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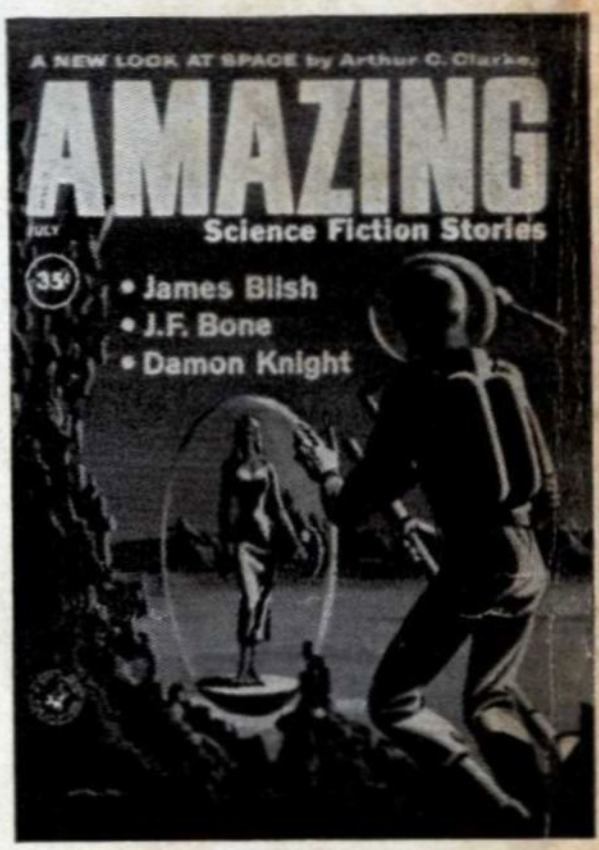

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Editorial

WE'RE rather proud of the literary relay race that features this issue. A "round-robin" story—in which different authors write different parts of the same plot—is not an original idea. It has been done before; but not for a long, long time. And not, we think, with the wizardry of our five writers.

In planning this event, we tried to choose five top s-f authors whose styles both of plotting and of writing are widely different. Then we commissioned artist Leo Summers to design a cover that had no seeming connection with anything. Then we tossed the cover to our writers and sounded the starting gun.

The result is more than an exciting and original story. It is a revelation into the way the minds of the writers tick. Poul Anderson, creating his bravura characters and situations; Isaac Asimov, grounding the conflict in a framework of theory-in-action; then Bob Sheckley ripping the fabric by going to the ends of the galaxy for complications; penultimately, Murray Leinster beginning the fusion of story strands with ideational adeptness; and finally Bob Bloch taking the wildly disheveled story and tying it up in a brilliant job of plot-resolution, down to the patly ironic last sentence.

This is more than a great story. It is a lesson-in-action in both the craft of science-fiction writing, and in the individual approaches to the field which make it the live and lively one it is.

We welcome your comments.—NL

Five famous science-fiction authors pool their talents in this "round-robin" novelette that stretches man almost to the breaking point on the rack of Time and Space. Here is a rare pyrotechnic display of sf writing skills and styles.

THE COVENANT

Part One

By Poul Anderson

By POUL ANDERSON
ISAAC ASIMOV
ROBERT SHECKLEY
MURRAY LEINSTER
ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATOR VARGA

TIME," she said.

Ban stirred, uneasy in this dim and rustling air. From outside, he would not have thought The Oracles wide enough to hold as many rooms as now appeared to stretch, doorway beyond arched doorway, further than he could see. Or was this a single great many-vaulted chamber? He didn't know. It was too dark to tell. Too many wings moved under the invisible ceiling. He wondered where the light came from, what little there was of it.

"I beg your pardon, prophetess?" His voice sounded strange in the bones of his head. "I don't quite understand."

"It is as well," said the one who sat across the black table. Her face was not veiled, and he should have been able to see what she looked like. But somehow he had only a blurred impression — eyes which caught more light than they should, so that they became blind luminous ellipses —perhaps, he guessed confusedly, more than somewhat afraid, it was because he could not stop watching her hands. They lay palms down on the table, relaxed, but with strength in every line. They had less taper than a woman's hands commonly do, but he

thought he had never seen any so beautiful.

"If you understood," she said, "you might not dare to act."

That touched his pride. He sat up straight, clenching his gun, and answered: "Prophetess, the Cloud People killed friends of mine. Also, I am the son of the Warden—I have duties—" He faltered beneath her gaze. Something scuttered across the dusky stone floor. Pompousness drained from him. Almost wryly, he finished, "If the Cloud People take the City itself, what Wardenship will there be for me to succeed to?"

Did she nod? "Yes," her low tones replied, "there will be nothing then but the Heaths . . . a few lonely huts where men huddle and mutter, forgetting they ever raised a City . . ." After a pause: "Time is the strength of the Cloud People, even as Space is the strength of man. What you must overcome is Time itself."

Ban sat in twilight, and the rustlings and whisperings seemed to go around and around his head, but he could only see the hands of the prophetess. He fumbled for comprehension: "A man may walk or ride or fly in Space—from here to there—but no man can swim Time's river. Unless you—What is an Oracle? One who has mastered Time, ever so little perhaps, but not altogether helpless before it?"

She made no answer. "Forgive me," he said. "I am surely wrong. I didn't mean you were merely human, prophetess."

"There was an age once, which may come again if the last men flee out onto the Heaths, when lightning destroyed where it would," she told him. "Now, a hundred times a year. the highest towers of the City are crowned with lightning, and unhurt. That is one force which men have come to understand a little; and so they are not its pawns. There are others. Once, it may be, there were many others. But the world is very old, and much has been forgotten."

Then the silence lengthened so unendurably that he got the courage, or the desperation, to remind her: "Prophetess, I came to ask on behalf of the City—of all mankind, maybe—how the Cloud People can be overcome. For none of our weapons has served. You have not replied to my question."

"Not yet," she said. "Not ever, in full. For there is no destiny. Time is not a single river, sweeping from the birth

of the stars to their last cinders. It is more akin to a huge many-branched delta."

She sighed. "Armies have been broken. So by now, Captain Ban, you should know the uselessness of armies. One man alone, though—"

Her words were like fingers closing on his heart. But he found the strength to say, "Myself."

"I can tell you nothing." The shakenness in her voice was the most unnerving thing of all. "I can promise you nothing. I can only say, go secretly and alone to the island. Remember that Time is the strength of the Cloud People, but Space is the strength of man, and remember that in the end Time and Space are the same. More than that, I cannot say. It is too dark."

The beautiful hands rose to cover the face he had never quite seen. "It has always been too dark," she screamed. "Go!"

Ban rose. He didn't even stop to make obeisance. He almost ran, stumbling over his feet and his gun. For a moment the room echoed with his noise, then he lost awareness of the echoes because his own heartbeat grew so loud.

When he emerged on the terrace—never quite sure how he had done so—it was like waking from nightmare. He spent a while simply leaning on the rail, breathing hard. Piece by piece, he began to recognize familiarity. He looked a thousand sheer feet down the black side of The Oracles to an incongruous park where clipped trees and formal flowerbeds made star patterns. Several other towers were visible, though even at this height the City stretched too wide to be encompassed in a glance. He saw the colonnaded tiers of Alpha, graceful against a deep blue late-afternoon sky; the startling red slimness of The Needle; the shifting polychrome which rescued the massive facade of Arsenal from monotony. The sun was low, striking long rays between those walls, flaming off windows and making parks, forests, gardens, crop fields glow an impossibly intense green. Here and there the light flashed off wings, bird or human. And far on the eastern edge of the world lay a blinding silvery gleam of sea.

It was quiet up here. A breeze ruffled Ban's sweat-dampened yellow hair. He shivered, drawing the tunic closer about his big young body. From somewhere, freakishly borne across a mile or

two, he heard faint merry strains of music. Hard to believe that anyone could dance to a ballad while the Cloud People laired on this same planet. But he had done it himself, a few days ago. (Only days? It felt like centuries, now.) Life persisted unto the final destruction, and life was not a single thread. It was war and defeat and misery, yes, but it was also eating and sleeping and lovemaking and playing games to pass idle hours and looking at the stars with wonder and disputing with your blacksmith neighbor whose shop got too noisy and—

Urmuz came from behind one of the weeping willows which, with stone seats and an intricately playing fountain, ornamented this terrace. He looked out of place here, his great frame squat and hairy in a black tunic, his face battered beneath a military helmet. "What did she say, sir?" he rumbled. "Any help at all?"

Ban blinked, stared around him, clasped his gun as if to draw strength from iron. He felt dimly surprised, through all the turmoil within him, that he should reply with coolness, "I don't know. I did get some advice. But who ever heard of an Oracle making a straight answer?"

Urmuz spat. "Old Mother Grotta, on the twelfth floor, she'll speak plain. I told you not to monkey around with these here upper-level seeresses. Let's go find Mother Grotta right now."

Ban actually chuckled. "I don't need homely common sense, Urmuz, or a fake love philtre—"

"Dammit, captain, her love philtres work! I know!"

"The situation has gone beyond that." Ban's smile vanished, though his lips remained tense. "I suppose it was always beyond that, though we realized too late what the coming of the Cloud People meant."

"What good are these upper-level prophetesses?" persisted Urmuz. "They're frauds, captain, that's what they are. Their words're so bloody vague that after things've happened, they can always claim that's what they meant. Me, I'll waste my money on blondes and booze."

"Be quiet!" Ban yelled. "What do you know about it, you mud-brained sub-level mechanic? Go back to school and learn about the prediction paradox, at least, before you start quacking—" He saw the ugly face stricken, and knew he was only venting his own fear. Urmuz had stood with

him in the last battle, when others fled and the Cloud People laughed unseen. Urmuz had guided his first baby footsteps, and taught him to handle a gun, and carried him home from youthful nights when they drank down stars and moon and sang the sun awake . . . "I'm sorry," said Ban. "Nerves."

"Nothing to be sorry about, captain," said Urmuz. "Part of my job, being cussed out. Well, so what did she tell us to do?"

Ban looked away. "I have to do it alone," he said. "Secretly."

Another emerged from the willows. She was as young as he, and her light white robe did not much hide fullness and suppleness. The loose hair streaming down her back was the color of a sunset after storm, and her eyes were great and gray in a sweetly shaped face. "Ban," she said, making his name beautiful to him. "Captain Ban—"

"Yes?" He turned with eagerness to watch her, thinking that he would probably not have many more hours to watch anything at all.

She stopped before him, flushing, and they stood a while in mutual awkwardness.

Finally she sighed. "May you reveal what the prophetess told you?" she asked.

Ban shook his head. "Best I don't."

"He has to go somewhere secret," blurted Urmuz. "Why don't you wait here, captain, and I'll get our kit and we can start right out?"

"At once?" breathed the girl.

"I think so," said Ban. "No way to tell when the Cloud People will attack next, but it will be soon—and that next attack will bring them to the edge of the City."

She looked seaward and shivered. "Mists out there," she said, "and cold, and thin singing. Is that how it will be?"

"If we don't stop them," he said. "Yes, I'd better leave at once."

Before I become so afraid I can't leave at all, he thought.

"I'll get our kit, sir," repeated Urmuz.

"You stay here," said Ban.

"Sir!"

All at once Ban had no strength left to argue. "Very well," he said. "Go fetch the stuff, then, and come back here."

"Yes, sir!" Urmuz snapped a salute.

"Don't tell anyone," said Ban. "Not even my father."

"No, sir. Of course not."

Urmuz touched the flight stud on his brass belt. The wings unfolded from the flat pack under his tunic, catching the light in a gauzy metallic shimmer. The noise of his takeoff resounded loudly among the willows.

When he was out of sight, Ban took the girl's hands. She tried to withdraw them. "Please," she whispered. "Don't. I am her attendant—"

"And someday you'll be her successor," he said bitterly, not letting go. "Oh, yes. But still, if the Covenant allowed me to come up here, again and again, and allowed you to sit by me and talk in the moonlight, surely I can touch you when I say good-bye!"

She gulped and stopped pulling. Her head drooped.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"I haven't any," she said in a hurt, uncertain tone. "You know that."

"You must have had one once, before your mother gave you to the prophetess. What was it?"

"Please," she begged again.

He released her. One hand smacked against his bare thigh, the other clamped on his gun. "All right," he said harshly. "As you will. Goodbye."

"You aren't—your man won't be back till—"

"I sent him off to get rid of him," said Ban. "Someone has to go, and alone . . . she told me. It may as well be myself."

"No!" she cried. "Someone else, Ban!"

"I am the Warden's son," he declared, "and you won't tell me your name. So good-bye."

He opened his wings with a savage blow on the belt control, and whipped off the terrace while her mouth was still parting to speak.

After a moment he realized how childishly melodramatic his exit had been. A mature man wouldn't have sped off like this—the very absence of farewells underlining his self-sacrificing heroism and similar egotistic noises. But it was too late now. Stubbornness, resentment, the fear of looking foolish, were stronger than survival instinct.

His wings rotated hard and steadily. He must squint into the speed of his own passage, and felt cold in a mere tunic. The brass belt contained, in its various compartments, basic field equipment and a few days' emergency rations. But he should have gotten full kit. A helmet, at the very least—

Well, he thought with sudden excitement, well, he wasn't really about to embark on

any one-man campaign of reconquest. The prophetess had only said to go secretly to the island. Doubtless that meant nothing but a spying-out expedition—closer, to be sure, than anyone had yet dared approach a stronghold of the Cloud People, but still, just a quick investigation. He might be back before dawn, and Urmuz would make him a stiff drink and— He shook his head, as if to clear the last of that oracular twilight from it, and tried to look sanely out on a sane world.

Once or twice he passed a hovering citizen, and they hailed him, but he continued and soon had left them all behind. No one ventured far out over the sea any longer.

Nonetheless, the realization broke through his thoughts with a shock: that he *was* now above the water. He looked behind, seeking a final view of home. The sun exploded in his vision. For minutes that burning after-image remained. When he could see again, there were no towers, no beach, only dark choppy waves.

He didn't need map or compass to tell him he was bound due east, cutting across the Gulf of Orea toward Mwyrland. He had flown this way often enough, in boyhood years before the Cloud People came. (Where now were the green Mwyrland hills, the cottage of Ilbur the Robot with smoke lazing up from its chimney, the girl who shyly brought him milk in a wooden bowl? He remembered the sound of bells, and the belling of hounds when he hunted, but now there was nothing there but fog, gray fog and the Cloud People flitting and singing in a cold formless gray—where had Mwyrland gone? Indeed Time was a mystery which men did not comprehend.) He had usually passed over the island which marked the halfway point. Even then it had been a swart volcanic desolation; now the mists had reached that far westward and the island could no longer be seen. Scouts flying close thought they had glimpsed black towers on it, through an occasional rift in the fog, but they were never sure—

There!

The vapor bank rose like a mountain. Ban swallowed panic and slanted downward. This was as close as those scouts who returned had ever ventured. A few had tried to fly into the swirling thick mass of the cloud itself, but they had not come home.

It was very silent here.

When he landed, retracting wings through his tunic slits into the unit on his back, Ban felt the water chilly around his knees. A few streamers of fog curled and smoked; the waves were stilled. The sun was directly behind him, already blurred. Ahead was no sharp demarcation. The air simply grew murkier, until at last blackness loomed from water to sky, cutting off half the world.

Ban hefted his gun and started wading.

That was the idea which had sprung into his head, when the prophetess said to go alone to the island. Anyone else would approach from the air—would he not?—and the Cloud People would see him (or hear him, or whatever they did for awareness) and destroy him. But the island shelved very gradually toward open water. There were places where, at low tide, you could walk knee deep for miles until you reached shore. In fog and night, would even the Cloud People know of a single man walking through the sea?

The water splashed with his passage. Its cold stung him. The air was frigid, too, with a dank taste. Despite all need for caution, he cherished his own little noise, for otherwise he was totally alone. Grayness thickened; the sun was a blur at his back, heatless and cheerless, toppling toward the night only minutes away now. Ban unclipped the flashlight at his belt and tested its beam. Already it helped him. Hard to tell without it where water left off and the bleak, eddying air began. Mist streamed through the cone of light. Somewhere out in the unseen, he thought he heard dripping, as if the bowl of the sky were chilled and wet and dripping into the sea.

The sea felt heavy. He was getting higher all the time, now the water was hardly above his ankles, but it was an effort to shove it aside. He began stumbling more and more often on the irregular bottom, nearly dropping his gun. Seen by flashbeam and the last daylight, the weapon looked rusty. And it weighed in his hand. How it weighed! The flashlight, of thin inert metal, remained itself; but the gun barrel grew dull. Was there really a faint patina on his brass belt?

And when had he torn his clothes? Ban squinted through deepening gloom at his tunic. It hung from his bent shoulders, damp and rotten. He jerked a hand in startlement. The sleeve ripped apart and hung in rags. His belt certain-

ly was tarnished, no, it was corroded, close to crumbling from his waist. The air was like ice; as it entered his lungs he coughed and cleared the rheum from his throat. His legs hurt, the knees weren't quite steady and he wanted to stop and rest but there was no place to rest. Was the sun down yet? Or had his eyes blurred on him? He rubbed them with the back of the hand that held the flashlight. He couldn't see so well. His legs were twin blotches. But his gaunt liver-spotted hand was still visible, if he held it close. He stroked it down his wet white beard—slowly, ever so slowly.

Time, he thought wearily, Time was the strength of . . . of who had she said? And with every step forward— His thoughts trailed off incoherently. He was too tired now to think, or be afraid, or anything except sleep. When he reached the black shore, maybe he could lie down and sleep. There had been something he meant to do there, but— He waded onward.

Part Two

By Isaac Asimov

THE land tottered under his feet, the last of the wavelets gone. Maybe— Maybe—

To sleep—sleep—

* * *

It was like the soft sound of chimes in his dull ear, the distant sound of thin singing. Where had he heard something like that?

A battle? A tall, rough man at his side? What was—his—name? Music—

Like thin sweet wind-torn words.

"There! He was almost gone!"

Ban heard that. His eyes

flickered open and suddenly he knew he was Ban. Of course What was wrong? Where was he?

He could breathe more easily somehow. He lifted his hands and the tawny, yellowing hair of his chin caught on them and he stared foolishly at it, uncomprehending.

"Help me hold him," said the girl's voice.

How did he know it was a girl? There were no words, only a singing in his mind, and yet there were words and they were girl's words.

A different voice—different in what way?—but a boy's, said, "He's not that timevy."

"Timevy enough for me. Get under."

Ban struggled to his feet and stared about him. No one was holding him. No one was lifting him. The fog stretched out, luminously gray, not quite as dank as he remembered.

The sun, he thought suddenly. The sun must be gone by now. Why was it not night? The fog was still gray, as gray as the Prophetess' blank eyes. He remembered the Prophetess? What had she said?

The girl's voice sang, "I never saw one before."

"I did," said the boy. "I came out once where the fog closes in and saw one on—on — like — change — like — different—come and go."

Fly, thought Ban, catching the dim thought intuitively. The boy had no proper expression for it. We fly, he thought, we fly. He whirled around and spoke for the first time since the fog had closed him in. "Who are you?"

There was nothing, at first, just the voices, and as he turned and tried to beat the fog aside by force of eyes alone, there was a short smothered chime without words.

Then, "Here we are, Changeman."

They were like two coagulations, two clottings in the cloud; two shrouds with nothing inside.

He felt a chill and the hairs rose on his arms, so that he could feel their pressure against the sleeve of his tunic.

Oddly, his mind jumped backward. Hadn't the tunic been torn, shreded? He remembered feebly for it was all as foggy as the fog. He shone the flashlight on his sleeve and it was whole, thinned and worn with age, but whole.

Suddenly, he flashed the light in the direction of the Cloud People and there was nothing there. Musical wordless chimes in his ears was all.

He moved the light away and the shrouds were there again.

He said, "What has happened to me?"

The boy's voice said briefly, "You fell." Then, "You Change People always fall, don't you know that."

"Fell?" He looked down, shrinking automatically from an unseen and non-existent cliff.

"*Fell,*" said the girl. "You are so silly."

"They don't know," said the boy.

"Tell him," said the girl.

"I don't think we ought to."

"Who cares? I want to watch his top move when he talks. Do you see it in among the fringe, there."

"The fringe came when he fell. It always does."

Ban stared, feeling worn with the accumulating strain. They were discussing him and by fringe they must mean his beard.

It hit him with the shock of cold water colliding after a dive. His *beard*. He had no beard. He felt it and it was there and was yellow but it had been white.

He said, "Even so, I've grown old." He felt the brittleness in his knees, so noticeable against the lithe strength he remembered.

"You fell," said the boy, explaining.

I fell, thought Ban, and I grew old. He said, certain, "I fell through time. How?"

"I don't know. You Change People always fall. You can't lift up."

Again Ban was remembering: Time is the strength of the Cloud People.

She had said that. The Prophetess had said that. Hadn't she said more?

But he wasn't as old now as he had been. His beard was no longer white. His uniform was no longer in shreds. *They* had held him, the boy and the girl. They had gotten under.

"Are you holding me now?" he demanded.

"Of course," said the boy, "or you'd fall."

"Lift me higher, then."

"Why?"

"So I can talk."

It was like feeling air come into clogged lungs, or slowly straightening a cramped muscle. The beard shrank to a yellow inch and his gun was almost glossy. He looked at it and at his jagged fingernails, then pointed the gun in the direction of the figures, automatically.

The girl's voice said, "What's that, ——— ——— ———?"

(She concluded with a clear

musical triad which did not resolve itself into words. Was it the boy's name?)

The boy said, "It throws a piece of metal. It can't hurt, but if he tries I'll drop him at once."

Ban put the gun down hastily. He had to find out. He might get back. The Prophetess had sent him to find out. And if he didn't get back, even so— He might not get back— He would not—

Drearily, he thought that after all he might not die in some flaming instantaneous holocaust or under the crush or cut of steel, but peacefully of sleep and old, old age.

He was young enough now to laugh shortly. He said, "Why do I fall here? I don't fall back there." He jerked his head, not knowing in the least if he were gesturing in the right direction.

The girl said, eagerly, "The fog holds you up."

"No, it doesn't," said the boy at once. "Keep quiet, ——— ——— ———, you know nothing about it."

The girl made a spiteful little discord, a sound that resolved itself into nothing in Ban's mind.

The boy disregarded it. He said, "You do fall. Slowly."

Ban said, "Fall?"

"In your world," said the boy, "everything is a gentle slope, isn't it?"

"No," said Ban.

"Yes, it is," said the boy. "Our Knower has told us. Your world is a slope and you roll down it all the time. Down and down until you wear out and die."

Time, thought Ban, the inexorable flow of time. What had he said to the Prophetess? No man can swim Time's river. Or climb up Time's slope. One could only roll downward, or slide and slip downward, or, if one were at complete peace, walk downward.

"Time," he said aloud, as the Prophetess had said to introduce their recent meeting.

"And here," said the boy's chiming voice, "there is no slope. Here it is free and we can move as we wish, up and down—"

No, he didn't say "up and down." Ban caught at the nuances of the chimes. This was different. His mind seized on "up and down" because the musical tones put the thought in his mind, but the thought was not quite "up and down." The words were different; the meaning—

"Up and down in time," said Ban, breathlessly.

"Up and down," said the

boy, with again that difference.

"And I fall down, only down."

"It's the only way you Change People ever move. So if you come here, you fall."

Because here there is no slope, only a precipice; a plunging gap into which all life and matter fell, changing and aging and falling apart and dying. Rock might survive unchanged and water and air and all the fundamental fabric of the universe, but metal would rust and fabric disintegrate and—all living things would die.

Ban's heart beat faster. No wonder men penetrating the fog never returned. No wonder armies and arms were useless. How hit a creature or how beat one who could evade you by moving in a direction you could not even conceive.

He could go back now and tell them there was no victory.

But could he go back?

They were holding him now, the boy and the girl, and under him was the black remorseless pit of eternity.

He said, "How do you move upward?"

"You just —— ——— —— — ———."

They went on and on but the chimes were chimes, not words. He lacked the ability to make meaningful concepts out of meaningless ones. As well, he thought bitterly, ask a fish how to breathe water or a tree how to live on sunlight.

"Teach me," he said earnestly, desperately. "Teach me."

Teach me to breathe water, fish, for I must or drown. Teach me to live on sunlight, tree, or I starve.

"I'm showing you. See, you are moving. See, up and down."

Ban held his breath, closed his eyes. Was there any sensation at all other than what he felt in the way of strength. Now he felt his muscles harden, then slacken. There was no movement, no feeling of up and down. He was simply standing on the beach; he could even hear the faint noise of the surf. There was only the change within, the physiological concomitants of old age coming and going. That was all.

He said, "Isn't there any way I can see better?" What good would seeing do?— He didn't care, seeing was man's chief sense. While the fog closed in, nothing could be clear.

"See?" asked the girl.

"See!" said the boy, changing the word too subtly for

Ban to catch the nature of the change.

"You mean he's so used to the fog that—" began the girl.

"I want no fog," said Ban, with a sense of physical loathing at the very word. "I want it clear."

"But it *is* clear. *Your* people have the fog."

Ban fell silent. Here was a world in which all levels of time were commingled, in which people could move up and down—NO, he wondered if the words they were trying to say were "pasted" and "futured"—in such a world with up and down and past and future all commingled, surely all would be a fog to a man condemned to an eternal soft travel down a slope.

He pleaded, "Hold me. Hold me."

He had to work it out in case—in case he could get back. And on earth, with Time a mere slope that bound all creatures and all matter to a limited inexorable downward wash, it was fog to them, to the Cloud People.

Earth was a world in a universe of open space and bound time. Space is the strength of man, had said the Prophetess.

Had *she* known all this? he wondered suddenly. Had she understood? Then why had she not said so?

And did she know how to fight them, the Cloud People, as the Cloud People were fighting us?

His youngish heart leaped. But it was hard for them, too. It was for that reason that they, irresistable as they were, unfightable, undefeatable, didn't take over at once. The time-limited universe fought them and they advanced only slowly.

If men could only help the universe. If he could get back—

He said, "Teach me to fly in —in time."

The girl's voice said, "He means —— ——— —— ———."

The boy interrupted. "I know what he means, but how can I show him?"

"Show me," insisted Ban, desperately. "Show me."

"I *am* showing you. I'm up'n'downing you." (And behind the words, Ban could now hear a dim and simultaneous "past'n'futuring you.")

The girl said suddenly, "Lift him all the way up—Let's see what happens."

"No," screamed Ban.

He felt the lifting as though something, not air, not matter, but something, pressed against him with the speed of his passage. His cheeks were

downy with unreaped fuzz and his legs were spindly. The pants came down over his shoes and then he seemed to shrink together.

He remembered his wings. He reached for the flight stud but it was gone and the wings themselves had fallen off his back a dull lump of reddish rock.

"No," he screamed in treble, and started to run across a fog-shrouded beach on short legs that entangled themselves in strands of raw wool that was turning to fleece. He fell and kicked chubbily, drooling and conscious of nothing more than a vague hunger. His lips moved in response, sucking—

Then his legs stretched out, and he rose tottering, unsteadily, to his feet. He was thin, about a foot less in height than he dimly realized he ought to be.

A voice said, and he recognized it all over again, as a girl's. "He changed. Did you see that? He changed."

"Of course." It was a boy's voice. "He's one of the Change People. What do you exepect. —He isn't as timevy as he was."

Timevy, thought Ban's boy-mind. Time-heavy.

He remembered. And he didn't remember, too. He remembered the past and his own future when he would grow up; no, when he had grown up. It was madly confusing. He was twelve years old. Just a moment ago, he had been on Mwyrland and Ilbur the Robot had told him stories out of his long, long memory of a time when men crowded the earth and built cities on power unthinkable—dim myths and legends coming out of the crowded mechanical consciousness of a deathless robot—

And then he had been twenty-two and then ninety-three and then fifty-one and then twenty-nine and then a half and then twelve again, in inextricable confusion.

Yet how could he understand it better now? It made more sense.

Even the fog—The fog!

It was still there, but thinner. He could make out a glimpse of flatness, of gleaming smooth evenness and of infinite gap and sparkle and, in the distance, moving patches of shininess. The Cloud People?

He turned to bend his glance at the two who were with him. They were shrouds still, but sparkling shrouds now.

The boy said, "He's - now. When we lifted him up high, he got ———."

Ban almost caught that. The young were intimate with time. Time stands still for them and flows oddly, commingled and intermingled. It is only in maturity that the convention clamps down.

He had felt the movement through time just there at the end. He had felt something rushing past them.

"Teach me," he said, "teach me now how to move through time."

"Put out ——— ——— ——— ———," said the boy's chiming voice.

Ban tried. He *tried*. He tried to let his mind intuit if it could not understand. Almost he thought he had it. He put out something—something—

"No," said the boy. "Like this."

Ban felt something wrenching at him and something of him had moved. Nothing anywhere on his body. Something deep in his mind. It had moved and even fluttered.

"Now," said the boy. "I'll let you dow-ture-n easy."

Ban felt himself swelling and filling out, lift up and grow broad across his shoulder. The uniform was on him, fitting snugly, and the comfortable weight of furled wings was on his back.

The boy said, "No. You don't get the right ———. It's out, but you don't use it."

And a new voice interrupted. A deeper voice of chords that were incredibly beautiful. A mature voice, a subtle one.

"Younglings. It is long past time you were home. And you have been asked not to stray so near the fog banks."

The boy's chimes, thin and subdued, said, "Yes, Knower."

But the girl said, "We have one of the Change People."

"I know that, youngling. And you have been amusing yourself with him, which is not kind. And I see you have been trying to teach him to ——— also."

"It was wrong," said the boy, humble.

"Have you decided it was wrong?" said the Knower, without anger or reproof, merely questioning.

Ban cried, "Knower. Wait." But when he cried "Knower" he felt the thought shoot across the gap between himself and the Cloud People in a different form.

"You wish something?" There was a third shroud next to the two he had seen earlier, and it did not glitter. Even in the thinned fog, it did not glitter.

Ban had to bring his new knowledge to the City. He said,

"Send me back, Knower. Let me return."

"Ought I?" The Knower said nothing more than that to him. The next words were addressed to the boy. "You are holding him."

"He's not very timevy," said the boy.

"I understand that. Let him go."

"But I'll fall," cried out Ban. "I'll die. Don't let go."

The third shroud clarified itself. A face, something very like a blank, formless face, came mistily into view. Something like blind, luminous ellipses formed themselves to gaze with infinite compassion down upon him.

"Let him go," said the Knower, and Ban knew that the boy must.

And he also knew the thought into which his word "Knower" had transmuted itself. He cried out, stranglingly, "Prophetess—Prophetess—Are *you* one of them?"

And the boy let go and, in his despair, Ban let himself fall, uncaring. The beach was under him, steady, motionless, but he fell and his aching muscles slackened.

And when the desire for life overwhelmed him, as it must to the end and he struck at his flight-stud to unfurl wings and race old age to the City, the rusted remnant came off in his trembling fingers and his cheeks fell in over disappearing teeth.

He struggled with fading fierceness against the end.

"Prophetess—" he wailed.

