ANC

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

APRIL
35c

Uncharted Pathways Lead to Astounding Surprises on the Frontiers of Tomorrow in the World of . . . . . .

JUST AROUND THE CORNER by William Scarff

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

For well over a century fiction writers and philosophers with an Utopian bias have been talking about a future age of miracles. It is a little difficult to realize that they have been talking about *us*. So incredibly mixed in with the miracles are commonplace survivals antedating the Pyramids and The Sphinx—did you ever notice how closely a watch of the seventeenth century resembles a modern watch?—that we stubbornly refuse to believe that just around the corner in a house with shuttered blinds may actually be sitting—hold your breath—a *synthetic man!*

An impossibility, as eerily remote from reality as a resuscitated dinosaur or Alice in Wonderland on Mars? Well, suppose we take a sober look at the record. There's hardly an organ or tissue of a frog's body that can't be artificially kept alive for an indefinite period in a modern, well-equipped biological laboratory without the assistance of the frog. And on the human plane artificial hearts, lungs and kidneys that can take over in an emergency when the proper oxidation cycle apparatuses have been ingeniously installed, are well within the realm of the immediately realizable.

Artificial legs and arms? There's no branch of research and accomplishment in the area of physical rehabilitation that has advanced in sturdier giant's boots, and with a more assured stride. A metal limb today is a miracle of adaptive mechanics that can actually respond in a subtle, and quite startling way to nerve-impulses emanating from that greatest of biological miracles—the human brain.

The human brain! It might justifiably be assumed that our speculations have now reached a dead end, that the most formidable of stumbling blocks has descended directly in our path. But consider this. Neuro-surgeons have assured us that the human brain could be pared down to the size of a walnut and that memory and desire and creative thought would still remain, so miraculously tiny is the vital area in the cerebral cortex that holds the full resplendent measure of a man.

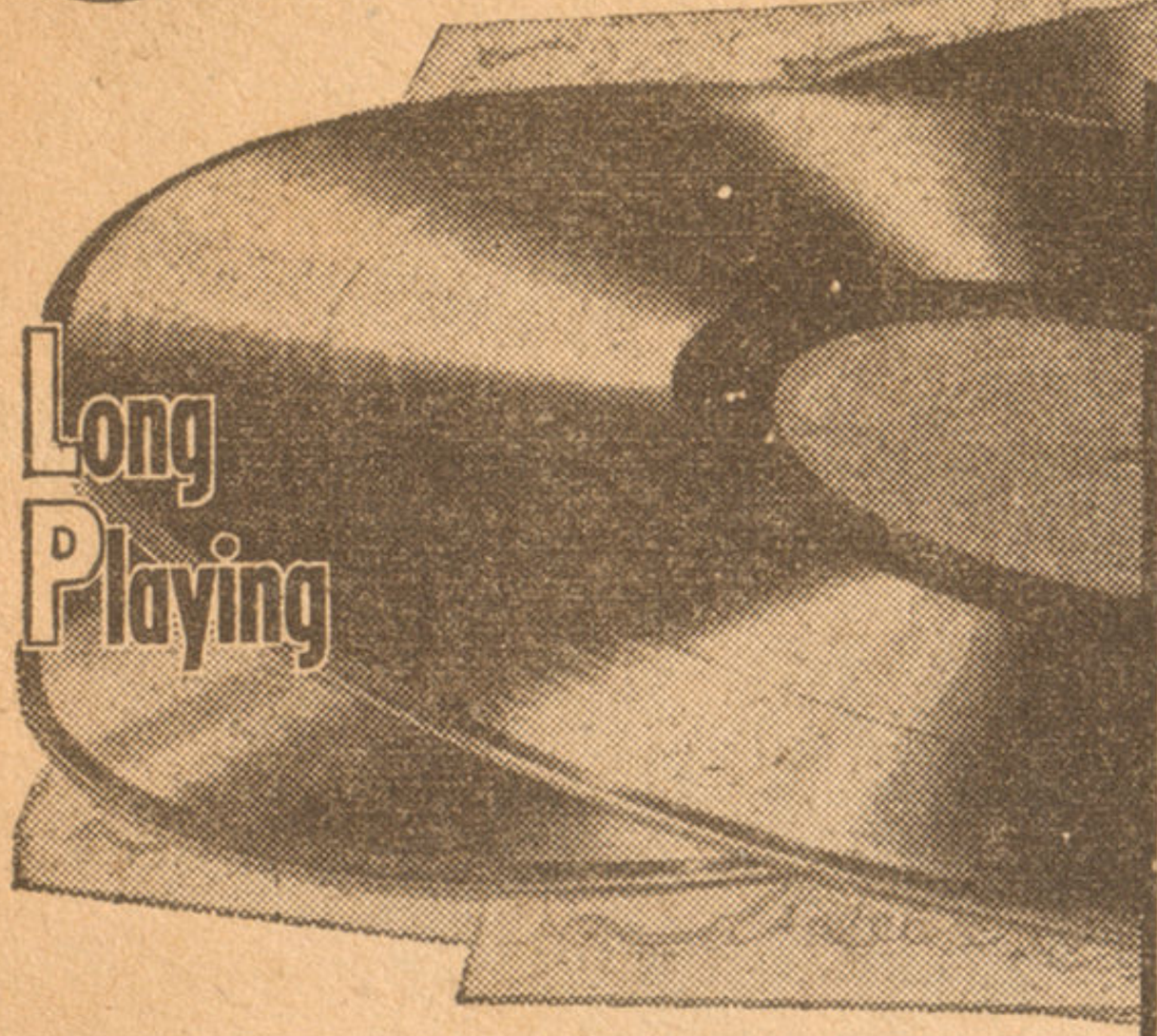
And so, you see, he may really be just around the corner in that house with shuttered blinds.

We give you—the Synthetic Man!

FRANK BELKNAP LONG.

LONG-PLAYING (33⅓ R.P.M.) HI-FIDELITY

8 MASTERPIECES COMPLETE TO THE LAST NOTE! $1.00



No Strings Attached!

No Need to Buy Any Other Records Ever!

Full Advantages of Trial Membership

ALL 8 masterpieces for only $1. Performed by world-famous artists. Custom-recorded on purest vinyl. Reproduced with a tonal fidelity encompassing the *entire range of human hearing* (50 to 15,000 cycles). This amazing offer is made only to demonstrate superb quality of our recordings; and to show you advantages of trial membership.

HOW CLUB OPERATES — We advise you monthly of new releases. Those you want are sent you for FREE trial. After 5 days' listening—*only* the records you decide to keep are billed you at the low membership price of $1.50 per disc (average playing time 40 min.). You save ⅔ the usual retail price! This "give-away" offer can obviously not be kept open indefinitely. MAIL COUPON NOW while supply lasts. **Full money-back guarantee.**

Not $1 each, but $1 for all 8!

SCHUBERT
Symphony No. 8 (The "Unfinished"),
Zurich Tonhalle Orch.
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

BEETHOVEN
The Ruins of Athens (March and Choir),
Netherlands Philharmonic Choir and Orch.,
Walter Goehr, Conducting

BRAHMS
Academic Festival Overture,
Utrecht Symphony
Paul Hupperts, Conducting

MOZART
Piano Concerto in E Flat, K 107
Artur Balsam, piano,
Winterthur Symphony Orch.,
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

BACH
Toccata and Fugue in D Minor,
A. Schreiner; Organ of the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City

WAGNER
Die Meistersinger, Prelude, Act 1,
Zurich Tonhalle Orch.,
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

DUKAS
Sorcerer's Apprentice,
Utrecht Symphony
Paul Hupperts, Conducting

MOUSSORGSKY
Night on Bald Mountain,
Netherlands Philharmonic
Walter Goehr, Conducting

The Musical Masterpiece Society, Inc., Dept. 954
43 West 61st Street, New York 23, N. Y.

Enclosed is $1 in *full* payment for the recordings of 8 masterpieces listed. Enroll me as trial member. **Privileges:** No purchase obligation *ever!* Advance notice of releases. 5 day free trial on any discs. I may reject records before or after receipt; may cancel membership at any time. For *future* l.p. discs I keep, I'll pay only $1.50 each plus shipping.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Canada, *address: 686 Bathurst St., Toronto 4, Ont.*

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

APRIL, 1955
Vol. 3, No. 3

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 3, No. 3. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscriptions 6 issues $2.00, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, New York.

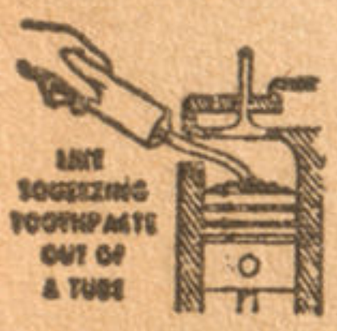
CAR BURNING OIL?

Engineer's Discovery Stops it Quick

Without A Cent For Mechanical Repairs!

