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OCTOBER

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

DELUGE II

By Robert F. Young

THE MOTHER

By David H. Keller, M.D.

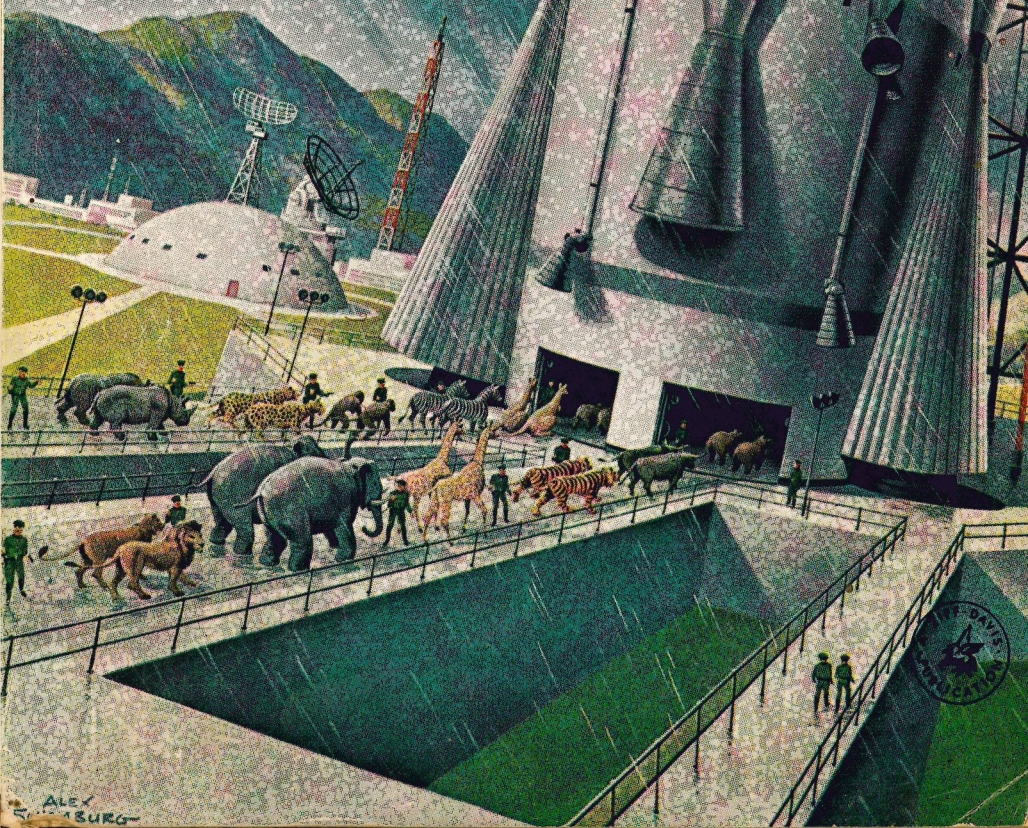
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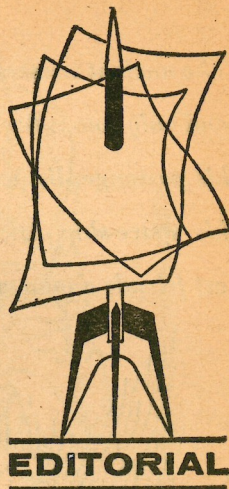
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MOST of the progress that has been achieved so far in shaking man free from the dusty ground of earth has been rooted in the development of machinery and techniques that would make it possible to adapt the alien environment of space to the human mind and body (and, perhaps, soul?). Recently, however, scientists proposed the revolutionary opposite: adapting the human being to the environment. He would then, in the words of Dr. Manfred Clynes and Dr. Nathan Kline, become a "cyborg"—a "man-machine in which the control mechanisms of the human portion are modified externally by drugs or regulatory devices so that the being can live in an environment different from the normal one." ("Cyborg" is a word compounded of "cybernetics," the science of information control, and "organism.")



The cyborg would be something more than human—or, if you are philosophically inclined, perhaps something less than human. Eating, breathing and other functions would be automatically handled by drugs and machines, many of which would be directly built into the organism's flesh. Some of you may be familiar with sf stories about the men who "terra-formed" alien planets. Our scientists are going a step better: they are "space-forming" human beings.

How would the adaptation to a hostile environment be accomplished? Here are some things the two scientists suggested:

- replacing the blood's oxygen with carbon dioxide by rigging a "solar-powered lung" to a man's arteries. This would do away with the need for breathing.
- processing body wastes to extract their nutrients, and then recycling this material back into the carbon-dioxide bloodstream. This would do away with the need for eating.
- injecting, automatically by osmotic pumps or similar devices, drugs that would induce cold sleep for the long journeys across interstellar distances. The injection device could be surgically incorporated in the cyborg's body.
- automatically heating the brain to enable it to maintain full function during hibernation.
- implanting devices to measure and react against dangerous

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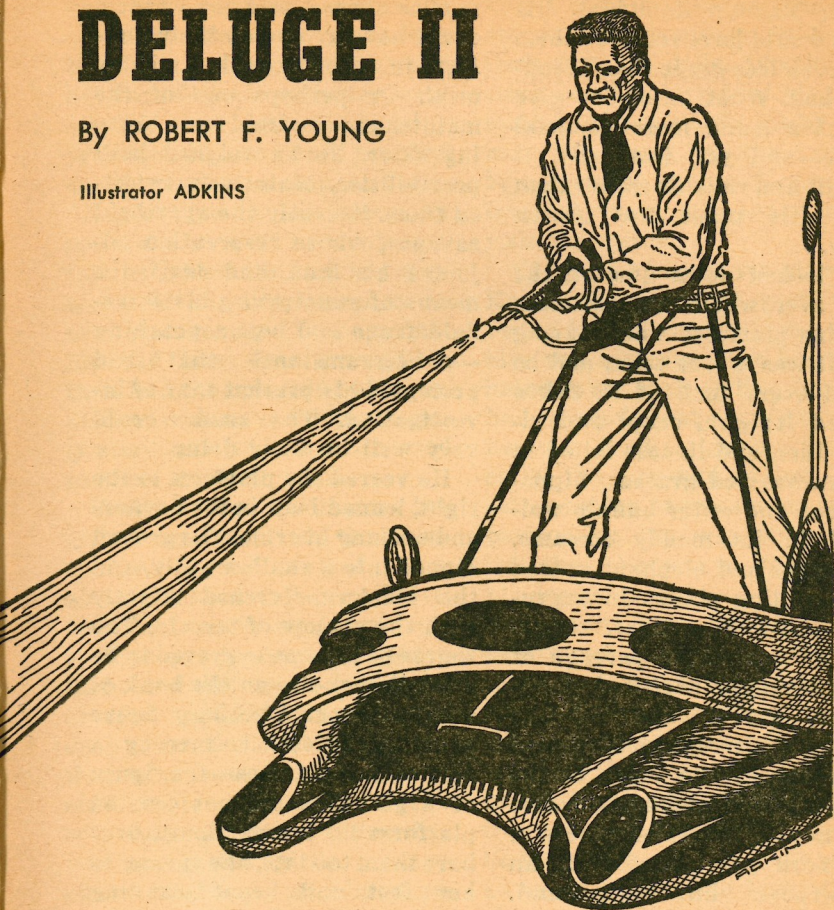
The ancient stresses were ready to tear the earth apart, and only Anton Burke was ready. He planned to choose his passenger-list with care. But when the time came, his space-ship Ark was empty—save for the strangest friends a man could have on a journey to the stars.



DELUGE II

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrator ADKINS



*The brazen throat of war
had ceased to roar; All now
was turned to jollity and
game—*

—PARADISE LOST

IN COMMON with Stendhal,
he sought after mistresses;
in common with Stendhal, he
won but few; in common with
Stendhal, he was ugly to look at;
in common with Stendhal, he
was gifted with foresight. But
he was destined to give his
world no Julien Sorel, no ex-

quisite Madame de Rênal. His world would have received them with even less grace than Stendhal's had. What he had to give was of a much more material nature—and yet, ironically, it brought him ridicule rather than fame. His name was Anton Burke.

He looked down now on the veldt over which his noiseless shooting-platform was bearing him. It was a vast veldt, and he owned every inch of it. Zebra roamed it; gnu, okapi and giraffe. Lion and lioness lolled in its sun-warmed grasses, hippopotamus and water buffalo wallowed in its muddy streams, rhinoceros and elephant grazed on its rolling plains. Incongruously there were tiger, kangaroo and ocelot. An acreage of riotous jungle harbored chimpanzee, gibbon and baboon; gorilla, *Cercopithecidae*—and orangoutang. The Veldt, as the gleaming sign above its ornate entrance on Diversion Street in Old York proclaimed, was an all-purpose hunting-ground. Anton Burke, rich to begin with, had populated it at great expense with the species of fauna that had almost been killed off during the pre-exodus era, and as a result had become even richer.

Far to his right, smoke rose in a tenuous blue-white column. There were numerous hunting-

parties abroad, and one of them could have grounded their platform in order to cook a midday meal. Or perhaps one of the maintenance androids was burning litter. Burke weighed both possibilities, tentatively rejected them. Recently the apartheid savages, whose reservation adjoined his land, had devised a means of penetrating his force-field fence and begun poaching—a circumstance that had prompted his present tour of investigation. The smoke could very well be their doing.

He veered the platform to the right, leaned back in the harness and unslung his rifle. The ground dipped into a shallow gully, and the platform lurched slightly with the change of terrain. The source of the smoke proved to be a small cook-fire on the bank of a little brook. A solitary figure squatted before it, turning a spit over the flames—the figure of a girl. She did not see the platform till it was almost over her; then, too late, she sprang to her feet and began running along the bank. Burke raised the rifle, aimed and squeezed the trigger. The girl collapsed in midstride and rolled into the brook.

HE grounded the platform, stepped off and pulled her up on the bank. She was clad in a skimpy sarong made of ante-

lope hide—standard attire for apartheid females. Her long hair was midnight-black, and her dark delicate eyebrows were so vivid that they gave the impression of having been penciled on. Her face was thin, and surprisingly young—at the very most, she couldn't be a day over thirty. Indeed, the striking symmetry of her body denoted an even younger age. The aparthoids had been less susceptible than had the coloreds to the radiation storms, and consequently sterilization had not occurred in them quite so soon.

While he was waiting for the girl to recover from the stun-charge, Burke walked back along the bank to her cook-fire. Skewered on the crude spit was a hind-quarter cut of okapi flesh. A dozen yards away, the carcass lay half-hidden in the deep grass, the shaft of a primitive spear protruding from its side. He stared at the carcass in cold fury, mentally estimating how much the girl's contemplated meal had cost him; then he kicked the spit and the fire into the brook and returned to the platform. After contacting the veldt-base on the radio-phone, he gave his location and told his wife to send out a maintenance android to pick the carcass up. It would never do for any of his carnivores to get a taste of okapi flesh, else they

might come to prefer it to the standard beef-rations each of them was fed daily. Okapis, in common with the rest of his animals, had been unaffected by the radiation storm, and their numbers were increasing. Nevertheless, they were still too rare to risk decimation.

The girl had not yet stirred. He sat down on the platform, rested his rifle on his knees and idly ran his eyes over her. He hated every inch of her, but he had to admit that every inch of her was good to look at. Ironically, the sun had tanned her skin a golden brown, and in comparison his own was lily-white. But then, he was a light-complexioned man.

As he sat there, he found himself thinking of his current mistress. Eulalie Bernard was the best Frivolity Street had to offer, but her blond beauty withered into tinselly prettiness next to the dark and vivid beauty of this savage he had felled. Eulalie hated him quite cordially, and he knew it; he also knew that she put up with him solely because he could afford a more luxurious love-nest than his rivals. However, a man in his position needed a striking mistress and Eulalie had been the most striking he could find.

A striking mistress . . . This apartheid savage now—wouldn't she be striking though?

Washed and dressed, her hair aligned in a cosmetically correct coiffeur; her crude manners disciplined to conform to the conventions of mid-twenty-sixth century society? He pictured himself showing up at the forthcoming mayorial ball in Old York with her on his arm, and he found the picture thrilling—so thrilling, in fact, that when the girl's eyes fluttered open, his heart began to pound and blood throbbled thickly in his temples.

The eyes were a deep cold blue. Loathing leaped into them the second she saw him. He directed the muzzle of the rifle at the center of her forehead. "Get up," he said.

Grudgingly she complied. He got a nylon snare-net out of the platform locker, dropped it over her upper body and secured it. He shoved her toward the platform. "Get on."

She whirled, blue eyes diamond-bright with fury. "Don't touch me, nigger!"

He drew back his hand to slap her face, but it was an empty gesture and he knew it. He was incapable of hitting anyone, Anton Burke was, and an apartheid savage was no exception. Self-contempt suffused him. "Get on," he repeated.

THIS time she complied. The platform was a standard two-man job, and after securing

her in one of the two harnesses, he secured himself in the other, lifted to sixty feet and headed back for the base. Mountains rimmed the western edge of the veldt, and for a long while nothing was visible against their misty-blue background. Gradually, however, the tall tapered shape of his reconditioned and reconverted starship emerged from the blueness, and not long afterward the dome of the old radar-telescope building that housed his veldt living-quarters could be seen gleaming in the afternoon sunlight. Beyond the dome, the base-buildings showed faintly at the feet of the mountains, and far to the right lay the deserted structures of the old Bantu staging-area.

The girl never once took her eyes from the ship from the moment it emerged from its blue background till the moment they came down in front of the dome. Despite her undisguised loathing for him, Burke found the picture he had drawn more and more intriguing. And there was an excellent chance that it could be brought to life. Poaching by an apartheid was punishable by death, and with such an alternative hanging over her head, she should prove to be most cooperative.

He ushered her into the dome and down a paneled hall to the living room. The living room oc-

cupied the entire rear-half of the building, and a wide window extending from the apex of the concave ceiling to the floor provided a splendid view of a jungle-clad mountainside. After removing the snare-net, he indicated a twenty-foot sofa, and she sat down reluctantly.

He wasted no time in outlining his proposition. Standing before her, his short bulky body silhouetted against the mountainside, he pointed out first of all what would be in store for her if he turned her over to the Old York authorities; then he told her what he had in mind. She was sitting bolt-upright on the sofa when he finished, eyes glittering with hatred. "Do you think I'd sleep with *you*?" she demanded.

He wanted to point out that he was not a negro, but a colored, and that the negro blood that flowed in his veins was as negligible as the negro blood that flowed in the veins of most modern Americans; but doing so would have given her the false impression that he was ashamed of that blood. Therefore, he let the epithet pass. "You would be my mistress in name only," he explained, "and the whorl-lock on the love-nest in which I established you would be adjusted to respond to your touch alone. Surely you can see the advantages of such a way of life. For

the first time since you were born you would have enough to eat and a roof other than a skin tarpaulin over your head. You would have clothes to wear—the best clothes Old York has to offer—and you would be a respected member of civilized society. And your only obligations would be to attend public gatherings with me and to give the impression while doing so that you respected and admired me. I am, in effect, offering to touch you with my magic wand—and my magic wand is hard cold cash.

She was regarding him narrowly. Why?"

"I—I need someone like you. Someone unusual who will attract favorable attention to me and to my business." He withdrew a lavender kerchief from the pocket of his tailored hunting-jacket and patted his forehead. To his astonishment, he saw that his hand was trembling. He replaced the kerchief and took a deep breath. "There is yet another advantage that would accrue from your acceptance."

"Yes?"

"I had two reasons for purchasing this tract of land," Burke said. "One was its rich potentials as a hunting-ground; the other was the spaceport and ship that came with it. The ship is the last of its kind—the last

the World-office of Stellar Migration had built—and it was never put into use because at the time of its completion, the predicted radiation storms had already begun and the emigration ban was in effect. Both the ship and the spaceport then became the property of the new center of world-government—Old York—and after the few Bantus who had been left behind took telepassage to the city, both were allowed to fall into desuetude. I got them for a song, and several months ago, when I became convinced that my seismograph extrapolations were correct, I had the ship reconditioned. When the forthcoming tectonic revolution begins, I, and I alone, will have the means of escaping destruction, and I and I alone, will choose my fellow-passengers. Many of them I have already chosen, though I've informed none of them yet. I have room for many more."

HE paused, searching her eyes for the awe which his words should have evoked. He did not find it. Presently, "Let me elaborate," he went on. "In tech-school I specialized in seismology. Today it is no longer taught, and the tutorobot who taught it has since been scrapped; but even then it was an unpopular subject. But for some reason it

fascinated me—so much so, in fact, that I have made a hobby of it ever since. Today, in the basement of The Veldt building in Old York, I have a central co-ordinator which is attuned to hundreds of hypersensitive seismographs located in key positions all over the world. The co-ordinator interprets their recordings, correlates them and projects the result on a huge graph. I instituted the setup because I had been led to believe from my earlier seismic observations that centuries of weather-control have interfered with the normal cooling-off process of the planet and have brought about the conditions necessary for a new kind of tectonic disturbance. I have found out since that such is actually the case, and thanks to the efficiency of my seismic setup, I can predict the beginning of the end almost to the day. The new tectonic revolution will commence on or near the seventh of July—less than a month from now."

He began pacing up and down, and when he spoke again, his voice was slightly louder than it had been before: "But this time, as I inferred, the revolution will be the result of expansion, rather than contraction. This time, the mountains will not rise, but the continents will sink, and as a prelude, there will be rains such as man has

never known before!" He swept his arm in a wide arc, and his voice rose higher. "All will be covered, save for the tops of the highest mountains, and they will be as barren islands in a vast planetary sea. Let the civic dignitaries and their mistresses laugh at me behind my back—I don't care! When the time comes they'll listen to me. 'Save us, Anton Burke!' they'll say. 'Save us, please!'" He darted over to a huge tele-window, tuned it into the spaceport. He pointed at the ship with a rigid forefinger. "There it is—the *Deucalion*—and I own it, it's mine! It will carry me and whomever I choose to accompany me to Alpha Centauri VI, and there I will establish a colony far superior to the one established on Alpha Centauri V by the unfortunates who escaped the radiation storms, and I will call it Asgard—the abode of the gods!" He turned from the tele-window and triumphantly faced the girl. His blob-like body and ugly moon-shaped face anticlimaxed his rhetoric, but he was blissfully unaware of the aspect he presented. "As my mistress," he concluded, his voice calmer now, "your salvation would, of course come first."

There was awe in her eyes now all right—or was it simply fear? "Be—before your wife's?" she asked.

He nodded. "Before my wife's. In Old York society," he explained, "a marriage is no more than a merger. My wife owned the Diversion Street frontage that I needed for my veldt enterprise; I possessed the money and the business acumen necessary to put that frontage to profitable use. Hence our partnership—or marriage. She has, of course, no claim to the *Deucalion*—I bought that and the spaceport in my own name. And now, if you will give me *your* name, or whatever other one you care to go by, I'll have the necessary papers fabricated and by tomorrow morning you will be a citizen of Old York."

She got up from the sofa, walked over to the huge window and looked out at the green mountainside. At length, "It is very pleasant here," she said.

He knew then that he had won, and relief suffused him. "Your name?" he asked in a slightly thicker voice.

She did not bother to turn. "Leah Volkertszoon."

"We'll make it 'Volker'." Modern apartheid often replaced their real surnames with historical substitutes in an attempt to suggest a genealogy that oftentimes did not exist. In all probability she didn't know herself whether she had descended from the original Dutch settlers, the English settlers who had fol-

lowed, or from the American expatriates who had migrated to South Africa in the last years of the twentieth century when de-segregation had finally triumphed in their own country. "I'll inform my robotler of your presence and it will take care of your needs. It will also see to it that you don't leave this building. I'll be back for you in the morning."

She continued to look at the mountainside. He waited several moments, then, angrily, he left the room, climbed a spiral stairway to his sleeping quarters and changed into pastel street-clothes. After summoning his robotler and giving it the necessary instructions, he left the building and returned to the base on the shooting-platform.

IT was but a few steps from the platform-hangar to the Safari Room. Here, half a dozen customers were being briefed on platform-shooting by his wife, Pamela. He was careful to bestow an ingratiating smile on each of them as he passed through the room on his way to the teleportal. Pamela was wearing a translucent yellow blouse and fawn-colored jodhpurs. Her cupreous hair was coiffured in accordance with the latest style—parted in the middle, one side braided, and coiled behind her right ear, the other side combed

down in such a way as to create a spray-effect above her left breast—and gave her oval face an aristocratic cast. As he passed, her intelligent gray eyes met his in the withdrawn way attractive women reserved for him, and he cursed her silently behind his empty smile. In a moment of weakness, he had included her name on his mental passenger-list; now, with sudden savage glee, he struck it off.

After unlocking the teleportal, he stepped across north-western Africa, the Atlantic Ocean, the Brooklyn ghost-city and the East River, and emerged on the mezzanine of The Veldt building. He had made the transition so many times that the brief tingling of his nerve-ends no longer registered on his consciousness, and he descended the marble steps to the concourse as casually as though he had just emerged from one of the private lifts that gave access to his and Pamela's twenty-story multi-plex. Presently he stepped into Diversion Street and hailed an aircab.

Diversion Street had once been Park Avenue, just as Old York had once been New York. The latter change in name had resulted from the founding of a New York on Alpha Centauri V, while the former had resulted partly from the post-exodus re-

building of Manhattan—the only section of the city still in use—and partly from the disappearance of the last vestiges of puritanism from the make-up of its re-builders when it was discovered that instead of altering their genes and making future mutations of the race inevitable, as had been expected, the cosmic radiation storms had rendered them sterile and simultaneously quintupled their longevity. Old York was Babylon and Sodom and Gomorrah, all rolled into one. Except for the self-exiled apartheidists, who had been denied the right to migrate by the centuries-old East-West World Government that had come into being after the cold-war “cease-fire”, and a scattered residue of other primitive left-behinds, everybody lived there. And why not? Its teleports possessed maximum transmission-power and gave access to every corner of the world worth visiting; even more important, they gave access to the automated farms that constituted the world’s richest food-supply. Sinecures could be had for the asking, and money ran as unrestrainedly as wine. There were still people who had more of it than other people, and there were still women who walked the streets; but there were no longer any have-nots, and the few women who walked

the streets did so because they wanted to. On a planet that had once sustained some three billion souls, half a million people living in the right place needed to deny themselves nothing. Nor did they.

THE cab bore Burke aloft, whisked him over Frivolity Street—formerly known as Fifth Avenue—and came down to rest in Aphrodite Acres—formerly known as Central Park. The round, saucer-and-cup shaped houses scattered over the greensward had something of the aspect of a recently-landed squadron of UFO’s. Burke’s house was one of the largest. Instructing the android operator to wait, he stepped out on the concrete cab-pad, approached the shrub-bordered entrance and thumbed the whorl-lock.

After a moment the door opened, and he walked into a large living-room, the cynosure of which was a 70’ time window. In accordance with contemporary architecture, the enormous complex time-grid that ferreted whatever moments out of the past that the viewer wanted and brought them to life on the screen, had been made to function as a sort of sub-ceiling. Except for the huge cabinet that housed the window, there was no furniture. The floor functioned

as a sort of enormous sofa, and lying upon its cushioned surface, watching the rape of the Sabines in the time window, long legs drawn up and crossed, and hands clasped behind her blond head, was Eulalie Bernard.

When she saw him, she swung a slippered foot in insolent greeting and went on watching. The screams of the Sabine women filled the room. Burke went over and turned the window off and swung around and faced her. "Get out," he said.

She raised herself on her elbows, fear flickering in her lam-bent gray eyes. "Why Anton, darling, what's come over you?"

He went into the bedroom, gathered an armful of her clothes returned and threw them at her. He threw a handful of credits after them. Then he went over and opened the door. "There's a cab waiting outside," he said.

She gathered up the clothes and the credits. In the doorway she turned and faced him. Her once voluptuous mouth had become a thin white line, and her cheeks seemed sunken. "Whoever you found, she'll hate you too!" she said. "You're not a man—you're a mimic. You do what other men do because you think it's your duty, not because you want to. You're—"

He closed the door and leaned against it, shuddering. Abruptly he ran over to the time window

and turned it on. After tuning in the pastime he wanted, he sat down on the floor, drew up his knees and hugged them against his chest. He concentrated on the window, shutting all else from his mind. Slowly the window brightened. Rain could be seen falling out of a leaden sky. In the background loomed the dark hulk of a rough-hewn vessel. In the foreground, at the base of a crude but sturdily-built gangplank, stood the commanding figure of Ut-napishtim. Slaves were carrying artifacts and treasures up the gangplank, their rain-wet bodies gleaming dully in the gray light. Ut-napishtim was shouting commands in a language that had been dead for centuries. Burke knew every movement, every sound, by heart. After the treasures and the artifacts, came the animals. First by sevens, then by twos. The rain fell harder and harder. Burke hugged his knees more tightly, rocked gently back and forth. He began to whisper. "Up," he whispered. "Up-ship—*up!*"

THE mayoral ballroom was larger than Madison Square Garden once had been, and the building that housed it stood on the site formerly occupied by Columbia University. The walls exhibited the latest in three-dimensional décor—deep space pied with multicolored stars—and a

huge chandelier in the shape of a spiral nebula was suspended from the apex of the concave ceiling. Opposite the wide entrance, a series of polished steps led up to a railed, luxuriously carpeted dais on which were arranged a number of plush sofas and chairs.

All of the civic dignitaries were present on the dais when Burke entered with Leah Volker on his arm, and the other guests, who had already paid their respects, were standing around waiting for the first dance to begin. It was as he had hoped: he and Leah had no sooner started across the floor than the eyes of every person present were upon them. Small wonder. Attired in a thousand-credit bikini-gown that gave golden glimpses of her legs and breasts, Leah was a vivid flame of a woman in a room that had not, until the moment she had entered it, known what true feminine radiance was. Her black hair had lent itself stunningly to the prevailing coil-and-spray coiffeur, and her blue eyes seemed more diamond-bright than before. Looking at her sideways, Burke found it difficult to believe that less than a week ago she had been a barefoot savage in an antelope-hide sarong.

The mayor, tall and blond and cordial, advanced to meet them when they stepped up on the dais. He was around Burke's age—

forty-eight—and his skin-tone fairly shouted the longevity which the left-behinds had fortuitously fallen heir to. His mistress, a striking redhead, came up and stood beside him, while the lesser dignitaries and their mistresses ranged themselves behind him. Burke gave an inward groan when he saw Townsend Mallory, the Director of Waterways, flawlessly attired in blue pleated trousers and white gold-trimmed coat, standing at the end of the line. In his eagerness to exhibit Leah, he had forgotten that Mallory was a Bantu, and his oversight could very well prove fatal.

"Welcome, Bwana Burke," said the mayor, employing the sobriquet by which Burke had been known ever since opening The Veldt. He turned expectantly and faced Leah.

Burke took a deep proud breath. "Mayor Lindquist, may I present Miss Volker. Leah—Mayor Lindquist."

Lindquist was charmed, and said as much. He introduced Leah to his mistress, then proceeded to escort her down the line of dignitaries. Burke hovered nervously at her elbow. He was certain that she had never seen a full-blooded negro in the flesh before—she couldn't have had: ever since the bloody apartheid wars that had almost exterminated South Africa's negro popu-

lation, the apartheid had been rigidly confined by the World Government to the Bechuanaland Reservation. If she betrayed her instinctive hatred now, she would be recognized for what she was and he would be ruined. What a fool he had been to play Pygmalion and jeopardize the social-standing he had fought so hard to attain!

He sensed a tautness in her when she came opposite Mallory, saw the slightly heightened color of her cheeks. However, she acknowledged the introduction in the same polite tone of voice in which she had acknowledged all the others. Mallory bowed graciously, betraying only by his slightly increased blink-rate that he was affected by her beauty, and then, miraculously, it was all over and Lindquist was raising his hand in a signal for the music to begin.

THE first notes rained softly down from the hidden ceiling-speakers. Lindquist turned to Leah. "As a prerogative of my office, I hereby claim the first dance," he said.

She gave him her arm and he escorted her down the steps to the ballroom floor. Burke followed, stared after them as they disappeared among the other dancers. They went quite well together. Lindquist, it was said, had no negro blood in his veins,

and such could very well be the case: the American negro had been completely absorbed by the white race, but the apartheid were by no means the only whites who had not participated in the absorption.

There was a bar beneath the dais. Entering it, Burke ordered a double brandy. It did nothing whatsoever in the way of alleviating the icy lump of fear that had settled in his throat, and he ordered another. The bar, at this early hour, contained only a handful of patrons. Two of them Burke knew—Buffalo Bill McIntyre, the owner of The Prairie, and Alligator Smith, the owner of The Amazon. He nodded to them, but did not join them as he ordinarily would have done. Instead, after drinking his second brandy, he returned to the ballroom.

It was some time before he managed to locate Leah, and an even longer time before he managed to obtain a dance with her. Her blue eyes, on a level with his made him painfully aware of his lack of height. She no longer recoiled from his touch, but he still had the feeling that she despised him. He tried desperately to think of something suitable to say, but when he finally did, Lindquist cut in and whirled her away before he could say it.

He retired to the sidelines, the icy lump of fear larger now. The

evening inched by. Several times he glimpsed the tall white-coated figure of Townsend Mallory, and remembering the epithet Leah had instinctively employed on the veldt, he dreaded the possibility of the man's asking her to dance. However, his concern was wasted, for never once did Mallory go near her.

Remembering his position, Burke made it a point to dance with the mistresses of the various dignitaries. He obtained only one more dance with Leah, and he was glad when at last the evening was over. As they were leaving the ballroom, Leah gave a slight start, and following the direction of her gaze Burke saw a tall man, discernible only because of the white coat he wore, standing in the shadows just to the right of the entrance. However, she made no reference to Mallory, and soon they were ensconced in an aircab, heading for Aphrodite Acres.

Burke told the android operator to wait and walked with her to the door. The June night was warm and fragrant, and a gibbous moon dispensed an argent luminescence that was almost tangible. "You enjoyed yourself, didn't you?" he said when they reached the shrub-bordered doorstep.