Part Three

By Robert Sheckley

DESPERATELY he fought time. Wisps of fog curled around him like pale headless snakes, and the sand far beneath his feet shifted and crept like an army of malignant ants. Ban winged through the fog bank, etern-

ally falling, and saw his rifle barrel corrode and crumble to fine dust before his eyes. He flew, and a part of him watched with fascinated horror as ropelike blue veins corrugated his emaciated arms, and his head, unsupported by the wasted muscles of his neck, drooped on his chest.

"No man wins a race against time."

Who had spoken? Was it the Knower? Or had the prophetess shrieked into his ear. Whoever spoke the words, Ban knew they were true. Even before reaching the far edge of the fog bank, Ban knew himself as old, too old. He could feel the sluggish blood pounding in his brittle veins, could sense the threadlike beat of his heart threatening momentarily to stop.

He knew then that he would never live to reach his city. Even now he was dying, dying . . .

Uselessly.

With an old man's petulant anger he turned back. What had the Cloud People taught him? Could he remember it now, when memory had grown dim? Could he check his fall through the unplumbed depths of time?

Ban fought his way upward, swimming like a tired fish against the rushing river of time. He remembered concepts without words, he sensed his heaviness in time. A new direction seemed to open for him. He struggled toward it singlemindedly, and someone was singing a song without words. He fought for knowledge. Truly were his people called the Change People! For now Ban discarded everything he had learned, believed or felt before entering the fog banks that marked the furthest ramparts of time.

He attempted to lift himself in time.

In part, he succeeded.

He could feel the bone-wrenching jar as his body struck the sand. The blow would have shattered an old man's frame; but Ban was old no more.

Neither was he young.

He lay helpless on the sand, and realized that his stupendous effort had been based upon an incomplete knowledge of time's processes. He had held back death; but his present state was perhaps worse.

Stretched out on the sand was the heroic trunk and head of a middle-aged, yellow-bearded man. Beside him was his gun, the barrel deeply pitted, the wooden stock turned green and beginning to sprout. The hand that held the gun

was a talon with brown-spotted parchment skin stretched tightly over frail bones. The other hand belonged by rights to a chubby boy of perhaps twelve. His legs could be judged at about four years old; but there from those small, fat legs hung a man's colossal feet.

Ban had learned the use of time—partially.

"Listen to me, Ban. Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," Ban said, and realized that the Knower had spoken to him.

"You must become again what you were, Ban. You must fight again with time. You must ——— yourself."

"Impossible!"

"You must do it," Knower said. "For your own sake, and for the sake of all others. Because now we are all in deadly peril."

"I do not understand," Ban said.

"You still comprehend yourself only spatially. You must think temporally, as well. You must realize that you have stretched yourself to an immeasurable distance across time. How can I explain to you? Ban, your temporal elongation has created a flaw, a fault, a discontinuity in time. Now you are a ———."

"I still do not understand."

"Do you know what a fuse is?" Knower asked.

"Yes."

"You are a fuse. You are a connection. You are a conductor. A sea-wall holds back the ocean; you are a hole in the wall. A single tree on a barren plain attracts the lightning; you are a tree. Two elements may be stable until a link has been made between them; you are a link. Now do you understand why you must become as you were?"

"For whose good?" Ban asked.

"For the good of your people and mine," Knower said. "Ban, our people are not truly at war. Instead, we are both warred against. We push you because we ourselves are pushed, by the chaos that seeks to engulf the ordered universe. We must quarrel no longer. We must cooperate, your people and mine."

"How can I believe you?" Ban asked. And after a moment, he heard a cool, lucid voice behind him.

"What he tells you is true," the voice said, and Ban recognized it as that of the prophetess. "I myself tell you, Ban, you must become as you were. That is the first step."

Ban listened in an agony of indecision. Here in the thin mists, a man could be led to

believe anything! Was this the prophetess speaking to him, or had the Knower adopted new form? What was happening, what was time going to do?

He decided. He fought to become as he had been. The heroic middle-aged trunk and head grew years younger; the parchment right hand started to fade, to take on size and strength. He fought to retain it, and suddenly his boy's legs grew three years younger. Desperately he aged his legs, and felt his arms grow thin and old. He made them young again, and felt his feet shrink hideously in his boots.

"It's impossible!" Ban screamed. "I can't do it all at the same time!"

"You must!" the prophetess told him.

"I need help!"

"No one can help you. Only you can do it. And Ban—there is very little duration left to do it in!"

Now Ban could hear a vast roaring in his ears. The sand beneath him seemed to mutter and shrink. He heard the Time children wail suddenly.

"Quick, Ban, quick!"

Staring wildly, Ban saw a strange entity before him, a creature of blind, luminous ellipses, beautiful, unhuman hands, a sparkling shroud. It was Knower. It was the prophetess. For a moment, Ban thought that they were standing side by side. Then he realized that he was staring at a single hermaphroditic entity, neither male nor female nor neuter, combining essences of all. Surely not human, yet perhaps benevolent. And Ban could not fathom the purpose of this Janus-natured creature, though he knew that purpose had to be there.

"Ban! For your own sake and for the sake of your people! *Become what you were!*"

Ban stared at the entity. Barren knowledge flooded his mind. Suddenly he understood the important yet ambiguous nature of the Time children, and what they would do to him, and he to them. Almost, he could understand the nature of the Knower-Prophetess.

"Ban!"

He blocked all thought from his mind. He made a massive effort, pitting all his strength and concentration against the baffling task before him. His hands became a man's, and his feet grew large again, his legs stretched. He ground his teeth together, concentrated . . .

Space and time recognize no differences, no difficulties, no

separations. Near and far, past and present, are terms for men to use; but the forces of space and time are not contained in terms.

So, in another part of the galaxy, at another time and place, an event was taking place whose meaning was crucial to Ban and also to his people.

On a planet named by its inhabitants Hiallo, a small red crustacean dropped to the sandy ocean floor. Far from his burrow, he moodily contemplated the mysterious ways of love. He considered the reasons for his rejection by the brood-queen. He thought of his position in life, the honors he had attained, the chances he had missed. He wondered about the ocean of air far above him, distant, hidden.

He finished thinking. With one powerful claw he pinched off his head, thus committing the eight thousandth suicide for that year upon Hiallo.

His act was in no way remarkable. Rejection by the brood-queen was normally followed by suicide upon Hiallo. And yet, this one particular act was crucial to Ban and his people.

In another part of the galaxy, at another time and place, an event was taking place whose meaning was crucial to Ban and his people.

A biped named Marcellus, of a planet called Terra, sat beneath a huge oak tree. The sun was hidden, and the gloomy forest somewhere in Germania was chilly, so Marcellus pulled his woolen cloak tightly around him. He looked around and tried to figure out where he was. Everything looked the same in these damned woods; one tree looked like another tree, and all the avenues of the forest led in different and unknown directions.

Marcellus and ten others, under the command of a centurion, had marched out from the forward command post at Legae to check on the movements of the barbarians. They had penetrated half a day's march into the forest, had been about to turn back when the tall, pale-skinned man had fallen upon them. It had been a slaughter. At the end, Marcellus had fled; and now he was lost.

He was an unimportant man; and yet, it was very important that he get back. For he, a common foot soldier, had glimpsed a sight in the forest that might change the destiny of Rome itself.

Marcellus got to his feet, stifling a curse when he put

weight on his slashed leg. He looked around at the identical corridors of the forest. From what direction had he come? He didn't know; but it was unlike a Roman to stay indecisive for long. Marcellus chose a direction and struck out, limping.

After half an hour's march, he stopped. There were faint sounds on either side of him, sounds that no bird or beast would make. Marcellus peered around him into the gloomy woods. It was almost night. He was very hungry, thirsty, and weaponless.

The whispering sounds came closer. Marcellus listened for a moment, then broke off a branch of a tree. Quickly he stripped it of twigs. A Roman soldier would die fighting, no matter what he had to fight against.

His only regret, as the whispering drew nearer, was that he would probably not live to tell the others of the strange and marvellous thing he had glimpsed in the woods of deep Germania.

Death in battle was a common fate for soldiers of the Roman Empire, and Marcellus himself was in no way a remarkable man. And yet, what he had seen in the dark German forest was crucial to Ban and his people.

In another part of the galaxy, at another time and place, an event was taking place whose meaning was crucial to Ban and his people.

On a planet whose discoverers called it 3Bcc, two explorers were having an argument. They were at present four-legged and two-handed. For the purposes of the argument, each had extruded a triple tongue. Enormously simplified, their argument went like this:

"It was your fault!"

"Yours!"

"You took the gravity readings wrong. You left out an entire decimal point. You gave me this misinformation, and in that way our ship was wrecked."

"I will admit that the dials did not read correctly. But *you* were landing the ship. You should have felt the gravity fault and corrected for it in spite of the readings."

"You shouldn't have trusted the dial. You should have *become* a dial."

"I was sleepy. Besides, if I had become a dial, who would have been on standby?"

The two explorers stared at each other. At last, good humor reasserted itself. They flowed into friendlier shapes and contemplated the planet upon which they had crashed.

"It is a good land."

"A very good land."

"We will stay here, we will propagate, we will increase."

"And lose capability for our journey?"

"It is intended for journeys to have an end. And when the end is reached, the capabilities for journeying are no longer needed."

"That is true. This is a good land, and you have made a good answer. We will not be as we are . . . Still . . . Tell me, which of us will bear the children?"

"You will. After all, I piloted the ship."

"No, *you* will. For through me we came to this place, and the next task is yours."

The two explorers thought for a time. Then one said, "So important a decision cannot be argued. We must let another decide."

"That could de dangerous!"

"Not to us."

So they constructed a hermaphroditic machine to select fairly and randomly who would be the mother and who the father. And when that was done they turned with a good will to the land, and let the machine do as it desired, and where and when it desired.

The machine lived. With hideous self-awareness it knew itself and its destiny. Not even desire was spared the machine; not even a strange and absurd destiny connected inextricably with the act of a red crustacean creature, with the courage of a Roman soldier, and with the final decision of two explorers.

"The machine is dangerous," the female explorer said.

"Not to us," said the male explorer.

"Then to our children, or to their children."

"Would you have me destroy the machine?"

"No. Limit it, confine it, *dedicate* it!"

"Very well," the male explorer said.

The machine, which no longer directly perceived itself as a machine, accepted the limit and the dedication with good grace. It could not blame the explorers, for the machine recognized its own danger inherent in its qualities of randomness. The built-in limit almost took care of that; but made much more difficult the task to which it had been dedicated. Perhaps now the task would be impossible; but the explorers didn't care.

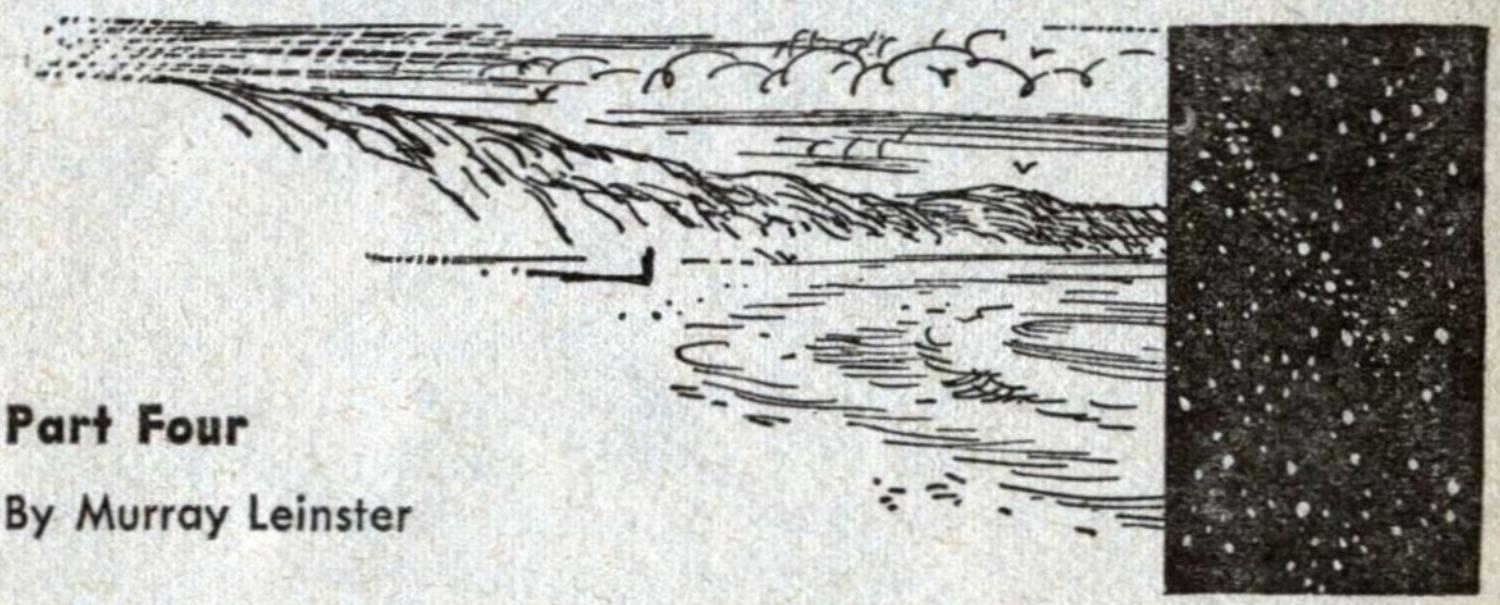
"Where is the machine?" the female explorer asked after a while.

"It has left us," the male explorer answered. "It has gone in order to do its work."

"And it didn't even say goodbye," the female explorer said thoughtfully. "I wonder if that means anything . . ." But then she had to take care of her two children, and there was no more time to think of the machine.

And Ban, lying in the coiled sea-mists, was dimly aware of all this. A red crustacean, a Roman soldier, a hermaphroditic machine . . . He fought to become as he had been, struggled, cursed. Slowly, inexorably, he began to succeed. He was becoming Ban again . . .

And then he heard the despairing wail of Knower, the simultaneous shriek of the Prophetess. It was too late. The lightning had struck, the sea-wall had collapsed, the last fraction of the fuse had flared. Just before unconsciousness struck him, Ban could feel the forces of chaos engulfing him much as storm clouds engulf the sky.



Part Four

By Murray Leinster

HE DID not exactly return to consciousness. Later, it seemed to him that he had not really become unconscious, but that the things he saw and heard and felt were so completely preposterous that his mind rejected them. Because it appeared that chaos had engulfed the universe and that time and space and reality had ceased to be. On the whole, that was a reasonable assumption.

Neverthless he saw. He felt. He even heard. The hearing was a thin singing which did not form words at all, but muted wailings. The feeling was that the cosmos had turned askew, and the horizon had tilted so that what should have been the east was up, and what should have been the west was down—and he tended to fall toward it—and the beach was merely before him and the sky behind.

The seeing was unexpressable distortion of the beach. He saw it, but in a manner he could never have explained to anyone. An artist's portrait of the beach and the waves would be something like it. But it would have to be a portrait, which differs from a photograph because a photograph is a picture of an instant and the sitter happens to be in it. But a portrait is of a person, and the moment is only a convention.

So Ban saw the beach, not as of this minute and second, but as a portrait shows a person. Somehow he saw it, all at once, shrouded in the fog that had come upon it since he was a boy, and also he saw it in bright sunshine. It was merely a pretense that he saw it between two breaths—at a given moment—because he could look inland and see smoke coming from the chimney of Ilbur the Robot, and he could see the beach empty as it was before there were either Cloud People or men. And he could see it as it would be aeons from now—.

No. What he could see changed, even as he looked. He saw it, after a fashion, as a man in flight, and thousands of feet high, would see a winding highway in all its turnings in the same seeing. A man on foot on the same highway would see only a few hundred yards before him, and only remember what was behind. Ban saw the beach in such a strange perspective. He saw the beach from that dimension which is time. But it changed. There was an ending, which drew nearer. It was not unlike a highway seen from far above, with a cloud-mass moving to blot it out. Ban saw an ending of the beach, in time. There was a thing which was like a wall in the direction he knew to be the future. Nothing existed beyond that wall. The beach came to an end. There was no time beyond the wall. It was the end of everything,—the solid world of men and the cloudy mist of the Cloud People alike. And the Cloud People wailed.

Ban could not actually see the wall because it was nothingness. Only nothingness could bring an end to time. And nothingness cannot be seen. Yet Ban knew it because it did not reflect the light that fell upon it, not yet absorb it. Nothingness cannot do either. It cannot do anything. If it could act it would not be nothingness, but something. Yet Ban knew that yonder real things ceased to be. Beyond that spot in time there was no time. There was a moment be-

yond which there was no next second. And this was what had made the Knower and the Prophetess cry out in horror, because Ban had brought it about.

Back in the city of the tall towers and living people, folk were apprehensive, but they feared the Cloud People. They did not fear this. But here with the east overhead and the west underfoot Ban knew that the Cloud People wailed because they could perceive what men could not, save Ban.

But how could he know? What had happened to him? The Knower had said bewildering things, each one specific but all of them confusion. The Knower said that Ban had stretched himself across an immeasurable distance of time. He had made a short-circuit, a discontinuity, perhaps a hole or a puncture in time, rather, a gap in time and space together. While the different parts of his body were child and man and doddering ancient all at once, he had created a weakness in the fabric of the universe. And somewhere, somewhen, reality began to collapse. These things were the only possible explanation, but Ban found himself objecting. A thing cannot collapse unless by so doing it releases energy. A thing is not destroyed unless its destruction releases some tension. Yet it was old, old knowledge that the universe of suns and stars and matter—and of Cloud People and men—exists only because it is held in existence. It did not create itself, and it does not sustain itself. And in some strange fashion Ban's blind fumbling had broken one small spot in the fabric of being. It could be likened to a puncture. And it spread.

But why could he see through time as the Cloud People did? And why was the east now overhead and the beach before him and the west beneath his feet? He noticed, suddenly, the tugging which pulled at him. He tended to fall. Downward. Toward the west. He fought the fall automatically, struggling to sum up this experience to know what to do. But he did not incline to fall toward the beach, any more than a man beside the Needle or Alpha or the Arsenal would be drawn toward those vast structures. Down, to Ban, was westward.

Why? There had to be an explanation.

He struggled to grasp his situation to do battle with it. In his absorption he unconsciously lessened his conflict with the westward pull. He re-

minded himself of a bird that had flown against a window in one of the City's towers. All windows and all outer doors were screened by force-fields like bubble-films, which allowed air to pass in or out gently, but resisted any fast-moving solid object or any strong wind. Sometimes a bird in full flight struck such a screen. Then the screen which was meant to act gently became violent. The bird was flung away, spinning and reeling and toppling helplessly. Sometimes the circuit-breaker clicked off and the bubble-field ceased to be unless someone restored the circuit. Yet one could reach a hand gently through the field, and the field ceased until the hand was removed. A man could walk through. But a running man would be flung back with violence.

That was it! Normally a man travelled slowly through the bubble-films which were instants of time. They let him pass slowly and gently through to the future, and age, and death. The boy and girl of the Cloud People had transported Ban through innumerable such films. Where the mists of the Cloud People hung, there was less impediment to time-movement than where clean sunshine shone upon the City. But when Ban became partly capable of time-motion, yet erratically; when Ban's legs were in one time-film and his body in another; when his body violated the laws of time and space, he shorted out the time-films as a hand through the bubble-screen destroys the screen until the hand is removed.

In effect, his body thus impossibly stretched through time acted as a man's body across an open screened doorway. It would destroy the screen; so that tornado-winds might roar through with nothing to stop them. And those tornado-winds would beat with terrific violence upon the man. He might be flung crazily away, like a bird trying to fly through a window.

This would explain everything. Partly instructed and partly capable of motion through time like the Cloud People, Ban had destroyed the time-films of unguessable centuries. And this caused the terror of the Knower and the Prophetess. Some part of him, some trivial part perhaps, remained remote from its proper place in time. There was a connection between it and now. There could be no time-films between while that connection lasted. So there could be no time. And through that gap

came nothingness, to spread as a break in a soap-bubble spreads . . .

And Ban was beaten upon by the forces of the cosmos, trying to hold to what held it in being, like a force-bubble with a man lying across a door while a tornado raged. He was flung crazily about like a bird which has tried to pierce a window's bubble-field. He moved in no normal direction; he had no secure link either to space or time, and therefore the east was up and the west was down—but where was the past and future?—and the sky was behind him and the beach before. At least that was so.

But the beach was not before him! There was water, rippling like a vertical wall. There was stone. He looked ahead and saw down upon the rocky pinnacles of that small island halfway between Mwyrland and the City. There was no mist upon it now. He had forgotten to resist the pull upon him, and he fell, but not toward ancientness and death, nor toward the ground or sea, nor even skyward.

He fell toward the west. He gazed downward and saw that his motion was a retracing of the path he had flown, from the Oracles to Mwyrland. He fell headlong.

And then he noticed his body. It had changed again. He was a gangling boy of fifteen. He cried out angrily, and his voice broke. It was partly treble and partly the discordant croak of early adolescence, and then Ban realized what the tugging at him was, and what was its consequence. He was not only in a new relationship to the things of space, but of time. He no longer had an inherent tendency to fall toward the future and increasing age. Now he fell toward infancy. And the direction of infancy was the west.

He checked his fall by a terrific exercise of will, to look at his hands. They were not thin as a youth's hands are. They tended toward chubbiness like the hands of a child. The first phalange of each finger was rounded. His finger-joints were smooth.

It was exhausting to hold himself still, and not to fall toward the west. The pull was not as strong as it had been at first. He was a boy now, and the Cloud People children had said of him as a child that he was not as timevy—as time-heavy—as an old man. But as a boy he had not the strength of manhood. Yet now it was a man's mind that demanded the impossible of a child's body.

And that man's mind despaired, while still he fought the pull of time toward infancy, which lay to the west. He needed help. He needed knowledge. He raised his face toward the beach and cried out shrilly for the Cloud People to come and help him, however great their desperation.

Again there was a change. He still saw the beach as from time, but the distance through which he could look futureward had dwindled. The wall-which - was - not - a - wall was nearer. The end of existing things was closer. As a standing forest grows small while a forest fire rages across it, time-to-come grew less as nothingness swallowed it. Yet nothingness cannot swallow anything. The beach and the sky and the sea were not devoured, but bit by bit they ceased to act; to reflect light or absorb it, to pull together or push apart, to move or to resist motion.

They ceased to be real. They became one with all those things which are merely possible and are not actual. There remained, in theory, a link to actuality in that they could exist if they could affect each other, if they could do anything, if they could perform any action of any sort. But for a thing to operate there must be time. Time is the arrangement by which things are able to happen. Without time nothing can occur. And there must be space. Space is the arrangement by which things can consist of parts which are side by side. But time and space were broken and breaking together like a punctured bubble, and the universe grew smaller.

There was no longer a cloud-bank over Mwyrland. Ban had gone back to a time in his childhood before the Cloud People formed their mist over Mwyrland and slowly, slowly, slowly deepened it until ageing men and women fled their homes and the war with the Cloud People began. But though Ban went back toward days long past, he still could see the vast encroachment of nothingness upon all things that were.

He knew very bitterly that he had brought the catastrophe about. He'd not intended it, to be sure. He hadn't done it alone, even, two Cloud-Children really began it, and the Knower was aware and thought their behavior only unkind. There had been no awareness that there was danger in the playful investigation, by Cloud-Children, of the nature of mere man. Yet the Cloud-People could travel back

and forth in time from past to future. They could see the future. Then there had been a future, but now it grew less and less, so that there must be some dimension beyond the three of space and the fourth of time in which alterations of those four could come about. And of this dimension neither the Knower nor the Prophetess had any inkling. So there was a limit to prophecy.

And now he understood his present estate and the topsy-turviness of up and down and past and future. The universe attempted to use him—who had begun it—to bring an end to its destruction. The cosmos strove to heal itself. Had Ban died on the beach as an incredibly aged and futile dodderer, the sun would not shine on Mwyrland, to be sure, but it would still shine on the City, for a while. Had Ban not extended himself through time, there would not now be a gap blocked by his still-displaced body in which time could not exist as bubble-films which make the endless succession of seconds and minutes and hours and years. If Ban could restore himself to what he had been—withdrawing every atom of himself from any other time but the present—the crack in the cosmos would heal itself, like a force-bubble across a door or window. But it was impossible. He could not do it. There was only one thing he could do, which would have the same effect. He could repair the fabric of reality by not ever having been.

It was this that he must consent to, in yielding to the westward tugging. His body was fourteen years old, now. Perhaps thirteen. To him, childhood lay to the west and maturity to the east. He was drawn backward through a displaced time toward infancy. This tugging, this pull, was the result of the laws of existence, because existence could not continue while his body contravened the laws of existence. If he let himself fall past ten years of age, and six, and two, and infancy itself . . . If he let himself fall back into the time before he was, then there would no longer be a break in the unity of time and space. He who had never been could not create a flaw. His body which had never existed could not short-circuit time. There could not be a break where he had never existed to make it.

Ban raged. It is not too bad a thing to die. All men face it sooner or later, and there is a secret knowledge which comes

to every man at such moments. The knowledge is that it is not the end. But Ban was required to make a greater sacrifice than death. It was demanded of him that he surrender ever having been. He was required to embrace extinction.

He raged. But he was the Warden's son, and the City must be defended. He could not survive, but he could make extinction count. With somehow an air of scorn, he let himself fall. And it was dramatic, as he fell, to remember bitterly such unrelated things as a girl who shyly gave him a bowl of milk in the home of Ilbur the Robot, and Urmuz scolding him respectfully for some unrecalled fault, and the Prophetess with the strong hands and strangely indefinite face beneath her hood, and the girl who was to be her successor, who denied that she had a name and yet looked wistfully at Ban when he was in the prime of his strength and arrogance.

He remembered innumerable things, and now not one of them would ever have been real. Because he would never have been, and Urmuz would not teach him soldier-craft, nor his companions ever sing or drink with him, nor his father try to hide his pride in a swaggering son who would be Warden after him.

These things would be worse than forgotten. They would never be thought of. They would go into that limbo of possible things from which so few ever emerge to become actual. When Ban had never been born — why — things would start fresh. Perhaps his father would have another son, whom Urmuz would guide and scoldingly cherish. His friends would not miss him. How could they miss someone who never was? Perhaps they would choose another in his place, not knowing that it was a place that could have been filled otherwise. The girl at the Oracles would not think of him. How could she? She would think wistfully of someone else entirely. The Prophetess would not guide him, nor the Cloud-People children.

Then Ban revolted. In midair, he abruptly fought his own descent to infancy. His mind was still a man's mind, in a body perhaps four years old. The disparity, in fact, was very probably the reason for the disaster to all things. But he was required to make a greater sacrifice than any other man was ever asked to make. And it was not a reasonable bargain. He would ac-

complish nothing worth the sacrifice if he ceased to exist.

He fought the pull that dragged at him. He ceased to fall. Above him was the east and below the west and behind him there was the sky and before him the very shore-line of the Gulf of Orea. But he would not fall farther. He would not! Because there was no reward for his falling.

His non-existence would not keep the Cloud-People from forming the thinnest of mists above Mwyrland, in which people aged overnight, when the mist was thin, and then between sunrise and even-fall, when it grew thicker, and then in fractions of an hour when the cloud was at its densest.

If he were not ever born, the army of the City would still sally forth valiantly to do battle with the Cloud-People, and never return. The mist over Mwyrland would spread slowly out over the water, and cover the rocky volcanic island halfway to shore, and move forward to the City.

If he were never to exist, still someone—not he, but someone—would desperately demand counsel of the Prophetess on how the Cloud-People could be vanquished, and she would send him to Mwyrland as she'd sent Ban, alone. And he would die and ultimately the towers of the City would be filled with mist. Then the Cloud-People with their singing voices would drift about the wetted structures and only a few men would remain out on the Heath, forgetting that men had ever built cities or flown among the clouds.

These things would happen despite his sacrifice. But Ban had ventured greatly in defense of the City, because he was the Warden's son and it was his obligation. He was still the Warden's son, and it was still his obligation to defend the City. This sacrifice would do no good to the race of men. He would not sacrifice himself to extend the dank domain of the Cloud-People! He would not!

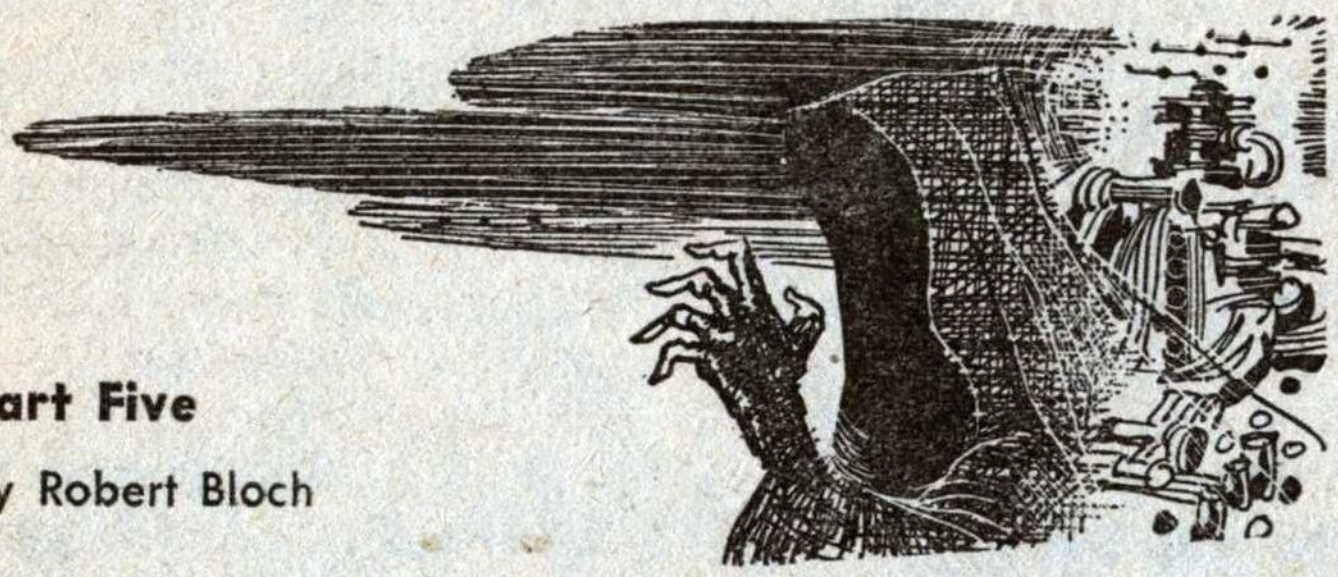
He cursed, and wept with rage because his curses were in a shrill treble voice, and he was a small and naked child in whom a man's mind inexplicably functioned, and because he stood alone against time and space and destiny and there was no one to help him in what he must accomplish. Must!

"I won't do it!" he cried in his child's high voice to the world and the sky and the sea about him. "I won't do it!" he cried fiercely to the galaxy. "You can't make me!" he

cried to the universe itself. "Unless you make it save the City I won't do it!" he cried to all creation. But oddly enough he thought of a girl in the Oracles, who had looked wistfully at him when he was a tall, virile young man.

There was no reply. He clenched his child's fists and pipingly defied all time and space and destiny:

"I won't!—won't! won't! —won't!"