If your car is using too much oil—if it is sluggish, hard to start, slow on pickup, lacks pep and power—you are paying good money for oil that's burning up in your engine instead of providing lubrication. Why? Because your engine is leaking. Friction has worn a gap between pistons and cylinder wall. Oil is pumping up into the combustion chamber, fouling your motor with carbon. Gas is exploding down through this gap, going to waste.

SAVE $50 TO $150 REPAIR BILL



Before you spend $50.00 to $150.00 for an engine overhaul, read how you can fix that leaky engine yourself, in just a few minutes, without buying a single new part, without even taking your engine down. It's almost as easy as squeezing toothpaste or shaving cream out of a tube, thanks to the discovery of a new miracle substance called Power Seal. This revolutionary, new compound combines the *lubricating* qualities of Moly, the "greasy" wonder metal, with the leak-sealing properties of Vermiculite, the mineral product whose particles *expand* under heat. (Up to 30 times original size.)

Just squeeze Power-Seal out of the tube into your motor's cylinders through the spark plug openings. It will spread over pistons, piston rings and cylinder walls as your engine runs and it will PLATE every surface with a smooth, shiny, metallic film *that won't come off!* No amount of pressure can scrape it off. No amount of heat can break it down. It fills the cracks, scratches and scorings caused by engine wear. It closes the gap between worn piston rings and cylinders with an automatic self-expanding seal that stops oil pumping, stops gas blow-by and restores compression. No more piston slapping; no more engine knocks. You get more power, speed, mileage.

This genuine plating is self-lubricating too for Moly, the greasy metal lubricant, reduces friction as nothing else can! It is the only lubricant indestructible enough to be used in U. S. atomic energy plants and jet engines. It never drains down, never leaves your engine dry. Even after your car has been standing for weeks, even in coldest weather, you can start it in a flash, because the lubrication is in the metal itself. That's why you'll need amazingly little oil; you'll get hundreds, even thousands of more miles per quart.

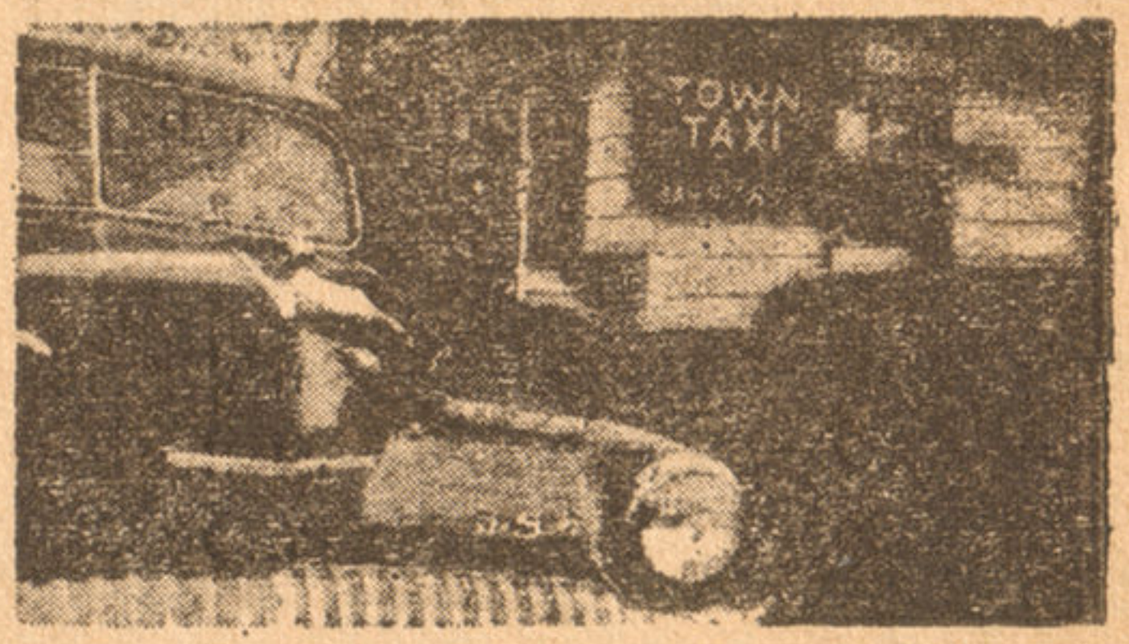
TRY IT FREE!

You don't risk a penny. Prove to yourself that Power-Seal will make your car run like new. Put it in your engine on 30 days' Free Trial. If you are not getting better performance out of your car than you thought possible—if you have not stopped oil burning and have not increased gas mileage—return the empty tube and get your money back in full.

Power-Seal is absolutely harmless; it cannot hurt the finest car in any way. It can only preserve and protect your motor.

Rudson Automotive Industries

400 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.



POWER SEAL MAKES WORN OUT TAXI ENGINE RUN LIKE NEW!

Here are the Test Engineer's notarized figures showing the sensational increase in compression obtained in a 1930 De Soto taxi that had run for 93,086 miles. Just one POWER SEAL injection increased pep and power, reduced gas consumption, cut oil burning nearly 50%.

	Cyl. 1	Cyl. 2	Cyl. 3	Cyl. 4	Cyl. 5	Cyl. 6
BEFORE	90 lbs.	90 lbs.	105 lbs.	90 lbs.	80 lbs.	100 lbs.
AFTER	115 lbs.	115 lbs.	117 lbs.	115 lbs.	115 lbs.	115 lbs.

BEST INVESTMENT WE EVER MADE, SAYS DRIVER-OWNER

"We simply inserted the POWER SEAL per instructions and made no other repairs or adjustments. Compression readings were taken before and after and showed a big improvement in both cars. As a result the engine gained a lot more pick-up and power which was especially noticeable on hills. What impressed us most was the sharp reduction in oil consumption. In one cab, we've actually been saving a quart a day and figure we have saved $11.20 on oil alone since the POWER SEAL was applied a month ago. In the other cab, oil consumption was cut practically in half. We have also been getting better gas mileage. All in all, POWER SEAL turned out to be just about the best investment we ever made. It paid for itself in two weeks and has been saving money for us ever since, to say nothing of postponing the cost of major overhauls that would have run into real money." *Town Taxi, Douglaston, N. Y.*

SEND NO MONEY!

Simply send the coupon and your Power-Seal injection will be sent to you at once C.O.D. plus postage and handling charges. Or, to save the postage and handling charges, simply enclose full payment with the coupon. For 6-cylinder cars order the Regular Size, only $4.95. For 8-cylinder cars order the Jumbo Size, $7.95. Power-Seal is now available only by mail from us. Send the coupon at once.

RUDSON AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRIES, Dept. FU-4
400 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Please send me ..... tubes of the amazing new POWER SEAL.
☐ Regular Size, for 6-cyl. cars, $4.95 ☐ Jumbo Size, for 8-cyl. cars, $7.95
On arrival, I will pay the postman the price indicated above plus postage and delivery charges. I must see an immediate improvement in the pep and power of my car, less oil consumption, greater gas mileage, reduced engine noise, easier starting, faster pickup, within 30 days, or you will refund my full purchase price.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone..... State.....

☐ Save Here! Send cash, check, or money order with coupon and we pay all postage charges. Same money-back guarantee.

just around the corner

by . . . William Scarff

It was the deadliest weapon of destruction on Earth. Would it lead to a new birth of freedom—or the darkest of human tomorrows?

THIS IS EARTH, 1996:

The slightly peculiar-looking man who came along the sidewalk was wearing standard Government Issue civilian clothes, but his sleeves were incongruously buttoned around his wrists.

Officer O'Reilly, directing traffic, devoted the corner of one eye to him. He frowned slightly, trying to decide whether the individual in question was worth checking. While he thought it over, he waggled his fingers at a clump of impatient pedestrians. Instantly they charged off the curb and, weaving carefully between the cars and trucks, sprinted across the street.

The civilian O'Reilly had spotted stayed where he was, giving way absently to the other civilians dashing past and around him.

The sight of all those male civilians, their cuffs neatly turned back between wrist and elbow, decided Officer O'Reilly. He walked determinedly away from the intersection, leaving its control to the automatic signals, and cut through the crowd toward the suspicious

---

You will search the map in vain for the actual locale of this story, for its boundaries in future time and space grow brilliantly and exciting from William Scarff's untrammeled imagination. He has set up landmarks of his own, and created a wholly new world of violence and values, of suspense and breathtaking speculation on the frontiers of a tomorrow quite as startling as Orwell's famed chromograph of the Brutalitarian State. Vividly memorable writing this, with a hard core of truth.

---

man, who was still standing irresolutely on the corner, obviously not too sure of which way to turn.

The civilians made way for Officer O'Reilly almost unconsciously, none of them seeming to really look at him squarely. Nevertheless, there was a well-defined corridor through the crowd, with Officer O'Reilly at one end and the suspicious civilian at the other. As Officer O'Reilly moved forward, the corridor closed up behind him, but its width directly in his path remained unchanged.

Officer O'Reilly frowned again. The suspicious civilian was looking straight at him.

There was more than just hesitation in the civilian's eyes. More than just the lack of decision which might have been displayed by a confused man debating whether to turn down the street or continue on the avenue.