She looked out across the moonlit lawn. "Yes, very much."

"The mayor is very charming."

"Ralph? Yes, he certainly is."

Burke cleared his throat. "I think I should point out here and now that being my mistress in name only does not give you the right to engage in . . . promiscuity."

Her slap numbed the whole side of his face, and a moment later he found himself standing all alone on the doorstep.

HE stood there for some time, debating with himself. He had kept only half his promise, and while the whorl-lock now responded to Leah's right thumbprint, it also responded to his own. There was nothing to prevent him from deactivating the lock and entering the love-nest—nothing except his pride. And where matters of the heart were concerned, Anton Burke had very little pride.

He pictured her beyond the door. He knew exactly what she was doing. She was tuning in lynching on the time window. It would be hours before she would go to bed. Since the moment he had installed her in the nest she had spent every minute of her spare time sitting cross-legged in front of the window, avidly devouring one lynching after another. He shuddered. No, he would not force himself on her tonight. Perhaps later on—when she became more civilized . . .

He couldn't get Lindquist out of

his mind. Thoughts of the man's blond handsomeness still lingered when he arrived at The Veldt building, and knowing that he would be unable to sleep he headed straight for the mezzanine-teleportal and stepped across one third of the world to the Safari Room. A light burned in the adjoining office, and he knew that his wife was working late. However, he did not go in, but continued on to the hangar. After securing himself in the harness of the first platform he came to, he lifted and sped out over the veldt.

He veered the platform in the direction of the sound, slowed it to a crawl and turned on the search beam. Now a bright lake of light traveled before him over the veldt, bringing each detail of the terrain into sharp relief. Presently he saw the lion. It was a magnificent black-maned male, and it was lying on its tawny side, licking its left forepaw. Protruding from the bottom of the paw was the broken end of a large thorn.

Burke swore, stopped the platform and locked it in hovering position. His lions constituted The Veldt's biggest attraction, and he had very few of them. This particular one was an unusually splendid specimen and it had probably been "killed" a hundred times and bragged about in as many different bars.

Sportsmen, who had been exposed to the braggadocio, would undoubtedly visit the veldt for the sole purpose of adding the beast to their trophy list too. He simply couldn't take a chance on losing it.

He decided to do the job himself. There was nothing to it, really. All he had to do was knock the beast out with a stun-charge, extract the thorn, cleanse the wound and vacate the premises before the charge wore off. He fumbled for his rifle-sling in the darkness. He fumbled in vain.

THIS time he swore in earnest. He hadn't really forgotten his rifle—there simply had been no reason for him to remember it. Just the same, he should have brought it along. Only a fool traveled the veldt without one. But then, wasn't he a fool?

He shrank from radio-phoning his wife and asking her to send out a maintenance android. She wouldn't ask him what he was doing all alone on the veldt at this time of night, but she would wonder, and somehow that was worse. Besides, he had paid no heed to his direction, and consequently did not know exactly where he was; hence he would be unable to give his location. And if he returned to the base himself to pick up his rifle, he might not find the lion again.



He regarded it contemplatively. Its eyes were a baleful yellow in the search beam; its tail flicked sinuously from side to side. Did he dare take the chance? The beast had no taste for human flesh, but it had been "killed" time and time again by creatures like himself, and even

now, if the search beam wasn't blinding it and the wind had been right, it would undoubtedly have been charging the hated platform, thorn or no thorn.

Or perhaps fleeing from it.

Abruptly the lion roared again, and this time the note of pain was even more pronounced than

it had been before. His mind made up, Burke got a pair of pliers out of the tool chest and rummaged through the first-aid kit for sulfa-salve. He grounded the platform gently, keeping his eyes on the lion. When it did not move, he stepped down to the ground and walked gingerly into the lake of light.

The lion started, and he paused. For a long moment the yellow eyes gazed enigmatically into his. Then the beast resumed licking its forepaw, and he resumed his approach. Probably it had never been able to distinguish hunter from platform and hence was unable to associate a man on foot with danger. Valid or not, Burke found the explanation reassuring.

With several feet still to go, he knelt down and inched his way forward on his hands and knees. The lion whined. Tentatively Burke extended the hand that held the pliers. The lion did not move. He brought the jaws together upon the thorn, tightened them. Suddenly the absurdity of what he was doing overwhelmed him. Here was he, Anton Burke, risking his life to save the life of a lion that would die anyway, once the imminent tectonic revolution began. Worse, here was he, the man who had foreseen the forthcoming end of the world and who held the salvation of the left-behinds in the

palm of his hand, jeopardizing that salvation for the sake of an insensitive carnivore so incapable of gratitude that it would undoubtedly kill him the very next time the opportunity presented itself. But then, hadn't man always been preoccupied with immediate threats to his security and disdainful of distant ones? And wasn't he, Anton Burke, as basically short-sighted—for all his foresight—as the rest of the human race?

He braced himself and pulled with all his strength. It was over in an instant, and he was toppling backward, the extracted thorn gripped in the jaws of the pliers. The lion leaped to its feet with a roar of pain and regarded him with feral eyes. He did not move. Then, as abruptly as it had leaped up, the lion lay back down again and resumed licking its forepaw.

Burke moved then, and once again approached the beast. He was sure of himself now, and his hands did not even tremble when he opened the sulfa-salve container. He swabbed the wound thoroughly, then stood up and walked boldly back to the platform. Turning, he looked at the lion once more. It had just tasted the salve, and the wry expression on its huge face was almost comical. Suddenly Burke laughed. He boarded the platform, lifted to one hundred feet and traveled

in a wide circle till he picked up the lights of the base. They lay like a handful of diamonds at the dark feet of the mountains, and high above them, dawn was creeping into the sky. He sped over the veldt toward the new day. It was all right now. Now he could sleep.

ON the eighteenth of June, Anton Burke began loading the *Deucalion*. Its huge hydroponic garden would supply half of the nutritional needs of his two hundred passengers during the three subjective months of the 4.35 light-year journey, and all he needed in the way of additional ship's provisions were fruit, meat, milk and eggs. However, it would be months before the new colony would be self-sustaining, and additional provisions had to be included to cover this period. Also, tools, temporary shelters and weapons had to be taken along. The cost exceeded Burke's estimation, but he was determined that his passengers should lack nothing in the way of food and comfort.

The supplies were transmitted through the freight-teleportal of his warehouse on East 57th Street, and transported on cargo-platforms from the veldt warehouse to the ship. Despite the unfamiliarity of the operation, his maintenance androids

carried it out with dispatch, and by the twentieth of June, the *Deucalion* was ready to go.

Next, Burke set to work on his passenger-list. By now, it was complete in his mind, and all he had to do was transfer the names on paper. The passengers included the mayor, his wife and mistress; the lesser civic dignitaries, their wives and mistresses; Burke's business acquaintances, their wives and mistresses; certain of The Veldt customers whose patronizing attitude toward him needed revising; and Leah Volker. With the exception of Leah, he had not as yet apprised any of his prospective passengers of their forthcoming salvation. He would apprise them when the torrential rains began . . . and they would realize then how wrong they had been in laughing at him when he talked about the second deluge, and they would be sorry they had called him "Little Ut-napishtim" and "Little Zuisudra" in a joking tone of voice. Admiration would come into their eyes, admiration and respect, and they would look up to him and accord him the veneration he deserved, and during the long and lonely journey to Alpha Centauri VI, the wives and the mistresses would come to him in the night and he would turn them disdainfully away from his stateroom door.

ON June twenty-fifth—twelve days before the revolution was supposed to begin—he took Leah Volker to the spaceport and showed her through the ship. He had forced himself to stay away from her since the night of the mayorial ball, and he was surprised at the increased thinness of her face, taken aback by the shadows under her eyes. Had she missed him? he wondered, hope blooming in his breast. Did she realize now that Anton Burke wasn't someone you could cast aside like an old shoe?

His heart sang, his step grew light. Enthusiastically he conducted her through the commodious staterooms, the huge lounge, the lush hydroponic garden. He showed her the reactor room and explained what went on beyond the massive door. High in the prow, he ushered her into the control room and described how a single person could control and navigate the ship simply by feeding verbal instructions into the mechanical tympani of the automatic pilot. Admiration came into her eyes—but it wasn't admiration for him. However, that would come later, he told himself.

They returned to the base, stepped back through the teleportal to The Veldt building and thence into Diversion Street. To his astonishment, she slipped her arm through his. "Let's visit the

Administration Building," she said.

He frowned. "I'm afraid you'd be disappointed—there's not much to see. Practically all of the administrative procedures are automated and the offices are little more than private suites."

"It may be warm tonight. In fact, I am quite sure it will be. Probably I shall leave my door ajar—I love fresh air."

He looked at her. The blue eyes gazed steadily back into his. Impromptu promises burned in their blue depths, and his voice, when he spoke again, seemed to come from far away. "All right," he said, "I'll take you there."

The Administration Building stood on the site once occupied by St. Patrick's Cathedral. It was twenty stories high, and each floor was given over to a separate department. The top-most one was reserved for the mayor. When apprised of Burke's and Leah's presence, he came eagerly into the ornate anteroom to greet them. "Hello, Bwana. Hello . . . Leah."

Leah's face told Burke nothing. Turning toward Lindquist, he said, "Miss Volker hoped you might find the time to show us around." He emphasized the "us" slightly.

"Nothing could please me more," Lindquist said.

He conducted them through the mayoral suite, then, in turn,

through the Department of Entertainment, the Department of Buildings, the Department of Parks and the Department of Streets. Burke grew nervous when they descended to the Department of Waterways. In common with the other departments, it was fronted by a large luxurious office lined with impressive tiers of gilt filing cabinets—and in common with the other dignitaries who had thus far received them, the Director of Waterways had been informed of their coming and met them when they stepped out of the lift.

TOWNSEND Mallory seemed even more striking than usual in his immaculate white coat and dark blue trousers. Proud of his ebony complexion, he chose the sort of attire that would enhance it the most, regardless of prevailing fashion. It was an indulgence which Burke had always considered both justifiable and proper; now, however, he found the effect disquieting, and fervently wished that he hadn't acceded to Leah's request.

Again he sensed a tautness in her, again he noticed the heightened color of her cheeks. But her words were pleasant, and her tone of voice gave not the slightest hint of her apartheid attitude. Burke relaxed. Perhaps she was more civilized than he had thought.

Mallory was politeness personified. He insisted on showing Leah each facet of his luxurious office, and he explained in detail each aspect of his official duties. He even insisted on showing her his private library. Burke was surprised as well as relieved when she graciously consented.

He exchanged small talk with Lindquist till they returned from the adjoining room. Throughout the rest of the tour, Lindquist seemed pre-occupied. After it was over, Leah lingered behind, thanking him profusely for his trouble; then she joined Burke, and together they stepped out into the street.

He took her to The Villa for dinner, and they ate on a wide cool patio that overlooked the Mediterranean. In this part of the world darkness had already fallen, and the sky was riotous with stars. Leah was withdrawn, but Burke hardly noticed. All he could think of were the impromptu promises her eyes had held that afternoon. Soon she would have to keep them. He had fulfilled his half of the bargain; now it was up to her to fulfill hers.

It was twilight in Old York when they stepped back through The Villa's teleportal, and night had fallen by the time they reached Aphrodite Acres. After following Leah out of the cab,

Burke told the android operator not to wait. Coldly Leah countermanded the order, said good night and walked away.

FOR a moment Burke was stunned. Then, recovering, he ran after her and confronted her on the doorstep. "But you promised," he began. "You said—"

"I said that if it was warm tonight I'd leave my door ajar." She pulled her two-thousand credit stole higher around her lovely neck. "It's cold, and you know it!"

He had to admit that it was cold—astonishingly cold for Old York. But that was beside the point. "Very well," he said stiffly. "I'll turn you in in the morning. I can play it your way too."

She laughed in his face. He could not see her eyes, for the sky was overcast, but he sensed the loathing in them. "Turn me in and lose your precious prestige? You wouldn't dream of such a thing! You couldn't bear what people would say. You couldn't—"

"What does it matter what people say now? The end of the world is less than two weeks away." He paused, shocked by his own words. Why, it was true—it didn't matter! He hadn't realized it before because he hadn't been able to correlate the present with the future except in regard to his forthcoming

role as savior. "And even if some of them should speak against me," he went on, "I can eliminate them from my passenger-list. Just as I can eliminate you."

Again she laughed in his face. "You fool! You contemptible fool! Why, you're the laughing-stock of Old York. Do you think anyone *believes* in your silly prophecy? Do you think I believe in it? Do you think that I agreed to be your mistress because I thought you could *save* me? You couldn't save anyone, Anton Burke—not even yourself. I agreed to your plan because I was hungry, because I was sick of living in dirt. And most of all I agreed to it because I knew that once you had given me what I wanted you would be afraid to take it back!"

She started to turn away. Abruptly the long and empty corridor of the lonely night appeared before his eyes, stretching into eternity, and he flung himself at her feet and clung to her the way a little boy who is terrified of the dark clings to his mother's skirts. "Please don't send me away," he said. "Please!"

The sadist in her was moved, but the masochist was repelled. She twisted free from him and thumbed the whorl-lock. He heard the door open. He heard it close. He heard the silence of the night.

For a long while he did not move. Then, numbly, he rose to his feet and walked slowly back to the aircab. Blades whirring soundlessly, the cab climbed into the lowering sky. High above the streets and the lights and the laughter, the wine and the women and the song, he wept.

The cab deposited him on the roof of The Veldt building. Descending to his den, he poured himself a tall brandy at the bar, drank it down without stopping. He poured another. He wondered idly where his wife was. With her lover, probably—or working at the veldt-base. He sighed. It did not matter. Nothing mattered any more—least of all the love-life of a wife he hardly even knew.

HE drank the second brandy, poured a third. There was a warmth in him now, and the corridor of the night no longer seemed quite as empty. 'A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country,' he said to himself. He savored the words, spoke them aloud. "'A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country,'" he said. And then, "Up, ship—up!" He downed the third brandy.

The mech-maid came into the room, curtsied. "Did you call, sir?"

Burke threw the empty glass at her. "Get out of here!"

The glass missed, shattered against the wall. The mech-maid curtsied again. "Sorry, sir," it said, and backed dutifully through the doorway.

Burke didn't bother getting another glass, but drank out of the bottle. Time picked up her subjective skirts and began to run; hours shrank and minutes flickered. Deep in his alcoholic haze, Burke found a truth and pounced upon it. He owned Leah Volker. Whether she knew it or not and whether she admitted it or not, he owned her. He owned the floor-sofa she lolled on, the time window she gazed into, the bed she slept in, the clothes she wore and the air-conditioned air she breathed. He owned her as completely as he owned the *Deucalion*, as completely as he owned the spaceport. And a man does not suffer affronts from his property, be it animate or inanimate; quite the contrary—a man's property is his to do with as he sees fit.

It was raining when he returned to the roof and climbed into the aircab he had summoned. He hardly noticed. Lightning zigzagged over the Old York skyline; thunder brought giant jaws together and masticated Broddingnagian mouthfuls of the night. In Aphrodite Acres, the love-nest buildings stood in the rain like rows of gray cabages. It was a cold rain, and it

pummeled Burke's face when he got out of the cab and approached the shrub-bordered entrance. Still it did not register on his consciousness.

He felt for the whorl-lock in the darkness, thumbed it the instant he found it. The alternate personality with which the brandy had provided him needed momentum, in the absence of more brandy, to sustain it, and if he hesitated he would be on his way back to being Anton Burke again. Nevertheless, a moment later, he did hesitate. Just within the door. He had expected to find Leah sitting cross-legged in front of the time window, and his tentative plan of action had been projected from that point on. But the time window was in darkness, and Leah was nowhere to be seen.

Had she gone to bed then?

A trembling began in his knees, spread throughout his body. He stepped deeper into the dim-lit room; then, becoming bolder, he walked across it. Suddenly he saw the coat lying on the floor just to the right of the bedroom doorway, and he stopped in his tracks as though a stone had struck him between the eyes. In a sense, one had.

Lindquist's handsome Nordic face exploded into being on his mental retina. Again he saw Leah whirling off in the man's arms, again the icy lump of fear

settled in his throat. Her motive in wanting to visit the Administration Building was agonizingly clear now. It should have been clear before, and it would have been—to anyone except a fool. And he had thought that *he* was the cause of the shadows under her eyes and the thinness of her cheeks!

The coat blurred in the dim light, and for a moment he half-believed, half-hoped that he wasn't really seeing it at all; that he had conjured it into brief existence in an unconscious effort to torture himself. He bent over it, praying that it would go away altogether. It did not. Instead it stood out with sudden, horrid clarity, and for the first time its color registered on his mind.

It was a white coat.

BURKE was cold sober when he stepped out into the rain. It was coming down harder than ever, and by the time he climbed into the cab he was drenched. Perhaps it was the coldness of his soaked clothing that finally brought him completely back to life, that shocked him into realizing that the rain was wrong.

It was wrong for a number of reasons. It was wrong because the three-day weekend was just beginning, and on weekends rain *never* fell. It was wrong because of its intensity; rain was sup-

posed to fall gently, not in wild abandon. It was wrong because of its temperature; rain was supposed to be warm, not cold—

Burke was sitting bolt-upright on the seat. Was it possible that he had erred in his extrapolations? Was it possible that the tectonic revolution was already on hand? Heart pounding, he told the android operator to take him to The Veldt building. Ten minutes later he stepped out of the lift into the basement and approached the huge coordinator. A glance at the graph told him all he needed to know: the preliminary seismic disturbances which he had predicted along the western South American littoral were occurring ahead of time, and the first of the worldwide network of weather control stations which dated from the pre-exodus era had been destroyed, thereby deranging the entire system. The revolution was only hours away.

Unless he was as big a fool as a prophet as he was a lover.

He shouldered the thought aside and headed for the lift. There was still time, of course, to get his passengers together, but he would have to hurry. He went to the mayor's residence first. The robotler informed him that Lindquist and a number of the dignitaries were having a private conference in the den and did not wish to be disturbed.

Burke grunted, shoved the mech-man aside and burst into the room. As he had suspected, the "conference" was a poker-game.

LINDQUIST'S blue eyes were frosty in the radiance of the electric screen that depicted his hand. The chip-totaler screen on the wall showed that he was losing. "What is the meaning of this intrusion, Bwana Burke?"

Burke had dreamed of the moment a thousand times, and each time he had conducted himself with impeccable dignity and said what he had to say in a detached tone of voice. Now, however, he began pacing back and forth, and when he spoke, his voice was shrill and his words sounded melodramatic even to his own ears. "The tectonic revolution is at hand," he said, "and I have come to offer you the salvation which only my starship can provide! I—"

The mayor raised his hand. "Bwana Burke, I think that even you will agree that I and the other dignitaries have been as tolerant of your obsession as we could reasonably have been expected to be; but when you come barging in here uninvited and begin mouthing absurdities, you're straining that tolerance to the breaking point. I beg you to leave before you force me to say something unpleasant."

Burke was so taken aback that he stopped pacing. "But it's raining!" he gasped. "Don't you understand? It's raining, and it's Thursday night. It's pouring in fact!"

Lindquist sighed. "No weather-control system can be expected to function flawlessly forever. I am sure that the maintenance-mechs will find the source of the trouble soon, and that it will be corrected in a matter of hours. Besides, for all we know, the discrepancy may be confined to the immediate vicinity of Old York. I suggest that you go home and read Montaigne. "To him who feels the hailstones patter about his ears, the whole hemisphere appears to be in storm and tempest."

The quote infuriated Burke. He thought of the fortune he had expended on his world-wide seismograph-setup, of his years of painstaking study, of his carefully evaluated extrapolations, and a redness rose up and filmed his sight. "All right," he shouted, "if that's the way you want it, I'll leave you here to drown, to sink beneath the sea along with your contemptible city! I'll go alone!"

Lindquist looked at him mockingly. "How about your mistress—aren't you going to take her along?"

Knowing looks traveled around the table. Several of the

dignitaries winked broadly. One of them snickered. Burke went cold all over. He did not even feel his legs beneath him as he turned and staggered from the room. The first wave of laughter broke even before the den door closed behind him. "I'll show you out, sir," said the robotler.

The rain was torrential now. Burke walked in it, head bowed. His own words echoed in his head—"I'll go alone". But he knew he would not, for if he did, there would be no one to show gratitude toward him, no one to look up to him and accord him the respect he deserved. Whom should he take then? There was no point in contacting his business acquaintances—they would not believe him any more than the dignitaries had. The same held true for The Veldt customers he had singled out. Whom then? Eulalie Bernard? She was the mistress of the Director of Longevity-research now, but if he could convince her that the second deluge was on hand and that he and he alone could save her, she might consent to accompany him. It was worth a try.

THE Director of Longevity-research's love-nest was not far from his own. He had no trouble finding it. Eulalie answered the door. "Eulalie," he began, "I am here to—"

She had a glass of champagne in her hand. She threw its contents into his dripping face. "Go away, you detestable little mimic!" she said, and slammed the door.

His wife then?

He found her in her private apartment on the sixteenth floor of The Veldt multi-plex. She was watching her favorite pastime in the time window—the birthday banquet of Herod Antipas. He spoke of the imminence of the tectonic revolution, of the need for haste. She heard him out. "Will you go with me?" he blurted.

She looked at him for a long time. In the time window, Salome was being presented with John the Baptist's freshly-severed head. Finally, "I said nothing when you bought your silly ship and spaceport," she said, "but if you think you're going to involve me in your naive attempt to impress people, you're quite mistaken. Run along to the veldt now and play with your grown-up toys like a good little boy."

He realized presently that he was in the street again. Walking. For a moment the ground seemed to tremble beneath his feet, but he could not be sure. Soon, though, it would tremble, tremble and quake, and the continents would be rivened with ragged wounds and the land would shud-

der and sink and the face of the world would be a mighty raging sea. But by then he would be long gone, he, Anton Burke, would—

Noah with an empty ark. Ut-napishtim with a payload of nothing. Deucalion headed for a lonely Parnassus in the sky.

Would no one believe him before it was too late?

Would Leah? She hadn't believed him before, but with the downpour to bear him out, he might be able to convince her now—if he still wanted to.

Sickened, he knew that he still did, and hailed an aircab. The cab swam in the sky, its windows portholes against the driving rain. Aphrodite Acres was more like a cabbage patch than ever—and the cabbages were rotten to the core. Hating himself, he thumbed the familiar whorl-lock and stepped into the love-nest. Would he kill Mallory, he wondered, if the man was still there? He knew that he wouldn't—couldn't—and he hated himself even more.

SHOUTS affronted his ears, and there was a background sound of many voices. The room was in darkness, save for the glow emanating from the time window, and at first it appeared to be empty. He went over and looked into the window. It had not been turned on, and yet there

was a scene in progress in its depths. A lynching scene. Torches burned garishly in the night, illuminating eager faces. They illuminated one face that was not eager—a dark tortured face with eyes that held the naked fear of death.

As he stood there, puzzled, he felt something brush the top of his head. Looking up, he saw her feet. One of them was bare; the other was covered by one of the two-hundred credit slippers he had bought her. He saw her lithe tanned legs, and the filmy folds of her negligee clinging to them like pale mist. He saw her limp arms . . . her awry neck . . . her swollen face with its protruding tongue . . . He saw her long hair raining down, as dark as death, upon her shoulders . . . The other end of the stocking that she had knotted round her neck before stepping off the time-window cabinet was tied to one of the bars of the time-grid, and it was her weight upon that particular bar that had materialized the scene in the window.

Burke cut her down, but it was too late. Horrified, he ran from the room, plunged through the blinding sheets of rain to the aircab. The cab rose loggily, its blades slowed by the rising wind. High above Frivolity Street, Burke, looking through the floor-viewer, saw the huge wave rushing darkly in from the sea, and

for the first time since the rain had begun he felt fear. An Atlantic tsunami was the last thing he had expected.

The rain was combining forces with the wind now in slowing the churning blades, and the cab began to settle. Clearing a final rampart of buildings, it came down in the middle of Diversion Street, its once soundless motor sputtering. The water had receded, but it was still knee-deep, and Burke felt a frightening undercurrent tugging at his ankles when he stepped into the street. The Veldt building was six blocks distant, and fearing the advent of another wave, he decided to make for the 57th Street warehouse instead.

The going was difficult. Old York's lighting system had failed, and there was no illumination whatsoever save for the sporadic lightning flashes. In the darkness around him, people were shouting and screaming, and several times he stumbled and fell. Once he collided with another person, and both of them clutched each other for support. Lightning flashed, and Burke saw the pretty painted face of a professional street-walker inches from his own. She twisted free from him as night closed round them again, and moved away. "Wait," he called, "I can save you!" She did not answer. "But don't you under-

stand!" he screamed. "I'm Anton Burke. I'm Noah. I'm Deucalion!" The rain came down harder than ever.

HE was almost to the warehouse when the water, which had been gradually receding, began to rise again. He knew then that a second wave was on its way and that he had only minutes at best to gain the freight teleportal. Fortunately the first wave had smashed the warehouse door, so he lost no time there; but the water was up to his armpits by the time he gained the interior, and he had to swim the rest of the way to the teleportal. Frantically he began diving for the whorl lock. The water continued to rise, more rapidly now. On the third dive, he found the familiar concavity and pressed his right thumb into it with all his might. The teleportal responded, but before its automatic locks could secure it again, thousands of tons of water were transmitted along with Burke and emerged with him in the veldt warehouse. There, they battered down the door, carried him out over the veldt on a rapidly dwindling crest, deposited him in a rainfilled gully, and left him to die.

But he did not die. He awoke beneath a gray sky out of which rain was falling steadily but not with the same intensity as it had

been falling in Old York. He was lying on a muddy slope, half in, half out, of rushing water. He sensed that he was not alone even before he saw the huge black-maned head poised above him, even before he smelled the lion's fetid breath. As he lay there, petrified by his horror, the head lowered, and he felt the pressure of mighty jaws closing upon his shoulder. But the teeth did not penetrate his flesh, and presently he felt himself being dragged the rest of the way out of the gully, and then the pressure was no more and the lion was standing over him, looking down into his face.

Slowly it raised a huge forepaw, on the mud-coated pad of which a half-healed wound was visible, and placed it lightly on his breast. Burke understood his destiny then, and he accepted it. Getting to his feet, he locked his fingers in the lion's mane, and together they walked through the rain to the base.

NOAH had three sons—Shem and Ham and Japheth. Anton Burke had thirty androids. Embarkation took place in a cold slanting rain beneath a lowering cobalt sky. Two each of tiger and water buffalo and hippopotamus. Two each of rhinoceros and gorilla and orangoutang. Two each of kangaroo and zebra and okapi. Two each of giraffe and

leopard and lion—the one lion the very special one that had shown kindness to a man who in all his miserable other-directed life had never known what kindness was.

“Up—up ship!” said Noah Ut-napishtim Deucalion Burke when the water tanks were emptied and the locks were tight,

and the *Deucalion* lifted on fiery flames and floated on the sea of space—

*Where luxury late reigned,
sea-monsters whelped
And stabled . . .*

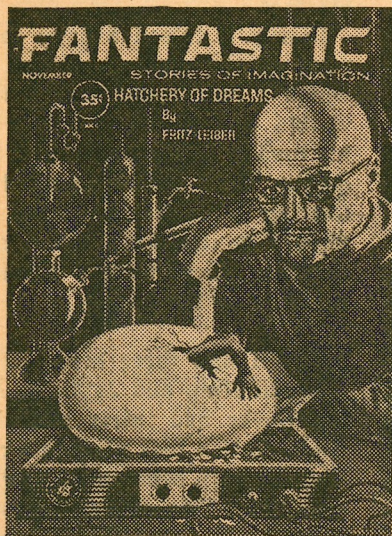
*How didst thou grieve then,
Adam, to behold
The end of all thy offspring?*

—PARADISE LOST

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

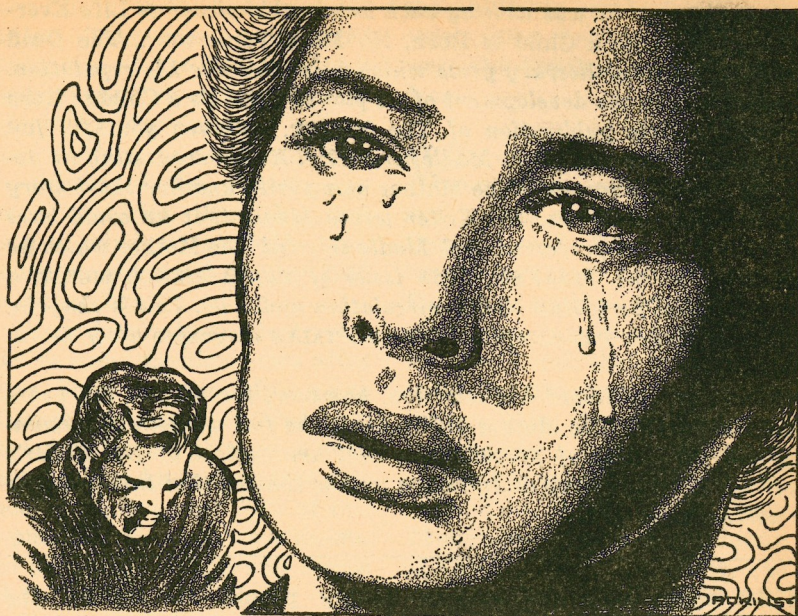
Do you want to know what the strangest sounds in the Universe are? Then be sure to read November FANTASTIC.



“Special Effect,” a novelet by J. F. Bone, brings these sounds to you in all their chilling binaural eeriness. This is one of the most wierdly imaginative stories we’ve seen in a long time.

Fritz Leiber will be back again with an off-trail tale of witchcraft in the New England tradition, (see cover, left). And the Fantasy Reprint in the next issue of FANTASTIC will be the famous “To Heaven Standing Up,” by Paul Ernst.

Plus short stories and our regular departmental features. Be sure to reserve your copy of the November FANTASTIC, on sale at your newsstand Oct. 19.



