nonconfs, if he could find them—he couldn't conform to this civilization either. Oh, God, he thought, let me get out of this mess. Let me get home.

Fully dressed, Jason lay wide-eyed, staring into the black night overhead, in his imagination killing the hunters—Putt and Booth at least—before making his break. The fire had long since smoldered into ashes, and only a few slender shafts of moonlight filtered through the trees. He shivered and wondered nervously if he could chance it yet. They all seemed to be asleep. He had wondered at first why no watch was posted, for Booth had called this dangerous territory, but then he remembered something Putt had said about the big man's cat-like hearing. That made them reasonably safe from sneak attack, but it also added to the risks Jason had in mind. He decided to wait just a little longer to be sure.

He listened tensely to the measured cadence of their breathing, and a chill crept along his spine. It was still

steady, but seemed to have lessened somewhat in volume. Calm down, boy, he told himself. For God's sake, relax. He breathed deeply and tried to think his muscles out of their rigidity.

Suddenly he froze, the blood of fear pounding through him. Was it his imagination? But then it came again—faint, hardly more than the whisper of a breeze—an insane, gloating giggle from somewhere close behind his head.

Jason scrambled to his knees and swung his shotgun like a baseball bat, blindly, with all the strength he could muster. It thudded into something soft and raised a surprised grunt which was followed by a scream of pain or rage.

Jason didn't stay to find out which. He heard Putt scream again, and Booth's bass shouting something unintelligible. But then those sounds were lost in the noise of his own frantic thrashing through the tangled matting of the forest.

Jason ran until he could run no more. Exhausted, and bruised from tripping over roots, ripping through thickets and bouncing off tree trunks he couldn't see in the darkness, he dropped to the ground and lay there gasping

for breath. When his wind came a little more regularly he sat up, surprised to find he was still clutching the shotgun. There seemed to be no pursuit, and that was good, for suddenly all the strength and resolve drained out of him. Tomorrow, if he woke up alive, would be time enough to decide what to do next. Now he had to sleep—and maybe when he woke up he'd be home.

He woke up to the scolding of a squirrel. The sky through gaps in the trees was a leaden, sodden gray. Cold and stiff, every square inch of his body aching with a special pain, Jason staggered to his feet and started to walk. There wasn't much else to do. He didn't know where he was going, but he didn't know where he was either, and that seemed to balance things out. He would just walk until he met somebody or until something happened. He prayed that he wouldn't meet the hunters again.

He drank from a stream and ate some berries and walked. And walked. Forest grove became forest clearing, tree followed tree, and still he trudged on. He did see signs of life, but they were all cold, like old campfires, or dead,

like the skeletons of what he knew must have been non-confes. Sometimes he had the feeling that eyes were following him, and once he made a sudden turn and heard a distinct scurrying in the bushes. But he saw nothing alive except the birds and the squirrels.

He was stumbling across a broad meadow that was flanked by a broad river on one side and a rugged outcropping of hills on the other when the wind made a few tentative passes through the long grass and thunder rolled behind the hills. Then the wind picked up its promise and the rain came pelting down. Jason debated with himself wearily the point of running for cover. He was tired to the bone and the rain was refreshing on his face. He put the shotgun under his jacket to protect it, licked his lips and raised his face toward the sky.

He saw them then. There were three of them, and they were cutting across the meadow from the river, walking with their heads bowed low against the flail of wind and rain. They were all seminaked, so they had to be non-confes. But were they renegades? The shout of joy died on Jason's lips. He stood undecided, automatically taking

the shotgun from under his jacket.

One of the nonconfs caught sight of him and let out a yell, and the three of them stopped, crouching slightly, tensed for flight.

This is it, Jason thought with surprising calmness. Either they are or they ain't. He took a step forward and held the gun over his head. "Friend!" he shouted. "I'm a friend. *Amigo!*"

At the sight of the gun the three figures whirled and raced back toward the river. Jason stumbled after them. "Hey," he shouted, "don't run. I'm a friend." But the wind whipped his voice away.

When they had drawn a good distance away the nonconfs stopped and looked back. Jason stopped too and, panting for breath, called out once more. "Listen, I won't hurt you. I'm a friend. See . . . ?" He wrapped the shotgun carefully in his jacket and laid it on the ground. Then he walked slowly toward the huddled figures, holding his hands palms up and forward in front of him.

Instead of running again as he feared they would, the trio of nonconfs moved cautiously to meet him. He breathed a sigh of relief and hastened his

pace. He realized suddenly that the three breech-clothed men seemed to be moving faster, too, and all at once they broke into a trot. In the instant before their shrieks were carried to him by the wind, Jason saw the necklaces of ears dancing and jiggling on their bare chests, and he began to reel.

He ran blindly. Slipping and stumbling, the wind tearing at him and the rain whipping into his eyes, he ran for his life. His lungs felt like swollen balloons that were ripping his ribs apart in search of release, but he ran on. The shrieking followed him, rising triumphantly as it drew closer, and he knew without looking that knives were flashing in the darkening air.

He made the nearest hill. And somehow, by desperation and panic, he dragged himself to the top. The shrieking stopped, but he knew, with the small core of reasoning power left in him, that they were now stalking him in the hills.

Sobbing and gasping, he drooped against the face of a huge boulder. Night was falling rapidly, and he could run no more. He had to find shelter, some place to hide or some place to make a last-ditch stand in. The hilltop was bar-

ren except for rocks, but a streak of lightning momentarily turned a dark patch down to the right into a clump of pine trees. He picked up a rock in each hand and headed for the trees.

Inside the grove, his footsteps muffled by the soft accumulation of brown needles, Jason sank to the ground exhausted. He sat there for perhaps a minute, his breathing a tortured rasp, before he became aware of the humming. He tried to still his breathing to listen. The humming filled the air with a steady drone.

Jason began to cry. He knew that sound. It came from dynamos. Civilization and electric lights and dynamos. This must be one of the power plants Booth or one of the other hunters had mentioned. It was towering over him in the black night only a few feet away, stone and strong and solid. He couldn't hope it was manned in this wild country, but it was as good a place as any to barricade himself in. And if he wasn't successful, at least his body would probably be found here — not that it really mattered, or that he really cared at this point.

But the nonconfs had guessed right. They were waiting for him. They let him get through the doorway. Then

they crowded in after him, their howls bouncing hollowly off the stone walls, their knives glittering in the spark-stuttering air.

Backed against a guard rail, Jason twisted desperately as a rough hand seized his left ear and the knife came snaking up. He felt a quick stinging as he rolled free, but he rolled too far and fell through the guard rail, and everything was blinding white and then everything was black, senseless and timeless.

The lights flickered back on, dim and yellow and unobjectionable. Jason opened his eyes and blinked at them. Then he became aware that someone was talking. With a great effort he turned his head a little and rolled his eyes so he could see the stairs. His wife, Edna, was standing on them, one hand clutching at her throat and a look of fear fighting with one of relief on her face.

"Are you all right, Jason?" she was saying in a curiously tiny voice. "That terrific bolt of lightning hit and everything went dark for a minute. Jason! Are you all right?"

Jason looked at her and licked his lips. They felt dry and puckered. With another great effort he nod-

ded his head. "I guess so."

"Thank God!" she said. "For a moment I thought— Jason! If you're all right why don't you get up off the floor?"

With a small shock Jason realized he was lying flat on his back on the cold cement of the cellar floor. He struggled to a sitting position and closed his eyes. "I must have been asleep. Or knocked out. What a horrible dream I had."

"But you couldn't have been asleep, Jason. You were only down here a few minutes when Al called and said he and Barney and Paul were on their way over. I was explaining about the TV when that lightning struck, and that was only a minute ago. Why, Al is still waiting on the phone."

Jason stared at his wife dumbly, the dream—or whatever it could have been—tumbling through his tired brain. Suddenly, with great determination, he raised his hand and touched his left ear. His fingers came away dry. The tension passed out of his body and he slumped forward.

"Well, why don't you say something, Jason? Look, Honey, I'm sorry about the TV. You go ahead with Al and the boys. I can get the repairman in the morning."

Thunder grumbled in the distance. Jason looked down

at his hands and said quietly, "I—I don't think I feel much like hunting now, Ed."

"For goodness sake, Jason, stop acting like a petulant child. I said I wasn't mad anymore." She leaned forward tensely. "Or are you hurt somewhere?"

Jason shook his head. "You don't understand. It's that crazy dream. I don't want to go hunting."

"Well, you can do what you like. But you better come up and tell Al. But I still don't see how you could have dreamed anything in that short a time. It was only a minute. Come on now, Jason."

She stood waiting for him to get up with her hands on her hips. Jason wearily pulled himself to his feet, and then the rage hit him with the force of a bullet. Bounding across the cellar, he grabbed her by the arms and yanked her from the stairs, shaking her as if she were a dirty rag. "It was a dream!" he shouted shrilly. "It had to be a dream! You better stop saying that it couldn't be! You better stop!"

Edna screamed and fainted. Jason stood quietly for a moment, then dropped her and sank to the floor, sobbing and shaking and covering his ears with his hands.

THE END

THE BARBARIAN

By G. L. VANDENBURG

You and I and all our friends talk a good case for tolerance of all living creatures, but how would we react if faced with an ugly-looking reality? Would we investigate rationally, or would we kill the monster first and be tolerant later? Here's a story about a group of people who were put to the test.

A RABBIT hunter couldn't have asked for a better day. October had invaded the countryside with its customary briskness. The spruces and poplars had done their shedding and stood melancholy but well protected under the towering pines in Hoban's woods.

Jesse K. Slattery, the tall gaunt ex-mayor of Payneville, and short pudgy Carl Slocum, Payneville's only barber, had been hunting rabbits since early morning. The two men were the closest of friends and the keenest of rivals. The day's catch amounted to six rabbits. Each man had bagged three.

The two of them plodded along the path in Hoban's woods, heading home for Payneville. They reached a

clearing and stopped—mouths agape . . .

The thing floated down from nowhere. Silently. The two men stood frozen. Their good sense told them to take cover, but their legs refused to obey.

The globe was about forty feet across and ten feet high.

Carl Slocum spoke in a faltering voice, "There ain't no doors or windows or port holes or nothin'."

"Damned if you ain't right," Jesse croaked.

"You . . . you . . . don't suppose whatever's inside," Carl Slocum swallowed hard, "is something *unhuman*, do you, Jesse?"

"I don't know. According to all I ever read about flying saucers this here one ain't very big. Maybe there's noth-



Condemned without trial, the creature fled for its life.

ing inside, human or otherwise. Maybe it ain't even a flying saucer."

But it was a flying saucer and they both knew it. The fear continued to pile up inside and paralyze them.

The purring of the motor stopped. Jesse and Carl quit breathing. In all of Hoban's woods there wasn't a sound. It was as if even the lowest insect was aware that it was in the company of something alien.

The ship began to turn. Slowly. Evenly. It gradually rose some ten feet off the ground and rested on a thick silvery pole which protruded from its center. The pole was about fifteen feet in circumference. In its new position the ship resembled a giant toadstool and the two men soon discovered there *was* a door. It slid upward until there was an opening in the pole six feet high.

That was enough to unhinge Jesse K. Slattery's legs. He high-tailed it for the nearest bush. The opening in the pole had no such affect on Carl Slocum. It only seemed to solidify the pudgy little barber's frozen state. He stood there, not a muscle moving, his eyes drawn to the blackness inside.

A moment passed.

Jesse deduced that whatever was inside the opening might be studying the terrain from its own safe vantage point. But how long would he study it? Would Jesse have time to run out and drag Carl Slocum bodily back to the safety of the bushes? He couldn't let his old friend stand there unprotected, vulnerable to God only knew what kind of attack. Jesse slowly rose.

In a split second he was flat on his stomach, the nauseating fear returned, pumping away inside him. The creature had appeared. First in the doorway where the shadow of the saucer resting above obscured Jesse's vision. Then it brazenly set foot on earth's soil and walked into the clearing.

What was left of the afternoon sun provided more than enough for Jesse's face to pale with repulsion. Green! A sickening green! It was five feet tall and had two boneless things like tentacles for arms. Five smaller tentacles formed tributaries at the ends of the larger two. It was the closest thing to a living vegetable that Jesse had ever seen. And yet it looked like no vegetable known to man.

The green one stood outside

the perimeter of the ship and searched purposefully over the ground. Under one tentacle he held a cloth-covered object.

He selected a smooth spot and set the object down. The cloth peeled off like the skin of a tangerine, revealing what looked like a portable radio or transmitter.

The creature's tentacles moved over the object as a fortune teller's hands move over a crystal ball. In a matter of seconds the ship had swallowed up the pole and was resting comfortably on the ground again.

From a blue glistening metallic bag strapped around its shoulder the creature produced a gun. He pointed it at the object on the ground. In an instant a gelatinous substance formed a transparent dome over it. The green one quickly adjusted something where the hammer of an Earth gun would be. Again the gun pointed to the ground and this time the creature walked a wide circle around the gelatinous substance, all the while keeping his weapon trained on the earth.

No flame spat forth from the nozzle and Jesse could detect no sound from the weapon. But when the circle was

completed Jesse knew what the creature had done.

The object he had been carrying was obviously his only way of getting back into the ship and he had given it double protection from any curious intruders. The gelatinous substance protected the object. And a wall of heat, so intense that Jesse could feel it where he sat, protected the gelatinous substance.

It meant two things to Jesse. The ship was operated by only one such creature. And if the green thing was protecting the object it must be too heavy to carry anywhere, meaning that the creature was on the march to civilization. To Jesse that only meant Payneville. The town would have to be warned!

The creature packed the gun away and folded the two tentacles. He slowly turned as though looking for a path leading out of the clearing. It was doubtful if Jesse could have done anything at all to help Carl Slocum. But even if he could have it was too late now. The green one had spotted Carl.

The creature whipped the gun out. No fire. No sound. Only that gelatin. And inside—Carl Slocum.

The creature came forward and stopped six feet short of

the gelatin. He seemed satisfied with the results and turned to face in the direction of Payneville. He was closer to Jesse than at any time before. Barely fifteen feet away.

The sun sat on the horizon, a reddish orange glow, but enough of its radiance filtered through the wooded area for Jesse to see the creature's face. Two malevolent eyes, as large and as purple as plums with only a strand of flesh between them; nostrils that spread out as far as below the cheekbone; a head shingled with oily green threads for hair; a wide spongy mouth that curved downwards at the corners. Jesse shuddered. Now it would be his turn. But the creature either missed or ignored him and disappeared into the woods.

Jesse let his head fall to earth. Cool, soothing, lovable, rich, friendly, protective Mother Earth! His tension began to ebb and after awhile he was breathing normally again. . . .

Jesse kept his distance from the gelatin as he circled it. The body of Carl Slocum, distorted and smothered, stood inside, one warped foot still poised for the step he never took.

Jesse Slattery felt a roar-

ing anger welling up inside him; an anger born of the helplessness and frustration of having to stand by while his dearest friend was unmercifully asphyxiated.

He must get to Payneville and warn the populace of the menace that threatened them. That gun could render Payneville's entire population of six hundred and five non-existent in a matter of minutes.

The creature had gone down the path leading to town via Foley's Corners. Jesse could head straight north and enter town through Bender Street. The creature had a head start on him but Jesse figured that if he hurried he might get there first . . .

It was dark when he arrived in Payneville half an hour later, and he could see that something was radically wrong. There wasn't a light on. The streets were empty. The stillness was overpowering.

The creature had been here!

But where were the townspeople? Dead, Jesse thought. *All dead! Like poor Carl. But why aren't some of them dead in the streets? The creature couldn't have gone killing from door to door. There had to be people outside at the*

time of his arrival. And not all of them would have made it to cover. Some would have been caught unaware of the menace and would be frozen in gelatin here in the street!

He stood in the middle of Bender Street, afraid to yell, afraid even to move.

He saw a light, one dim bulb glowing faintly from around the corner two blocks away. One infinitesimal glimmer of hope in an otherwise lifeless community. A haven! He thought he could hear voices, stifled voices murmuring in the distance. He tried to run, sure that with the light would be the protection and warmth of his fellow human beings.

His legs were like anvils. With each leaden step grew the sickly notion that from the other end of town that horrible creature would also be heading for the light. Jesse had to get there first!

As he came closer he could almost feel the warmth of that lonely naked bulb, transmitting its meager light just for him, encouraging him to hurry in out of the wicked night.

He rounded the corner of Elm Street. The light came from the window of Dilweg's small one-story bungalow three houses away. The ex-

cessive flesh around Jesse's midsection, wrought by the laxities of middle-age, was beginning to drain his vital breath away. He had not run a distance of two and one-half blocks in sixteen years. Yet he somehow managed to accelerate his pace. He sprinted across the porch and burst into the living room.

The creature was there.

Jesse went mute. His thinking became garbled—beyond coherence. Only his instincts seemed to function. He turned and ran hysterically, as if into an empty, endless space that held nothing. Nothing but Jesse—running, running, running . . .

He tripped and fell next to a picket fence and told himself that this was surely the end. He lay on the sidewalk, the black night banked in around him, the agonizing stillness ever present. He was too exhausted to lift himself up, to run anymore. His flesh quivered at the thought of the gelatin. Any moment. Any moment now a gun would go off. He wouldn't hear it. He wouldn't see it. He would only know when the gelatin began to enshroud him, to smother him forever.

He cursed himself for not wanting to get up. Why

couldn't he raise himself and run! He wasn't *that* tired, not too tired to save his own life! Then he remembered. Carl Slocum had stood transfixed, had not moved when he should have. He must have been hypnotized to have exposed himself so willingly. That's how the creature had smothered him so simply. That was the only reason.

Jesse lay there and waited. When? When will it come? He didn't want to die but if he had to he didn't want the agony of suspense involved. He waited.

But there was no gun. No flame. No sound. Nothing. And after ten minutes he was still very much alive and even beginning to feel a little better.

He heard footsteps, flapping footsteps like the sound of thin rubber being slapped against the pavement. He moved in flush with the picket fence. The footsteps stopped at the sound of his body rustling a few dead leaves.

Silence.

Footsteps again. Coming closer. Closer. Jesse hugged the fence. He could barely make out the long tentacles reaching almost to the sidewalk, the thin wide webbed feet as the creature went by

him, moving slowly, cautiously.

Suddenly a light, a thin strip of bright light coming from Garrick's drugstore. A blurred face peering out through the blinds. People! Someone *was* still alive! This time he could go to the light and be sure of a welcome.

He hesitated a moment as the creature crossed the street and became silhouetted between the light and him. The green one paused a moment, revealing the blue metallic bag slung over his shoulder, and then was consumed again by the blackness . . .

There were four people in Garrick's drugstore not including old Garrick himself. Under normal circumstances they were four of Payneville's solidest citizens but at this moment they were the solidest four people in the world in the eyes of Jesse K. Slatery.

They had seen him coming through the shaft of light in the street and had been only too eager to let him in.

Jesse told them his story from beginning to end as they fed him and gave him black coffee. They were duly appalled at the part about Carl Slocum. It was with heavy

hearts that they related that the same fate had befallen Sam O'Connell, the postmaster.

Some sense of normalcy began to find its way back into Jesse's shattered nervous system. He gulped down a second cup of coffee. As he set it on the lunch counter his eyes bulged.

"My God!" he said. "My God, is that . . . is that the . . ." he pointed to a small object lying on the counter.

"That's the creature's gun all right," said Deacon Jim Farnsworth, the medium-sized portly gentleman who seemed to have taken charge of the small group. Deacon Jim, as he was called, was not a minister. He was simply a wise man, a man who knew something about everything. Hence, the nickname. He was a frugal sort, living on the remnants of an inheritance. Outwardly he gave generously of himself to his neighbors. His smile and his handshake belonged to everyone. When Deacon Jim spoke it was tantamount to the final word in Payneville.

"What's it doing here? How in tarnation'd you get hold of it?" blurted Jesse.

"Bunch of the fella's was chewin' the fat down at Foley's corners 'round quittin'

time," drawled Herman Barstow, the gas station owner. "All of a sudden like outa nowhere's this thing shows up. It was just gettin' dark so at first nobody knew just what it was. But it came closer and they found out soon enough."

"What happened at Foley's corners?" Jesse wanted to know.

Deacon Jim took over again. "Some of the boys ran. Sam O'Connell decided to go after it. That's when the thing turned on him and sprayed him with this gelatin gun. It was pathetic. Poor old Sam just froze there in a running position. About that time Miss Dilweg here," he motioned to the prim, elderly widow sitting with her arms folded near the radiator, "she came around the corner driving her car. The sight of the creature standing in the middle of the road frightened her and . . ."

"That isn't quite accurate, Deacon Jim." The widow Dilweg tried to conceal her annoyance. Her straight paper-thin lips barely moved when she spoke. "I was in full control of myself during the entire incident. Still am. However, I was unable to slow down sufficiently to avoid hitting the monster!"

"And the monster was too busy taking care of Sam O'Connell to take notice of Miss Dilweg's automobile," Deacon Jim added.

"I don't figure it was that, Deacon Jim," Jesse said. "I figure where he comes from there's no such thing as automobiles. I'll bet he didn't even know the thing could hurt him."

"Well, any way," Deacon Jim continued, "Miss Dilweg's automobile only stunned him but it was enough of a jolt to throw the weapon out of his hands . . . or what was supposed to be his hands. That's when Herman here picked it up . . ."

"I tried to fire the thing at him but I'll be hanged if I could work it," said Herman.

"We've had it here ever since," said Deacon Jim, "trying it on all kinds of little objects. None of us can work it. But the main thing is we got it away from the creature."