Officer O'Reilly reached down, and flicked open the catch of his holster. His first suspicion had been right. The civilian was definitely out-of-the-ordinary. As Officer O'Reilly's muscles tensed, a self-congratulatory warmth flooded his mind. His hunches were still paying off.

He was a good police officer. Disregard the extra pounds of flesh, and the weighty accretions of ideologies which are, after all, only the façade a man builds against the thrust of life. Only a few men are privileged to decree the shape of society—the rest, willy-nilly, do their best with the tools and aptitudes which harsh necessity has placed at their disposal.

Abruptly, the civilian turned and ran. He bolted down the cross street, throwing people aside with spastic jerks of his arms. He rebounded and side-stepped, skipping around unexpected barriers, thrusting himself forward in incredible bursts of speed and windmilling feverishly for balance when he suddenly had to check his stride. Like a billiard ball inexpertly cued, spinning and slipping, he fled from Officer O'Reilly.

And just as frantically and conspicuously O'Reilly ran after him, cursing his extra pounds in a low, grunting voice. He had the Positive out of its holster, and the lanyard jerked the back of his neck with every step. The lanyard was a fine idea until a man in pursuit of his duty wore one around his neck like a noose.

The civilian was becoming confused. O'Reilly knew that a man could only do so much running on a crowded street with a police officer in pursuit of him without losing his nerve. He'll begin to fear that the next knot of passersby will not give way—that someone will find the courage to seize and hold him. Then his thrusting arms will become hesitant, and his progress less precipitous.

Finally his nerve will go completely. Desperately he'll turn his head from side to side, looking for a doorway, a space between two buildings, an alley—anything!

Officer O'Reilly saw the civilian fall to his knees, scramble up, and dash into a store. He increased the pace of his own strides. On a cinder track, the civilian would have left him long ago. But on the cement of the sidewalk, obstacled by civilians who had to be pushed out of the way but who melted aside for Officer O'Reilly, the odds were nowhere as long.

Officer O'Reilly burst into the store. "Where'd he go?" he yelled at the white-faced clerks. One of them pointed toward the back.

"There's a loading dock out there," someone else volunteered.

Officer O'Reilly turned, and ran through the back door, almost colliding with the civilian. Both of them were trapped in a narrow space between the door and a truck with its loading doors shut.

Officer O'Reilly shoved the man back, giving himself room. He raised the Positive, his eyes narrowed, and accusing.

"Let's see your papers, Mac!" he demanded.

The civilian made a thin noise in his throat. He reached into his shirt, and Officer O'Reilly watched him carefully. Sometimes—once in a great while—you were suddenly confronted with a razor blade under circumstances like this.

Something did glitter in the civilian's fingers.

Officer O'Reilly stepped back farther still, keeping out of reach. He began to squeeze his Positive.

Blinding light erupted in Officer O'Reilly's face, and the world dissolved out of his eyes. The civilian leapt, panting, over his burning body, and ran away between the loading docks.

Traffic knotted itself into an inexorable snarl at the intersection Officer O'Reilly had left behind.

II

An officer of the law does not die—though that's small consolation to his widow. He is on file in too many places, checked off on too many scrupulously preserved rosters. His first examination papers are on file—and his Academy instructors' reports. His medical examinations, his pistol scores, the reports he himself has filled out—all these, and more, go into the permanent composition of an officer of the law. The machinery of the law clothes him in a paper flesh far more durable than that of his living body. It gives him paper clips for bones, and uniforms him in the punched cards of the IBM machine.

Until the last paper has been refiled, and the investigation of his death has been completed, until the manner and circumstances of his tragic departure have themselves been reduced to sextuplicate and his killers reduced to ashes, the ghost of an officer walks.

And because this is 1996, two ghosts walk, in two separate places, representing two distinct—and antagonistic—kinds of law.

What kinds, precisely? Well, for this we must return to the store where Officer O'Reilly died, and scrutinize two of the clerks.

Teddy Wilcek was about twenty-eight. Like every other male human being, he had passed through his compulsory two years of military training between the ages of eighteen and twenty. The entire early part of his life had pointed him, very much as a carefully inspected compass needle might have been pointed, toward that period.

He had been born in New York City, on the edge of the Tenth Precinct, and had immediately been issued his Infant's Identity Card and Number, which bore his thumbprint and optical disk pattern. That card, in the temporary possession of his parents, had authorized them to purchase additional food and appropriate clothing. It added his name to the Precinct Register, and decreased his father's Patriotic Subscription by five dollars per month.

That customary assignment of benefits was one kind of law. But almost from the moment when he had been issued his Child's Identity Card and had started attending classes in reading, writing, simple arithmetic, and Citizenship, he had been aware of the other.

His family was, perhaps, just a little worse off than the next. His father was a pale, nervous man who walked with a dragging twist of his hips. Once, when he had been very young, Teddy had caught a frightening glimpse of thick, criss-crossed scars running down his father's back from his shoulders to his waist, and it had seared itself on his memory.

It was possible, after working well and consistently in one labor classification, to advance to the next. Teddy's father never seriously tried.

Still and all, his parents got along on a lower food ration than might have been expected. Mr. Muller took care of them. He dropped in on Teddy's father quite often, usually bringing packages which later proved to contain food, or extra clothing.

Teddy's father explained it this way: "Well, son, you've got to remember that we're pretty much ordinary people. If we stay out of the law's way—" He'd touched his back unconsciously as he said that, "—the law's not going to pay much attention to us. Now, Mr. Muller, he's a good friend of mine—a friend of everybody in this precinct, you might say. If you've got a problem, it's easier to tell him about it than to go bothering the law. Then, when Mr. Muller wants a favor—why, if it's something I can do, I do it."

Teddy Wilcek absorbed that information, and learned, as he grew older, that it was perhaps the most important thing his father had ever taught him.

Mr. Muller was never too busy to listen to a boy's problems, or to do something about them. In return, Mr. Muller infrequently asked Teddy to run errands for him, or

just to mention anything he might have chanced to see that seemed out of the ordinary. Whether, for instance, one of the neighbors talked to the police very often, or whether he had more money than you'd expect—things like that.

When he finished his schooling at the age of ten, Teddy Wilcek found that almost all the kids in the Patriotic Scouts, which he had automatically joined, had known someone like Mr. Muller. You didn't do much talking about it, of course. You understood, by then, that what the official law didn't know wouldn't hurt you.

Shortly before he left the Scouts for his two years' training, Mr. Muller died. But that made no difference, because Tony Bianci, who'd just finished his training and come back to the precinct, seemed to take his place. That was even better, for Teddy, because Tony was a good friend of his.

So, when the frightened civilian had burst into the shop, and stopped momentarily at the back door while he tugged at some glittering thing, Teddy Wilcek had kept his eyes open. By now he had names for the things and people he'd grown up with. There were Patriots, and there was the Liberty Party. You didn't often see a Libertist with a gun, but it had happened. Once in a while, you stumbled across a dead Patriot on a dark street.

Wilcek felt his muscles tense in sympathy. The tightness of his clothes constricted the rising pressure, and a grimace of faint disgust flickered over his mouth. It was no use. Even if he had wanted to carry a weapon of his own—and he did not—his clothes would have failed to conceal the bulge.

It was the same old story. The Libertists and the Patriots took an occasional physical crack at each other, and there was nothing you could do to help either side. Your best bet was to duck swiftly out of the line of fire.

But there was nothing that kept you from not losing your head. So, when the thing in the civilian's hand clicked suddenly, and a little bit of metal rattled faintly on the floor and slid toward him, Wilcek scooped it up and dropped it in his pocket.

The movement was swift and unobtrusive, but it did not pass unnoticed. Another clerk named Mortenson, whose father had always provided well for his family, happened to be standing a little behind Wilcek. Mortenson had gone through roughly the same thought process as Wilcek, but his subsequent actions were biased by childhood memories of plain white envelopes slipped under the door at night, envelopes which almost always contained money.

O'Reilly died.

Both Wilcek and Mortenson suddenly realized that, whatever the civilian might have been, he was armed with a weapon terrifyingly new to their experience.

Wilcek told Tony Bianci.

Mortenson told the Sergeant in the Precinct House.

III

Josiah Harmon was getting to be an old man. His face was thinning out and running to dry jowl under the shrunken contours of his jaw. His white hair was brittle, sparse, and lusterless, and his lips were beginning to disappear.

He turned the little shape of twisted wire in the fingertips of his left hand, which was the only one equipped with a thumb firm enough to make the action possible. Even that thumb was partially paralyzed, its base ringed with old, thick scars.

He looked up at Benton, who had brought him the wire. "It's machine-formed," he said.

Benton nodded in quick satisfaction. "A factory job," he agreed.

Josiah Harmon coughed dryly behind his hand. The cellar was too damp for the tissues of his bronchial tubes, but—the world aboveground was too dangerous for the bones of his neck.

"Do you think it's a component of a raygun?" he asked.