Part Five

By Robert Bloch

THE warp was widening. Time and Space had lost coalescence in a disintegrating cosmos. The Prophetess had predicted, the Knower suspected, but only one man had full knowledge, full realization. And shrilled his ultimate defiance against the ultimate extinction of all things—Ban, in his child's body, tangled in the loosening web of Time and Space, keening, "I won't, I won't, I won't!"

Only one man, and he helpless.

One man—and one *other*.

It was not man, nor beast; neither male nor female, but both and more than both. The machine which had been created on 3Bcc and vanished, was dedicated to a mission. And that mission involved neither instinct nor emotion. It was the pure, objective goal of cosmic survival.

Unfettered by tri- or quadri-dimensional laws of Time and Space, it moved freely through the universe as a random entity. All choice was its portion, all sentience and sensation was there to sample. But the machine was seeking the focal point, the focal point of weakness wherein it must function.

And its initial data was limited.

Perceptivity came slowly. First came the knowledge of weakness—a learned acquisi-

tion, for the machine had no initial referents. Then came the dimly-intuited associations.

The cosmos was a maze. Somewhere in the maze there was a flaw, threatening the entire structure. *Problem:* find a way *through* the maze *to* the flaw. *Clue:* personify awareness of distress.

On these vague premises the dedicated entity acted, and localized isolated instances; computing and discarding on the basis of intensity, probing for full comprehension.

Two images emerged, two clues to aid in the search. The machine established them as voices.

"I won't, I won't, I won't!"

First the voice was an interior echo. The machine sought to personify it. The only data which came through was ambiguous enough, and in the form of a single, simple impression—*redhead.*

Redhead.

Where in the universe was the redhead in distress? Another mechanism moved into full operation—and the machine found itself foundering upon the sandy ocean floor of the planet Hiallo, contemplating the red head of a crustacean which rested there, snapped clean from the lifeless body.

The cry had not come from here.

And yet it echoed, was still echoing, for in the Oracles the nameles neophyte who loved Ban could hear his call; she pressed her hands to her head, tangling her fingers in the red locks as his cry came to her. *"I won't, I won't, I won't!"*

The machine sensed her presence now, but simultaneously a stronger image came —not the echo-emanation but the source of the call itself.

A yellow-haired man.

The machine blurred and left the ocean bed of Hiallo. It was on Terra now, in Germania's tangled forest, perceiving the battle. Perceiving, and perceived. For yellow-haired Marcellus glimpsed it.

Marcellus—was this the entity the machine sought? It sensed no danger to the cosmos here, only individual destruction, and yet it could not be sure. There was more data to be gleaned. It followed Marcellus, waited for him in the wood. And it assumed substance and beckoned Marcellus with a whisper. Marcellus awaited it, armed with a puny branch.

The machine probed. Here was fear and courage, commingled in defiance. Marcellus did not want to die, but his

thought was wholly self-centered. It was his danger and his alone which prompted him. And *"I won't, I won't I won't!"* had not emanated from this yellow-haired biped.

So this was not the area of threat.

The machine moved from Terra, probing again. The keening cry existed. The keening crier existed. Existed in an area of almost non-existence.

Images and impressions multiplied. A fog, and a singing. A hairy, ugly man pacing the entrance to a tall edifice. A cold-eyed female in prayer. A moist-eyed female *(redhead? yes!)* in supplicating agony. An amorphous presence, a Knower, drained of all but dread.

All of them caught, caught in the maze. And the maze itself disintegrating. Yes, the cosmic threat was here, in this area. In this *non-area.* For that was what it was becoming, as Time and Space twisted and tore, and only one faint voice defied eternal termination with *"I won't, I won't, I won't!"*

The voice of a *yellow-haired* biped.

On land?

On sea?

In the air?

The machine probed. Probed land that was scarcely land, as Space sundered. Searched a sea that was now sky and mist and fog commingled. Roamed air that was truly empty—empty of all dimensional interrelationship.

The machine sought the source of the sole remaining strength; the awareness of extinction which still rebelled against the knowledge of its own ending.

And it came to Ban; came to the ridiculous child-body twisting and turning in a loosening Limbo where north, south, east, west, down, up, forward and back whirled free of all relationships.

The machine sensed the problem and the solution. It communicated with Ban using neither word nor image, merely direction in the form of reinforcing Ban's own survival-urge.

Suddenly Ban felt the strength surge back to implement his defiance. He began to move, to grow. He would become *himself* once more. And give *himself* up to the gap, to heal the breach between Time and Space. When he was properly timevy, he would be fixed in the balancing-area, forever, so that the universe could stabilize.

There was no right, no

wrong, no alternative at all to consider. This was his purpose, his function. Where the new-found resolution came from was not even a question; nor was the source of his sudden power to act.

He became Ban.

And being Ban, he had only to remain fixed, forever fixed in this Limbo beyond Space and Time, so that the balances he had disturbed would be restored.

It meant an end to living, an end to consciousness, and end to self-awareness. But it was meaningful sacrifice, and worthy of the son of a Warden. Even if he would no longer know himself to be the son of a Warden. Even if he would no longer retain consciousness of squat Urmuz or the beautiful nameless one who waited (would wait forever, now, and in vain) inside the Oracles.

Ban *was* the sacrifice, his was the dedication. He felt consciousness spin away. For a moment there was a physical twinge of regret, but then the physical awareness left him, and the regret was purely psychic. He would cease to be, and that was right; yet he had lost the final battle. For in the end, this wouldn't alter the inexorable course of events. The cosmos would persist, but for how long? Only until the Cloud-People invaded his city and the Heaths beyond. Then the extinction would proceed until all was engulfed in nothingness. For Time would devour Space.

So it was a delaying-action, at best, this sacrifice he was making. But it must be done. He must surrender himself, lose himself in the whirling, for he was dedicated—

Dedicated.

The machine observed, registered. Something was wrong. *Ban* was not dedicated. Dedication was the machine's function.

Ban must not usurp its place.

The machine could heal. And it must communicate, quickly, establish a relationship with Ban before he was irrevocably lost in the elemental Limbo.

"Ban—come back!"

Then the directive came, implemented by action. The machine lifted, grasped, transported.

Ban awoke to blinking awareness, standing upon the terrace beside the black bulk of the Oracles. He felt the firmness beneath his feet, sensed his proper physical-temporal relationship with Alpha, The Needle, the distant Arsenal.

He was *himself* again.

But for how long?

Something had snatched him from the jaws of sacrifice. But the jaws still gaped. Far away was the sea and the mist. Beyond that the Cloud-People hovered. Hovered closer and closer. Nothing had changed.

Nothing had changed, *because he had failed.*

Urmuz emerged from the shadows, breathless.

"You left me behind, sir—I was looking everywhere—" His face worked. "She told me—"

The girl with the great gray eyes stirred in the shadows behind the burly man.

Ban faced them, nodding slowly. "Yes, I went alone." He shrugged. "And to no avail. There is no way to conquer the strength of the Cloud-People. Man cannot conquer Time."

"But I don't understand, sir—tell us what happened—"

Urmuz stared at Ban helplessly. Then his eyes fell. "I suppose it's no use talking."

Ban nodded. "No use talking," he echoed. "The end will come soon."

The girl stepped forward. She walked proudly, bearing a gift in her great gray eyes. Ban saw it there, and found the exultation of ecstasy even in despair. His hands went out to claim the gift, and she was in his arms, her hair enveloping his shoulders in a red caress. *So we die,* Ban told himself. *But first, even for a moment, we live—*

"Hold!"

The voice that was not a voice came from the face that was not a face.

Ban stepped back, releasing the girl. She turned to stare, as he and Urmuz stared, at the apparition of the Prophetess.

"I heard," she said.

Ban squared his shoulders. "Then what does it matter?" he countered. "You know time has run out for all of us. Let the girl be. Give us the last few moments that remain."

"Captain Ban." The beautiful accents were measured. "You spoke of failure. Of this you need not be ashamed, for I am aware that you fought hard, even to the point of giving up the ultimate essence of identity."

"I tried," Ban murmured. "I failed."

"To fail is one thing. To surrender, another." The tones were even. "You are a soldier. Even now, with the battle lost, you cannot capitulate. You cannot flee, as you seek to flee, into the oblivion of momentary sensation. This girl is dedicated to the Cove-

nant of the Oracles, just as you are dedicated to Wardenship of this City."

"I cannot stop the Cloud-People," Ban replied. "Time is too strong."

Urmuz stirred restlessly. "What do you want us to do?" he grumbled.

The Prophetess faced him. Something in her face—or what radiated from it and obscured it—caused the squat man to bow his head.

"I—I meant no disrespect, Prophetess," he muttered. "But the Captain's right. We are finished. What can we do now?"

"We can function as we were meant to function. We can observe the enemy. Watch and wait." A beautiful hand rose and beckoned. "Come with me."

Together they moved into the many-vaulted vastness of the Oracles. Together they sank down before the table as the Prophetess took her place behind it and bowed her head. For a moment, silence. The long, meaningful silence which is a prelude to extinction.

Almost Ban could see the clouds gathering and moving towards them; the Cloud-People were swirling before the sea and city, as Time moved forward to devour Space. Almost Ban could sense the death of the world as he knew it.

And then he *could* see, *could* sense.

For a cloud was with them now; the Prophetess, Urmuz, the girl could see it, too. It hovered in the vaulted archways above, and it emanated from the lovely hands upon the table-top.

The Prophetess had conjured up the final vision . . .

Once again Ban gazed upon the desolate shores where the shimmering clouds hovered. He thought he recognized the shape he had come to think of as the Knower, but he could not be sure. For there were thousands of shapes; thousands upon thousands of swirling semi-solid shadows, lambent and yet unillumined, obtuse and opaque. They were not merely hovering, they were converging now—converging upon a common goal.

It might have been a machine there in the sky, but it was not an artifact Ban recognized. It might have been a gigantic ship, designed to transport those who had not mastered flight by wing. It might have been a living entity, functioning to attract the Cloud-People.

Ban and the others did not

know. But they could perceive what it was doing—incredibly, inexorably, it lured the cloud-shapes to its side. And a myriad whirring slits opened and engulfed them. The cloud-shapes disappeared, incorporated into the shining, shimmering sphere. The object was now a gigantic, blinding blur, and Ban could not look upon it, even in prophetic image.

He wrenched his eyes away, stared down at the Prophetess, seeking to fathom her face.

And now, suddenly, her *face* was a blinding blur, mirroring the machine.

The non-voice spoke.

"Fear not. Time is conquered. The Cloud-People, as you know them, are willing to depart. For they know that there is no future for them here. Their Time can devour our Space, but by the very nature of the act, the cosmos will be destroyed. I have told them so, and they have agreed that their place is in a cosmos of their own. I shall transport them there. That is my purpose, the function to which I am dedicated."

"But—who are you?"

"An instrument. An instrument serving one purpose—survival. I have served here in many ways. As Knower of the Cloud-People. As Prophetess, to your humanity. Now my service here is ended."

Ban glanced upwards and away. The gigantic vision was fading—and within it, the gigantic machine was blurring, too—

He tore his eyes from the incredible and searched the features of the Prophetess. *The features that were fading now as the machine faded.*

The lovely, lulling voice was fainter, too. But Ban could still hear it as it spoke.

"You thought you had failed, Captain Ban. But you did not fail. My mission was to save the cosmos, but I could not function until I found the focal point. And that focal point was in your strength, your human defiance of all destiny. It was your voice, crying, *"I won't, I won't, I won't!"* that guided me, brought me here. I go now, forever from your cosmos and your consciousness. But there is no need for me any longer. The Covenant is ended. I leave you with all you require to survive—your humanity, which is your strength."

The voice blurred, the vision blurred, the Prophetess blurred.

And then there were only the three of them—the squat,

shaken man, the quiet, trembling girl, and the yellow-haired warrior in an empty, vaulted chamber.

"I don't understand," said Urmuz.

"I do," murmured the girl.

"I'll try," said Ban.

Together, the three of them walked back into the garden.

The sun was shining, as far as the eye could see.

"Dream?" muttered Urmuz.

"Reality," the girl affirmed.

"Perhaps both," Ban nodded. He paused. "If, somewhere, sometime, someone perfected a mechanism dedicated to saving the universe—and if it directed itself to us—"

"Foolishness!" Urmuz was scowling.

"But the Cloud-People are gone. We're safe. You know that, don't you?" the girl persisted.

"Yes. And I'm going to do something sensible about it—in the nearest tavern." Urmuz turned. "Coming, sir?"

Ban shook his head, moving closer to the girl.

Urmuz shrugged and moved down the dappled sunlight of the path.

For a moment Ban stared down into the great gray eyes—so cool a contrast to the red radiance of the haloing hair.

"You heard what she—it—said," he whispered. "The Covenant is ended."

She nodded gravely.

"That means there is no need for the Oracles. The future need not be foreseen; it is in our hands."

His hands reached for hers and she did not draw away.

"You are now destined to be a prophetess. You are a woman now."

Again she nodded. "And mine to claim."

She gave him her lips willingly enough, but Ban sensed no surrender. And when she was at last free to speak, her voice was firm. "Claim," she echoed. "But not to conquer. For I *am* a woman, as you are a man, and that is a struggle which never ends."

"You're joking," said Ban, with all the instinctual arrogance of the commander and future Warden.

"Perhaps," said the girl.

"Be serious for a moment, my darling. Remember, it is permitted now—tell me your name."

Slowly she raised her great gray eyes to his, and in them he read the forecast of his future.

"Your name," he commanded.

"Time," she said.

THE END

This is the third in a series of articles by Sam Moskowitz, quasi-official historian of fantasy and science fiction, which analyze the achievements and contributions of outstanding names in the field. Future issues will feature evaluations of the little-known English fantasists, M. P. Shiel and H. F. Heard and of the American Philip Wylie.

KAREL CAPEK:

The Man Who Invented Robots

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

WHILE the passage of the years had given science fiction an unshakeable stature as prophecy, and the efforts of Edgar Allan Poe and H. G. Wells had admitted it to the canons of accredited literature, its material had not lent itself readily to theatrical adaptation. Though Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* enjoyed more than a century of revivals as *Presumption, or the Fate of the Monster,* with script by Richard Brinsley Peake, it scarcely can be treasured as one of the masterpieces of the stage.

Science fiction as meaningful drama came into its own under the brilliant efforts of Karel Capek, "Father of the Czechoslovakian theater." Together with his brother Joseph Capek, he produced, between the periods of World War I and World War II, these science fiction and fantasy plays: *R. U. R., The Insect Story, The Makropulos Secret, Land of Many Names,* and *Adam the Creator.*

Today, there is scarcely a collection of great modern European plays that does not include one of them. Capek has become the most internationally renowned of all Czech composers of plays.

The quality of his plays far

exceed the requirements of dramatic entertainment; they profoundly changed the direction of science fiction since their appearance introduced the word "robot" to the language of many nations and distinctly affected the thinking of the Western World. Interspersed with his plays came books; three of them science fiction novels, which further enhanced his already glittering reputation.

Karel Capek was born Jan. 9, 1890, in Male Svatonvici, Northern Bohemia, an area that was then part of Austria-Hungary. The son of a physician, he found the means were readily available for his education. He studied at Prague, Paris and Berlin, finally graduating from the University of Prague in 1917.

Philosophically, he was a disciple of the Americans William James and John Dewey, exponents of pragmatism, a method of thinking which regards "the practical consequences and useful results of ideas as the test of their truthfulness, and which considers truth itself to be a process." His college thesis was written on the subject of pragmatism.

More closely, Karel Capek was influenced by the views of his talented older brother Joseph, born three years earlier, who was to make a reputation as a playwright, fiction writer, artist, producer, scene designer and art critic. Their attitudes and outlook were so similar that collaborations were extraordinarily successful.

A series of short stories and sketches, some in collaboration with his brother, created Karel Capek's first literary reputation. They showed so deft a touch in their handling that he deservedly was termed the Czech Chekov. A collection published in 1916, *Luminous Depths,* is of special importance, inasmuch as it contains a short story "L'Eventail," which utilizes mechanical dolls much in the manner of E. T. A. Hoffman.

An even earlier reference to robots may be found in Capek's essay, "System," which appears in his collection, *Krakonôs's* Garden, issued in 1918, but actually written between 1908 and 1911. It becomes obvious that the concept of the artificially created man was something that intrigued Capek over a period of years.

In his short stories, Capek openly acknowledges a debt to Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde and Charles Baudelaire, and in method he was an experi-

mental modernist. He was at the forefront of a group of European writers attempting to write what amounted to impressionistic prose. Readers sampling Capek for the first time are frequently startled by the daring, almost sensational handling of his prose. Though his spectacular methods struck a chord of affinity with the youthful generation, it was his subject matter and not his style that brought him fame.

Almost without exception his short stories were off-trail, either in theme or approach. Lovers of the detective story will find his volume *Wayside Crosses,* published in 1917 and later translated as *Money and Other Stories* to be a bitter but highly original collection of "whodunits" *without solutions.*

The end of World War I and the creation of the new republic of Czechoslovakia marked the turning point in the career of Karel Capek. During the course of the war, Karel, with his brother Joseph, managed a theatre in Vinohrady, in what was later to become Czechoslovakia. With the granting of Czechoslovakian independence on Oct. 28, 1918, the National Theatre became the cultural center of the new nation and Karel Capek allied himself with that theatre.

World-renown followed unexpectedly and swiftly. The increasing trend toward mechanization, the scientific slaughter of the First World War, and the efficient mass-production methods of the United States made a profound impression on Karel Capek. A modernist in thought and action, Capek did not feel that the idea of scientific progress in itself was bad. However, he was concerned with the use to which new discoveries were being put and their effects on the lives of people around him.

Karel Capek conceived the idea of *R. U. R.* "quite suddenly in a motor car when the crowds around him seemed to look like artificial beings," claims Jessie Mothersale, a close friend. The word "robot" as the term for the synthetic men in the play was allegedly suggested to him by his brother Joseph and was derived from the Czech word *robititi* or *robata,* meaning "to work" or, in a certain connotation, "a worker."

The play *R. U. R.* (Rossom's Universal Robots) opened in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Jan. 26, 1921, and was a stunning success. Overnight it made Capek Czechoslovakia's top

dramatist, a distinction he was to retain the remainder of his life. The audacious drama, though even in the narrowest sense bonafide science fiction, still proved magnificently effective theatre.

The story is laid in the near future, on an island whose location is not specified. Here, a formula to chemically produce artificial humans for use as workers and servants has been adapted to mass production and hundreds of thousands of such creatures are being made and sold annually. These chemical machines are replacing human workers everywhere; the only thing staving off worker revolt is the fact that the lowered cost of labor has dropped prices of the essentials of life to an all-time low. The robots are even increasingly being purchased for armies. The manufacturers justify their position on the grounds that eventually robots will free men from all toil and a utopia will emerge.

Unfortunately, one of the chemists alters the formula and the robots, who have hitherto been without emotions, assume the desires for freedom and domination that previously has been characteristic only of the human race.

The emotionally advanced leaders among the robots organize a revolt of their minions, which now number millions in key positions throughout the world. The rule of man is cast off and the human race is ruthlessly exterminated.

At bay on their little island, the robot manufacturers suspensefully stave off robot attack, but are betrayed by the misguided Helena Glory, president of the Humanitarian League, who even burns Rossum's original formula for the creation of robots. Since the sexless robots cannot reproduce their kind without it, they might have accepted it in barter for the lives of the remaining humans.

Remorselessly the robots destroy all but one man, whom they command to rediscover Rossum's formula. They offer him the world if he can help them rediscover the secret of the creation of life. However, he is only a builder, not a scientist, and cannot duplicate the method. Finally, he turns to them in recrimination and asks why they destroyed mankind.

"We had learnt everything and could do everything. It had to be," Radius, leader of the robot revolt, replies.

"We had to become masters," explains a second robot.

"Slaughter and domination are necessary if you would be human beings. Read history," clarifies Radius.

With almost all hope gone for the continuation of any type of human life, a male and female robot who apparently have naturally developed sex organs are discovered, and the implication is that they may become the new Adam and Eve of the world.

Fame of *R. U. R.* spread rapidly. It was produced in Germany, where Erica Matonek, writing for Britain's *Life and Letters Today,* in 1939 reported, "that it was a 'smashing success in Germany, too'." The play then opened in London and New York simultaneously, Oct. 9, 1922. Under the auspices of the Theatre Guild, its production at the Garrick Theatre, New York, was the event of the season, and it ran 184 performances. Reviews were enthusiastically provocative:

"It is murderous social satire done in terms of the most hair-raising melodrama. It has as many social implications as the most handy of the Shavian comedies, and it also has so many frank appeals to the human gooseflesh as 'The Bat' or any other latter-day thriller. In melodramatic suspense and in its general illusion of impending and immediate doom, this piece from Vienna makes on the alarmed playgoer across the footlights somewhat the same impression as would an infernal machine of which the mechanism had been set and the signal given."—*New York Herald.*

Under the critical surgery of the most absolute standards, *R. U. R.* showed some scar tissue holding its components together. Yet time, the supreme judge, finds that this play, with the possible exception of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Liliom,* is the most frequently anthologized of modern European scripts.

While an acknowledged lightning bolt to world theatre, *R. U. R.'s* effect was even more far-reaching on the development of science fiction. The term "robot" became an integral part of the language of science fiction as well as an addition to the dictionaries of the world. Beyond that, the isolated stories of creation of artificial life of the past, such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bierce's *Moxon's Master* had been clothed by Capek in such thematic richness that henceforth they would constitute a phase of science fiction exceeded in popularity only by the interplanetary story.

Never before, in science fiction, had artificial life been created in wholesale, factory lots. Given that hypothesis, the robot could influence the entire pattern of man's culture and through its numbers create its own culture. The plot potentialities were vast and unplumbed.

If the author wanted to imagine a civilization in which machines gained absolute control, it was now possible, such as in Miles J. Breuer's novel, *Paradise and Iron,* published in the Summer, 1930, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY; the necessity for built-in safety factors to protect humans from a Capek-like fate were the contributions of Isaac Asimov in his book, *I, Robot;* the next step was a metal man with beneficent motives which may be found in Eando Binder's series concerning *Adam Link.* The possibility of an affectionate relationship between androids (science fiction terminology for a human-like robot as opposed to an all-metal one) was touchingly explored by Lester Del Rey in *Helen O'Loy* and eventually humor built around robotic machines, notably Lewis Padgett's *Robots Have No Tails* . . . swung to the other extreme from that of the Frankenstein-monster concept.

That *R. U. R.* was written in and first electrified audiences of Prague, the home of the Golem, synthetic monster of Hebrew legend, is no coincidence. Not only did Capek admit to being thoroughly familiar with and influenced by Rabbi Judah Loew's mass of clay cabbalistically infused with life, but he had several reminders that may have directly sparked his inspiration.

What was the background and origin of the Golem legends, whose influence on the writing of *R. U. R.* specifically, and on science fiction generally, proved so powerful?

Late in the thirteenth century, a book had been compiled by a Spanish Jew named Moses de Leon titled *Zohare* (the "Splendor"), which purported to reveal the real secret behind the words of the Torah (Bible). Since *Zohar* was theoretically a commentary on the Bible, even the religious Jews could not be prevented from reading it. Its pages, filled with a fantastic melange of magic words and numbers, demons, angels, incantations, evil eyes, spells and all the paraphernalia of superstition was seized upon as intellectual playing by the learned, and as a ray of hope in their drab existence by the ignorant. Eventually the book itself was

often referred to as the *Cabala.*

Few men could unravel the "secrets" of the *Cabala,* but the supreme master of its magic and certainly the most frequently quoted authority was Rabbi Judah Loew of 16th Century Prague. Not only his disciples, but most of the people of 16th Century Prague, were ready to accept the story that this brilliant man had created a Golem to be able to virtually read minds and thereby detect those who meant harm to the Jews. The Golem was impervious to pain, could not be killed by fire or water, and had immense physical strength. Golems were sexless as were Karel Capek's robots in *R. U. R.*

Capek's theatrical success in *R. U. R.* proved no accident. In 1921, working in collaboration with his brother Joseph, he followed *R. U. R.* with *The Insect Play,* a fantasy in which a society of insects is shown whose foibles parallel in composite those of humans. Alternately known as *The Insect Play, The Insects, The Insect Comedy, The World We Live In, And So Ad Infinitum* and *From Insect Life,* this effort not only achieved international success, but was hailed by many critics as a better unified piece than *R. U. R.* The critic of the *New York Globe* enthused: "A finer thing than *R. U. R.* Finer in scope, feeling, philosophy. Better than the original production in Prague." (The critic saw this play abroad.) His feelings were echoed throughout America as the play was taken on a triumphal tour.

The satirical lines of the script are pointed and pungent. Capek unmercifully flails the shortcomings of humanity; at the same time, the insect characteristics, as authentically transferred from J. H. Faber's *La vie des Insectes* and *Souvenirs Entomologiques* gives the lie to the banal old saw that the animals and insects in the field are more noble or more sensible in their actions than mankind!

Though he gives credit to the reading of a theory by Professor Metchnikov, famous Russian scientist, as the origin of the idea for his next play, *The Makropulos Secret* (sometimes called the *Makropulos Affair*), which was first produced in 1923, actually Capek has borrowed from the classic Wandering Jew legend. Though this play did not enjoy the success on the boards

of Capek's previous two efforts, its effect on the immortality theme in science fiction was at least as emphatic as that of *R. U. R.* on the development of robot stories.

In *The Makropulos Secret,* a woman is discovered who has lived 300 years as the result of an elixir perfected by her father. The woman seeks to regain the formula, which is no longer in her hands, so she can renew her life. Others, suspecting the value of the document, vie with her for its possession. Finally, through an appeal for understanding, she convinces her opponents that immortality becomes a frightful vacuum as too much is seen and felt and eventually nothing has value or desirability because there is no end of it. When they give her the formula, she destroys it.

To the well-read individual, even at the time of its appearance, *The Makropulos Secret* might have seemed just another repetition of an old idea. In fact, the charge was brought against Capek that he had received his inspiration from George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* which appeared several years earlier. Capek denied ever having read or seen Shaw's effort, and pointed out that from what he had heard, *Back to Methuselah* regarded the achievement of immortality as a prerequisite of paradise, whereas his play took the opposite tack.

In correspondence, he later debated the desirability of longevity wtih Shaw, finally topping Shaw with the perfect squelch: "We still have no experience in this sphere."

While in the original legends of the Wandering Jew, immortality is a curse which finds its possessor yearning for eternal peace and rest, it is also true that the desire for eternal life is ingrained in humanity. Capek tries to show that, in reproduction of its species, the human race does have a certain kind of immortality.

Capek's device of the meeting of a lover, grown senile, with the ever-youthful Makropulos woman, echoes in the achingly beautiful and popular lines of *Mr. Moonlight;* it is sketched poetically in Stanley G. Weinbaum's *Dawn of Flame,* where old Einar totters again into the life of Margaret of Urbs, the immortal woman who loved him in his youth; it is revealed again in the ironic whim of Naga, heroine of Rose Rocklynne's *The Immortal,* published in COMET, March, 1941, who com-

mands her lover to go away for "awhile." But how long is "awhile" to an immortal woman?

The same year as *The Makropulos Secret,* Joseph Capek, without the aid of Karel, produced a science fiction allegory titled *Land of Many Names,* which deals with a continent that suddenly rises from the bottom of the sea. This new continent is offered as the land of hope, where each may build anew and achieve his innermost desires.

Nations incite war for its control and possession. Instead of a land of dreams, the newly-risen mass becomes the land of the dead. Finally, when one of the nations has triumphed and engineers and government officials lay plans for exploitation, the continent sinks back into the sea.

The moral is obvious: wars are organized by the greedy and selfish and fought by the deluded dreamers who ultimately wake to reality and disillusionment. The play enjoyed only a modest success, possibly because the blank verse which set out to be expressionistic resolved itself into a stylized tableau.

The year 1924 was a year of transition for Karel Capek. He had begun as a lyric poet, made his mark as a short story writer, won international renown as a playwright, and now he would become a novelist. A science fiction idea —the discovery of atomic energy—carried by a daringly experimental narrative technique, combined with his proven artistry at dialogue and characterization rang the bell in *Krakatit.*

"And I've discovered atomic explosions," Prokop, the inventor, tells his associate Thomas. In trying to get the secret, Thomas blows himself, and most of the countryside, up, and Prokop loses his memory.

The point Capek makes is that a discovery too big, like atomic energy, can do more harm than good. "It is better to invent something small and useful," is Capek's credo. Capek saw clearly, in 1924, the implications of atomic energy and the fact that it was more likely to be used for war than for the betterment of mankind.

He scores the telling point made by L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz,* who, in an earlier book titled *The Master Key: An Electrical Fairy Tale,* published in 1901, has a Demon give to a small boy the power of antigravity as well as an offer of

force screens, wireless communicators and life restorers. The Demon is the slave of whomever strikes the "master key" of electricity, but is chagrined when, after various misadventures, the boy thrusts his gifts back like an ingrate.

"Why, oh why did not some intelligent person strike the Master Key!" the Demon moans.

"Accidents are always liable to happen," the boy replies. "By accident the Master Key was struck long before the world of science was ready for it—or for you. Instead of considering it an accident and paying no attention to it you immediately appeared to me—*a mere boy*—and offered your services."

Convinced of the possibility of atomic energy, Karel Capek wrote a second novel on the theme, *The Absolute at Large*, in 1927. This follows the plot pattern of *R. U. R.* The inventors of the process have set up a company and sell atomic devices to anyone who will pay.

"The division for atomic motor cars has got the roof on," the company head is informed. "The section for atomic flying-machines will begin work during the week. We are laying the foundations for the atomic locomotive works. One wing of the department for ships' engines is already in operation."

"Wait a minute. You should start calling them atomobiles, atomoters and atomotives, you know. How is Krolmus getting along with the atomic cannon?"

Atomic energy brings about overproduction and war. The world destroys itself and in the end the secret is lost.

Though clumsily constructed, a fault of many of Capek's novels, *Absolute at Large* is written with a light touch and the reader is rewarded with frequent flashes of brilliant wit and shining humanity.

One last time Karel Capek ventured a fantasy play, again in collaboration with his brother Joseph. *Adam the Creator*, which was first produced in 1927, was not a commercial success in the theatres where it was performed. Yet, in printed form it possesses undeniable potency, which probably accounts for its frequent appearance in anthologies.

Adam, dissatisfied with the world God has created, wipes the slate clean and begins a new process of creation. However, everything turns out wrong. Some of the outstanding men and women he cre-

ates adopt an air of pagan superiority and revile him. Where temples of worship are set up, he finds that he is barred; and commercialism, not piety, seems to be the objective. When, occasionally, humans accept him as their creator, he is reminded that his lack of foresight, not their own actions, is responsible for the plight of the world.

When Adam, in his wrath, threatens to destroy the world with his Cannon of Negation, it is the wretch who personifies the poor and downtrodden who most determinedly acts to prevent him.

Finally, Adam realizes that he has botched the matter of creation, and decides the only thing to do is to give the sorry world a chance to work out its problems alone.

To follow was a gracious period in which Karel Capek traveled and wrote numerous books of observations with such titles as *Letters From Spain, Letters From Holland, Travels in the North;* books on dogs and cats, gardening, fairy tales, newspapers and the theatre. These volumes were filled with a charm, wit, humanity and sagacity that can only be compared to Mark Twain.