"He may have another one," Jesse advised.

"That don't make much difference," the gas station owner put in. "He thinks we *can* work this one. At least it looked that way from the way he ran when I pointed it at him."

"So that makes him just as

scared as we are," the voice belonged to Avery Feller, the banker. He had tried to make the remark in a jaunty manner but the way his every limb trembled betrayed his true feelings. He sat alone, huddled in a corner, as though he wanted to be as far from the door as possible in case the creature stormed in unexpectedly.

"I'm sorry now that I didn't pile right into the monster!" Miss Dilweg hissed indignantly. "If I had, Payneville wouldn't be facing this horrible crisis right now. But no, I had to be humane! I had to have a heart. If I had only known *what* I was hitting!"

"What about the rest of the town?" Jesse asked.

"We had Amy at the switchboard call everybody who hadn't already witnessed it and tell them to turn out all lights and secure all doors and windows." Deacon Jim paced in front of the lunch counter scratching his head. "Jesse, you're the only one who's seen the spaceship. Do you have any idea what he's doing here? What he wants?"

Jesse remembered his friend, Carl Slocum. He was angry again. "I might not know the specifics of why he's

here but I know one thing. Whatever the reason is, it ain't good! It's evil, I tell you!" The oratory of his political heyday was reaching out of the past and taking command. "I wish I could find the words to describe how ruthlessly, how unmercifully he murdered poor Carl Slo-cum! Destruction is his purpose! My theory is he's here as a raider, come to find out how vulnerable we are. Then he'll go back to where he came from and tell the others of his kind that we're pushovers and before we know it they'll all swoop down on us like the seven year locust!" He was standing now, addressing each and every person, heatedly banging his fist into his palm. "Some plan of action must be devised and fast!!"

"Well, I think we all agree on that, Jesse," Herman Bar-stow was puzzled, "but what can it be?"

The widow Dilweg rose and wrapped the shawl tighter around her skinny shoulders. "What difference does it make as long as it's something that shows we can strike back! Jesse is one hundred percent right. We cannot let that monster get back to his ship. How do we know there aren't others like him waiting to

supply him with more tools of destruction? We must act now!"

"Well," said Deacon Jim, "if he was jolted by Miss Dilweg's automobile he must know pain, and if he knows pain . . ." the big man fingered his chin and turned to the drugstore proprietor, "Mr. Garrick, how many guns you got stored back there?"

"Two shot guns and a carbine," came the reply, "and plenty of ammunition."

"Good." Deacon Jim turned back to the others. "Jesse, Herman, we three'll go outside and start looking. Miss Dilweg and Avery better stay here."

"You mean just the three of us are goin' out there in the dark with nothin' but guns?" Now Herman began to tremble.

"Now, Herman, take it easy," the spokesman said, "you know old Deacon Jim better than that. We're going to have help."

"From who?"

"I have a plan. And if the citizens of Payneville can cooperate in sufficient numbers it'll work."

"You know you can count on our people in a pinch, Deacon Jim," Jesse preached with one finger held on high. "This town got a little

scared," he conceded, "I guess we all did, but now we've got our wits about us again and we're ready to fight back."

"Well put, Jesse, well put!" Miss Dilweg smiled.

"Now what's the plan, Deacon Jim?" And Jesse leaned over the counter to hear it . . .

After a series of phone calls followed by a ten-minute wait the three men packed their guns under their arms and went into the dark street. In a moment they were joined in front of Garrick's drugstore by five more men, all carrying weapons.

Deacon Jim took charge. "Now everyone listen carefully. First of all does anyone know the last place this creature was seen?"

A small man spoke up. "About ten minutes ago he was roaming around the Kepling plant. I seen him from my window."

"What in heaven's name would he want at the Kepling plant?" Deacon Jim's face wore a wrinkled expression.

"The watch dials!" Jesse Slattery erupted suddenly. "Of course! Remember during the war the plant was converted to make airplane parts? Precision parts. Some of them were top secret. By

God, the thing is a menace to our security. I knew it!"

Rumblings of agreement were heard throughout the small crowd. Jesse's excitement and confidence seemed to agitate them.

"He can't come here and threaten *us!*"

"Let's go find him and show him we ain't made of jelly like he thinks we are!"

"Yeah, let's go."

"Now quiet, men, quiet!" Deacon Jim said in a loud whisper. "Here's what we're going to do. We'll spread out in twos and take up positions along Bender Street. At exactly 7:00 o'clock almost everyone in town will turn their lights on. Old Hank down at the generator has been called so the street lamps will go on, too. That ought to be enough to take this thing by surprise and, if he's still here, flush him out. Everything he might want in Payneville is right on Bender Street so that seems the most likely place. Now once I've given you your positions you're to stay at them. Under cover! Remember that, under cover. This is no time to take chances. We already know this thing is plenty dangerous!"

The men dispersed and silently took up their positions

along Bender Street. It was five minutes to seven.

The minutes ticked by.

Jesse Slattery, his fingers carressing the bolt of a carbine, sat huddled in a bakery doorway with Deacon Jim.

"I hope he comes by right near us, Deacon Jim. I won't give him no more of a chance than he gave poor Carl."

"It's almost like the middle-ages, isn't it?" Deacon Jim asked. "A regular barbarian loose in the streets of a civilized community!"

The seconds disappeared.

Herman Barstow, shotgun in tow, lay on the grass in front of the town hall. He turned to Amos Williams, a dirt farmer, who lay beside him.

"Amos," he whispered, "I'm here to tell you that that there creature was *the ugliest* thing I ever *did* see. I got a feeling he probably is pretty thick skinned. Likely to take the heap of us to bring him down. If he shows up, that is."

Seven o'clock.

The lights went on all over Payneville. It had been so dark before that the sudden brightness was like a thousand Roman candles going off at once.

The men maintained their positions. There was silence.

Nothing moved as everyone conditioned their eyes to the light.

The creature, attracted by the light, stepped out of the door of Grayson's feed store. For all who couldn't see him the green thing was given away by the flapping of his wide webbed feet.

He looked cautiously around the street. With both tentacles he clutched the small blue metallic bag to his bosom.

"He's been looting!" Jesse whispered. "Let's get him!"

Deacon Jim gripped Jesse's shoulder. "Not yet. What's he got in that bag?"

"Who cares! He can't lick all of us!"

"Wait until he reaches the street. God, Jesse, I hope he doesn't have another one of those gelatin guns in that bag! If he does we're all done for!"

Jesse Slattery gave Deacon Jim Farnsworth a strange look. The big man was shaking. He was afraid. It was the first time Jesse ever knew Deacon Jim to be afraid.

Jesse waited, impatient, every nerve quivering, his fingers itching for revenge.

The creature moved into the street and, as though sensing the immediate danger, broke into an awkward run.

The crack of Jesse's carbine broke the stillness of the night. The creature slowed down momentarily. He had been hit somewhere below the thigh but he kept running.

"Get him!!" Jesse screamed savagely. "Everybody get him!!!"

Two more shots from the carbine. Then another and another. And soon Deacon Jim and Herman and Amos Williams and all the others were emptying their guns at the lone figure running helplessly toward the open field.

Payneville's main artery became a battleground. Windows smashed, signs fell, three street lamps were shattered during the steady firing that continued for five minutes. It wasn't until most of them were out of ammunition that they realized their enemy had long since fallen at the end of Bender Street near the edge of town.

The creature lay there in a macabre heap, the metallic blue bag still selfishly protected by the two tentacles wrapped around his chest. The body was dead. Only a few last stubborn nerve muscles twitched frantically as though there were still some slim hope of survival.

Out of the battered doorways, down the shell lined

streets came the warriors of Payneville. Slowly they crept along, hugging the buildings, still immersed in a fear that had driven them to destroy their common enemy.

They formed a semi-circle around the body. None was willing to venture near it. They just looked at it, wide-eyed and still afraid . . .

A man fought his way through the crowd which grew larger with spectators every second.

The man was Carl Slocum. He halted at the sight of the creature. "You've killed him! My God, you've killed him!!" the pudgy barber exclaimed.

Jesse K. Slattery's mouth opened in horror. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. "Carl! Carl, I thought . . . I thought you were . . ."

"Dead? So did I," Carl said soberly. "And I don't know why I'm not. I'm just not, that's all. All I know is I suddenly came to in the middle of Hoban's woods and it was pitch black and for a minute I didn't know who or where I was. I was just standing there with one foot off the ground."

"The gelatin!" Deacon Jim yelled. "It isn't fatal! It's just a temporary weapon! It must melt off."

As if to prove his point another man worked his way through the crowd. It was Sam O'Connell, the postmaster.

"I don't know anything about any gelatin," said Carl Slocum. "I only know I feel different. Kind of good all over. Fresh and clean and almost young again. Like I feel after a long steam bath only better, much better."

"So do I!" said Sam O'Connell. "I don't know how to describe it but I'm happy and contented sort of. I think I'm never going to be sad or lonely or mad at anyone again for the rest of my life. Isn't that strange?"

"Yeah . . . strange," and Carl Slocum moved to Sam O'Connell's side. It was somewhere apparent to the crowd that these two men had experienced a kind of understanding unknown to the rest of them. . . .

Deacon Jim went to the lifeless body of the creature and knelt beside it.

"Watch out, Deacon Jim!" Jesse Slattery warned. "You can't be sure that thing is done for!"

"He's done for all right. I'm just curious. I've been wanting to know right along just what it was he came here for and if I'm not mistaken the answer is right in that little bag he's carrying."

Deacon Jim had a bit of a time prying the blue metallic bag loose from the creature's death grip, but he finally got it and opened it. He pulled out a smaller bag made of muslin.

The crowd, seeing that no harm had come to Deacon Jim, hovered around the body, curious to learn the contents of the bag. The smaller muslin bag contained nothing but a handful of grass seed. Deacon Jim reached into the metallic bag again and produced a book. In muted tones he read to them the lettering on its binding.

"The Holy Bible."

THE END

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THE UGLY BEAUTY

By GENEVIEVE HAUGEN

ONE more hour to live. Bill stood alone at the door of his isolated valley retreat and gazed at the cool distant hills absorbing the pastel beauty of a California sunset. His mind was resigned and his emotions at peace because the decision had been his own and the executioner was to be himself.

A loaded pistol lay ready and waiting on the desk in his den. After the twilight had faded he would use it on himself. He could think of no reason not to, except the knowledge that he would never again feel the poignant pleasure of witnessing another sunset. However, a man cannot live for only an occasional glimpse of beauty when life is too crowded with ugliness and psychic trauma.

In a Universe of Multiple systems, this man discovered a bewildering truth—that there are places where the ugliest man is the handsomest; where the most beautiful woman is the most hideous.

“I suppose they will think I was insane,” he mused. “Perhaps I am. Healthy male, age 30, college grad, intelligence quotient above average, moderately successful television actor, no involvement with women—” He broke off with a sardonic chuckle. “The Freudians would say that last item is the real problem. Perhaps I am mistaken in believing that my will to survive depends upon something even more important than sex—a little thing called human dignity.”

A radiant orange glow outlined the purple hills as the sun dropped below the horizon and Bill responded with a similar inner glow of aesthetic enjoyment. “Too bad I wasn’t born with the genius of a Toulouse-Lautrec. We



It was a bath or a hot seat—depending on how you looked at it.

have so much in common—worshippers of beauty trapped in ugly bodies.” He smiled in despairing detachment. “To be or not to be! What noble tragedy these words convey from the lips of a handsome Hamlet. Yet, let’s face it; when a cross-eyed, bow-legged, flap-eared, undersized, spindly caricature of a man utters these same words all the dramatic talent in the world won’t stop an audience from laughing.”

Bill had described himself with objective reality. He was only five feet tall and his ears would have done credit to an African elephant. His extremely bowed legs, thin body and stunted stature were the result of rickets and malnutrition before he was left an orphan by his sharecropper parents in Mississippi.

Despite these handicaps he had worked his way from an orphanage through college and clawed a place for himself in society. Because of his comical ugliness his outstanding talent in the field of drama could only find expression in slapstick roles and he had philosophically made the most of what few parts he was allowed to play.

Other unhandsome actors

could find dignified roles, such as the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Frankenstein’s monster, Corneille’s *The Cid*—roles which inspired sympathy or terror—but even Frankenstein’s monster would seem harmless if he were as cross-eyed as Bill. People started laughing the moment they looked at him without waiting to be impressed by a demonstration of thespian talent.

To Bill’s sensitive nature this was the *coup de grace*. He had struggled with it all his life, a losing battle which was culminating in this last hour of existence. Despite his proved talent and intellect the world would never take him seriously; he would never be anything but the butt of jokes and unwarranted ridicule. Yet, despite his craving for human respect, he was well enough integrated to not hate the world. “I, too, would laugh if I saw someone like myself walking down the street like a character out of an animated cartoon. Anyhow, it’s not malicious laughter. Most peoples’ sense of humor is based on the fact that they are relieved not to be the victim of the joke.”

Sex, of course, was out of the question except for visits to professional establishments

which dealt in such things. Bill was realistic enough to know that no normal woman of sufficient beauty and intelligence to appeal to him could possibly return the compliment.

The hills were now a black silhouette against the faded color of the horizon and Bill turned with a sigh to enter the den where the pistol awaited him. It was at that moment the vibration reached his ears. It was a quiet, purring sound and it came from above.

Wondering about its source Bill turned back and looked at the sky. A silver globe was dropping like thistledown to a resting place between the two cypress trees bordering the barbecue pit. If it were not for the muted throb of its power source he would have taken it for a balloon.

Curious, he approached the object which gleamed softly in the light of a rising moon and observed that it was almost the height of his bungalow. The thought that it might be a craft from outer space sparked his interest. UFOs were always being sighted although none, to his knowledge, had proved to be visitors from an alien world.

The globe had touched the

ground and now the sound of its propulsion power ceased. It rested motionless and silent as Bill arrived close enough to touch it. Puzzled, he could discern no break in the silver surface, no seam or crack to indicate an opening. He was startled when a hole appeared melting into focus in a widening circle above him and a ramp slid noiselessly to the ground.

In order to see into the entrance port he would have to climb up the ramp. However, he did not rush to intrude, surmising that whoever—or whatever—was inside would soon emerge. For several tense moments he waited, speculating on what kind of creature it would be. A BEM perhaps, with tungsten filaments as nerve fibres? Charreuse midgets from Mars? By now he was fairly certain that this UFO was extra-terrestrial.

Finally a figure appeared in the port and beckoned to him. Bill felt a slight letdown because it was obviously a man and not a monster. However he could not see him clearly enough for further details except the gratifying fact that he wore a strange, glistening helmet and matching leotards of gold mesh.

He was further startled

when the man spoke. "Please come in."

Bill felt a twinge of disappointment upon hearing English spoken instead of some alien tongue. However he saw no reason not to accept the invitation. Possible danger holds no terror to one who is resolved on suicide. Without hesitation he walked up the ramp and was ushered into a circular compartment illuminated by a soft light with no visible source but which projected every detail with amazing clarity. Before studying his surroundings he examined his host and even as he did so the entrance hole silently diminished into nothingness behind him.

"My name is Xexex," said the alien. He was unmistakably human despite his odd attire; not very tall—about five feet six—clean-shaven, lean and muscular, and his voice was a pleasant baritone. However, Bill had a haunting sense of familiarity—a feeling of *dèja vu*. A fleeting thought crossed his mind: Where have I met this man before?, quickly followed by: Could all this be an elaborate hoax—a practical joke by the Friars Club?

Then it hit him why this man seemed familiar. It was

because he was looking at a non-caricature of himself! This is how he, Bill, would have looked if he had only been a little taller, a little less emaciated, not quite so horribly bow-legged (the alien, too, was bow-legged, but not to a comical extent) and not so ridiculously cross-eyed (Xexex had a definite squint). Even the ears of his host loomed large and protruding beneath his gold helmet although they would not have evoked the envy of an African elephant. In other words, Xexex was a modified version of Bill himself and could pass on Earth as a homely man without being considered laughably ugly.

In the few seconds it took for these thoughts to pass through Bill's mind he also noticed that Xexex was staring at him with equal intensity, but there was a marked difference in his expression. Whereas Bill was gaping in plain, unadulterated curiosity, Xexex was gaping in almost reverent awe.

This hit Bill hardest of all. No one had ever looked at him respectfully before except actors playing a part in front of a television camera. In fact, no one had ever looked at him at all without suppressing a smile or laughing

outright. Yet this man seemed sincere and somehow he felt that this was not an elaborate prank by the Friars Club.

Bewildered, Bill looked around for reassurance and found it immediately. This *must* be a craft from outer space because a couch was materializing from the floor and his host was beckoning him to it. It looked like a cloud of eider-down without a containing cover, as unsubstantial as floating mist, yet when he sank into it there was a firmness and resilience that gave heavenly comfort. "What on earth is this?" he gasped, at the same time setting comfortably.

"Not on Earth," corrected Xexex. "You have no such inventions. It's merely a temporary arrangement of atoms." He gestured to a row of buttons on the circular wall, each with a symbol beneath. "The button I pressed on our sub-netic materializer temporarily supplies a comfortable resting place, so please relax while I answer your questions." He punched another button which provided an ottoman-shaped cloud for himself and sat down to face his guest. "Of course," he explained, "there is a limit to what our materializers can

supply in the narrowing confines of a starship, however, outside of the . . ."

"Starship!" gasped Bill. "Then this is not an inter-planetary craft from our own solar system?"

"No. We're from the center of the galaxy—Lygnus XII to be specific. It's an Earth-type planet with twin red suns but no satellites. Our ecology, however, is remarkably similar to yours. Atmospheric content is approximately one-fifth oxygen, gravity almost earth-normal, polar diameter about 8000 of your miles, minor land surface and all that sort of thing."

"B-but you speak English," stammered Bill.

"Permit me to explain." Xexex earnestly leaned forward. "I am a deputy of the Minister of Historical Culture Research and it is not a sine-cure as is apt to occur in your own civilization. I did not receive my appointment through political channels but through merit based on competitive examinations. One of the qualifications is a knowledge of galactic linguistics."

Slightly overwhelmed Bill continued to shoot questions. "If you are from another

solar system why do you look so terrestrial?"

Xexex smiled whimsically although his admiring gaze never left Bill's face. "This will no doubt startle you but we Lygnites are direct descendants of Earth people." His smile broadened at the expression on Bill's face and he shook his head in answer to Bill's as yet unspoken question. "No. Our ancestors did not invent space travel. We were absolute primitives. However, some five thousand years ago an alien craft landed on Earth and collected some specimens of homo sapiens for their zoo. Unfortunately, they also collected a virus of the common cold along with their human herd and, despite their advanced science, were unable to control the plague which exterminated their entire population. We alone survived on their planet, sole inheritors of a remarkable technology."

"But if you were primitives how were you able to grasp their science?"

"That's a good question," said Xexex. "But before I answer, do you mind if we take off for Lygnus XII? We shall not abduct you against your volition and guarantee safe conduct if you wish to return.

Meanwhile, we wish you to be our honored guest."

"W-we?" Bill stammered again.

"I am not the only occupant of this craft," explained Xexex and gestured above him to a row of vari-colored blinking lights. "Those are signals from the astrogator's compartment. Later you will meet the crew. At present they are desirous of taking off according to the computations of their celestial coordinates. I, myself, have no knowledge of such things. My field is historical culture research."

Dazed and bewildered though he was Bill did not take long to make his decision. After all he had nothing to lose. Besides, he wasn't even interested at the moment in suicide—that is not until his curiosity was satisfied. A hundred more questions had already sprung into his mind, but the most paramount was: *Why does Xexex look at me with such respect and admiration? Why am I selected to be the honored guest of another planet?*

"Er—tell them to go ahead and take off," he said inanely.

His host's face brightened. "Thank you, oh thank you!" he exclaimed. "We are grateful that you have chosen to

accompany us." Jumping up, he pressed a button under the blinking lights. In almost immediate response a humming vibration throbbed throughout the starship.

Bill rose from his fluffy couch and was startled to see it dematerialize. Xexex was still busy, this time punching buttons on the subnetic materializer strip, and now a bathtub took the place of the couch which had just vanished. That is, it looked like a bathtub of unconventional design filled with water. "Hop in," Xexex instructed briskly. "It's a breathable fluid developed by our research scientists which contains anti-gravitic properties which will protect you against acceleration." In order to allay Bill's fears he immersed himself in his own tub and no bubbles appeared on the surface as he breathed and talked. "Simply a temporary arrangement of atoms," he assured again in an ungurgling voice.

This can't be real, thought Bill. It's too fantastic. Yet, why not? So he stepped into the tub. It felt just like lukewarm water.

Although his every instinct rebelled against it he deliberately submerged himself and inhaled. To his amazement it

was as though he were breathing air. At the same moment the low throb of the starship rose to a supersonic pitch and Bill could hear only silence.

The only indication they were airborne came from Xexex. "We'll be out of the atmosphere in a few minutes. After that we can dispense with this anti-gravitic fluid and switch to inverspace."

Hard as he was trying Bill found it difficult to remain nonchalant. "And what's inverspace?" he croaked.

"That's not my field," deplored Xexex. "All I know is that it's the shortest distance between two points. It seems that time and space are synonymous and when one acquires a certain speed surpassing the velocity of light one enters the fourth dimension. All one has to do is press the right buttons, but that's the astrogator's department. The main point is that we'll arrive on Lygnus XII in approximately two hours earth time, despite the millions of light years separating our two systems."