Benton inclined his head again. "Wilcek—that's one of the clerks in the store—told our ward man that the fugitive stopped just inside the back door before he ducked out onto the loading ramp. The man was fiddling with something. Wilcek thought at the time that he might be working the slide of an automatic. Later, after O'Reilly was killed and the fugitive escaped, Wilcek found that."

Josiah Harmon turned the shaped wire again, reserving comment for the moment. A gun in the fugitive's hand—or what looked like a gun—had obviously meant only one thing to Wilcek at the time—an out-in-the-open clash between an armed Libertist and a Patriot. That spelled out HANDS OFF! to a civilian, no matter what his politics might be. Only after O'Reilly's death had proved it was no kind of gun this world had ever heard of, had Wilcek felt free to act.

Josiah Harmon looked up. "Before I forget—you'd better pass the word back to Wilcek's ward leader that he's to be allowed a credit of three parking violations waived, or the equivalent."

Benton nodded and made a note.

"Now—" Harmon dropped the wire on his desk. "Next question—what is it?"

Benton shook his head. "It's ordinary iron wire, pretty badly oxidized from carrying a heavy electrical load. Those two prongs are terminals. You can see the mark where they were plugged in to some kind of power supply. Why he dropped it—or what that power supply was—I don't know, and the lab can't tell me."

Harmon nodded. "Well, it's a beginning, Irving. A fair beginning. As to why he dropped it . . . Well, why did Wilcek at first suppose he was working the slide of an automatic? He was in a panic. He had

a weapon—a weapon straight out of fantastic fiction, true, but, nevertheless, a non-magical, mechanical weapon. He wanted to be sure it would function—as mechanical weapons will sometimes not do when they are most needed. So he did the equivalent of working an automatic's slide to be sure there was a cartridge in the chamber."

He picked up the wire again. "This will be his ejection element. Obviously, it's been used. Probably it can be used repeatedly, but he knew it might be worn. So, almost without conscious thought, he replaced it with a new one. And now we have the old one."

He looked up at Benton. "We must find this man and his weapon immediately. Most important, we must have the weapon, if we cannot have both. And the Patriots must have neither."

Benton saluted. "Yes, sir." He turned to go.

"Benton?"

"Yes, sir?"

"O'Reilly's dues were paid up, weren't they?"

"As well as could be expected, sir," Benton replied. "With the new tax raise, and the discontinuance of the uniform allowance, he hadn't made his last quarter's payment yet."

"We'll consider them paid. Arrange for the usual line-of-duty pension to his dependents. And make sure it's five dollars a month more than the Patriots pay them."

"Yes, sir."

That was Josiah Harmon, Sergeant-at-Arms of the New York City organization of the Liberty Party.

Now, this is Ford Atkinson, Chief of Police in the City of New York, Patriot:

"Damn it, Jones, what killed him!" Atkinson slammed his fist down so hard on the teak of his desk that the sound rang out like a pistol shot. His voice almost broke on the last word.

Vincent Jones, Chief of Detectives, pointed defensively at the thick pages of the report. The defensiveness was deliberate and deceptive. He knew it was expected of him, so he displayed it.

"He was electrocuted," Jones said redundantly, for the report had been explicit on that point. "A high-voltage electric current entered his body at the face. Examination has shown he was grounded, so there's no mystery as to how it happened. Lab also says that a surge as powerful as that would jump far enough to find ground even if you thought you were insulated. What *is* puzzling and mysterious is the fact that there's no fixed power supply of the requisite voltage anywhere near there.

"A portable supply of even the most modern kind would have filled two trucks. Only one conclusion seems possible. He must have been killed by an electrical current originating in a power supply whose nature would be incomprehensible to present-day science."

Atkinson sat down again, his hand slapping the arm of his chair. "Any eyewitnesses?" he asked.

Jones shook his head. "Not of the actual murder. One of the clerks in the store—a fellow named Mortenson—says the civilian stopped inside the door for a minute. He was fumbling with something—his weapon, most likely. Mortenson says he thought he saw a small glittering object fly away from it and land on the floor. He says that later, after the killing, he saw another clerk, named Wilcek, pick something up."

Atkinson glared at him. "Well?"

Jones shrugged. "Wilcek's a known Libertist. I can always pick him up, but there might be more to this than we know. I was reluctant to start a political riot on my own say-so.

Atkinson chewed his lower lip. He was a good deal younger than his political opposite-number, Harmon, but his hair was turning grey where he was not bald.

"Libertist, huh?" He cursed under his breath. "Well, I suppose you were right." He sat up like a steel spring. "D'you suppose—" Then he slumped back. "No, no, it's not a Libertist weapon. Not yet. They wouldn't spring it on a traffic cop, when an ordinary weapon would have served quite as well. If they'd developed something like that, it would be somebody big they'd try it on first. *Me!*"

Jones tightened his lips. "Me, too," he said, with bitterness. "About this traffic cop—O'Reilly's his name. The usual line-of-duty pension, and the usual citation?"

Atkinson nodded, thinking of something else.

"Listen," Atkinson said abruptly, "we've got to find that civilian—and his weapon. If the Libertists get hold of him, it means a new election. With weapons like that, they could force themselves back on the ballot."

Jones nodded. "I know. I've got my men out. About O'Reilly—"

"Who?"

"O'Reilly, the traffic patrolman. I suppose you know the Libertists are going to pay a pension on him too. And they'll make damned sure it's higher than the one we pay."

Atkinson cursed again. "Jones," he said stiffly, "the official policy is that the Liberty Party does not exist, has never existed, and will not exist at any problematical future date. We may wind up shooting all their members to prove it, but that's the policy. So how do we admit they can possibly pay anybody anything?"

Jones shrugged. "Okay, Ford. I'll get back to my office." He returned to his work, wondering how Atkinson would go about shooting three-quarters of the population.

THIS IS EARTH, 1996.

IV

Josiah Harmon coughed reedily in his cellar. His good hand played incessantly with the ejection ele-

ment—or with what he had decided was an ejection element. Certainly that empirical conclusion, considering the fact that nobody had ever actually seen a raygun, was rather presumptuous.

But a badly puzzled and alarmed man had to start somewhere. Twenty years since the last election. The power in the hands of a few, the labor in the hands of the many. Yes, a man assuredly had to start somewhere. Undoubtedly, a raygun —well, some sort of electronic weapon, at any rate—wasn't to be sneezed at as a beginning.

The ejection device alone was amazing. Where did a man find a factory, these days, to turn out anything intricately mechanical? Where had he done the research which would have had to precede the actual construction of the weapon? Where had he acquired the specialized skill for it in the first place?

He wasn't a renegade government scientist. That could be taken for granted at the outset. Government "scientists" were mostly schoolmasters these days, and even they were tagged and branded with radioactive tracers, like so many sheep in a flock. They couldn't stray far before the detectors found them —assuming of course, that they hadn't had the straying spirit thoroughly knocked out of them.

But there was time enough for such disturbing speculations when the man was found—by Irving Benton, Harmon sincerely hoped. What mattered immediately was the pragmatic aspect of the weapon's existence. With it, the social balance could be destroyed. With it, the Patriots could bolster their sagging system. Either way, whoever found it, won.

Josiah Harmon stopped toying with the ejection device, and looked across the desk at Irving Benton. "Have you got anything yet?"

Benton shook his head. "No, sir. Wilcek's description of the civilian has been distributed to every ward in the city. The New Jersey and Connecticut organizations are cooperating. And, of course, there are Assistant Sergeants-at-arms out on it. But he's vanished. No slightest clue has been found—"

Josiah Harmon laughed with a thin sound. "Nobody vanishes anymore," he said tautly. "Not with personal identity cards, and required registration at the local precinct and at all other precincts visited by card-holding civilians in the course of twenty-four hours. Not with spot-checks, with food and clothes available only to card-holders, with the possession of weapons made punishable by death, with the singing of certain songs forbidden, the remembrance of certain documents rigidly proscribed . . ."

"Yes, sir."

Josiah Harmon unclenched his ruined fist. He sighed. "Thank you, Irving. I thought I'd grown too old to experience immoderate, almost uncontrollable anger. "I'm glad I haven't."

"You were saying that no one

vanishes anymore, sir," Benton said gently, somewhat embarrassed. "But we do."

Josiah Harmon shook his head. "No, we don't. Atkinson knows where we are. He can arrest us at any time—if he wants to risk a revolution."

Josiah grinned mirthlessly. "And it may come to that. We're in a race. I think we might win it, because we know a few things that Atkinson doesn't. But I don't think the civilian has his papers. Otherwise, why should he have resorted to violence to make good his escape? An identity card would have satisfied O'Reilly."

He folded his hands, and rested his chin on them. "Our civilian is probably both friendless, and homeless. I say probably, because some machine-shop produced his weapon for him."

He coughed again. "No, he didn't vanish. He has to reappear, somewhere."

Benton nodded. "And we'll be there to meet him," he said with grim assurance.

Harmon smiled. "And if we're not, what then?"