The MOTHER

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

Illustrator ADKINS

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

D*URING the thirties, when he was a regular contributor to the science fiction magazines, David H. Keller, M.D. was twice voted the most popular science fiction writer in America, by a readership poll conducted on two different occasions by WONDER STORIES. This popularity derived from the deep understanding of human nature he displayed in his treatment of characters as well as a high degree of originality and ingenuity in plotting. The stories were related with an economy of words which made the style appear deceptively simple. The Mother was written during the period of his finest out-*

put, at the time he was writing such memorable pieces as Life Everlasting, Unto Us a Child is Born, No More Tomorrows, The Dead Women and other literary gems which helped secure his reputation. A similarity in the development of its plot to Unto Us a Child is Born prevented early publication of The Mother, so when youthful fan magazine editor Robert A. Madle wrote Dr. Keller requesting he donate a story, he received The Mother along with another short story titled Valley of Bones. Dr. Keller wrote Madle that he could have whichever one he preferred. Bob Madle selected The Mother which he published in the Jan.-Feb., 1938 issue of FANTASCIENCE DIGEST, a hektographed periodical with a circulation under 60. To his chagrin, Valley of Bones was accepted by WEIRD TALES magazine after he returned it!

Time has vindicated his selection, however, for despite the years that has passed. The Mother still retains the full warmth of humanity and adroitness of presentation that are typical of Dr. Keller's best work. Its previous distribution was so limited that this printing is virtually its first.

THE young man and woman met for the first time in the office of the Chairman of the N.P.C.B.

The National Population Control Board was in many ways the most important unit in the government. It was no accident that Caleb Carlson was its Chairman. For many years he had devoted his waking moments to an intensive study of Eugenics and sleeping hours to dreams of a better race. He had lived to see the time when the nation's welfare had forced the formation of a Board which had complete power over the production of children.

On his desk were two folders. In front of his desk sat the two

young people. He opened the folders slowly and arranged the papers and then started to speak to them in a kindly, but low and monotonous tone.

"I have sent for you today because there is a matter of great importance to discuss with you. This summer you both graduated from our National University with honors. For years our Board has been following your progress. I have before me a complete record of your lives from the day of your birth. You probably do not know it, but you were born on the same day.

"I not only have your personal histories, but also your family records. Your relative ancestors for three hundred years have

been famous in the history of our nation. They have contributed Governors of the States, Presidents of the Universities, famous scientists, theologians, prominent welfare workers and two Presidents of the Nation. For three centuries there has not been a criminal, alcoholic, epileptic, or abnormal of any kind in either family.

"Your families were destroyed, like so many families, soon after your birth by the Mysterious Disease. You have studied that period in history in your college courses. You know that in a few months we lost over 70% of our population. You two were among the survivors, and became wards of the nation.

"As you know, the great loss of life forced the creation of the board which I head. We felt that since there was bound to be a great reduction in births, the time had come to have better babies. Our new national marriage license law gave the husband and wife the right to have one child. The permission to have more children was only granted to those who showed by the development of their one child that they were fit to be parents of more.

"Naturally our population continued to drop in numbers, but increase in health, intelligence and physical vigor. But we have felt that so far no one has shown

the ability to create families of outstanding brilliancy, such as were the families you two came from.

WE need leaders, powerful, dominant, remarkable men and women such as represented Putnam, and Barnes families for the last three hundred years. For years we have felt this need and for an equal number of years we have hoped that someday we could find the proper answer to the question of how these leaders could be given to the nation.

"That is why you are here today. You have never met. Though you are both graduates of the National University, one was educated in the Pacific Sector and the other in the Atlantic Sector of this University. As you know, you were both trained with the idea that love and marriage were social factors that were not to be considered till you were through with your education.

"We want you to marry, and in the next twenty years give the nation as many children as possible. The records show that twin births have been frequent in both families. You are now twenty years old. By the time you are nearly forty you can become the parents of at least thirty children.

"That will be your life work. The nation has cared for you in

every way since your parents died, and from this was the program formulated for you. Now have you any questions?"

"I have several," sharply replied John Barnes. "How do you know the young lady wants to marry me? How could we support a family of that size? How about my training as an expert in the Conservation of Natural Resources?"

Caleb Carlson smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I think these are all proper questions. In regard to the lady's willingness to marry, perhaps we had better leave that to her to answer. As far as supporting the children, that will be the happy task of the government. On your future home in Michigan you will find a bird sanctuary of three thousand acres of land of every kind. There are many acres of virgin timber, lakes, and swamps. Animals, fish, and birds live there in great variety. You are to study their lives and habits and write on proper methods of conservation. It is your hobby. You will be provided with all the necessities of life and many luxuries.

"Your future wife, Caroline Putnam, has specialized in cottage industry and feminine handiwork. We have selected a library of five hundred volumes dealing with every form of handcraft known in America, since its set-

tlement. We would like to have her spare the time to teach the subject to a very few, carefully selected young women who will in their turn organize schools in various parts of our country. It is believed that the brilliancy of our feminine minds in the past was due to the intensive use of their hands in sewing, knitting and weaving. She will have ample time because she will not be asked to care for her children. A large home is being built for them where they will be housed and cared and educated from the day of their births. The best leaders in medicine, sociology, and education will be entrusted with their future welfare. We hope to raise to adult life all of your children, but we are asking you to assume no responsibility. In fact, we feel that they will grow into better leaders of our future society if they are raised in this way rather than with their parents. They will be wards of the Nation.

"Your future welfare and security will be provided for in every way. From the time you marry and move into your Michigan home, you can be assured that for the rest of your life you will have no financial problems. Even your social life is provided for. If you have a few good friends you can have them come and live with you. You may play bridge, golf or tennis."

"In some ways the future is an attractive one," whispered the young man, "but we still do not know what Miss Caroline Putnam thinks about it."

"Suppose I leave you to talk it over."

The old man slowly walked out of the room.

JOHN BARNES turned to Caroline Putnam and said one word.

"Well."

She smiled.

"A most unusual proposition, but it seems we are living in an unusual age. I have always wanted three things, a husband, a home and babies. For years you have been my dream man. I have a scrap book filled with everything I could find out about you. That is that. As for the home? It seems to be ideal in many ways. And the babies? Not just what I longed for, but at the same time we do owe the nation something."

"It is all very strange," commented the man. "For the last five years I also kept a scrap-book and in it are newspaper pictures and clippings and my personal comments and hopes concerning Caroline Putnam. I have met many girls, but you were the only one I ever wanted to marry, and I simply know you by reputation. Perhaps all this is fate. We could start a family library with those two

scrap books and a new book for each of the children. They would send us pictures, and their school reports and Intellectual Quotient tests, and thus year by year the library would grow. We may live to see our children form a new social order leading the men in every way worth while. I have given a great deal of thought to babies of birds and fishes and little wild animals, but I never anticipated having babies of my own. I also am not sure of some parts of the program, but perhaps the men who have worked it all out know more than we do about the wisdom of it all. What shall we say to the Chairman of the N.P.C.B.?"

"I think we better say 'YES'."

"It will take courage and sacrifice on your part."

"Yes, but I will have much of what I wanted and, after all, a woman cannot have everything, and I will have you, and now that I have seen you and heard you talk, I know that many of my dreams can come true."

John Barnes walked to the door, opened it, and asked Caleb Carlson to come in.

"Our answer is 'YES'", he said with a smile.

"Good. I almost knew it would be. The scrap books worked."

"What do you know about the scrap books?" asked Caroline.

"Everything, my dear child.

We have been furnishing you for years the material you put into them, but that was a part of the plan. We wanted you to know and love each other before you met. Now suppose we sign the papers and take the first plane to Michigan. Your new home is ready for you in every last detail. Some of your friends are waiting for you there. From them you can select those you wish to share your life with."

TEN years later John Barnes came in from the woods, bathed and put on his flannels and hunted up his wife. At last he found her where he thought she would be, in her private library. She was at her desk surrounded by scrap books, papers, pictures, and paste pot.

"Busy?" he asked, kissing her.

"Always, but not too much to stop and talk to you. A lot of mail came from the home today and I am putting it into these baby books. There are ten of them now. Think of that! Three sets of twins and four solitaires. Look at those ten pictures on the wall. Do you remember when there were only two there of the first little twins? They are older now, and we have any number of changing pictures in the baby books, but just ten little baby pictures on the wall. I like to think of them just as babies. I saw them once, kissed them and

said goodbye to them, but they will always be my babies. Somehow I cannot think of them growing up."

"Four years ago," replied her husband, "I found a baby beaver with his paw caught under a log. I rescued it, but the paw was ruined. I saw that beaver today. He is a big fellow and has a family. I think he knew me; at least he sat still long enough to enable me to identify him. Beavers grow up; foxes and deer and birds and fishes grow up. Do babies grow up?"

"They must. Do you ever feel that you would like to see our babies? Do you ever dream about them?"

"Sometimes."

"When you awoke crying?"

"Yes. I thought I was there, and little Angelica, the little one was crying, and the nurses and doctors could not find out what was making her cry. But I knew, and I tried to tell them, but they did not understand and when I tried to make her stop, a great chasm came between us and there I was on one side, and the little one on the other side, and that was when I awoke."

"Let's go and golf!"

"Sorry, but the doctor suggested that I had better not golf for the next two months."

"Well, how about a rubber of bridge?"

"In an hour. I really must fin-

ish Maud's book. Bring it up to date. Then I will come down to the card room. I am really very happy, John. You have been very wonderful."

TEN years brought 10 more babies. Magdalena at one end past eighteen and almost through college. Rose and Philip at the other end, the last of the celebrated Barnes twins. Twenty baby pictures on the wall. Twenty large scrap books in the book case, with two more of John and Caroline. The parents were twenty years older, but did not look it. Time had aged them very, very gently. John came in one evening later than usual. All that day he had been watching, through his field glasses, a pair of American eagles feeding their young ones.

The butler met him at the door.

"There is a radiogram for you, Mr. Barnes," he said softly. Your wife opened it and read it and then said that I should give it to you, and you were to meet her in her private library."

"Anything wrong?"

"I am afraid so."

Barnes took the envelope. He looked at it, but did not open it. Then, holding it in his left hand, he walked to the little library which, for twenty years, belonged to Caroline. She was at her desk and the desk was

cleared, except for one baby book. She was bent over the desk, her face buried in her arms, silent, motionless. The man walked over to the desk and looked at the book before him. On one side was the picture of a young, rather beautiful woman. Under it, in his wife's handwriting,

"MAGDALENA PUTNAM ENTERED THE SENIOR CLASS OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE WITH HIGHEST HONORS."

The opposite page was blank. The man took the radiogram out of the envelope, and read,

"Mr. John Barnes:

Your daughter Magdalena killed in an airplane wreck today. The National College extends deepest sympathy to Mrs. Barnes and yourself.

Signed,

Joseph George, Pres."

Barnes looked at the radiogram and then at his wife. The letter trembled in his hand, but his wife remained motionless. He slowly reached over, opened the paste pot, and securely fastened the message on the blank page. Then he closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. Then he dropped one hand on his wife's shoulder.

"Perhaps," he said very slowly, stopped and started again. "Perhaps we might adopt a baby."

The woman started to cry.

THE END

MAGNANTHROPUS

By MANLY BANISTER

Illustrator FINLAY

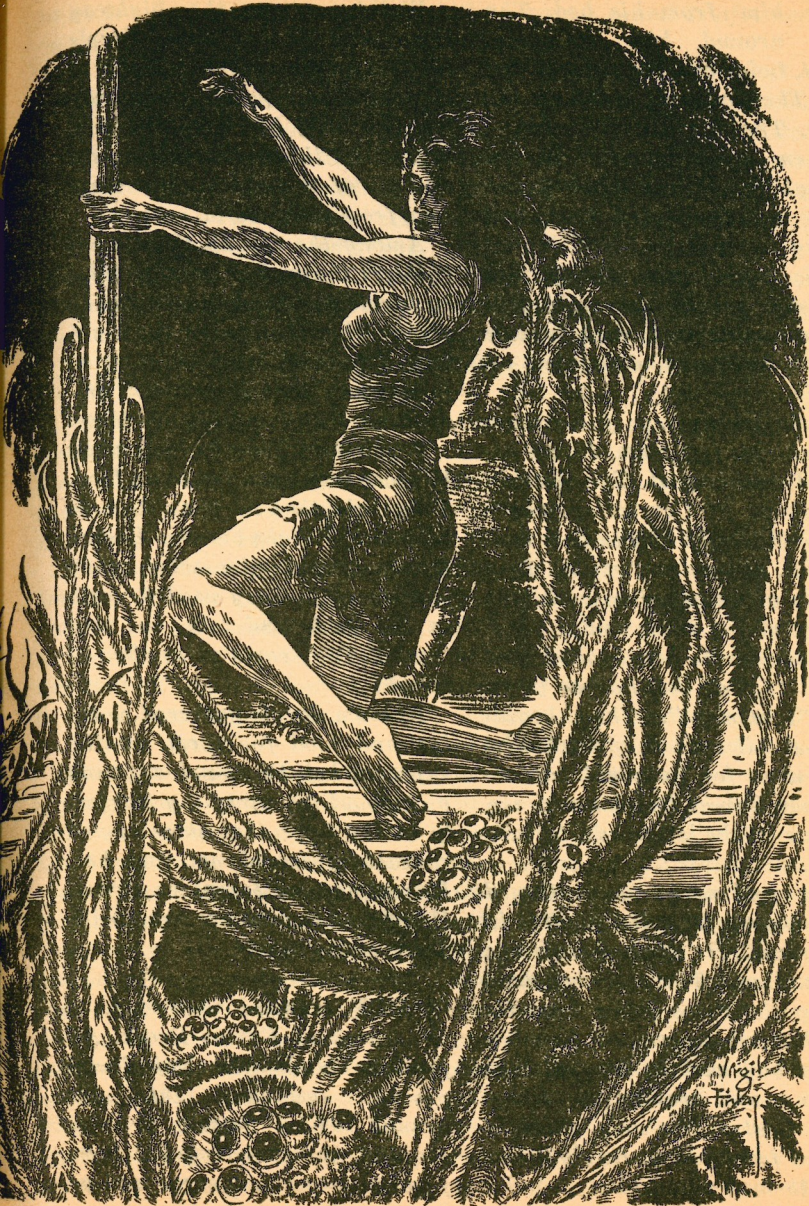
SYNOPSIS

IN July of 1997 Jefferson Jarvis was driving along a super highway in his atom car heading toward a rendezvous with a man named Eamus Brock. Brock was known to all because he had developed a forcefield shielding for small atomic engines—used in cars, boats and aircraft. Some-time prior to this day Brock

had written a letter to Jarvis asking that he come and join him in his work. Jarvis had thrown the letter away, but now, for some inexplicable reason he was frantic to find Brock and take his offer.

Jarvis had stopped in a hotel for some sleep. Abruptly he was awakened by a thunder that





shook him from his bed. The walls around him collapsed, leaves, twigs and trees enveloped him. Then all was quiet as the grave. The world had died.

When grey daylight filtered through the sky he climbed one of the massive trees that had sprung up in minutes. Clinging to his perch some thirty feet from the ground, he could still hear an occasional earth tremor and an explosion, detonated on the air.

While wondering if he were the only one left alive, Jarvis reflected on his past. The year in the House of Correction where they had taught him to be a conformist, at least outwardly. In a society of automation work was outmoded for those under 15 & over 45. Jarvis had broken that law at 15. For that he was given the "treatment". They brainwashed him. This effected him even now, for he could not remember Eamus Brock's address, the one on the letter he'd thrown away.

More and more trees continued to spring up from the fissures in the ground. He climbed from one to another. There were dead among the ruins below him. He heard a whimper and found a young boy clad in his pajamas sobbing and wandering along. Toby Carter, the only survivor from a family of 5. Jarvis promised to look after him.

Walking along the highway they found other refugees. Jarvis became aware of how pitiable it all was. These people were truly lost, for they had not been permitted to think for themselves and all of a sudden they were torn from their world.

Among the throng there were ruthless thugs. For greater safety Jarvis and the boy took to the trees rather than follow the highway. The thick branches were so interwoven that it was not difficult to travel quickly on them.

Jarvis told Toby to hide while he went into town for some food. Toby said that he knew how to keep out of sight because Eamus Brock taught him when they used to play. They used to walk in the fields and talk, but that was all Toby could remember of Brock.

In town Jarvis gathered clothing and food for them. In the supermarket he found a young girl, about 25, crouching fearfully in the hope that some armed ransackers would not find her. Her name was Josephine Crane. He offered to take her along with Toby and himself.

THEY traveled westward, in search of Eamus Brock. All familiar landmarks had disappeared, swallowed into the ground which began to rise steadily, and their way led them farther into strangeness and an

unknown land. Jarvis was driven on by the hope that they would find Brock and once they did, all would be made clear.

Shards of rock littered the forest floor and what should have been the farmlands of midwestern America. The humus was thick and spongy underfoot. They began to wonder: Were they no longer on the Earth at all?

That night they camped and Jarvis looked up toward the sky. A moon appeared—something to connect him with the world he'd known. But his reassurance was short-lived, not one moon but two hung above him.

When Jo joined him and voiced her fear of these unearthly occurrences, his own uncertainty dissolved in an effort to reassure her that all would be well as long as they kept moving, westward to Eamus Brock.

They grew accustomed to the nightly storms of the forest. After much trekking the forest vanished and they came into a region of snow-capped peaks. Then they trod into gulfs and canyons. Once out of the forest game appeared, six-legged creatures with triple-jointed limbs—proof enough to Jarvis. Traveling in a land of plenty, they saw no other human being, only game animals, and darting in the blue depths of sky, hordes of huge, glittering butterflies, from whom

there rose a sound as of ethereal singing.

The relationship between Jarvis and Jo remained a simple one. Between them Toby was a bond of devotion. They poured their affection and energy into protecting and providing for him.

One night a travel worn man appeared by their fire. A former Lawyer named John Daniels, he told them that they were headed in the right direction . . . to Eamus Brock. Jarvis tried to get more information but the man fell asleep and in the morning was gone.

This rekindled Jarvis' hope. Shortly after they broke camp Toby found an animal that only faintly resembled a baby elephant. He named it Mr. Murchison and it followed them.

The butterflies continued to fly overhead and Jarvis made a mental note that they were much larger than any of their species on Earth. Awed, he watched as they paired off in a mating dance. One pair broke away from the others. Their song became exultant and they were oblivious to the danger that lay below them. Careening wildly on the gusty currents in the canyon, they were dashed into the ground. Those above them swooped down and began to gorge. Jarvis ran to the aid of the one survivor and was shocked to find it was no butter-

fly but a beautiful winged, naked miniature, female human being not twelve inches tall!

Whatever the origin of this creature, Jarvis felt sure it did not stem from the Tertiary apes. Its origin was unearthly, as was its appearance and very being.

They splintered the broken leg and made a basket in which they could carry the tiny creature. Was it human? Jo suggested that this might be what their descendants would look like a billion years hence. Still no answers.

Jo commented that the butterfly maid seemed to look at Jarvis with adoration. Jarvis shrugged this off as impossible, for the discrepancy in sizes, if for no other reason. They continued westward. Reaching a barren, rocky plain, they discovered that water was becoming scarce. There was no game among the rocks either. Mr. Murchison had disappeared. Later the animal returned all wet. They followed him to a pool and camped.

WHILE Jo was bathing the little butterfly creature, Toby told Jeff that her name was Eluola and that he could communicate with her. She was grateful to Jeff for saving her life from the Eeima. It was she who had made Mr. Murchison find the water for them. She would lead them to safety.

Through Toby, Eluola described what route they should follow. They must curve southwest to avoid the desert below and the sea people who trapped the Eeima with sticky nets in the treetops. To the southwest they would find grassy savannahs, water and game.

Her injuries mended and she flew above them. Toby explained to Jeff how he communicated with her, it was like a voice in his head. He said that Jeff could also understand her because he was a master, but Jo could not because she was a child.

Then Jeff heard her song within him and it voiced promise of delight such as he had never known. It was a song not of her throat, but of her being. There was something new inside him, born of his brief insight into the song of Eluola's soul.

She explained that this was the world of Eloraspon meaning World of Beauty. It was old and not Earth. Sometimes Earth people came there by accident and sometimes they accidentally returned. There were holes in the veil that separated Earth from Eloraspon, and they could sense them, but were forbidden to go through. When lone wanderers came through they tried to help them, but could never speak to them as they could to Toby and Eamus Brock.

Jeff seized the opportunity to

find Brock's whereabouts. But Eluola only knew of him because he was known among the Eeima. She had been told that he was of the Mighty and could come and go between Earth and Eloraspon as he pleased.

It was enough for Jeff to figure out what had happened to them. Earth and Eloraspon somehow occupied similar positions in different "dimensions". The earthquakes—of Elorasponian origin?—had caused the midwestern town in which he had stopped to "fall through" whatever it was that divided the one dimension from the other. Eluola had also told him that the earthquakes had caused the holes to close, so it was impossible now to tell whether Earth still existed on the other side of the nameless veil. There was some hope. If anyone could tell them how to return to Earth, it would be Eamus Brock.

Most of what Eluola told him was so symbolic as to be unclear to his basic understanding. He began to be overcome with her subliminal self. A new passion arose within him and he was sure he loved her.

Eluola continued to travel with them, until one day the Eeima came sweeping over the horizon and she rejoined them.

At first Jeff was heartbroken. Then he remembered that Eluola had said that the Eeima were the People of Love—and he knew

now that in Eluola he had found the very personification of Love. She was complete carnality, pure emotion winged, and her charm had snared him through his vulnerable undeveloped mind.

Then he realized how he had neglected Jo. He knew he was of her kind.

They would head toward the Great Cliffs which Eluola had described to them earlier. As they prepared to break camp Jo suggested that perhaps Jeff would prefer to go on alone. He apologized for his neglect and blurted out his love for her.

His avowal of love brought no material change in their relationship. There was too much to do, too far yet to go.

THE Great Cliffs surpassed their wildest conception. The sheer escarpment of them plunged away at their feet, opening an immense gulf in space that was blued and milky in its great depth. Before them, across the gulf of empty space floored with forest, the land rose again and heaped itself into mountains. Instinctively he knew that was his goal. There he would find the answers to his questions, the solution to the riddle of Eloraspon and Eamus Brock.

The descent to the beach was not easy, but he knew that the unencumbered beach was preferable to the forest.

In the air of Eloraspon they had grown thin and strong. Toby had developed from a 10 year old in a few months to a youth of 16. In Jo, Jeff recognized a symbol of the indomitable spirit of Mankind, the race Mother in person. The memory of Eluola had grown dim in his mind, replaced by his love of this woman.

One night while the others were sleeping, Jeff had wandered away to the beach. Jo joined him. He was grateful for her presence, and their love was fulfilled.

In the morning, at the great river, they built a raft to take them across. When it was ready they launched it and struck out against the strength of the river currents.

Just as they approached the spot Jarvis had selected for a landing the wind died and they were swept into the deadly current. Jeff's gun, his axe and all their packs were swept over.

The raft wouldn't hold through the night, they had to swim for shore. The sea was not so salt as the oceans of Earth and it was less buoyant. They had to stroke harder as they struck out for shore. Jeff strangled on brine and was dashed against rock, knocking him unconscious.

When he comes to, he is on the shore but there is no sign of Toby or Jo. As soon as it is light enough he searches for them among the rocks. He finds no

tracks, no trace, yet refuses to believe the sea claimed them. The air seems to be calling him. He gets the impression of a swelling throughout the breadth and depth of his soul, not a song of passion as that of the Eeima, but a nostalgic dirge of adoration pregnant with awe and holiness, of a people prostrate before their god.

He rushes on through a screen of leaves and finds himself in a natural cathedral. His sweeping glance takes in a cluster of huts and in the midst of the clearing are the singers and the object of their adoration. . . .

CHAPTER 12

IN the middle of the clearing, scarcely visible in the dim light, Jo and Toby huddled upon a five-foot high platform of poles. Around them, writhing and swaying with the unheard, soul-sensate melody of their dirge, weird monsters worshipped—Sea People, creatures of horror that had been beyond the powers of Eluola's description. They were like giant spiders, many-eyed, football sized bodies sheathed in chitinous armor and huddled in the midst of attenuated, hairy limbs, almost thread-like, several-jointed and clawed, twitching with the rhythm of their silent song.

Jarvis' mind struggled with

opposing symbols—the sight of horror conveyed by his eyes to his understanding—the sound of sublimity captured in the mesh of his soul. What manner of creatures were these, whose hideous bodies hid the spirits of god-men, and whose souls paid homage to the kinship of the Mighty?

They knew he was there, and they cleared a path for him to the dais, for such it was, their soul-song rising in a paean of spiritual triumph, and the song became thought in his mind, and the thought was interpreted in words . . .

“Hail the Mighty! . . . of the Mighty of Old! Again the Mighty walk upon Eloraspon and the Song of Power is heard again in the Land . . . of the Mighty in our midst!”

Jarvis took Jo tenderly down from the platform, and Toby hopped down beside him. She quivered in Jarvis’ arms

“There is nothing to fear,” he said quietly. “They are friendly.”

What more could he tell her? What more could she understand?

“Toby said that,” she whispered. “He said they talk . . .” She shuddered.

“Never mind,” he soothed. “We’ll leave here now. They won’t stop us.”

“Child of the Mighty . . . hail!” The salutation was adoration itself, and it made Jarvis feel

uncomfortable. “The Sea People are made glad, for the day of the Mighty is come again! Blessed are we who have seen, blessed are we who have known the touch of the Mighty and of the Child who is of Him who is Mighty, whose soul is filled with the Song of Power . . .”

Quickly, Jarvis led Jo along the path edged with squirming horror. What he had sensed emanating from the Sea People, he knew Toby had sensed also. But Jo had known none of the beauty of their souls, only the horror of their bodies.

“I don’t know why Jo couldn’t hear the song of the Sea People, Toby,” he said later to the boy. “She does not hear these things that you and I do. That does not make us better than her, nor her less than us. We are different, that is all. And because we can hear these things and she can’t, it means she is more of a stranger in this world than we are, and we must both protect her, and not let her worry about such things.”

THEY went on weaponless, marching along the seashore, until progress was stopped by a vast morass into which the sea thrust slimy, moveless fingers that swelled and dwindled with the tide, and stank of mud and nameless crawling things. The forest came down to the edge of

the swamp and marched into it, and the only possible way of crossing was by means of the branches, from tree to tree, if the trees extended far enough.

But before they dared move farther on their journey, away from the sea, Jarvis had to arm himself. Rifle and stone axe now lay at the bottom of the sea, but he still carried his knife at his waist. With it, he fashioned a boomerang from a bent fragment of a limb. A few practice throws before it was quite finished revealed errors in design, which he corrected. Then, in the final test, he cast the weapon strongly from him. It whistled across the flat face of the beach until about to plunge into the surf; then it shot suddenly upward in wheeling flight, hesitated at the apex of its trajectory, and, spinning still, came planing down to land at his feet. He smiled with satisfaction, picked it up and tucked it under his belt. From the level of the animal, he had once again elevated himself to the status of Man.

The Eeima, as Jarvis had known them through Eluola, had been partly familiar through legends of the fairy folk, of Queen Mab and Puck and the horde of "Little People". On the other hand, the Sea People were of an unfamiliar category. Why such beauty of soul had been blended

with such hideous physical trapings was a mystery known only to the Divine Mind that caused such things to be. Jarvis only dimly sensed what had happened on the world of Eloraspon, through the inevitable working of natural selection in the specialization of species through evolution.

Tossed on a bed of thorny thought, his mind prickled with questions. He reviewed all that he knew of this alien world, combined it with all that Eluola had managed to convey to him, and still he knew nothing. Of one thing he was certain, evolution on Eloraspon had followed spiritual paths along with the physical. The planet had developed not one, but several races of telepathic beings; and this somehow tied in with the obvious lack of culture of both the Eeima and the Sea People. What culture was possible when each race expressed only a single facet of being?

Eloraspon was either a very young world, or a very old one, he could not be sure which. If the planet were old, from what had the Eeima and the Sea People sprung? And if these two races existed, others must also, each probably reflecting single-facetted existence. And what did it all add up to? The Mighty, undoubtedly . . . and who were they? Every way he turned pre-

sented a question, and in no direction was there an answer.

THEY marched for three days along giant limbs of the forest, and in all that great wood no animal roamed. If there were fish in the black, tarn-like pools over which they flitted, he had no means of catching them. They had water only at night when it rained, and the store of smoked shellfish with which they had started was gone.

When glum daylight filtered into the forest depths on the fourth morning of their progress, Jarvis knew that they were lost.

Climbing the tree seemed more arduous than it had ever been, but he had to catch a glimpse of the sun to orient their direction. Perhaps, from the roof of the forest, he could see some end to their journey, or make up his mind to turn back before they starved in the limitless reaches of limbs and leaves.

The sky was cloudy when he reached the top, and it was only guesswork when he thought he detected the direction of the sun. It was, perhaps, because the sun was hidden that he searched the sky more minutely than he might have, and in the search detected the dancing motes high up. Had the sun been shining, they would have passed unheard and unseen. As it was, his sharpened senses detected a song in the distance

—faint and wavering—the soul-song of the Eeima.

He thought of reaching out with his mind and calling to them, but he had no way of knowing that he could be received so far away, or if the Eeima might not remain indifferent, even if they heard. Even as he watched, the tiny swarm flitted lower and lower and soon was lost behind the fringing tree tops, and he sank back in the crotch that held him, holding his aching head in his hands.

Then, suddenly, clear and strong, the magic of tempestuously passionate song smote again into his soul. He lifted his head and peered among the screens of greenery, calling out gladly in his mind to guide the winged one he knew was there, seeking him. Tendrils of fire enlaced his brain with ecstasy, and a blaze of color fluttered into view, and he knew it was Eluola who had found him.

A flash of gold, of turquoise, blue and scarlet blazed against the leaden sky, and she planed down through the interstices among the branches and perched within arm's length of him, slowly fanning the air with her wings.