There was another blinking of lights and Xexex rose from his tub, dry and dripleless. "We are now outside the atmosphere. When the Switch occurs you won't even feel it.

Meanwhile, make yourself comfortable." Now he began punching more buttons and Bill barely emerged from his tub before it vanished and was replaced by the old familiar couch.

Brains reeling, but still at the bat, Bill doggedly asked: "To get back to that last question I asked, how come you primitives were able to survive in your zoo after your alien masters died off?"

Again the inexplicable expression of reverence came to the face of Xexex as he looked at Bill. "Because one such as you is our prototype."

Bill took a long breath, exhaled, and flopped on the couch. "I give up. So I'm a synthetic prototype. Please take over."

Xexex seemed distressed. "Please forgive me. It's just that I haven't had time to explain. You see, we Lygnites worship the memory of Mut, our great leader among the original captives. Although a savage like the rest of our forbears, Mut had god-like qualities of intelligence and physical perfection so outstanding that he was made the personal pet of the Ruler. He was kept on a leash like your dogs but his genius was so great that he learned their

language and understood everything that transpired in the highest places of the Council. He feigned ignorance, of course, but was kept at the Ruler's side because of his charming display of uttering a few words in their alien tongue—much as you esteem your parakeets.

"When the virus of the common cold had already decimated half the population of the planet their scientists finally traced it to the Earthlings in the zoo. All other life forms from other parts of the galaxy had succumbed, but only the Earthlings seemed to have a certain immunity. Exterminating them would not solve the problem so the Ruler, when he realized his own race was doomed, decided to leave the heritage of their accumulated knowledge to the only race that could possibly survive—the Earthlings.

"By then he knew that Mut was not just a charming animal despite the fact that he had only one head instead of two, and two legs instead of three. Recognizing Mut's genius, he gave him the keys to the scientific knowledge of Lygnus XII and, before he died, charged him with the task of keeping the planet populated."

Xexex lapsed into silence.

Entranced, Bill urged, "Yes, yes, please continue."

"What more is there to say?" shrugged Xexex. "Naturally Mut instructed his race in the sciences of the original Lygnites and the Earthlings took over, multiplying throughout the millennia to a present population of 500 million."

"But what has that to do with me?" Bill asked impatiently. "You said I was a counterpart of your great leader Mut, yet I am certainly not a genius and as for god-like qualities of physical perfection—" He broke off with a bitter laugh that was half a sob, "Well, at least you have been polite enough to not laugh out loud at my ugliness."

"*Ugliness?*" exclaimed Xexex. Slowly he rose gazing at Bill in adoration. "Aren't you aware that you are the most superb specimen of human beauty extant? Why, you are the living incarnation of Mut himself whose statue, cast in solid ilversae from the mold of his living body, still endures in the Shrine of Apolladonisex. You are every Lygnite's ideal of physical perfection."

"I—I *am*?" stuttered Bill.

"I am so sorry," Xexex laughed contritely and sank

back to his ottoman cloud. "You see I keep forgetting that you are not one of us. Permit me to explain that our standards of human beauty are not the same as yours. Our little colony of captives were more closely interbred and less numerous than the widespread races of Earth, so we all look pretty much alike. Some, like myself, grow too tall for beauty. You are a perfect sixty inches in height. Your eyes are the most divine in the universe—both orbs crossed to a precise angle of utter perfection whereas most of us have only a slight irregular angle of squint. Your ears surpass description—they are the largest I have ever seen and the most outstanding. Some of our vainer Lygnites have plastic surgery performed in order to make their auricular appendages more protuberant, but only a rare few can boast of such majestic size—"

Bill groggily interrupted his ravings. "Wait a minute. I think I'm beginning to get the idea. Even bow legs, I take it, must be fashionable on your planet, yet mine are the result of a deficiency disease."

Xexex nodded, his rapt gaze shifting to his guest's

malformed limbs. "Not so in our case, of course. Mut and our other progenitors were genetically inclined to a curvature of the fibula and inbreeding has intensified it, but it bears no connotation to ill health. Naturally we have never intermarried with other Earthlings, even though we have had your planet under surveillance for almost five thousand years as a matter of clinical interest. Earth has had nothing to contribute to our culture and you are the first we have ever invited to be our guest."

Stunned, Bill could only shake his head in bewilderment. The concept was too startling to grasp all at once. He, who had always been the epitome of repulsiveness was now a paragon of perfection. I mustn't let this go to my head, he thought. There must be a catch to it somewhere. Aloud he asked, "Aside from my, er, beauty, what is so remarkable about me that I should be selected for this honor?"

"Why, it's your talent, of course!" exclaimed Xexex. "Apart from your breathtaking physical attributes you have much to contribute to our culture in the dramatic arts. We have been monitoring your television channels

through our robot saucers in the ionosphere and found little of interest. Our own media of entertainment is so far superior that it is beyond discussion.

"However, we could not overlook the great artistry that is implicit in even your briefest performances. Mostly, you are assigned the role of a clown or buffoon, but every nuance of grace and expression was noted by the deputies of our Aesthetic Branch of Culture Research. We hope you will elect to stay with us and lend your presence to more serious roles befitting your great talent."

This was too much. Even Heaven couldn't be *that* good. Bill's beleaguered brains gave up the struggle. In short, he fainted. . . .

One year later, Bill stepped out on the terrace of his private retreat on Lygnus XII to view the setting of the twin red suns. It was a magnificent panorama and his artistic soul responded as appreciatively as ever. How different from California, yet how similar in many respects. Xexex had spoken the truth about it being an Earth-type planet. The slight difference in atmosphere lent even greater beauty to the sunset which

was blending glorious colors against the fantastically shaped backdrop of the horizon.

"One more hour to live," murmured Bill.

Inside the exquisitely graceful structure of his home, which looked as though it were made of spun crystal, there was a room he called his den, and inside the den was a tubular-shaped device known as a ray-transmitter. After the twilight had faded he would use it on himself.

"I suppose they will wonder why I did it," he mused. "I have learned their language and become the idol of Lygnus XII. I have had the satisfaction of playing the title role of HaMut, their greatest drama, a masterpiece surpassing Shakespeare's best. I am prosperous and respected beyond my wildest dreams. Yet I am the loneliest soul in the universe. I am right back where I started from one year ago."

He viewed the dying sunset in despair thinking back to that day on Earth when he had made a similar resolve to end it all. For awhile after the fortuitous intervention of Xexex he had thought that he had been transported to paradise. Lygnus XII was Utopia as compared to Earth.

The people were sincere, intelligent and whole-hearted. Their social system was so well-balanced that poverty or crime did not exist. Their music, arts and skills were so highly developed that everything was a symphony of harmonic perfection. They had given him the thing he thought he craved most—human dignity. Now he writhed in misery at the memory of his former excuse for suicide.

"What a self-deceiving, idealistic ass I was to assume that my will to survive depended solely upon human dignity—to be accepted for what I am instead of being ridiculed because of my appearance. No, I was wrong and Freud was right!"

It all boiled down to sex after all. Now that he had achieved the serious acceptance for which he had hopelessly yearned all his life he was lonelier than ever because he had no one with whom to share these blessings.

On Earth he had understandably been spurned by women. On Lygnus XII they adored him and he could have his choice of any female. The horrible irony of it was that although he liked and admired them as friends he could not find them sexually

attractive. He had been conditioned to entirely different concepts of what constituted human beauty and simply could not wax romantic in the presence of cross eyed, flap-eared, bow-legged belles no matter how charming, cultured or simpatico they were in other respects.

His real need all along then—his basic reason for suicide—had been this subconsciously suppressed awareness that nowhere in the universe existed a mate with whom he could share the fulfillment of a great love. If he were an old man perhaps it would not matter so much, but he was at the peak of youthful maturity and the biological urge was dominant.

With a deep sigh he tore his last gaze from the faded glow of the horizon and stepped inside to carry out his resolve. Better no life at all than this incessant, aching loneliness, this lack of fulfillment that had eaten away his very soul like an incurable cancer.

Entering his den he almost stumbled over a figure kneeling on the floor. Startled, his first reaction was one of irritation. The servants customarily retired to their own private domes at this hour, quarters which were almost

as luxurious as those of their masters on this world. Yet here was a kitchen maid with an electronic scrubbrush carefully dedirtizing the filigree-work of the floor pattern.

Startled, she jumped to her feet. "Oh, I am so sorry, Mutman Bill!"

He was used to being called that. "Mutman" was a title of honor conferred on those who had won unusual distinction in some field of accomplishment. However, Bill could only stare in incredulous amazement at the girl as she hastily apologized. "I thought you had gone out for the evening, sir, or I would not have dared to intrude. Please do not be angry with me. It is only that I have nothing to do evenings and it is an honor and a pleasure to clean your floors."

She was looking at him in worshipful pleading while Bill's jaw dropped another notch. "Where did you come from?" he gasped. "I have never seen anyone like you before."

Indeed he had not. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen on this or any other planet, although she definitely conformed to the Earthside concept of a fairy princess. Honey-blond hair, dainty shell-like ears,

large violet eyes, sweet sensitive mouth, straight limbs with luscious curves in just the right places.

Quick tears sprang to her eyes and she hid her head in humiliation. "Please do not laugh at me, Mutman. Most people are kind and hide their smiles. I know I am freakishly ugly and it was only through compassion that the Employment Division sent me to this job when your kitchen maid took sick—to give me a glimpse of your fabulous beauty in compensation for my own barren life.

"But I assure you that I am a conscientious worker

and will faithfully serve you."

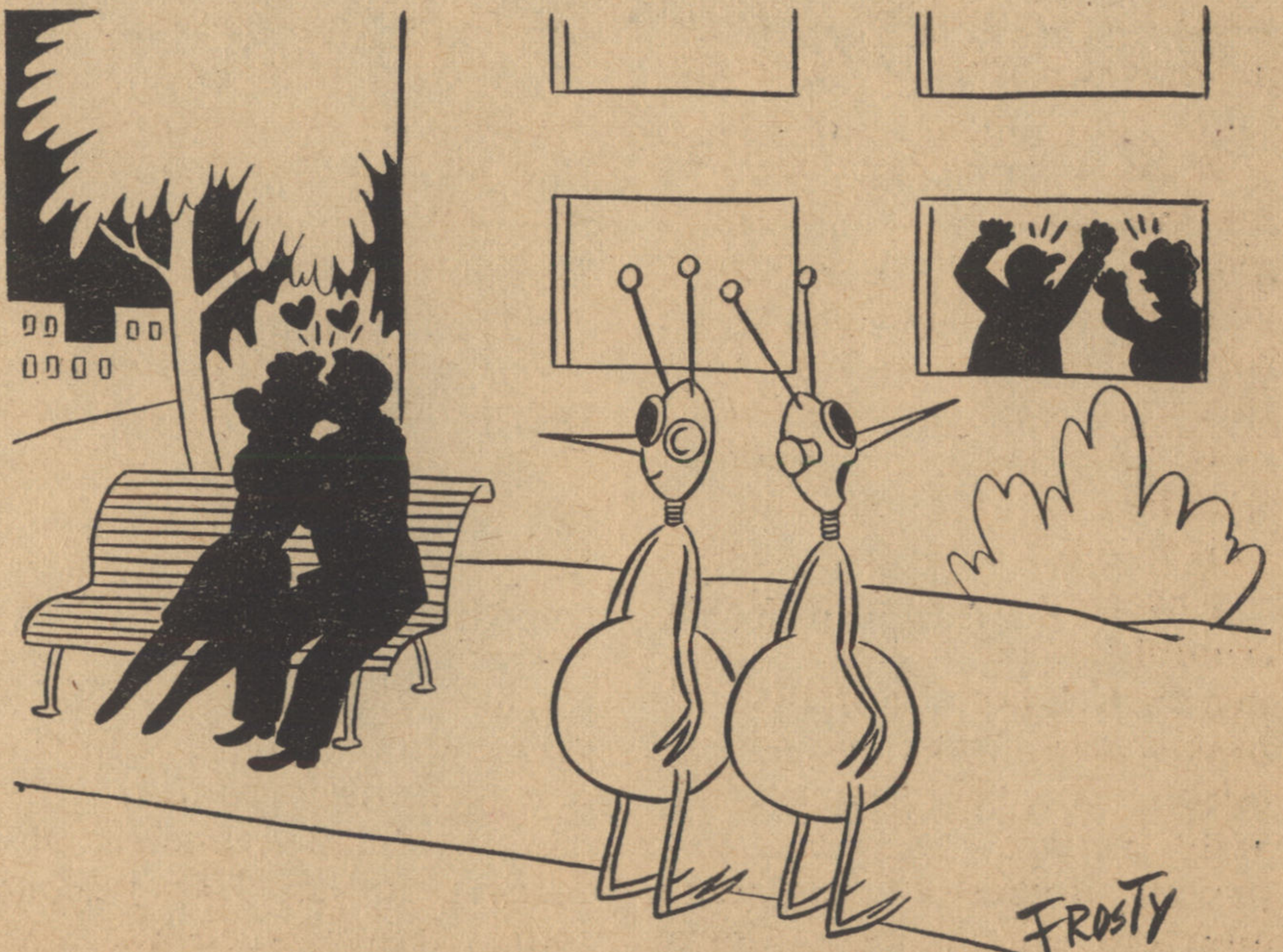
Bells were ringing in Bill's head. Whistles were blowing and flags were flying. Sky-rockets flared, and then he came to his senses.

He looked up through the crystal ceiling and murmured, "Thank you, God. I'll never doubt you again."

Then he went to his desk, picked up the ray-transmitter and chucked it into the dematerializer.

After which he went to the trembling kitchen maid, gently disengaged her hands from her tear-streaked face and asked, "Will you marry me?"

THE END



"Which do you suppose is the most fun?"

OPERATION

GRAVEYARD

By IVAR JORGENSEN

It began when Officer Matt Ward found a casket lying in the middle of the street. It continued through various strange byways—to finally uncover one of the most bizarre invasion plans ever recorded in the annals of science fiction.

THE door of Grayson's department store was locked. Officer Matt Ward walked on to Warner's Hardware. The door was secure. His rounds were almost completed. Everything seemed safe and sound. A routine morning.

He crossed Cabot Street. It was deserted and lonely at five A.M. To the west dawn was peeking in over the Berkshires. He tried the door of Dryden's Jewelry Shoppe. Locked. Routine. He left the doorway.

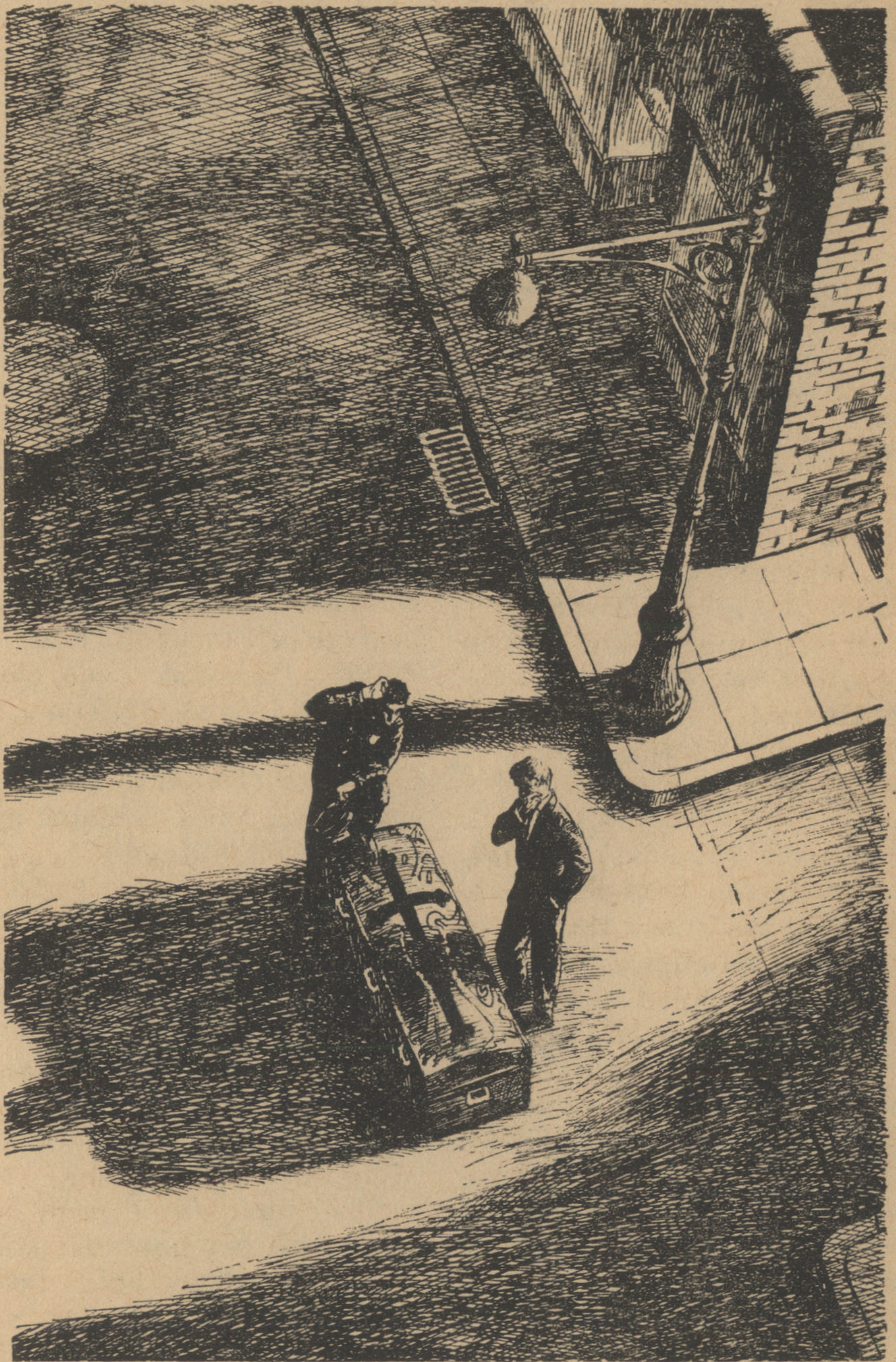
An object in the middle of Cabot Street caught his eye. It looked like a discarded crate. It hadn't been there when he'd last gone by. Something glittered on its top, reflecting dawn's first rays.

He approached it, slow and cautious. He stopped. A slow

whistle of surprise escaped his lips, cracking the stillness of the morning with magnified velocity.

It was a coffin. Long, slender, expensive looking. Made of sturdy oak. Matt pulled out his report sheet and pencil. He started to write. The thought of how the *Waverton Times* would handle the incident made him chuckle. *PATROLMAN WARD FINDS DELINQUENT CASKET*, it would probably say. He'd be fair game for some leg-pulling by the station house comedians.

He stopped writing. The report wouldn't be complete, he thought, if he didn't open the casket. A chill went through him. He lifted the lid. The thing was empty. He smiled, finished the report



It was a good serviceable casket, but what was it doing here?

and walked a block and a half to the night box. . . .

"What's cooking, Matt?" The cheerful voice on the other end of the phone belonged to Harry Griffin, night desk sergeant. "Come across any dead bodies, Matt, old boy?"

"No, Harry, old boy," Matt aped him, "but I found a nice cozy coffin in the middle of Cabot Street."

"And you let the body get away?" Harry guffawed.

"Body must have stepped out for a short one. The thing was empty."

"Hey, Matt, did you ever hear what one casket said to the other casket?"

"Harry. . . ."

"It said, 'Is that you coffin?'" Harry roared at his own joke.

"Harry, I know it sounds crazy, but so help me, I am standing not more than fifty feet from an empty coffin."

Harry stopped laughing. "Are you kidding me, Matt?"

"Want to lose a fast saw-buck? I'll give you good odds."

"Okay, okay, I'll wake up a couple of the boys and send them around with the paddy wagon. A casket in the middle of Cabot Street," Harry muttered as he hung up.

Matt closed the night box and walked in the direction

of the coffin. There was a man standing beside it. It was unusual for anyone in Waverton to be on the street before 7 A.M. Matt's pace slackened. The man was tall, slender, wealthy looking. He was attired in a charcoal gray suit and a black homburg. He had a cane draped over his arm. He cocked his head from one side to the other, inspecting the huge box from every angle, as though trying to decide whether he could lift it by himself.

Matt saw a black sedan parked on the other side of the street in front of Grayson's department store. It was empty. It hadn't been there while he was making his rounds.

What's the old guy so curious about, the policeman asked himself. Maybe he's an undertaker. Nope. Couldn't be. Only one undertaker in Waverton. Hampton. Know him anywhere. Isn't him. Who then? Aw, hell, maybe some old fogey who couldn't sleep . . . or hasn't gone home yet.

Matt approached the casket.

The man faced him and tipped his homburg. He had a long, angular face, distinguished by a pair of gold rimmed pince-nez.

"Top of the morning to you,

officer Ward!" His voice was mellow, easy on the ear.

"You know my name?"

"Oh, is that really your name?" The man put his hand to the side of his face. His mouth hung open. "Bless my soul, I just picked that name at random."

Matt's eyes squinted suspicion. "Who are you, mister? What are you doing near this coffin?"

"Why I'm merely observing how strange it is to encounter one of these in the middle of a main thoroughfare. Don't you agree?"

"No, I don't. And that isn't what I asked you."

"But don't you see the paradox, officer? A coffin in a business district . . . a death box in the center of a city's life. Strange, what?"

"Let's see your identification."

The man moved around the casket. "Identification? Oh, yes, of course, you did want my name, didn't you?"