These were the good years when Capek was one of the most illustrious literary figures in Europe, the epitome of a civilized human being. He had married the beautiful Czech actress, Olga Scheinpflugowa, and enjoyed a gracious social life as well.

However, the seeds of his influence were coming to the surface in European literature. In the wake of the moving picture produced by her husband, Fritz Lang, for Germany's UFA in 1926, Thea von Harbous' melodramatic but compelling novel, *Metropolis,* became a best-seller across the Continent. A focal figure in the novel was a metal and glass robot, fabricated in the form of a woman, who turns the head of the son of a great industrialist. The basis of the story is enslavement of the workers to the machine by the greedy few.

When it seemed that Capek's years of writing science fiction were a thing of the past, *War With the Newts,* sometimes titled *The Salamander War,* appeared in Czechoslovakia in 1936. This long novel is Capek's science fiction masterpiece and the one most likely to endure. It concerns the evolving in the sea of a strange, non-human sea race called the Newts. The Newts are intelligent creatures, easily taught, with gen-

tle, pliable natures. Gradually, man exploits them for profit, but in the process the Newts are learning. The day comes when they revolt against man and slowly begin to undermine the continents so they sink into the sea. In the end they have all but destroyed the humans and set up their own nations and culture.

However, Capek sees them developing factionalism, warring among themselves, finally exterminating their kind; man comes out of hiding to build anew. There is one puzzling note. The world capitalist tycoon in *War With the Newts*, G. H. Bondy, has the identical name as the leading industrialist in *The Absolute at Large*. If this was deliberate, it could only mean that Capek felt that such men were all of the same mold and it was senseless to distinguish them with new names.

Despite his blows against the evils of capitalism, Capek was anything but a Communist. In his book, *On Political Things or Zoon Politics*, published in 1932, Capek states: "When all is said, communism is out to rule, not to rescue; its great watchword is power, not help. For it poverty, hunger, unemployment are not an unendurable pain and shame, but a welcome reserve of dark forces, a fermenting heap of fury and loathing."

In addition to his other activities, he worked daily in the editorial offices of the newspaper, *Lidove Noviny*, from 1917 to 1938. As a newspaperman, the ominous implications of Adolf Hitler's Germany were frightfully clear.

When it became unmistakable that Czechoslovakia was threatened by its warlike neighbor, his friend Eduard Benes enlisted Capek's aid.

On June 22, 1938, Karel Capek addressed the Sudetan Germans from Prague radio, reasoning for tolerance:

"If we could in one way or another collect all the good that is, after all, in each one of us sinful human creatures, I believe that on it could be built a world that would be surely far kinder than the present one."

Four months later, the robots marched. Goose-stepping, eyes empty of all but hate, they moved on Prague.

As Capek had predicted, the robots would look like humans.

At the age of 48, Christmas Day, December 25, 1938, Karel Capek died of pneumonia, his will crushed by the realization "that an alliance of violence and treachery was stronger than truth."

THE END

SPECIAL REPORT

By FRANKLIN M. DAVIS, JR.

GENERAL JANNISON'S EYES ONLY

Raja Hotel
Kraypenh, Khmai Nam
16 February 1960

Major General Wilton H. Jannison, USA
Office of the Inspector General
Department of the Army
Room 3E1026, The Pentagon
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Willy:

The attache tells me that the diplomatic courier will get this to you before....

. . . Air Khmai Nam can do as much for me, so because I have at last come to appreciate the utter urgency of this affair you sent me out here on I know of no better way to communicate this same urgency to you than to have you read the enclosed statement from Lt. Col. Dillon. In reading it, please bear in mind that I, as your personal representative,

have checked the evidence. I have seen everything that is to be seen, from the dog chain at the beginning to the unfortunate "sample" at the finish. So I simply want to tell you three things, Willy. First, Lt. Col. Dillon has never been anything but a rational and dedicated medical officer. His record is entirely in his favor. One cannot discount his brilliant work among the Japanese immediately after the war, and later in Korea. It is this work, in fact, which lends weight to his observations. Second, it is a known fact (I am certain this has been discussed in the United Nations) that there are still some 40,000 unreported World War II prisoners of war, Germans and Japanese alike, in Russian hands today. Keep that in mind. Third and last, I stake my reputation on the belief that this should be reported to the President and the National Security Council at once. The national course of action may then be considered and plotted.

I shall be back in Washington by the 19th and am prepared to give any assistance you or anyone else may require. Meanwhile I have ordered the MAAG Chief to release Lt. Col. Dillon from arrest and have arranged with the Ambassador to restore his diplomatic immunity. I am satisfied — and now everyone on the U.S. side here is too—that Lt. Col. Dillon is in no way directly responsible for the death of the Soviet second secretary. While of course I have assured the silence of our people concerned here on this matter, it is my firm belief that we shall find the shocking demise of Naborikov to have been to our definite and distinct advantage because it broke this business into the open. Pending our own action, and in the face of the frightening silence on this subject in Soviet circles, I see no other course at the moment.

Regards,
DeWITT C. LaROUSSE
Brigadier General, USA

Incl: 1 Copy, Sworn Statement of Lt. Col. Dillon.

GENERAL JANNISON'S
EYES ONLY

Incl to Ltr 16 Feb., Gen. LaRousse to Gen. Jannison

DeWitt C. LaRousse, Brig. Gen. U.S.A., repr T I G: Personally appeared before me on the 13th day of February 1960 at Kraypenh, Khmai Nam, Lt. Col. Leslie T. Dillon, Medical Corps, U.S. Army,

who of his own free will and volition deposes and makes the following sworn statement:

My name is Leslie T. Dillon. I am a lieutenant colonel Army Medical Corps, stationed in Kraypenh, Khmai Nam, as the medical staff officer of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group to Khmai Nam. General LaRousse has told me to keep this in my own words and tell it in my own way, which is a handsome attitude, I must say. Between the Ambassador and the MAAG Chief here, I've been expecting to be marched out and shot just so my suddenly embarrassing presence could be removed from the scene. I won't dwell on recriminations, however, since it is easy to see how misunderstandings could develop when you know Khmai Nam. Accordingly, I'll have to begin with a little geography and sociology, both important to this statement.

Khmai Nam is a neutral republic in Southeast Asia, bordered on the south and west by Cambodia, on the North by Thailand, and on the east by Laos and part of South Vietnam. It emerged as a republic after the partitioning of Indo China as did these other Southeast Asian states. The capital is Kraypenh, which sits on the Tonle Kong river, a point important to this report. The Tonle Kong is the fifth largest river in the world—and judging by some of my water samples, the first dirtiest. The Tonle Kong rises on the edge of Manchuria in China and flows through much of China to eventually become the eastern boundary of Khmai Nam and thus a route for small shipping from the north and a route for larger shipping across the Southeast Asian peninsula as the river goes south to enter the ocean at the large Vietnamese port of Saigon. I mention this because a lot of people don't seem to be aware of the fact that a small boat, like a native sampan or junk or even the large bamboo rafts with family housing aboard can come all the way into Kraypenh from as far north as innermost China. The river flows south and provided you don't mind taking a lot of time, you can drift on down, especially during the rainy season.

So much for the geography. Now the sociology. The Khmai are a gentle proud people who at last are independent after being dominated by somebody or other for donkey's years. You need to know this because

while there is a pure Khmai racial strain—connected to the ancient Chams—over the years the Khmai have intermingled and married with whoever might be around. And, since the Japanese occupied this area during the last war, a number of Khmai either married directly or *marié un peu* with Japanese, the latter phrase being the local description for the less formal arrangements. This point is likewise important to this statement.

I think I should add too, the point that medical science recognizes the sex drive, the hunger drive, and the urge for the security of the family as being fundamental to man whatever his immediate environment. This is well-known of course, but I mention it because it has bearing, indeed, is in some ways the heart of the whole matter.

Now for the beginnings. I have nothing to hide concerning my interest in Madame Phen U. Indeed, I count the day I met her as one of the most fortunate of my life, transcending even those moments of personal triumph such as the day I received my degree in medicine at Cornell. It has been my practice, with the full knowledge and approval of the Ambassador and the MAAG Chief, to provide medical assistance within our means wherever possible. Accordingly, in dealing with local cases I meet many local people. I did not "establish a clandestine liaison" with Madame Phen U as the newspaper *Aujourd'hui* charged; I met her in the course of my medical work.

I state the circumstances. First, it must be appreciated that the health and medical situation in Khmai Nam is incredible. In spite of my experience in the past in Japan and in Korea, I was not prepared for the appalling conditions I found in Khmai Nam. Here the combination of subtropical heat and Khmai apathy and ignorance in health matters have created conditions almost beyond belief in this modern day and age. To illustrate, the life expectancy of the average Khmai is a scant thirty years. The infant mortality rate is a flat fifty per cent. In this country of just over five million people there is not a single Khmai doctor trained in modern medicine, though of course there are virtually thousands of *kru* or local sorcerer-medicine men who use cupping, leeches, herbs, spells and similar techniques unknown to

materia medica. I am preparing a paper on this subject as a matter of interest

The modern practitioners here are the few French doctors and the one Japanese and though much has been accomplished in recent years in terms of clinics and hospitals, it is well known that there is nowhere near the medical help here the country needs. When you add to this the fact that nowhere does there exist modern sewage disposal, public sanitation, nor even the most rudimentary conceptions of domestic home health measures, the frightening mortality statistics are not surprising.

In my capacity as the only American doctor in Kraypenh and thus in Khmai Nam and since it is my duty here to run the Embassy dispensary, I have both the opportunity and the facilities to serve and to study. Just last week, for example, I diagnosed my first case of leprosy, or Hansen's Disease as some know it, and found some intensely interesting mutations in the bacilli. I am likewise preparing a paper on this; many doctors will spend a lifetime of practice and never see such a case.

I mention this to emphasize two points. First, as a doctor, albeit a military one, I am sworn to help my fellow men. Thus how could I have had anything to do with the violent death of the Russian Naborikov? Second, because there are so few modern practitioners here there is great co-operation. Though admittedly we still evacuate our serious cases to Bangkok, I am gradually working the Ambassador around to permitting treatment of many American cases in the new Khmai hospital. Eventually, I think, all cases will be handled there after dispensary action. The Ambassador is reserving decision because he simply cannot get used to the idea that the *chekshi* lizards which crawl on every wall in Khmai Nam and so cannot be eliminated from the hospital, are innocent of sanitary threat.

But to get back to Madame Phen U. I was returning a month or so back from a call at a missionary home—advanced *acne rosacea* misinterpreted by the child's parents—when on a whim I swung my jeep down the Street of the Crippled Elephant toward the river, heading for the Quatre Bras where the Tonle Kong makes a wide sweeping turn to reach the skyline in a graceful bend most pleasing to the eye. There is a gentle cast

to the land in Khmai Nam that I never saw in Japan or Korea. It comes from the great flat reaches of lush green paddy and the soft nodding of the palm trees in continuous ballet. It comes from the incredible blue of the sky, the placid brown of the huge river, and from the thundering majesty of the sunsets. Small wonder life proceeds in easy unhurried attitude in Khmai Nam.

At a point where the Street of the Crippled Elephant turns past a huge thicket of mango trees shielding a sweeping driveway that leads back into the brush of this rather thinly-settled part of Kraypenh just short of the bursting raucous reaches of the waterfront, my jeep moved easily in the rutted roadway. I was thinking of nothing more than the fact I would enjoy the view of the river and would, as I often did, re-charge myself by a moment or two of communing with this soft and placid land.

I was astonished, then, when a screaming Khmai woman flashed in front of my jeep from the mango thicket, arms waving, face contorted. "Ai! Ai!" Her shrieks were heart-rending. "Ai! Ai!"

I braked the jeep instantly and jumped out. Once she stopped screaming, I discovered that her child had been badly bitten by a dog, as nearly as I could interpret her hysterical gabbling. I don't speak Khmai well, but I can manage, and so it was. I found the child, a plump little boy of perhaps six and naked as are all Khmai children of that age, with a badly gashed leg. Propped against the bole of a palm along the drive, the child was likewise screaming. After I completed rudimentary first-aid prior to taking the youngster to the dispensary for a more complete examination and rabies shots, I got the full story from the child's mother, now more calm and rational. The woman was a servant in the big house at the end of the drive, the building of many roofs now to be seen above the crowns of the trees. Madame who owned the house and who was thus the mistress kept a huge dog, *prochti plaang*—very bad—for a watch dog. The dog had attacked and bitten the child.

This was all a little unusual, even allowing for the natural exaggeration of the distraught mother, who was small and fine-boned like all Khmai women, with a flat-planed brown face now streaked with tears and smudged with the

inevitable betel. Khmai dogs are all small, much like Japanese dogs, with thin bony heads and slanted eyes. The Khmai, being Buddhists, do not believe in violence or restraint for humans or animals. While even the lowliest Khmai dog would serve as a watchdog of sorts, ordinarily the family, with animals, fowl, pigs, lizards and everything else lived in happy community. But the size of the bite alone indicated a big dog, and of course I wanted to get a rabies check as soon as possible.

So I moved up into the shaded green thickness of the yard below the big house. Sure enough, on a long heavy chain fastened to an iron stake in a neatly-landscaped terrace lying behind the barrier of mango, banana and bamboo trees edging the drive, I found a tremendous German shepherd dog. As I circled the terrace, conscious of the imposing teak facade of the villa, wondering if I couldn't get someone to help me restrain the dog for examination, the beast flung itself against the end of its chain. Fangs bared, eyes red with rage, the animal made the afternoon hideous with a deep and snarling bark. Hoping that the thick chain was as strong as it looked, I kept out of the dog's arc and circled toward the house.

"You are frightened of my dog?" A woman spoke from the porch.

As I stood, startled, at the foot of the stairs, she spoke a single guttural command to the dog and the beast stopped barking at once and slunk back to the center of the yard where it lay down and appeared to ignore me. I stared up at the woman, seeing at first glance that she was a slim graceful-looking person, with a delicate face saved from blank impassiveness by snapping black eyes and an exceptionally rich-looking mobile mouth. Her jet black hair was piled high on top of her head, and she was wearing a handsome white silk *chumpat*, the Khmai woman's native dress that elsewhere is called a sarong. Above the chumpat she was wearing a peppermint-striped shirt, styled like a man's, open at the button-down collar with the sleeves rolled back to her elbows displaying softly rounded arms. Her skin was the creamy shade of the Khmai aristocrat and because she had spoken to me in musical English and because her dress was a curious combination of Khmai Nam and New York, I knew at once that she was unusual for a

Khmai. And, as it turned out, for myself as well.

"No," I said, "I'm not afraid of your dog. But the beast has bitten a child, very badly. Has the dog had rabies shots recently?"

She laughed, a light musical sound, and her teeth looked a shade too small against her mouth. "You Americans!" She used the phrase derisively. "Must everyone have a shot for everything?" She dropped a hand to the railing. "Why not a shot for loneliness, for poverty, young doctor? Indeed, why not a shot for all evils?" She stopped smiling and looked at me sharply. "Do I look like a person who would deliberately keep a savage beast for my protection and not look to the safety of those around me who must also be protected? Of course the dog is protected. Against everything except the torments of a curious and rather cruel child. I have warned Ah Sum of this before, you know." Then her face changed expression again and she said, this time her voice full of concern, "But what of the child?"

"He'll live," I said dryly. "Curious and cruel or not." Someone else, I thought, was curious and even cruel. But with her rather grudging assurance about the dog, it was best to care for the child and so I did, making a further check at the dispensary where there seemed no reason for stitches, and starting the rabies shots series, just in case. I should mention here, I think, that having served a total of seven years in the Far East, Oriental women are no particular novelty to me. That is to say, I see them as individuals, not as exotic creatures from another world. And as always in my dealing with women, I found my relationship with Madame Phen U to be a complementing of personalities and, if you will, the exchange of strengths.

The child and the dog-bite gave me an excuse to return to the villa, ostensibly to inquire as to the health of the youngster.

"Now that you have come," Madame Phen U said to me, with a slant-wise glance I found most intriguing, "you must have some tea."

Tea turned out to be excellent Scotch served on the back patio porch of the villa, the first of many such pleasant visits. In the course of our association, in the complementing of personalities and the exchange of strengths, I found in Mei (this being her small name, or first name as

we would call it) a deep spring of warmth and companionship I didn't dream could exist in any woman, let alone exist in a place like Khmai Nam and I have convinced myself that she found something similar in me. In any event, in a short space of time we learned a great deal about each other and I knew that for my part I was falling in love.

Mei, I know, had reservations. On the settee overlooking the patio one day, with the Grundig tape-recorder playing a symphony, the perfume of the land a faint caress, the brilliant greens and blues of Khmai Nam gleaming after a swift tropical rain, we were sharing one of those magic moments you want to hold forever. Mei slipped a slim hand over mine and said, "There is nothing for us, my Leslie. This you know."

I stirred on the settee. She was right of course, but hard facts always get obscured by soft moments. "Only because of so many silly rules," I said. "And rules are made to be broken."

She shook her head. "Not for me. I am here because of rules. Without them I should be nothing."

I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything. I just did some thinking. I confess that when I first saw the rich state she maintained for herself, so unusual for a Khmai woman, that uncharitably enough I thought she was very likely the mistress of some wealthy metropolitan businessman, perhaps back on the European continent on a trip. Such arrangements are common enough in Southeast Asia. Instead, I discovered, she was a ranking member of the royal family now in eclipse in the new republic, living out her days until the pretender might be recognized. Her husband had been killed in the Indo-China fighting. In a way, like so many of us, she was the prisoner of her heritage but at least she had the sense to recognize that it was a benevolent restraint. "What must be must be," she went on in the musical English she'd acquired in a Swiss school, her hand stroking mine. "But when I feel sorry for myself I think of Ah Sum, or of the countless others who have less than I."

"Ah Sum?" I didn't get what she meant by the reference to the maid.

"Of course. She has not seen her husband in perhaps fifteen years. She has married with a Japanese, you know. During the Occupation."

I smiled a little, thinking of the age of the child I'd treated. "She is not suffering," I said. "She has a child hardly six years old. She must have other arrangements."

"Oh no," Mei said quietly. "The child is fourteen. But it does not grow. It will be six years old forever."

I started. "Impossible," I said. "Why, that child is perfectly normal." And I went on with a rush of medical jargon to prove it.

"As you wish, my Leslie." Mei shrugged my comments aside. "But I have been here when Ah Sum returned from Japan after her husband vanished. I know the child. You thought it cruel when I showed no more concern about the dog bite. But at times the burden becomes a little heavy, even for me. The child is not right."

Looking back on it as I prepare this report, I wish now that I had flagged this moment for what it was, very likely the vital moment in the whole case, but I didn't. I refused to take Mei's word for the child's age. And while I did arrange to examine the child later, I found absolutely nothing to prove it was anything but what I thought, an active well-formed youngster of six. I was wrong. In my stupidity, I put Mei's tale down to some whim of respectability when all I would have needed, I think, to start me on the proper track was the place in Japan where Ah Sum had lived with the missing husband.

But a man in love accepts many things from his beloved, and just as I accepted Mei's life, suspended as it was between the best of the worlds of East and West, just as I accepted her wish to maintain that savage dog when a watchman would have better served her security needs, so I accepted the explanation of Ah Sum's child. If that was how Mei wanted to believe it, it was good enough for me. I knew better, but I didn't force the point. While I suppose I was romantically consistent, if that's the term, it was most unscientific of me. I shall regret it forever, because it was the first piece of the puzzle. I simply did not know it.

The second piece, I suppose, is the man Naborikov, the second secretary at the Russian Embassy in Khmai Nam. A tall thin bony-nosed man with an expression of permanent hauteur on his face, I simply knew who the man was. The diplomatic community in Khmai Nam is small

and as in Asiatic posts elsewhere, the Westerners are prominent just because they are different from the people of the land. I had seen Naborikov at a few of the big affairs —the French Embassy Bastille Day reception, for example; at our own Embassy's Fourth of July formation and once at a large dinner party given by the Khmai Foreign Secretary to which I escorted Mei. To the best of my recollection, I never spoke to the man. In a neutral country, to be sure, one occasionally rubs elbows with the representatives of the opposition because this is the way of protocol. One needn't seek them out.

I mention all this to show that I could have no motive for any action toward Naborikov except a sense of revulsion one feels for the group that is so patently bent on destroying what we ourselves believe in.

This brings me now to the evening of the fifteenth of January. This was a Friday night, and I had taken Mei to the Embassy movie, a rather dull affair for me since it was a screening of *Boys Town,* a film already finished on the TV circuits at home, but of course suitable for entertaining Americans in the far-flung outposts. But like so many Khmai, Mei loves movies and entertainment in all its forms and so we attend regularly, though I am not unaware of the disapproval of people like Mrs. Ambassador who assigns me, I am sure, all manner of base motives so far as Mei is concerned. It amuses me, when I think of it, to consider that Mei's family goes back to two thousand years of Khmai royalty; more, I suspect, than Mrs. Ambassador can say.

We returned from the movie in the jeep and I by-passed the driveway at Mei's place to drive closer to the river, conscious as always that the dog was snarling and barking at the end of his chain, but at such a distance as to be a barely distinguished noise in the background. It was my thought to walk together up a pleasant path, under the soft fringes of the palms and the bananas, to enjoy the moonlight and the river before we settled down for drinks and music on the porch. The nights in Khmai Nam, when the darkness hides the harshness of the humid day, are beautiful to me. They have an inherent velvet caress, as though capable of wrapping you in a soft shroud protecting you from all evil and offering somehow a promise that only

the present moment is important. Somehow, no problems can go unresolved.

So we dismounted from the jeep and as I usually do, I thrust my flashlight into my pocket, largely from habit. There are no streetlights in this section of Kraypenh and while I know the path well, it is easier to walk back to the jeep with a light when the time comes for departure. I slipped my arm about Mei's waist and we started to stroll down the path, her arm around me. Just as the path bends back toward the house, where you get a marvelous view of the river, the moon, and the dappled richness of the land spreading down to the river, I turned to kiss Mei. Thus my back was to the moon, and I say this because it is to my everlasting regret.

Just as I turned I heard a sound and had an impression —nothing more—of a shadow overhead. The sound was a faint hissing, as if a huge bird glided above us, and the shadow was formless. Just there. I started. "What was that?"

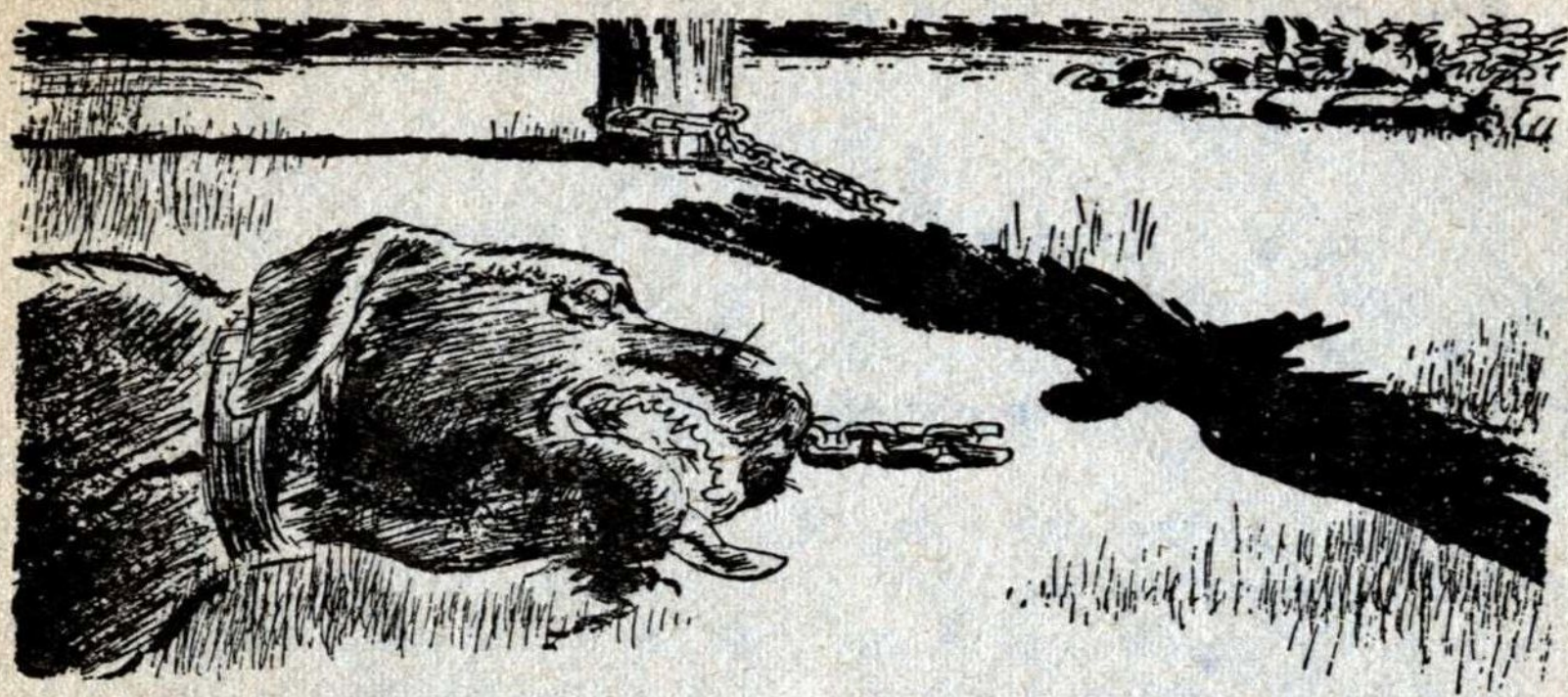
Mei's face was turned up to mine, her eyes glowing. "It is nothing, my Leslie. Come, my darling. Kiss me." I did so.

Here, I should emphasize something. I do not believe that Mei knew what the shadow was. If she had, I am sure, she could never have remained so calm. Much has been made of the point that she knew all along what was going on, but I frankly cannot believe it. She is not capable, I am positive, of accepting the occurrences as credible, something she would have to do if she knew of it. I am certain that she thought, as did I, that we had simply stirred up a vulture or similar large bird, and at the moment neither of us gave it much thought. I claim this view is borne out by the later events.

After dallying on the path a few moments, we went on but now, I realized something was wrong. It took a while for this to seep in, but as Sherlock Holmes put it, ". . . the mystery, Dr. Watson, was that the dog did not bark at all."

I realized the dog was silent before Mei did, principally I think because I was always alert to the possibility that the dog would one day get loose and too, I had been practicing the Khmai commands to control it, without much success I might add.

"What's the matter with Phnong?" The dog is named for the Khmai word *savage*. "He's not yapping at me tonight."



"Perhaps he recognizes it is I who come."

"No, I don't think so. He never has before."

As we emerged from the path toward the yard, I pulled the flashlight out of my pocket and flicked it across the yard. In a moment, the thick beam marked a huddled lump near a *mangouste* tree. Warily, I moved closer. Then, as I saw what was left of Phnong, I waved Mei back. "Don't come up. Stay there!"

I knelt to examine the dog. The great jaws were closed, and the red eyes stared vacantly. With the light, I saw with a squirt of shock that the dog had literally been torn in two. I won't describe the details. Further, the chain had been broken a foot or two from his collar, snapped clean.

Inexplicably, I was now thoroughly frightened. I can't explain this. My first thought was that the dog had been attacked by the vulture or whatever the bird was I thought I saw on the path. But that didn't explain the chain. Remember, Phnong was a tremendous dog. He weighed, I suppose, a hundred and twenty-five pounds. Somehow he had been killed without any appreciable reaction. I had heard no unusual barking, such as you might expect in a struggle between dog and predatory bird.

The next events were confused at the time, but I have them sorted out by now and I consider this a reasonable eye-witness account.

I am certain it was at least an hour that I passed with Mei on the porch. Somewhat to my surprise, she regarded the death of Phnong as of little consequence. "I shall get another dog," she said. "Perhaps one a little less violent."

For my part, I wanted to call the police. After all, a valuable property was destroyed.

Mei laughed. "The police? They are of no use. No, my Leslie, do not be disturbed. Come, fix us something to drink."

I moved to the porch bar, making mental note to get someone to check up on the situation. I even gave some thought to burying the dog but then thought it might be better to wait and see if the vulture came back. I wanted to see what kind of bird could do that to a dog the size of Phnong. As for the little spider-legs of fright traveling my spine, these I ignored. There on the porch, in the pleasant night, it was hard to be frightened.

Until we heard the voices. Then I was startled. As in most Khmai houses, Mei had Ah Sum and the other servants quartered under the house, in a series of small compartments offering only the rudest accommodations. These voices came from there, rising high in argument, now shrill, now cajoling, always abusive. I recognized a word or two. "Good Lord, that's Japanese!" I looked at Mei. "What's a Japanese doing here?"

Catching up the flashlight, I ran down the stairs, Mei pattering after me. As I wheeled into the servants' area, I saw three figures ranged in tense attitude around the flickering clap-pot lamp set on a low *tashi* table. I staggered back, flinging out an arm. Mei bumped my arm. I goggled. Facing each other, faces contorted, bodies straining, were two men. One I recognized as Naborikov, second secretary from the Soviet Embassy. The other I had never seen. He was a huge Japanese, stooping now under the low ceiling, great arms reaching. His face was twisted, his great head looked scarred even in the bad light. Most incredible of all, he was surely seven feet tall.

"What the hell is this?" Instinctively, I gathered Mei to me.

Ah Sum, the servant, crouched at the table, sputtered something in Khmai and I heard Mei gasp, then she shuddered in my arms. "The husband." She whispered, a hand going to her face. "But what has happened to him?"

Naborikov spoke and he must have intended to address me because he spoke in English. "This is a matter of concern only to the Soviet Em-

bassy," he said. "You would do very well to get away while you can." He thrust a hand in his pocket.

Then I realized that the Japanese was in some sort of uniform. As he faced me, I saw he was wearing what was plainly a rough tunic and had some sort of boots on his tree-trunk legs. "Are you threatening me?" Frankly, I didn't think Naborikov had a gun in that pocket. "What's going on here? What are you doing with this man? Who is he?"

At this point, I think, the fundamental drives took over. Instincts of self-preservation, protection of the family, call it what you want, I won't attempt to describe it. My first thought was to protect Mei so I tend to the belief that the giant Japanese was protecting what he loved, namely, his wife and his family—Ah Sum and the child.

Because the Japanese made a swift gesture. One great arm flashed out, thick fingers grabbed Naborikov at the throat, and as easily as I lift a tongue-depressor, the Japanese banged Naborikov *tunk tunk tunk* against the overhanging beam.

Naborikov screamed. *Splat Splat.* The gun in his pocket went off. Twice. The giant faltered, let Naborikov fall, and as Ah Sum and Mei both shrieked, he tottered, swayed, then crashed over across the table.

I barely gave Naborikov a second look. He was as dead as Lenin. I tried to help the Japanese, but he was past help. He'd taken two bullets in that great chest, and it's a miracle, nothing less, that I got the few words out of him that I did before he died.

I won't attempt to describe the burden I felt descend on me when I realized the impact of what he said. I did get Mei, after some effort, to verify through Ah Sum that I had heard correctly—I know little Japanese. I do claim, however, that I acted in the best interests of the United States and that my decision, made at that moment, to talk to no one except a special investigator was sound. What I discovered even there in that poor room was too much to trust to anyone except someone from Washington. I admit that I violated a few local laws, but these are incidental.