"Now I have found you again after much searching, Child of the Mighty," her sweet inward voice sang. "From the Mothering Pits northward I sought you,

over the sea of water and over the sea of grass. Upon the Great Cliffs I looked for trace of your passing, and found your cold fires, and the tracks your feet had made in the mud of river banks. In the forest I hunted you and found you not. In the land of the Sea People, among the deadly nets they spread for me, I looked and did not find. Many times my companions would have turned back, but I spoke and they stayed, until now that I have found you, they have gone their way and accompany me no longer. For the song of your soul is the Song of Power, and few among the Eeima can bear it in their souls, though to me it is as the quenching of a thirst to feel my being drenched with it."

The sense of Eluola's angelic song did not come to Jarvis as if it had been an outpouring of speech, but as sharp slivers and darts of thought punctuating the aria that trilled from her soul. She clung to her limb, peering gladly into his face, her elfin head tilted toward one shoulder, her wings glinting with every color, slowly fanning like butterfly wings.

Once, he remembered, Eluola's song had power to intoxicate him, to rend him with passionate desire. Though he heard it now gladly, it was only a song, nothing more, and he knew that his love for Jo, expressed at last, had

built around his heart an armor of love, proof against any dart of alien passion.

HE learned then why Eluola had left them. She had enjoyed her mating flight, from the consequences of which Jarvis had rescued her, and her time had been upon her when the flight of Eeima, migrating southward to the Mothering Pits, had come by, and so she had joined them. They had all been females, returning to the age-old pits to lay their eggs, and she had joined them for the self-same purpose.

What were the Mothering Pits, he wanted to know? In his mind, he caught a sensation of being in a tremendous, luminous cavern beneath the surface of Eloraspon, and he understood that there were many such, interconnected, through which the Eeima flitted, shining in the pale, cadaverous light that came from fungus-like growths covering walls, floor and ceiling.

These were the Pits where the female of the Eeima laid their eggs, then fluttered again to the open air, while the young, grub-like, fat-bodies, that developed from the eggs foraged among the glowing growths and in time became Eeima also, splitting their slug-skins and emerging full grown and winged, flitting forth to join the concourse of their kind in the bright upper air.

All this he gathered from Eluola in short moments; then, recollecting the desperateness of their own plight, he quickly told her of their progress into the swamp from the sea and made known the dire fact that he was entirely lost.

"Have no fear," she said. "Return to your companions below and I shall lead you from up here. The way you have been going is impassable, as you are going deeper and deeper into the swamp, and soon there will be no trees to carry you farther. But if you will turn southward now, you will come soon to the beginning of a grass land, where the ground rises to meet the towering hills in the west, where the city of Eamus Brock is and where you will find companionship among others of the Mighty whom he has gathered there."

Jarvis' mind reeled with this quickly delivered information, but Eluola could not clarify her meaning, even at his insistence. What was Eamus Brock, then—a man or a god? Who were the Mighty around him? What was this city to which she alluded but could not clearly picture in the music of her thought?

"Part of the way to the City of Brock I can lead you," she said. "The rest of the way must be traveled by you three alone, for not even I can bear the majesty and might of the Song of Power

that rolls from that mystic city in its cup in the mountains. No, I should die if I heard it too well; but from where I shall take you, you will find the way easily by yourself."

She sprang lightly into the air, bright-hued wings sweeping, and took up a dodging, flitting movement that carried her upward and out of the forest, into the clear upper air, and Jarvis heard the impassioned song of her soul ringing sweet and clear in his mind.

Slowly, he began the long climb downward to his waiting companions.

CHAPTER 13

DAYS and days and days of travel later, they rested on the flank of a hogback, its great ridge towering over them, in a forest of conifers—of more Earthly proportions. The ground was carpeted with brown needles among rock outcroppings, and a spring bubbled from a fissure where they camped.

"Tomorrow," Eluola promised Jarvis, "I will show you a camping place of the Mighty."

"The City of Brock?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet, impatient Child of the Mighty! Here the Mighty camped in great numbers before the time of the Eeima, in the days of old, when only the

Mighty walked the face of Eloraspon. It is told among the Eeima that there were none of us winged folk then, no Sea People, and no one of the many others who people our world with us. Then, indeed, were the camping places of the Mighty many in number, and the number of the Mighty was plentiful without end."

"Is it still a city, then, this place you call a camp?"

"The remains of a city it is, Child of the Mighty. In the days and the years of the Mighty, this place was called Amenorha, and it was a place that shone upon the face of Eloraspon. It was a city, as you say, of light, which is the meaning of Amenorha, its name."

"Where are those Mighty now?" he wanted to know. "Is Eamus Brock one of them?"

"Not he, nor any others of the Mighty with him, for the Mighty of old are gone forever, and the new Mighty who walk the forgotten ways today are not the same as those who are gone. But their soul song is the Song of Power, which was the soul-song of the elder Mighty, and so we call them also Mighty who are here few in number today."

"What does Eamus Brock look like, Eluola? Is he a man—or something different from a man, as the Sea People are different from the Eeima?"

"I have never seen him, Jarvis

of the Mighty. None of the Eeima has seen him, for it is only his thought which has reached out and communed with the Eeima, bearing the song of his soul, which is the Song of Power. That being so, Eamus Brock is of the Mighty, and therefore we call him such, even as I call you so, even in your childhood."

"Then he *could* be a man of Earth—like me?"

"He could very well be. It is true that he is of Earth, though whether a man or some other Earth creature, I cannot say."

That settled it, then, Jarvis thought. The Eamus Brock of Eloraspon and the Eamus Brock of Earth, financial wizard, inventor and technician were one and the same. His thoughts raced with excitement. Eamus Brock had been Toby's childhood companion, had somehow exerted a spell over himself that had drawn him across two worlds to a puzzling rendezvous—what did it all mean? Where would it end? In sudden self-abasement, he wondered abjectedly if he had the strength of soul to withstand the knowledge that would have to be his before he could understand at all.

All living things, he thought, emit a soul-song, which characterizes them. Not just *living* things, Eluola corrected him. *All* things. Sticks, stones, water, air—all things had their song. That

he, Jarvis, was still a Child explained why he could not hear all these songs—only certain extra powerful songs of the living were his to hear. "You will learn," she assured him. "You will learn them all. Be content now with your Childhood, though tomorrow you will not hear the song of Amenorha, which rings forth from that ancient city with the melody of power. Many of the old places remain where the Mighty left them, and all sing the Song of Power in Things, which is similar to the soul-song of the Mighty themselves."

AMENORHA, City of Light, far from lived up to its name. About mid-morning, Jarvis led his party out upon the brow of a low bluff. He looked down upon an almost circular valley of shelving perimeter, like a bowl measuring miles across. Through the center of the bowl meandered a stream, tree-banked, reflecting the eye-wrenching blue of the sky. If Eluola had not told him that the remains of a city lay here, he would not have known it. He saw only a valley floor dotted with overgrown hummocks and mounds, among which his eye occasionally caught the glint of some bright shard. And though he listened with all his soul, he could not hear the Song she assured him was there, and which marked all such places as

this, wherein had dwelt the Mighty of old.

So this, Jarvis thought moodily, was Amenorha, built beside the sea in the long ago, before there were Eeima, when a race of preposterous beings called the Mighty populated Eloraspon. As Jarvis set his foot upon the way leading down the face of the bluff, Jo grasped his arm.

"Let Toby go down first and look around," she murmured. "I—I'd rather wait a little while."

Strangely enough, Jarvis understood her feeling, for he somewhat shared it himself—a reluctance to enter this ancient graveyard, manifested by a sensation of primeval fear that lifted the hackles at the back of his neck.

He motioned Toby ahead. "Go on down, Toby. We'll be down in a little bit."

The boy darted ahead, slim, graceful, burned by the sun to the hue and beauty of walnut uttering whoops of delight. Half sliding, half running, he descended in a hail of small stones and dust, Eluola fluttering over his head, and set off at a swift lope to investigate the nearest of the many mounds.

"The thought of the uncounted centuries hovering over this place kind of gets you, doesn't it?" Jarvis remarked.

"It isn't the ruins that scare me, Jeff," she said moodily, placing an arm around his waist. "I

can't put a name to what it is, but the ruins symbolize it. And in just what way eludes me. I *am* scared. Not of here and now, but of tomorrow and the day after. I —I don't know what it is!"

HE sat down and drew her down beside him.

"Once a kind of people lived here," she murmured dreamily, "as once there was an Earth where our kind of people lived. How did we come here, Jeff? What was it that sucked us into this alien world?"

He felt her need to cry, and he let her, holding her close against him for all the comfort he could afford her.

"Don't be afraid," he murmured. "We'll be joining Eamus Brock soon, and then all our worries will be over."

"Oh, God! It's *that* I'm afraid of!" she cried hysterically. "I could not dare to put it into words—but that's what it is—Eamus Brock!"

"Maybe I've misled you with some of my ramblings," he tried to reassure her. "After all, Eamus Brock is just another man—a man of Earth—like ourselves. This stuff about Song of Power and all that—well, I've tried as best I can to get across what Elu-ola has told me, but I guess it just isn't possible. What I think she says may not be what she is saying at all . . ."

Jo straightened, wiping the back of her hand across her eyes. She laughed shakily.

"There, it's all right now, Jeff. I was a fool to break down like that. I won't do it again."

"You had every right to," he said, "but I'm glad you feel better now. Shall we go down . . . into Amenorha?"

Viewing the remains close up, Jarvis supposed that a million years was not too short a time to guess the age of this ancient city. It was probably older. Toby came running up with glittering fragments of crystal that glowed with prismatic colors, and in sudden revulsion, Jarvis dashed them from his hand, knowing them for what they were—the petrified bones of a civilization long dead.

More such fragments were visible frozen into the face of the bluff behind them, taking on seeming outlines of doorways, of pillars, walls and towers, and he wanted to deny that this was a city at all, that the Mighty had ever been, and to assert that Time began and ended now, and who they were and where they were was all that there was to the endless puzzle of existence.

"Let's get out of this place!" he muttered gruffly, and led off at a fast pace, as if to cover in a few strides the half-day's march that lay yet between them and the op-

posite wall of the valley that sheltered Amenorha and its glittering, crystal shards of ancient glory.

CHAPTER 14

HOW old could a planet be? Five billion years? Was that the age of the Universe? Suppose it was five billion years. Eloraspon, then, was no older than Earth, but life must have developed here first . . . and more swiftly. Toby's phenomenal growth in the past few months demonstrated how quickly the organism developed to maturity on Eloraspon. The growth of a child from birth to adulthood could not require more than three or four years—five at the most. The thought was startling.

Had the Mighty been men? Their civilization had developed to its utmost a million years or more before Mankind had emerged on Earth to replace the dinosaurs and the Tertiary apes. But, if the Mighty *had* been men, why was Eloraspon now destitute of their seed, and whence had come today's freakish population—the Eeima, the Sea People and others that Eluola had hinted at? What had proved mightier than the Mighty and had destroyed them, leaving only fragments of their great cities to remind the passerby that others had been here before him?

Eamus Brock was not of the Mighty of old, but of a new Mighty, and he had come from Earth. Somehow, Eamus Brock had discovered Eloraspon long before the cataclysm that had dashed Jarvis from one planet to the other, and he was as well known—or as little known, however you looked at it—here as on Earth.

They had marched many more days. Eluola fluttered down as the party paused for rest and perched on Jarvis' shoulder.

"The song of Eamus Brock's camping place is loud in my soul," she complained. "I have come as close as I dare." She fanned her wings with a quick, nervous movement that betokened physical distress. "I leave you now, Jarvis of the Mighty. Your path lies straight ahead, through the pass between those two mountain peaks. Beyond, upon a plain, lies the city you seek, at the foot of a new mountain, which was not there before the earthquakes. May the Song of Power fill your soul with gladness. We shall not meet again."

She rose fluttering, wheeled in a flash of color against the stark blue of the sky, then swiftly dwindled into a dot that vanished in the distance.

Eluola's leaving was to Jarvis like parting with something out of his soul. But her leaving also left him with something—the



problem of finding their way. The pass she had pointed out was no more than a few miles ahead and above them, and he wanted to push on, but the sun was low; and after some deliberation, he decided it would be best to camp where they were for the night.

On either side of them, mountains were piled, terrace on terrace, breathing down upon them a breath chilled by snowfields and glaciers. There was need for the warmth of a campfire following the setting of the sun.

THEY had eaten and the fire had died low. Jo and Toby lay curled on the ground by the glowing embers, sleeping. Jarvis, wakeful and nervous, got up and strolled into the blackness, where the sound of his companions' breathing was lost, and he had only glittering stars for company.

There were no moons tonight, and the gloom was intense, so that he had to feel his way among the rocks. When he could no longer see the glow of their expiring campfire, he sat on the hard stony ground, his mind filled with troubled thoughts.

The wind sighed on its way down the gorge, and the nip of it on his bare skin was exhilarating rather than chilling.

Then, in the dark, he saw a glow begin to form, that was like a phosphorescence. Ancient fears

awakened in his brain; the hair stirred at the back of his neck, and he half rose, supporting himself upon his hands.

The glow clothed a man, clad in a cocoon of light, and the cocoon seemed to drift toward him across the ground, and it was as if the man within the cocoon slept. The man's face appeared lined and old, yet it was strong with a strength Jarvis had never seen in a face before.

"Welcome among the Mighty, Jeff Jarvis," said the man, but his mouth did not open; it was as if the words formed themselves in Jarvis' mind.

Jarvis' heart skipped a beat. What strange denizen of Eloraspon was this?

"I am Eamus Brock," said the apparition. "You have reached your goal—or shall have by tomorrow mid-day. This form you see before you is a projection—I am in my tower in the City of Brock, where we shall meet face to face tomorrow."

"You are Eamus Brock?" Jarvis muttered.

The vision smiled. "I am an old man and blind, but I am Eamus Brock, nonetheless. What did you expect—a virile, god-like being of some kind? I know what you have learned from the Eeima about the Mighty, and I can fancy what kind of figure you must have drawn in your mind of us. But we are only people—people of Earth,

saved from the cataclysm that destroyed our world."

"You are blind—yet you found me here in the dark? What kind of instruments do you have that can do that for you?"

"The Mighty need no instruments, Jeff. We see by other means than sight. I was born blind. I have never seen the sun, nor the twinkling of the myriad stars, as you have seen them. But I, in my way, know them as well as you do, for I have other senses that more than take the place of the five senses you know."

"What are you?" Jarvis cried, the words sticking in his throat.

"A man, as I said. What I do, I learned from the Mighty of Elosraspon, from the records they left hidden in their marvelous cities. But now is no time to discuss these things. We shall have time later. I have sent a man named Dave Mitchell to meet you and guide you to the City of Brock. Tonight, he is camped just over the ridge of the pass. You will meet him as soon as you start on your way in the morning. Good night, Jeff . . . until tomorrow."

There was suddenly darkness all around. The apparition had vanished. Jarvis slowly picked his way back to camp, his mind a confused jumble of thoughts.

THEY met Dave Mitchell just after dawn, when they had

climbed almost to the summit of the pass. He was about thirty, the same age as Jarvis, but taller and broader in the shoulders, though sparsely built with sandy hair and ruddy complexion. His clothes were sturdy and practically new, and, though soiled from mountain climbing, gave him an air of natty spruceness compared to the three-quarters naked, dishevelled, sun-browned and dirt-crusted appearance of Jarvis and his companions. However, there was no disapproval in the man's look as he sized them up.

"I heard you walked it from Missouri," he said affably.

Jarvis nodded, noticing that he wore a pistol belted to his waist.

"Handy for bagging small game," Mitch said, noting the direction of Jarvis' glance. "If there were any small game around here to bag."

Jarvis' eyes lighted up. He had spoken so seldom lately, that words came to his lips with difficulty, and his voice was harsh when he spoke.

"Hunting has been bad for many days," he said. He touched the boomerang in his belt. He fell into step beside Mitchell, and the party continued among the rocks.

Mitch said, "I noticed that thing. How in the world do you learn to use it?"

Jarvis showed his teeth in a grin.

"You damn near starve for about a week, then the knack comes to you!"

Mitch shook his head. "Brock told us about the Great Cliffs . . . oh, he kept good tabs on your progress, Brock did. We didn't think you'd ever find a way down."

"Good hunting up there," Jarvis grunted. "Best country you ever saw . . ."

He glanced around him at the barren mountain terrain in disapproval. He darted an inquisitive look at Mitch.

"How'd you get here—on Eloraspon, I mean? Tell me about it."

"Not the hard way—like you folks did. Brock brought me—I hired out as foreman of a construction crew."

"To go to Eloraspon?"

"I should have known I was going to Eloraspon?"

They had been picking their way down a twisting canyon, and suddenly Mitch stopped. "Better stop a minute and pull yourselves together," he said tersely. "As soon as we round this next bend, you'll see it."

"See what?"

Mitch wheeled and started off again down the stony ravine, which showed signs of coming rapidly to an end.

"The City of Brock!" he said over his shoulder.

THE ravine debouched upon a broken plain. At their backs, the twin sentinel peaks guarding the pass through which they had passed were like two teeth in a great, circular bandsaw stretching around the horizon. The plain was the bottom of a cup-like depression, surrounded by jagged, snow-summitted mountains.

At the northern edge of the plain, a bare, conical peak dominated the landscape, silhouetted against distant snow-fields. But it was none of this grandeur of view that affected Jarvis. What stopped the breath in his throat was the City of Brock.

It was not vast in breadth, that city, but the concentration of its towers made its beauty even more striking, for they shone with every color of the rainbow, and others that seemed to flow in a changing, patternless rhythm from blood-red through rose aquamarine, turquoise, blue and violet—living color that crawled and writhed upon the sight, enmeshing the needle-like spires, bridging them with trellis-like, curving walkways that curled from tower to tower in spirals of sensitive design.

"They say it sings," Mitch murmured in Jarvis' ear. "Can you hear it?"

"No," Jarvis muttered. "I can't hear it."

Mitch sighed with what seemed like relief. "Only the Mags can," he said. "You must be one of us Saps."

"Saps?" Jarvis was curious.

"People are Saps—they are Mags—Brock and the rest of them who live in that city. The people have a village outside the gate—log houses. We can't even enter the city."

"Why not?"

Mitch shrugged. "Mag rule. They say it's dangerous. We're not so sure about that. Most of us feel they're working on something in there they don't want us to know about."

"In there—in that city? Who built it? Was it here when you came?"

Mitch shook his head. "Only Mags could build a city like that. We leveled off the ground and fixed it up for them, then they took over—built it in a single night. It took us a long time to get used to it."

They picked their way over the rough, fissured surface of the plain, Jarvis so immersed in the scene and in the bits of information he gleaned from Mitch that he had wholly forgotten Jo and Toby, struggling along after them.

MITCH went on. "I was living in Nebraska when Brock first got in touch with me. I had a pretty good reputation as an en-

gineer, and that's what led him to me. He hand-picked the crew he brought here with him. Anyway, I came to the camp Brock had established—in Colorado, at the foot of Pike's Peak. None of us could learn anything—there were about a thousand of us. Some thought Brock was going to build an underground factory for producing atom-engines, and others thought maybe Brock was just the supervisor for some kind of government project—maybe another try with a moon rocket, or something like that. Anyway, we were wrong, about the moon rocket and all—Brock was right to keep his purpose from us. We wouldn't have believed him if he had explained the whole situation in detail.

"One morning, Brock ordered us to load all the trucks and half-tracks, get aboard and drive up to the top of Pike's Peak. For two days, the trucks shuttled up and down, carrying people, gear and supplies. Then there we were—all crowded on top and hanging onto the sides—and it was cold, even if it was July.

"Well, a lot of us didn't like it." He laughed brittlely. "We went to Brock with our grievance. He was living up there in a great, big modern trailer. We told him what we thought of the situation; then he told us. He told us the world was about to be destroyed and that he had saved us. That he

was going to take us to a new world, where we could start all over again. He talked on and on, and the more he talked, the more disgusted we became. Most of the men had their families along, and it was miserable for them up there, believe me. Here we had come from all over the U. S., lured by the promise of high-paying jobs, only to find we'd hooked up with what we thought was some kind of a crank. A real nut, believe me!

"We'd have walked off the mountain then, except we knew it would take days to get all that stuff down again; so we told Brock that next morning we'd start taking the things back down the mountain, and when we got all his stuff down again, we were quitting—every last one of us.

"I thought at the time he was awful calm about it. He agreed quite readily that we were free to do just that in the morning, and he was sorry he had put us to so much trouble. He was just lulling us, of course. Because, in the morning, there wasn't any Earth for us to go back down to.

"The Disaster struck that night, as you very well can remember. The mountain jumped like all the volcanoes in Hell were erupting. There was a hurricane of wind, and the rain slashed down, and the sky was lit with a

continual flashing of lightning. The mountain rocked and heaved like it was alive. People were screaming, trucks and gear were tumbling down the side of the mountain—then over all that racket, we heard Brock's voice on the P. A. system. He told us to hang on and pray, it would only last a few minutes. Certainly, in a few minutes it was over, and there was only the rain and the lightning and the thunder, that lasted the rest of the night.

"The next morning, we walked down the mountain and found ourselves on Eloraspon."

"You don't mean you walked down Pike's Peak and found yourself here—just like that?" Jarvis put in.

Mitch nodded. "Yes, we did. Just as I said." He speared a lean finger northward. "See that molehill behind the City of Brock?"

Jarvis' glance swung to the bare, low peak he had noticed earlier, at whose foot rose the spires of the City of Brock.

"That's all that's left of Pike's Peak," Mitch said.

CHAPTER 16

MITCH'S calm announcement was a shock to Jarvis. *That insignificant upthrust from the plain was mighty Pike's Peak? It was a mountain that had not been there before the earthquakes,*

Eluola had said. Then, like the midwestern town where Jarvis' adventure had begun, the tip of Pike's Peak had also been thrust into the domain of Eloraspon and left there. And where was the Earth?

He puzzled over these questions with Jo after Mitch had left them in the cabin which had been assigned to them. There were many cabins like this one—rude huts, mostly, built of logs that had been chain-sawed in the distant mountains and trucked here by half-track.

There was a community kitchen with a large dining room where the population ate in shifts, a combination church and community hall, and several warehouse buildings where supplies were stored. This comprised the "village", and Jarvis had ample opportunity to look it over.

He had left Jo and Toby at the cabin, and, returning, he found Jo alone, resting.

He said, "A real luxury to be able to stretch out on a bed, isn't it?"

"I'm really more tired than I ought to be," she confessed.

"Happy?" he asked.

She knew to what he referred. She nodded. "Very happy, Jeff."

"You're not afraid any more?"

Her look clouded momentarily, then cleared; and she smiled.

"No—truthfully, Jeff, I'm not afraid any more!"

"You're awfully sure of yourself," he grinned playfully, "but I'm glad you feel that way."

"It's being tired that makes me feel happy and unafraid."

"I don't quite follow you."

Do I have to draw you a picture?"

He sat on the edge of the bed, leaned over her and kissed her, his thoughts mainly still on the iridescent city of Brock.

"I didn't realize you were an artist, child. Draw away."

"Jeff . . ." She hesitated.

"HmMMM?"

"Jeff, I'm going to have a baby!"

Words came out of him explosively. "The hell you are!"

"Your baby, Jeff!"

"Mine? Good grief!" He ran a shaking hand through his hair, then suddenly grinned and seized her up off the bed into the grip of his wiry arms.

"Are *you* happy about it, Jeff?" Her voice was muffled against his chest.

"Happy?" he caroled. "Delirious, kid! When's it going to be? Think it will be a boy?"

She laughed. "One question at a time, boy! These things take time, you know. But I can't promise it will be a boy. What would you think if it were a girl?"

"I'd think hallelujah," he chorled hugging her. "Of course, if it's a boy, there's an awful lot I could teach him . . ."

"That you couldn't teach a girl?"

He realized abruptly that she was serious, that she was worried whether she would bear him the man-child he wanted. He shook her gently and playfully.

"Just don't you worry about that. So if it's a girl, I'll teach her—think a girl can learn to throw a boomerang?"

Her smile was shy and proud. "With *you* to teach her!"

MITCH called at the cabin. There was a strange look on his face.

"Do you know John Daniels?" he asked.

"A big colored fellow?"

Mitch nodded. "Lawyer from Joplin, Missouri. He's at the city gate—asked me to fetch you." There was a peculiar look in the engineer's expression.

"We met briefly in the wilderness," Jarvis explained. "But he couldn't be here already. He was on his way north when I saw him, and we came as directly westward as possible. How in the world did he get here so fast?"

Mitch shrugged. "Daniels is one of the Mags. You're supposed to go with him and see Eamus Brock—that means you're a Mag, too."

"I? Oh, no, Mitch! See here. I talked with a projection of Eamus Brock last night, on the other side of the pass, but I don't

know anything about this Mag business."

"You and the boy," Mitch insisted stubbornly. "Brock called the boy in an hour ago. And now he's asking for you. Only a Mag can enter the city and live—that's what they tell us. Come along. I'll take you to Daniels."

Jarvis went with him, after saying goodbye to Jo. Her eyes followed him as he went out of the cabin. So he was a Mag, Jarvis thought. And Toby was a Mag. What was a Mag? What he and Toby were—telepaths! It was convincingly clear just now. And Jo? She was not a Mag. She had not demonstrated the telepathic ability he and Toby had—and Eluola had said she was different from them—had called him Jarvis of the Mighty. So what, then, was so mighty about the Mighty?

He turned on Mitch. "I've got a feeling the Mags aren't very well liked out here, Mitch. What's the story? You're acting differently toward me now than you did this morning."

Mitch shrugged, shamefaced. "Nothing personal, Jeff. Maybe we Saps just owe the Mags a lot and resent it. Or maybe we resent being segregated—into our little ghetto, or colored district, as it were. Though there's nothing racial about the Mags—there's all races among them, as there are among us. But the

Mags are different from us, in a way I don't understand—and that makes *you* different from us. Just before the City of Brock was completed, I saw a dog chase a cat, and the cat ran into the city area. I refused to believe what I saw—there was just a puff of light, and the cat vanished utterly. Of course, that brought all the Mags on the run, and we received a solemn warning then and there never to trespass or . . .”

“Or what?”

“Or the same thing would happen to us. Brock told us that as we are safe in our environment, the Mags are safe in theirs. But the Mag environment is not compatible with the Sap physical make-up. Oh, I didn't dig half what he said—but I know enough to keep out of the City of Brock!”

JARVIS felt a thin worm of fear crawl along his sinews. Mitch was so earnestly sincere, he knew that the engineer told the truth. But he, himself, was only human, he reasoned. What were these Mags, then, if not supermen who required a different kind of environment than earthly beings? Then what would happen to *him* when he trespassed on that alien environment?

“It is not an environment alien to you, Jeff, for you are a Mag, and the environment of the City of Brock is compatible with the mind of the Mag.”

The words formed silently in Jarvis' mind, and with them he had a feeling of the presence of John Daniels. He felt warmth and welcome in the intruding thought, but the city was still a quarter of a mile away, and he could not see the Negro.

He said to Mitch, casually, “The Mags are telepathic—that's what makes them different from ordinary people.”

“More than telepathic, Jeff.” Daniels' voice sounded again in his mind. *“Our minds are to us what their arms and legs, their machines and their weapons, are to them.”*

They were approaching the gate. Jarvis said, “Mitch, what is a Sap?”

“If you haven't guessed by now,” Mitch growled, “I won't be the one to tell you—Eamus Brock undoubtedly will.”

“Don't guess, Jeff. Sap is short for homo sapiens. You don't belong to the human race, Jeff. Mitch does. That's why he resents you . . . us. He can't help it. It is a trait of homo sap to fear and distrust anything he does not understand—anything that is different. But we are your people. We understand you, and you will learn to understand us. The gate of our city is open to you.”

Passing through the gate was like stepping from air into vacuum, Jarvis thought—no, more like passing from Hell into Para-

dise. The feeling was profound, indescribable. It was not the same as it had been. He was here, nowhere, and everywhere at once. Daniels was beside him, in front of him—on all sides, and even inside. There was a oneness to be experienced that he had never knowledged before.

"It's dark," he said confusedly. "No—it's light! It—it's both at once and neither. I—I'm alone . . . yet I feel you, John Daniels, and many, many others . . ."

"You are a newborn infant, Jeff Jarvis," Daniels assured him. "How does a baby feel when it first emerges into the world? The same way you feel right now. You can not separate space and time, because they are one, and you have not yet learned to achieve the psychological distinction of one from the other. But you will grow, Jeff, like a baby grows. You will crawl a while before you walk erect among the Mags, but you *are* a Mag, and don't ever forget it!"

"I can't seem to understand anything," Jarvis commented, dismayed.

"God will bring you understanding, as He brought understanding to Eamus Brock. Nothing is changed, Jeff, except environment. All the other true things, like God, remain true, even here."

"God—here?"

"I thought this place *was* God

when I first entered," Daniels avowed. "Now I know it's just the closest place hereabouts to God, but that's a mighty big comfort."

"And Eamus Brock is—?"

"No more than the rest of us—except he's the leader of the Mags. Don't look for anything supernatural here, Jeff. But I'm just a lawyer—and I'm not good at explaining things like this. You ready to see Eamus Brock?"

JARVIS felt a sensation of peace, drifting peace. The soft, flowing colors of the city soothed him in their bath of iridescence. And the muted melodies of countless human beings—no, not human but *more* than human beings—that the city housed surrounded him and permeated him with a pulse of the ultimate in life. He felt the presence of them en masse and individually, and heard for the first time in his soul the throbbing symphony of the Song of Power, which was the soul-song of the Mighty.

They were the Mags—they were the City. There were all races among them, men, women and children. And they were all kin to him. He recognized that kinship with a deep pang of gladness. He accepted their oneness with him, relinquishing his own individuality, glad to be home at last.

He was alone in one of the tall-

est towers in the city. Without explanation, Daniels had left him. Or had the lawyer been with him at all? Jarvis had no physical sensation of being anywhere. And then he saw that he had company—a man shrouded in a glowing, cocoon-like garment. Jarvis went over toward him and the man turned. The lined face and sightless eyes—Eamus Brock!