Matt moved with him, staying in front of him. The man reached for his cane. Matt's hand shot backward for his gun. The man was amused. He fumbled through his suit for the identification. He seemed to be having difficulty. Again he inched his way around the casket.

The policeman was puzzled. *Why the hell is he sparring with me? Keep an eye on that cane. He may try to pull a fast one.*

The man searched his pockets again. "Isn't that funny? I could have sworn I left the house with my wallet. Silly of me, I suppose."

"All right, I'll have to ask you a few questions."

"Anything you say, officer."

The man took three short steps to his right. Matt pulled out his report sheet and countered three steps to his left. He felt a little nervous. The boys were certainly taking their time with that paddy wagon.

He opened his report sheet, keeping a close watch on the stranger. "Okay, what's your name, mister?"

The man seemed more relaxed now as he folded his arms and placed one foot on the casket. "My name? Oh, yes, my name is . . . ah . . ."

"Come on, mister, quit stalling! You've been hedging ever since I started talking to you. What are you trying to hide?"

The man smiled. "Nothing, officer, nothing at all. My name is Samuel Pearson."

Matt Ward mumbled as he scratched the man's name in

his report, "Samuel Pearson . . . what are you doing out at this . . ." Suddenly he stopped and stared at the report sheet. In making it out he had copied the name inscribed on top of the casket. He blinked at it in amazement. SAMUEL PEARSON, born September 16, 1900-died June 10, 1966. "Say, what is this, a joke? Listen, the wagon will be here in a minute. I'm taking you in for questioning! No more stalling."

"I can assure you, officer, it is no joke. And the wagon will *not* be here in a moment."

"What are you talking about!"

"If you will look to your right you will see that the police wagon is stalled four blocks up the street. Two of your friends have their heads inside the hood trying to determine what is wrong."

"I'm not looking anywhere, mister. I'm going to run you in whether they get here or not!"

The man's hand went to his cane. Matt ripped his revolver from its holster and retreated a step. A dull pain shot through his shoulder as he backed into what felt like a wall of iron. He tried to turn his head as two armor-plated arms encircled his chest. His head wouldn't turn. After

that everything happened fast, too fast.

He realized now that the man had deliberately maneuvered him so that he'd have his back to the sedan. And the sedan wasn't empty as it had appeared. He tried to struggle. It was useless. He was trapped in a vise that kept getting tighter and tighter. He weakened. The gun fell from his limp hand to the street. His head seemed to bulge like a bubble. It would burst any minute, he thought. The rest of his body went limp. He looked at the stranger standing there with a complacent grin on his face. He felt himself sinking to the street. Dawn began to shrink into oblivion, smothered by an endless black void. Time stopped and then there was nothing. . . .

It was hot and sticky and Matt Ward perspired until his face felt like an irrigation project. There seemed an interminable time period, a no man's land of the mind, between unconsciousness and the light of day. His half opened eyes stubbornly refused to define the forms that lingered above him.

He wanted to wipe the waves of sweat from his face but his arms were two mag-

nets clinging to a steel paved street. He tried to speak but the sounds came out warped and incoherent.

Where was the paddy wagon? If only there was some way of letting them know he was hurt. Why couldn't he move? What the hell had that man done to him? His head ballooned again with a vicious throbbing. He let his eyelids droop shut and tried to relax. It was hard. . . .

When he opened his eyes again they were more willing to function properly. He discovered he was not on the street after all.

The old man's office at the station was the friendliest sight in the world. So was chief Alcone's stern, unsmiling face, an eight inch cigar jutting out of it as always. Matt glanced around the room. Harry Griffin, plump and rosy cheeked, came into view.

Matt managed to lift his arm. It felt like a hundred pound weight. He put his hand to his forehead. He had not been perspiring. A giant icepack on his head was bleeding cold drops down his face.

"How do you feel, old boy?" Harry's usual effervescent tone was missing.

"Like I just boxed a goril-

la," came Matt's reply. "Am I going to live?"

Harry reverted to type and chuckled. "I wouldn't be surprised. Chief wants to ask you a few questions. How about it?"

"Can I have something to drink? Anything."

"Sure thing, Matt."

Harry got up and left. Chief Alcone moved into the empty chair.

"Ward, what the hell happened? This is the craziest thing I've ever heard of. Can you talk about it?"

"Sure. Did you get the guy in the black Homburg and gray flannel suit?"

The chief looked puzzled. "What guy in the black homburg? What are you talking about?"

"What about the casket?"

"Ward, the only thing lying in the middle of Cabot Street when the boys got there was you."

"Then the guy in the homburg must have heisted the box!"

The chief chewed furiously on his cigar. "Oh, brother, now I'm really up a tree! First we have an empty casket that walks off and now we got a guy in a homburg who walks off *with* it!"

"If the boys had only gotten

there with the wagon a little sooner."

"They couldn't. Thomas and Hendricks didn't get more than a block away from here when the damn thing stalled."

"Well, I'll be a—" Matt tried to sit up but thought better of it as a blinding pain shot through his skull.

"Take it easy, kid!" The chief removed the cigar from between his teeth, a sign that he was genuinely concerned. It usually took an upset in a national election for that cigar to come out.

"The guy told me the wagon was stalled up the street," said Matt, "and I didn't believe him! How the hell did he *know*?"

"Who was the guy? Ever seen him before?"

"He said his name was Samuel Pearson but I'm sure that was just to throw me off because. . . ."

"I know. Samuel Pearson was the name on the box. Maybe he wasn't kidding. Maybe it *was* his casket. That makes as much sense as anything else has this morning."

"What do you mean?"

"Matt, we've gone over your report sheet like a gang of microbe hunters. We've checked every detail, every angle. And so help me no one

by the name of Samuel Pearson ever existed in this town. There is no such person."

"That's impossible! The name was right on the casket . . . I couldn't have made a mistake."

"We checked the telephone company, the city clerk's office, all our own files, the library and the credit union. No Samuel Pearson. Just before you woke up we got a teletype back from Washington. No fingerprints on record."

Matt raised himself on one elbow. "Say what time is it anyway?"

"A little after ten. You've been out for over four hours."

Matt slowly sank back on the leather couch as Harry Griffin returned with a tall glass of water. Matt frowned a little at the sight of water. He had given Harry credit for more imagination. He took the glass anyway.

"Many happy returns."

The chief jammed the cigar back between his teeth. "Would you know this guy if you saw him again?"

"Yeah, I'd know him all right, but there's something else I haven't told you. He isn't the one who put me out."

"Cripes!" the chief exclaimed. "You mean there

was somebody else with him?"

"Not somebody — something."

"What do you mean?" The chief and Harry Griffin leaned forward, all ears.

"Well, it was—" The expression on his face changed from certainty to indetermination. He looked away from the chief's penetrating eyes. Doubt sprang up all around him. Finally he blurted out, "Okay, brace yourselves. Whatever it was that crept up behind me—" he hesitated again, "—it wasn't human."

Chief Alcone and Harry Griffin exchanged dubious glances. The old man removed his cigar for the second time, something of a record for one day. "Now listen, Matt, we know you were hit pretty hard—"

"Now that's another thing, chief. I wasn't hit at all."

"What!"

"I wish I could explain it—I was kind of paralyzed by this thing behind me—I couldn't even turn my head to get a look at it. The arms came around me and just squeezed—and either those arms were *made* of steel or some guy was wearing an iron suit."

The chief twirled the cigar between his thumb and index

finger. His tone was one of deep concern. "Matt—are you sure there *was* a casket?"

Matt sprang upward in spite of the throbbing in his head. "Oh, now wait a minute. I know what I know, chief. I'm not ready for the looney bin yet . . . not by a long shot!"

"Okay, okay, Matt, relax—take it easy. Harry, get me that piece of wood."

Sergeant Griffin got up and went to the outer office. The chief paced back and forth in front of his desk, deep in thought. Matt watched him closely, never taking his eyes from him. It was one thing to be kidded about this thing and quite another to be regarded as a screwball.

Sergeant Griffin returned and handed the old man a battered piece of wood. The chief showed it to Matt.

"Recognize this, Matt?"

"Is it from the coffin?"

"That's what I'm asking you."

Matt examined it. It was oak and badly splintered. He gave it back to the chief. "Yes, it is."

"Okay," the chief said, "there *was* a casket. We found this piece in the gutter near you. Our guess is the casket must have fallen from

the back of a truck. It was probably moving pretty fast in order to butcher a piece of oak like this. If the casket fell on that side of the street the truck had to be headed south toward Ellis square."

"Toward Hampton's funeral parlor?" There was disbelief in Matt's voice.

"That isn't what I said." The chief sat behind his desk and folded his hands behind his head. He was troubled and annoyed. "But what choice do we have? We have one lousy hunk of wood to go on. We'll question Hampton. If he doesn't have a casket with a corner damaged we're dead."

"Hampton is a respectable man," Harry put in. "If he lost a casket it figures he'd have called us. Why should he turn to violence?"

"Let's find out first whether he did, Harry. Then we can worry about why. Matt, do you feel well enough to walk?"

"Sure, chief."

"Good. Go into the wash-room and freshen yourself up. You and I have a date with an undertaker. . . ."

The prowler car came to a halt in Hampton's driveway. Matt and the chief noticed an annex being constructed at

the rear of the house. The chief dryly observed that business must be rushing. Neither of them laughed at the remark.

Miles Hampton opened the front door. The two police officers exchanged glances. Hampton did not look surprised to see them.

The undertaker ushered them into a plush office. He assumed an erect posture behind his desk, his light sensitive hands folded in front of him. He more resembled a minor bank official than an undertaker. His manner and his dress were meticulous, precise.

"Well, well, I certainly did not expect a visit from our police this morning. How may I be of service to you?"

Matt began the interrogation. "Did you receive a shipment of caskets this morning, Mr. Hampton?"

"Why, yes, I did."

"Was one of them missing?"

"Missing? I don't understand."

"Was the delivery one casket short?"

Hampton smiled. "Of course not. Why? What seems—"

The chief cut in with, "How many oak caskets in that delivery?"

"Oak? Ah—let me see—I believe three—yes, three."

"Mind if we take a look at them?" asked the chief.

"Is it all right if I ask why?" Hampton inquired.

"Let's have a look at them first," said the chief.

Hampton's fingers drummed the edge of the desk. He was annoyed. "Very well, follow me." He opened a door leading to the rear of the building.

At the doorway Matt stopped and stared at a clothes tree in the corner. Hampton was out of earshot.

"What's wrong?" the chief wanted to know.

"Look at the clothes tree," Matt whispered. "A black homburg!"

"This way gentlemen," shouted Hampton from beyond the door.

Matt and the chief followed him. He led them downstairs to a large room. It smelled of scented wood. Hampton turned on the light. The walls were not visible for the caskets. They were all sizes and descriptions. They flooded the room in abject depression.

Mr. Hampton pointed to an area in front of the stairs. "This morning's shipment," he said.

The bare bulb hanging from the ceiling failed to illu-

minate every corner of the room. Matt took out his flashlight. There were ten caskets in that morning's shipment. He trained the flashlight on them. Studying each one carefully.

There was a sudden noise behind them.

"What was that?" demanded the chief.

"What was what?" asked Hampton nonchalantly.

"I heard it, too," Matt exclaimed. "It sounded like metal on cement."

"Beam that light over behind those caskets, Matt!"

The chief kept his eye on the undertaker. Hampton cleared his throat.

The flashlight beam clashed with the ultra-brightness of highly polished metal. Its reflection shot back into their eyes. Matt swerved the light to a more advantageous angle. They moved in closer.

The thing was lying on the floor between two caskets, the arms folded across the chest.

"What the hell is it?" asked the chief.

"It is a suit of armor, gentlemen," Hampton explained. "My father used to collect them. There are still two or three around the house."

"What made it move?" asked Matt.

"This is a very old house. You hear many sounds in it that you can't account for."

"A cement floor isn't a very healthy place for a nice polished suit of armor," Matt observed.

"I just had this one removed from my father's old study. It took up too much space. I hated to do it but—"

"But you have an expansion program underway," said the chief. "We noticed as we came in."

Matt resumed his examination of the morning's shipment. None of the caskets had been damaged. They apologized to Hampton for taking his valuable time. The undertaker led them back to his office.

"Now may I ask what this is all about?"

"To tell you the truth, Hampton," the chief lit a fresh cigar, "we're not sure ourselves. Interesting case we're working on. Don't come across many like this in Waverton. We'll keep you informed. Will you excuse us?"

The chief's ambiguous answer irritated the undertaker. His politeness became pointedly synthetic. "Certainly. Anytime I can be of service."

"One more question, Mr. Hampton."

"Yes, what is it?"

Matt deliberately stalled to light a cigarette. He watched to see if Hampton's nerves might be on edge. They were. "Did you ever hear of a man named Samuel Pearson?"

A weak grin creased the undertaker's mouth. "No, I don't think so."

"You never buried a man by that name?"

"No."

"Is that your hat on the clothes tree?"

Hampton looked at the clothes tree. He looked back at the policeman. He obviously didn't know how to answer the question. "Yes," he finally said.

"Would you get it for me?"

"Get it for you? Why?"

"We'll ask the questions, Mr. Hampton." The chief knew what Matt had in mind. There were two hats on the clothes tree. The homburg and a brown felt. "Just do as officer Ward tells you."

"Very well, but . . ." Hampton was sweating now. He took short, uncertain steps as he walked to the clothes tree. He reached for the brown felt and brought it to Matt Ward.

Matt examined the sweat band, the size, the make, pretending to be looking for something. During this phony strategy the chief watched

Hampton's reaction. The undertaker's florid complexion deserted him. He looked like a man in need of a strong drink.

Matt gave the hat back to him. The chief thanked him again for being cooperative. Hampton said he'd show them to the front door. Chief Alcone told him not to bother, they could manage by themselves. Hampton was relieved to see them go.

The two policemen walked through the funeral parlor. The chief opened the front door. Matt grabbed his arm before he stepped out. He gestured to the chief to stay inside and close the door.

The door slammed.

The two men waited.

"What's up?" the chief whispered through spiralling cigar smoke.

"Just a hunch. Wait here a minute."

Matt tiptoed back to the door of Hampton's office. He paused and listened. After a deep breath he opened the door.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hampton. . . ."

He was interrupted by the sound of glass shattering. Hampton, behind his desk, had a bottle of whiskey in his hand. His other hand, which

had been holding the glass, was shaking uncontrollably. He was not alone in the room. Matt knew that was *why* he was shaking.

The proprietor of the black homburg stood at the undertaker's side, the pince-nez firmly in place, the half-smile on his face as complacent as ever.

"Yes, yes, what is it officer! I'm a busy man!" Hampton bit the words off savagely.

"Nothing, Mr. Hampton . . . nothing at all. Get yourself another glass and have that drink." Matt took a final look at the man who had called himself Samuel Pearson. In contrast to Hampton the man was in complete control of his faculties. His smile remained intact, as though it had been painted there.

Matt closed the door. . . .

Chief Alcone started the prowler car. "What happened?"

"I ran into an old friend."

"The guy who belongs to the homburg?"

"You win the cigar."

The chief pulled the car over to the curb. "Why the hell didn't you pinch him?"

"What for? Can you imagine how stupid I'd look against that guy in court? Remember he never laid a finger on me himself. I can

see myself explaining how I found this casket in the middle of Cabot Street and this character came along and had me mauled by something I didn't see, but which I am sure was made of steel. And when I woke up the casket was gone."

The chief rubbed his chin. "Yeah, I guess a story like that wouldn't add much prestige to the department. Well, we know who we want anyway. The only thing we don't know is *why* we want them."

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't met your friend yet, but I only had to look at Hampton to know he was plenty scared. He was trying too hard to make us think he wasn't. Something queer is going on in his joint and it isn't good. An undertaker loses a casket the natural thing to do is report it. I want to know his reason for not reporting it."

"Chief, will you take me off the beat for a few days?"

"You want to handle this thing yourself?"

"I'd like to, yes."

The chief leaned back and rested his elbow on the car door. "I don't know. I'd hate like hell to see you get flattened again."

Matt smiled. "I'll be all

right now that I'm on my guard. You could keep a half dozen men alerted in case I have to send out an S.O.S."

The chief looked at the young, athletic looking policeman. It was a thoughtful, paternal look. Matt knew how Alcone felt about his men. If anything ever happened to one of them he'd hold himself responsible.

"Look, chief," Matt tried to persuade him, "I'm a single man. No wife or kids to worry about. And I deserve this case. I earned it the hard way, didn't I?"

"Okay, Matt, I'll take you off the beat. And out of uniform, too. I think you'd best operate in street clothes for a few days." The old man shook his head as he started the car again. "This sure is a queer one. I wish we had something solid to go on."

"I think we ought to put a news blackout on this thing for a while, chief . . . until something breaks."

"You're right . . . especially those Boston papers. I don't need any of their editorial guff on small town cops. You better get some sleep. Give Hampton some time to cool his heels. You can get started first thing in the morning. . . ."

The following morning

Matt Ward arrived at the station at eight o'clock sharp. He had spent most of the night reconstructing the events of the previous day. He hadn't gotten much sleep but that didn't matter. He had conjured up enough angles to keep him busy for the day.

He borrowed a squad car and drove to Boston. After two hours with the sales manager of the Imperial Casket Company he drove back to Waverton.

The obituary editor of the *Waverton Times* was pleasant and cooperative. Matt spent an hour with him in the *Times* morgue. He left with several back issues under his arm.

His next stop was City Hall.

The Superintendent of Cemeteries was an ageless old codger with thick lens glasses down around his nostrils and hair growing in every direction. He was ill-dressed and equally ill-mannered. His was a patronage job and thus secure until the advent of a Democratic administration, which was about as imminent as the next appearance of Haley's comet.

The old duffer hemmed and hawed and wanted to know why Matt was asking so many questions. Matt finally lost pa-

tience with him and threatened to bring chief Alcone in to force the information out of him. The superintendent grudgingly cooperated. . . .

Matt entered the station late in the afternoon. He knocked on the chief's door. Alcone yelled to him to come on in. Matt opened the door. The cigar smoke was thicker than Los Angeles smog. The chief, busy poring over a stack of reports, didn't bother to look up.

"Yeah?" The cigar slid from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"I'm up to my rear end in assorted information. Thought you might be able to help me."

Alcone brushed the reports aside. "Matt! How's it going? Find anything in the way of a lead?"

"Yes, quite a bit. And I still don't know what to make of it."

"Sit down. Let's hear it."

Matt pulled up a chair. He took several sheets of paper from his inside coat pocket. "First of all, Hampton has more than quadrupled his casket orders in the past four weeks. The sales manager of the Imperial Casket Company in Boston gave me these duplicate orders . . . to compare

with what he called Hampton's normal supply."

The chief studied the papers. "Very interesting."

"That's what I thought too. But then the guy at Imperial told me the same thing was happening with about twenty-five other undertakers around the state. There seems to be a trend."

"Toward dying?" A note of sarcasm crept into the chief's voice.

"I checked four weeks of obituary notices in the *Waverton Times*. I made a list and compared it with Hampton's orders. . . ."

"And?"

"Caskets outnumber deaths by better than three to one . . . *assuming* that *everyone* who died in Waverton used Hampton's facilities. . . ."

"Which is damned unlikely."

"So the odds are probably a little better than that." Matt produced another set of papers. "Now here's the most interesting tidbit of all. These documents are from City Hall . . . and we have to return them . . . there's a touchy old guy who's Superintendent of Cemeteries . . . I practically had to get them at gunpoint . . . anyway these are the maps of three public ceme-

teries in Waverton. And these blue slips are requests for plots that Hampton has filed with the city."

The chief shuffled them in his hands. "My God! The guy is doing a land office business!"

"I took the time to figure it out. If he kept up at this pace he could bury the whole population of Waverton in about ten years."

"I don't get it. Do you think he could be doing that much out of town business?"

"Not a chance. Besides, the out of town undertakers have increased their orders too, remember?"

"That's right." The chief rose and paced the room. "What the hell does it mean! He can't be burying people if they aren't dying!"

"Maybe the best thing would be to keep tabs on him twenty-four hours a day."

"Good idea. In the meantime you keep checking. He must be burying something. Collecting caskets as a hobby doesn't strike me as being very clever."

"Oh, speaking of collecting things . . . I almost forgot to tell you I ran into old man Thurman, the druggist. He was an old friend of Hampton's father."

"What about it?"

"Thurman told me Hampton's father never collected suits of armor. He never collected anything."

The chief reached for his hat and jacket. His face was red. He was angrier than Matt had ever seen him.

"Where are you going?"

"Come with me," the chief said tightly. He ripped the dead cigar from his mouth and flung it into the wastebasket. "The hell with the twenty-four hour watchdog. We're going back to Hampton's now and *make* the creep talk!" He threw the door open and stalked out.

Matt followed him. As they went through the station the desk sergeant's phone rang. The sergeant was at the water cooler. He started for the phone. Matt waved him off and answered it himself.

"Police headquarters, officer Ward speaking—" There was heavy, labored breathing on the other end of the wire. "Police headquarters — hello—"

"Officer — Ward — " the voice was weak, "need help—they—tried to kill me—"

"Who is this?"

" — Hampton — not much time—they tried to kill—"

"Hampton, where are you!"

"My home—should have

told you—yesterday morning —afraid they'd find out—"

"I'll be right there, Hampton!"

"No—don't come—too late—they're looking for me—I can hear them—closer—get you too—be careful—"

"Who's they?" The breathing grew heavier. "Try to tell me, Hampton!"