Benton shrugged, and sighed. "Then Atkinson gets his weapon—and Lord knows what else, besides. The Liberty Party dies, and freedom is farther away than ever."

Josiah Harmon shook his head. "No. Freedom is always just around the corner. We'll die, yes. The Liberty Party itself may perish. But if it does, there'll be a new name for it. It will return, in one form or another. The Patriots will only have a momentary advantage."

He stared at Benton steadily.

"I say momentary. I mean momentary in so far as politics are concerned, which is not the same as a moment in history, or a moment in a man's lifetime. But how long will it be before one of the weapons falls into the hands of a man who won't use it foolishly? Then it will be taken apart and studied, and the principles of its construction will be spread among other men like himself.

"And then we'll be right back where we are now—with the weapons, the system, and a few trained men on the side of the Patriots, and with the people on our side, ready to move the instant we get an advantage.

"Any group like the Patriots constantly has to fight to maintain a *status quo*. Why do they regiment us? Why do they number us off and tag us like cattle? Because they have to know where each of us is, every minute. But all we need is one opportunity—one break in the system. Then we shall have them."

Josiah Harmon's bad fist clenched again. "I'd like it very much if this man and his weapon were our opportunity. But, if it doesn't work out that way, there'll be other times."

Benton nodded. "Other times—but not for us. And a lot of hard work wasted."

Josiah Harmon agreed silently.

It was all well and good to talk theory. Reality often favored the killers of the dream.

THIS IS EARTH, 1996.

V

Atkinson looked across his desk at Vincent Jones. "Anything, yet?"

Jones shook his head in disgust. "Nothing yet, Ford. We put Mortenson's description of the civilian on the wire, and there's a three-state APB. But so far, nothing."

Atkinson bit the tip off his cigar. "Look—the man can't disappear. We've got spot-checks. Everybody carries a card. If he isn't registered, he'll be automatically checked against his description. What kind of hole could he possibly have crawled into?"

Jones pursed his lips. "I don't know. But as you say, he's got to show up sometime. He hasn't got a card. He can't get new clothes, he can't eat. Even if he's taken refuge in the machine-shop where that dingus of his was made he'll come out sometime. I don't care how well-stocked it may be. Our problem is, when? Before, or after the Libertists get to him?"

"What makes you so sure he hasn't a card?" Atkinson demanded. It was obvious he'd stopped listening from that point on.

Jones shrugged. "I'm not positive, but something made O'Reilly spot him, and something made him run. Would he have killed O'Reilly if he had a card to show?"

"Okay," Atkinson said. "So he hasn't got a card. Double the spot-checks and start pulling in everybody who answers to his description."

Jones looked at him fixedly. "Will you put out a police order to that effect?"

"Make it official? What else can I do?"

Jones stood up. "Right. I'll refer to your order of this date in the arrest forms. Now I'd better get back to my office and start the ball rolling."

He walked unhurriedly out of Atkinson's office, carefully keeping his face impassive. Pull in everybody that fits the civilian's description! Now, *there* was a brainstorm!

Jones walked steadily along, his face blank, his mind seething. Did Atkinson think they were still living in the days right after the War, when the civilians were accustomed to being regimented "for their own safety and protection, and to further the efficiency of the nation?"

The Libertists might not exist, officially. But they could get you a doctor if your kids were sick, and a job if you were out of work. They could get you food if something happened to your status card. They were the rod and the staff of the neighborhoods. You didn't have to be politically conscious to play ball with them, under those circumstances. You just had to be human.

You couldn't see it in the voting records, of course. Twenty years ago, when President Barstow had decid-

ed to make regimentation look legal, he'd piled up a tremendous majority of ballots marked YES. But if you went down into the wards today—without a two hundred pound "election clerk" to look over your shoulder—what then? You could feel it, down there. You could feel the weight of a party that didn't officially exist. All you had to do was find the men in the alleys with their heads broken, and watch the people in trouble go to the big, heavyset civilian hanging around at the drugstore—a civilian who looked remarkably like an old-fashioned ward boss. You could see the NO, big and black.

Keep tabs on their men? Sure. Arrest them?

That was the stumbling block.

That had been tried in Cleveland, in '84. The paddy-wagons screamed through the streets, and men with lists in their hands knocked on doors. One week later, when the people of the neighborhoods began to feel the loss, there was a march on City Hall.

They'd died like flies in Cleveland, throwing bricks and waving bloody kitchen-knives. Now there was a permanent garrison in Cleveland, but nothing the government did could keep the news from filtering out. Ever since, the job of keeping the civilians happy with the Patriot Party had been twice as tough. Even without weapons, in their tight, carefully-tailored clothes that showed the slightest bulge of a gun or a club, the civilians were dangerous. Even with tracers on every official weapon, so that nobody could steal and hide one, you still ran across the pitiful home-made weapons, with their black-powder paper cartridges and rubber-band actions.

But that stupe Atkinson couldn't get it through his head. He couldn't see the thin tightrope they were walking. One push. One ill wind . . .

Damn it, what was he going to do? He couldn't just disregard Atkinson's order. His only alternative was to stall, hold off for a day or two.

Jones sighed. Better one man than ten thousand. He'd have to take a chance on pulling in Wilcek.

VI

Theodore Wilcek leaned against the corner made by the bar and wall of the partition. He took a gulp of his beer, finishing it.

Lawrence Mortenson leaned in the other corner. "My round?" he asked.

Wilcek shook his head. "Mine," he admitted grudgingly.

Mortenson put up a disparaging hand, and dropped some change on the bar. "So who counts?" He signalled to the bartender by pushing a button.

Wilcek shrugged. If Mort wanted to spend his money like a drunken sailor, that was his business. Besides, a penny saved was a penny toward his Patriotic Subscrip-

tion, which was getting steeper by the payday.

"That was quite something about O'Reilly, wasn't it?" Mortenson said after the beers had come, and the bartender had left.

Wilcek nodded.

"I guess I must have seen him on that corner every day for ten years," Mortenson went on. "And then a mad dog of a Libertist has to kill him."

"Dirty shame," Wilcek agreed. He'd liked O'Reilly too. But the civilian who'd killed him was no more a Libertist than his father had been. Not with that weapon in his possession. That had been something special.

So he'd taken the bit of blackened wire to Bianci, and he'd kept his mouth shut afterwards, too. Why? Well, Libertist Schmibertist Bianci was the good friend you went to with your troubles. And if you got a chance to do him a favor, it paid off.

Wilcek tended toward the theory that politics was something the Ins and the Outs used to grind the little fellow between them. He wouldn't give a Congressman the right time of day. But Bianci was different. Bianci was right out of the ward—A friend you bought your food with. You said hello to him every day.

"What did you say, Ted?"

Mort was looking at him in a funny way.

Wilcek frowned. "I said it was a dirty shame—and it was. O'Reilly was all right."

Mortenson sidled over to him confidentially. "Just how do you mean that?" he whispered furtively. "You mean O'Reilly was doing favors?"

Wilcek went pale. His glance automatically darted around the compartment, looking for the mike.

"Watch what you say, Mort!" he whispered urgently.

Mortenson suddenly seemed very drunk. "Why?" he demanded in a loud, aggressive voice. "Why should I? Because the Patriots got everything wired for sound?" He slammed his fist against the nearest partition. "What are we, hogs?" he shouted. "We can't assemble in public places, so we're partitioned off into these coops! Listen, you!" His voice rose defiantly. "You hogs out there in the other pens! How does it feel to be penned off from each other?"

Wilcek, his pulse hammering with fear, tried to clamp a hand over Mortenson's mouth. Mortenson shook him off. Scooping up his beer, he threw it at the back of the bar. "Mad dogs of Patriots!" he shouted. "Come and get me!"

Wilcek turned to run. But the two plainclothesmen stopped him. "Easy, son," they said, slipping a cuff on his wrist. "Just come along."

Wilcek strained against the cuff. "I didn't say it! Honest, I didn't! You've got to listen!"

"Tell it to the judge," the plainclothesman said. They pulled him out the door, and into the waiting police car.

Mortenson watched them taking Wilcek away.

He shrugged, feeling almost sorry for old Teddy.

Oh, well—tonight there'd be a little plain envelope under the door again. A penny earned was a penny toward next month's Patriotic Subscription, which was getting to be a pretty steep item.

VII

Irving Benton raised his eyebrows at Halloran, who was a ward man in the Old Chelsea district. "Yes, Frank?"

Halloran closed the door behind him and sat down. He was a big, red-faced man with a lot of weight on him, and a good-humored crinkle around his eyes. His eyes, however, could measure a man while his face was busy smiling. And he had his own approach to social intercourse. Every ward man did, developing a personal attitude in complete harmony with the peculiarities of his particular neighborhood. Benton let him play it his way.

What better way was there?

"Well, Irv—you know my Commies?" he asked.

Benton grinned. Halloran's little enclave of Communists was a standing joke. Benton remembered reading about the old Czarists, all dreaming of going back to Russia some day. You could feel for them and their dream, in a way. But people who still laid complicated schemes for re-establishing a "Peoples' Democracy" were too pathetic to be taken seriously.