Brock smiled. "Sit down, Jeff. I'll be with you in a moment—as soon as I finish recording my thoughts of the day. But let me insulate you first—I'm afraid this must be terribly confusing to you."

Jarvis felt suddenly at ease, well placed, with two feet on the ground. There was a chair by him and he sat, noticing the appointments of the office in which he found himself. Brock sat at a large desk that had a recording machine of some kind on it, to which he was addressing himself. It all seemed quite normal and business-like.

Brock concluded his task at the machine, waved his hand, and the recorder vanished. He bestowed another smile on Jarvis.

"This is a trying period for *Magnanthropus*," he explained, "and generations in the future will be grateful for my daily thought recordings. There is so much being done, and so much to be done."

"I'm grateful for whatever you did to clear away my confusion," Jarvis acknowledged.

"On the contrary, I simply re-confused you," Brock retorted amiably. "For the first time in your life, you were thinking clearly, only you could not realize it. I re-established your ordinary environment of confusion, to which you are accustomed."

"If this is confusion," Jarvis exclaimed, "spare me clarity, please!"

Brock laughed. "You will learn—I cannot tell you how, but you will. Perhaps I can guide you a little—as a parent guides a newborn baby. But you will find your own way of learning, and you will grow up among us yet."

Jarvis ranged his glance around the room. An air-conditioning unit purred in the window. The floor was thick and soft with carpet. Panelled wood walls reflected the overhead lights. It was all quite natural and normal, and Brock was telling him that none of this was real—only a vision conjured in his mind to stave off from his senses what reality was actually like.

"I didn't guide you half-way across North America to make fun of you," Brock said seriously. "Nor have I time, myself, to instruct you in the ways of the Mags. But I think your first contact with the Mag environment

is best made through me. We knew each other years ago, Jeff, when you were a child. I took those memories away from you and they will never come back. When they took you away to the House of Correction, I believed I had made a mistake in you, and I renounced you. I now sincerely apologize. I was wrong in thinking that a true Mag should know enough to conform, but now I realize that you have something else—an indomitable kind of courage that even many Mags do not possess.

"It was only because you were a Mag at all that I gave you the drive to find me. Now I am glad I did."

"You directed me to find Toby and bring him to you," Jarvis said.

The blind man nodded. "You are wondering, if I could do that, why I did not reveal myself to you. I could have, but I chose not to. For one thing, I was curious as to how you would get along by yourself—not merely curious, I was beginning to have plans for you. I had to see how you could prove yourself. And then there was the girl . . ."

"Jo?"

"Yes. You know, of course, she is not a Mag? You made yourself responsible for her, and I quickly had a view of the kind of man you were. You wouldn't have left her behind to come to

me by means faster than you could travel—"

"I'm afraid I don't understand . . ."

"You may have heard it called teleportation. There are other names. But we could not have brought Jo that way, so it had to be as it was. But all this is beside the point. You have many questions to ask, and you won't learn anything if we skip around at random. Listen and I will tell you what you want to know . . ."

Eamus Brock leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his stomach. He looked like a tired old man, sleeping, but the "voice" that sounded in Jarvis' brain was full of vigor and strong.

IN Jarvis' mind a picture of the Universe grew. He understood things he had not known, or had only guessed, before. Brock led him from the familiar concept that matter is not entity, but only energy in another form, to other concepts upon which Jarvis had never speculated. What was that which was to energy as energy was to matter? It was nothing less than thought. So that from thought was made energy and from energy, matter, and so the Universe was made.

Thought was the primal drive behind the creation of the Universe, the matrix in which both energy and matter found being.

Brock did not profess to know, or even to understand, what primal Mind was. It had had many names in the history of Mankind—the one most familiar to Jarvis was God.

The very concept of mind was infinite, Brock told him. But infinity implied more than endlessness. It also meant numbers without end. If Mind could conceive of such a thing as a Universe without end, it could in the same effort conceive universes without number.

Jarvis tried to visualize an infinite number of simultaneous universes, and failed. For every star in the sky, there was an infinite number of identical, or almost identical stars, in an infinite number of identical universes. He wrestled with the concept, thinking that all universes occupied the same place, but knowing they were not in the same space. His brain whirled dizzily.

Brock simplified. Imagine the Universe of Earth and the Universe of Eloraspon, co-existing in separate spaces, each the same except for a thin differential in concept.

What was the blind man trying to convey? Not universes simultaneous in space. Not universes simultaneous in Time. But universes *simultaneous in concept!*

"I discovered Eloraspon the

year I was fifteen," Brock said. "When *you* were fifteen, you were in the House of Correction . . . for being a fool. But I have forgiven you that, and we shall speak of it no more. I was always blind, you see, and I was a Mag. I had the mind of *Magnanthropus* and, in my dark world, I had little else to do than learn to use it. I first reasoned out the probability of simultaneous universes. Once I had my theory, I attacked the problem both mathematically and conceptually. Where mathematics failed, my brand of conceptual reasoning went straight to the truth—and I literally *thought* my way through the division of concepts that separates Earth's Universe from that of Eloraspon.

"I had a freedom of movement it would be difficult for you, at this stage, to realize. And my capacity for discovery and learning was correspondingly great.

"I was enchanted with Eloraspon. I made contacts—telepathically—with various of its people.

"The planet, I learned, was slightly larger and warmer than Earth. The entire Elorasponian solar system, in fact, was an almost exact counterpart of our own."

"But Eloraspon has *two* moons!" Jarvis objected.

"You mean there are two moons in the sky of Eloraspon,"

Brock corrected. "One is the original satellite of Eloraspon—the other is the moon of Earth! Perhaps now you are getting an inkling of the disaster that overtook the Earth and the entire Solar System. You see—there has always been a certain instability in the Mind matrix involving the conceptual regions of Earth and Eloraspon. What happened was simply this: Eloraspon and its Solar System materialized into the terrestrial Universe—but partially, not completely."

Jarvis understood. Earth and Eloraspon now occupied the same space at the same time, and it was clear to him how this was possible. The thought of it took his breath away, and dread made his heart beat a swift tattoo.

CHAPTER 17

ONCE before in the ages of Earth, this same disaster had occurred, Brock told him. It was at that time that the moons of Earth and Eloraspon had separated from simultaneity. But in the case of the planets, the simultaneity had both times been absolute . . . and Eloraspon, larger than Earth, had encompassed the latter, its atoms materializing within the empty, inter-atomic spaces of the physical structure of Earth.

"The planets are not exactly

congruent," Brock explained. "In a few isolated spots on the surface of Eloraspon, the surface of Earth shows through—such as your midwestern town and this isolated tip of Pike's Peak. There are a few other areas hereabouts, some in Central America, a portion of Tibet, and so on. Before the disaster, I directed men and women of the Mag race to these areas—that was how you found yourself where you did when catastrophe struck. But only a few thousand were saved, and most of these are now here in the City of Brock. Within a few days, the last of them shall have come trickling in."

So there was no hope, Jarvis thought, of ever regaining Earth. That world was dead, buried with all it contained within the body of Eloraspon. What few of Earth's billions that still lived owed their lives to Eamus Brock.

"At the time," Brock said, "that the moons of Earth and Eloraspon were jarred out of simultaneity, everything that lived upon the Earth was destroyed. And everything that lived had been the monstrous lizards, the tree ferns, and the trilobites that had inhabited the Earth in prehistoric times. But the situation was different on Eloraspon; for here a race of remarkable beings had developed. They were humanoid. They were similar in many ways to the race of Man I

call *Magnanthropus* — Man the Mighty.”

Eloraspon, then, was Earth in simultaneity, but it was not Earth. Its destiny had been predicated on different circumstances than Earth's, circumstances that lay on the other side of a thin veil of thought, hence had to differ.

When the first germs of life had begun to swim in the tropic seas of Earth, in remote, ante-Devonian times, Eloraspon was already populated with a race of intelligent beings who called themselves the Mighty. The path of the race had been similar to that of Man—rising through stages of social and technological advance to a high state of civilization, but incredibly faster than Mankind's development.

What was it that distinguished Man, Brock asked, from the beast that fathered him? What was it, more than a reasoning brain, that differentiated Man from the animals? Jarvis suggested that a soul made the difference, but Brock pointed out that the Mighty had proved that even *things* have souls . . . afterlife in the conceptual thought-matrix of the universes.

Man was an unfinished animal. That was his difference. An animal is born into the world complete, ready to cope with its environment—furred, clawed, an elemental machine.

But Man came into the world not equipped with anything with which to fend for himself. His jaw was puny, his teeth useless. He had no talons to rend his prey, the grip of his hands was weak. He was slow on his feet and he had not the stamina of the beast. Man was a frail weakling, equipped with only a mind.

WITH the power of his mind, Mankind had *thought* his way to mastership of the world. The environment into which he had been born was one that would not accept him. So Man made his own environment. He had no claws, so he learned the use of stone and club. He had no fur, so he clothed himself in the skins of the beasts he slew. When animals fled the fire set in the forest by lightning, Man approached it and made use of it.

Man did not adapt to environment. He adapted environment to himself. Therefore he survived. The same series of evolutionary events took place on both Earth and Eloraspon, each in its own time.

In the beginning, Man had been born of beast because of a slight shift in the parent-genes. More recently, a similar shift had occurred—and a new race had been borne of Mankind, the race of *Magnanthropus*, Man the Mighty!

Magnanthropus was not new,

geologically speaking. He had occurred many times. Brock claimed to have discovered sporadic incursions of the Mag race even in early historic times, perhaps even in prehistoric times. To him, every great man in the history of the race was suspect of having been in truth a Mag.

But the rate of emergence of the Mag race had recently been accelerated—possibly by the effects of atomic bomb tests on human genes during the 'fifties and 'sixties of the last century Earth would ever know.

The new race differed from *homo sapiens* only in relative mental ability—the difference was wholly conceptual. Man's brain from the beginning had been capable of reasoning, imagining, and creating. Wholly specialized man of the pushbutton age had no longer needed such a brain. Mankind had at last created an environment wholly and perfectly adapted to himself.

Magnanthropus, on the other hand, was characterized by his inability to fit into the mold created by *homo sapiens*. Jarvis had proved that point to his own sorrow.

The Mag mind, however, was not limited to the environment of its predecessors. It could and would create its own environment, which was typified here in the City of Brock on Eloraspon. Man's swansong had been inex-

orably begun, when disaster had forestalled the event of his dissolution by natural means.

"Under ordinary circumstances," Brock said, "the Mag race might have taken hundreds of thousands of generations to realize its full potentiality. Perhaps, somewhere in the interwoven matrices of thought comprising the numberless universes, there is a spark of Intelligence that guides these destinies to a rightful conclusion. I like to believe that there is, and that God is guiding us right now along the perilous path we must tread."

The concept of peril delivered by Brock startled Jarvis. There was vehemence in the blind man's thought—even dread.

Brock shook himself, as if to disavow the thought.

"But let me not digress. I meant to explain that Mankind measured its expansion upon a horizontal plane, instead of reaching upward. Man dissipated his genius and spread his intellect thin in mere acquisition of things. He left unborn within him the seed of greater things than any he had ever allowed to flourish. Man's self-created environment was not worthy of him. He housed the gem of intellect in a cheap shell of chrome and plastic and developed a recognized 'guilt feeling'—his subliminal recognition of his own shortcomings. He had substituted

technology for culture, possession for civilization, and denied the values of humility and spiritual enlightenment. It was time, indeed, for *Magnanthropus* to dispossess him!

I DISCOVERED the ruined cities of the Mighty on Eloraspon, and in one, in the southern hemisphere, I found the records of those ancients. Those records are still there, engraved in eternal thought upon subterranean walls of what once was the mightiest of all mighty cities.

"I read those records left by supermen, and found that their minds were more than devices for thinking. They were conceptual integrators, able to formulate a concept and create from it. From those records, I learned the things that made me rich on Earth and provided me with the money I required to continue my investigation of Eloraspon. I worked for many years, unraveling the records, but I could encompass only a few in all that time. Of the rest, I have made transcriptions, and these, future generations will have to decipher.

"The concept of simultaneous universes was not a strange one to the Mighty. More, they were cognizant of the danger inherent in the instability of such simultaneity. They knew that the least overbalance of one force upon

another could precipitate an alien world, or its entire system, into this universe. Eloraspon was only one such precariously balanced world.

"They were familiar with Earth as it was then, too. It was a wild, rank, steaming planet, peopled by brainless saurians. And conceptual integration forecast for them an imminent merger of Earth and Eloraspon. They could not *predict* what would happen when the merger took place, but they could reason what probably would happen. They feared a nova, as the dense mass of the Elorasponian sun attempted to merge with the equally dense mass of the terrestrial sun.

"They made plans to leave their world, and they built tremendous ships to carry them. But there were some who refused to leave their homes, preferring certain destruction to the certainty they would face in the void of space. Those who departed never returned. The descendants of those who remained are the Eeima, the Sea People, the Bronze Men of Surandanish, and many others. The spirits of these present inhabitants remember still the god-like qualities of the Mighty, but their minds have long since degenerated and their spirits have developed along narrow paths of individuality.

"But the dreaded nova feared



MAGNANTHROPUS

by the Mighty did not occur. That is why we can be here today. Do you know what a nova is?"

JARVIS knew, but only the effect of one. Brock explained that a nova is caused whenever a sun from simultaneous space merges with a sun of terrestrial space. In the dense heart of a star, he pointed out, there is no such thing as inter-atomic space. The protons, stripped of their electrons, are packed together in a furnace of incalculable heat and pressure.

The universe contains many nova-type stars, Brock said. Terrestrial astronomers learned long ago to classify them spectroscopically. The bright-line spectrum of Earth's own sun, even, was found to be quite similar to that of known nova-type stars. Up to the destruction of Earth, many theories had raged concerning the cause of novae. In some cases, Brock declared, the space strain was periodic in nature, producing a cycle of mergence and drawing apart, and this manifestation of cyclic instability resulted in the waxing and waning of light output of variable stars. Not all stars, however, could be novae. The condition is limited to unstable points in the Universe.

Unfortunately, Jarvis realized, Mankind happened to inhabit one

of those points of instability.

"That is the danger we face now," Brock assured him grimly. "What did not happen in the days of the Mighty is bound to happen now—unless we prevent it. You have noticed how bright is the sun—how warm is the season, which is actually midwinter! At this altitude, we should be buried deep in snow! Very soon, now, the balance will be fully overcome. There will be a mergence of suns . . . and nova!"

Jarvis felt sickness throbbing in his stomach.

"Can't you do something? *You* are Eamus Brock!" he cried.

"Even the Mighty of old fled before the danger," Brock reminded him, "and they were many. We are doing what we can—no adult Mag sleeps. Our brains are twenty-four hours a day on the job. If there is a way to defeat destiny, we shall find it. I have that faith . . . in God and *Magnanthropus!*"

CHAPTER 18

JARVIS lived in the village, with Jo, and went to "school" in the city. Brock had not been willing to grant him that, until he had explained that Jo was pregnant.

"Your child will be a Mag, like you," Brock had told him. "That is a point we must not neglect,

whether we are trapped by the nova or not. Think of it, Jarvis—a child of your own! A newborn infant, born to the destiny of *Magnanthropus!*"

"If the sun turns nova," Jarvis pointed out bleakly, "it won't matter if my child is a throw-back to the Tertiary apes."

"We must continue to rear our children, and teach them," Brock said solemnly, "even if we had absolute proof the sun will nova tomorrow."

It was the unborn child, then, that gave Jarvis extra privilege. Brock insisted that Toby remain in the city.

"I have said," Brock told him kindly, "that I have made plans for you. If those plans should bear fruit, you will profit from living in the village. As for Toby, he is mine. I accept him among my people. He must learn swiftly what it is to be a Mag."

It irked Jarvis, living in the village, among the villagers whom he counted as his own people, to be able to say nothing of the impending nova. Brock had sworn him to silence and secrecy. He must not speak of it, even to Jo. He understood, of course, Brock's concern for secrecy. It would do no good to upset the villagers with that information, and there was nothing *they* could do to avert doom. Only Brock and his *Magnanthropi* had the potential power to turn aside the inten-

tion of Fate . . . if they could exercise it in time!

It did not take Jarvis long to realize that Mitch was his friend, even though the lanky engineer had expressed bitterness at discovering him to be a Mag. It was he who suggested that Jarvis be admitted to the governing board of the village, and so Jarvis became junior member of the village council.

"Mitch, why don't you trust the Mags?" Jarvis asked him.

Mitch scratched his lean jaw. "Not so much the Mags as Eamus Brock, Jeff. Remember—he kept the truth from us—when he brought us here."

"That was to save your life!"

"Even so, it was a lie. I think he would lie again if he thought it was for our own good."

"What could he possibly be lying about now?"

Mitch shrugged. "We hear a lot of silence out of the City of Brock these days. What are they covering up? I've even hinted to you a few times, and you close up like a clam. What kind of a lie is it that's too big to be uttered?"

Jarvis felt flustered. "Look, Mitch. You're wrong! Brock isn't hiding any lies, and he isn't covering up. There's a lot of work to getting started off right in a new world. The Mags have a lot of problems they're working out—"

"I'll bet they have," Mitch agreed morosely.

"However you feel about it, Mitch, the Mags are a race of supermen. They can do a lot for you and the rest of humanity on Eloraspon. Give them time."

"*Homo sapiens* had a million years," Mitch said pointedly, "and what did *he* ever do for the apes?"

"Our case is different—"

"Different? Oh, yes, it's different! And how it is! You've tried time after time to tell me what it's like in there—in the city—and I still haven't the least idea. Different? We live in totally separate worlds, you and I!"

"I live here in the village with you!"

"Because you're married to a Sap!" Mitch interjected heatedly. "Oh, I know, Jeff—I know what you'd like for me to think, and believe me, I wish I could think that way. But I understand the people in the village—they're my kind. I don't understand you and yours. Half the stuff you try to tell me about the Mags sounds like double-talk to me. Promise me one thing, Jeff. Don't try to *help* us, will you? You just sit on the council and keep your intelligent mug shut. Will you do that for me?"

Jarvis grinned, and sealed the agreement with a handshake.

THE first council meeting with Jarvis sitting in was not a success. His chief opposition

was a man named Saylo—Gardner Saylo, formerly mathematician at a small, midwestern college. He was a small man with a thin, sallow face, black moustached, yet obviously middle-aged. Saylo could have been a man who had nourished ambitions, Jarvis thought—to be college president—to be another Einstein, maybe. Now he possessed the highest rank he would ever have—council member for a village of less than a thousand people.

Harper was Saylo's friend—Roy Harper, big, humorless, red-faced. He seconded Saylo's dislike for Jarvis.

Saylo made a motion to reserve governing privileges in the village to the species *homo sapiens*, and Harper seconded it. The other five members, excluding Jarvis, voted it down.

The incident was not noticeably large, but it impressed Jarvis. He felt like a hobo sitting in a council of apes and rejected for his effiteness. Those who had voted him in had done so out of friendship for Mitch.

After the meeting, Mitch said, "You expected that play from somebody, didn't you? I knew something like that would be forthcoming—believe me, I know my *homo sapiens*—hoof, hide, hair, horn and claw, I know him."

"You're being unfair to your own people, Mitch."

"Unfair, am I? Look, Jeff—you're a Mag, and you don't understand. No man of *homo sapiens* has ever fully trusted another. Where do you suppose we got our rituals of hat-tipping and hand-shaking? These are no more than wary signs, saying, 'For the moment, you are safe from me'. Why, men have competed against each other since the Year One, and they always will compete. You Mags have no idea of what competition is—it's completely foreign to your nature. So don't forgive Saylo and Harper for making fools of themselves. They don't deserve it!"

In the weeks that followed, Jarvis interspersed moments of anxiety concerning the approaching doom of nova with nostalgic reminiscences of their trek across the face of Eloraspon, his and Jo's and Toby's. Life in the village, he thought, was only more of what he had tried to run away from on Earth. Only now he was enmeshed too deeply to pull out. There was no place to go from here, and he had Jo and his unborn child to hold him fast.

The villagers had always assumed that he and Jo were legally married. They were married, as far as Jarvis was concerned, and Jo, too. So they never disabused the villagers' minds of the notion.

Meanwhile, he attended classes of "instruction" in Brock's

city. He learned more and more of what it was to be a Mag, yet realizing that his progress was slow, because he could not spend all his time in the city.

Still, he learned a few basic mental techniques. He learned to distinguish the thought-tones of things, the subtle emanations arising from the interstitial vibrations of the thought matrix that underlay form. He learned to "hear" the song of the city in the depths of his soul, to know the melodies of water, wood, stone and other substances. These things were taught him in a precise way, along the lines of a theory in harmonics, by means for which he was required to memorize the frequencies of only a few elements. Then, by interpolation, he could intersperse the others with remarkable accuracy. Then he was taught a method of analysis, by means of which he was enabled to break down complex tones into their elements, thus revealing the nature of compound substances—water, for instance, was a combination of the thought-tones of hydrogen and oxygen. He was on the threshold of being able to "see" without eyes.

What was more important to him, though, was to be able to shut out these subliminal radiations when he wished. After that, he could really enjoy silence in his soul.

ON one of his infrequent visits with Brock, Jarvis brought up the subject weighing on his mind.

"Aren't we going to say *anything* to the villagers about the nova?"

"Not until the time is ripe for it," Brock assured him.

"Do you think of them as apes?" Jarvis asked suddenly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Apes. I said once to Mitch that the Mags could do a lot for *homo sapiens*. He asked me what *homo sapiens*, in a million years of existence, had ever done for the apes."

"Sometimes they caged them," Brock put in dryly. "Would you like me to do that to your villagers?"

"I don't mean that. But isn't that what you're doing by holding back knowledge of the catastrophe ahead?"

"You worry more than is good for you, Jeff. I think you will fit nicely into my plans. You will have to worry a lot to do what I have in mind for you."

"And what is that?"

Brock waved a negligent hand. "All in good time. Do you feel you are progressing in your studies?"

"Not as fast as I should like."

"But fast enough, nonetheless Brock assured him. "You cannot be hasty."

"But you say there is so little

time left before the sun erupts. How close have you come to finding a way to avert it?"

"I won't inflate your hopes, Jeff. Remember what I said about if we knew the sun must surely nova tomorrow. We must also keep on working toward averting it. Listen to me—it was the Carboniferous Age on Earth when the Mighty migrated from Eloraspon to escape disaster. They built their thousands of spaceships, believing that those ships would permit them to flee before the nova took place."

"It's obvious they figured the nova wrong. It never happened."

"Is it so obvious?"

"The solar system is still here, Eamus! You could be wrong, too, you know. If the Mighty were as mighty as you say, surely they could be even more accurate than you and this handful of Mags? Eloraspon may yet swing back into its own universe without help, and there would be no nova."

Brock looked exasperated. "You possess a few of *homo sapiens'* traits for specious argument that will probably never be weeded out of you," he reprimanded. "The sun *will* nova because it *must*. At the time of the migration of the Mighty, it had also to nova, and it would have except for . . ."

"Except for what?" Jarvis wanted to know.

"Have you noticed the unfin-

ished tower at the eastern edge of the city?" Brock asked irrelevantly.

"I've noticed Mags working on it."

"It will soon be finished. That is our spaceship, exact in every way to one of those ancient spaceships of the Mighty. But it is only one."

"You couldn't be planning to remove everyone from Eloraspon before the nova!"

"Correct. I plan no such thing at all."

A horrible suspicion bred itself in Jarvis's brain.

"Then why are you building a spaceship?"

"This spaceship is not a simple shell of metal into which you might cram a thousand or more human beings, along with supplies for many years' journey. It is a complex thing, Jeff, like no spaceship any man of *homo sapiens* ever imagined. We could not transport one human being in it, let alone many. It will not even hold air."

"Then of what use is it? Why are you building it?"

"For ourselves, Jeff—for *Magnanthropus*. There is no material substance in any part of that tapering hull. What you see is only a matrix, a mould for thought. In a certain sense, it is no more than a sponge that will hold, not water, but the *minds* of *Magnanthropus*. When we leave Eloras-

pon, we must leave our bodies behind . . . with the people in the village."

"Why do you do this thing?" Jarvis demanded bitterly. "Isn't it better to die here, than somewhere in the endless void of space. And even if you live, how can you live with your own conscience?"

Brock smiled, wearily. "I have been over all these arguments before, Jeff, threshing them out in my own soul. But the spaceship may be the salvation of *homo sapiens* as well as of *Magnanthropus*. Mind power will drive that ship—the power of the united Mag minds within the matrix of the hull. Applying the drive will set up a strain in the thought-matrix of the Universe—and may totter the Elorasponian system back into its own space. I say it may, because I can not be sure that it will. When the Mighty fled Eloraspon long ago, they fled in ships by the thousands. The tremendous, tearing energy of their flight hurled their planet, their sun and its system back into their own normal space. If our one ship will do what the many of the Mighty did long ago, your villagers will live, and a civilization of *homo sapiens* will build itself on Eloraspon."

"And if it doesn't?"

Brock shrugged. "Then we all die—*homo sapiens* and *Magnanthropus*. If the shock does not

avert the nova, it will hasten it. Even in our spaceship, we can not expect to escape the explosion."

"Suppose your scheme works? How about the Mags?" Jarvis was thinking of bodies lying on the plain of Eloraspon, and disembodied minds fleeing forever through space.

"Time will not exist for us, nor space," Brock said. "We shall go where we must, wherever that is. I know the orbit of the Mighty on their flight. We shall follow that orbit, with a few slight corrections to compensate for the intervening time. We shall seek the Mighty, and if we find them, learn from them how to return to our physical forms again."

Jarvis did not pursue the subject. The respect he had had for Eamus Brock and his little handful of supermen was more profound than ever; for who could say whether or not the Mighty had survived their flight, and, having survived that much, had lasted on through the millenia intervening?

CHAPTER 19

THE resentment against Jarvis in the village was not more than mild; still, it was there. But he realized that the feeling was not directed personally against him, but more against the race which he represented. In spite of what Eamus Brock had done for

them, the villagers were afraid of Brock and the Mags, as men have always feared what is different and strange. The Mags and their works were beyond their comprehension; and if they felt inferior, they expressed it in general distrust and disbelief in the intentions of the Mags.

In his heart, Jarvis pitied them. He had come close to sharing their feelings—until he had learned from Eamus Brock the enormity of cataclysm that hung over them all.

Toby came quite unexpectedly to visit them one evening. Jarvis had not seen the boy since the day of their arrival in the village. And he knew that Brock was inflexible in his insistence that Toby have no further association with the people of the old race, and that included Jarvis and Jo.

Jarvis has spent an evening with Mitch, and when he returned home, Toby was with Jo. He sprang lithely up as Jarvis came in, crossed over and seized Jarvis' hand in a grip of steel. It was not immediately that Jarvis recognized him, he had changed so. He was a grown man now, possessed of a remarkable physique and a buoyant strength that matched in power the clear light of intelligence gleaming in his wide-set eyes.

"Toby!" Jarvis exclaimed at last, when it finally came through to him that this handsome man

was eleven-year-old Toby Carter. "What are you doing here?"

Toby tossed his head back and laughed deep, masculine laughter.

"I couldn't stay away forever, Jeff! They've been keeping me pretty busy on the other side, but I had to see you and Jo again."

It was a real reunion. Jarvis quickly adjusted to the physical change in Toby, and in minutes they were laughing together and reminiscing on shared hardships and triumphs of only a few months ago that now seemed like years.

"I've missed you, Toby," Jo told him fervently. "I really have. Jeff is busy, too, you know. He spends his time in the city." Her look clouded. "When is it all going to end, Jeff?" she asked plaintively. "Aren't we going to settle down some day and live ordinary, normal, pleasant lives?"

Jarvis looked at Toby and shook his head slightly. Did Toby know about the nova, too? Undoubtedly he did. The boy seemed to understand—Jarvis steadfastly closed his mind to all telepathic communion. He would not have it around Jo.

He said, easily, "There will come a day yet, Jo—won't it, Toby? It won't be like this forever. Eamus is working the problem out now . . ."

Toby looked uncomfortable. "I'd better be going back," he

said quietly. "I'm afraid I've overstayed my leave already. I kind of left without letting anybody know I was going."

"You didn't have Eamus' permission?" Jarvis got up and took him by the arm. "Come on. I'll walk you back to the gate."

It was only Jo's awe before the tremendous change that had taken place in Toby that kept the leave-taking from being a tearful one.

OUTSIDE, Jarvis said, hastily, "I hope you didn't mention the nova to her."

"I didn't, as a matter of fact," Toby replied. "I felt that you had probably discussed it with her, and I didn't want—"

"Nobody out here knows," Jarvis said imperatively. "I'm the only Mag Eamus allows out of the city, and he has sworn me to absolute silence."

In the light from the windows, Toby's face looked suddenly drawn.

"I didn't realize that," he said abashedly. "I—I thought everybody knew—"

Jarvis felt a thrill course through him.

"You haven't talked with anybody about it?"

"I was looking for your cabin," Toby explained lamely. "I met a man of the village and asked directions from him. I—I did discuss the nova a little with him."

"What in the world ever made you do that?"

"He brought it up," Toby returned defensively. "He asked how we were getting on with our plans—no, he didn't say plans—our preparations—that was the word he used—against the nova."

"And you said what?"

"That we were working on it, that's all. And that we hoped to have some significant news pretty soon. Honest, Jeff. That's all that was said—but if nobody out here knows about the nova, how did *that* man know?"

"That is what I shall have to find out," Jarvis said grimly.

"Who was the man?"

"He said his name is Saylo."

Jarvis was assailed by mixed feelings. How Saylo had found out about the impending nova, he had no idea. But if Saylo spread word throughout the village that the sun was about to explode—He shook his head and patted Toby on the shoulder.

"I'm glad you told me about this, Toby. Now, you'd better get back to the city."

Toby squeezed his hand. "Good-by, Jeff. No, don't walk me back to the gate. I'll take off from here."

The words still rang empty in Jarvis' ears, and Toby was gone, vanished as if he had never been there. Jarvis stood blinking. The boy was far ahead of him in techniques. He had no idea how

the disappearance had been effected, but he knew beyond doubt that Toby had instantaneously transported himself back to his quarters in the City of Brock.