Chief Alcone raced to another desk and picked up an extension.

"They made me—a traitor—didn't mean it—tell people—I'm sorry — remember — million megacycles—Gabriel's horn—"

"Gabriel's horn! Hampton, I don't understand!"

" —got to—understand—important code — Gabriel's horn blows—judgment day—super intelligent — destroy everything — not human — " There was a sudden noise, like a door being broken down. Hampton's voice was paralyzed with fear. "They're here now—coming closer—going to kill—don't forget—Gabri—"

There was a piercing scream before the receiver clicked.

The chief slammed his phone down and addressed the desk sergeant. "Woods! Send out a call for every car in the city to report to Hamp-

ton's funeral parlor. I want the house surrounded!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Come with me, Matt!" The chief raced out the door, Matt Ward right behind him.

There were five patrol cars on duty. When Matt and the chief arrived at Hampton's three of them were already there.

The chief gave orders to watch every side of the house. He took Matt, who was still in street clothes, and three other men with him to the front door. They drew their guns.

Matt rang the bell. After no answer he began pounding on the door. A key turned inside. The door opened. Matt was surprised to be greeted by the man in the black homburg. There seemed to be no end to the guy's gall, he thought.

The sight of five policemen didn't phase the man. His voice was pleasant. "May I help you?"

"Where's Hampton!" the chief barked.

"Mr. Hampton is indisposed at the moment."

"I'll say he's indisposed!" Matt said. "Get out of the way, mister. We're coming in."

The man stepped aside. "Anything you say, officer."

"Watch out, Matt," the chief warned. "This guy's too willing to cooperate. Let's not go walking into a trap."

"He knows we mean business!" Matt replied. "Don't you, Mr. Samuel Pearson?"

The man stared at the floor and pointed to the undertaker's office. "This way to Mr. Hampton's office."

The chief motioned to one of his men. "Keep this guy covered."

Alcone followed Matt to Hampton's door. The door was ajar. Matt poised his gun. The chief stepped to one side to cover him. Matt raised his foot and kicked the door open.

The sight took his breath away.

"Oh, good evening, officer Ward. Who is that with you?" asked Hampton. He rose and crossed to the door. "Ah—chief Alcone. A pleasure to see you again. How are you?"

The two policemen stared at each other, unable to believe what was patently obvious. Hampton was very much alive. He looked healthier than when they'd last seen him, and a good deal less nervous.

"You're not—dead!" the chief said in a hoarse whisper.

"Dead?" Hampton laughed. "How absurd. I couldn't very well serve the dead if I were in that condition myself, now could I? You both look pale. Is anything wrong?"

"Yes," said Matt, "something is wrong. Why did you call the station just now and claim someone was trying to kill you?"

"Me? I'm afraid you're mistaken, officer. I placed no call—"

"The hell you didn't! I recognized your voice—"

"A clever impersonation perhaps. I've been at my desk working for over two hours. Mr. Mason can verify that."

"Who's Mr. Mason?"

"The gentleman in the foyer."

"You mean the one who calls himself Samuel Pearson?"

Hampton chuckled. "You *are* a persistent man, officer Ward. I told you yesterday I was unfamiliar with anyone by that name."

The chief yelled to his men to bring in Mason.

The man in the homburg came in and verified Hampton's story, to no one's surprise.

Matt moved into Hampton's office. The clothes tree had been removed to another cor-

ner. In its place there was a suit of armor.

"I thought you were storing these things in the basement?" he asked.

"I decided to keep at least one upstairs. My father would have wanted it that way."

"Your father never collected suits of armor, Mr. Hampton. Why did you lie to us yesterday! Why are you lying now!"

Hampton went to his desk and opened a drawer. He removed an 8 x 10 photograph and handed it to Matt. It was a picture of the elder Hampton surrounded by a dozen suits of armor mounted on pedestals.

"My father and his collection," Hampton announced with a cocksure grin.

Matt shoved the photograph back at him.

Alcone said, "We'd like to have another look around your house, Mr. Hampton."

"Of course," smiled the undertaker, "may I see your search warrant?"

The chief glared at him. "If you have nothing to hide you shouldn't mind a search!"

"You searched yesterday and didn't find what you were looking for. I don't see—"

"Excuse me," Matt interrupted. "Can I see you alone for a minute, chief?"

The chief followed Matt outside the office. Matt closed the door behind them.

"Notice anything different?" Matt whispered.

"His attitude, dammit!" The chief stuck his hands in his pockets and walked to a window overlooking the back of the house. "He's as cool as a cucumber. Not a bit like yesterday. And he's right, of course. We can't search the joint without a warrant."

"Can we get Hampton and his pal out of the house long enough for me to look the place over?"

"How?"

"Book them."

"For what?"

"Suspicion of murder."

"Are you crazy? What can we prove?"

"If we leave them here now we'll never be able to prove anything. They'll find some way to dispose of the evidence . . . if there's any left. And I'm sure there is."

"What are you talking about?"

"Give me a chance in here alone and I know I'll come up with something, chief. I know it's a long shot but I think it's the only way."

Alcone pondered the idea. "I don't know, Matt. What can you possibly find—"

"Chief, I can't explain right now. But trust me, will you? You won't be sorry."

The chief looked him square in the eye. "I hope not, Matt—for your sake I hope not."

They returned to Hampton's office.

The chief said, "Hampton, we're taking you and Mason with us."

"On what charge!" Hampton demanded.

"Just going to ask you a few questions."

"Why can't you ask them right here?"

"Because we like to play in our ball yard. You won't be detained for more than a couple of hours . . . if you're lucky. Take them away boys."

Alcone's men started to lead the two suspects out.

"You can't do this!" Hampton shouted. "You have no authority . . . I demand that you let me call a lawyer. . . ."

"All in due time, Mr. Hampton," the chief yawned. "You can call your lawyer when you get to the station."

"Wait a minute," said Matt. "Who is your lawyer, Mr. Hampton?"

Hampton looked at Matt with a blank stare. "What did you say?"

"I asked you who your lawyer is?"

"Why, I—I—"

"You don't know, do you!" Matt lashed out at him. "You run a successful business and you *do* have a lawyer but you don't know who he is, do you!"

"I'll call him from the station," Hampton said tightly and defiantly.

The two men were taken outside and put into a squad car. The chief directed that they be taken to the station and locked up. He ordered Hendricks and Thomas to stick around. They waited until the car carrying the two men had left.

The chief turned to Matt. "What the hell was all that business about lawyers?"

"Hampton is dead, chief."

"How can that be? He's—"

"Don't you think a man as prominent as he is would have a lawyer on retainer and would certainly know his name?"

"Of course. But how did you know he didn't?"

"I'll explain later. You remember what Hampton said over the phone? What does Gabriel's horn mean to you?"

"It's from the Bible."

"Right. And so is the Judgment Day. The two go together. The sound of Gabriel's horn will herald the resurrec-

tion. Then comes Judgment Day."

"I don't get it."

"Hampton said — they're not human — they destroy everything — they're super-intelligent—"

"You've been reading too many cloak and dagger stories."

"And you haven't been reading enough science fiction stories. You have no idea how big this case is, chief."

"All I know is they'd better not get us for false arrest."

"They won't. I'm taking Hendricks and Thomas into the place with me. We'll turn that funeral parlor upside down. I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts we come out with a corpse . . . of one kind or another."

The chief stuck his head out the car window. "Watch your step, Matt."

Thomas and Hendricks followed Matt Ward through the front door of the funeral parlor.

"Thomas, you keep your eye on this door and the stairway. Yell if you see anyone coming."

"Right."

Matt and Hendricks walked down the long corridor toward Hampton's office.

"Hendricks, stay outside the office door by this window. Cover the driveway. And keep your gun in your hand."

"Okay, Matt."

A door slammed. Matt jerked his head around. He ran toward the front of the house.

"Did you open a door, Thomas?"

"Not me."

They were not alone in the house. It was as Matt had suspected. He dashed back to Hampton's office and threw open the drapes on the window overlooking the garage. He caught sight of something slithering into the door of the garage just before it closed. He waited a moment. Then, at the little window near the top of the door, a pair of eyes appeared. They had huge square, greenish pupils. The shutters blinked horizontally.

At Matt's call Thomas and Hendricks came running.

"We'd better stick together," he said. "Watch every exit. We may have to blast our way out."

Matt ransacked Hampton's desk. He was no longer looking for reserved cemetery plots. He wanted the ones that were already occupied. A small metallic object in one of the drawers caught his

eye. He removed it. It was no more than three inches wide and an inch thick. It had a small opening with symbols printed on it. They were foreign to him. But he knew the object was a radio. An important radio. He shoved it into his pocket and ordered the two policemen to follow him.

They descended the stairs to the casket room. Matt turned on the light.

"Look!" Hendricks cried.

"What is it!" Matt cocked his revolver.

"Through that door! Something. . . ." Hendricks' hand quivered as he pointed to a door between two racks of caskets. "I saw something—slippery—" His hands went to his temples. "This joint is too creepy . . . maybe it's getting the best of me. Maybe it's haunted."

"No, it isn't, Hendricks. You haven't seen the worst yet."

Matt opened a casket. A suit of armor lay inside, its arms folded over an imposing chest.

"Holy mackerel!" Thomas blurted. "What's it doing in there?"

"The room is full of them." Matt took the tiny radio from his pocket. He turned it over in his hand. "I hope to God

I can find out how this gadget works."

"What is it?" Thomas asked.

"Ultra-high frequency radio of some kind. If I'm not mistaken it's designed to operate those crated robots."

"Robots!"

"I guess this is as good a time as any to let you guys in on things. Unless we can find some way to prevent it, there's going to be an invasion. And a pretty bloody one."

"By who!?" Incredulity warped the faces of the two young policemen.

"Your eyes weren't going bad, Hendricks, when you saw something going through that door . . . something slippery I think you said . . . something creepy . . ."

"Yeah. . . ."

"I don't know what they look like yet . . . but they're not human. They're from outer space."

The two policemen retreated toward the stairs, gaping at Matt Ward. Matt returned to his study of the minute radio.

Thomas jerked his head to one side. "Listen!"

For a split moment everything was still. Then a humming pervaded the room. It

was soft and soothing as a lullaby.

"It must be the radio!" shouted Hendricks. "You've got it working!"

"It's the radio all right," said Matt, "but not the one I have. I didn't touch any of the dials on it."

The humming grew loud and harsh. Matt drew his revolver and instructed the others to do likewise. The sound intensified.

"We've got to find that other radio before. . . ."

"Matt! They're opening . . . the caskets . . . they're . . ."

Thomas' revolver quivered in his hand.

Matt spun around. Each robot moved with the same speed. They had all risen to a sitting position.

"Up the stairs!" Matt cried. "There isn't a second to lose!"

The three policemen scrambled to the first floor.

"They'll be coming up in a matter of seconds. Quick, Thomas . . . Hendricks, out the back way. We'll have to shoot our way into that garage!"

The humming continued to crackle in their ears as they ran toward the rear of the house and onto the back porch. Matt reached the garage door first. He aimed his

revolver at the lock and fired three shots. He stepped back and gave the door a kick. It swung open revealing a staircase.

The sudden sound of gunfire made him forget the garage for a moment. He wheeled around to see Thomas and Hendricks unloading their weapons at three advancing robots. Several more of the metal monsters were coming from the house.

"The hell with them!!" Matt bellowed. "We've got to find that radio!"

Thomas and Hendricks realized that bullets were useless. They hastily joined Matt and the three policemen ran up the garage stairway. All three of them froze as they reached the second story landing. They were standing face to face with the thing Matt had seen slither into the garage. Its body was a network of bones with a tissue-thin layer of skin covering it. The head was grotesque, bulb-shaped and bald. The huge, square eyes blinked dumbly at them. The creature stood in front of a table containing a larger, more complicated looking radio.

The sight of a creature from another world rendered the three policemen speech-

less. Matt Ward was sweating savagely, the incessant humming droned unmercifully in his ears. He looked down the stairway. The robots had entered the garage and were maintaining their slow, steady pace up the stairs. He looked back at the creature. Its limbs were spread protectively across the front of the radio.

Matt's mind was spinning. Thomas and Hendricks would be no help to him now. They were both standing near the stairway like wax figures, paralyzed with fear. In a moment it might be all over. The three of them would be dead, crushed by the savage steel of the extra-terrestrial enemy.

He had three bullets left. He was sure that the creature, who had maintained a rigid pose in front of the radio, was just as frightened as he was. Otherwise it would have made some kind of a move. But Matt didn't know whether to fire at the creature or at the radio. With three bullets there would be no margin for error either way. The robots reached the top of the staircase. Matt gripped his gun hard.

The sound of gunfire rocked the small room. The creature went tumbling to the

floor. Matt jumped over the body to the radio. His hands worked in frenzied, jerky movements over the dials. The humming continued. He looked in back of him. Thomas and Hendricks were already in the clutches of two robots. Another of the metal monsters was headed for the radio.

Matt continued to turn every dial his fingers could find. Suddenly the noise lessened. Then it went back to normal. In his haste Matt had found the right dial and had turned it down and then up again. His hand raced back for it. He flipped it to the left as far as it would go.

The humming stopped. The robots went dead. The room became filled with stillness. The stillness was exhilarating. Matt fell back against the radio, exhausted, his blood rushing in all the wrong directions through his veins.

He lifted his head and surveyed the room. The creature appeared to be dead, although no blood was visible. Matt became erect again as he recalled that Hendricks had seen one of the space men. Maybe there were even more of them. But they'd be powerless, he realized, without the

radio . . . unless the *miniature* radio also served to activate the robots.

He looked at the uneven line of robots that stretched all the way down the stairs and out into the yard. He saw Thomas and Hendricks lying prone near the stairway. They were still breathing. They'd be all right, he thought, but never in time to help him finish this job.

He bent over one of the uniformed policemen and took the spare bullets from his cartridge belt. After reloading his .38 he started down the stairs, making his way around the statue-like metal monsters.

A volley of shots from the yard stopped him cold. He took refuge behind one of the robots and held his gun ready for action. The garage door opened. Matt cocked the hammer on the .38.

Chief Alcone's head peered around the doorway.

"Matt, are you up there?"

Matt leaped up and raced the length of the stairway. He clasped the old man by the arm. "Am I glad to see you. It got a little hotter here than I thought it would. I couldn't figure out a way to get in touch with you. What made you come back?"

"Are you kidding? There

hasn't been a dull moment since I left you. We got a call from the cemetery that there was some kind of a minor earthquake out there. Then another call saying it wasn't an earthquake at all, but a bunch of damn graves opening up all by themselves."

Matt rubbed his temple and spoke wearily. "God, I was so busy trying to mop this place up I forgot all about the master plan."

"What master plan?"

"I'll tell you about it in a minute, chief. What happened next?"

"Well, my first impulse was to have the cemetery watchman committed. But when he said iron men were coming out of the graves things began to add up. I took a squad of men out. When we got there the cemetery was full of these things," he pointed at the deactivated robots, "only they were standing still just like these are. I didn't take the time to figure it out. I came here as fast as I could. As we were coming into the yard that thing over there was making a break for the cellar door."

Matt looked toward the house. One of the space creatures lay sprawled on the

ground riddled with bullet holes.

"What the hell is it!" the chief asked.

"I don't know *what* it is, chief. Or where it came from. But I know their operation was bigger than this. I began to realize just how big when Hampton phoned us. He said something about being a traitor."

"So?"

"I got out the list of Imperial Casket company customers and checked their names and addresses. Then I studied those locations on a map. I discovered the various cities they were located in formed a circle around Boston. It reminded me of an invasion plan I'd seen during the war."

Matt took the chief by the arm and walked him to where the creature lay on the ground near the cellar door.

"Whatever these things are," he said, "they're neither very strong nor very pretty. If they had ideas about conquest they certainly couldn't do it by themselves. So first of all they created androids. . . ."

"They created what!"

"Synthetic human beings. The androids acted as front men. Our friend, Mr. Samuel Pearson, is a good example."

"What about Hampton."

"Hampton is dead. You can be sure of that. They evidently had to intimidate him and a lot of other undertakers. Then as soon as they could reproduce them in android form they did away with them. The real Hampton, while he was their hostage, probably never had occasion to mention his lawyer's name to them. That's why the phony Hampton had no way of knowing who his own lawyer was."

"I'll be damned!"

"The plan was to bury a whole army of robots. Then at the sound of Gabriel's Horn—I guess that was their code version of D-day—the big radio upstairs, and probably a hundred more like it, would be turned on full blast. The screeching of an ultrasonic frequency would be heard everywhere. People would look to the skies for an attack. But the invasion would come from down below."

The chief whistled. "Buggers thought of just about everything." He ordered his squad of men to guard the Hampton residence. Then he and Matt Ward walked to a

patrol car. "I'll get in touch with the governor's office. If you're accurate about their plan there's still a lot of work to be done. The rest is a job for the army and air force."

Chief Alcone came out of his office chuckling. Matt Ward, energy spent, his head resting on folded arms on his desk, looked up.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said the chief, "I just got to thinking what a nifty trick it was to pattern robots after suits of armor."

"Maybe you'd like one for your den? Put him on the right frequency and you'll have a hell of a servant."

"No thanks." The chief put his arm around Matt's shoulder. "This place will be crawling with reporters pretty soon. I think the governor will be wanting to see you, Matt. Before all the publicity starts I thought I'd tell you you're being promoted. You can put the old uniform in mothballs."

Matt shook the chief's hand and thanked him. He rose and walked out the door of the police station. A promotion was of secondary importance at the moment. All he wanted was a good night's sleep.

THE END

Earth was doomed. Not from atomic explosion nor from crushing outerspace invasion. Not to the accompaniment of thunder and flaming glory. Still, it would be a dead, empty world after the—

MARCH OF THE YELLOW DEATH

By ELLIS HART

FIRST came the total blank-out of all communications.

Then the rising whine of great motors in the air.

Then they dropped the spondle. What the word meant, no one knew. Nor where it came from. Some said the word came out of Kansas City, just before the yellow spondle overwhelmed the inhabitants. They said one lone radio message came through, and the half-crazed radioman screamed, "The spondle! It's all over everything. It's—"

And that was all. So the nation—or what was left of the nation—called it the spondle. Whatever it really was, they couldn't tell, but it appeared to be a greasy, thick and viscose substance that grew and

pulsed and formed, getting larger as it moved.

It rolled across the countryside like some animated gelatine, smoothing over everything, getting larger and larger. Whole towns disappeared beneath its progressing bulk. At its smooth edges it turned under as it rolled, like quicksand mud sliding over itself. It got a deeper and deeper yellow as it grew, as if it were swallowing the houses and trees and grass and people, and converting them to its own substance.

What little information there was circulating, swore it was an invasion from space. The ship had been seen just before the spondle dropped. It had been huge, and shaped like the claw of a lobster, and it had whined into the atmos-



What manner of death could be more horrible?

phere a few minutes after the total blackout of radio, wireless, TV and radar. It had swooped low over Kansas, and dropped the one gigantic teardrop of spondle.

Then it had zoomed up, and disappeared. Whatever it had meant to do, it had done. It had dropped the spreading yellow gelatine-death, and left the Earth. Completely devastated of life.

In a matter of days it had covered the entire southwest, spreading in a deep yellow wave over everything, inundating Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, the upper portion of Mexico, and spreading down past Baja, California. Water didn't stop it.

After it moved across Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California, it moved out into the Pacific, sinking down into the water, and building itself up. Till it was a blanket that covered everything. It worked its ways toward the Midwest, just as inexorably. It worked up toward Canada, and the trees sank beneath the yellow stuff. Nothing seemed to stop it . . . not fire, not water, not chemicals, not physical violence.

It made no aggressive move; it was not in itself sentient, but it moved steadily,

and it was obvious what the final outcome would be.

For after three weeks, the entire United States was gone. Europe was beneath the yellow tide. Japan could see the yellow horror coming toward them across the North Pacific. Thousands died before it arrived, for though it did not cause a tidal wave, it *did* swallow all the sea life.

Only the northeasternmost tip of Greenland was above spondle. South America was gone, and the spondle had long since crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, heading for the Sandwich Islands. A streamer of spondle had attacked Rio de Oro and French West Africa. The eventual outcome was horrifyingly clear, to the few frantic men who reconnoitered by jet plane, high above the mass of pulsing yellow stuff.

The Earth *had* been invaded, *had* been overcome, and within two months, the unbroken surface of glistening yellow gelatine would be the new surface of the planet.

There was no hope. Earth was dead. Whoever or whatever had dropped the spondle, had won the battle without loss to themselves, in the most terrifying and overwhelming manner possible. The outcome was clear, and the end was in sight.

The battle was over. Earth was dead.

The name of that particular Florida key was Sandor Key.

It was named after August Sandor, who had bought it for his seclusion. August had been swallowed by the spondle while fishing off his rowboat, and the key was left untouched. The only reason the Key wasn't under spondle was Bailey Stone.

The only reason Bailey Stone hadn't been swallowed was the "field" he had erected two months before the arrival of the spaceship and the dropping of the spondle teardrop.

August Sandor and Bailey Stone had had some unusual concepts about what the energy-stream was, and how it might be tamed for personal use. They had pooled their cash assets, during their stay at Miami University, and bought the Key. They had used the last of Bailey's father's will to get them the field generator equipment they thought they needed, and they had moved to the Key for seclusion.

After eight months, they knew they had done nothing. The energy stream mathematics were all there, all set down sweet and simple. There was no reason why they couldn't

build the generator. So they tried. And failed. Somewhere in the mechanism, nothing happened. Passing between one coil and another, the power frittered off to somewhere, and they got nothing. They knew they had created nothing.