"Uh-huh," Benton said. "What is it this time—fusion bombs in the President's breakfast?"

Halloran chuckled in appreciative amusement. Then abruptly, he became deathly serious. "They've got *something,* Irv."

Benton drew in his breath sharply. "Are you sure, Frank?"

Halloran leaned forward, one pudgy hand with its spread fingers upraised. "You bet I'm sure. I'll tell you why."

He checked off points.

"One: They're sleeping during the day and staying up all night. Two: Whenever one of 'em does come out he moves fast and shifty, but he walks on his heels. You can practically see the big plan bursting out of his head. Three: You can hear the mimeograph cranking from dawn to dusk. Four: They've all moved in together. Lord knows, there aren't enough of them to fill even one house. And, Five: They're sneaking in extra food—pulling the old double-shuffle. Two of them that look more or less alike are both buying on one card, besides what they get legitimately.

"Now, if it was only the first four things, I'd let 'em go. It never hurt anybody yet to turn out five thousand copies of a good, rousing manifesto. But that fifth thing can only mean they've got somebody in there with them—somebody without a card of his own. And whoever he is, he has something that's

pepping 'em up like all get out."

Benton frowned down at his fingernails. "Sounds interesting, all right," he said cautiously. He looked up. "Tell you what—let's you and I pay 'em a visit."

"Right now?"

"We might as well. How about it?"

Halloran shrugged. "If it interests you that much, sure. No time like the present."

Benton pulled the skillfully counterfeited card out of his desk drawer and slipped it into his pocket.

He didn't like the thought of going out in the street. But this . . . This might just be worth it.

* * *

Vincent Jones looked down at Wilcek.

"Now, let's go over this again, Teddy," he said gently. "You say, according to this signed and sworn statement—*sworn,* mind you—that you did not come into the possession of any weapon, or component of a weapon, or information as to the nature of a weapon, on the day that Officer O'Reilly was killed behind your store. Is that correct, Teddy?"

Wilcek nodded wearily. "Yes, sir. That's correct."

Jones nodded. "Ah-*huh!* Now, Teddy, I'll ask you again to keep in mind that this is a sworn statement. Maybe the legal language is confusing. The phrase 'come into the possession of' does not imply that you *kept* anything. It simply means that you touched something—moved it, possibly, or gave it to somebody else. You may have just looked at it and left it there. Who'd you give it to, Teddy?"

Wilcek shook his dank head like a bull with lance points driven into his withers. "Nobody. I—I didn't *possess* anything to give."

Jones smiled. "Okay, Teddy. Now, about this charge of treasonous declamation in a public place . . ."

"Mortenson," Wilcek said mechanically.

Jones shook his head. "Now, why drag Civilian Mortenson into this, Teddy? That was *your* voice. We can prove it."

Wilcek clenched his fists, but not in defiance. Fresh perspiration broke out on his forehead, and trickled down his face.

Vincent Jones gave him a full minute in which to think.

"Well, Teddy," he said, when the period of grace expired. "I suppose you know that the second charge involves a different basic correctional procedure?"

Wilcek nodded.

"The first charge," Jones said matter-of-factly, "involves no one but yourself. After all, a thing like that can happen at the impulse of a moment. You see a pin, and you pick it up—that sort of instinctive response. All in all, I can think of things a great deal worse.

"But that second charge . . ." He shook his head. "Treasonous declamation isn't something that just

comes over you. It's the spontaneous manifestation of a complex and lengthy thought-process. It's an indication that the subject has been systematically examined in your mind. Now, an idea doesn't just happen. It has to come from outside. Something, or someone, has to exert a profound influence on your way of thinking. Which means, of course, that we'll have to interrogate and investigate your family, your friends—almost anybody you've ever been in contact with."

Wilcek stared down at the floor. "That's pretty dirty, Jones," he said huskily.

Jones leaned forward. "Just between you and me and the microphones, Teddy, were you really expecting justice?"

Still looking down, Wilcek shook his head. "No, I guess I wasn't."

Jones smiled thinly to himself. "All right, Teddy, I'll just tear up your first statement. How's that? You've convinced me that our case on that treasonous declamation charge isn't as strong as we thought. You won't make me change my mind, will you, Teddy?"

"No, I'll talk. You give me no choice."

"All right," Jones said mildly. "Now—for the official record. What did you pick up, and who did you give it to?"

VIII

Halloran knocked on the door of the nearest apartment in the Commie house. Irving Benton could see him priming himself. The good-humored look was seeping into his features like invisible writing being developed under the guidance of an expert.

The door opened a crack. "Yes?" The voice was husky with sleep. It belonged to a tousle-haired, blond youth of about twenty. Obviously, he had just gotten up.

"How are you, Augie?" Halloran said. "I didn't know you were staying here now?"

"Oh, hello, Mr. Halloran," Augie said, peering into the dark hall. "Yeah, I'm staying with the Curtisses for a while."

"They up?"

Augie shrugged. "I guess so. I heard them moving around in their room a while ago."

"Can I come in for a minute?"

Augie shrugged again. "Guess so." He opened the door wider, staring curiously at Benton.

"This is Irv Benton, Augie," Halloran said quickly. "He's a friend of mine. Irv, this is Augie—"

"Brown, Mr. Benton," the young man volunteered. "Augie Brown." Augie extended his hand while Halloran chuckled.

Benton shook hands, looking curiously around the room. An open sofa-bed stood against one wall, and surrounding it were stacks of mimeograph paper. A pile of stencils lay beside an ancient typewriter on an up-ended shipping carton. There were no lights on, and the one window, itself grimy, opened

on a dark back-alley. Stepping forward, Benton stumbled over a crammed wastebasket. Augie apologized and switched on a battered lamp standing on an unpainted wooden table beside the bed. "Just got up," he explained.

A door on Benton's right opened abruptly, and a tall, gangling man, one hand finger-combing his thin hair, came into the room. "Glad to see you, Mr. Halloran!" he said, with hearty cordiality. "What can I do for you?"

"Just dropped by for a little chat, Jim. This is Irv Benton."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Benton," Jim Curtiss said. He shook hands in a sincere manner. "Well. Find a place to sit down. I'll be right with you. Just got up," he explained, heading for the bathroom.

Benton looked first at the edge of the bed and then inquiringly at Augie.

"Sure, go ahead," Augie said. "No, wait. I'll fold it up." He grasped the foot of the bed, folded it over, and pushed the mattress back into place. He hunted behind the stacks of paper, found a couple of pillows, and dropped them into place on top of the mattress. "Okay. That's better." He looked around at the room apologetically. "Don't get much of a chance to clean the place up."

"Pretty busy these days, huh, Augie?" Halloran remarked, dropping down on the sofa. Benton sat down beside him.

"Well—uh—yeah, kind of," Augie acknowledged. He moved his hands nervously, and finally lit a cigarette. He inhaled and coughed. "Haven't had breakfast yet."

Curtiss came out of the bathroom, which apparently lacked a washbowl, and began scrubbing his teeth over the kitchen sink.

Benton stared at the stacks of paper. About half of them seemed to be done. He raised his eyebrows at Augie. "Mind if I look?" he asked.

Augie's expression became even more uncomfortable. He shuffled his feet irresolutely. "Well . . ."

"Sure," Curtiss said from the kitchen. "Go ahead. That's what they're for, Augie—for people to read."

Benton bobbed his head to indicate thanks and picked up a stapled pamphlet. The title at the top of the first page said: CIVILIANS OF THE WORLD! Then, below it, in smaller type, was the legend: "Join Hands with Your Fellow-Civilians Across the Seas."

Halloran looked over Benton's shoulder. "That's pretty good, Augie. Hits you right in the eye. You write it?"

Augie nodded, embarrassed.

"Well," Halloran said. "Well, Augie! You're getting better every day. I always told you there was talent in you, didn't I?"

Augie grinned sheepishly. "Yes, sir, I guess you did," he mumbled.

"Well, Mr. Halloran, Mr. Benton, what can I do for you?" Curtiss said, coming out of the kitchen.

"Augie, will you start some coffee, please?"

Augie slipped gratefully into the kitchen. Curtiss found a stack of paper and sat down on it, lighting a cigarette. He looked expectantly at Halloran and Benton.

"Just keeping in touch, Jim," Halloran said easily. "I've noticed you people have been pretty busy lately. What's cooking?"

Curtiss waved a hand at the contents of the room. "You mean this stuff?" He smiled, leaned forward with a cautious glance toward the kitchen, and winked. "Exercise, mostly. Can't afford to let the Movement go stale, you know."

Halloran winked back. Benton, looking at the two of them, couldn't help admiring the way both of them managed to look like a couple of old, battle-scarred politicians who happened to be on different fences, but who nevertheless understood each other.

"Well," Halloran said. "Well. Augie's coming along real fine, isn't he?"

Curtiss nodded. "He's a good boy." He sighed. "Damn few like him, these days. I'm running an old men's club." For a moment, dejection seemed to take complete possession of him, driving the smile from his face, and causing even his shoulders to sag.