Jarvis returned into the cabin and Jo put her arms around him.

"You look worried, dear. Don't be. Toby is still more like you than the rest of the Mags. We haven't lost him entirely."

"It wasn't—" Jarvis began, then he smiled and returned her affectionate squeeze. "I wasn't thinking of that at all," he assured her. He had not yet told her that their own child would be born a Mag.

A KNOCK sounded at the door and Jarvis opened up. Gardner Saylo was outside.

"I want to talk to you, Jarvis."

Jarvis looked over his shoulder at Jo. Her face held a strained, anxious look, as if she detected the tension in Jarvis that sight of Saylo had brought on. He nodded reassuringly to her and stepped outside, closing the cabin door behind.

"What's the trouble, Saylo?"

"No trouble. I just have to talk to you, that's all."

The cabin light shone dimly on the man's round face. There was a sheen of sweat on his forehead and his eyes seemed unnaturally large. Jarvis knew that his dislike for the man stemmed only from the opposition Saylo had

expressed against him in council meetings.

He said, mustering kindness into his tone, "Glad to hear you out, Saylo. What's on your mind?"

"I—I talked to that boy of yours tonight—"

"Yes. Toby told me."

Saylo exhaled heavily. "The nova! Look, Jarvis—I've been making observations. Crude ones, to be sure. But I'm as sure as a man can be that the sun will explode—turn into a nova soon. I figured if I could find that out, the Mags would be sure to know all about it. So I mentioned it to your boy—he seemed to think we knew all about it out here."

"Unfortunately," Jarvis observed, "he has been kept pretty close to his studies in the city. Knowing what you know, Saylo, you also realize what kind of panic would occur if the people were told about the nova."

"They would take *that* well enough, Jarvis. I asked your boy how things were going, and he said the *spaceship* is almost finished. Now, what did he mean by that?"

Jarvis started. The spaceship was a familiar story to Toby. He hadn't even realized he had mentioned it in reassuring Saylo. Jarvis bit his lip.

"I can say nothing about that," Jarvis said. "You may be sure the Mags are doing everything

in their power to avert the nova. If this world is saved, we will all have Eamus Brock to thank. I would advise you, Saylo, to forget this conversation, and to say nothing to anybody. There is no use getting the people upset."

Saylo straightened with an air of bravado. "There are some of us who don't trust you Mags," he blustered. "Now that we know about that spaceship, we want to know more about it."

"For instance?"

"I'll speak bluntly, Jarvis. Is Brock planning to take us away from Eloraspon before the explosion? If he is, why is he making such a big secret of it? Isn't it more likely he is building that spaceship *for the Mags alone?*"

"If I told you the truth, you wouldn't believe me—because I'm a Mag," Jarvis pointed out.

Saylo gnawed his underlip and his moustache writhed.

"I think I've learned what I wanted to know, Jarvis. Good night."

He turned and strode quickly away.

CHAPTER 20

IT was barely dawn when Mitch knocked at Jarvis' door. Jarvis was already awake and dressed. He had hardly slept.

"Something serious has come up, Jeff," Mitch said. "Gardner Saylo is—"

Jarvis raised his hand wearily.

"I can guess the whole story. Saylo was here last night."

"Here? What did he want?"

"Confirmation of a suspicion. Mitch, how much do you trust me?"

The lanky engineer was taken aback. "Why—of course I trust you, Jeff! What's this about trusting?"

"You're pretty excited, Mitch. More excited than I've ever seen you. And you've heard the false rumor Saylo is spreading about the Mags."

Mitch seized on his words. "Then it *is* false! The Mags *aren't* building a spaceship to escape from Eloraspon?"

A muscle twitched in Jarvis's cheek. He made up his mind.

"That much is true, Mitch. Now, I'm going to tell you the rest of the truth. Whether you accept it for truth or not will be up to you."

Slowly, in measured words, Jarvis explained the entire situation. When he had finished, Mitch was silent. Finally, the engineer spoke.

"What you say has the ring of truth in it, Jeff. Maybe I'm just shocked after living so long in a fool's paradise. I thought the disaster was done, finished with. Now I know it has hardly begun. Jeff, Jeff—*will* Brock's plan have any effect on . . . ?"

Jarvis shrugged. "That is a point on which it is best to main-

tain a philosophical attitude. Either we are all saved—or all must perish.”

“You must talk to the people, Jeff! Most of them are scared to death by Saylo’s accusations. They really believe the Mags plan to desert us. It was a mistake for Brock ever to keep this thing secret. Your speaking to them as a Mag may do something to allay their fear.”

“It seems to me you are afraid, too, Mitch—but not of the nova. Of what?”

“Of my own people, Jeff! Being a Mag, you can’t understand the psychology of *homo sapiens*. Only a little more of Saylo’s talk will start a riot. They may rush the city—and I *know* what happens to anybody setting foot inside that gate!”

Jarvis jerked up. “Do you think they would dare?”

“It isn’t a matter of daring! Being crazed by fear will drive them to it.”

JARVIS wanted to tell them the truth, but he felt he should talk to Eamus Brock first. Perhaps the leader of the Mags could think of a way to avert this tragedy.

Before Jarvis could leave his house an angry group of villagers had gathered out in front.

A small delegation of men approached the doorstep. One was Gardner Saylo, another was Roy

Harper. Jarvis knew the other three by sight.

“We’ve come to take you, Jarvis,” Saylo said. “Go quietly with us and nobody will get hurt.”

Jarvis looked at the faces confronting him. He saw fear there, but determination. Jo was looking up at him.

He said, “What’s the idea?”

“You’re a Mag, Jarvis,” Saylo told him. “If Brock insists on leaving us behind, he’ll leave you behind, too.”

“That’s fair enough,” Jarvis agreed reasonably. “Did you think I was planning to go with them?” He put his arm around Jo’s waist and drew her close. “I’m staying with my wife.”

Saylo tossed his head. “Oh, that sounds noble, Jarvis! But you could find room in your ship for *one* extra person all right! But we have other ideas. Everybody goes . . . or everybody stays! Now march!”

They locked him in a store-room and went away, assuring him they would lose no time notifying Eamus Brock of his plight. Alone, Jarvis chewed his lip and thought. Undoubtedly, Brock was already aware of what had transpired. Saylo could not threaten the Mag leader. But what he could do would endanger the lives of everyone in the village. Jarvis waited.

“Don’t feel badly, Jeff. You did the best you could.”

Eamus Brock was there, as Jarvis had known he would be.

"What are we going to do, Eamus?"

The blind man, in a shimmering cocoon of light, stood quietly.

"There is nothing we can do, Jeff. The time is almost here. We have only minutes."

"The spaceship is finished?"

"Finished. Our people are boarding her. "Come with me now, Jeff. Into the city. You will go with us . . . help us complete the destiny of *Magnanthropus*."

Jarvis shrugged. "You were watching what was going on. You heard what I told those men. I'm not going with you, Eamus."

Brock smiled. "I know you are not, Jeff. I was only giving you a last chance to refuse. I have told you that I have plans for you, and here they are. These people need you. They don't know it yet, but they will. In the months and years to come, they will need the guidance you can give them in resettling Eloraspon.

"I have desired all along that you remain with them. From you will spring a new and independent line of *Magnanthropus*. You must tell them this: In the southern hemisphere, there is a city of the ancient Mighty, and its name is Surandanish. The land around it is peopled by a race of humanoids called the Bronze Men

of Surandanish. There lie all the secrets of the Mighty. If we on our journey into space do not find those who fled millenia ago, we may be back—and your descendants will be here to greet us, with the secrets we have not had time to unravel from the records of the Mighty." Brock paused, and there was a rattle and thud outside the door. "The lock is broken," he said. "Go. You must give us every instant you can—prevent the people from rushing the spaceship when they discover we are about to take off. The lives of every one of us—Mag and *homo sapiens* alike—depends on it!"

CHAPTER 21

MITCH had heard and had been on his way to release Jarvis from the storeroom. They met outside the door.

Mitch said, "The people are acting ugly. They're scared, and they're following Saylo and Harper blindly. They think they can force the Mags to include them in the space ship. We're going to have to get hold of Eamus Brock and let him know what's going on."

"He already knows," Jarvis said. "Mitch—we've only got minutes!"

"Minutes?"

"The sun is about to explode." Mitch's face turned gray. "So soon?"

"Mitch! As soon as the people are aware the ship is about to take off, they are apt to riot! We must prevent that at all costs!"

"But you, Jeff! You're going with the Mags!"

"I'm staying with Jo, Mitch! If this thing goes through and the nova is averted, there will be work for me here."

Jarvis left him and went directly to Jo. In these last few minutes, whatever happened, he wanted to be with her. But even those moments were denied them. Mitch followed within a few minutes.

He said, "They're going to storm the launching pad!" he cried. "Can you hear them?"

Jarvis listened. There were shouts and cries throughout the village. He heard the sound of running feet, and a group of men raced past, stirring up the dust in the street. They were armed, clutching rifles, pistols, clubs. The whole village was in confusion, milling to the sound of an agonized shout.

"The Mags are deserting us!"

Mitch said, "We've got to stop this! Come on, Jeff!"

He ran and Jarvis followed. A block from the cabin, he realized that Jo was with them, running. He turned sick inside with concern for her.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Stay in the cabin until this is over!"

Her head was thrown back

proudly, her face gleaming warmly bronze in the intense sunlight.

"I'm staying with you!" she replied shrilly.

"Think, Jo—think of the baby!"

"If you live, I will live. If I live, so will my baby! So don't waste strength yelling at me!"

The air was dust-filled, barred with the shadows of the trampling throng. Dust entered Jarvis' throat, and he coughed as he yelled. His heart swelled with pride in Jo, at the same time the thought of what might happen to her dismayed him.

No one listened to his and Mitch's shouts. These people were afraid—afraid beyond the restraint of reason. Jarvis saw Mitch fall, trampled by the furious crowd. He fought his way to him, stood over him and slugged viciously into the press, until Mitch could stand again.

The swirling of the mob had taken them to the edge of the launching pad. The spaceship was a needle-like spire, towering above the many-colored city of Brock. It was still a half-mile away, and Jarvis could see a throng of Mags milling around the base.

Somewhere among them, he thought, was Toby . . . and Daniels, the Negro lawyer from Joplin. But he could not hope to pick them out. The Mags were a clus-

ter of luminous cocoons around the space ship.

The mob roared with an ugly temper, but moved no closer.

"Something's holding them back!" Mitch shouted in Jarvis' ear.

"A force shield!" Jarvis exclaimed. "Eamus has insulated the Mag environment with a force shield. I heard talk of it in the city."

STONES, hurled at the barrier, flashed in spicules of flame, shattering with miniature thunder. A few firearms crackled, and the bullets exploded on contact with the invisible screen.

"Whoever touches that screen is a dead man," Jarvis said.

His ranging glance caught sight of Saylo and Harper at the barrier. Both were shouting simultaneously, gesturing toward the hurrying Mags. Jarvis charged them as it seemed the crowd was on the verge of surging into the shield. He struck out and Saylo spun half around and went to his knees. Mitch charged past him and struck Harper low, his shoulder into the pit of the red-faced man's stomach.

"Stop!" Jarvis screamed. "Anybody who passes the edge of the launching pad will die! You can do nothing to stop them! Go back to your homes!"

A growl and a roar from the mob followed his words.

"Can you contact Eamus Brock?" Mitch put in excitedly.

"I am with you, Jeff." Brock's voice sounded in Jarvis' mind. "We need a few more minutes still. The mob can not reach us, but many will die if they rush that screen. I am sending Toby out to you—he will stay behind with you. That may confuse them just enough to give us the time we need."

A glowing cocoon raised from those around the spaceship base, hurtled through the invisible barrier and hovered over the crowd. Toby's voice rang out, clear and strong.

"Do you believe the Mags are deserting you? I am a Mag, and I choose to stay with you!"

The cocoon settled and Toby materialized at Jarvis' side. Jo grasped him.

"No, Toby! Go back! They are your people! You must go with them where they go!"

"Jeff needs me here as much as Eamus ever could," he said gently. "You and he—you are my people. And Brock wants it this way."

Another cocoon lifted from the crowd of Mags and hurtled swiftly toward them. Daniels grasped Jarvis' arm, palmed Mitch's shoulder in a huge hand.

"I'm staying, too!" he shouted at the crowd, and his voice rolled like thunder on the dust-filled air. "I've got faith—and that's what

you folks need—faith! Eamus Brock is going to save you once again, like before—and I'm staying here with you to prove it!"

During this interval, the crowd had milled confusedly, staying clear of the edge of the pad. Saylo and Harper had helped each other to their feet. For a moment, eternity stood still, then there was a cry from the crowd—a cry that made the hair prickle at the nape of Jarvis' neck.

"The sun! The sun!"

He looked up into the sky, peering through the crack between two fingers to protect his eyes from searing rays of ultraviolet. His sight filled with scalding tears. The sun, like a glowing cave-mouth in the sky, had swollen enormously. It blazed more fiercely than it ever had, and the intensity of light and heat emitted from its billowing surface was almost more than flesh could bear. And it was no longer a disc. The incandescent surface glowed waveringly, as if seen through a roiled fluid, and from its limb giant flames licked out, millions of miles into space.

The sun was erupting—the nova had begun!

JARVIS felt the sunlight beating on his upturned face in a raw downpour of scorching radiation. The plain was drenched in shimmering brilliance. The tem-

perature of the air was mounting swiftly to unbearable intensity.

How long would it take for the first tendrils of furiously flaming gases to span the gulf from sun to Eloraspon? How many minutes had they to live—if Brock and the race of *Magnanthropi* failed?

In minutes only, Jarvis knew, the increasing ferocity of radiation would set plains and mountains afire long before the planet was engulfed in flames. The oceans would boil in their beds, and the surface rocks would melt into bubbling slag. There would be no living thing left to see that phase of destruction . . .

Jarvis felt possessed with a calm, such as comes with the knowledge of inevitability. The time was now. They would die or they would not die, and they were powerless to direct destiny to either hand. Their only hope lay in Eamus Brock.

What point could panic serve now? Panic is an urge to flee to safety. What use is it when there is no safety, nowhere to flee? The crowd stood mute, irresolute, shielding their upturned faces with their hands.

Jarvis' glance ranged the field where, a moment ago, the cocoons of the Mags had flitted. There was no movement there now. Lifeless bodies lay sprawled on the ground—the spaceship was manned!

The scene grew hotter, the daylight brighter. What was Brock waiting for? There had been hurry and desperation in the last few minutes—had the ship been boarded in time?

It seemed to Jarvis, watching with scorching eyes, that the spiring needle of the spaceship quivered. Jo clung to him, her body pressed against his.

He stood with legs braced, shoulders thrown back, his craggy face tense and sorrowful, his eyes fixed on Mankind's final challenge to the threat of destruction. *Would that ship never move?*

The ship began to glow. Colors flowed in phosphorescent streams from stem to base, brighter and brighter, until their lashing brilliance outshone the exploding sun. A mighty humming vibrated on the air. In the depths of his soul, in spite of everything he could do to shut out the torture of it, Jarvis felt the screaming as the very matrix of space writhed under the lash of force unleashed by the united Mag minds.

Perspiration trickled down Jarvis' lean cheeks and dripped from his jawline. The air smelled hot, and it seemed to him he could hear from afar the roar of floods in the mountains as snowfields and glaciers melted and ran in the heat.

THE spaceship lifted! The humming mounted to a shrill resonance of sound that tormented the eardrums, then whispered into silence. In Jarvis' inner being, in his very soul, such a tumultuous storm of thought-turned-to-energy ripped and tore that he could not bear it, and cried out, covering his head with his arms. But he could tear his eyes from that magnificent ship. Dust swirled at its base, mounted in a cloud to its sky-reaching tip.

The spaceship shone with a brilliance that was like a flame in the shroud of dust. The needle-tip pressed against the glowing sky, which seemed afire with pallid flame from horizon to horizon. The ship began to glide upward with swiftly increasing acceleration.

The air clove before it with a whistling shriek, and suddenly the ship was gone, vanished in an instant into outer space, the dwindling mote of it lost forever in the glare of the sky. Jarvis' mind rocked with the assault of a deluge of force. The air thundered in a continuous, diminishing peal. And the sky was empty of all but light.

Somebody shouted, and the shout was swallowed up in a babble of confusion. The very air turned dark. The sky churned with an opaque barrier of clouds, sprung up from nowhere, driven on the wings of a furious wind,

dropping scalding rain as they fled. People tumbled to the ground and rolled helplessly in the grip of the hurricane, their cries lost in the noise of earthquake, in the brittle breaking and smashing of the magnificent towers of the City of Brock.

Before the dark wholly closed them in, Jarvis caught a glimpse of John Daniels, his giant frame still standing when all else had been battered to the ground, his arms lifted skyward in a gesture, at once of beseeching prayer and of triumph.

The breath was dashed from Jarvis' lungs as he was flung to to the ground. He gasped for air, and the howling wind snatched it from his mouth and nostrils. He reached for Jo as he tumbled, trying desperately to find her in the abysmal murk and pandemonium.

The ground heaved, uttering thunderclaps of sound as invisible crevices opened and crashed together again. He crawled on hands and knees, crying Jo's name.

Lightning flared and a drenching rain sluiced upon the plain. He felt cold drops hammering him, like hammers of ice, cold and getting colder. He heard Jo's voice, tiny, lost in the enormity of wind and rain, answering his call. They collided in the dark and the hissing rain and clung to each other.

The jarring of the planet was abruptly stilled. The wind shrieked a note on diminishing force. Pallid light wavered through the gloom.

Jarvis felt light, as if he barely touched the ground. The air was filled with wreathing vapors—cold, cold. He sat up, feeling his bruises. Jo was in his arms and he thanked God she still lived.

The downpour from the heavens was like water dripping from ice, congealing on his flesh. He searched the murky plain with his eyes. Formless lumps stirred here and there as stunned people got to their feet. He looked toward the city. It was a heap of tumbled shards.

The wind dropped to nothing, then began to blow from the opposite direction, keen and cold. He felt the sharp prickling of ice crystals pecking at his heated cheek. He grasped unbelievably at the flecks swirling before his eyes, looked at them on his palms, melting into water droplets. *Snow!*

STUNNING realization struck him, and he shouted with sheer joy. Scrambling hastily to his feet, he pulled Jo up beside him.

Brock's plan had *not* failed! The snow was proof—Eloraspon had been hurled back into its own universe! He shouted as loud as he could.

"Get up! It's all over! *There will be no nova today!*"

Jo's face loomed in front of him, her eyes wide and alight, and she was smiling, her hair in wild disarray and flecked with snow. He seized her in his arms and hugged her delightedly.

"It's winter!" he cried. "It's winter and it's snowing! Eloraspon has returned to its own universe!"

The freezing wind bit at their lightly clad bodies. Jarvis danced, holding Jo as a partner, cutting fantastic capers. He felt as buoyant as if he floated in water. For months, he had been accustomed to the combined gravity pull of Earth and Eloraspon on his body. Now Earth

was gone. There was only the gravity of Eloraspon to contend with . . . and the winter. Yes, it would be hard, this winter; but there would come Spring. And after that, he would find a way to lead his people out of the mountains, to the land of the plateau, where game was plentiful, where the grass grew deep, and where a new civilization might take root.

He fell in with the movement of the crowd toward the village, cuddling Jo against him, and looked up at the sullen sky.

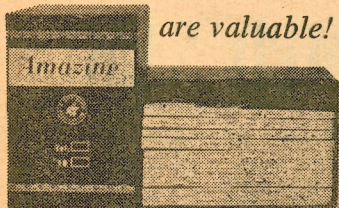
What would Eamus Brock and the Mags discover up there? Or, would they some day return to Eloraspon? He clutched Jo more tightly against him and hurried her toward the village.

THE END

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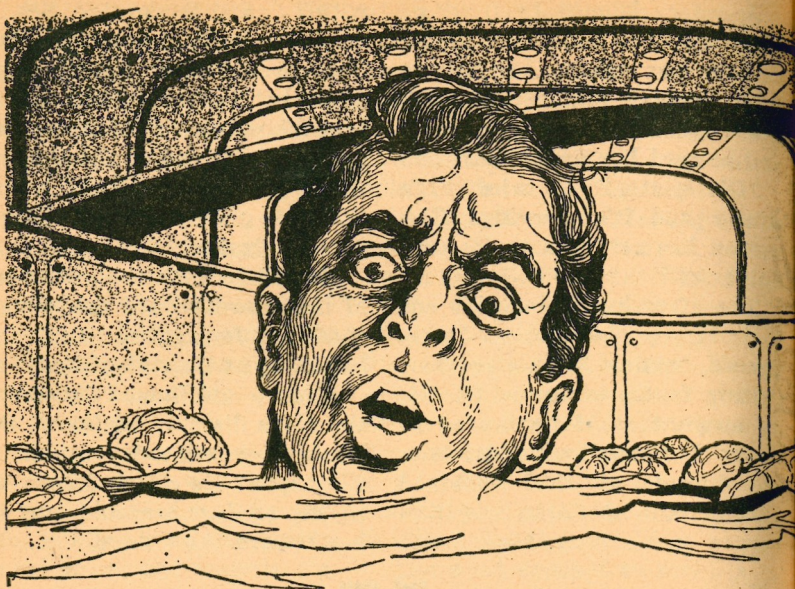
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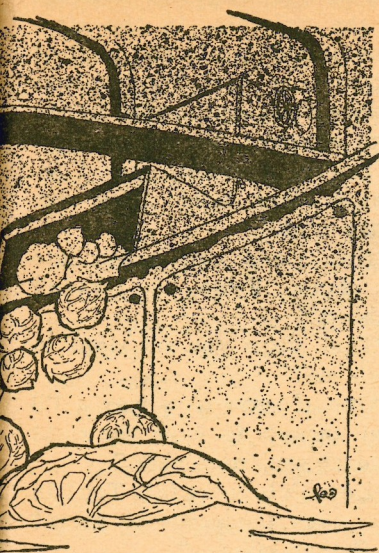
A CABBAGE NAMED SAM

By JOHN JAKES

Illustrator KILPATRICK

And again the miracle of plentitude is done. The cycle is turned full upon itself. The dark aluminum and blueglass

cornucopia closes once more. Under the winter star along the rimed white barren the pods slip into larger pods, the airstreams



hiss and burn the frost, the plenty-swollen carriers fan out upon the gleaming tracks like spiders on a web, down along networks running a hundred thousand miles. Out of the useless waste has come one course to feed a billion five o'clock bellies, one course of a hundred to be had for the asking, created in a white emptiness where life is hard on one side of the blue glass but quiescent and soft and lapping and easy on the other. Waiting. Stillness and waiting. The turbid peace of growth, until the miracle begins again in forty hours.

THEY were the only two persons within four hundred

miles of The Karmanov Cabbage Works, Ltd., this man and woman.

The man had the name Sam Cole. He also had teeth of long yellow prominence, and intelligent fish-scale gray eyes.

The girl called herself Jolly Haven. But Sam knew damn well this was just a dodge. Thin, wheat-haired, ivory-faced dollies of her sort did not go thieving with men of Sam Cole's caliber under their own Top status family handles.

Such women as Jolly told their proper, envious friends what exactly they had stolen only *after* they had stolen it. Then the proper could be envious. Could wish to add another status scroll above their mantles and know they could never buy a scroll the way Jolly Haven was buying hers. After all, everyone in the world had money, even the thieves. Money and soft, warm bellies. And a life expectancy just short of a hundred. It was all just perfect.

Women of the Jolly Haven variety, however, lived on a glut of status. Status hogs, Sam thought, the night he met her in a bar in Liverpool after correspondence and pre-arrangement. Gorging was one thing. Sam was now engaged in a much more serious process, the very deadly serious process of moving from a third grade to a second. This

move resolved into transferring wife and little son (cute fish-scale gray eyes, too) into a four rather than a two room apartment on the seventieth floor of the Ionosphere Heights Development, Queens. *If* he and Jolly got away with it.

Sam Cole breathed the cold air and shinned down the servopipe that led from the deserted penthouse on the roof of the factory to the receiving dock. Under his arm he had rolled up a cut-from-the-frame Dilghous oil. Under his cap he had a little premeditated murder.

"Jolly?" He called up to a shadow against the stars. "You coming, dear?"

"That'll be enough of the familiarity, baby," said a voice. Though female, it managed to sound like a kicked tin can. In the winter-dark Sam sneered. Deb bitch.

The girl, all black boots and trousers and corked face, the second Dilghous oil under her arm, turned on her magnagraples and walked down the pipe surrounded by a faint halation of blue. She snapped at him, "We agreed to do this job together, baby, for what both of us would get out of it. But that doesn't mean we get to be friends, or anything close to it. Think you've got that through your head by now?"

Jolly hit the slippery receiving

dock with a clang. She switched off the grapples. In the starshine, intensified by the glint of distant Lake Aral, her face was a white chalk oval slashed by the mean charcoal line of her lips.

"You're a crude one, Cole. That holding hands trick was pretty neat."

"Hell, you'd have fallen into the damn Volga if I hadn't grabbed."

"That gives you no right to touch me!"

"One of these days maybe I'll steal enough to have the right to touch you, remember."

"Enough to move into Top? In how many thousands of years? My Father killed—"

"Yes?" Sam's eyes shone blue as frosted rocks. "Yes, love? Go on about your daddy."

"So you can find out where I came from?" Jolly laughed at him. "Maybe walk in some night and breathe your drunken breath all over my friends? Tell them how we jetted and boated and walked a thousand miles together for these two pictures? No, baby. I'll take my mingling at the ball park, where I can watch the millionaires sweating in the bleachers."

IF IT was just money made you top—" Sam began, impatient with rage.

"But it isn't, baby. It used to be, but it isn't now. It's the

heritage. I had a head start five hundred years ago, when the first one of my ancestors I care to talk about sold ten thousand faulty hub assemblies to a light plane company in Wichita, Kansas. Do you know how many people died? Sixty-seven the first year. I've got to reach to top the record. That's why I went so far as to hook up with someone from your class. The first time out—"

"Sure, I get you, but how about canning it?"

As he talked, Sam was thinking: *Why not five rooms instead of four: Up the ladder another notch.* He couldn't do it with a book. He couldn't do it with an equation. He couldn't do it with a propulsion process. He did it the way the other thieves did, up to and including those in Top, like Jolly Haven, whom the world respected and honored from the simple fact that they got away with it and lived to tell.

Sam watched the girl's flash of blonde hair as she bent to look over the edge of the receiving platform. The aircar was parked somewhere below. He let his eyes drift out over the tundra waste, pulling the fur collar nearer his cheeks. Six steps, across three of the recessed semi-circular receiving chutes. *Now*, while Jolly Haven was trying to see where they'd parked the stolen vehicle . . .

Clutching the Dilghous which was his half of the loot, Sam lifted a boot.

Red lights began to blink on a distant hillside.

The innumerable beads of bleeding radiance caught Sam in the corner of the eye.

"What the hell—?" He swiveled his head. Could it be Pytor Rathensteen returning from the Bahamas?

Impossible. Rathensteen sometimes occupied the sealed penthouse atop the factory. He was the factory owner and operator, although that last word hardly had a rational meaning any more. Sam Cole and Jolly Haven had hired a seedy detective to search Rathensteen's itinerary. He was not due back until the equinox.

Peering at the lights through a cloud of his own breath, Sam was vaguely aware that Jolly had vanished. Probably over the dock's lip into the aircar. The lights were strung out in a long incandescent red chain, serpentine over the whiteness.

Couldn't be a human party. The plant was miles off the tourist routes. The suggestion to steal the two priceless Dilghous oils had come from Jolly Haven simply because Rathensteen's factory was so remote, even though it was also one of the tougher alarm-and-guard places in the world to crack. They had cracked it. Spent eight months

with the diagrams, but cracked it. Now was someone coming to queer—?

Sam Cole felt enraged. Damn it, where *was* Jolly? A sec more and he'd have killed her. Had two Dilghous oils instead of one. Five rooms instead of four. *What in hell were those red lights?*

A COUPLE of feet above his head a klaxon went off.

Afterward, Sam Cole reasoned that it must have made him start, that klaxon, together with the spot bank which came on, photoelectric and otherwise, set in a row beneath the roof guttering. He had a fleeting glimpse of the source of one of the red lights—a black ovoid riding up on blasts of air, bouncing over the frozen terrain pulling a train of other ovoids behind it. Then Sam Cole heard a whirring. He knew what it was the moment his foot somehow slipped and went down onto the receiving dock which by a misstep was no longer a dock but one of the intake chutes.

The wide belt at the bottom caused the whir. The stars went around. Sam dropped the Dilghous oil. He cried Jolly's name. The sound was obscured by the padded thud of the first of the ovoids in the delivery train knocking against the bumpers on the dock's edge, right as Sam fell squarely into the chute.

For a mocking moment all the red eyes on the pod train, actually little running lights, seemed focused on him. He flailed. But the chutes were faintly slimy, and angled downwards. Sam slid.

With a whang and clang, gates opened. Sam tried to get a grip on the dock above him, pull himself up. Beneath him one of his legs, he couldn't tell which in his panic, felt twisted and hurt. He forgot it. His head snapped back. He went sliding on his back headfirst down the chute.

He didn't try to escape once he saw the top of the first pod esculate up over the dock and dump. Dump a cabbage, and then another. And then a hundred cabbages, and then a thousand. Big as basketballs, they struck him on the head, in the belly, everywhere, blam, blam, blam, his head just another cabbage among the scores piling down the chutes.

Overhead he had a faint glimpse of what appeared to be a metallic partition, only a fraction of it in his sight through a crack between cabbages. Wet with leathery leaves, vegetables oppressed him, stifled him. His most vigorous wrench and twist was soft and useless against the sides of the down pitched toboggan of the factory intake chute.

That he was in the factory he had no doubt. The partition

which had passed overhead marked one set of intake gates. Besides, brilliant sunlight, not natural but artificial, lanced down in hot beams through the gaps between the vegetables.