Except the "field" which kept Bailey Stone alive.

One experiment had produced an effect neither of them had known about. The power had warped itself across that gulf between coils, leaped a transistor, cleverly evaded a "fail-safe" that might have put it back on the proper track, and spouted out into the atmosphere.

It had, in effect, created a force barrier around the Key, and around half a mile of Atlantic Ocean. It had stopped the spondle cold, and sent it scurrying around. Had August Sandor not been out fishing beyond the half-mile limit that day, he, too, would have survived the spondle horror. But he wasn't, and the gelatinous mass came spreading across the water, engulfing Sandor, boat, and fish to the bottom of the ocean, all at one time.

Now, only Sandor Key and Bailey Stone were left above-spondle. Bailey's experiment had saved his life, and he

didn't know it. He probably never would, though he suspected as much. He had reasoned through the remarkable philosophy of the famous Sherlock Holmes:

If nothing but the impossible is left, then the impossible must be the solution to the problem.

After calculating what forces *might* have left Sandor Key untouched—for by this time he was certain the rest of the world was gone—and casting them out one by one, he arrived at the conclusion that the one thing Sandor Key had that the rest of the world did *not* have was the energy stream generators. And that somehow, they had produced this effect that had kept him safe.

Which did nothing to abet him. He was there, and he was alone. It was a slightly ridiculous way to think of it, but he *was*—in all probability—the last man on Earth. But not for long.

The fish that were left alive and swimming in the half mile of clear water would feed him for a while, but what happened when the ecology of Earth (was there an ecology any longer?) shifted to compensate for the total loss of all the oxygen-producing plants?

What happened when the fish could not trap the other life they needed to eat, and died off?

What made him think he could live on Sandor Key the rest of his life . . . and why should he want to, anyhow?

Seclusion he had sought. Seclusion, yes, but total and complete isolation? On a dead world.

The radio had been dead since shortly after the teardrop of spondle had landed. The radar cast back no indication that movement or life existed anywhere within its perceptive radius. He was alone, no question of it.

Then the day came when he realized he would get nowhere on the generators. He had contented himself for a few days with the thought that now he could experiment in complete privacy. But somehow it was not the same. The thought that out there somewhere people *did* exist, should he need help or assistance with a problem, was one thing. But the sure knowledge that no one existed anywhere but here, was another.

And another that was terribly frightening.

On the day that fact hit him fully, he took the rifle from its excelsior nest in the unpacked carton of miscellany they had

brought to the Key, and went out on the edge of the beach to blast his head off.

He took off his shirt (then wondered why) and sat down barefoot on the white sand. He fitted his toe against the trigger of the rifle, having made certain it was loaded, and put the barrel in his mouth. His eyes began to close, his toe to tighten on the trigger, when he saw the movement far out in the spondle.

It was a flicker, as though a bird were skimming the water's top and for an instant he was about to complete the movement of closing his eyes. But the flickering continued, and he watched it with growing fascination.

Finally, he stood up, and watched the movement come closer.

When it was almost to the edge of the spondle, about to breast clear water, he realized it for what it was.

A man.

Just like that. Without any great inflection or significance to the word. Just a man. Then he got the second wave of realization, and the rifle clattered to the sand unnoticed.

It was a man!

He had known futility about his experiments, just a moment before. Had known he was up against the wall, and

without the steady trickle of information from other men of science, he was doomed to failure, for he was no lone-wolf genius. He had been convinced a moment before there was no reason to remain alive alone on this horror planet.

A moment before all hope had been expended . . . now with the appearance of life, the problem assumed new proportions. Now there was something to work for, someone to talk with, there was a meaning, swimming toward him.

By the time the man was within eye-range, Bailey knew something was wrong. The man was not swimming. At least he wasn't swimming with any style Bailey had ever seen. His hands were straight at his sides, and his head was raised slightly from the water, arching his back, and moving his legs in a sharp, up-and-down pinioning movement, that propelled him at a fantastic rate of speed.

Bailey kept his eyes on the man, and almost without knowing he was doing it, reached around at his feet for the rifle. The warmth of the metal made him more conscious of his position.

The spondle had swallowed

everyone, even August. The world was dead, except himself, and he was now fairly sure he knew how *that* had happened . . . but what about this fellow? How had he escaped? What was he doing swimming in from a world-spanning sea of yellow spondle? Where was his boat? Who was he? And how did he happen to choose Sandor Key for his destination?

There wasn't another spit of land within a hundred miles. He *couldn't have* swum any distance like that. And the final—most frightening—factor was this: how could he swim in the spondle without it swallowing *him*, too?

A slight, icicle-cold shiver ran through Bailey Stone's body, and all the time, the man kept swimming, kept coming.

By the dull shadow-ring of rocks that circled the Key, just below the surface of the water, the man paused. Bailey Stone got his first full, unhampered view of the fellow.

It wasn't a man.

Not, at any rate, a man in the Bailey Stone accepted sense of the word. Not a man with two eyes, nose, mouth, hands, feet and torso. This was some weird, amphibian-looking creature, a bright

golden yellow, with the anatomy of a human—twisted and changed, and so subtly altered, that Bailey Stone felt his face go cold, felt his hands stick numbly to the rifle.

This was *man-plus* or *man-minus*, but surely not man-normal. The fellow stepped to the top of a rock. His legs were half underwater, but what remained above was quite clear, almost more clear than he would have wished, to Bailey.

The fellow stood easily six and a half feet. His head was drawn to a point at the top, like some whipped cream bubble drawn up to a tip. His eyes were set low on the face, without lids. The nose was nonexistent, unless the two breather holes set slanting between the eyes were a nose. The mouth was a wide, gill-ringed slash—precisely like a fish's mouth. The arms were thin and looked emaciated, ending in five silken tentacles, webbed between. The body was huge-chested and deep-lunged. He was naked, and Bailey could see his body was massively-muscled, terrifically-corded. He had no sex organs that Bailey could see, but his legs were so heavy, so thick—undoubtedly from all that swimming—they rubbed together at the thighs, and the

organs might have been concealed by the mass of flesh.

Bailey was almost certain the feet would be webbed, also.

The man was bright golden yellow, but there were bands of lighter yellow . . . butter, almost-copper, faintest tinges of buttercup, buff and shades of saffron . . . all over his body. As though he had been taken from the coloring pan or furnace before the color had set properly on his body.

There was something—aside from the terror at his form—that made Bailey fear him. He didn't seem particularly aggressive, or look as though he was dangerous, but the thing had swum spondle from somewhere, and he was not of this world. That was so obvious, Bailey's arms raised the rifle almost while he filtered the thought through.

The thing was alien, not of the world he had known, not of any normal, natural progression of evolution.

Whatever it was, it *wasn't* Bailey Stone's kind of people.

The rifle leveled, he fired.

The bullet splattered short, kicking up a spray of water far in front of the gill-thing's feet. Bailey fired again. Between the instant when the shot sounded, and the bullet struck through empty air

where the gill-thing had been, the "man" had dived head-first off the rock, and was gone.

Disappearing into the water with a streak of deep yellow that flashed twice, then was gone. He rose once, a mile off, in the spondle, then surfaced, and was gone completely.

There was no thought of suicide now. Somehow, it was a life again; a life with some purpose. Even if only the purpose of danger nearby. It was *something*, and to know he was not alone on the planet, was a new factor. Then, too, the very mystery of the gill-thing, the non-effects the spondle had on it, its appearance near Sandor Key, the whole situation, had a stimulating effect on Bailey.

Now he worked night and day on the generators, knowing nothing could come of it, because he just didn't have the raw data to perfect the energy-stream mechanism, but still working for the sake of working. And at night he would sit by the shore, cradling the .22 in his lap, watching the faintly phosphorescent spondle, waiting for the gill-thing to come back.

Watching, and hoping. And not hoping, for his terror at

the thing grew, not diminished, as the days passed.

He had frightened the thing off with the shooting, but what if it came back? What did it want? Why had it come to him—for he was now certain the thing *had* been trying to make some sort of contact—and why did it not return?

Then, one evening, as he lay slumped against a palmetto tree, the work of the day having caught up with him, the thing *did* return.

His eyes had closed almost against his will. He had been watching the shimmering, unbroken line of spondle that ringed his Key. Watching the yellow glow that rose into the night, merging out finally to be deadened by the glow of the moon.

The gill-thing came up out of the water, a half mile down the beach, around the curve of the island.

Bailey let himself be feathered off into a half-sleep, his head slipping to the side and back, resting against the trunk of the palmetto. The rifle slid down his cradling arms, teetering on his thighs. It came to rest there, balanced, but unheld.

The gill-thing, silent and stealthy, skirted the shore, rounding the bed, till he lo-

cated Bailey. He had surfaced out there for an instant, seen the man, and gone under again, to swim the rest of the way to shore underwater.

Now, dripping spondle-mixed water, he crept up behind the dozing man.

Perhaps it was the droplets of water striking sand; perhaps it was the shadow the gill-thing cast; or perhaps it was merely a premonition. But whatever it was, Bailey Stone's head snapped up, and he stared directly into that wide, fish-like face.

The thing made a grab with its thin, fragile arms. Bailey had a moment to wonder why there was so much strength in an arm that appeared so weak. Then he was lifted clear of the ground and hoisted above the thing's scaled head. He grabbed frantically for the rifle, which had fallen off his knees, but it was out of reach.

Then the thing had him above its head, struggling futilely. It began to walk toward the water's edge. Bailey kicked out madly, wildly, but the thing was too strong for him.

It stank of sour alcohol, or something akin, and the smell rang in Bailey's head. He had to do something! The thing either wanted to drown him, or carry him into the spondle, either one of which was death.

He tensed his body, then flung all his weight backwards. The thing staggered, and Bailey shifted his weight, tossing his legs out to throw the thing further off-balance.

The gill-thing suddenly slipped, with all the maneuvering it was being forced to make, and Bailey rolled free from its grasp. He landed heavily on the sand, rolled, and came up sprinting. He made a dash for the rifle, got it in his hands, but the thing was too close to take aim.

Bailey swung the rifle, butt-first, and caught the thing in the face. The rifle butt went splat! and yellow stuff dripped away to the ground. The thing staggered and fell back, its face smashed above the eyes. It put a feeling hand to its forehead, and the hand came away with pulpy yellow drippings on the webs. He stared at Bailey for an instant, as though trying to comprehend what had happened, and Bailey swung the rifle again. The butt of the rifle hit the beast in the mouth, tearing away half the slashed opening as it snapped on, and away.

The thing fell down, writhing, its face a shredded thing.

It lay there at Bailey's feet, the yellow dripping of its face staining the ochre sands. Bailey Stone leaned up against a

tree. He felt ill, and his mind was whirling. He had to exert conscious effort to keep from vomiting, swallowing thickly, again and again, to keep himself in command of his body.

The gill-thing finally lay stretched out to unconsciousness, and Bailey stood over him, watching the weird body in the pale light of the moon, half in shadow, half not. He watched it, and suddenly felt a great weariness, a great melancholy overtake him. The futility of all this!

Then it quickly passed, and he lifted the gill-thing by its arms, till he could get a grip on the body. Then he bent down on one knee, folded the body over himself, and lifted the gill-thing onto his back in a fireman's carry. He stooped, with difficulty, to retrieve the rifle, and started off, up the beach, and back toward the three small, grouped huts that were the lab and his home.

On his back, out of his sight, as he walked, the face of the gill-thing—torn and dripping—was slowly remolding itself.

There could be no doubt. The gill-thing would remain unconscious a good long while, so Bailey tied its hands behind it, to the straight back of a chair bolted to the floor.

Then the weariness came again. Perhaps it had been building since the spondle dropped, perhaps it was from overwork and not enough rest, perhaps it was mental fatigue, but whatever it was, Bailey Stone fell across his army cot, and in a matter of moments was asleep.

The gill-thing sat slumped in the chair, its face pointed toward the floor while its head rested on its chest. For an hour and forty minutes, the flesh of the yellow thing merged. It melted with itself, flowing together, stripping the long streamers of flayed skin back in place. The seams of the face knitted, the holes smoothed over. Like pouring glue in a crevice, the face healed and ran together, and in an hour and forty minutes, the gill-thing was whole once more. No sign of the vicious beating it had taken was visible.

An hour and forty-six minutes after Bailey Stone had tied the gill-thing in the chair, it woke up.

For quite a long time it sat there, its slash mouth working fitfully. Opening wide as a fish's mouth opens wide, then snapping tight-shut, then opening again, as though trying to loosen some soundless scream. The thing's face was a

contorted battlefield of emotion, nameless emotional searchings, for it seemed to be calling, calling, calling, and yet it could not.

Finally, it realized calling could do no good, for it ceased the activity. Then—calmly—it snapped the ropes binding it, and lifted Bailey Stone's sleeping, unresisting body to its massive shoulders. The walk to the beach was a short one.

Bailey woke at the first shock of cold water. He tried to twist and squirm, but he was held tightly in the lock of the thing's arms. He turned his head, saw the pinioning feet kicking out regularly, saw the white froth churned up by their motion. Then he turned his head back toward the horizon, and the pale, wan wafer that was the moon. And the glowing, yellow line of the spondle.

The thing was swimming him into the sure death of the yellow spondle!

"No! No, you've got . . . to . . . let . . . me . . . go!" he struggled with the thing, but slumped back in the being's grasp, knowing it was no use.

Strangely, the gill-thing kept the man's head above water, as though sensing he would drown should he go under. And yet it swam steadily

toward the even surer death of the enveloping spondle.

They neared the half-mile barrier.

Bailey got his first look at the spondle close up.

It was a sticky, gelatinous mass, as he had suspected, and it was shining, like the smooth surface of a bubble. Its light came from deep within it, and at the edges, where it pressed against the invisible barrier, it seemed to be puckering. Puckering, as though sucking, and striving, and trying to move, and eat, but held back, and marking time in its hunger.

Bailey shivered, and beat frantically at the gill-thing.

It was no use. With a terrific surge, the gill-thing skimmed across the final few feet of water, and plunged into the mass of yellow spondle. The being swam a few feet, kicked its legs powerfully, and surfaced-under carrying the screaming, struggling Bailey Stone with him.

Down, and down, and down till there was no down and no up and the whirling, swirling of the yellow mass was a spinning eternity enveloping him, eating away at his body till the yellow was smoothed over by the shining and glossy black of the ebony uncon-

sciousness—that finally had come. . . .

It was a room that was not a room. Bailey Stone looked up and saw the shifting pattern of many colors on the ceiling. The ceiling seemed to be made of some elastic substance, pulled into a baffle-chain set. It was a many-holed thing with each hole a square of the same size. It wavered and swam out of proportion, even as he watched, and he turned his head. The walls were doing the same thing.

It was like the strange mirrors at the fun house, that warped everything down till they looked thin and taffy-pulled at one end, bunched and squat at the other. It was an odd effect, but somehow one that didn't disturb him.

His head ached, and he reached up to touch his skull. His hand passed before his face, and he dragged it back unbelievably, to stare at it. His hand was thin and emaciated and yellow. It ended in five silken tentacles, webbed between.

He felt his face.

No nose.

His eyes were pocketed by gills.

There was a sharp, horny, spine crest that ran back to the small of his neck.

His mouth was a slash.

He knew immediately, of course, and felt his stomach tighten. He tried to sit up, and found he couldn't. He tried to sit up and found three wide, fabric belts held him strapped to an oddly-designed table affair.

He tried to sit up, and the other gill-thing's face swam in sight. He saw it as through a film of yellowness, as though the other were behind a silken curtain. A voice spoke in his head:

Is it painful, Bailey?

There were moments of confusion and terror as the sounds rebounded inside his skull, and then he heard himself answer, non-vocally, *No, just a dull ache in my head.*

Then he added, *What . . . what's happened? Am I dead?*

The gill-thing laughed, and the sound tinkled to him through his brain, not through the air—if there *was* air here. He was certain he was in the spondle, somewhere. But just where, and who this was, and what had happened to him, and why he *wasn't* dead, and what would happen to him, were all questions he wanted answered, but could not ask.

They'll all be answered soon, Bailey.

I didn't say anything.

Have either of us since you

woke up? The tinkling laughter again, inside his head, like feathers tickling the inside of his brain.

Where . . . ? He couldn't finish the sentence.

You are in City. What was called Miami Beach before the spondle. City stretched entirely across what was North America, Central and South America, and Canada. There are three other Cities; they're called Home, Place and Coldtown. In addition, there's the Deep, which we've set up in the Cayman Trench.

It only took us ten generations to get the Deep in shape.

Bailey listened, and his mind, working at top-notch efficiency, didn't seem able to grasp what the being was telling him. Cities under the spondle. Cities in the bottom of the ocean, in the Cayman Trench? Life beneath this yellow horror?

It will all be explained soon, Bailey.

Who are you? How do you know my name?

I'm Maynal, great-great-grandson of August Sandor. I was assigned by the Coordinators to bring you to us. We've known about you for several generations, but we've also been too busy reconstructing and preparing for

the Visit to get to your island. We now are ready for your help. We hope you'll give it.

Bailey's mind boggled before these facts. August Sandor's great-great grandson? It was unbelievable! And in that form. It abruptly reminded him he, too, was in that shape. And he wanted to scream. It started to bubble up in his throat, but he forced it back.

Wh-what's happened to my body?

Just the Change, that's all. It happens to pre-spondle men taken down for the first time. All of the Coordinators were like yourself before they were spondled and Changed.

What are you going to do with me?

That is not my place to say. I'm to take you to the Coordinators. Just remember, you aren't in any danger. We need your help, you're one of us now.

Even though I shot at you?

You never shot at me.

But I did! I—

You shot at my father, Lesjen. By the time he got back to report, he was too old to return, and it took them a full generation to train a new mission-agent. Myself.

But . . .

Come. We mustn't waste any more time. I haven't much time left before I stet, and

they send me to Coldtown or the Deep.

He passed his webbed hand over the ends of the three fabric straps that secured Bailey to the table, and the straps came loose and contracted like rubber bands, into cubicles on the opposite side of the table affair.

Bailey sat up, and Maynal helped him down.

Then the baffles contracted and expanded, and they stepped through and out. They were in a huge hall, that stretched as far as Bailey could see, into a yellow and multi-colored distance.

Your eyes have yet to grow acclimated, entirely, Maynal said, and then he stepped. He stepped quickly, and Bailey saw him there, then not-there. One step and he was gone.

Then Maynal reappeared. *Come on, I had to come back for you.* He took Bailey by the hand, and they both stepped.

They were there in four steps. They were in the Coordinators Hall in four steps.

Bodily action had been speeded up fantastically.

The Coordinators were all the same man. Each gill-thing looked precisely like the others.

When you are better adjusted, Bailey, you will see that

we are each as different as humans were . . . and we look as superficially alike as humans did. One Coordinator had spoken.

Please, Bailey Stone pleaded, please tell me what this is all about. What's happened? Who are you? How did this—this world beneath the spondle come about?

The Coordinators took turns telling him the entire story, precisely what had happened, and what they had finally concluded. *We have had five hundred years in which to conclude these things, Bailey Stone . . . enhanced by the speeded-up activity of our brains. We are certain what we have said is true.*

But . . . but five hundred years?

Yes, what seemed to you but a few months, has been five hundred years to us here in the spondle.

Bailey ran what they had said through his mind, turning it over, knowing they were reading his thoughts. But he knew what they had said was true.

The ship that had slipped in and out of Earth's atmosphere was a robot ship, sent by some alien race as a scout, to "soften" up all worlds they might want to conquer. Who this race was, or what they

looked like, no guess could be made, but they used the spondle as a foolproof war weapon, to envelop a planet, and kill off its inhabitants. They probably had a method for drawing the spondle off, later, with all the inhabitants, plants, life of any sort, reduced to its components, and harmless. It was a weapon that was successful because nothing could stop it. But something had happened this time.

Whether they had ever tried it with Earth-type humans before, or whether it was something in the atmosphere, the spondle had not worked precisely as it should have. Instead of swallowing up the Earth and its people, it had swallowed the Earth and converted its peoples.

It had changed them, in a matter of a few generations, and the Earthmen had accommodated themselves to living in the spondle. They had not died, but had mutated. They were now gill-things, with a complete social framework, based upon their accelerated metabolism, and the newly-acquired shortness of the life-span.

Now a gill-thing lived a full life in what would be three days to a normal, before-spondle Earthman. But there was no death. When their life-span

had ended, they went into a state of suspension, until they were revived.

Those who had suspended—or gone into *stet*—were put in a shelter-creche in the Deep or Coldtown, which covered Antarctica. They were being saved for the Visit—the big showdown.

For the gill-people who had been Earthmen knew that one day the aliens who had sent that robot-ship, sent the spondle, would return, and try to drag off the blanket of spondle.

That would undoubtedly kill off the gill-people, and allow the aliens to take over the planet. Earth had been given a reprieve, and in many ways had benefited, but the aliens had to be stopped.

New cities had been constructed, and the same Coordinators who had proved themselves wise rulers were revived over and over and over after each *stet*, so they could resume their duties without being stored.

Earth had learned to live with itself, during the last five hundred years, and now all efforts were turned toward the visit of the aliens. The Visit. When they would swoop down as conquerors, and think they had another yellow-blanketed

world to merely remove the spondle, and inhabit.

But their own battle weapon had betrayed them. It had acted differently on the Earthman's metabolisms, and instead of a dead planet, the aliens would return to find a race that had totally adapted itself.