"Say, Jim—" Halloran said.

"Uh-huh?"

Halloran's eyes twinkled. "Don't close your eyes like that. You'll never get 'em open again. Be honest now, Jim. You've been spreading this 'Just got up' stuff pretty thick. How long has it been since you got any sleep?"

Curtiss's face fell. Then he chuckled ruefully. "I should have known better than to try to deceive *you,* Frank." He smiled in agreeable resignation. "As a matter of fact, we've all been up since noon yesterday." He jerked his head at the piles of pamphlets. "We've been turning these out in thousand-lot batches. Call it a Spring offensive." His voice dropped.

"Listen, Frank, if I don't give my people something really exciting to play with, we're through. I've got every Party member in the city scattered through this building. There are fifty of us left. That's all —just fifty. I've got to hold them together somehow." He slumped his shoulders again, and looked unseeingly at his cigarette. "Fifty can dwindle to ten—fast!"

Halloran shook his head in sympathy. "Jim, that's tough. I didn't know you people were so desperately bad off."

Curtiss nodded silently.

Benton put down the pamphlet he'd picked up. He shot Halloran an inquiring glance. Halloran nodded imperceptively.

Benton reached out casually and pulled another pamplet out of the middle of the pile. The title on this one was: CIVILIANS OF THE WORLD—UNITE! The legend below it read: "Rise Up and Join Hands With Your Fellow-Civilians

Across the Seas! Throw Off the Yoke of Patriot Fascism!"

Curtiss shot out an arm to snatch the pamphlet away, but Halloran knocked it down. Curtiss started to protest. Then he let his arms drop.

Benton threw a quick look into the kitchen. Augie was standing in the doorway, a pot of boiling water in his hand.

"Don't do it, Augie," Benton warned. "Put it down."

Curtiss looked up. "Get back in the kitchen, Augie," he said quietly. "We can't fight the whole Libertist organization." He turned back to Halloran and Benton as Augie subsided.

Suddenly he looked at Halloran and began to laugh. He shook his head in admiration. "I should have known better than to try and fool you boys," he said.

Halloran chuckled. "Son, we were hiding our real literature under a few harmless dummies when you were still spelling your way through Marx."

Curtiss was still chuckling. "I'll bet you were at that, you old fox." He sobered somewhat. "All right. So we're really giving it one more whirl." Then he looked bitterly at Halloran and Benton, his despair breaking through the forced mask of casualness.

"Sure," he said thickly. "I know how far we'll get. The ones of us that the cops shoot down will be lucky." He sprang up suddenly, his fists clenched. "But we're going down fighting! We're not going to sit around as you've been doing, waiting for a break. To hell with that! We're through." His arms jerked. "Finished! So we're going out in style."

"You know," Benton said casually, "this is the first time in years I've run across a cover-story to cover a broken cover-story that was covering a cover-story in the first place. Where is he, Curtiss?"

Curtiss dropped his cigarette. He dropped the "Custer's Last Stand" pose, too.

"Who?"

"The civilian with the raygun," Benton said. "The civilian who killed O'Reilly."

"Augie!"

Benton jumped off the couch, scooped up the typewriter, and rammed it into Augie's stomach. Behind him, he heard Halloran grappling with Curtiss. The pot of boiling water clattered to the floor.

Benton reached down and picked Augie up by the slack of his crumpled shirt. He dropped him on the couch beside Curtiss, and stood over both men, his face flushed, his breathing labored. Keeping his head up and his eyes on them, he scooped up two heavy stacks of pamphlets and dumped one into each of their laps, telling himself with satisfaction they'd have a tough time jumping up in a hurry.

Halloran was over by the bedroom door, listening. Benton put a hand up to his ear in a pantomime of "hear anything?" Halloran shook his head. He jerked his

thumb at the door, looking at Benton inquiringly. Benton nodded.

Halloran passed quickly out through the door. There was a flurry of noise, interspersed with a woman's strident shouting. Augie tried to get up. Benton slammed a hand on top of his head and kept him down.

Halloran came back through the open bedroom door, holding a small, thin, dark-haired woman. She was struggling furiously.

"Mrs. Curtiss," Halloran said. "No one else. I can't say I'm not grateful. If I'd had to face that souped-up gun—"

Benton nodded his head. "They wouldn't keep him here, Frank. He's upstairs somewhere—or down in the cellar."

Curtiss looked up bitterly. "Think you're pretty smart, don't you, you pseudo-Liberal!"

Benton shook his head. "You've got the wrong man. I'm four-square for high tariffs and low corporation taxes."

Halloran eased the woman down on the sofa. He made sure the apartment door was locked. Then he went out into the kitchen and picked up a hefty steel knife-sharpener. He handed the implement to Benton, and pulled out a loose fireplace brick for himself.

"That's just to make sure you don't take unexpected advantage of the numerical odds," he commented, looking squarely at Augie.

"Now, then," Benton said, "let's just sit here and think up a way for you to deliver that civilian and his gun to us without him killing us all."

IX

Josiah Harmon's cellar was under a bakery managed by a man named Dunlap.

Dunlap knocked uncertainly on Harmon's door. "Mr. Harmon?" he called.

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Bianci's here. She says she has a message for you from her husband. I couldn't find Mr. Benton."

"That's all right. Ask her to come in, please."

Josiah Harmon frowned. He opened a drawer and dropped the ejection device into it. Benton had left him a note on where he was going. They were close—and would remain close, Harmon suspected, until the end.

And now—more trouble. Mrs. Bianci brought it into the room with her like a shawl wrapped around her shoulders.

"Mr. Harmon?"

"That's right, Mrs. Bianci. Won't you sit down, please?"

Mrs. Bianci was around thirty, slim, and firm-jawed. The look in her eyes was dangerous.

"Atkinson's men picked up my husband this morning," she said. "He was charged with a traffic violation. I didn't find out about it until just now. My husband keeps a running account of everything important that takes place in our

ward. I checked back on last night's entry. Teddy Wilcek has disappeared. He has not been seen since eight o'clock last night."

Harmon exhaled a long breath. "Mrs. Bianci, how much do you know about why Wilcek's disappearance would be important?"

He paused, his gaze intent.

She shook her head. "I know he was mixed up in the O'Reilly killing. I know he talked to my husband about it. I know my husband came to you immediately afterwards. That's a chain, Mr. Harmon. You're the next link."

"I know," Josiah Harmon said absently. "I know . . . But that's not important. Listen, Mrs. Bianci. You're acting ward man, as of now. I want you to spread the word through the ward that you expect to go away shortly. That it's not important, and that you'll be back within ten days or two weeks. Will you do that?"

She nodded. "Yes."

Josiah Harmon smiled. "Thank you. Now—if you're not arrested, you can always say you changed your mind. But don't let the people in your ward riot, no matter what happens. I can't say exactly what may occur, but, unless it's in obvious, urgent self-defense, your people will strike a stronger blow by simply staying home."

She nodded again.

Harmon took a deep breath. There were going to be no repetitions of Cleveland here, if he could help it. "Good. I'm sending the same message to all other wards, in case you were wondering."

"I was."

He smiled again. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Bianci. I can't promise you I can get your husband released. But I'll do my best."

"Just talking to you has helped, Mr. Harmon. More than you know." She got up and left.

Josiah Harmon sat motionless behind his desk for a moment, considering the problem.

Yes, if Wilcek's arrest had led to Bianci's, then the next man was himself. Atkinson would take the chance.

He had to hurry.

He called Dunlap downstairs again, and gave him the message for the other ward leaders.

He hoped Benton was moving fast, too.

He looked down at his almost useless hands, remembering and anticipating pain.

* * *

Ford Atkinson stared across his desk at Vincent Jones.

"You haven't started the civilian arrests?" he asked, angrily and incredulously.

"No, sir. I got a lead last night—too late to report to you on it. It paid off again this morning. I now know that a component of the weapon is in Josiah Harmon's hands. I've ordered his arrest. By now, he must know where the man and his weapon are."

Atkinson sank back in his chair

with a grunt. "Well—all right." He looked up again, anxious. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

Jones shrugged. "It's a calculated risk, sir. I'm gambling I can move fast enough to have the weapon in our hands before there's any significant repercussion among the civilians. After that, of course, it doesn't matter."

Atkinson grunted again. "See that you *do* move fast enough. That's an order!"

One of Jones's eyebrows flicked up too short a distance for Atkinson to see. He saluted gravely. "Yes, sir."

X

Irving Benton looked steadily at Jim Curtiss. "Now, then— You say he came looking for you? That he simply turned up at the front door?"

Curtiss nodded. His wife, her lips a pale, compressed line, turned on him. "What's the matter with you? What are you telling him anything for?"

Curtiss looked at her wearily. "This is the Liberty Party I'm talking to. Once they get this far, they can't be stopped. Or are you still waiting for a great wave of proletarian indignation to swell the ranks of the Peoples' Party?"