Naturally, I left Naborikov where he was. "You must," Mei said. "He is murdered."

It was no easy job to move the Japanese—later we found he weighed three hundred and twenty-five pounds—but I found the strength somehow.

Extra adrenalin, I guess. I locked him in the mortuary room of my dispensary. From there, I made the anonymous telephone to the Khmai police and also called a good friend among the French doctors to see to Mei and Ah Sum. Then I undertook the detailed examination of the Japanese, uninterrupted until I was arrested toward dawn. My detailed findings are enclosed in the attached medical notes. I also enclose the films I attempted, but they are virtually worthless because of emanations from the body itself.

The facts, when assembled, speak for themselves. Ah Sum, I have established, was in Hiroshima with her husband's family on August 6, 1945. At the moment the first atomic bomb went off, her child was three days old. I now believe that the child's retarded development stems from radiation exposure incurred during this explosion.

Her husband, one Tanigaya Kakichawa according to the identity disc I found around his neck, was en route on August 6, 1945 to join a Japanese regiment being posted to Manchuria, a regiment captured by Soviet forces presumed by Japanese authorities to be among the host of World War II prisoners still in Russian hands.

From my own autopsy and examinations of the dead giant I am satisfied that his amazing growth and development was artificially induced by repeated hormone injections and controlled irradiation which created unbelievable pituitary action together with additional phenomena I shall mention shortly. Encountering a savage dog while seeking his beloved family, it was no problem for a man of Tanigaya's strength to dispose of the beast with a few swift strokes of his talon-like hands, breaking the chain in the process.

That Tanigaya escaped from wherever the Soviets are conducting these experiments we know by his own statement to me, proven by Naborikov's presence. The Soviet Embassy in Khmai Nam unquestionably was alerted to be on the watch for the poor unfortunate. That Naborikov found him so readily speaks well for the Soviet dossiers on the experiment personnel.

My own future is uncertain. Mei is not likely, in spite of my urging, to give up her life to join mine. But I must pursue this case. By far the most frightening fact of all—here we may speculate endlessly—

lies in something the Khmai police might have verified had I suggested it. I had no trouble verifying through a bargeman that he brought a huge Japanese down the Tonle Kong from deep in China and deposited him at a dock six miles above the city from where the Japanese presumably walked on into Kraypenh.

Walked? I know better. And now I know what caused the shadow over the moon that night, and what made the faint hissing sound in the air.

During my examination of Tanigaya that night in my dispensary, I found the real cause of the Soviet concern and the real source of the dangers in these inhuman experiments now underway. Beneath that rough tunic, as much a part of his splendid torso as his muscular neck and his tremendous arms, Tanigaya Kakichawa had grown a set of fibrous planes, when unfolded measuring seven feet from tip to tip. In their experiments on prisoners of war with mutations and irradiations, the Soviets are creating something they are not yet ready to expose to the world.

LESLIE T. DILLON
Lt. Col. Medical Corps
United States Army

THE END

THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY

By ROSEL GEORGE BROWN

The hospital needed Dr. Hisel. He was a fine physician. He was also a Martian. And therein lies the problem.

"THAT'S tomato catsup," Quintius Greene, out in Oregon, informed his wife. "Look at those actors! And see—oh, no! A comic character, no less."

Dr. Hisel, his chest bare and his lungs flapping mightily, came pushing through the white-robed circle just as the anesthetist, or rather hypnotist, leaned over to check the patient's blood pressure. She whispered something to Dr. Crayton, who was using his scissors in the open chest cavity.

The audience was not perturbed. Millions of Americans munched on decalorizing bars and thought uplifting thoughts about the grandeurs of science and the state of their own internal organs. And oh, how they loved operations in the round, and particularly in color! You could practically reach out and let the blood drip over your fingers.

Dr. Crayton did the operation himself because he was a neat, masterful-looking surgeon and he never let blood squirt on his uniform or dropped his operating lenses into the incision. One doesn't do this sort of thing for advertising, but it is uplifting for people with money to leave to medical institutions.

Mrs. Greene eyed Dr. Hisel disapprovingly, finished her decalorizing bar and reached for a chocolate cream. "What's he doing?"

"Following the script," Mr. Greene said, outraged. "Relax. They always end well."

But Dr. Crayton's medicinal calm was indeed shattered. The look he gave Dr. Hisel was enough to turn the Gor-

gon's head into a ceramic fuel tank. He meant business.

Hisel was a much misunderstood man. Mostly because he had a heavy Martian accent and everything he said sounded either hilarious or sinister, depending on how many drinks you had had.

At the hospital the nurses would follow him around surreptitiously just to hear him say things like, "Madam, your schild hhas honly ha bad hattack of whwhhwhhooping schhoughh." He really went off on something like the "wh" in whooping cough, because when Martians aspirate all out they use their extra lungs and you can hear them close with a "flap" before the word goes on.

Dr. Hisel had his faults and surgical nurses frequently collapsed after his operations. As a Martian, Dr. Hisel was accustomed to strong-impulse telepathy, and frequently just held his hand out, expecting the nurse to know what to put in it. And a look would pass from the surgical nurse to the circulating nurse and around among the interns and finally Dr. Hisel would say, "For Hhhwhran's *sake!* Scalpel!" And then if the nurse slapped the scalpel into his hand, as she had been taught, he'd roar like a bull, because he peeled off his epithelium before an operation instead of using gloves. And then, he didn't say, "stat," for haemostat, as other doctors do. He said "haemo," which usually came out as a flap of his extra lungs.

So his directives frequently sounded like—Pause. For Hhhwhran's sake! Scalpel. Qcqvttt! Pause. *Scissors.* Flap. Unprintable word! (Mostly aspirates with uvular overtones).

It was for this and similar reasons, besides a purely personal prejudice, that Dr. Crayton, who was head of Bayside Memorial Hospital, decided that Hisel should be dispensed with.

It is no easy matter to dispose of a staff doctor. Firing is considered gauche. The best method is to find him a better offer from elsewhere. But Hisel did not rise to better offers. He was engrossed in his work and he knew his way around the hospital and he had a good robotic apartment and a good mechanic for his car and a good laundry. It never occurred to him to want anything else. Certainly not money.

"I don't want to leave," he would tell Dr. Crayton. "I like it h(flap)ere. I like you."

And Dr. Crayton, though he had the ice-locked heart required of a good administrator, was still human enough to feel like a heel. He had to wait until Hisel left his office to plan his next move.

With a planetary immigrant there is always a way.

"Your mother," Dr. Crayton told Hisel, "didn't sign your Martian emigration papers."

"I was forty-two," Hisel said, "when I emigrated. My mother was dead."

"I know," said Dr. Crayton, who hadn't really. "It's a technicality. But it's the sort of thing the League for Pure Blood gets hold of and they'll make a stink about it and cause a lot of unpleasantness for you and the hospital."

"I have," Hisel pointed out, "the purest blood in the county. Martian blood is of necessity sterile of Terran bugs. I have growing in my colon the Martian adapted lichen . . ."

"Of course. You miss the point. What the League for Pure Blood means . . . never mind. The point is that perhaps you'd be happier returning to Mars now instead of waiting until . . ."

"I do not intend to return," Dr. Hisel said. "I am happy here. There is so little real disease on Mars. Mere congenital defects. You have no idea how I rejoiced over my first real appendectomy, knowing it was not a mere synthetic model. Here you have more disease than you can use. For a doctor it is a paradise!"

"Yes, yes. But there's still this legal technicality. There's no getting around it, Hisel. Sorry, old boy."

"How about Whox at Minnesota? I know his mother didn't sign his emigration papers. I was a second generation mutation, but he was one of the few successful flask babies."

"Whox is married to a Terran girl," Dr. Crayton said somewhat hesitantly.

"You are so kind," Hisel said. "I know a hint when I hear one."

Dr. Hisel's courtships were brief. "Will you marry me so that I can become a permanent Terran citizen?" he asked the surgical nurse after a trying operation.

"Qcqvttt!" she said, and left trembling.

On the advice of a sympathetic scrub nurse, who was eight months pregnant, Dr. Hisel tried a more subtle approach.

"It is a lovely night for romance," Dr. Hisel said,

directing his date's gaze to the starry sky.

"But def!" she giggled. "Look at that moon! It looks like . . . like . . ."

Dr. Hisel slipped his arm around her, as he had been directed. "It looks like a gangrenous gall bladder," he supplied tenderly.

It was the same with one girl after another.

"I am not successful with women," Hisel told Dr. Crayton sadly. "Is there no other way for me to become a permanent citizen?"

"Sorry, old boy."

Still, you know, Hisel not only got to be a full-fledged citizen. He created such a stir that the immigration quota for Martians rose forty per cent and the League for Pure Blood couldn't even find a photographer willing to do their microslides.

It was partly pure chance, as almost everything is, if you think about it.

Hisel, who spent his small amount of leisure time reading the medical columns in the micronews and watching medical events on TV, was, of course, watching Dr. Crayton's televised interratrial septal defect repair from the doctors' lounge. It was one of those things that really looks dramatic, but usually goes pretty easily these days. Ordinarily.

It would have been obvious even to someone not familiar with Martian facial expressions that something was wrong. The massive eyebrows drew together, the cheeks puffed out roundly and then sucked in. The tank-like chest pushed in and out.

"Flap," Dr. Hisel began. "Flap, flap!"

"Hot gall bladder!" the bright-plumed piroquot called from its perch in the corner. "Hemorrhage! Jaundice! Purulence!"

"Flap!"

"Scissors!" said Dr. Crayton.

He began to cut away, ignoring Dr. Hisel who had peeled himself from waist to neck and was using a towel clamp to pull the rest of his current epithelium from his hands.

"Stat," Dr. Crayton barked. "Suture!"

Dr. Crayton turned his head to hear what the anesthetist was whispering in a modulated scream, so that he, but not the television audience would hear.

At this point Dr. Hisel calmly pinched one of the tubes leading to the heart-lung machine, removed the

end of the tube from the balloon-like affair, made a quick incision at his own carotid and inserted the tube. Then he pinched the other tube and inserted into the jugular on the other side of his neck.

"Pace maker!" Dr. Crayton cried, shouting over his shoulder. "It's a transfusion re . . ." He turned and spotted Hisel, who was grinning like something out of a Medieval Bestiary and breathing on all four lungs.

"You may proceed," he said, "with the operation." He was carefully pushing the polyethylene tubes down into his aorta and vena cava. "Otherwise," he pointed out, referring to his own actions, "the patient would probably have died."

Blood from the heart-lung machine had squirted all down the side of Dr. Crayton's uniform and he was damp across the shirt from his own sweat. "Stat!" he demanded finally, routine coming to his rescue.

"MN reaction," Dr. Crayton explained. "But how did you know before we did?"

"The patient," Dr. Hisel said, "was under anesthetic hypnosis. Apparently he had been told not to talk or move. He could therefore neither voice his discomfort nor manifest his chill by tremor or thrashing of his extremities. In the exigency of the moment, he was able to exert strong-impulse telepathy, no doubt because it was impossible for him to express himself any other way, and I was able to pick up the impulse, amplified by the television. He telepathed one word—'help.' "

"She," Dr. Crayton corrected. "Suture."

If it had been a closed circuit broadcast, Dr. Hisel would have gotten written up in the Journal of the A.M.A., those hospitals, (like Bayside Memorial) not yet testing for rare blood factors would have started to do so, and that would probably have been the end of it.

The general public, however, takes no such pallid approach to dramatic events. There was an immediate demand not for better blood testing or improved anesthetic hypnosis, but for more Martians.

"Your patient," the now eight-and-a-half-month pregnant scrub nurse told Dr. Hisel, "is a very pretty she."

"She is not my patient," Dr. Hisel said. "She is Dr. Crayton's patient."

"But she wants to see you," the scrub nurse said, duck-walking over to the desk to

switch on an intercom to room 34. "She's not married. Her name is Miss Stancel. And Dr. Hisel, she's *awfully* grateful."

"Ah! I will propose," Dr. Hisel said, ending with a resounding flap!

"Not right away, Doctor. It's so hard to get the idea across to you. The first time, you just talk to her."

Thus began Dr. Hisel's romance and there was about him, the nurses decided, an air of polyethylene, etheric orange blossoms. There was a general softening of the heart concerning Dr. Hisel, even among the nurses in surgery, and Miss Stancel got more service than rich old Mrs. "Three-shift" Carson received.

Miss Stancel (Violet), however, was found in tears on the day of her discharge. The scrub nurse, now on the verge of labor and therefore not allowed in surgery, came prepared to propose in case Dr. Hisel had neglected to do so.

"I told him not to propose right away," she confided to Miss Stancel. "But I happen to know . . ."

"Gloop!" Miss Stancel sobbed from a soft, white throat. "He *did* propose."

"Well?"

It was easy to see what he saw in her. It was a little harder to imagine what she saw in him. But such is the way of Providence.

"He took it back." Miss Stancel carelessly blew her nose on the lace negligee she had just removed.

"But why, for heaven's sake?"

"He said it was unnecessary to get married."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of." The scrub nurse glanced at her watch, beginning to time her pains. "Why is it unnecessary to get married?"

"Because . . . gloop . . . he's *already* been made a permanent Terran citizen."

"Oh, Lord. Look, I'm going into labor. But don't give up. I'll dig into his records when I get out of the delivery room. With a planetary immigrant there is always a way."

THE END

●

The Crispin Affair

New Novel by

JACK SHARKEY

ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU

(First of Two Parts)

CHAPTER 1

ON SEPTEMBER the 18th, 1983, I had never even heard of the planet Crispin. As far as I was concerned, there was the sun, the moon, Venus and Mars, and a few other celestial bodies which inhabited the universe, and that was enough for me. After all, it wasn't my place to know about such things; that's what we paid astronomers for. Any time I really had the urge to learn more about the cosmic


Bernklau

roll call, I could always go to the lending library and get a book on it.

My place, I felt, was in New York, where all the plays, nightclubs and luxury liner berths were. When you're born into the world with sixteen million dollars waiting in a trust fund for your twenty-first birthday, you don't really worry too much about anything, let alone the names of far-off planets. The grimmest thing you can imagine befalling you is forgetting the tickets for an opening night.

On this date, September the 18th, 1983, my twenty-first birthday was seven years behind me, and a lot of carefree years ahead. I was sitting in my bedroom in the Barbizon-Plaza, with the window blinds drawn against the glaring afternoon sunlight, sipping black coffee and whiling away the few remaining hours till nightfall by boning up on my favorite subject, show business. I was thumbing idly through *Variety*, noting casually which celebrities were staying at which hotels, which plays were opening, which closing, and being mildly amused that Hollywood had once again made "the greatest motion picture ever filmed," when the door buzzer sounded.

I was a little curious about the buzzer. None of my suits were at the hotel cleaner's, nor had I ordered anything more than the coffee I already had from Room Service. My social circle kept the same hours I did, which meant that they, like myself, were undoubtedly just pulling themselves out of the sack, so it couldn't be any of them. If it turned out to be someone selling something, I determined to take him downstairs by the scruff of the neck and use him to brain the desk clerk, who had orders about such people violating my privacy.

I thought all these things in the brief time it took me to toss aside the paper onto the unmade bed, tighten the waistcord of my robe, and cross over to the door, leaving coffeecup and saucer teetering precariously on the back of the couch as I passed by.

I twisted the bolt open, and widened the door a crack. Then I swung it completely open. "Well!" I said, softly. "Well, well."

The girl stood just outside, timidly, staring into my unshaven face with a tiny line of puzzlement appearing like an exclamation point between her brows.

"Mr. Blane?" she said. "*Morgan* Blane?"

"Yes," I said. "Somewhat obscured by black stubble, I admit, but it's me, all right."

"Oh." The tiny line vanished. She licked her lips, uncertain as to how to proceed. I made the plunge.

"If you're not afraid of being compromised, come in, Miss—?" I stepped back and held the door for her.

"Merrick. Lora Merrick," she said, with a quick little smile that flicked on and off faster than subliminal advertising. She hesitated, looked at me once more, then took three short quick steps into the room, with the same enthusiasm I imagine would be evinced by a first-time fire-walker in India.

I shut the door, before she could panic and rush right out of my life, and gestured her to a chair. She took it, perching carefully on the very edge of the cushion, ready to leap for safety at the first provocation.

"Well, here we are," I said, standing facing her, my hands in the pockets of my robe. She nodded, but didn't say anything. I tried prodding a little. "Do I have to play Twenty Questions to find out why you're here, or am I supposed to know?"

She looked up at me, her dark brown eyes woeful, and a kind of helpless look came over her features. For a hopeful moment, I thought she was going to say something to clarify things, but all that came out was a miserable, "Oh— Oh dear!" She gazed at the carpet, trembling just a bit, and giving the faintest of shuddery signs.

I studied her a moment, then said, "All right, let me guess . . . You came here to see me about something. Whatever it was, it's taken you a long time to work yourself up to actually gaining entrance here, and now that you have, you suddenly have lost your nerve. Is that it?"

Those dark brown eyes swept up from the carpet and locked on mine, and then her lips formed themselves into a brilliant smile of almost abject gratitude. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Blane," she murmured. "I didn't know how to get it out. I've been standing in that hall for twenty minutes, working up courage to ring your bell. And then, when I did ring it, I almost ran away."

"I'm glad you didn't," I said sincerely. "I'd have gone crazy trying to figure out who it was. I'd call all my friends, curse at the desk clerk downstairs, badger all the bellboys—"

She laughed, then. A soft,

apologetic chuckle, in a warm contralto that perfectly complemented her mellow-toned voice. Feeling I was making progress, I settled down into a chair opposite her perch, and retrieved my coffee, with a long stretch of my arm, from the couch.

"Now, then," I said, after a fortifying sip. "What can I do for you, Miss Lora Merrick?"

Her face looked into mine, hovering small and solemn before my eyes, then she said, swiftly, "I want two million dollars."

The coffeecup didn't shatter on the carpet, but it clattered something awful in the saucer. I stared at her, thoughtfully, then said, "Who doesn't!"

"I suppose I put it rather too bluntly . . ."

"There— There *was* a certain lack of subtlety—" I remarked. "Would I be terribly boorish if I asked *why* you wanted this money?"

"To buy a spaceship," she said.

"Uh-huh," I nodded, as if her statement were the most reasonable request in the world. "Couldn't settle for a Cadillac? Or a Schwinn?"

"You don't understand," she said, "I—I *need* it."

I eyed her warily. "You— uh— You're not out on a sort of—scavenger hunt, or anything?"

"Oh, no. You see—I have to get to Crispin, urgently. And it's outside the regular space lanes. I can't even hire a pilot to take me there, for less than a hundred thousand dollars— Which I haven't got, by the way—"

"Look, Miss Merrick," I said, intensely curious, "the price you quoted me, as I recall, was two million. Why not simply ask for the hundred thousand? Assuming, of course, that I'm willing to give it to you . . ."

"Because I'd never be able to pay back a debt like that," she sighed. "I only earn ninety dollars a week. Even if I gave you my full salary, that'd take me—"

"A hell of a long time," I nodded. "But if you can't repay the hundred thousand, how did you expect to return the two million?"

"Why, I'd simply let you have the spaceship when I was through with it," she said brightly. "I don't want it forever, just for the trip to Crispin and back."

Insane as her attitude was, I found myself liking it. She was crisp, honest and businesslike about the thing, even if her request was a bit balmy.

I glanced at my watch. "Look, Miss Merrick— Do you have to leave at any special hour, or have I time to shave and get some clothes on before blastoff?"

She sank back into the chair, hurt. "You— You're making fun of me," she said, with chagrined realization.

I stood up and glowered at her. "Miss Merrick, I am not the fun-making sort. If I had opened my door just now to anybody but a pert little brunette like yourself, that other party would now be picking himself up at the foot of the main staircase in the lobby, and— Have you had lunch?"

She jumped, caught by my sudden question. "Why—no, I haven't, but—"

I pointed to the phone. "Order some—"

"Oh, I can't—"

"Easiest thing in the world," I said. "You just pick up the phone, get Room Service, and ask for anything that comes into your head . . . And make it for two."

"I couldn't impose—" she began, awkwardly.

"*Impose!?* You come in here, a total stranger, and ask me for two million dollars, and when I offer you a free lunch, you can't *impose?*"

"Well," she laughed uncertainly, "if you put it that way—"

"I do," I grunted. "And order a bottle of beer on the side for me. Excuse me." I went into the bedroom and shut the door. I started to undo my robe, then had a thought. I pulled open the door again, and caught her just about to lift the phone. "Hey, Merrick?"

She looked up, startled. "Yes, Mr. Blane?"

"Look, I know why you came to me in one way: You need money, and I've got it. But why me in particular? There are oodles of millionaires in New York City. What made you pick on me?"

She flushed a lovely scarlet. "Your . . . picture was in the paper, in the society column, and—"

"And—?"

She squared her shoulders, swallowed, and said, before she could reconsider, "I said to myself, 'If you've *got* to pick a millionaire, why not get a good-looking one?' . . ." She caught her lower lip between her teeth, embarrassed. "Do you mind?" she said, after a moment.

I shrugged. "Hell, no. Matter of fact," I grinned at her, "that's what I just figured." I matched her dropping jaw with a friendly droop of one

eyelid, then went back into the bedroom to shave and dress.

"This," I said to myself in the bathroom mirror, "looks like the start of a very interesting afternoon."

We were dawdling over our dessert, on the small roll-table on which lunch had been brought, when I suddenly asked her, "Any particular color??"

". . . Color?" she said, bewildered.

"You know. The spaceship."

"Oh. Oh, yes, that." She sat back in her chair and frowned. "You know, Mr. Blane, I don't think you really believe me."

I set down my spoon carefully, thinking. "Well, now, I wouldn't say that. Lots of girls would like to meet a millionaire. I believe *that* part, all right. But as for the other—Well, let's just mark it down to a successful method of introduction. It had novelty, a certain amusement, and—Hey, where are you going?"

She'd thrown her napkin down onto the table, and was reaching for her handbag. She turned to face me. "I'm sorry I wasted any of your valuable afternoon, Mr. Blane—!"

"Which old movies have *you* been watching on TV?" I said, shaking my head. "Until now, you had a nice flare of originality! However, you forgot to wear glasses."

". . . Glasses?" she said hesitating.

"You know. To take off, so I can suddenly discover that you're ravishingly beautiful. Which, by the way, you are not."

She sank back into her chair. "I'm—I'm not?"

I had to smile, then. "Well, to be utterly frank, yes, you are. But it was the easiest way I knew to get you back into that chair— Ah-ah! Stay put, now. How about we continue with a few less histrionics, hmmm?"

Mentally, I kept my fingers crossed. Then, Lora Merrick muttered something under her breath, and tossed her handbag back over on the couch. "You're right, Mr. Blane. I was being dramatic. But you have got to believe me about this spaceship! I *do* need one, desperately."

"I won't ask why, since the obvious reason is that you can't very well *walk* to whatever-it-is . . ."

"Crispin. It's a planet, very much like our own—in *some* ways— It's in Andromeda."

"Which is where?" I asked politely. "And if you say 'up thataway', I'll crown you with this coffeepot!"

"Well," said Lora, "Andromeda is about two million light years from here— Do you know what a light year is?"

I shrugged. "Sounds more buoyant than a *heavy* one . . ."

"It's the distance that light can travel in a year. And light travels a little less than two hundred thousand miles a second."

I started to do some mathematics in my head, then gave it up. "I repeat, you can't very well walk there."

"But the new Lectralifts can make the trip in under two weeks," she said.

"How long'd it take the old ones?" I asked.

She narrowed her eyes. "Are you amusing yourself at my expense, Mr. Blane?"

"Honey, I know less than nothing about outer space. Any queries I voice on the topic come from the heart, believe me. And what *is* a Lectralift, now we're on the subject?"

"It's a non-combustion rocket engine," she said. "Do you know what a Venturi tube is? Or an electromagnet?"

"Ah, good! A familiar word in that jungle of technical terminology. The magnet part I recognize. I used to have one as part of my Lionel train set—" I caught her look. "When I was much younger, of course. But the other part leaves me baffled as ever."

"Oh, dear," she said, then plunged onward grimly in the cause of my scientific education. "A Venturi tube is a tube, such as on a ramjet, that is wider at the intake end than at the outlet end. So a gas rushing through there, in order to get out, has to go out faster than it came in, to negotiate the lesser diameter of the tube. Is that clear?"

I nodded. "Crystally. Like tightening the nozzle on a hose, sort of. Okay, teacher. But what's a Lectralift?"

"A combination of the two," she said. "Someone found that by winding copper wire around a hollow tube—rather than the soft iron solid center of a normal electromagnet—so that the number of windings grew greater as the tube diameter grew less, you got a violent magnetic reaction, that would propel anything even slightly magnetizable through its length at a fantastic acceleration, which— Well, they eventually were able to use plain old carbon particles as fuel. You could go to the moon on a teaspoon of soot . . ."

"Not much seating room," I remarked. Then, as she opened her mouth, "Apology! Apolo-

gy! Sorry, Merrick, I was only kidding. Okay, so these new Lectralifts can take you to Crispin in two weeks. How many teaspoons of soot are going on the current market for two million bucks?"

"Mostly," she said, "you're paying for the copper wire. The bottom two-thirds of the ship is nothing but windings of wire about the central tube."

"And the other third?" I said, interested.

"The upper third is divided into two levels, the bottom of which contains the fuel, polarized carbon particles. The top half of the upper part is the living quarters and control cabin."

"And where do I plug in my Eveready batteries?" I said. "Or is the electricity for the magnet kept in a bottle someplace?"

"Oh—Well, there's an atomic generator housed in the very bottom of the ship, near the tail fins—you know, to keep the radiation at a safe distance—and it has a closed cycle of water-into-steam-into-water, running the generators."

"Mm-hmmm," I nodded. "Sounds neat and compact. And all at once, I begin to believe you *are* serious about this cosmic excursion. Otherwise, why have all this info on hand? . . . Unless you're a space technician in private life?"

She shook her head. "Just a secretary. But I've always been a bug on science. And when the new propellant-method for spaceships came out, I read up on it."

"Tell me," I said, "your love for matters scientific can't be your sole motivation for this jaunt. What's the reason behind this sudden urge for another planet?"

Her teeth were working on that lower lip again. "I—I can't tell you that," she said, softly.

"Honey, look—" I said, kindly, "even if I were sap enough to drop the two million in your lap without asking questions, the Federal people might take a less tolerant view of my listing 'I can't tell you' on my income-tax report, under 'Reason for Expenditure'. Am I not pardonably entitled to *some* curiosity about why the money was spent?" I reached out a finger and touched her chin lightly. "And stop that; you'll fray your lip."

"You—You won't believe me," she said.

"After all I've believed up until now, honey, *anything* would sound reasonable! I'd even believe you if you said

you were claiming Crispin as an inheritance— Did I say something wrong?"

Lora Merrick was staring at me, wide-eyed. Then she reached to the couch for her handbag, opened it up, and took out an envelope. She handed it to me, wordlessly.

I opened it, after a puzzled look at her, and slipped out the contents. It was a single sheet of paper, with very little writing on it. I read it, slowly. Then I read it again. I handed it back.

"Is this thing on the *level*, Merrick?"

She nodded, anxiously. "I'm the sole owner of the planet Crispin."

CHAPTER 2

I LET out a slow, solemn whistle. Then I extended my hand, to shake hers. "May I be the first to— Or *am* I the first?"

"That's just it!" she said, angrily. "You're not! I made the mistake of telling—telling someone, and he—the louse!—started legal proceedings to stake a claim on the planet. The only way I can legally enforce this deed is to *be* there, in person, and—"

"Whoa!" I hollered. She stopped. "Look, honey, have a cup of coffee, switch your gears into low, and start from the beginning, huh?"

She paused, then gave a mute nod. I poured her a fresh cup of coffee, then one for myself, then sat back to hear her story . . .

Her grandfather, said Miss Merrick, had taken off, ten years before, in one of the "slower" ships that would take a year or so to get to Crispin, to try and find a nice war- and tax-free planet to set up housekeeping on. That was the last she'd heard of him until the week previous to her visit at my place, when she'd received a letter, brought in after various interplanetary shuntings, from him. He had, he wrote, discovered vast deposits of most valuable—since the invention of the Lectralift—metal of the current era, copper, there for the taking on Crispin. He sent her, along with the holographic deed, a map, indicating the location of the copper deposits. He further stated in his letter, however, that he was worried about his health, which seemed to be declining, and was going to rocket over to one of the neighboring systems for a medical checkup. The day after getting the letter, Lora said, she'd received a cosmigram from a physician on that

planet, regretfully telling her of her grandfather's death, due to advanced age.

"—and so," Lora said, blinking back a few suspicious droplets from falling down her cheeks, "I went to see a lawyer, Maximilian Barton— Do you know him?"

"I've heard of him," I admitted. "But go on."

"There isn't much more to tell," she said. "I told him my story, showed him the deed, and asked his advice."

"Which was?" I asked, as per my cue.

"To forget it."

I raised an eyebrow.

"He told me it was undoubtedly the wandering mind of an old man, that Crispin had already been explored for cupric deposits and found unprofitably barren of them, and—"

"You'd be wasting your time," I finished for her.

She nodded. "So I was going to give the whole thing up, but then, he wouldn't let me have the map back."

This time I raised both eyebrows.

"Why didn't you call a cop?"

"He— He said it had been lost. You see, I sent it to him through the mail, when I first got in touch with him. He returned my letter, and the deed —it's made out to me, so it wouldn't do him any good— and said that the map had been somehow lost by an error on the part of his secretary. So—I got suspicious."

"Naturally," I said smoothly. She gave me a funny look, but I kept my face expressionless, so, after a moment, she went on.

"I decided to file the claim, anyhow. That was three days ago. Today, the government assayer's office sent it back. A prior claim, with map, had already been filed."

"By Maximilian Barton?" I asked.

"By some woman, named Flax Dempster," she said. "But it was handled through Mr. Barton's office . . ."

"So, let me get this straight," I said, lighting a cigarette, then remembering to offer her one, which she declined with a quick little headshake. "You think that Barton has grabbed your map, which is probably genuine, and used some girl as a 'front' for the claim?" She nodded. "Well, tell me, how would it help you to get to Crispin, in that case?" I said, slowly. "Why make the trip?"

"Because if I can get there before Barton or this Dempster woman or somebody else does, I can prove the truth of my claim by finding my grand-

father's original diggings, or mines, or whatever you have when you search for copper. But if they get there first—"

"They bury the evidence," I said. "Uh-huh . . . And how would *you* find this planetary pinpoint without a map?"

"I—I don't know. I was going to leave that part to luck," she said sorrowfully.

I shook my head. "You've left out just one thing."

"What's that?"

"The mortgage," I said.

". . . The mortgage . . ." she repeated, confused. Then she shook her head. "What mortgage?"

"The one on the old homestead, honey," I smiled. "Hell, you *can't* have an ancient Western without a mortgage! Does Barton have one of those sinister moustaches to twirl, by the way?"

She came violently to her feet, her face white with fury. "You haven't believed a word!" she whispered, tense with the grip of her emotions.

"Aw, let's face it, Merrick, that plot's right out of Death Valley Days! The old prospector, the granddaughter, the deed, the mine—Wow!" I threw back my head and roared with laughter which had been building up throughout her narrative.