A race that had accommodated itself in this strange battle.

The battle garb was different, but the Earthmen were there, prepared to fight.

All this, Bailey Stone warped through his mind, while the Coordinators named Eisenhower and Stevenson and Churchill and Schweitzer and Chiang Kai-shek and Russell and Toynbee and the others watched. He watched them . . . men who had lived five hundred years, who had lived as Earthmen and as gill-people. As Earthmen and as Earthmen-plus!

We need your mind, Bailey Stone, for your island was the only exempted area when the spondle overwhelmed the planet. We have deduced, from what August Sandor and his friends told us, what they passed down to their children, that on that Key, something happened that created a force barrier.

We need that barrier, Bai-

ley Stone, and you may hold the missing piece to the energy-stream puzzle that has stopped us for many years. Will you help us? Will you forgive us for **FORCING THE Change** on you so abruptly?

Bailey Stone, the gill-thing that had been Bailey Stone, turned it over and over in his mind.

There wasn't really any problem. He knew the answer he would gladly give. He knew it was more than just stopping the aliens who had killed

and given new life to his world.

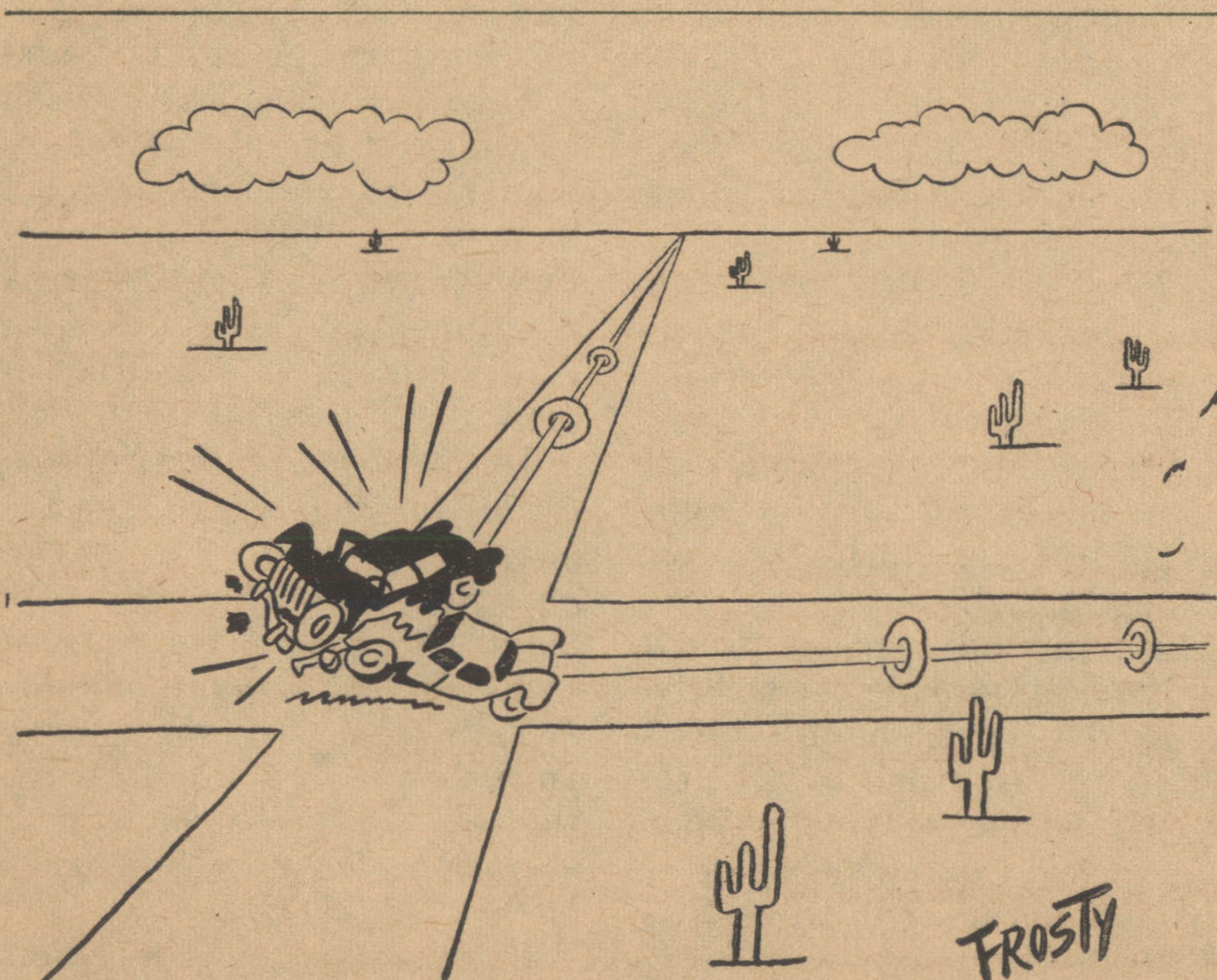
He knew it was working with the problem again, with men of his kind. The loneliness was at an end.

He looked up at the rows of Coordinators, and thought almost joyfully, *What was that phrase about the best of all possible worlds?*

They smiled, and Bailey Stone added:

When they get here, those aliens are going to be surprised. Which way is the lab?

THE END



How's Your Sense Of Direction?

Here's an ingenious quiz that will test your knowledge on all sorts of subjects: history, popular music, television personalities, geopolitics, geography, and still others. Twelve correct answers and you can nod to any quiz-master. Fifteen right, and any quiz-master will bow to you. (Answers on page 128.)

1. Horace Greeley advised young men of his time to "Go _____."
2. A popular detective team on the radio Mr. & Mrs. _____.
3. Seoul is the capitol city of _____ Korea.
4. The strait connecting Long Island Sound and upper New York Bay _____ River.
5. Robert Edwin Peary was the first to reach the _____ Pole.
6. The location of New Jersey's Upsala College is _____ Orange.
7. Mrs. Henry Wood's famous novel published in 1861 _____ Lynne.
8. Included in the Soviet zone of Germany is the Province of _____ Prussia.
9. The actress whose tagline is "Come up and see me sometime"—Mae _____.
10. Ancient kingdom of England, its territory corresponds to what is now Norfolk and Suffolk counties _____ Anglia.
11. Benedict Arnold betrayed the American cause at _____ Point.
12. Minnesota is known as the _____ Star State.
13. Only natural habitat of penguins is the _____ Pole.
14. A popular syndicated book critic Sterling _____.
15. Home of the calypso songs are the _____ Indies.

ACCORDING TO YOU...



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

What an issue! The July run was greater than ever. Every story was a gem of fantasy in which it could happen.

"The Secret of Marracott Deep" was excellent. Couldn't put it down until I finished.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
172 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

● *Can't leave W. C. out. He's getting to be a fixture.*

Dear Editor:

Just finished the July *Fantastic*. The most outstanding feature of this issue is the remarkable cover. Naturally, since you noted that it was painted by Valigursky I thought something was definitely wrong . . . either you made a typographical error or Valigursky had undergone a tremendous surge of ambition and had improved considerably. Well, since the August issue came out several days ago I now know the truth. Summers is the nice man that turned out said cover. I do hope you run more of his.

None of the stories were really exceptional this time except for Richard Wilson's "Change of Venue" which was fine quality work.

Seems to me that the fiction in your science fiction magazines is becoming more and more on the level with *Dream World*—i.e., pseudo-science fiction; a long story based on a very weak science fiction theme which spends its most part dealing with non-science fiction occurrences. How about some more "out of this world"

stories. I don't mean that in a "Gosh-Wow!" sense but there have been very few stories dealing with spatial backgrounds since *Dream World* came out. Not a one in the July issue. Glancing through the August issue, things look different, though.

I believe in a past *Amazing* or *Fantastic* you mentioned a future story by Murray Leinster. Any further details on Leinster or was it all a ruse? I hope not—a Leinster story would really increase the sales with the adult set.

I seem to be missing Finlay in *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, this will most assuredly not do. More Finlay if you know what's good for you.

Bill Meyers
4301 Shawnee Circle
Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

● *The Murray Leinster story will appear in the December issue of Amazing Stories. Watch for "The Machine That Saved the World." Also, scoop of scoops! the same issue will feature a Finlay cover that's just plain tremendous.*

Dear Editor:

After finishing your recent publication of *Fantastic* I began looking through previous copies, finding with much regret, several copies missing. I will buy them from any readers interested in selling theirs.

I quite enjoyed "The Secret of Marracott Deep" for its adventure and found "The Day Baseball Died" extremely funny.

Richard Burch
9595 Alto Dr.
La Mesa, Calif.

● *You'll be hearing from traders all over the country, Mr. Burch.*

Dear Editor:

Sitting in an Army barracks in Kentucky, so far from New York and the writing game, the perspective shifts, and a lot of things became clearer. One of them is the sound of some of the letters in the August *Fantastic*. The PX gets the Ziff-Davis magazines, and seeing a touch of "The Real World" I bought them. Enjoyed them muchly, as usual—mainly because I had a yarn in each—and read them front to back. I hit the letter section. I flipped!

I'd like to say a few words to people like George Wells, H. R. Frye and their ilk, if I may. Not in defense of your books, because Lord knows they sell well enough to need no defense, proving they must be enjoyed, but just to make a few comments, and try to set

these people straight, for it is apparent from their comments that they perch in their Ivory Towers and know nothing of what happens in a publishing firm. Or, worse, what happens behind a writer's desk.

Look, fellows. Mr. Frye (I *assume* it's a Mr.) has some pretty odd things to say about us "old foggies who sit behind our gold desks and throw away our efforts without assistance." Crap! If you'll pardon the bluntness. In this business, Frye, a guy can't *afford* to be an old foggie. Old foggies wind up like Maxwell Bodenheim—dead, poor and sick in a cold-water flat, without the price of a can of beer. A guy in this trade has to grow, to mature, to change, or he's a dead pigeon. And to my knowledge—with the exception of boys like Hemingway, Schulberg, Shaw, Steinbeck and Faulkner—none of us have solid gold desks. I figure I'm pretty lucky, mine is blackwood with a white leather top, and I had to sweat my rear off for three years, nearly starving for two years of that, to get *that* desk. If young writers want to sell their stuff, don't offer them charity, that only breeds more and worse puerile writing. Let them work the way the rest of us work . . . to sell, to live, to grow in our trade. That way their stuff will be better, and better, *for* them. A magazine that will publish the work of new young writers is not the answer. First of all, because it could not survive, and second because it would not receive enough fiction of real worth to make it readable. If a writer has what it takes, he can crack the magazines and write for a living. If he hasn't, and his stuff is no good, is there any point in running it? Bad writing is easy to come by. The editors of even *Amazing* and *Fantastic* get hundreds of bad manuscripts every week. Would *you* like to buy a 35¢ magazine full of immature and amateur efforts, merely to be able to say with false pride: "We're giving the new writers a chance?" I should think not. If a writer has the will to write—if he writes because he *has* to write, which is the only really valid reason for writing in the first place—he will be recognized all too soon. If he is a piddler, if he wants the money and not the work (the Sammy Glick type of "What Makes Sammy Run?" fame) then he will sink back to the oblivion or factory job he is suited for. This is not a supercilious attitude on my part, but life. The way it is, brother Frye. Not altruism and soft pink thoughts, but the only kind of harsh reality that means anything in the long run.

Charity does not pay off. Hard work and talent do.

Now (he said, turning his howitzer on George Wells), let's check into this business of lowering the cost of a magazine from 35¢ to 25¢ to please *you*. Do you think the editors *want* to charge 35¢? Do you think they *want* to have people turn away from the newsstands saying, "Well, I can't afford that extra dime?" No, brother! There

are many valid reasons why magazines today cost more than twenty years ago. There are lithographer and printers unions. Those boys want more dough. And they get it. There are proofreaders and typesetters who want more money. They, too, get it. There is the cost of paper which has risen fantastically in the last ten years. There is the cost of distribution, printing, artist's and author's wages, editor's salaries (which are not as magnificent as you folks outside New York seem to think), advertising, office worker's salaries. The books cost 35¢ because they *have* to cost that much to make any money. Let's face it, no one is in business for laughs. We all like to eat. If a book has a 35¢ tag on it, that means the publisher can make a cent or two off each copy. Simple? Sure, it is, when you look at it logically.

And if you'll pardon my impertinence, Mr. Wells, you sound pretty young, making statements like: "Leslie Gerber, who I know outside of your letter department, said 'My Robot' was a darned good story and it wasn't, etc." Who cares? Who cares whether you and Leslie agree or not. For the past three years a highly literate friend of mine has been telling me that Faulkner's "Mosquitoes" is a great work of art. Frankly, I think it stinks on ice. But that's just my opinion. What does it matter? The writer had something to say, he said it. And to accuse O. H. Leslie (Who I know outside of this magazine) of semi-plagiarism because Asimov had a similar story somewhere, borders on childishness and wallows in dangerousness. Haven't you ever heard about the similarity of ideas and the instances of people coming up with similar stories at the same time? Or people trying a fresh angle on an old theme? Use your head, boy. Not every yarn is going to be a classic. There are good stories and bad ones, and sometimes the false tries make it into print. If "My Robot" *was* a false try. Only you said so. Leslie didn't seem to think so. And obviously the editor didn't think so, or it wouldn't have shown up in print.

What the readers way out there seem to need, is a sense of perspective. Ideas and gripes and suggestions are great; they are the lifeblood of any publishing venture. But try to reason them out before you start dashing off letters to nationwide commercial publications. You sound foolish saying to a publisher of stature: "Why don't you sell your books for less?" or to a writer who makes his living hitting a keyboard: "Why was that story so similar? I thought it stank!" You don't have a valid question, either time, and asking questions like that means something only when phrased properly and when framed with intelligence.

Try to remember, fellas, there is more behind the scenes. When you pick up a magazine off the stands, there before you is the concerted efforts of dozens of people, from editor and artist and writer

on one end to printer and typesetter and typographer and pressman in the middle to distributor and newsman at the end. There are good reasons for everything, usually, and just as I don't expect to know what goes on in a movie company, so that I have to lay out \$2.00 to see "Lust For Life" or expect to know why Picasso paints as he does, so that I have to scratch my head at some of his work, so *you* should realize we're all trying the best we can all the time. When we fall short . . . well, we're sorry. We'll do better next time. When we succeed, hell, it was nothing really.

But be tolerant. And in some cases, fellas, kindly, grow up a little, willya?

Harlan Ellison

● *Mail for Harlan addressed to Amazing Stories here in New York will be forwarded.*

Dear Editor:

I usually enjoy all the stories in your magazines. Also the illustrations hit the spot. But do you mind telling me just what story the cover pictures are connected with? They're all very good but just don't make sense, to me anyway.

As for the stories keep them as they are.

Mrs. Rita Houk
12408 E. Pellissior
Whittier, California

● *In almost every case, they illustrate the lead story. If a shorter story is featured, we note the fact on the index page.*

Dear Ed:

Feeling in a letter writing mood, I shall now assess your stories at face value. I say this because I haven't read them yet and am going only by the titles, blurbs, and illustrations.

"The Secret of Marracott Deep"—It looks interesting, especially since Henry Slesar's name appears below the title.

"Change of Venue"—The illustration has got me curious; looks different.

"Gas!"—On the surface it appears that there's a lot of excitement in here.

"Dark Miracle"—L. R. Summers makes a good case for the yarn as if Jorgensen's name wasn't enough.

"Heads You Lose"—It appears ordinary until you notice the gal's second head and read the blurb.

"The Day Baseball Died"—It looks like more fun than a bullpen of monkeys, but is it s-f?

"The Marriage Machine"—The title sounds humorous and O. H. Leslie writes a good story, but somehow, the illustration makes the whole thing look rather dull.

Peter Kane, Jr.
241 Twelfth Street
West Babylon, N.Y.

● *Nice way to go through a book, Peter, looking things over, anticipating. It actually adds to the pleasure of reading. When I pick up a book I always go through and catch all the cartoons. Maybe that's why there are so many in Amazing and Fantastic. I like 'em. And you readers seem to like 'em, too.*

Dear Editor:

I like anything that Ivar Jorgensen writes, but I'm afraid that modern ending for "The Secret of Marracott Deep" knocked it out of first place this time.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

● *You lost me, James. According to my copy of Fantastic, the story you mention was authored by Henry Slesar. But that makes your criticism no less valid. But so long as you were moved to comment the story must have impressed you overall. Write again.*

Dear Ed:

To make matters clear, I will say here that I am writing about the issue of *Fantastic* for July, 1957. I say this because I have noted that there is a lapse of about one issue before a letter appears. Incidentally why is that?

I'm a little bit disgusted with this issue's editorial which is just an ad for some two-bit dinosaur epic. I hope you do better on your next selection. I feel that you ought to reprint some of the serials from the old *Amazing* in this series.

Andrew Reiss
741 Westminster Rd.
Brooklyn 30, New York

● *The reason for the lapse you mention involves printing dates. And this may be a good place to apologize to those Fantastic readers who are also Amazing Stories fans, for being so slow with the list of prize-winners in our "Babbit . . ." mistake contest. Actually, three full issues are printed before final judgment can be made. So you'll find the results in the October issue of Amazing Stories, on sale September 9th.*

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SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES

WEATHER

Servant or Master?

By LEIGH MARLOWE

IT USED to be that everybody talked about the weather and nobody did anything about it. But now, weathermen all over the globe are so busy trying to do something about it that one American expert estimates within the next decade the uncertainties of weather prediction will be a thing of the past and within the next four decades man will be able to exert strong controls over weather, perhaps even have it made to order.

Many meteorologists who see the important ramifications of their work are calling for another Manhattan Project—this time to concentrate research and money in meteorological studies. Further, whether we like it or not, and despite many loud statements to the contrary, experimental explosions of A and H bombs probably do cause unexpected weather phenomena—phenomena that cannot be explained by the

usual analysis of atmospheric conditions.

The United States Government, whose service is the best in the world, directly employs approximately twenty thousand persons whose sole job is to analyze weather conditions and make predictions—a slow and laborious process which is currently undergoing a revolution with the use of automatic weather stations in remote places, the collection of data by weather balloons and the projected use by the Navy of automatic weather buoys. These robot meteorologists are presently operated by gasoline or battery power, but experts are hoping to set them up permanently with atomic fuel. Electronic computers to analyze weather data will be used more frequently and a central clearing house of weather information will expedite the collection and transmission of reports.

And, of course, there are



many private outfits involved in the business of weather. One rain-making firm is currently grossing a million dollars a year—and expects to do much better in the years to come.

Weather control means not only control of the weather, but control of our actions based on accurate long range forecasts of it. For example, a coal strike can affect the health of millions in this country—long range weather prediction can determine if the next weeks will bring chilling cold or will be relatively mild, and on this basis, the government can decide to use the powers given it by labor laws. Or farmers whose crops have been affected by poor growing conditions can employ long range forecasting to decide to leave the crops in beyond the usual harvest period for further ripening and better prices.

The possibilities of success-

ful rainmaking were first seen several years ago by Dr. Langmuir, the Nobel Prize winner. Experiments in this field followed fast and furious, since dry conditions are a constant hazard to the well-being of the states west of the Mississippi. At the present time, rainmakers have shown beyond any reasonable doubt that they can increase rainfall, dissipate fog and reduce hail which is a severe source of crop damage.

Rainmaking is actually cloud control—control of the moisture content of clouds through the use of dry ice or silver iodide crystals. But nature has to cooperate in supplying clouds of the correct moisture content and temperature. What happens is simply that the crystals act as points on which water droplets can collect. When enough of them collect, the cloud becomes heavy, drops into cooler air and releases its burden of moisture in the form of rain.

The ordinary concern with rainmaking has been to relieve dry areas, but viewed in the larger context of cloud control, the crystals are really double-barrelled weapons because they can be used to prevent as well as make rain.

Though there is some debate on this point, it is theoretically possible to prevent rain by overseeding the right kind of cloud—too many crystals within the cloud would provide too many points of condensation, so that no collection of droplets would be heavy enough to sink the cloud. Also, if a storm cloud is seeded in its early stages, the storm will be much abated, lessening the tremendous damage and back-breaking expense of flooding farmlands and pastures.