SUDDENLY, above the grinding and bumping of the cabbages Sam heard another sound. A metallic ratchet-y clacking. Frantically he tried to remember the diagrams he and Jolly Haven had studied. Oh, heavenly Christ—the processing gates! *Where the chutes narrowed!*

He remembered most of the layout all in a rush, just as the stifling river of not-quite-matured cabbages bumped to a slower pace. One by one the cabbages would be forced into the v of the processing gate. How narrow *was* the chute between the gate walls?

Sam couldn't recall enough of the diagrams to be positive. He began to flail like a wild man until he managed to turn on his side. The weight of the layers of cabbages came close to breaking his back. His head slid between polished guides. The control mechanism chugged, changed gears. The belt carried Sam on.

His shoulders wedged, barely sliding, between two plates of stainless steel. Ah, sweet God, it was going to squeeze his lungs out, that damn belt that kept

moving, moving him between those plates as though he were half a dozen individual cabbages in a row.

His hips, caught between metal surfaces, began to suffer excruciating agony. Sam bit his lips and opened his crazed eyes a crack. What he saw, not an inch from his face, was a distorted picture of himself in the polished stainless steel as the intake machines squeezed him, squeezed him, squeezed him down and down, thinking him just a row of larger than usual vegetables. At the moment when Sam thought his body would pop open like a rotten melon he heard another whir, over the constant bumpity-bumpity-bumpity of a thousand vegetables going down chutes. Mercifully he felt the pressure against his chest relax a little. The gears! The blessed gears had shifted to accommodate a larger than usual head . . .

With a quick slippery slide he was through the gates. He plunged down again, more steeply, under the hot blaze of lights. He wrenched, twisted, tried to slow his fall by grappling the sides of the chute. His palms screamed with pain and he let go. A cabbage rolled over his head and tumbled off into space. There were cabbages at heel and nose, jamming, pushing.

Sam remembered another de-

tail of the layout when his body lurched and smashed around a sickening toboggan bend in the chute and was suddenly unsupported.

Growth tanks! Nearly a God damned mile of them! But there was no stopping. Out of all the chutes cabbages were plopping like pebbles into the tanks of thick gray liquid. Sam tumbled, screamed Jolly Haven's name. Then the warm gray fluid, thick as syrup, closed with a final sucking glug-glug over his terrified head.

NO matter what the courts and the reformers and the analysts attempted in the way of a social burning, the thief was a phoenix.

Once, the thief stole for a warm loaf of bread. Or because he had been whipped with a belt in a musty trunk-filled attic of childhood. Or because he had been forced to purchase certain upholstered females when his glands told him to do so.

Then one saving day the laboratories rammed all the bread he could eat, fresh from the automated bread factories, into his surprised mouth. Later he woke from a restful floating sleep at a free clinic with all invisible belt marks expunged from his back end, and his glands fully mastered.

The thief walked out into the

pleasant sun of a neatly organized world where, praise be to the planners, money could be had for the printing and a man worked to satisfy his desire to carve curios or print circuits with a process camera but never to buy bread, pay encephalo physicians or purchase loving companionship.

Why, wondered the courts, reformers and analysts, was not everyone content in their multi-layered, interworking world? Why, they wondered, did not abolition of the need to work abolish the desire to excel? To belong to cozy in-groups, each possessing at least some tiny shred of exclusivity? *Why?* They wondered while staring vacantly into faces behind which lay brains that were still perverse and darkly tainted.

So class perpetuated. To move up a notch required a novella or a thin little string quartet. Or a big steal. A big, gotten-away-with steal. The phoenix came up shrieking from the healing flames. And one of the shrewdest and toughest of the birds was Sam Cole.

He stole when he was eight with scuba under yachts in the East River. This moved his family forever away from dormitory-style federal housing provided for explosive populations. And once in an element—even if the element was cabbage nutritive

juice, thick and soupy and opaque to the point of inkiness—Sam Cole concentrated on the element until he nullified it. Sam stroked. He kicked. He kept his mouth shut tight against the lappings of the obscenely thick stuff, and even though the fluid was not bracing but just the opposite, soporific in its sucking, lapping warmth, its very touch sharpened his mind and made him think:

Sam, kid, you either swim up again or bleed your lungs out.

So his head broke the surface and he sucked air. He kicked with one leg. The tank was hardly three feet deep, so he was only in danger mentally of drowning. As he kicked his other leg struck the side wall of the tank.

“Oh, Christ!”

He screamed. Anguish. The leg must have been broken and twisted under him sometime during the ride down the chute. Only now, as the shock wore away, did sensation fully fill up that leg and spill over along his nerves to his brain.

He grabbed the edge of the tank and tried to pull himself up. He fell back with a viscous splash, sobbing. Never had anything hurt as much as that leg.

But he *had* to crawl out of this filthy gray tank with its cabbages, hundreds of them, floating up and down either way he looked.

HE heard a little pneumatic hiss. Jointed cables the diameter of his little finger shot out of the sides of the tank, tendrils, one on each side of him. To the end of each cable was affixed a thin aluminum wafer. The cables swayed around his head, curiously alive, like artificial cobras. Then they struck.

Before Sam knew it he had an aluminum wafer practically welded to his two temples. Down the long narrow tank, so long and narrow Sam could barely make out its ending at a gray multi-doored wall almost a mile distant, a thousand other cabbages bobbed in the nutritive fluid, each with two aluminum wafer tight against its leaves.

Sam lunged, thrashed, leaped. He got his hands on one cable. He tried to pull it away from his head. He stopped when it felt as though his skin were being stripped off.

Next he tried to pull the cable out by its mechanical roots at the tank wall. That was equally futile. And all the activity just made his leg scream more.

He fell back down in the floating goo, spitting some of it, faintly tasting like cod liver oil, off his lips. The cables, however, did allow him a slight bit of latitude in which to turn his head. What he saw, both in front and in back, depressed and made him hysterical by turns.

Parallel tanks, several dozens of them on either hand, stretched the length of the atmospherically sealed growing shed. Above ran the plane of the roof, at least two stories overhead. Its blueglass severity was relieved only by the mammoth illuminators, by the cross-hatch of aluminum framing and by one darker oblong in the center of the factory roof which had no lights beneath it. That would be the deserted penthouse of Pytor Rathensteen, the man who ran this automated vegetable hell. A hell in which Sam's own head had become merely one more cabbage among ten thousand in the tanks. Sam cackled shrilly. The echo bounced back from the artificial suns high above him.

He tried to remember details of how often the factory, operated by computers, was serviced by human technicians. How often? A month? A year? *Never?*

Rathensteen did not have to live here. The factory ran itself. But Rathensteen's father had started the business, Sam knew that much. Rathensteen himself was nearing ninety. The penthouse atop the factory made as good a place as any to store clothing and a couple of art treasures between world tours. Another six months and Rathensteen's two prizes, the Dilghous oils, would have been donated to

the Sydney Museum. That was why he and Jolly—

"Jolly!" Sam shrieked. "Jolly! Jolly Haven! In here, Jolly. In here, come and get me."

Get me get me get me, sang his voice. All the false suns went out at once. *Get me get me get me . . .*

Ah, God, God, thought Sam, I am going to drown.

THINKING so, he began to splash and muddle about in the nutritive fluid again. He swallowed one whole sickening mouthful of it. He tried very hard to understand precisely why the whole vast cabbage-stinking vault had been plunged into total blackness. Now the winter stars pricked through, wan dots outside the blueglass roof.

With pain beginning to flay him pain that tormented worse than any pain he had ever known, Sam knew that he had to get out of this place or he would die here.

But Jolly Haven was still outside! She would wait—wouldn't she?

For five minutes Sam Cole's mind went completely blank while he screamed Jolly Haven's name.

At the end of that time a jar of his leg against the side of the tank produced enough pain to render him partially lucid

again. He jerked and yanked at the cables until he felt his own blood leaking out from little hemorrhages under the aluminum wafers.

The wafers did not release. Sam panted, blinking. They would not release until the Goddamn computers told them to, he knew that much about automated factories. And the notion that Jolly Haven had left in the aircar with the two Dilghous oils—well, that was so unthinkable that if it were true he might as well relax and drown in the tank. Instead Sam simply put it out of his mind. In spite of all her bitchiness and her status, Jolly Haven was surely out there this very minute, pacing and fretting and wondering where Sam had gone off to.

Wouldn't she look inside the factory?

Why should she? Sam wouldn't go in there, even if he was dumb and low-rank. No, Sam said to himself, playing Jolly, Sam would not go in there by himself because the diagrams specifically said that human intrusion tripped relays which activated cathodes and signalled Rathenseen wherever he was in the world.

Human intrusion on the walkways, Sam amended. How about human intrusion in the guise of a cabbage? Oh, sweet bleeding Christ, *funny*? It was pathetic.

Of course Rathensteen wouldn't hear that. No alarms had gone off. The machines obviously considered Sam just one more cabbage. Therefore, Jolly Haven was crouched somewhere outside in the air car, never dreaming that Sam Cole might have decided to join the cabbages as just one more cabbage himself.

How to call her?

ANOTHER interval of screaming, at the end of which time his larynx felt aflame, produced no effect. All the rows after rows of artificial suns came back on, blinding and hot.

In another quarter of an hour they winked dark. Picking over the bits and tatters of the diagrams still left stored in his head, Sam had a frantic memory of what the Karmanov works was all about. Two more intervals of light, random intervals by his reckoning, proved it.

In Mexico City Sam Cole had bought a notebook for fifteen hundred dollars. The notebook contained a dossier on the Karmanov works assembled by a fence who had once been a biochemist for the General Foods Cartel, but who had lost his status when discovered photocopying the firm's only copy of the anise-water carbonated beverage, Licoricola, Trademark.

What did it say? Sam thought wildly. *What, what? What about*

Karmanov? Who was Karmanov? What did he do? What did he discover? It's all there but unless you dredge it up you may be squeezed to death and crated.

Breathing raggedly, Sam lolled his head against the edge of the tank. So warm, the liquid. So soothing. Better to sleep. *Sleep? Christ, no!* And wake with his spine cracked in a U inside one of those unbreakable plastic crates they made nowadays?

What was it? Remember! Karmanov and pressure. Karmanov

...

Although Sam Cole did not recall all the details in anything resembling a logical order, and did not know why the details should be as they were, after a long struggle he recalled enough.

In essence the Karmanov works was the simplest of mechanisms. Once in the twentieth century there really had been a Karmanov, a phytobiologist, a man who knew semiconductors and light physiology. And he had discovered, God knew how but Sam didn't, that plants signal when they need growth light. Karmanov answered silent screams that had gone unheeded for centuries.

Gauges were affixed to leaves, gauges sensitive to some kind of pressures at the surface. With this pressure the plant signalled its photosynthetic needs. To

grow a plant—actually to let it grow itself Karmanov had simply hooked in the plants' surfaces with the electrical center. The pulses ran through wafer gauges to a computer and thence to servomechanisms which lighted the artificial suns as the surface pressure went down. The lights darkened when the pressure went up. The lights—daylight duplicated—went on and off at intervals set by the plants themselves.

Sam Cole caught hold of the edge of the tank. He dragged himself up so that his weight rested on his good knee but did not pressure his bad leg in too agonizing a fashion. He bit his jaws together. He tried to make the veins in his temples change their size.

After the first bite the suns blazed on again, blinding him, sending up clouds of invisible mugginess throughout the vast echoing loneliness of the factory. Sam knew he had nothing to do with it. The plants had dropped pressure, signalling for light. His gambit was to shut the lights off.

In three quarters of an hour the light went off again. Sam still had nothing to do with it, although his lips were bitten through and his mouth was brown with dried blood and he was panting.

He had to sleep. He positively

could not try it again without sleeping. He hung his arms over the edge of the tank so that he would not drown and closed his eyes to the dark.

LATER Sam woke up. He slithered around in the tank, testing his leg, and found that the pain had somewhat deadened. It remained a thick, tumid hurt at the end of his body. But it was not nearly so demanding now. The lights were on again.

Sam bent his head back and glared up at them, round row on row of nourishing eyes. Sam screamed an indecency at them but quickly decided against the foolishness of that approach. He had one more try left in him. Sam was sufficiently a realist to understand that if it did not work this time, when he had more or less regathered what little strength he had left, it would never work.

All the suns were blazing. Sam hooked his slimed hands on the tank edge, pulled himself up as far as the cables and his leg would allow, shut his eyes and bit his lower lip through.

Pressure, he thought. *Pressure*.

The suns on the ceiling flickered for part of an instant.

"Bastards!" Sam screamed with delirious joy at the cabbages. "Stupid vegetable bastards."

From that point forward it became easier and easier.

The only way he could fight was to fight against several thousand cabbages once their total surface pressure was reduced and the lights were shining. Sam thought and bit his lips to strips of raw meat. He heaved back and forth like a revivalist in an ancient tent meeting. He thought, *pressure*, *pressure*. The lights flicked off.

Sam strained for air, gulped it. The cabbages turned the lights on again. Sam turned them off a moment later. Sam Cole against the cabbages. Sam Cole defeating all the God damn cabbages of the world. The blood gouted red and hot over the point of his chin and congealed in the nutritive fluid. But it got so he could establish a regular rhythm of pain, the lights coming on because the cabbages did not get enough light in a short interval, Sam turning the lights off, the cabbages turning them on, Sam turning them off again. Flick, flick, flick, flick. Blinking out through the blueglass to the eyes of Jolly Haven somewhere in the winter night. Flick flick flick flick.

Sam sank down into the tank. Where the wafers pressed his temples felt as though they were huge livid boils. "No more," he said to himself. "No more—can't—"

Just then the lights came back on. Sam screamed in rage and bit the last ragged strings of his lower lip completely off.

"Show you! Show you—"

Flick.

On.

Flick.

Off.

"Something vegetables, something something dumb something cabbages—"

The shrieks rang and bounced until a hundred Sams were cursing all the cabbages of creation while the artificial suns, receiving one signal, and then another went on, went off, on, off, in almost a blur. Sam clashed his teeth together faster and faster. At last the exhaustion became too severe. His hands slid from the tank edge. He sprawled out into the nutritive with a sick moan of pain. The suns blazed and fused over him, burning hot and bluish white and steady down upon the quietly shrieking vegetables.

Sam Cole floated lazily in the tank, defeated. Only the cables and wafers at his head kept him from drowning again.

Sam Cole had no accurate way to reckon time. Thus he did not precisely know that it took Jolly Haven seven hours to get inside the Karmanov Cabbage Works, Ltd., without signalling Pytor Rathenstein half around the world.

ONE moment, a half dead Sam had been blearily staring up at the suns. The next moment a shadow fell over his face. Jolly Haven was on a catway overhead.

"Took—you so long," Sam panted, crawling up the side of the tank. "Took—you—"

"The alarms, baby," came Jolly's voice, tinny again, and even more so due to the racketing interior of the factory. Jolly leaned onto the catway rail, one elbow propping up her palm which in turn propped her chin. She was a picture of bland and sophisticated amusement in spite of her workmanlike black fur clothing and smudged face.

"What a fix. And what a partner I picked. Can't you do anything right?"

"Signals," Sam burred in almost hysterical joy. "Didn't think—you saw—"

"How could I miss? I'm no agrophyst but I'm smart enough to know cabbages don't need that much light that often."

"You were *waiting!*" Sam howled. "Oh, bless you, Jolly, I take back all I said, all I did. You're okay. Jolly, Jolly, know what? I wanted to kill you, I wanted to kill you and take the other Dilghous to upgrade. I confess, Jolly. Jolly, you're a saint. Jolly, what are you looking at?"

Sam blinked through the film

of ichor dripping off his eyebrows. Jolly held out her wrist on which an object flashed. Time? Why was she checking time.

"Jolly, Jolly Haven, thank you, oh my God, thank you. Now come down. Come down and get me out quick. Jolly, it might start processing. Come on down, Jolly."

"All right, baby, I'll come down." Jolly started for a descending ladder. "It might be interesting to follow you along."

"Jolly, I thought—" Sam gurgled, unhearing. "—done for when I slipped—"

"Slipped? Baby, you got pushed. I came up the side of the dock behind you. I can use another status point even at Top. I guess we aren't so far apart after all. I was thinking like you. I was only waiting out-

side to make sure you'd gone. Baby, isn't that funny?"

Sam Cole could not hear Jolly Haven's laugh because all the machinery started at once.

And again the miracle of plenitude begins. The cycle is turned full upon itself, the dark aluminum and blue glass cornucopia opens once more. Under the winter star along the rimed white barren the liquid swirls, the wafers loosen, the cables retract, the drains open, the nutritive flows, cabbage after cabbage after cabbage bobbles its way toward round openings from which will emerge packaged abundance, as cabbage after cabbage after cabbage slips down liquid ways so that a billion five o'clock bellies may take nourishment again from Karmanov's incomparable slaw.

THE END

EDITORIAL (continued from page 5)

radiation in outer space. These would be linked to other mechanisms that could, when the meter reached a danger level, automatically inject anti-radiation drugs.

THE PICTURE may well fascinate science-fictioners or fantasy enthusiasts. On more sober thought, it sickens. These cyborgs would not be, as the scientists envision, "super-human" beings. They would be sub-human. The individual would become a mere component of an automatized system—a tiny cog in a machine incomparably imaginative, but incomparably fatal to everything we respect.

Perhaps something like a cyborg may be necessary to get us into space. If that is so, one wonders whether the results will be worth dehumanizing what it took a greater Scientist several millions of eons to make human.

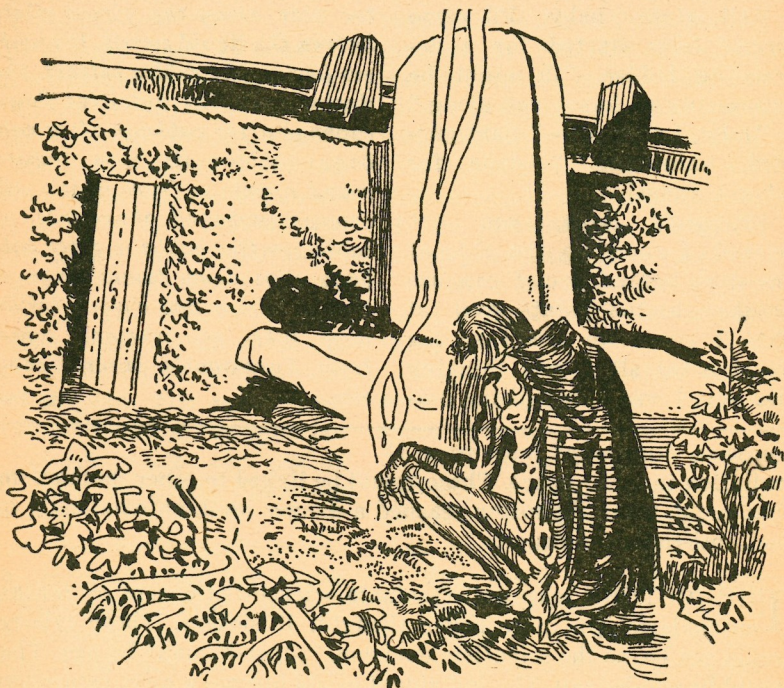
—N.L.

How cold the beautiful smile! How warm the glowing ruby! How treacherous the garden of . . .

the LAST DRUID

By JOSEPH E. KELLEAM

Illustrator SUMMERS



CLOBHAIR the Thief and Doreen the Weasel came silently down Gallows Hill into the Glade of the Dark Trees. Behind them the sun was low, and as they descended along the worn

road they waded knee-deep in shadows.

The twilight deepened, and Doreen grew more and more afraid. Finally he stopped. "Clobhair, let's turn back—"

Clobhair took him by the shoulder with one big hand and shook him as though he were a child. "No one's there but a weak old man and a beautiful woman. Think of it, Doreen. A beautiful woman, stark naked except for a ruby pendant about her throat. A ruby as big as your fist. A woman with snow-white skin, more beautiful than the Mist Women who dance by the lake. The ruby and the woman, they belong to an old, old man. Now, I ask you, should such things be?"

Doreen shivered. "Ah, if the story is true! Well, lead on, Clobhair."

Below them, in the hollow between two hills, were a number of dark circles—green-black like lumps of shadow.

They reached the first barrier. It was a hedge, nearly eight feet high, and a narrow door had been cut through this wall of living green. They entered, advanced a few yards, and came to the second green wall. Clobhair searched and found another opening.

Within the hedges there was a constant scurrying and squeaking, as though a host of meadow-mice had hidden there. They walked fearfully. The old tales said that the Druid lived within the seventh hedge. He was the last Druid of all; therefore, he was the oldest and wis-

est and most terrible. Sweat formed like beads of ice beneath their leather jerkins.

Doreen drew close to Clobhair and whispered, "Clobhair, you take the woman and I'll take the ruby. Rubies last longer."

"Quiet, you fool," Clobhair growled in a low, deep voice. "I could have handled this by myself, but you saved my life that time when the judges would have hanged me. But you are weaker than a small bird. You are a coward, Doreen. Could you kill an old man? No, I will have to snap his neck. Old as he is, you could not kill him. So I will take the woman with the white skin. Then we will sell the ruby and divide the gold-pieces—"

"Ah," Doreen whined, "it may be an old wife's tale."

THEY found another opening—and another and another. In the spaces between the hedges there were high, upended stones that looked older than old. A wind was whispering and sighing among the green-black leaves, and little half-seen things squeaked and scurried away from their feet. Clobhair and Doreen were almost in darkness now.

Then they found the last opening that led to the inner circle of the maze. It was lighter here, for a tiny fire was glowing. A few dying coals made the shad-

ows tremble and leap higher.

Then the Druid barred their way at that last leafy entrance. He was a thin old man with a long, white beard, and he wore nothing but a tattered robe.

"Why do you come here?" the old man asked. "Why do you trouble my seven gates?"

Doreen fawned. "Master, we have come to seek truth—"

Then Clobhair laughed. "Yes, we seek a woman with snow-white skin and a ruby as large as a man's fist. Two truths, old man. A beautiful woman and the price of a kingdom. What other truths are there?"

The old man frowned. The flickering coals behind him turned his white hair and beard to a pinkish glow. "There are many truths," he said. "Some of them are terrible truths. But you, at least, are honest—"

Clobhair the Thief and Doreen the Weasel laughed.

Then Doreen got down on his knees and chanted: "You are the oldest of the old. You have wisdom left over from the Garden. And I have come to you to seek that which only the Night Bird knows—"

The old man looked down at Doreen with deep contempt on his lined face. Suddenly he raised a bony hand to strike. But while the last Druid's back was turned, Clobhair took a quick step and seized him in his two

big hands and snapped his neck.

Clobhair lowered the old man to the ground. Then he bent over him, listening for a heart-beat. As Clobhair knelt there, Doreen took a rock from under his coat and struck him upon the nape of the neck. Clobhair fell across the old Druid's lifeless body.

Doreen the Weasel went on into the innermost part of the seventh circle, leaving the two still bodies behind him. There, where the little bed of coals was flickering, he gasped a strange gasp of awe.

Near the bonfire was a beech tree with small, twisted limbs. There was a tumult of whispering within its leaves. It was not tall, that beech tree, and it seemed to Doreen that its branches had been pruned and shaped many times. From the ground to a height of six feet, its whitened bole was shaped into the form of a beautiful woman. She was stark naked, and the twisted branches appeared to be growing from her hair. She was staring at Doreen, and about her throat was a green-gold chain that ended in the great ruby pendant that smoldered between the statue's breasts.

Doreen blinked his eyes. The ruby blazed with all the fires of hell—and it promised him heaven and earth.

Forgotten was the shape of the woman who was carved from the white bole of the tree. Forgotten was the old man. Forgotten was Clobhair. Forgotten were the seven circular hedges and the upended stones. Forgotten were the things that scuttled about among the leaves.

Doreen reached forward and seized that blazing ruby. Scarlet fire laced through him. For a moment the body of Doreen the Weasel was like a figure made from bloodstone. The woman who was carved from the white bole of the beech tree looked at him and smiled. Then Doreen's body was no more than a pinkish cloud, and the drooping branches of the tree plucked down and caught it. For a second the tree held the reddish mist in its branches; then that which had been Doreen the Weasel faded and disappeared among the rattling leaves.

Doreen was gone, except for something that crouched in the shadows.

WHEN Clobhair awoke he was lying over the cold body of the old man. It was late and

the little fire was flickering out. He rubbed his aching head and struggled to his feet. Then cursing Doreen he stumbled to the tree.

From the white bole of the beech the cunningly-carved woman smiled at him. He cursed again. So the woman was no flesh and blood woman at all! Nothing but a thing of wood. But the ruby was real. And it was even larger than a man's fist now.

As he moved toward it a tiny white thing dodged away from his feet. He did not notice.

Clobhair too reached for the flaming stone. And ruby snakes of flame crawled through him. He too became a blood-red mist that faded, dissolved, disappeared—

The wooden figure was still smiling. The ruby had grown.

Doreen was gone. And Clobhair too. Or nearly so—

In the grass beneath the tree were two tiny white things, bleached six-inch figures of men. With staring eyes and idiot faces they squeaked and scurried away into the green-black shadows of the hedges.

THE END

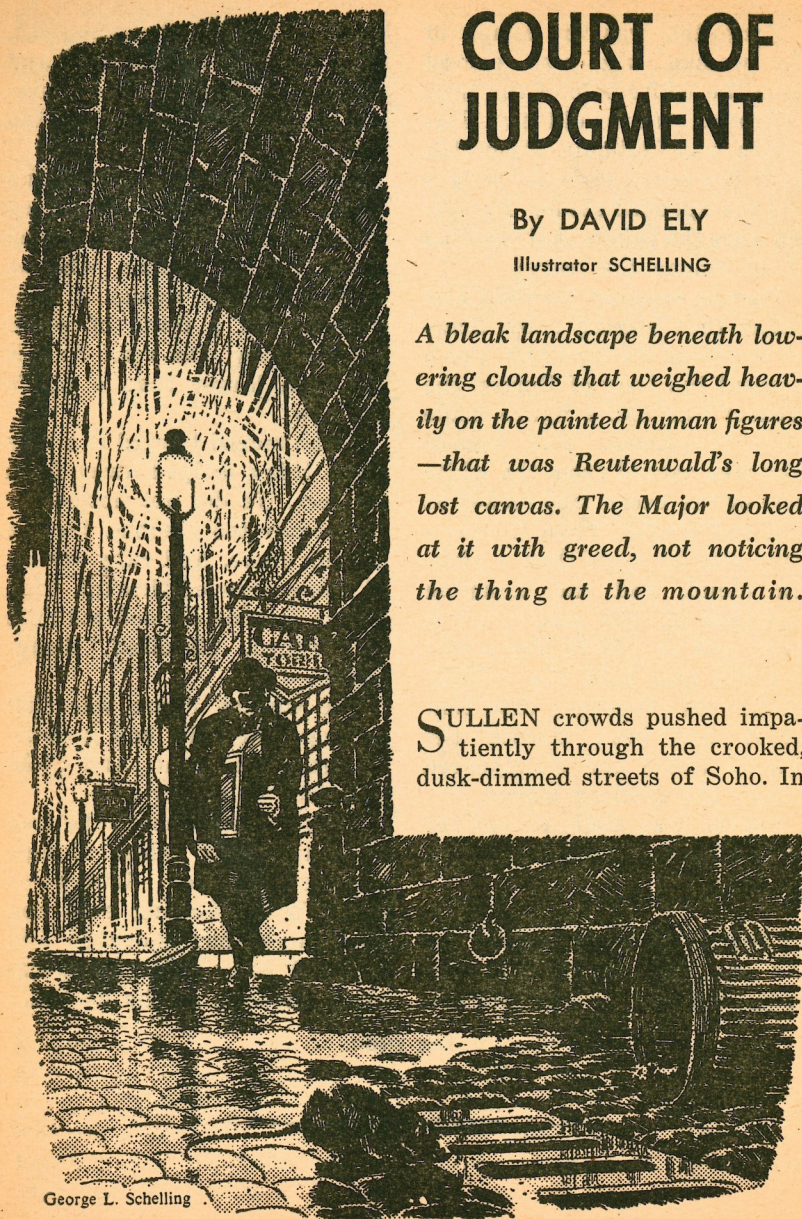
COURT OF JUDGMENT

By DAVID ELY

Illustrator SCHELLING

A bleak landscape beneath lowering clouds that weighed heavily on the painted human figures—that was Reutenwald's long lost canvas. The Major looked at it with greed, not noticing the thing at the mountain.

SULLEN crowds pushed impatiently through the crooked, dusk-dimmed streets of Soho. In



George L. Schelling

the gathering fog, the cautious cars honked softly, like worried geese; street lamps had begun to spot the fast-falling night.

His tweedy bulk brushed packages from a woman's arms. As he bent to retrieve them, the blood thundered up behind his ears. He gasped, "Terribly sorry." The woman seized the packages and darted off. He leaned against a cold and unfriendly wall until the dizziness passed. How had that idiot medical man phrased it? "Spend the winter in a more congenial climate . . ." Yes, that was it. Congenial! He twisted his gray mustache bitterly and started off again. On a military pension? The fool!

Somewhere in the damp arcade, an unseen drop of moisture echoed faintly, like a distant footstep. He found the shop and peered for a moment through its grimy window. Inside, a single unshaded bulb illuminated a bald head, glinted off a pair of spectacles, gently touched a dusty background of paintings, sculpture, a tarnished breastplate, a stuffed malicious owl, a fierce-eyed parrot swinging in its cage.

The doorbell twinkled. Old Mr. Carstairs glanced up greedily from his littered desk, his blurred eyes searching; the parrot screeched and tore vainly at the bars.

"Ah, Major Dance!" Mr. Carstairs said, blinking in uncertain

recognition. The Major inclined his massive head. He noticed that his Indian niello pipe still gleamed on the shelf.

"Nothing yet?"

Mr. Carstairs shook his head. "No offers, even," he said in his wrecked tenor. A professional expression of dubiety threaded among the seams of his face. "My dear sir, I feel you are asking too much for it."

"But the Maharajah himself presented—"

Mr. Carstairs cut him off with a fluttering hand. "Undoubtedly, it has great sentimental value to you, Major. Undoubtedly. To you. But to a stranger—?"