The next thing I knew, there was a loud smacking sound, and I was watching a myriad of dancing white lights, and sitting on the floor nursing a numb-feeling left ear. In the eerily ringing distance, I heard a door slam. I don't know what she carried in that handbag, but it packed a mean wallop. I got to my feet, still chuckling, and picked up the saltshaker, carried with me to the floor in my tumble.

Then I noticed the envelope, lying on the floor. Her bag must have come open when she slugged me with it. I picked it up, and looked at it. Then I looked again.

The postal mark on it bore the name of some planet I'd never heard of. But the cosmic designation was one I knew.

"Andromeda . . ." I said softly.

It didn't, of course, *have* to mean anything . . . She could have gotten the letter from anybody—that envelope, at any rate—and simply made up that deed. Getting a properly postmarked envelop isn't impossible . . . But it was a hell of a lot of trouble to go to. I sank onto the couch and tried to think.

Her story was corny, but—Didn't all girls have grandfathers? And weren't some grandfathers prospectors?

And wasn't Maximilian Barton one of the most notorious grafters alive, if casual gossip meant anything?

I nearly picked up the phone to have her stopped, down at the desk, then I pulled my hand back and didn't. What the hell. If her story *were* true, then she'd want the deed back, so she'd have to return to my suite, and— No, that wasn't right. The deed was worthless, with Barton's prior claim registered. So maybe she wouldn't be back . . .

"So what?" I said aloud. "So you never see her again, so what?"

So it bothered me, that's what.

"*Sucker!*" I growled at myself, but I picked the phone up, anyhow. At that moment, the doorbell sounded, the insistent buzz catching me short. Grinning, I replaced the receiver, and stepped to the door. Now maybe I could get the real facts out of her . . .

But it wasn't Lora, there at the door. I found myself looking into the tanned, very handsome face of Maximilian Barton. And he had a woman with him.

". . . Yes?" I said, but I had a not-so-small inkling of why he was there.

"I believe you have a young lady here," he said, his bright eyes burning with some kind of inner amusement, "by the name of Lora Merrick?"

I didn't move aside to admit him. "Sorry, Mr. Barton. The ship has sailed without you."

If he was surprised I knew him, he didn't show it. I guess a guy that well-known gets used to being recognzed.

"You're saying she's left already?" he said.

"I'm not only saying it," I said curtly, not missing his inflection, "she *has* left."

"Mind if I come in—?" he said. He didn't add, "—and have a look," but I felt the words, anyhow.

"Damned right I do," I smiled.

"I can get a warrant, if necessary," he said, less urbanely. "Miss Merrick is a dangerous woman. She is in the process of spreading slanderous lies about myself and this young lady here, Miss—"

"Flax Dempster," I supplied for him, still not budging from the doorway. Barton was taller than me, but I think I had a slight edge on weight, if not exactly muscle.

"Then she has been telling you things," he snapped.

"Family stuff," I smiled. "Tales her grandfather told."

"Mr. Blane," Barton said stiffly, "if you attempt, in any

way, to aid this young woman in her ridiculous scheme to preempt property rightfully belonging to Miss Dempster, I shall be forced to swear out an injunction against you for—"

Miss Dempster, apparently more sensitive to rising temperatures than her legal friend, laid a hand on his arm, and he stopped talking.

"Wait, Max," she said, with a sweet smile. "Let *me* talk to him."

She stepped forward, and I got a good look at her. She was tall, and slender, but by no means flat-looking. Her eyes were a dull cat-green, and her hair was pulled back into a tight chignon of red hair that would have seemed severe on a less beautiful woman.

"Mr. Blane," she said. The voice was husky, but I felt it wasn't a natural tonal quality. She'd had a lot of practice using that voice, Flax Dempster had!

I didn't respond, just waited for the pitch.

"While we regret the annoyance this afternoon's interruptions must be causing you, I do feel you should do us the simple justice of hearing *our* side of the story . . . ?"

Well, she had me, there.

Grudgingly, I stepped back and waved the two of them into my suite. They took seats on the couch, both of them noting with interest the table set for two, before they turned their gazes back to me.

"Before you contact the local scandal sheets, Max," I said, noting the satisfied glint in his eye, "the young lady and I were having *lunch* together, not breakfast!"

"I didn't say a word," said Max Barton, very blankly.

So what's to do? You can't slug a guy for what you think he's thinking. "Okay, forget it. What's your side of the Crispin story?"

"That it was Miss Dempster's grandfather, and not Miss Merrick's, who found and mapped the Crispin copper lode."

"And the proof?" I said.

"It's on file in the government claim office. I can procure you a photostat, if you so desire."

"Of the *map*?" I asked, softly.

Barton blinked. "Well, of course not the *map!* Just the statement of claim— What do you take me for?"

"I can't very well tell you that in front of Miss Dempster . . ." I said. Then I looked her over again. "On second thought, maybe I *can*."

They both came to their feet. "Very well," Maximilian

spat. "If you're going to indulge in childish repartee—"

"Childish?" I said, blocking his path to the door. He stopped, eyeing me cautiously. "If I'm being childish, Barton, then tell me something . . ."

"W-What?" he said, after a brief puzzled eye-contact with Flax Dempster.

"If Miss Merrick's claim is false, what do you care if she gets to Crispin or not? . . . *If* ther's no proof there for her to find?"

He seemed to have swallowed his tongue.

I nodded. "The door, kids, is over that way."

For the second time that afternoon, my ears echoed with the sound of slamming oak. I went to the phone.

"Desk? Grab a phone book and find me the number of Miss Lora—that's l-o-r-a—Merrick . . . Merrick . . . Yes, that's right . . ." While I waited, I said a silent prayer that she'd have a listing. After a moment, the switchboard operator came back on. "Lyceum 5—" I said, starting to scribble it down, then, "Wait, hold it. Better just give me the address. If I show up in person, she can't hang up on me . . . No, I was talking to myself."

I had a heap of apologizing to do. And also, I realized suddenly, a heap of spending, too. It'd mean cashing in some of my securities, and—I whistled. I hoped my stockbroker wasn't standing near an open window.

CHAPTER 3

BY NOON of September 20th, just short of forty-eight hours after my meeting with Lora Merrick, we were floating high over a green-blue orb that my mind, if not my senses, told me was the Earth, in a glittering metal needle that had cost me approximately one hundred thousand dollars per vertical yard. We were about to go into overdrive, which had been patiently explained to me before boarding by Lora, who seemed to know more electronics than any physics professor I ever met at Harvard, and I still didn't understand it. It had something to do with Einstein's theory—which also had to be outlined for me, and made things no clearer—about faster-than-light travel, and increase of mass to infinity under normal space conditions, and— Well, whatever the reasons, we were about to go into overdrive and avoid taking slightly less than forever to get to Crispin.

As per our pilot's instructions, Lora and I were self-

lashed to rubberized cots which were hooked to a gyroscopic arrangement that would give us a reverse-spin as we went into sub-space (I'm *quoting* most of these terms, by the way), the purpose of the spin to prevent the ship's initial warping of the space-time barrier from flinging any of *us* into it, lest we be irretrievably lost in some odd non-extant limbo which would nevertheless be quite real to us. Or is that clear?

Let's just say we put our trust in the pilot and General Electric and God, and lashed ourselves in as bidden.

Rather than give you all the details about how my stomach reacted to space-warping, let me tell you something about how I happened to wind up on the trip.

After an expected ten minutes of icy hauteur from Lora, I had managed to convince her that, whatever her personal opinion about my manners and sex appeal, I was still probably her only ticket to Crispin, after which she became quite docile, and accompanied me on probably the most expensive one-day spending spree in history, if we don't count the government's expenditures. First, we had to get flight clearances. This proved unexpectedly easy, since Crispin was not one of the regular spaceports, and therefore little knowledge was had about what sort of provisions or medical preventive inoculations we would need. We got off with standard army surplus asault packs, and an armful each of just-in-case shots for everything from motion-sickness to elephantiasis. The reason I was exposing my flesh to this invasion of privacy was the pilot.

See, Lora had planned on making the trip alone. She insisted she was quite capable of flying the Lectralift—called "Brunhilde", after the Valhalla agent in an opera—all by herself, if she could just have an hour or so with an instruction booklet. This, I had said, was *Out!* After all, I had a two million dollar investment to protect. So we got a pilot, named Binky Seers. That's the name was on his license, too, which shows either a certain droll outlook of his parents, or the extreme laxity of the Intergalactic Aeronautics Authority.

Binky was about forty years old, had scraggy neutral-colored hair, eyes and skin, and bit his nails. But, even if he wasn't quite the image of the smiling uniformed gentlemen who appear to captain all

luxury flights, at least in the ads, Binky had one qualification that put him foremost in our thoughts when we chose a pilot: He was available.

It was only after hiring him (the one hundred thousand dollars—a drop in the bucket after buying the ship—was payable in advance, to be banked for his would-be-widow in case he didn't return) that it occurred to me that it was unthinkable to let a young attractive girl ride for two million light years with a middle-aged male of unknown behavior. I didn't have much choice. I couldn't let her go alone, nor could I go along with her going alone with him, so—

Well, what the hell, I was paying for the trip! Might as well go along for the ride. So I did.

Preparations for boarding were exacting. Due to the nature of the Lectralift's drive, we could take along no metallic objects, unless we cared to spend our voyage magnetized to the cabin floor. Watches, eyeglasses, belt buckles, hairpins, coins, and even metal shoelace tips had to be left behind. They even sprayed the fillings on our teeth with a compound which could partially nullify the enormous "tug" of the forty yard electromagnet we'd be riding atop of.

"If you feel 'em loosening," the man with the atomizer had said, "try grittin' 'em. Sometimes it helps."

"Only sometimes?" I said, imagining myself arriving on Crispin with teeth looking like buckshot victims.

"But if they *do* start t' loosen, son, *spit!*" he went on, ignoring my comment. "Otherwise, you may end up with a nice hole right through your jaw."

"I'll remember that," I promised easily enough.

And so, smiling apparatus intact if not in evidence, we blasted off for Crispin, slid queasily into overdrive, and settled back to enjoy the trip.

"Scared, Morgan?" asked Lora, coming over to where I still lay in my reverse-spin harness. (I'd told her to call me by my first name. Two weeks of sharing a cabin as Mr. Blane would have been silly.)

"Very," I said. "This is my first time off Earth. It feels strange."

"Don't worry," she said. "If I'm not scared, why should you be?"

"I caught myself short of telling her that she didn't have the brains to be scared,

but decided against it. After all, I had to be living with her for the next fourteen days.

"Come on, Morgan. Unstrap yourself, and let's look at the view," she persisted.

"I thought you told me there *was* no view," I muttered, all the while unstrapping myself. "You said we'd be faster than light could catch us."

"That's only behind us, silly," she laughed. "Up ahead, we get a regular Doppler-effect of spectrum-bands—"

"Don't even tell me what that means," I groaned, swinging my legs off the cot. "My head's already cluttered with the jargon you've been spouting at me the last few days."

"Don't you ever want to know anything about electronics, or physics, or—"

"What for?" I said, following her across the cabin floor toward a metal iris on the wall. "You don't have to know Newton's third law to get a seat at the Stork Club."

"There! You *do* remember some of it," she exclaimed.

"Only the number. The law itself eludes me."

"Well," she gave a matter-of-fact shrug, "it's a start, anyways." She fiddled with a dial beside the iris.

"Toward what?" I complained. "An editor's chair at Space Comics?"

"Don't be a grouch, Morgan," Lora smiled, and spun the dial. The metal iris, like that lens gadget on a camera, opened at its center into a tiny circle, which soon widened to almost the full diameter of the port. I looked out into rainbow chaos, then clutched my stomach and turned away.

"What the hell was that?" I gasped, steadying myself on the edge of a cot. "It looked like a shower of neon signs!"

"That's what I was telling you about before, the Doppler-effect producing spectrum-bands. See, Morgan, we are approaching the light of those stars faster than the wavelengths of the light rays, and—"

"Spare me!" I moaned, holding up a hand toward her. "Bad enough to turn inside out without getting the scientific explanation of my troubles dinned at me."

". . . I'll—I'll close the port, if it bothers you," said Lora, much subdued.

As usual when dealing with a woman, although *I* was the party being afflicted, I was suddenly placed in the position of the heartless perpetrator of *her* woes.

"Leave it!" I snarled.

"Watch your damned dapple-dopple, or whatever it is. I'll just remember to face the other way for the next two weeks."

There was a sharp snicking sound, and I knew the port had irised shut, despite my magnanimous gesture. I turned back around. "So now I'm a louse?"

She nodded, then smiled. "But a nice louse."

The door at the end of the cabin opened, and Binky slouched in, nibbling at a nail that had somehow attained a length greater than a millimeter beyond the skin.

"All set," he said, amicably, and flopped with a yawn onto one of the bunks.

"What's all set?" I asked.

"The course. Nothing to do now but listen for the bell when it's time to come out of overdrive."

"You mean you merely *aim* this thing, and then relax for the next two million light years?!" I exploded.

Binky didn't seem upset by my wrath. Millionaire or not, I was pretty much at his mercy as soon as we left the spaceport behind.

"Sure," he said. "I'm just aboard for blastoffs and landings."

"If the landing takes the time the blastoff did," I observed, "you'll end up doing about twenty minutes' work between Earth and Crispin!"

Binky held up a cautioning finger. "And twenty minutes' work coming *back*," he reminded me.

"A hundred thousand bucks for forty minutes?" I said.

Binky reared up on one elbow and fixed me with a glassy eye. "Can *you* land a Lectralift?"

I withered before that cold gaze. "Well . . . no."

"So all right," said Binky, and lolled some more in the sack. Subject closed. I turned to Lora, disgusted.

"I'll bet he never loses at poker, either."

"Poker?" came a cheery cry. Binky came bounding over to us, flipping the lid on a well-worn deck. "What stakes?"

I decided to go easy. "Dollar ante?"

"You're kidding," said Binky. "Man, I don't even *shuffle* for less than five!"

We left Lora to make us some coffee from the powdered stuff in the assault packs, and settled down to a nice, friendly game . . .

By the time we reached Crispin's star, I owed Binky almost half of what I'd already paid him as salary.

Whoever the man was who quoted the tremendous odds against drawing to inside straights, I'm certain of one thing about him: He never met Binky Seers.

CHAPTER 4

THERE it is!" Lora exclaimed, clutching my arm excitedly as we stared together out the port. We stared first at shimmering silver plateaus of cosmic dust, lighted by the alien star of Crispin. These clouds masked all but the barest shape of the whirling globe toward which Binky's steady hand was directing the nose of our ship, and then our ferocious mass lanced through that airless haze, and exposed Crispin, in its uniquely formed strangeness.

"Holy heaven!" I choked out, despite myself. "It's like a —a basketball! Look at that lacing!"

"Triple mountain ranges," Lora laughed. "North to south. But the discoverer thought their shape looked more like the lacing in a shoe. Hence the name of the planet."

"Why hence?" I asked, bewildered.

"For Saint Crispin, of course. He was a shoemaker, in the third century. The first man to sight this planet thought those three ranges, with their tangent X-shapes, looked like laces. Hence—" she gestured down at the bright blue-gold globe, *"Crispin!"*

I leaned back from the port and stared at her, hard. "Tell me— Is there anything you *don't* know?"

She turned to face me, a smile toying with the corners of her mouth, then said saucily, "Nope! I even know the real reason you came along, Morgan Blane."

I squinted, trying hard to ignore the sparkle of those dark brown eyes. *"The* reason? Young lady, I have two million reasons. All dollars."

"You may be fooling Morgan Blane, but you're not fooling Lora Merrick," she lilted, oh-so-nonchalantly.

"Okay, I'll bite: Why *did* I come along?"

She laid her hands on my forearm, close together, then gazed solemnly into my eyes and whispered, "Because of me."

"Oh, marvelous!" I chuckled, turning away from her. "Perfect! And typical! Precisely what I might expect from a woman: *Because of me!* Oh, honey, that's priceless!" I spun back to face her.

"Did it ever occur to you that a man with my money and position can see any number of highly delectable young ladies, at any time he desires? Why, I know a dozen I can name right now who make you look like a reject from Lane Bryant! There's Charlene, and Patsy, and—" I'd been ticking names off on my fingers, but I stopped all at once. "Aren't you even angry at me? Why are you still smiling in that maddening way?"

Lora folded her arms, and bounced lightly on tiptoe, surveying me from head to foot with a casual flicker of her eyes. "If—uh—Charlene and Poopsy—"

"*Patsy!*"

"—if these *femmes fatales* mean so much to you, why aren't you with them right now? Hmmm?"

"Because," I growled, annoyed at her confident grin, "I have a sizeable part of my inheritance tied up in this overgrown sparkplug, and—"

"Oh, pooh!" she said.

"And what," I said, arms akimbo, "is with this 'Oh, pooh'?"

"If it was the money, Morgan, why didn't you just have the Lectralift *insured?*"

"Because the damned premiums were too high!" I snarled.

"For a millionaire?" she said, with scandalized incredulity.

I stiffened, then leaned over her until she had to bend her head back to look up into my face, which was nearly nose-to-nose with her own. "It so happens," I said maliciously, "that their rates go *up* when they know there's a *woman* on the ship!"

As my lips came together to form the final consonant, hers suddenly darted the intervening distance in a quick peck that caught my own inadvertent pucker unawares. I jumped back as if a bee had stung me, and swiped the back of my wrist across my mouth. "That'll be enough of that," I warned. I was annoyed by the sudden creak in my normally well-modulated voice.

She narrowed her eyes, raised an eyebrow into a provocative arc, and smiled like the Mona Lisa. "Oh yeah?" she whispered.

While I tried to think of a comeback, she turned casually back to the port and watched the planet growing in size beneath the descending ship. I found myself facing her back, my forehead hot and perspiring, and my hands clenching and unclenching of their own accord.

Stifling an urge to scream at her, I stepped forward, and began, in my best threatening tone: "If you don't behave yourself, I can still order Binky to turn the ship and—"

The rest of my threat was forgotten as the deck suddenly leaped beneath my feet. Lora, flung from her stance by the port, fell back into my arms, and we ended in a painful tangle on the still-heaving floor. The door to the control room was flung open violently, and I caught a brief glimpse of Binky, rocking in his seat, fighting a sparking, smoke-billowing control board. The good ship Brunhilde gave a crazy shudder, then something went *"zzzputch!"*, and—we fell.

Lora struggled in my arms as the cabin tilted wildly back and forth.

"It's all right," I declared. "I've got you!"

"That's the trouble, you idiot! Let me *go*!" she yelled, pulling free of my embrace. I sat up on the rivet-studded metal deck and watched, bewildered, as she made her staggering way toward Binky, still fighting the controls.

"What's wrong?" she yelled, over the deep hum and crackle that come from the board. At that moment, Binky's hand tugged at something, and the humming and crackling faded and died.

"The ship's gone crazy!" he gasped, staring numbly at the control board. "I had to cut the magnet out. It was ready to fuse!"

I clambered up, and made my way across the still-swaying deck to the door of his compartment. "Is that bad?" I asked, clinging to the frame to keep from sprawling.

Lora, her knuckles pale from the grip she had on the head-rest of Binky's chair, turned an even paler face up to mine. "Couldn't be worse, Morgan. It means we have no power, and we came out of overdrive at less than orbital velocity. We're spiralling down toward Crispin with no way to block ourselves from crashing." She spun about. "Binky! How long do we have before we touch atmosphere?"

He drew a shaky hand across his brow before leaning forward and squinting at a dial on the panel. "Well, if the altimeter is still working—we came out of sub-space a thousand miles up . . . We're about eight hundred, now . . . That gives us—an hour, at the outside." He shook his head, dazed. "After that—" He let the words die on his lips and gave a weary shrug.

"What caused it?" Lora demanded urgently.

"Another magnetic field. Powerful. Boosted the current in the windings by induction and brought the copper above its caloric limit."

Binky couldn't look as dazed as my brain felt. I put a hand on Lora's shoulder, and she turned back to face me, startled, as if I'd interrupted her in deep thought.

"Merrick, I don't get it. What—?" I stopped. I didn't even have an intelligent question to ask. This space life was a far cry from my normal existence. I was used to being suavely in control of things at all times; here, in outer space, I felt like a slightly retarded imbecile.

Lora, however, was patient with my shortcomings. She smiled wanly, and said, "Binky means that he can't use the magnet-power. There's a magnetic field around us that boosts the power in the coils, Morgan. Ten minutes of using them in that state of stress, and the last two-thirds of the ship become a forty-yard electric *heater*! But if we *don't* use the magnet, then we're without power, and we crash. It's simple as that."

Binky turned his head to face her. "Sorry, Miss Merrick, but it's worse than that. Look over here." He jerked a thick thumb toward another dial. Lora looked, and gave a beaten sigh.

"What?" I said, the dial and its calibrations being outside my experience.

"The other field's increasing," she said dully. "The nearer we get to the planet, the stronger it gets. That means that we won't even have those ten minutes of power when we need them. Otherwise we could—"

"Could what?"

She pushed a lock of hair back from her forehead. "I was hoping we could ride the Brunhilde down to a point, then use the coils for the landing. It'd be rough, but possible. See, Morgan, once we hit the atmosphere, we're going to be in trouble. It's like belly-landing a plane on a choppy sea— We pancake the ship on the crests of the air, then eventually dive into the air and use the fins to get us down slowly."

"We can't glide?"

"Not enough surface to the fins. They can slow our descent some, though, by keeping us moving in a horizontal direction instead of an increasing curve toward the planet. And then, our gyrostabilizers could turn the ship

around in the air—I hope—and we could slow our motion with a blast from the firing chamber, then swing the tail down and try to drop safely. But now— Well, we won't have the power for that last, and most important thrust."

"You mean that after two million light years' of travel, we don't have the power for the last few *feet?*" I said, slowly. "It's— It's kind of ironic, isn't it!"

She nodded, then reached out a hand and, looking at the deck, toyed with a button on my shirt. "Morgan— When it comes— Would you . . . Would you hold me?"

The switch from her former self-assured romantic attitude was refreshing. My hands went to her shoulders. "I'll hold you from now till then, if you like . . ."

Binky whistled tunelessly between his teeth. "Wonder what my wife'll do with that hundred thousand? . . ." he said out loud but to no one in particular.

"If only," said Lora, coming softly into my arms and nestling her head against my chest, "there were some way—"

I started to say something soothing, when she suddenly tore herself from my arms, her eyes wide and bright. "There *is* a ...way! Binky, where's the toolbox?"

Binky got out of his chair and opened the lid on a metal box built to the wall. The tools lay in neat racks inside, all of steel-strong nylon—because of the magnetic field in the ship—excepting the short-handled sledge hammer, which looked like metal to me. This last item Lora grabbed up and handed to me, along with a small hand-torch, used for emergency weldings.

"Here, Morgan. Take these and come on with me. Binky, see if you can dig up an emergency meteor-hole patch— And close the sphincters on the fuel-injector!"

Binky hurried off to obey, and I followed Lora to the side of the room, where the circular hatch leading to the polarized carbon chamber lay.

Lora jammed her fingers into her hair at the temples, shut her eyes and thought, hard. Then she pointed to the hatch, on the side away from the wall. "The ladder's on *that* side. Good. Morgan, I want you to burn the head off one of those rivets in the deck beside the hatch, and knock it through with that hammer— I'll find you a metal dowel or something to punch it out with . . ."

"Hey, hold on," I said, in some trepidation, "didn't you tell me that there's nothing but *vacuum* under us? What happens to our *air?*"

"We'll only lose *half* of it, Morgan. The fuel chamber has the same volume as this area, and Binky's sealing off the injection system to the magnet."

"What do we do, then? Breathe with one lung?" I asked.

"Will you *please* get moving!" she pleaded. "We have less than an hour. Once we hit the atmosphere, we'll be bouncing like pingpong balls in here, and it'll be too late to work, then!"

While she hurried off to find that dowel for me, I ignited the torch and proceeded to obediently burn the head off that rivet. It took nearly fifteen minutes, at the end of which time Lora was practically dancing with impatience at my side. But finally the head was gone, leaving only the rivet-hole and shaft showing.

"Here, I'll hold the dowel," said Lora, placing a pencil-thick rod about six inches long upright on the stub of the rivet. "Come *on*, Morgan! Smash it through!"

"I— I might hit your hand . . ." I said. "Why don't *I* hold it and—"

"You'll need both arms, that's why! This rivet was put in here to *stick!* Come *on*, now, hit it!"

Her slim white fingers held that rod rigidly vertical on the rivet-stub, and she waited. It was nerve-wracking, but I held the sledge's short handle in two hands, tapped it lightly on the top of the rod, then lifted it high, shut my eyes, and came down with a blow that lifted me off my knees.

There was a hissing shriek of escaping air, and I opened my eyes to see that rivet, and the rod itself, had vanished down that tiny hole, now thirstily drinking away our air. But Lora, who had yanked her hands swiftly away as the blow fell, now picked herself up from her sprawl on the deck, and was watching an indicator on the wall. I stood behind her and watched a needle drop from a fifteen mark to just above a seven. I felt suddenly woozy.

"Pressure's equal!" Lora sighed gratefully. Then she whipped out a handkerchief and started tying it across her nose and mouth. "Morgan," her voice came through, muffled, "undo the wheel on the hatch, will you?"

"You're not going down

into the *fuel tank?"* I said, appalled.

"It's got to be done," she said simply. Binky came running over, with a strange object in his hand. It looked like an oversize thumbtack, except that the underside of the disc had a canvas patch covering it. As I watched, Lora peeled this patch away, exposing a silver-green underside.

"What the hell is that?" I said.

"Meteor-hole patch," said Lora. "If a pebble-sized rock *did* bust in here through the wall, and our air was leaking, this's what we'd use. The colored part is auto-thermite. You just poke the rod-part through the hole, the escaping air pressure slams the disc home, and the auto-thermite heats up and welds itself in place . . . I'm going to use it on that hole you just made."

"But why *make* the hole, then?" I said, although I was already spinning the heavy horizontal wheel that undogged the circular hatch lid.

"Later, later, for pete's sake!" she said. Then her hand shot out in a frantic point behind me. "Look out, Morgan!" she cried.

I turned my head and witnessed the damnedest thing. Oozing up into the cabin through that rivet-hole was some stuff that looked like oil-slick, except that it was weaving in the air like a cobweb come to life. "What—?" I choked, jumping away.

"Carbon, polarized," Lora said. "To be used in one of these Lectralifts, they can't chance the particles adhering to one another, so they polarize them. They come about a hundred particles to a pinhead, Morgan, so they can defy gravity and flow through air."

"And you're going *in* there!" I said, incredulously. "Why, in ten seconds, your lungs'll be clogged with soot!"

"I'll hold my breath," she argued patiently, "and when that gives out, this handkerchief will keep the particles away for a while longer. Meantime, all you have to do is wait by that hole, and grab the tip of this patch when I poke it through. But *don't* pull it *tight!* I don't want the auto-thermite sealing the hole until we pump the oxygen down there—"

"Huh?" was all I could manage. Then Lora and Binky had the lid flipped back, and she started cautiously down the built-in steel ladder underneath. Carefully, I leaned over the hole and looked down. A few feet below her shoes, a

weird sea of sullen carbon heaved and rolled, looking like a pool of unrefined oil, black and glittering. If she fell into that, she'd drown just as surely as in a liquid. I watched her cling to a metal rung, and lean out underneath the deck, one arm outstretched before her. Then the tip of the patch came poking up out of that rivet-hole, and I snared it, being careful to simply hold it, and not pull the disc beneath the hole into contact with the metal of the deck.

I squatted there, much confused, as Binky helped Lora out of the hatch, then slammed it shut and dogged it again, with a few grunting twists of that big wheel. Lora, despite her short sojourn below, was a mess of black greasy-looking spots. Her white blouse, tan slacks and pretty face were a symposium of smudges. She sank down beside me on the deck, threw me a grateful smile as she tugged off the handkerchief from her face, then she took the tip of the patch, and bent it against the edge of the hole with a few light taps of the sledge.

"There, that ought to keep it from slipping back in," she said, satisfied. "Binky, where is that hose?!"

Binky, who had been occupied behind me, now came trotting over with a long tube of rubberized nylon mesh, which he handed to her. Without further ado, she stuffed the mouth of this tube down into the hole, then sat back with a small sigh.

"Turn it on," she said, wearily. Behind me, Binky made a movement, then the hose jumped, and I heard the hiss of a gas rushing down into the carbon chamber beneath us. Lora wiped futilely at a smudge on her nose, looking at it cross-eyed to get at it, then she gave it up, and smiled at me. "Now, Morgan, what do you want to know?"

"What's that going in there?" I asked.

"Oxygen. From our tanks."

"Why?"

"Well, it's this way: We can't use magnetic power, right?"

"Right."

"And the reason is that the nearer we get to Crispin, the less the interval between turning on our power and melting the copper windings into an electrical blast furnace, see?" I nodded. "Okay, then. If we can't *avoid* turning the last two-thirds of the ship into raw heat, we turn around and make *use* of it. See, I'm fixing it so that the carbon below is

mixed up with lots of oxygen. When we reach that point where we need the final thrust, we let the carbon-oxygen mixture into the firing cylinder, flip on the power, and the coils heat the tube almost to incandescence—"

"Setting off the carbon!" I realized. "But will it work? We can't control it— Just one big *boom*, and then we're out of fuel and on our own . . ."

Lora licked dry lips. "It's a risk, all right. But it's our only chance . . ."

"But what's the patch for?" I said, suddenly recalling the part that puzzled me the most.

"Two things. It keeps the oxygen from leaking back in here when we pull out the hose, and it keeps the explosion down below from sending a fatal flare of exploding fuel up here into the cabin. Soon's the hose is pulled, the oxygen will start pushing to get out the hole, and that'll slap the patch in place. Simple?"

"Yes, all at once. You make physics sound like child's play," I said with admiration.

"Easiest subject to learn. All cause-and-effect stuff. Most of it makes you wonder why you didn't think of it on your own without having someone else discover it— Oh, here we go. Come on, Morgan, strap in!"

I looked up. Binky was twisting a valve shut on the bank of oxygen cylinders bolted against the hull. He gave Lora a nod, and she tugged the hose out of the rivet-hole.

There was a short whistle of oxygen from the tiny aperture, and then the stem on the patch leaped up as its disc slapped and fused onto the underside of the deck.

"Time!" Lora yelled to Binky, who was scurrying for the control compartment. "Hurry!"

The disc humped up against my feet without warning, and sent me about two inches into the air. Even as I came down, there was another bump, and then another. The whole place was shimmering before my eyes.

"Strap in!" Lora screamed at me, over the sudden din. I raced to my cot as she dashed for hers, and dived atop it, fastening straps furiously. I glanced toward her, but she was already lashed efficiently into hers, lying braced for the oncoming impacts with fringes of atmosphere. I wished, somehow, that there were something I could do for her that she couldn't do better than I could. My money didn't carry much weight where I was at the moment . . .

The bumps increased in frequency, in noisiness, and in intensity, and then the ship was bathed on all sides with a sound that resembled a sustained scream.

"Air!" Lora called over to me in explanation. "Rushing past the hull—"

"It sounds like a thousand women being burned alive!" I hollered back. The scream grew higher and louder. "A thousand *cowardly* women!" I added.