The possibilities of cloud control are varied and numerous. Rain can turn desert into crop lands and could play an important role in reducing hunger and famine which are a basic cause of the world's unrest. Rain can put out forest fires which mere human waterworks cannot control. Cloud control will enable New England to scrap snow machines and skiers will enjoy fresh powdered snow to order. Sports promoters can be guaranteed sunshine for the World Series, businessmen fair weather for holiday boom times. Cities won't be caught with a gap in their budgets when it comes to snow clearing; highways can be kept

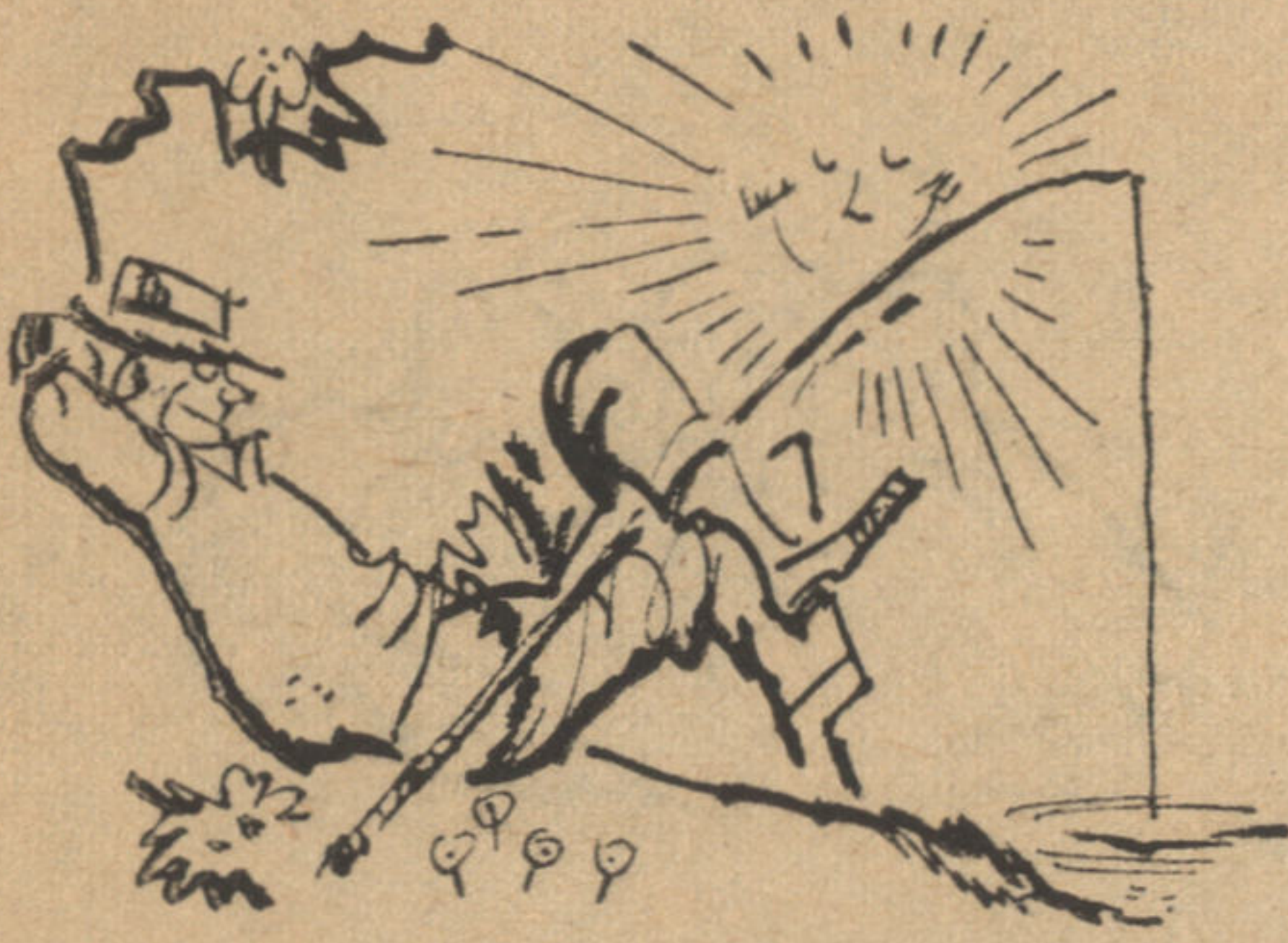


open so traffic will run on schedule.

Wartime uses are also in the offing. Cloud control can be utilized to dessicate or flood an enemy's bread basket, and to prevent or protect military operations.

But what about unplanned weather effects due to A and H bomb tests? Up till now, weather analysis has been based on convergent phenomena—the kind of briefing you get on the weather round-ups dealing with isobars, isotherms, highs, lows and so forth. Now, there's a new school of thought developing about weather: analysis by divergent phenomena. Basically, this involves a kind of chain reaction—where some small event somewhere on the face of the earth sets off a merging clash of influences that affects remote areas.

The theory behind atom experiments affecting the weather runs to the effect



that solar flares—hydrogen explosions on the face of the sun ninety-three million miles away—affect the weather and therefore hydrogen bombs on the earth's surface can also affect it. A hydrogen explosion affects the electrical condition of the air, changes in electrical energy in the atmosphere are associated with hurricanes, tornadoes and other cataclysms, as well as with unexpected hot, cold or dry spells. Further, even if bomb tests are carried out in unpopulated areas, winds can waft the radioactive debris over cities and agricultural areas where it falls to earth in the form of precipitation. Perhaps even more frightening is the fact that such

debris retains its power to cause meteorological effects over a period of years.

The facts are these: since atomic experiments began hurricanes have shifted from the Gulf Coast to New England, there have been more tornadoes and these have occurred over a wider geographical area. Europe had its worst winter in a century, and Holland the worst floods in five hundred years.

Weather generally moves from west to east on the earth but in the past few years there have been astounding reversals, where weather has gone from east to west. These events cast suspicion on categorical denials that bomb tests have no meteorological effects.

Right now, weather is capricious and lies beyond man's power to tame it. But it can be hoped that science will be able to turn weather into a powerful force for mankind's benefit, to harness its forces within the next few years.

THE END

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. West; 2. North; 3. South; 4. East; 5. North; 6. East; 7. East; 8. East; 9. West; 10. East; 11. West; 12. North; 13. South; 14. North; 15. West.

3

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It Sounds Fantastic, But . . .

Loony Canadian Laws

In the City of Toronto it's against the law to park in your own driveway if any part of your car projects beyond the front wall of your house.

In Victoria, B. C., you're breaking the law if you smoke in a taxicab, if you're the driver and you have passengers.

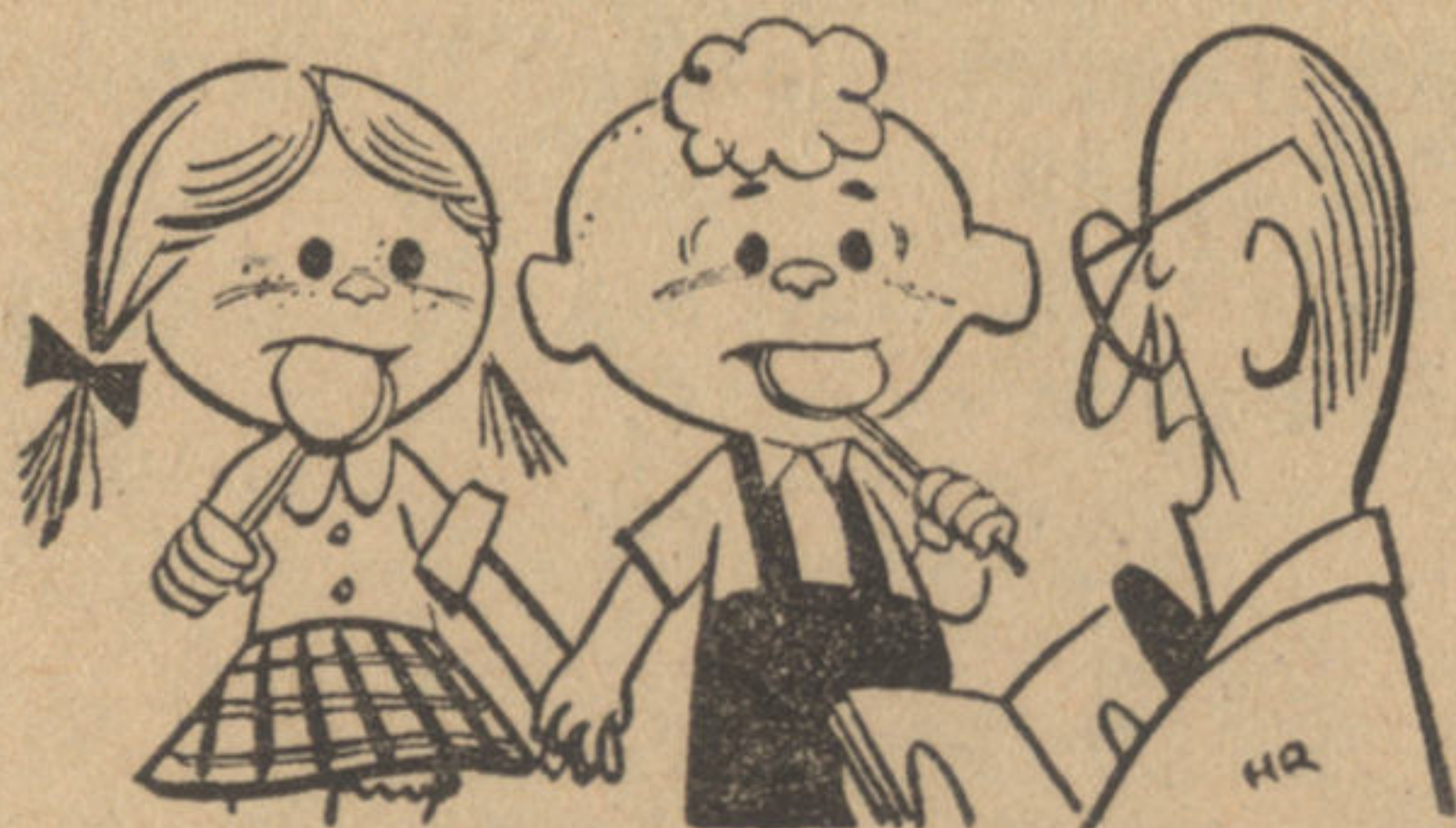
It's against the law in Canada to sell lottery tickets and anybody caught doing so is prosecuted but winners are allowed to keep the money, and some individual wins have totaled over \$100,000.



It's against the law in Canada to show a picture of a bottle or a glass in a magazine liquor ad. It's against the law in Ontario to publish liquor advertising in any form; to get around this most Ontario periodicals running liquor ads are published in Quebec.

In the Toronto suburb of Scarborough you're not allowed to place signs on hydro and telephone poles because the nails and wire left behind injure the linemen.

In the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island six-year-old children can marry if they have their parents' consent (and if they can find someone who will perform the ceremony.)



In Vancouver William Semnick pleaded guilty to the crime of not revealing the names of the two men who attempted to kill him.

Alberta authorities ran into a snag when they tried to introduce legislation making it illegal for hunters to shoot on farmers' property if the farmers did not wish them to do so. It was pointed out that NO HUNTING signs would apply to the owner of the property as well as to any trespassers.



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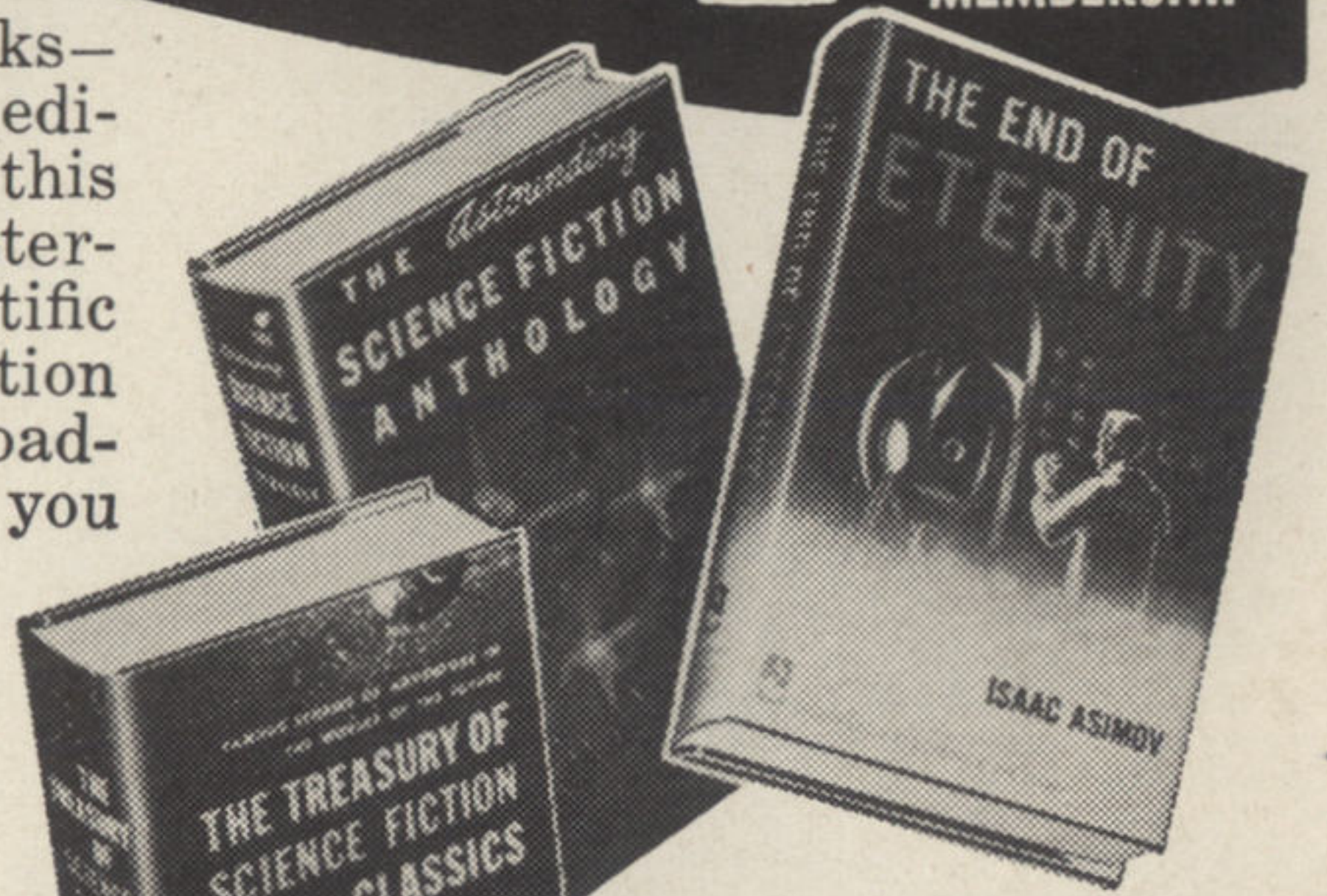
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THE END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov. For description, please see other side. *Pub. ed.* \$2.95.

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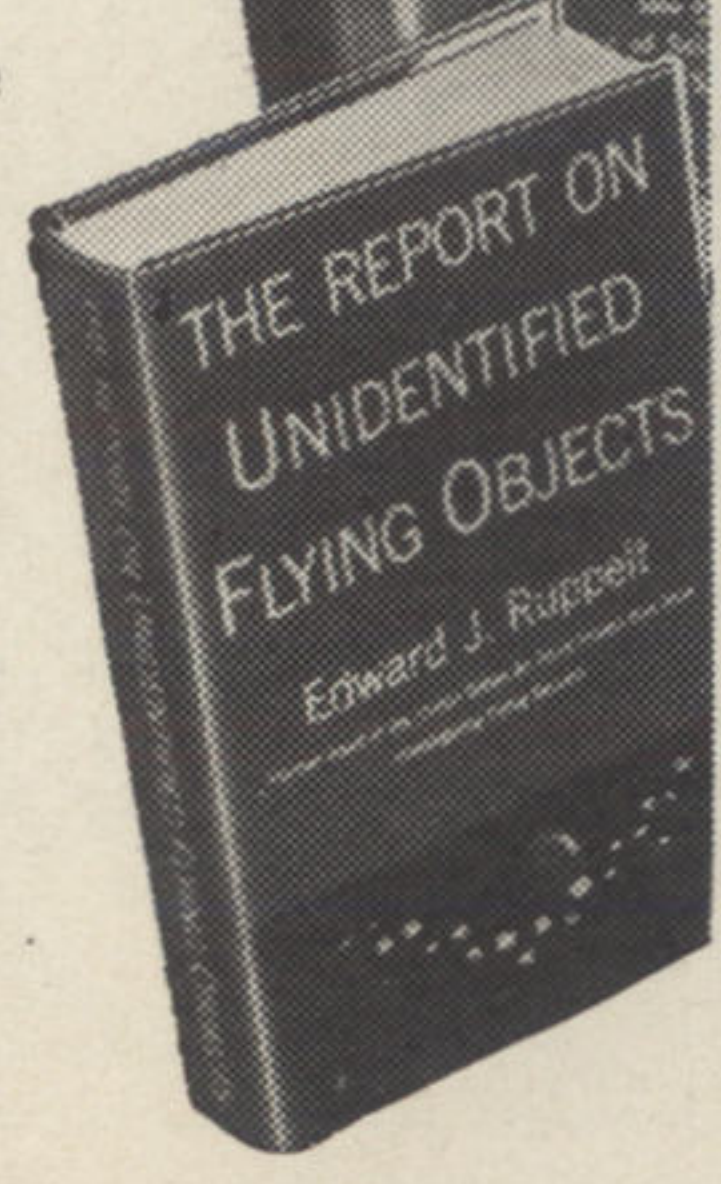
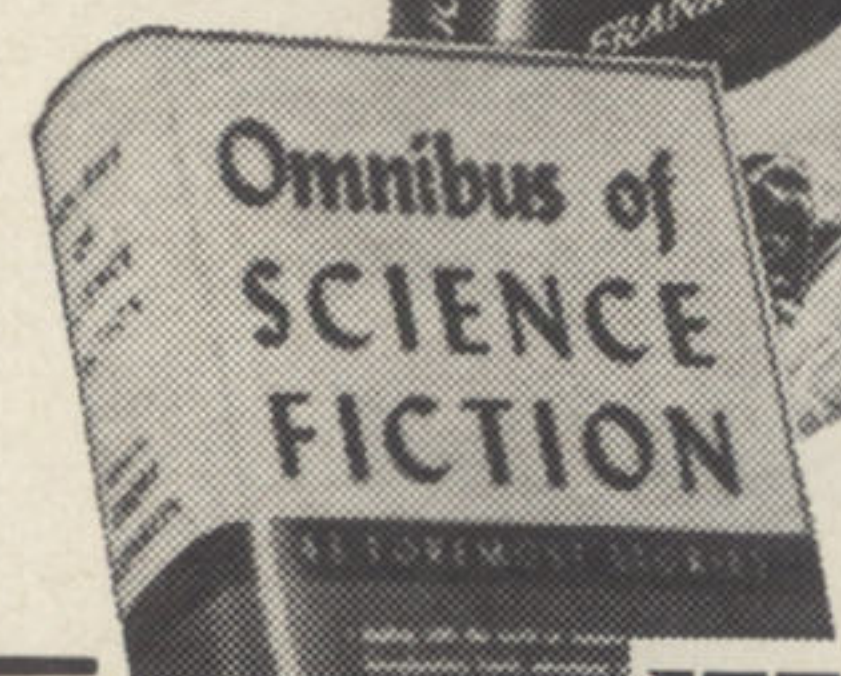
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Right now you're in the primitive "downwhen." You're here in the 20th Century on the most VITAL mission of your career. But you can't delay here, Harlan! *You've been ordered to board your Time Kettle and...*

Why are you hesitating, you FOOL? *Is it the girl? Is it the lovely Noys Lambent, with the seductive body of an evil goddess? Better get going! As an Eternal you belong to an inflexible priesthood which forbids romancing with a woman! YOU CAN'T HAVE HER. And, what's more... YOU'VE GOT TO KILL HER!*

Hurry, Harlan! That "blaster" you have leveled at her heart will erase Noys Lambent FOREVER! Maybe you DO love her... Maybe you DO want her. So what? It's too late for that! *You must kill her RIGHT NOW... OR CAUSE THE END OF ETERNITY!*

But perhaps... *perhaps she'd be worth it....*

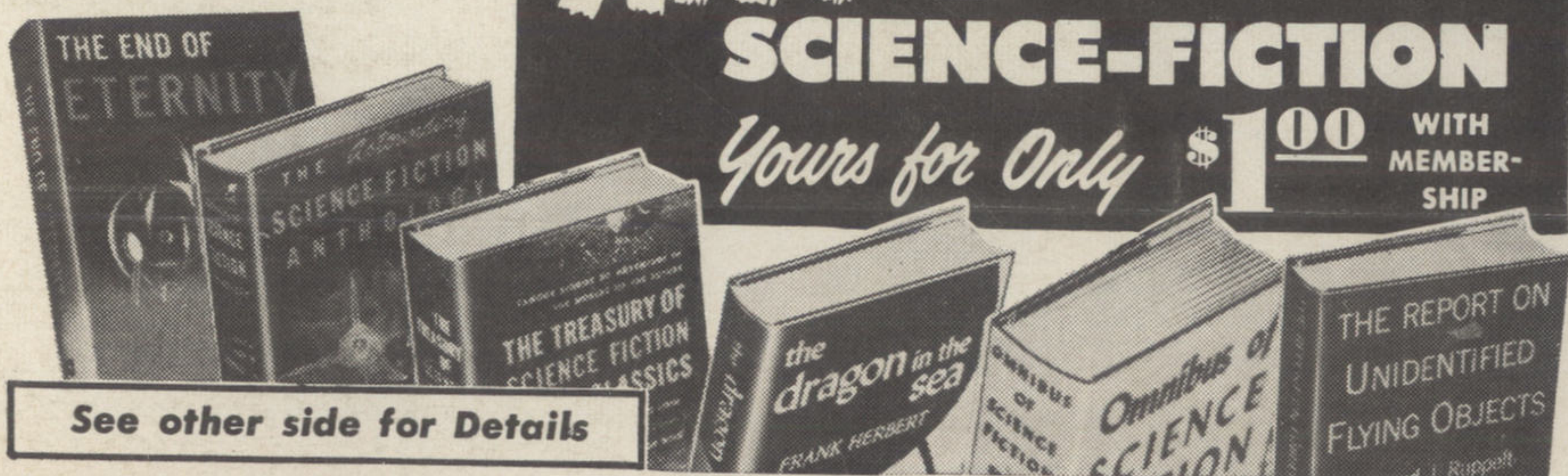
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