Outside, the dripping moisture beat a slow funereal drum, muffled and distant. Major Dance traced circles in the desktop dust.

"Fifty pounds!" Mr. Carstairs croaked. "I myself," he declared pityingly, "I would buy it from you now—on the spot—for twenty." The parrot chuckled and swung from side to side.

"Twenty!"

"No more, dear sir."

MAJOR DANCE stared hopelessly at the sharp features beneath the smooth pate. The tiny shop seemed suddenly close, unswept and musty, like an unclean cage. Mr. Carstairs rocked gently back and forth; so, gravely, did the parrot.

"A lovely pipe, it's true," said the old man, soothingly. "Twenty pounds—not to be sneezed at." He sighed and scratched at his stained gray vest. "Perhaps you have other mementos you would like to sell?"

Major Dance shook his head. There was only one thing left, back in his threadbare little flat—the regimental sword. He would never part with that.

"Come, sir—be of good cheer! We will try some more. Perhaps there will be an offer." Mr. Carstairs absently stroked his glowing skull, then snapped his fingers. "Ah!" He hustled toward the rear of the shop. "I have a treat for you, Major. Just wait, sir. With your interest in curiosities—"

He came struggling back with a large framed canvas, covered with a sheet of brown wrapping paper.

"German Renaissance," he puffed, propping the picture on a chair beneath the light. He chuckled gleefully as he clawed at the string which held the brown paper in place. "The bargain of a lifetime—can you believe it? My nephew discovered it in a country house near Paris last week—bought it in my name immediately—for fifteen pounds!"

The covering slipped to the floor. Major Dance stared at the painting; it was curious indeed.

"Fifteen pounds!" cried the old man. "You will recognize it, of course, sir." He cocked his narrow head and gave the Major a quick knowing look. "Reutenwald's 'Court of Judgment,' lost since the siege of Paris in 1870! Fifteen pounds!" He clutched the Major's sleeve. "The missing 'Court of Judgment!'"

It was a gloomy scene in grays and reds and heavy greens; a bleak, frosty landscape beneath lowering clouds that seemed to weigh upon the painted human figures. Major Dance tugged uneasily at his mustache.

"Compelling, compelling," he rumbled.

Mr. Carstairs quivered in delight.

"I'm putting it on the market tomorrow. Five thousand guineas!"

Major Dance cleared his throat. "Five thousand. You don't say."

Mr. Carstairs withdrew some papers from his coat pocket. "It's incredible, but it's true." He waved each paper at the Major in turn. "My certificate of ownership—duly notarized! The bill of sale! The previous record of ownership!" He laughed until he coughed and was forced to drop the papers on the desk and reach for a handkerchief.

"Interesting circumstances about Reutenwald," he said, when he had recovered himself.

"Each year, on his birthday, he began a new painting and put in as many figures as he was years old."

Major Dance pursed his lips. There were many figures in the "Court of Judgment." All of them, oddly enough, were staring out of the canvas right at him—in fearful supplication, as though he were their judge.

"For example," Mr. Carstairs continued, "when he was forty, he painted 'The Satyrs'—the one in the Louvre, you know. How many figures in it? Forty!" He coughed once more.

"And on this one now," he went on, "here's the date as plain as pie—1530. Reutenwald was twenty-eight then. And how many figures here? Twenty-eight, by Jove! Count them yourself!"

Major Dance obediently began to count. The figures were grouped in twos on a steep hillside. Yes, there were twenty-eight. Back in his flat he had an old volume on art history; he would look up this Reutenwald chap . . .

"It's cursed, of course."

Major Dance looked inquiringly at the old man.

Mr. Carstairs chuckled. "A fashion of the time, you know. Religious enthusiasm—a touch of the occult! With Reutenwald more than most. He placed a curse on this one in particular.

I must tell you about it. It's quite interesting."

But Mr. Carstairs was interrupted by another spell of coughing, so violent and prolonged that at its peak his spectacles flew from his nose and shattered on the floor.

"The devil!" he cried in despair, groping helplessly among the fragments.

Major Dance clucked sympathetically.

The old man peered around. "There's a second pair in the top drawer, Major. Would you be so kind?"

"Of course."

THE drawer held a stock of forms. As he felt cautiously behind them for the spectacles, he noticed that they were of two kinds: one for purchases, one for sales. He paused for a moment, his heavy hands thrust into the drawer; to one side, the parrot swung in silence, eyeing him moodily—beyond, beneath the light, the twenty-eight figures watched and waited. Five thousand guineas!

"Did you find them, Major?"

He felt a tingling along the slope of his shoulders, as if all those watching eyes—the parrot's, the old dealer's, those of the painted men—were probing him lightly there, like snaky filaments. Sweat gathered at his temples.

"Yes, I have. Here they are."

He turned with the spectacles. Mr. Carstairs shuffled forward. His body blocked the canvas; the light bounced sharply off his skull, its reflection flashing in the Major's eyes as he extended the spectacles. Before the old man's hands quite touched them, they fell.

But they did not break.

"Oh, I say!" Major Dance puffed in annoyance, forestalling Mr. Carstairs's confused fumbings with an authoritative wave. "Awkward—deuced awkward. Allow me, sir."

He stepped forward firmly as he stooped. There was a grinding crunch.

"Good heavens, Mr. Carstairs! I'm afraid that's done it!"

Mr. Carstairs groped for the corner of his desk, squinting helplessly toward the floor.

"Terribly sorry, sir!" cried Major Dance.

"Not at all, Major," the old man muttered mournfully, gripping the desk. "Not at all." In its cage, the parrot swung violently. "Accidents," said Mr. Carstairs, blinking in despair, "will happen."

Major Dance straightened up. "The pipe," he said. "I'll sell it to you for twenty pounds."

"Eh?"

"Twenty pounds—the pipe."

Mr. Carstairs brightened and smoothed his puckered cheeks.

Then he waved his hands ruefully.

"Perhaps you can come back tomorrow? I can't make out a slip properly now." He tapped one eyelid apologetically.

"I must be—in Manchester tomorrow. For a week or two," the Major said. "Perhaps I could fill out the slip . . ."

There was a brief hesitation. On the wall beyond the parrot's cage, the light cast the shadow of an enormous bird, its curved beak drooping.

"Ah yes, of course," Mr. Carstairs declared, rubbing his hands briskly. "You can fill out the slip—very good. And I'll sign, if you will guide my hand to the spot." He made a fluttering gesture of irritation. "You have no idea how vexing—to have one's faculties impaired, so to speak."

The Major had already turned, had selected the form, was filling it out. Mr. Carstairs signed blindly where his hand was placed. He clawed for his wallet.

"Permit *me*, sir," said Major Dance, firmly. He took his own wallet from his coat pocket and carefully counted out twenty pounds, which he folded into the old man's hand.

MR. Carstairs uncertainly held the notes near his eyes and sniffed at them like a bewildered

mole. "My dear sir," he said, "there is a confusion!" He chuckled and extended the money. "I am supposed to pay you!"

"Not in the least," said Major Dance. He took a deep breath and picked up the papers that still lay on the desktop. Then he calmly stepped over to the chair and lifted the "Court of Judgment."

"Good evening, Mr. Carstairs," he said in a commanding tone, not looking at the old man. He walked with his heavy soldier's tread to the door.

Mr. Carstairs began to splutter and wave his hands. His words jerked out in cracked, astonished phrases. The parrot cried and swayed in its cage.

At the door, Major Dance clapped his bowler firmly on his head and turned. "There is nothing more to be said, sir," he remarked in an off-hand manner. "You have just sold the 'Court of Judgment' to me for twenty pounds. I have your signature on the sales slip. You have my twenty pounds. Our business is concluded."

The old man lurched forward. "You can't—you'll never get away with—"

His hands flapped in the dusty air. As he stumbled around the desk, he seemed to fold sideways and clutched at his collar. The parrot screamed in fury. Major

Dance frowned and stood watching; he had seen men die like this before—the signs were unmistakable. A weak heart disintegrating under a sudden violent stress—the staccato gasps, the incredibly quick palpitations of the chest, the purplish coloring . . .

The old man had been propelled backwards by his exploding heart and now lay twisted on the empty chair beneath the light, trying to speak, his face contorted into an angry grin. "You . . . see . . . you . . ." The words spat out painfully, like broken teeth. "You . . . you . . . see . . . you . . . at . . . at the . . . mountain, the mountain!" Major Dance put his hand on the knob and felt the reassuring weight of the picture frame against his side. What last terrible visions were flooding through the old man's brain? On the chair, the gray figure was writhing in the final convulsions. "Mountain . . ."

And that was all. He slid off to the floor like a breeze-blown bit of crumpled paper and lay there stiffly, the open eyes staring, the mouth agape in the fixed empty grin. Major Dance approached the parrot's cage with some distaste and covered it. Then he stepped out into the fog.

THE flat was simply furnished, as appropriate for a retired

officer. But it was a seedy simplicity. The shabby rug and ragged curtains testified to the inadequacy of a military pension. Beyond the cheerless sitting-room lay a tiny bedroom. Doleful was the word for it, thought little Mr. Craddock, the art expert from Sotheby's.

Yet Major Dance was in a jovial, bubbling mood. He bristled with a mounting excitement. Rubbing his hands together, he hovered eagerly beside a modest table on which was propped the painting, covered by a cloth.

Mr. Craddock sighed. It was a hard life, he thought, to be the agent of disillusion. Only last week there had been a nasty case in Kensington. Elderly woman who had found a Titian. An appalling fake, of course. He had broken the news to her as gently as he knew how; but she had, perhaps understandably, said some frightful things to him. Still, she had had no right to order him shown out by the tradesmen's door.

Major Dance could stand it no longer. Pulling the cloth away with a flourish, he stepped back a pace, clicked his heels ceremoniously and turned to his guest. His mustache worked. His marbled eyes gleamed.

"There you have it, sir," he announced, spacing his words. "There—you—have it!"

Mr. Craddock edged toward

the table, looking at the painting sideways.

"Reutenwald's missing 'Court of Judgment,'" boomed the parade-ground voice.

Mr. Craddock squinted, peered, even seemed prepared to sniff (they all said that he could literally smell a fake).

"Five thousand guineas," said Major Dance, "or I'm a Frenchman."

Mr. Craddock pursed his lips. These amateurs, they were all so remorselessly confident. "We must not be hasty, Major," he said.

Major Dance puffed out his veined red cheeks, as though to blow caution from the room. In his heavy tweeds, he loomed over his visitor like a brambly hill. "Look all you like, sir. Take your time. Satisfy yourself."

He chuckled in the safety of his own certainty and drove one great fist into a pink palm. Mr. Craddock glanced up at the glowing face and forced a smile.

"Subject it to every test, sir," the Major continued. "I say, blaze away at it—point-blank!"

He laughed, in what Mr. Craddock feared was a slightly hysterical manner.

"The 'Court of Judgment,' sir," the voice rolled on, "or Sotheby's may have my head, sir." He gestured with one elephantine arm. Mr. Craddock's gaze fell on the room's only orna-

ment, the regimental sword above the tiny hearth.

"I am sure," Mr. Craddock responded, with a nervous laugh, "that we would have no stomach for such an arrangement, Major."

"No stomach for my head! Delightful!"

MR. Craddock completed his crab-like progress to the table. This picture was beginning to interest him. It was, at the very least, a highly competent imitation of Johann Heinrich Reutenwald, he thought, his mind automatically supplying, neatly bracketed, the dates: (1502-1564). The initials in the corner, characteristically tinged with a faint orange border . . . the date, "A.D. 1530," printed just above . . . the absolute mastery of detail, even to the bluish veins in the eyes of the figures. . . . And the longer he examined it, the more it seemed to fit the careful description of the lost masterpiece by this relatively minor, but interesting artist. The figures of men—the accused and the accusers—looking out from that nightmare landscape as though facing some unseen but awful bar of justice. They ranged along a grotesque, denuded slope, bounded by dark and ancient woods, while above them the clouds sagged threateningly.

"Eerie, eh?" came the voice behind him. "Seems to draw you right in, doesn't it?"

Mr. Craddock nodded politely. He was musing now: Improbable, but—possible. He could not tell. They would have to make the tests, he would have to confer with Mr. Jameson, with Mr. Whitfield . . .

"I heard—that is, I read an odd thing about the fellow," said Major Dance. "Reutenwald, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Craddock, absently. He tensed himself, leaned forward—and sniffed. His intuition, operating through his nasal passages, told him clearly: Early Sixteenth Century. His imagination plunged about wildly and he clutched at the table for support.

" . . . fellow painted a picture on his birthday every year, or some such thing," the Major was saying. "Painted one figure for every year of his life. Twenty-eight in this one here . . ."

Mr. Craddock nodded. He was well aware of Reutenwald's odd fancy. Once more he glanced at the canvas. Surely there was some obvious fault, some trick that the clever forger had overlooked. But he saw none, only those staring faces awaiting justice. What skill the man had possessed! One could not bear to look at it for long.

" . . . artist was twenty-eight,

you see," the Major rumbled on. "Twenty-eight figures! I counted 'em myself."

Mr. Craddock repressed a shudder. There was a legend connected with the painting. Something about a curse, about innocence and guilt. He could not quite recall it.

"When I counted 'em at the shop," said Major Dance, moving to the window and gazing down at the street, "that was the final straw, you might say." He turned, like a great ship in narrow waters. "That's when I *knew*, you see." He clapped his hands together. Mr. Craddock winced.

"And so, I snapped it up!" the Major cried.

Mr. Craddock could not pull his eyes away from Reutenwald's vision of corruption and terror. Twenty-eight faces, frozen in time on that bleak mountain slope, mutely awaiting some fearful doom. He thought of silent forests, of werewolves loping through the snow, following a scarlet trail . . .

"A twenty-pound investment!" roared the Major, wagging his bull's head. Then he chuckled. "Five thousand guineas—eh, Mr. Craddock? Quite a return!"

Mr. Craddock closed his eyes to blot out the Gothic horrors. He composed his face into the professional aspect of sympathy

and uncertainty. "One cannot be absolutely positive, Major," he said. "Even you and I, with our experience—"

"I understand, sir!" said Major Dance. "You must have your little tests. You must examine it from every standpoint. You must call in other experts. Oh, yes. I quite understand."

Mr. Craddock inclined his head. "Perhaps we may send our man around for it in the morning?"

"Naturally."

"We are fully insured, of course," said Mr. Craddock. He felt the closeness of the room now. The Major seemed to grow in size every minute. There was really no place left to rest one's eyes. It was either that ballooning bulk—or the picture, and Mr. Craddock somehow could not bear the latter.

THERE was still another question to be asked.

"I suppose," said Mr. Craddock, "that you have the usual evidence of ownership."

The Major fumbled in an interior pocket.

Mr. Craddock accepted the slip of paper. He read it twice. Preposterous. He glanced above it. The fate-ridden faces stared back at him, hopelessly.

"Carstairs . . ." Mr. Craddock mouthed the name on the slip.

Major Dance raised an annoyed eyebrow and turned again to the window.

"Good heavens," said Mr. Craddock, hollowly.

The Major's voice was thick. "Unfortunate case, of course. I suppose it might have been the old fellow's last sale."

Mr. Craddock spoke without reflection. "I didn't mean that, Major. I am simply amazed that old Mr. Carstairs would fail to recognize a Reutenwald. I cannot conceive of it."

Major Dance was frowning out at London.

Perhaps," said Mr. Craddock, "he realized his mistake later. Twenty pounds, you say?"

"Twenty."

From the table, Reutenwald's painting loomed, the tormented eyes gazing at their nameless fate. Almost against his will, Mr. Craddock was impelled once more to meet those stares. Something seemed amiss. He drew one hand across his moist brow and deliberately looked elsewhere—anywhere—finally at the paper in his hand.

It reminded him of something he had heard. He tried to curb his tongue, but in vain. "There was a story about the funeral. Hard to credit, of course."

Major Dance turned, his face bland.

"About Carstairs' funeral?"
"Merely an idle rumor," said

Mr. Craddock. He told himself he had no business rambling on about it. His instincts yearned for the fresh moist air of the street—anything, just to flee from this close little den. But his gaze was fixed on the 'Court of Judgment' and the poised figures painted there. Somehow he could not help himself.

"It was a cremation. This morning. I didn't go myself, but one of my associates did. He said—there were no ashes."

Major Dance stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"I mean," said Mr. Craddock, feeling illogically on the verge of laughter, as though he were about to produce the punch line of a joke, "I mean there was nothing left of him. He—he burned up completely—vanished, you might say—with nothing left. Nothing at all."

"If you will forgive me, sir," said Major Dance in a hard voice, "poppycock, sir."

NOW Mr. Craddock knew what was wrong with the picture. While he had been babbling away about old Carstairs, his expert's eye had been busy, hard at work, summing up.

"Major Dance," he announced, again battling the unseemly inclination to giggle, "there *is* a flaw in that picture!"

Major Dance's mouth dropped open.

"You are jesting, sir. Why, Mr. Carstairs himself—"

Mr. Craddock broke in excitedly, pointing at the 'Court of Judgment.'

"Count them yourself, Major!"

Now the Major's agitated bulk moved in front of Reutenwald's masterpiece and gruff little noises filtered through the mustache. He was counting desperately, as though a future life of ease and comfort on the Riviera depended on it, which in fact it did. He counted once and swore. He counted twice, then stamped his foot. The sword danced above the hearth.

"By Jove, sir! There must be an explanation for this." He tugged furiously at his mustache. Mr. Craddock edged quietly back, until he could feel the doorknob pressing against the small of his back.

Major Dance snapped his fingers. "The book!" he roared. He transfixed Mr. Craddock with a commanding gaze. "Don't go, sir," he ordered. "I've got a book—tells all about it—could have been twenty-nine years old, you know—"

He fled ponderously into the bedroom. Mr. Craddock could hear him thumping about, searching for the reference work. Then all was silent.

Mr. Craddock waited. Unwill-

ingly, his attention was pulled toward the picture. The terror-stricken eyes stared back.

"Major Dance?"

He could not abide this silence.

"Major Dance, sir!"

His throat was dry and constricted. He longed to fling open a window, but he was unable to move. Relentlessly, the painting confronted him—all those eyes, seeking pity . . .

"Major Dance!"

Mr. Craddock broke the spell, yet he rushed not backward to the freedom of the stairs but forward, past the awful masterpiece and into the tiny bedroom.

"Major Dance!"

On the narrow bed lay a large illustrated volume, its pages carelessly ruffled. In a corner leaned the Major's walking stick; on the dresser were arranged a set of brushes, a tin of denture powder, a book of matches. Above was a single window, its shade securely drawn. That was all—there was no other door.

Mr. Craddock stumbled out of the empty room, pursued by a fearful knowledge. The legend—the curse—he recalled it clearly. He edged past the painting, his eyes averted; he reached blindly for the door-knob. He did not need to count the figures now.

THE END

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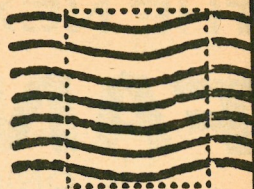
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According to you...

DEAR Miss Goldsmith:

Please, let us have some more of Leiber's Fafhrd-Mouser stories! Leiber is the only man now writing heroic fantasy, and this is a genre which gives a number of readers, when well done, and including myself, the purest pleasure we get out of any kind of fiction printed.

L. Sprague de Camp

- *A tribute from a peer.*

Dear Editor:

A few comments on the July issue:

I picked up this issue because of the remarkably good Kramer cover, and the fact that a Simak story was featured. As it turned out, the cover was a false representation, and the Simak story was the worst one in the issue! However, here is my rating of

the stories, rated with from one (terrible) to four (all-time great) stars; average is 2½.

1) "No Harm Done," by Sharky. It may seem surprising that the shortest story in the issue got first place, but for general excellence, I would consider this above the rest by a small margin, one of the better Sharkey stories I have read recently. Rating: ***

2) The "Forest of Unreason," by RF Young. This may be an overrating, but it is the third RFY story I've read, and the first that didn't leave me cold (the other two were "Goddess in Granite" and "Santa Claus," both from F&SF). The only objection I had was for Young's utter disregard for human values, which also appears in places in the other two. The ending was a horrible little surprise. The story turned out better as a whole than I expected. Rating: ***

3) "Solomon's Demon," by Arthur Porges. A fair idea, although sickeningly hackneyed, with a mediocre ending which upset the mood of the story. Again, a false blurb: to be a truly Gothic piece, this particular story would have to have a terror-filled ending. As it was, it was just another ho-hum monster yarn; the pace, however, was steady, and showed no real faults. Rating: **½

4) "The Goggles of Dr. Dragnet," by Fritz Leiber. After a terrible title, I was expecting the worst. However, I was not especially disappointed. This yarn held up the interest rather well, but had a dry, stale sort of ending, just like the one mentioned above. If I may say so, the story left me with a "so what" sort of reaction. Rating: **½

5) "The Creator," by Clifford Simak. Your featured story and your Fantasy Classic all rolled into one turned out to be a flop, in my humble opinion. I was expecting something completely different from what I got, I'm afraid. The story itself possessed a "sense of wonder," with an "idea"—that the universe was material substance, not infinitesimally small or infinitely large—but I didn't like the first ten pages *at all*—they were too coldly impersonal (after one reads what Simak has been producing lately) and matter-of-fact. Per-

haps this is how Simak of old wrote; but to me this is just another space-thriller. Rating: *½

Chuck Cunningham
822 Cherokee Rd., NE
Gainesville, Ga.

● *OK, now to comment on your letter. The first paragraph left us cold; too critical. The bulk of the letter improved, however, as you discovered much of the issue was better than you thought. Overall rating: ***, because you took the trouble to give us your constructive thoughts!*

Dear Editor:

Noticed a startling omission in the June issue. Where is the lettercol? Of all features, it's the one I'd least like to see dropped. Surely if it's a matter of space, you could make room for it by rejecting such junk as "A Small Miracle of Fishhooks and Straight Pins." This story seems more suited to my young brother's "horror" comics than to a mag of FANTASTIC'S standing.

The other stories were all good except for one—"The Face in the Mask." It was excellent. I can't give my opinion on the first installment of your serial, because reading half of a story and waiting a whole month for the second half is like eating the cake and leaving the frosting. Instead of carrying on with seri-

als, howzabout keeping both parts and printing them as one complete book-length novel with a few shorts? Incidentally, what's the percentage for or against serials? From the letters that get printed, I'd say it's about 3-to-1 against. Against such odds, ed, you haven't a chance. Sic semper tyrannis!

Jo Ann Imms
665 Osborne Avenue,
Verdun, Quebec, Can.

● *Most letters are pro-serial. We print the others to show how fair we are to the minority. Editors über alles!*

Dear Editor:

I wrote to reply to Mr. Hulan's letter in the July *Fantastic*. I strongly agree with his suggestion of having the equivalent of an An Lab—and I believe it would pick up sales of each issue, because more fans would see a chance to show their prowess as a critic.

I also agree to his criticism of Leiber's Fafhrd-Grey Mouser story, and his series as a whole. However, I do not go along with all he says.

For example, he can not make the generalization that "for maximum effect, the hero must be larger than life—viz. Conan, Tarzan, John Carter . . ." This is certainly not true. Witness L. Ron Hubbard's adventure novels

(most notably "Slaves of Sleep"). The story in which the hero does everything *wrong* is dying out in recent years—fortunately. My idea of an ideal hero is one completely human—capable of error, and occasionally guilty of it, but *not* the kind (like in "Darker than you Think") that doesn't seem to be able to do anything *right*.

Furthermore, I don't think Harold Shea is an optimum example. I will admit freely that "The Incomplete Enchanter" is the best fantasy novel ever written—I will also admit that "Castle of Iron" (the book, not the original edition) is one of the worst.

Finally, we come to Mr. Hulan's remark concerning Mr. de Camp. It is true that not all of de Camp's stories are classics—but is Mr. Hulan ready to cast judgement on "Lest Darkness Fall," or "The Undesired Princess," both of which contained heroes of the exact type that he was campaigning *against*. I would also like to contest his criticism of "The Tritonian Ring"—this, too, was an excellent story, not meant to teach or edify—just for sheer entertainment. I thoroughly enjoyed this yarn, and thought it was closer to the vein of "The Incomplete Enchanter" than any other of de Camp's works. And I do *not* understand his blasting of the type hero at all.

Mr. Hulan, can you explain yourself?

Charles Dixon
4578 Comanche Rd., NE
Chickapee, Ga.

● *Perhaps it is all a matter of superlatives. If the hero does everything wrong, he is also "larger than life." In sf, a hero should be life-size: i.e., capable of brilliance and error. But in fantasy, a hero can be anything the author wants him to be. Yes? No?*

Dear Editor:

Although AMAZING is generally considered the superior of the two Ziff-Davis science-fantasy twins the publication of "Second Ending" has made the June and July issues of FANTASTIC surpass its companion. I believe that this novel is the best either of your magazines has published in the last few years. The conflict between the futility of the protagonist's existence and the enforced continuance of his life was dramatically presented. I hope James White will be making appearances in future issues.

The gothic "tale of terror" by Porges in the July issue didn't stir me a bit. The story was too hurried and matter-of-fact to create the mood necessary for a successful horror tale. The real stunner in the issue was Shark-

ey's "No Harm Done." There just aren't words in the English language to describe the feeling that the climax of this story left. The piece had what might be called a pleasing grotesqueness about it. Not pleasing in the sadistic sense but pleasing because the author succeeded in putting over the story.

Jack Chalker's discussion of the faults of "The Violin String" was interesting. I went back and reread both the story (April issue) and Moskowitz' article on Lovecraft in the May, 1960 issue. In the "Violin String" I believe Hasse did what Moskowitz points out as a tendency of HPL in his later years, that is, to explain the supernatural by scientific means. "The Violin String" could have been a good weird-horror tale but by explaining the Doctor's narrative as madness Hasse makes the story rather poor science-fiction.

David B. Williams
714 Dale Street
Normal, Illinois

Dear Editor:

I have just read the June and July issues of FANTASTIC, and am sending my customary comments.

First, "Second Ending." I usually read each installment of a serial as it comes out, but for various reasons I hadn't gotten around to reading the June ish

until the July one had arrived, so I read it all in one sitting. It was *superb!* The best science fiction novel I've seen in a magazine in years! Who is James White? I don't remember hearing about him before, but surely this is not a first effort! Come clean—isn't he really some well-known favorite in a red wig and dark glasses? This is twice this year you've scored high on my list with a serial by a relative unknown—"Worlds of the Imperium" was also excellent.

The cover was simply awful. And Schomburg can do so well when he wants to, too. Covers like this are what stop people from buying magazines. The interior illos are improving, though—Ivie is quite competent, and Adkins is developing a Cartier-like style (more in evidence in the July ish) which *might* bring him up to the top level some day. Francis I don't like.

July cover—better than June, but still not up to your standards. It was very good as an illustration for the story, but not the type cover to attract readers. Incidentally, was the story written around the cover? Maybe that explains the odd form of Pan. Adkins' illos for "Second Ending" were excellent; the rest nothing to brag on.

The lettercol was the high spot of the ish, naturally—since I wrote half of it.

Here's one reader whose tastes you won't have to wonder about. As regards your comment about my request for an An Lab—maybe *you* get a good idea from readers' letters, but none of the readers do. Now if you'd just enlarge (my continual refrain), and give us a lettercol of 8-10 pages in a smaller-size type, then I'll admit it a better solution. But two or three letters don't tell much, and an An Lab wouldn't consume the space. Another thing, you might get more reader response if they knew that it would mean something.

However, I think that you're doing a good job of putting your mags together, all things considered. You're closer to publishing good stuff than any other magazine presently out. The difficulty is that you're getting mostly good ideas only passably handled, while ASF gets mediocre ideas very well handled. But keep improving and Long John will have to look to his laurels—you've already left everybody else far behind.

David G. Hulan
132 Goss Circle 9B
Redstone Arsenal, Ala.

• *Once more about the "An Lab." So long as we know what readers like or dislike, why do the other readers have to know, too? What are you—a bunch of conformists?*



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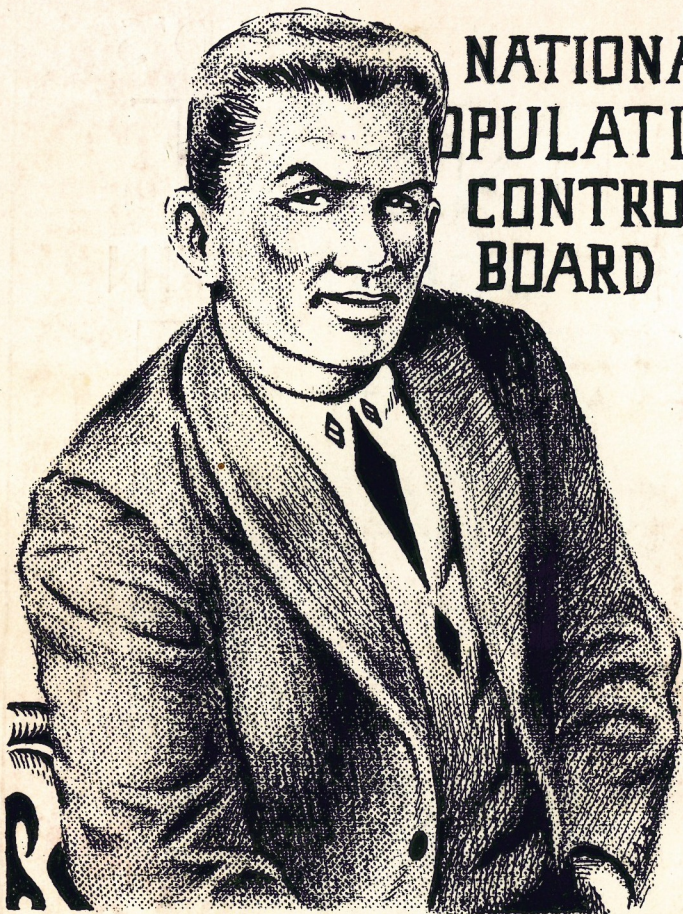
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