Suddenly, I noticed a peculiar phenomenon. The wall, usually a dull silver, was changing. It began to look a drab shade of white, then this evolved slowly into a smoky orange glow. "Merrick— The wall, look!"

"Friction!" she called back, a note of fear in her voice. "We've entered the atmosphere too fast. We're burning up—" My face began to prickle with the heat and perspiration was evident.

"Can't we blast?" I cried out.

"Not yet! We only have the one chance—"

"But, Merrick— If it gets any hotter— The *ship* will set the carbon off!"

"Yes," she yelled back, miserably. "I know!" Then she shut her eyes, and her face wrinkled into tense lines of concentration. Probably praying.

I shut my own eyes and joined her. What a hell of a fix we were in. Here I was, Morgan Blane, millionaire many times over, young, happy, beloved by all my friends—about to die. And, most likely, about to die of *wind-burn!* It wasn't quite glorious enough to suit me . . .

I looked toward Binky's compartment, but the door was shut. I had no idea if he were praying or steering. Both, I hoped.

Then I had a ghastly thought.

"Lora!" I yelled. Her eyes came open, and she turned her head to look at me. "Lora, if we've only got one blast, that means we can't stop our horizontal motion and have fuel left to stop our succeeding vertical motion!"

"We're splitting the difference!" she called back. "The gyros have us coming in at an *angle* to the planet. We'll land on a slant, tail-first, and hope the impact either straightens the ship up as we stop, or that our angle is low enough to make our fall easy, see?"

"I wish I didn't!" I groaned. I closed my eyes again.

My ears were ringing with the shriek of air-abrased

metal, and the glow in the room was cherry-red, now. At any moment, I expected to be slapped in the face with a gob of hot metal from where the ceiling should have been— Then my stomach and whole world turned over, sickeningly.

"The gyros—" Lora gasped, from the cot beside mine, "we're moving in tail-first— We're going to hit— Brace yourselves—"

The shriek outside grew to a roar like a stadium full of football fans going crazy over a touchdown. I looked toward the port, but only a whirling blur of colors met my eyes. I looked hastily away, and waited, my flesh hot from the shimmering crimson glow of the walls and peaked ceiling . . .

Then the deck heaved and tried to burst itself in the center, and my ears were numbed with the vicious brunt of the blast that came from the chamber only inches below the fuel that was only inches below us—

There was a screech of agonized metal, and I suddenly felt myself jammed against the rubberized cot as if some monster millwheel had suddenly been dropped onto my body. The air rushed from my lungs, and then my consciousness exploded into fragments of sparkling red lights . . .

My mind cleared amidst a giddy rocking motion, as the ship, flung by the impetus of striking the ground into a nearly vertical position, teetered nauseatingly back and forth, trying to find stability. Then the huge metal needle caught its balance, gave a final shudder, and came to a halt, nicely upright.

I decided that—ten minutes or no ten minutes—Binky Seers was worth every penny of the hundred thousand bucks.

CHAPTER 5

"THIS," I said to Lora, between automatic munches on an army-surplus wafer from an assault-pack tin, which had the golden-brown light flaky consistency of fried plaster, "is just dandy, Merrick! We're alive, which is something, but the coils are fused. And if they *weren't*, they'd only fuse again when we tried lifting *off* this nightmare place!"

Lora, seated beside Binky on the opposite side of the campfire—which burned with an eerie green blaze—looked glumly at the ground and murmured, "When my grandfather told me there was lots

of copper here, he didn't tell me it was the basic ore of the whole planetary crust . . ."

"But we found *out* quick enough, didn't we!" I muttered, crunching the wafer between my teeth in disgust. "Look at the fire! Grass-green, thanks to copper in the wood! And the lovely deep-blue lake beyond the ship—Owes its color to copper sulfide—"

"Sul*phate!*" Lora supplied automatically.

"All right, all right! Sul*phate!* A deadly poison, yet! We have to *distill* every drop we want to drink."

"Just be glad we have the distilling apparatus, son," said Binky, softly. "Imagine eating this stuff without anything to wash it down."

"Imagine my eating it *with* water!" I exploded. "I could be out at Leone's right now, sipping chianti, glutting myself on eggplant *parmigiana*—" I stopped, and swallowed. The mental image was too painful to bear.

"So could we," Lora said, gently. "You think *we* like the bill of fare, Morgan?"

There was no real anger in her tone, just patience, as with a beloved but wilful child. I had a sudden guilty sensation that that was exactly what I was behaving like. Small wonder Lora kept taking the reins; I was no great shakes as a leader, so far . . .

I thought briefly of asserting my male prerogative of assuming command, and—And what? Lead a wild charge into the jungle that bordered the lake? Toward what? Where were we at? Where were we going? And what could we do when we got there? I decided the moment was hardly propitious for taking over. Well, maybe I could protect her against the wildlife, if any. We had three small small revolvers, and a box of shells, one hundred of them. I'd learned to handle a rifle in service—the army gives not a damn about a man's bank balance or social echelon—and I was hoping that pistol-shooting was merely a refinement of technique already learned.

We'd seen no animals yet, nor any birds, but I didn't figure the local fauna had enjoyed that violent carbon-oxygen blast any more than I had. Any wild life with good hearing was probably still running the other way.

I hadn't answered Lora's question; it was rhetorical, anyhow. But she was watching me over the dancing green flames, her dark brown eyes couldn't keep off my face. She

seemed pinched with worry, anxious.

"Hey, Merrick," I grunted, avoiding that earnest gaze.

"... Yes, Morgan?..."

"Next gripe I make, you just haul off and paste me one, okay?" I brought my gaze up to see how she took my offer.

A little twitch at the sides of her mouth told me she liked what I'd said. I threw her an apologetic grin.

"Well," said Binky, after observing this silent interchange of amity, "we may as well pack up and get moving."

"Get moving where?" I asked, uncertainly.

"Miss Merrick," he said, jerking a ragged thumbnail in Lora's direction, "says she remembers some of that map. It had the mine marked off as being in the eastern angle of one of these X-shaped ranges. Now, I was pretty busy while we were coming down here, but I was able to see that we hit nearly in the western angle of such a range. That means we have one chance in three of being opposite the right spot. I say, let's go have ourselves a look."

I rose to my feet, on the opposite side of that eerie campfire, and stared at him. "You mean we take off through this nightmare jungle here, climb the mountain range beyond it, then clamber down the other side because we have one chance in three of finding a mine that won't do us a damned bit of good if we do locate it?"

Lora and Binky exchanged a look, then Binky said to her, "Looks like he wants you to paste him one!"

"Oh, now, hold on," I objected. "I'm not being uncooperative, just reasonable! What good *will* it do us to find the mine, huh?"

Lora shrugged. "We— We came two million light years looking for it . . . It seems foolish not to go the last few miles, Morgan . . ."

"And old man Merrick may have had a shack or some kind of shelter there. We can't just stick around here. So we might as well head on."

"We could live in the ship—" I said, stubbornly.

"And die in it," said Binky, emotionlessly, "when these food-packs give out. Besides, Merrick may have had a short-wave. We could signal for help. Our radio set burnt up with the propulsion coils. A fleeting smile flickered on his homely face for an instant. "Unless you *like* the idea of staying forever on Crispin?" He bent over and started packing the food-cartons into

a knapsack. Lora, after a moment, followed his example.

I watched them in silence, then said, "What about the distilling apparatus?"

"Too heavy to tote," Binky said, fastening the straps on his bundle. "I filled the three canteens. They hold a quart apiece. And there's snowcaps on the mountain. We can refill them up there."

I looked at him, then turned my head and gazed at the odd blue-and-red foliage of the lush jungle that sprawled before us, a few hundred yards from the border of the lake. The trees were basically the same as Earth-trees, what with being affixed to the ground with a root structure, and having a vertical trunk with extended branches bearing foliage, but they didn't look like anything I'd ever seen on Earth, not even in a Tarzan movie. The trunks were shiny and smooth, and a dull lead-gray, and a cross-section of them would have shown a more-or-less regular triangle. The branches jutted out from the trunks in a symmetrical circle, three to a "face" of the trunk, and slightly upward, like an umbrella blown inside out and stripped of its cloth. And the leaves were the shape and color of the pips on the diamond suit of playing cards, red and rhomboid.

Lora had tried to explain to me about some mineral forms of copper called charcocite and cuprite, which she'd said probably accounted for the color scheme and shape of the trees, but knowing the reasons for their distorted forms didn't make them any easier on the eyes.

And Binky, with undue relish, had given me the cheery news that the highly cupric nature of the planetary crust was the reason for our crash— Crispin, its magnetic poles abetted by its electrically-conductive crust, was a king-sized magnet itself.

"Lucky thing," he'd said, "that old man Merrick came here in one of the old combustion-drive ships, or he'd never have gotten off again; if, indeed, he ever got down here safe in the first place."

"Lucky thing for who?" I'd grumbled. *"Us?"*

Binky had dropped the subject in a hurry.

However, questioning Lora later about some things that still bugged me, such as the cans in the assault-packs, the metal sledge, and the guns, in view of the highly magnetic condition of the planet, she'd explained that they, in order

to be usable on a Lectralift, had been coated with the same stuff we'd had sprayed on our fillings, to partially nullify the tremendous tug of the ship's drive.

"So we're very fortunate we can still pick them up off the ground," she'd told me happily.

"Makes that much more junk to carry," I'd said, grumpily, and Lora, too, had dropped the subject.

I wasn't very popular with those two, I could see, but I wasn't in the mood for popularity at the time. However, by now, three hours after the crash-landing, I began to realize that I'd either have to get along with them or be miserably alone—even when with them—for whatever length of time we remained on Crispin. So I gave in, but just a little.

"You know, Morgan," Lora said, as we were strapping on our canteens and packs, "this may do you some good . . ."

I was way ahead of her. "If the army couldn't do it, Crispin won't," I said, shoving my pistol into my belt at the waist.

"Won't what?" she asked, puzzled by my response.

"I can follow your mind's peregrinations a mile off, Merrick," I said. "You've got me in a slot: Spoiled young millionaire, about to meet nature in the raw, where his money can't help him! Right?"

"I . . Well—" She stared at the ground. "Not as buntly as you put it Morgan . . ."

"But I've been through it before. In service, my money didn't mean a damned thing. I had to rely on myself, on my physical stamina, intelligence and courage, just like I'm going to have to do it here on Crispin. And so, you think, I'm going to realize that since money can't buy everything, such as survival, that there are better things in life. Well, there aren't!"

"But, Morgan—" she said, then halted.

"All I learned in service, when I was separated from my ready cash, was that it would be just that much more enjoyable to get back to!" I growled.

"All right, Morgan," she said, and turned away.

Feeling I'd made my point, I lifted up the case of shells for the guns, slipped its webstrap over my shoulder, and moved over to where Binky was dumping a panful of poisonous blue lake-water on the embers of the fire.

"All set, Mr. Blane?" he asked.

"If you mean am I looking

forward to this trek, the answer's no. But I'm still capable of movement, if that was what you wanted to know."

Binky muttered something under his breath, then hitched his knapsack up onto his shoulders, and started trudging off toward the tangle of blue-and-red jungle ahead. Lora, with a pack just as heavy as his—her own insistence—followed after him, and I brought up the rear, my thoughts as black and seething as polarized carbon.

At the edge of the wooded area, I turned for a final look at the Brunhilde. "Two million bucks, shot to hell!" I whispered. "And for what? So I could go mountain-climbing and eat C-rations!"

"What did you say, Morgan?" Lora called, partway into a blue-grassy glade of towering trees.

"Nothing that would make your conscience any lighter," I mumbled, scuffing after her into the dappled gloom . . .

Crispin's rotation was a little faster than Earth's, the days being about twenty hours long from dawn to dawn, so before we got many miles into the tangled shrubbery, a tar-colored blackness blotted out all vision. Binky figured us to be near enough to the planet's equator to have ten hours of night ahead, so we made camp in a small clearing, drew straws—stiff green weedy things—for who pulled the first watch, and I came in second, Binky last. Lora won.

I was awakened in midnight gloom by a cool hand upon my cheek. I lifted my head from the tussock of ground that served me—insubordinately—as a pillow, and sat up.

"It's your turn, Morgan," Lora's voice floated to me in the shimmering green twilight that my eyes slowly became aware of. "I think we need some more wood cut for the campfire."

I shook my head to clear away the cobwebs of sleep that still clung to my consciousness, and glanced over at the pale heap of glittering emeralds that was the dying fire.

"Just my luck," I muttered, getting creakily to my feet. The dim glow of the embers showed me Binky, rolled in a blanket, snoring lightly beyond the range of their heat. His thumbnail, as during his waking hours, hovered within nibbling distance of his even white teeth.

Lora, satisfied that I wasn't going to doze off again, began to move off into the semi-

darkness. I reached out and caught her arm.

"Whoa," I whispered. "What's become of the girl who was so amorous aboard the Brunhilde?" I asked.

Her brown eyes, jet black in the green light, seemed to shrink a bit at the corners, and her wrist, between my fingers, was trembling.

"Morgan, let me go," she said softly.

"Why should I?" I said. "Faithful Fido's asleep, isn't he? For all practical purposes, we're alone here, Merrick." Still, she held back. "Change your mind?" I asked

"N-No," she said. "I *do* like you, Morgan. That's why I won't— Please let me go . . ."

"What are you, one of those look - but - don't - touch girls? You practically started playing Delilah just before the crash came— Now it's Little Eva all at once."

"I—I was kidding, then," she said earnestly. Then, catching my expression, "No, not in that way, Morgan. I did mean it, but I didn't, too."

"That's a pretty typical female statement," I muttered.

"Morgan . . ." She yanked free of my grip, and then with feminine inconsistency, took a step toward me. "I was acting like that because I like you, and you were being stand-offish. Maybe it was silly. Score it as a little amorous horseplay, if you like. Maybe when we get back to Earth—" She halted.

"*If* we get back to Earth—" I said.

She didn't say anything.

"Come here," I said softly.

Lora stood facing me in that pale viridian campfire gleam, then took another step forward, and put her tiny hands upon my shoulders. I could feel the tremor that passed through her, as she stood looking into my face, a foot away from her own. My hands went to her waist. I was surprised to find that they nearly encircled it, without stretching so much as a finger . . .

She stood there, trembling, waiting—

Then I let go, and took her by the wrists, instead. Gently, I lifted her hands from my shoulders, and brought them down to her sides. I leaned forward and pressed my lips down on hers, firm but gentle. Then I opened my fingers and stepped back.

"You better get some sack time," I grunted, flicking my index finger toward her waiting bedding beyond the campfire.

"Yes, Morgan," Lora said,

obediently. She turned and went to her blanket, and in another minute, was curled up like a kitten in its folds, upon that alien sward.

My eyes stayed on her there, for a long moment, then I wrenched them away. *"Sap!"* I raged at myself, but I went out into the trees to gather some more of the green-burning branches for the fire.

The jungle, silent as a midnight graveyard when we'd first entered it, was perking with night-noises now. Whatever creatures had been scared off by our landing were back in the area again. Somewhere up in the branches ahead of me, an animal gave a peculiar ratchet-like cry, a clattering whistle that swooped from a bass quaver to a ridiculous soprano whoop before cutting itself off as if the perpetrator had been neck-wrung in mid-song. Which I hoped.

In lieu of an axe, which we didn't have among the tools back at the Brunhilde, I carried that short-handled sledge. It couldn't cut anything, but it smashed firewood loose from the trees easily enough, if you picked the smaller twigs.

My gun—loaded, just in case—was stuck in the front of my belt, against my stomach. I didn't know how big the local fauna grew, or how ferocious, but I was determined to fire at anything that didn't run the other way when it saw me. A few yards from the clearing, I found a likely-looking tree with thin lower branches, and I began battering at them near the bole with the sledge, while tugging and wrenching at the leafy end with my free hand, to speed things up.

Halfway through with demolishing the butt of such a twig, I became aware, with a chilly jab of ice into my back, that there were two shining golden eyes staring down into my own, from that upper foliage. I jumped back from the trunk, and had the pistol out in an instant.

The eyes blinked a little at my sudden motion, and then their owner clambered deftly, if carefully, down the trunk, face-first, to have a curious look at the damage wrought to that half-splintered twig.

I couldn't make it out, in that aboreal gloom, but whatever its shape, it was tiny. That helped my nerves a little, but I remained cautious. Coral snakes and gila monsters weren't very big, either, but it didn't pay to get too close to them. Then this thing chatter-

ed a little, and looked toward me once more, making little peeping noises.

Keeping the pistol ready, I moved back toward it, trying to pierce the gloom and determine its shape. On closer inspection, it proved to be monkey-like in appearance, except that it had pointed ears, like a terrier's, and a wicked-looking dark-snouted muzzle, from which two sharp canines protruded and gleamed, even in that uncertain light.

And its long tail was forked at the end, into two parts, each about a third of the tail's total length. I bent, picked up a small chunk of slatey rock, and tossed it at the beast, lightly, not to hurt it, just to scare it off.

The fork-tailed thing, instead of dodging, reached out a tiny paw and *caught* the stone, easily. Then, with another little peep, it tossed it back, not at all gently. I ducked just in time to avoid losing an eye, the sharp edge of the stone catching me a glancing cut on the forehead. I stood up muttering a curse, and then, hefting the sledge, stepped in to give that thing some *real* trouble.

Even then it didn't flee, just dangled by its forked tail from an overhead branch, and made that peeping sound some more, its golden eyes glinting brightly at me. I stopped at arm's length, feeling suddenly silly attacking such a tiny creature with a thing as dangerous as that hammer.

"Go on, shoo!" I urged it, poking at its belly with the top surface of the sledge. I kept at it.

The tiny paws darted down, and before I knew what was happening, it had torn the hammer from my grasp, and was scuttling up the tree with it.

"Hey!" I cried, making a futile leap to grab it in its agile flight. Then I recalled its propensity for hurling things, and suddenly crouched close to the hole of the tree. If it took it into his head to hurl the *sledge* at me, from the darkness—! I huddled there, my eyes shut, waiting for the blow to fall. Then the peeping came again, but from another treetop. I didn't know if it was *my* forktailed thing, or another of its kind, but I took a step that way, anyhow, my hands ready to protect my head from that hammer if it came my way from the blackness.

"Hey, Buster!" I called softly. "Drop Morgan's hammer, huh? . . . Come on, dogface,

you can't use it . . . Let it drop back on the ground, huh? . . ."

Again that unearthly peeping, only farther away, this time. I sighed and gave up, turning back toward my half-attacked tree. I'd simply have to *rip* the damned branches loose, and bear the disgusted looks of Binky and Lora in the morning.

I got back to the tree and searched for that partially severed twig, moving slowly about the trianglar bulk of the trunk. I couldn't find it.

Puzzled, I went around once more. The twig had been a little better than face height, so I couldn't very well miss it— Unless I'd come back to the wrong tree, maybe . . . "Be the easiest thing in the world to miss a tree in this green-gray muck," I said to myself in the semi-darkness.

Irritated, I moved to another tree. That wasn't the one, either. All the stupid trees on Crispin looked alike to me, I realized. Maybe a native could tell them apart, but— I wished I hadn't thought that.

Lora had assured me that her grandfather's letter made no mention of intelligent life on Crispin, but maybe he just never *met* any.

They might be watching me from the shrubbery, even now, I thought, awaiting their chance to strike . . . "Don't be an idiot, Morgan!" I muttered. "Come on, get the firewood and go back to camp . . ."

Which was, I suddenly asked myself, *where?*

I stood stockstill in that alien jungle, trying to think. If I were at that ragged branch, then the camp would lie a few yards directly at my back . . . But where the hell was that branch at? I thought instantly of calling out, but then decided to hold off for a minute or so. I didn't want the double embarrassment of admitting I'd gotten lost so quickly and of awakening Binky and Lora from their needed sleep to bring me back to camp . . .

I tried another tree, then another and another. Not a scratch on any of them. I felt like an idiot, but I had to find the camp before I wandered any farther. Binky had been guiding us through the woods by the expedient of noting the fall of sunlight through the trees, then striking eastward toward the mountains. I could, of course, wait till daylight, and then strike out in the same direction— Only, they might go back westward, looking for me . . .

Well, nothing to do but call

out. I cupped my hands about my mouth, took in a good lungfull of air—and then froze, my skin prickling with fear.

Something was coming through the jungle, something that gave low growls, and crunched the shrubbery aside noisily with the force of its passage. And it was coming my way . . .

My immediate thought was to start clambering up into the branches of a tree, in the hopes that this predator—which I assumed it was; better safe than sorry—couldn't follow after me. Then I thought of our camp. I was on *watch*, wasn't I? This was the very sort of thing I was awake to look for. The campfire might scare the beast off—No, that's right, there wasn't any campfire any more; that's why I was *out* in the jungle, getting wood . . . I had to do something—

But if I cried out, or chanced a gunshot, the thing might hear it and come after *me*—The low rumbling growl was getting nearer to where I stood. Swiftly, I pulled the pistol from my belt and flicked off the safety catch, aiming the barrel into empty darkness. Would I *see* the thing before it attacked me, or would it spring at me in a rush that the gun wouldn't stop?

I braced my back against a treetrunk and stood waiting, too chilled with fear to even perspire. My flesh felt icy and dry as old bones. The growling paused, as if the thing had scented something. Probably me.

I squinted in the darkness, trying to catch some sign of movement. After a moment, the growl came again, and was echoed by another, close by. And another. Whatever it was, it wasn't travelling alone!

That decided me. In another instant, I had jammed the gun back into my belt and swung myself up into the tree I'd been standing against, scrabbling with my shoes against the smooth face of the trunk, and then drawing myself clumsily up until I could stand on two divergent limbs, my back once more against that hard, glossy trunk. Then the bushes parted a short distance away, and something loped into the area beneath me.

A formless gray shadow, with a forked tail swaying back and forth behind it, glided easily to the base of the tree. Bright golden eyes gleamed up at me on my precarious perch, and I caught

the glint of sharp teeth in a long muzzle. The shadow was joined by another, and then more, until eight of the creatures were seated on their haunches, staring fixedly up at me. From what I could make out, they were something like wolves, except that twin bony spikes jutted up about six inches above the thick bony ridge of forehead, slightly curved, like a goat's.

"Go away," I said, my own voice startling me. "Go on, beat it or I'll blast you!"

The lead animal stood up gravely on all four feet, then rose swiftly on its hind legs, its forepaws bracing on the treetrunk a few inches beneath my feet. A low, angry growl was quivering in its shaggy throat. Then it telescoped itself downward a few inches, readying its powerful hind legs for a leap that—if it were even half as good as a wolf—would carry it all the way to my throat. My balance wasn't good enough to fend off a charge like that. And I lacked two bullets toward the destruction of the pack, assuming I made the six I had, all fatal.

"Sorry, White Fang," I said, and fired the pistol right down into the spot between those bright golden eyes.

The horned wolf gave a yelp, and went sprawling back into the pack, which leaped out of the way with fantastic agility, as the woods rang metallically with the sharp crack of that shot. The double tail twitched in a violent tremor, then the beast lay still on the ground. With vicious enthusiasm, the pack fell upon it and began ripping its still-warm body into shreds.

I looked away, and waited, expecting at any moment to hear Lora and Binky, aroused by the gunshot, coming through the jungle to find me. I had to be ready to pick off any of the pack that made for them when they appeared . . .

But aside from the greedy snarls of the pack, there was no sound in the darkness. Neither Lora nor Binky appeared.

I don't know how long I stayed there in that tree. Maybe an hour, maybe more, passed before I nerved myself enough to slip down the tree, beside the deserted remains of the horned wolf, the pack having loped away as swiftly as they'd come, once their savage feasting was over with.

"Lora!" I called. *"Binky!"*

There was no answer.

My emotions cracking back and forth between fury at their apparent deafness and

cold fear lest they be beyond the range of my voice—or beyond hearing *anything* anymore—I started moving forward through that black jungle, calling out loudly with every third step or so.

I don't remember much more of that night, except that it was the most terrifying I'd ever spent. The pale pink glow of sunrise over the mountain told me that I'd been wandering for over six hours. I didn't know where I was, where the ship was, or where my companions were. And I was too bone-tired to care.

Finding a thick spiny bush nestled against a thick grouping of treetrunks, I crawled inside there, braced my back against the protection of the trees, and went to sleep with one hand on the grip of my pistol.

I awoke, much later, to the sound of someone weeping. I scrambled out of the prickly shrub, staring about me. The sky was a dull pink again, which meant that sunset was not far off. I held my breath and listened for that sound again.

It came from my right, just beyond a copse of those dull-gray treetrunks. I jammed the gun back into my belt, and hurried around the trees, my heart beating frantically.

Then I came to a halt, stopping as if I'd run into a wall. Seated on the ground before me, in ragged slacks and grimy blouse, her flame-colored tresses falling in tangles about her hands, which were covering her face, was a woman. And it wasn't Lora. I went to speak to her, then—

I stopped, as she turned, panic-stricken, to see who had come upon her there. "Mr. Blane!" she gasped.

I was looking into the tear-streaked face of Flax Dempster.

CHAPTER 6

"WELL, well," I said. "If it isn't the Copper Heiress!"

She let my sarcasm go by as if she hadn't heard it. Instead, she clambered to her feet and rushed over to me, taking tight hold of my hands. "You have got to help me, Mr. Blane!" she said, her green eyes desperate.

"Help?" I said. "Lady, lest we forget: It's *your* fault that *I'm* in this fix!" However, my curiosity got the better of my bitterness, and I added—"What the hell are you doing here, anyhow?"

"We had to come; when

Max learned that you'd purchased a starship, he—"

"Hold it— *Max* is here with you?"

"Yes— No . . ." She shook her head, angry at her own confusion. "I don't know," she finished, "we came in separate Flickers, with our pilots."

"Flickers? From where? A Flicker wouldn't make the trip from Earth . . ."

"Radnor. It's a military base on the next planet out from Crispin's star. There weren't any regular flights to Crispin, so we had to come as near as we could, then rent the Flickers for the rest of the trip."

"But why *two* Flickers?"

"They only hold two passengers. Max and I can't fly them. So we each had a pilot."

I looked around the clearing, palely visible now in the roseate light that came from the setting sun. "And where's yours?"

"I don't know. After the crash—"

"You *crashed?!* I thought the Flickers had a combustion drive."

"These are newer models, with the new magnetic propulsion units. Only the Space Force has them yet, but— What has the drive got to do with the crash?"

"Everything, honey," I sighed. "I'm no expert, but I'm informed by reliable sources that this planet's polar magnetism gets a booster from the highly cupric nature of its soil, or something. It overloads the power units on the new ships."

"But— That's terrible! It means that Max has crashed, too, doesn't it!"

"More than likely," I grunted, nodding. "But why did you two make the trip? And where is your pilot?"

"As answer to your first question: Money. The copper ore on this planet is worth its weight in gold, what with the new drive-principle. Max says that if the map's any indication, this mine could be sold to the government for just under a billion dollars."

I whistled, softly. "No wonder he dropped everything and skedaddled out here! He must've figured that even with our headstart, he was up on us because he had the map, and could get to the mine quicker to cover up. Nice move."

Her dark lashes curved down over her eyes. "Or to make certain that Miss Merrick didn't *fake* evidence that her grandfather was here . . ."

"Still sticking with your story, huh?" I said. "Well, go

ahead. Lot of good it'll do you here in this jungle. But wait a minute— If you crashed *here* . . ." I did a quick mental calculation. "The mine must be just beyond *this* range! Lora was right!"

"You still believe her lies!" Flax said angrily.

"If they're lies, then when'd she see the map?" I said. "She knew at least that the mine lay west of the intersection of *one* of the three X-shaped ranges here on Crispin!"

"A wild guess!" said Flax, with hardly any conviction.

"Sure. And she pulled the name of the planet out of a hat, and the galaxy, and—"

"All right," Flax said. "I told Max it was a stupid scheme!"

"I'l bet you did!" I laughed. "Max says 'Here's a way to pick up a billion dollars' and you said 'Never! It's not the honorable way!' Sure you did, honey."

I glanced around. The jungle was turning gray in the gathering twilight, now. I took Flax's arm.

"Look, we can have our Morality Play later. Right now, we've got to find some kind of shelter for the night— You never did say what happened to the pilot. Did he survive the crash?"

". . . He parachuted," she said, bitterly. "When the control board sat there whistling and smoking, he flung open the dome and dived out. I—" she buried her face against my shoulder. "I thought I was going to die."

"And what happened?"

"The ship glided in, and came down in an open area. It hit pretty hard, but my seatbelt saved me. I left it, and I've been wandering, ever since. I thought I might find Max, but—"

"But Max may be having troubles of his own, right now," I finished for her. "Yeah . . . Did your Flicker have any food or water aboard?"

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't think to look."

"That was intelligent," I sighed. "Look, Flaxy, I don't suppose you know the way back there from here?"

She looked around the enclosing foliage and forbidding trees, staring first here, then there, then facing me again. "I'm afraid not," she said. "As I said, I've simply been wandering . . ."

"Okay, okay . . . Say, which one of you two had the *map* on him?"

"Max," she said. "He never even let me look at it."

"In that case," I said, "I

hope he *is* down. Not dead, but good and lost, anyways. Then we'll *all* have a fighting chance of locating the mine. Tell you what— It's dangerous traveling after dark around here. Let's follow the sunset west, while we still have some light, and maybe I can find *our* ship again. There may be some extra canteens there, and I *know* we didn't bring along all the food we had. So let's get moving, and find that ship as soon as possible."

"No," said Flax. "If we find the ship, I'm through with looking for the mine. Let's go back— Morgan— Let's fly back to Earth and forget this crazy idea . . . You don't need money. What do you want with a mine of—" She stopped, as I burst into laughter, despite the dseperation of our plight.

"Flaxy, old girl, didn't you pause to wonder why *I'm* at large in this tanglewood? We had that magnetic drive, too."

"Then we're *all* trapped here?" she said, horrified.

" 'Fraid so. Until the folks on Radnor start wondering when you two are bringing back their ships. And pilots."

"But Max paid them for three weeks' time!" she exclaimed.

"And the trip here took—?"

"About a day. That means that we have at least twenty days before they start—"

"—adding overtime to Max's bill," I said, interrupting. "No, honey, they won't come looking for you. In fact, if I know Max, he never even told them where you two were going! Admittedly, a Flicker wouldn't take you out of this system, but look at it this way: They won't raise a fuss for at least two months. When they do, they have a whole system of planets to investigate. And if they happen to pick Crispin, it's a pretty good-sized globe. Could *you* find eight people lost in—say —the South American jungles, for instance? The chances are good and slim."

"But what'll we *do!?*" she cried.

"Right now, we'll find ourselves food and shelter. We have maybe half an hour before total darkness. Let's move."

With Flax tagging sorrowfully at my heels, I started off through the shadowy forest, keeping the sun always at my face. After a while, though, I couldn't even detect glimpses of the disc through gaps in the foliage, so I had to set my course by the ruddy hue of the western edge of the otherwise black sky. And then, that too

was gone, and the eerie green-black gloom fell upon us.

I thought of pushing onward, in hopes of coming upon the border of that lake where we'd landed the Brunhilde, but then decided that shelter was a much better idea. At least, being myself barely awake from a day-long sleep, I'd be able to take the watch all night.

I picked a likely-looking tree, and gestured to Flax to climb it. "Time for bed, honey. It'll be safer up there than on the ground. I've *seen* some of what prowls the ground at night."

"But—" She held back. "What if there are animals up *there?*" She pointed a shaky white index finger into the tree.

"They only steal sledgehammers," I said. "Come on, climb."

Flax, it turned out, was no great shakes at climbing, but a cupped-hands assist under her sandals got her onto a lower limb. I was just about to follow when I heard the unmistakeable crack of a gunshot. I stood still, waiting.

"What was that—" Flax began.

"Ssh!" I hissed. "It may be a signal . . ."

Another shot sound. This time I caught the direction. It was from the west, the way we'd been heading. Maybe Lora and Binky had retraced their steps to the ship, hoping I'd do the same, and they were trying to attract my—

This kind of conjuecture ceased instantly as I heard another sound, one that made the hair prickle at the back of my neck. An infuriated growling. More than one animal doing it, too.

"Wolfpack!" I whispered up to Flax. "Someone's being atacked by wolves!"

"Well come *up*, for heaven's sake!" she said. "Hurry!"

I hesitated. Whoever it was might need help. I had only five rounds left in my pistol, but— Hell, if they were as bad as I was, they only had *four*.

"Look," I said, trying to keep the tremor out of my voice. "You stay up there. I've got to go and help. Don't make any noise, though, unless you hear me calling you for directions on getting back . . ."

"You can't leave me *alone* here—" she gasped.

"Believe me, I wish our positions were reversed!" I snapped. "Now stay put, and stay quiet!"

Rather than stand all night arguing, I set off at a trot through the underbrush, my pistol out, safety unsnapped, and muzzle preceding me

through the gloom. I had no trouble at all following those ravening barks and howls, and as they grew louder, I had to will myself to take each additional step toward them. What if the other person weren't alive anymore? That'd mean I'd be facing the wrath of the pack on the ground, alone, with five bullets . . . It wasn't a pleasant line of thought, but I couldn't turn it off.

"Move, you yellow-bellied coward," I muttered. "That might be Lora out there, in trouble!"

I wasn't sure why this thought kept me moving. I made up my mind that it was solely because she was a woman, and therefore helpless, discarding memories of her damnably perfect efficiency during the crisis on the Brunhilde.

The growls were near at hand, now, and I was careful to be especially noiseless as I crept forward for a peek. A low bank of thornbushes lay between me and an open glade. I rose on tiptoe and looked over their spiny tops, into the more open area beyond.

The first thing I saw was a white billowing thing that hung like some gigantic tree-caterpillar cocoon over a wide space of branches almost above the center of the glade. From it dangled a skein of twisting cords, and heavy cloth straps from an intersection of two groups of the cords. The straps were part of the parachute harness that had held Flax's pilot. They hung open, now, and were stained and dripping with some liquid. Three guesses what.

His pistol lay on the earth below, and the fang-worried remains of a boot. There was continued growling coming from the other end of the glade. I couldn't see over there, too well, but I caught the motion of gray shadows, and once I spotted a flicker of bifurcated tail.

The only way I could figure it, he'd stunned himself coming down through the trees, and had hung there unconscious until awakened by the distressing sight and feeling of one of those horned beasts chewing on the toe of one of his boots. I didn't see anything that looked like a wolf-corpse in the area, so I assumed he was either very nervous at his predicament, or a lousy shot anyhow, or that this was the pack I'd met last night and they'd learned to dodge the White Man's Firesticks.

I'd have gone back right then, but I figured I'd need

that gun. I had *two* people to protect, now. Assuming Flax wasn't being nibbled to death by those chihuahua-headed monkeys I'd met up with the night before. The wolves seemed too busy to be sniffing the air for trouble, so I stepped around the bushes, took a careful three paces into the open area, and picked up the gun. It was a .45, a good clubtype weapon even when empty. I stuck it into my belt, and began to back toward the bushes, keeping an eye on those flitting, feeding shapes not ten yards away.

Suddenly, one of them broke from the group, and loped toward me, coming into a patch of starlight. The black muzzle drew back from cruel fangs as it stood there, and a low growl shook the fur of its thick neck. I aimed my pistol between those golden eyes again, and waited.

The horned wolf surveyed me, silently, for a second, then apparently the sounds of its buddies' glutting revelry got to it, because some of the flame left its gaze, and it turned its head back toward the feast, hesitating. I held still, waiting. Then the wolf turned and trotted back to its hard-earned dinner.

I turned about myself, then, and pushed my way through the jungle shrubbery toward Flax's roost. This sojourn, I'd noted my outgoing passage, and I was careful to move back in exactly the same bushy lane I'd taken on the way to that glade. When I was a good way from the scene of slaughter, I called her name softly.

"Morgan?" a voice came floating plaintively to my ears.

I moved toward it, and found her still perched on that branch. "Greetings," I said, stuffing the pistol in beside the .45 as I pulled myself up to where she sat. "I just met your missing pilot."

"I hope you clouted him one!" she said. "The dirty—"

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, honey," I said. "There's a little wolf pack down the road that doesn't like deserters, either." I paused, then, "Except in a gustatory way."

She said, "Oh!" in a small voice, and shivered. "That was him you heard shooting?"

I nodded. "So that makes one less person for the Jiffy Flicker Loan Company, or whatever, to look for. I wonder how many people will be here when they do decide to nose around . . ."

"Morgan— What are our chances?"

"Well, if we don't starve,

get cupric poisoning, get eaten by wolves, succumb to thirst, or fall out of this tree— They are still pretty lousy."

"If we could only send a message . . ." she sighed.

"We could," I said, "but I doubt if smoke-signals would travel to the next planet."

"You're taking this awfully lightly," she observed.

I shrugged. "A long face won't make things any cheerier."

She was silent, then. So silent that I wondered if she'd dropped off her branch. It was impossible to see in that interfoliage gloom. Then a hand pressed lightly on my leg.

"For a young red-headed heiress, that's a man's leg, honey," I said softly.

"I know," she said, huskily.

"Oh, now look, lady, I admit you're atractive and all that, but we're balancing in a *tree* at the moment . . ."

"Morgan . . ." she went on, softly, "We may never get back to Earth alive. We may not—"

"Survive the night," I finished, nodding in the dark. "You sound like an old war movie. Don't you know that this sort of thing brings on hasty marriages? 'Let us not think of the future, there's only just tonight!' Bull! I'll bet more GIs came marching home to girls they couldn't stand the sight of—"

"Oh!" came a cry, and the next thing, both hands were on that leg as Flax slid off her branch and nearly plunged to the ground. Muttering, I grabbed her by the wrists and heaved her up beside me.

"Satisfied, Honey?" I growled, as she pillowed her hair against my chest and wound an arm around my waist.

"Mm-hmm," she murmured, hanging on, and giving little contented sighs every so often.

My neck inside my collar was getting warmer than could be blamed on the jungle climate. "You know—" I said, then cleared an annoying frog out of my throat. "You know, this won't get you any leniency when the case comes up in court . . ."

She stiffened, suddenly. It was easy to feel, her being so close and all. ". . . What case? . . ." she said, after a moment.

"Why, when it's proven that Max has filed a false claim to the mine here, with you as an accessory, well—I have to do *something* toward getting my lost two millions bucks back. A lawsuit might help a bit."

"But, Morgan—" she said, then paused. Even feminine-

type logic couldn't out-maneuver my position. She knew I had a strong point.

"A fraud is a fraud," I went on, "and redhead or not, you could still go to jail for it. Of course, an all-male jury might be a little lenient, but—"

"You wouldn't dare!" she said. "I could say that—that Max—uh— Yes! Max *told* me it was my mine, that my grandfather had found it and had left it to me. I was his unwilling dupe!"

"Really?" I said, unimpressed. "And what happens when investigation shows your folks are still extant in Cheboygan or wherever? Or have already passed away on Earth? Or—"

"Please, Morgan, don't," she said, earnestly.

"Hell, relax. They haven't even sent out the subpoenas, yet, honey. You don't have a worry till we get Earthside again. Then, of course, watch out!"

Silence. Her arm, still about my waist, was just there for support, now. Her head had drawn back from my chest at the first mention of my legal position. I yawned there in the darkness, but didn't really feel very sleepy, as I waited for some response.

"... Morgan?"

"Hmmm?"

"Are you— Are you in love with Lora Merrick?"

I had to think it over. "I don't know," I said sincerely. "I could do a hell of a lot worse, that's for sure."

"Have you ever kissed her?" Flax went on.

"That's none of your business," I said.

"Which means yes," said Flax. "If you hadn't, you'd have thrown me a pious denial . . ."

"Now look—" I said, then couldn't think of anything for her to look at.

"Has she ever kissed you . . . like this?" said Flax.

Her arm, the one not already about my waist, came up across my chest, and then her fingers were sliding into my hair, setting up a tingle-network down my spine, and she was puling my head down toward hers. I went to resist, for a second, and then— Well, it wasn't as if Lora and I were *engaged* or anything . . .

Her lips tasted moist, hot and experienced. I drew back for air. Flax's head was back against my chest again, and her body was shivering slightly.

"I'll bet she never kissed like that," said Flax.

"... But what do *you* know about *electronics*?"I said in

Lora's defense. "Now there's a girl who can—"

Flax was tugging my head down again. This time I didn't fight. I helped. We took another breather, and I found that I was shivering a little, myself.

"Of course, at the trial," I whispered, "I can always recomend leniency . . ."

"What trial?" said Flax, and started that head-tug again.

This time I kept my neck stiff. "Hot lips or not, I can't very well let you go scot-free. After all, *Lora* might have something to say about that! It's *her* mine, after all . . . And—uh—she has a temper, and . . ."

Flax's hand slid down from my head. "So you're adamant," she said fiercely. "Nothing will change your mind?"

"I'm sorry," I said.

Then her hand darted down to my belt and whisked out the .45, the muzzle of which was instantly pressed tightly up against my stomach. I sighed. "Now I'm *really* sorry."

"You have another gun," she said. "Drop it on the ground."

"You've got two hands," I said, uncooperatively.

"I need one to hang on. Drop it!"

I started to comply, then said, "What's to prevent my blasting you with it?"

"You're not the sort that shoots ladies," she said. "And this one I have might go off, you know."

"There's a story going around," I answered, "that an automatic pistol won't fire when it's pressed against a person like that. Shoves the slide back, you know . . ."

"Care to test that theory?" said Flax.

I dropped the pistol on the ground. "You know, there are wolves down there, lady."

"I'll find another tree," she said.

"You'd leave me weaponless in this feral forest?" I said. "You could leave me *one* of the guns, at least . . ."

Flax was already moving away from me on the branch, sidling out a ways to have clearance for jumping down. "I may need them both," she said simply. "After all, I'll be on the ground."

"Hope you break a leg," I muttered at the sound of her movement. There was a rustling of leaves, then a thump. "Are you dead, I hope?" I called down.

I heard her scrabbling for, then finding, the other gun. I thought of jumping down and

surprising her, but she might just step back, tug a trigger, and surprise *me*. I sat where I was, despondently.

"See you at the mine, Morgan," her voice called to me. "*After* I get there, of course."

"Turn blue," I growled, into the darkness.

I heard her moving off through the bushes, and muttered a violent curse. Treed, betrayed and disarmed by a redhead! It wasn't my *first* such experience, but all the others had done it in a more metaphorical way . . .

I sat there, dangling my legs and thinking nasty things about Flax Dempster for awhile, then I sniffed. And sniffed again. Unless my nose had gone mad, I was smelling woodsmoke . . . Which meant fire. Which, in turn, meant Man!

Or a very scientific chimpanzee, of course.

The only trouble with the sense of smell is that it's not very directional, nor is it persistent. You can only smell an individual odor for a few minutes, and then some nasal gizmo goes pffft, and you're out of luck unless you can get a whiff of fresh air and start over again. But if I could spot the firelight . . . I started to climb.

After fifteen palm-shredding minutes, I found myself clasped to the uppermost—and thinnest—part of that triangular trunk, like a sailor in a crowsnest trying to sight a whale. Fortunately, the tree was a tall one, and I could see *over* a lot of the others. Black sky, glittering silver stars, and a distant arm of mountain range met my eyes. Then I saw the thin ribbon of smoke, lighted from beneath by the green flames that provoked it, tracing a wandering vertical course toward the stars.

I looked up into the heavens, and tried to find a guide. There was one tiny formation of stars in that unfamiliar layout that looked vaguely like a fishhook. The point was on an apparent line between my locale and the fire's. Well, there was a lot of forest between me and that fire, but I couldn't count on its being still burning at daylight, so—

I started to climb down, hoping the local carnivores were all well-fed and asleep. Then I wondered . . .

The trees were close-spaced, after all, and Tarzan seemed to have no trouble maneuvering off the jungle floor . . .

What the hell. I slipped down the trunk to a point where its branches splayed nicely into those of the next

tree between me and the star-hook, and, straddling the limb, hand-hitched my way out there. The changeover was a little awkward, nearly plunging me a long ways to the ground, but I ended up hanging at arm's-length from the *other* tree, which was a help. I found some more footing there, and continued my arboreal excursion.

Two trees later, I was ready to risk being wolfbait on the ground again, until I hit a patch of really neighborly tree-trunks, their main bodies barely ten feet apart. Them I could negotiate by holding overhead limbs with my hands and simply *stepping* from branch to branch with my feet. I began following this improved method of progress for the next seven trunks, and then I hit a hiatus, where even the lowest and longest tree-branches didn't meet those of the tree ahead.

That killed the aerial route. I looked forward, and tried to spot the fire itself. Dimly, I detected a slight green flickering, probably reflected off some distant trees. Nothing to do but get to the ground and chance a barehanded struggle with one of those horned packs . . .

Then I saw something down below, and I stopped where I was and made sure I didn't even let one little finger rustle one tiny leaf.

There were creatures moving through the forest below me, and they weren't dumb animals, either. They carried spears, double-pronged, like the tails of the local wildlife. That made them intelligent, but not necessarily friendly. And besides, they didn't look too jolly, even discounting the weapons, as they padded toward that distant fire.

I had only an overhead view, so naturally couldn't get the full head-on effect, but the topsides were nothing to incite a chuckle. It was hard to tell if they were wearing hats, or not, but bareheaded or helmeted, *something* just above their faces sprouted twin horns, with a wicked forward-curve. From shoulder to elbow, they had bare flesh, but from elbow to wrist, the arms were matted with long dangling coats of hair, shaggy as a collie's throat. I couldn't be *certain* that they weren't wearing animal-hide wristlets, of course—*long* wristlets—but the humid jungle temperature made any but home-grown fur kind of ridiculous.

But it was their muzzles that bothered me the most. Even from above, I could see them, jutting forward, like the

face of a boxer—the dog, not the fighter—and the gleam of upcurved tusks that were their lower canines. With that sort of facial equipment, the spears were kind of superfluous, I felt, but I decided not to risk being impaled on either until I knew a little more of their intentions.

"Serve Flax right if she meets up with them," I thought. Then I remembered her two weapons. "Of course, it may just serve *them* right if they meet up with her . . ."

I sincerely hoped, all at once, that it was their own campfire they were approaching. Otherwise— It might be Lora and Binky, or Max and his pilot . . . Even *Max* shouldn't have to wake up to faces like that in the middle of the night.

I hung on up there, waiting until I was reasonably sure the last in the troupe had passed, then I crept back from my branch-tip to the tree trunk, and started a careful climb downward. If I could see them in their camp—if it *was* their camp—I might be able to tell whether or not they were friendly. I wasn't sure *how* I'd tell, exactly. Maybe I'd spot the chief pinning a rose on Mother of the Year, or something. Or pinning Mother of the Year on a rose, if my suspicions were correct.

I reached the ground, and stood against the trunk, panting, for a moment, then I started moving forward toward the fire. Without the foliage of the trees between me and the ground, my way was suddenly clearer than it had been back at Flax's tree. I could make out a distant collection of one-room-size cubical huts, alive with the dancing lights from the green fire. Keeping a tree or bush always between me and that encampment, I made my way through the woods toward it, crossing my fingers as if it were doing me some good.

The returning gang of warriors was just putting its spears against a kind of wooden rack near an oversized hut that was either the chief's home or the local sheriff's office. I inclined to the latter theory, seeing as there was a spear-holding fangface standing rigidly before the closed door of the place, and that it—unlike the other huts—had no windows. Probably even more likely the local pokey . . .

And a guard outside it. Therefore someone in it. Maybe someone from Earth? If it were, I ought to do something about getting him, her or them out of there, oughtn't I?

On the other hand, my efforts to penetrate the place might simply find me releasing the town drunk from a sleep-it-off incarceration. Assuming I didn't end up in the cell *with* him. Or dual-gored by one of those twin spearheads . . .

I took another look at the spear that guard held. In the leaping green firelight, it looked uncannily puny. It was not, I noted, a completely artificial construction. That is, the double head had not been added to a shaft. It was apparently the trimmed branch of a tree, cut off from the tree at its butt end, but simply trimmed of its rhombic red leaves at the other, like a water-douser's rod.

Hell, I decided, after a squinting scrutiny of that double tip, you *couldn't* spear anyone with that. The worst you could do would be to *whip* him to death. Of course, *that* wasn't exactly a fun-way to perish, either . . .

The safest thing for me to do would be to simply move onward toward the east, and to give up any attempt to storm the jail. But, after all, it might just be Lora in there. Lora and Binky, that is, I added mentally.

It wasn't going to be easy. Unlike western movies, the rear part of the pokey was not on the fringe of the camp, where rescuers could cut through the wall and sneak the occupants out. On the contrary, the hut occupied the central section of the compound, edged out of being the main focus of the camp only by the fire. But the troupe I'd followed in had already split up and vanished into various dwellings, leaving the place deserted except for that guard. So with luck an open sneak to the back wall might not be observed.

I hated to risk it, though, just on the offchance that Lora was—that Lora and Binky were there. But could I turn and go on, without assuring myself that they weren't?

I couldn't, I decided, after much soul-searching.

Even if it turned out that the guy was simply an honor-guard in front of the chief's harem or something, I had to see who was inside that place. As I circled away from his visual area, to come up at the rear, I wondered if—should it *be* the harem—I could convince the caliph that I simply didn't *go* for hairy-forearmed girls with horns and fangs. Probably not. The chief would say, "Then what were you *doing* there?" and I'd say, "Looking for some friends,"

and *that* would be a nice foursome of famous last words!

All the huts seemed to face the fire, so I was glad the one I sought was the largest. Because, other than its size, it was the duplicate of any other place. I wouldn't want to bust in on someone's bedroom.

The rear wall, when I got to it, was very loosely thatched with layers of wide rhombic leaves, all dry and very coppery in their color, now. I tried shifting one, and it crisped to powder between my fingers with an unnerving crackle, but the jungle noises were still loud enough to cover it, if I worked slowly. At any moment, I expected the guard to come peeking around a corner, spear poised for tossing, or for flagellating, whichever it was.

I was very glad, and a little surprised, that the back wall yielded to my fingers so easily. A wall like that was hardly the type that would serve as a jail. Not unless the occupants were bound hand and foot. After three agonizing minutes, I had a hole large enough to poke my head into. After a silent prayer that there wasn't an axe waiting for my neck on the far side, I leaned in and looked.

It was blacker than a shuttered coalmine at midnight.

I not only could not see the interior, I couldn't even see my eyelashes when I squinted. So I tried listening. I held my breath and strained my ears. Then I heard it, soft unconscious breathing. And then my heart leaped as I heard a body shift silghtly, and a palate vibrate in a familiar gargling growl. I hadn't spent two weeks on the Brunhilde with Binky Seers for nothing. I'd know that snore among a million. "Pssst!" I hissed. "Binky!"

There was a shuffling noise, followed by a rather vague "Mmmf," and then silence. Either he was gagged, or still asleep.

"Binky!" I persisted, a little louder.

A definite stirring this time. And then a voice, low and clear and very frightened.

"Morgan? Is that *you*?" said Lora Merrick.

"Sssh!" I cautioned. "Yes, it's me. Are you prisoners of these creatures?"

"Where did you go? We were so worried. We looked all over the area, and Binky found animal-tracks, and—"

"Will-you-for-pete's-sake-be-*still*!" I urged desperately. "That guard'll hear you, and—"

". . . Yes, Morgan?" she said, as I stopped.

"I—" I said tonelessly, "it

looks like I'll be in there in a minute, Merrick . . ."

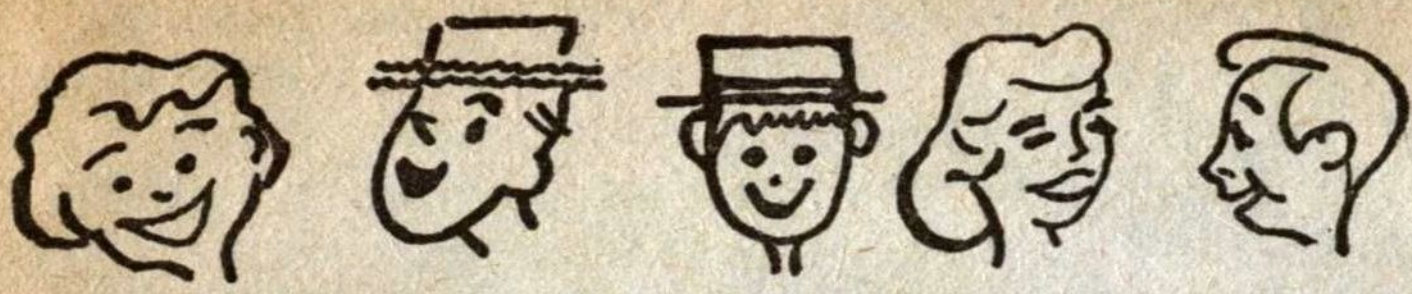
Dully, I pulled my head out of the hole, and turned to face the guard, who had just prodded me in the back with his spear-butt. He now had the supple-twig end pointed at me, and his manner was extremely menacing.

Even so, I would still have tried dodging that thing and coming at him with my fists, but he wasn't alone. About twelve of the villagers were with him, each toting a similar forked stick, all held threateningly on the horizontal.

And the horns, I noted with added dismay, weren't just worn viking-fashion on a cap. They were their own.

"Morgan, what *is* it?" Lora's voice came to me, through the hole in the hut.

"It's part two of Life with Lora!" I called back over my shoulder. Then I was grabbed, bound, and cast into the hut with her and Binky.



According to you...

Dear Editor:

For the first time this month, I bought your magazine *Fantastic*. I wish to say I enjoyed it very much.

The feature "According to You" caught my eye and because of one thing, the letter from James W. Ayers. It was brief and to the point, well stated and very interesting. I'm not the only one who feels this way about it. I live in a large institution (Nursing School) and every girl here who read it exclaimed, "I bet he is a writer for *Fantastic* magazine." I feel sure he writes stories for your magazine and if he doesn't he should! We here feel he must be a well-known author.

I wish to say again what a wonderful book you have and to never let us down by changing.

Ellen Widner
Radford, Virginia

• *Only for the better. As for Ayers, his ears must be burning—or his typewriter!*

Dear Editor:

The April *Fantastic* suffered from a severe overdose of Sharkey, from which it, unfortunately, did not quite recover. Oddly, or perhaps lamentably, enough, this rambling thirty-seven page inanity was the strongest piece in the mag, escaping that familiar apathy by virtue of its exceptionally drivelish nature.

"Eve Times Four," though I realize this is likely a manifestation of contrast, bore a striking resemblance to science fiction, but wasn't quite strong enough a rally to add much attraction to Vol. 9, No. 4.

"The Closest School" was inoffensive; an ingratiatingly enough bit of tongue-in-cheek stuff with a light touch.

"The Summer Visitors" contained a good enough story-idea, but not much story was hung upon a framework which seemed lean by itself.

"Ella Speed" was the . . . well, not whimper, but sigh, perhaps, that wasn't the bang with which *Fantastic* should have ended.

Earl Noe
3304 E. Belknap
Fort Worth, Texas

• *Now let's just make believe we are a publicity man excerpting your comments to show what a wonderful issue it was. Ready? Sharkey: "Strongest piece . . . escapes familiar apathy . . ."*

Eve Times Four: *"striking . . . science fiction . . ."*
Closest School: *"ingratiating"*
Summer Visitors: *"good . . . story-idea"*
Ella Speed: *"shouldn't have ended"*
Aren't you glad we're an honest magazine?

Dear Editor:

Having just finished reading the April issue of *Fantastic,* I am impelled to applaud your selections for this month. I realize that I am in the minority in preferring the magazine to be science fiction rather than horror, but I do appreciate occult and fantasy. And when I subscribed I was under the impression that that was what the editors had in mind in the division of stories between *Amazing* (a fine publication, by the way) and *Fantastic.* That is, science fiction for *Amazing* and fantasy for *Fantastic.* Naturally I am unhappy about the lack of a specific periodical for horror-lovers, but still I would rather not give up one of the magazines which I love so well to read. There just are too few good science fiction or fantasy stories, especially ones which involve aliens or psi faculties.

"Eve Times Four", a very good story, almost made me forget the children were around. Actually though, I don't suppose it was any more than that quality which we have come to expect from Mr. Anderson.

"Doomsday Army", "The Closest School" and "The Summer Visitors" all gave much food for thought in their almost prac-

tical possibilities, which is not surprising considering the authors.

"Ella Speed" is a good adventure story in a science fiction setting. This author I do not recognize. I hope he is new. With so many science fiction/fantasy authors going into other fields, we need newcomers.

If the next issue is as good as this, I'll subscribe, even though I hadn't intended to. Someday, maybe I'll try writing science fiction, but it probably won't be until someone invents a typewriter which responds to the voice. I can't spell, and I'm sure any machine could do better.

Mrs. Anita M. Neff
20 Grove St.
Pittsfield, Mass.

• *"Ella Speed" was written by Ron Goulart, a veteran but not steady contributor to the field.*

Dear Editor:

To my knowledge, the idea for eternal daylight, discussed in your April editorial, was first propounded by a writer named David Woodbury. In his "Guns of Eternal Day" this author describes how Professor Cojol produces light everlasting, not by encircling the Earth with dust, but by rendering the moon incandescent—thus changing it into a duplicate sun—by bombarding it with streams of "ionized matter."

"Professor Cojol," pleaded Ruth, ". . . Please stop it! . . . Don't you see what you are doing?"

"Two suns in the sky!" Cojol chanted, "I've dreamed of it. I hate the night! My dear, don't you realize how much crime is committed under the protection of night? Don't you realize what a boon I have conferred on agriculture? . . . Some day men will call Anton Cojol the benefactor of mankind."

"With no moon and no night," said Ruth slowly, "there is no romance left in the world . . ."

"Romance!" Cojol sneered.

(Astounding Stories, *July 1934, p. 132.*)

The reputed conflict between "sense and sensibility . . . between "science" and what was classified as "romance", was a popular theme for science-fiction writers of this period. As

a rough estimate, we may say that it places the "thought-variant" novel of the mid-thirties just ahead of the earlier type of "Faustian" science-fiction story, according to which science was a positive evil, the revelation of knowledge, "not meant" for humans to possess. I do not think it proper to give details here; since all particulars will be furnished in the critical "history" of pulp science-fiction, by Arthur Jean Cox and myself, of which the first volume is anticipated sometime in 1961.

The third chapter of this work is now in progress; a part of the second chapter—which includes Cox's illuminating study of "Anthony Gilmore"—is to be printed soon in Redd Boggs' amateur magazine *Skyhook*. Allow me the use of these columns to endorse Boggs' publication, which is possibly the only literate "fanzine" now in existence.

I am looking forward to the next issue of *Fantastic Science Fiction* with its story by H. P. Lovecraft. The printing of an unknown work by this writer is to be regarded as an important literary event.

Leland Sapiro
c/o Dept. of Mathematics
Chico State College
Chico, Calif.

• *There have been several science fiction approaches to eternal daylight. As for ending romance, it seems to us there might be quite a bit of romance in standing on a terrace with a beautiful girl under an incandescent moon or an ionized dust ring. The first problem: catch your girl!*

Dear Editor:

Thanks so much for printing my last letter. I do hope this one will find its way into "According To You." From my last letter, you know how I feel about Lovecraft, so you can understand how I can't wait to get the May issue, coming out in a few days. It's almost as if you took my suggestion and dug an unknown one up. I should be satisfied with getting one fantasy, but I can't help hoping that this story will be followed by some stories by Rohmer, Derleth, and some reprints by Kuttner, Merritt, etc.

You stated that it's hard to get fantasy. Well, don't you

commission authors to write a certain type of story? So couldn't you just ask them to write some fantasy? Of course you must be in a tough financial situation with fantasy, not knowing whether it'll fall flat on its face or not. There are quite a few encouraging factors on that point. First, you took a poll and found that the majority of your readers wanted fantasy. Second, two reprint fantasy magazines are doing quite well, and there are many, many paperbacks devoted exclusively to fantasy and weird stories. At present there are at least five of them. So, maybe you could give it another try. Contrary to one of your fans, I'd sure like to see the words "Science Fiction" omitted from the front cover.

I don't know about others, but I consider the stories in *Fantastic* and *Amazing* tops in the sf field, You've got some which are half fantasy and half science fiction, which are good too. I'd say the best of yours over the past year or so have been: "The Lurker", "The Trouble with Magic", "The Fife of Bodidharma", "The Blackbird", "Winter Boy, Summer Girl", "The Funnel of God", "In The Circle of Nowhere", "The Complete Father", "Marianna", and "The Kink Remover".

As others have said, you already have a great sf magazine. Why not balance it with fantasy? One person also pointed out that *Weird Tales,* lasted over thirty years. Well, I'm still hopeful.

Jeff Newman
228 Stewart Ave.
Nutley 10, N. J.

• *We are in the midst of starting a determined effort to get more fantasy into Fantastic. If we are successful, it is quite possible we may be able to make you happy about changing part of our title. Let's all keep our fingers crossed! The outlook is bright.*

Dear Editor:

I've heard, seen and read about everything, now. So Jack Sharkey has finally — the Starving Bug, eh—ha, sometimes, I really do wonder — landed a see—saw novelet in *Fantastic,* huh? It was the worst one that I've ever read in either *Fantastic* or *Amazing,* and after all of the sweet things I have

been saying about all his short stories, leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

I'd get another by Leinster or someone or else, hang myself.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Ala.

• *Well, there's a Sharkey serial in this issue for you to evaluate. Like him better or worse when he writes longer or shorter?*

Dear Editor:

I agree 100% with John Pesta. At first I looked rather disdainfully at the addition of Science Fiction Stories to your title, but now I've decided that it is very good. At least you say that your magazines are science fiction rather than conceal it. As John pointed out, there are several other magazines now which do not. I had noticed these changes in the other magazines, but they caused me no concern as I am devoted to the two fine Ziff—Davis publications more than any other science fiction magazine in the field. I hope you will keep up your policy of saying that you put out science fiction magazines and will not result to publishing a pseudo—scientific magazine or a *Junior Scientific American.*

Billy Joe Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Ala.

• *Science fiction is our bread and butter (or meat and potatoes, if you will, or even our gin and vermouth), and we will always concentrate on it. Good fantasy will appear with sf in* Fantastic; *and if we can publish an interesting BUT non—technical fact article, we will do so.*

★ ★ ★

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