Benton weighed the possibilities in his mind. They might simply be admitting defeat to throw him off the track. But he didn't think so. Curtiss was physically exhausted—a discouraged man. His morale had been lower than average to begin with, and his carefully prepared stories had crumpled, one after the other, like so much wet cardboard. Another blow to the ego—especially when added to the fact that Curtiss was certainly aware that Communism was forty years past its crest.

Desperation had its own rules.

Besides, Curtiss probably figured that playing ball with the Libertists now might well get him a foot in the door later. Which still left the actions of the stranger with the gun in an appreciably less than explicable format.

"All right," Halloran said, "let's stick to the point."

"I'm trying to." Curtiss glared at his wife, and she resumed her stolid pose at the end of the couch. "Okay," Curtiss went on. "We took him in, gave him some food and a bed. He showed us his weapon. We knew about O'Reilly by then, of course. We were convinced. No, I don't know how he got here, or where he's from. He doesn't speak a very clear brand of English. He keeps talking about joining his spirit-brothers. You figure it out. Anyway, he's damned anxious to help us."

Curtiss spread his hands. "There he was. Boom—right in our laps." He looked down at the pamphlets weighing down his thighs. "Like that." He grinned faintly. "I don't know what he thinks we are. He

keeps talking about our vast underground organization."

Benton exchanged a glance with Halloran. Then he turned to Curtiss. "All right. Is he in this building?"

"Yes. He's in the cellar."

"Good. This is what you'll do. You'll help us convince him that Halloran and I are top-level officials from Headquarters and that this is just a local center. Understand? We are going to take him to the Central Headquarters and set him up a shop where he can show us how to turn those weapons out in quantity."

Curtiss agreed silently, disregarding the indignant glances of his wife, turning his back on Augie's look of disillusion and betrayal. He stood up slowly, and motioned for Benton to follow him.

Benton half-smiled. "Hold it a minute, Jim," he said. He spoke to Halloran: "Better find some rope, Frank. We don't want Augie and Mrs. Curtiss raising a fuss behind us." He looked at Curtiss again, and smiled once more as he saw the man's last hope turn into a sour scowl.

The stairs down into the cellar were dark. Halloran fumbled for a light switch, found it, and revealed the descending tier of dirty and splintered planks leading down to a low, badly whitewashed room.

Benton looked down over Curtiss's shoulder, but there was nothing to see except the usual cellar litter.

"He's around the corner," Curtiss grumbled. He began to walk down the steps.

Yes, Benton thought, he would be. What had Josiah Harmon said? "Freedom is always just around the corner." And he'd been right. Because it is not in the nature of people to accept rigidity. A rigid system had to be based on the proposition that people were all alike, that they never changed, that nothing affected them.

But it did. A man was a storehouse of memories, of sensations recorded on his senses and stored away. He laughed and he cried. And another man, with different memories, with different impressions, might laugh to see him cry. If one man succeeded at an endeavor, another had to fail. If one man lost his wallet, another had to find it. Nothing could be more certain.

How do you make interchangeable machine parts out of soft clay? How do you take a bundle of tears and laughter and expect it to keep a straight face?

Not for long. Not for long at all. Count your many tyrannies one by one. How many of them lasted a full generation? How many of them, apparently embracing centuries, were actually highly fluid, almost frantically fluid, kaleidoscopes that, to survive at all, could do so only by making changes and then denying them officially? By pasting the same old labels on vastly different boxes?

Benton smiled as he walked down the stairs. How do you keep the

power in the hands of the few when the many are armed?

He turned the corner and saw the thin, nervous-seeming man who rubbed at his sleepy eyes.

"Mr. Stethan, this is Mr. Benton, from Central Headquarters. He's come to take you there," Curtiss said at Halloran's prod.

The stranger woke up instantly. His face broke into a smile. "How glad! How good! It gladdens me to meet you!" He jumped forward and pumped Benton's hand. "How good to see my flee-ing not wasted! Now soon comes revolution, no?"

"Why, ah, certainly, Mr. Stethan," Benton said, somewhat taken aback. "We're glad to meet you, too. This is Mr. Halloran. Are you ready to leave with us now?"

The stranger acknowledged Halloran's presence with a nod. He nodded vigorously to Benton. "Oh, yes, yes! It gladdens me!"

Benton smiled. "Well, that's fine. Uh—I'd like to carry your weapon, if I may. It would be safer," he added significantly, hinting at all sorts of complications by the tone of his voice.

"Yes, yes!" the stranger said, shaking Benton's hand again. Then he put his hand in his shirt and handed Benton liberty . . .

The stranger talked. And talked. He walked along happily between Halloran and Benton as they turned off Twenty-second Street on Ninth Avenue.

"It gladdens me to meet you at the end of ends. The per—personnel?—at the local center were pleasant, but I was a little most unable to wait much longer. What word—impatient? Yes. I am Much High Overseer of People—was. No more. I now political flee-er. I gladden to find in parahistory books your party here so strong."

A political refugee, eh? Benton smiled. Parahistory books? Benton shrugged. He'd made damn sure the weapon was in his shirt, before he did anything else. He could afford to listen to the thin, excitable man all day. As a matter of fact, they had all the time in the world, now.

Halloran, he noticed, was keeping his face impassive. Halloran was still a good ward man.

"I very too-mixed, first day. I have copy, address main center, our paratime. Your paratime, address is only of local cell. But makes no difference endwise. Difference makes, not notice style of dress, I think. Police officer notice." The stranger shook his head sadly. "Very unavoidable."

"Paratime?" Halloran said. The one word was the product of considerable mental sifting, Benton knew. He wondered what progress Halloran had made.

The stranger turned toward Halloran. "Yes. You silent up to now. I think you know what is. But of course, you lack knowing paratime." He turned to Benton.

"Paratime is like strands of cable. Many universes, all next each other. All going same direction. All doing

same thing. But not *same* universes. Each one, little different. In mine, is overthrow Overseers. In yours, you almost ready overthrow overthrowers. Where I from, Communism finish. Here, Communism soon start."

Benton looked at Halloran. Halloran looked at Benton. It looked very much as though the voluble stranger had gotten his universes a little mixed.

Benton grinned to himself. Just a little.

"Now, you take weapon, make many more. The power to destroy! Finish. Revolution, hah? Just like Paris. But I forget. You do not know Paris. Was 1871, our universe."

Benton cleared his throat. How did you shut this guy off? And yes, he knew about the Paris Commune in 1871. But in this universe, it hadn't lasted more than six weeks. It seemed to have done a little better, elsewhere. It struck him that here was one Communist, who, very possibly, had never heard of Lenin.

XI

Josiah Harmon sat turning the flat, glittering gold case in his fingers. It was about two-and-a-half by two inches in area, and perhaps a half inch thick. An ejection element peeped from a recess in one end, and there was a firing stud on both top and bottom. Apparently it fired when they were pressed simultaneously.

"Batteries, eh?" he asked sharply.

The stranger bobbed his head. "Yes. You make many—I show you. You arm people, then takes one, two days—utter destruction."

Josiah Harmon shook his head. "No. No destruction. We've had enough of political ideologies that kill. A government, theoretically, serves the people. Up to now, most governments have served the people supremely well—served them up to the cannon."

He put the gun down on the desk and laid his hand over it, covering it. "This is where the guns belong. Under the hands of the people—so long as we must have guns at all. For the people to take up or to put down, as they see fit. Not as some Overseer like yourself, whether he calls himself President of Earth or not, sees fit."

He cocked a white eyebrow at the uncomprehending stranger. "You brought us what you—and a good many other people—thought was a device for killing people. It is not. No weapon is. When a gun is fired, it has failed.

"A gun is a means of expressing an opinion. The opinion, perhaps, that the owner has the right to take another man's substance—that he has the right to deprive him of his liberties. Fire that gun, and you have admitted that you do not think the other man considers your opinion to be valid. In short, you have admitted the failure of your logic.

"There used to be several national constitutions which granted

the right to keep and bear arms. Not the right to murder. It was recognized that, so long as there were guns in the world at all, people would use them to enforce their opinions. It is a compromise solution. Those old constitutions could not attempt to abrogate that human impulse. But the indiscriminate use of those guns was an admission that the opinions behind them were invalid. So, the people with invalid opinions were removed from society.

"There will be no destruction. I'm sorry, Mr. Stethan. I hate to disappoint you. There will be no need for it. Once these weapons are in the hands of the people, their opinions will carry more weight than the opinions of a few Patriots who, up to now, have been the only people with the means of enforcing their opinions. There will be a few demonstrations of the invalidity of those opinions. But there will be no destruction."

Benton took a sidelong look at the bewildered stranger. Paratime, eh? Well, his machine—his chronomobile, or whatever he called it—had to be around somewhere, no matter how well hidden. With or without the stranger's help, even if he fully realized his mistake, they'd find it. It might be interesting to look up the Earth he'd come from, where the Overseers had become refugees. Certainly the attempt should prove enlightening.

The cellar door burst open. Vincent Jones blocked the doorway, speaking rapidly, not looking at anyone but Harmon.

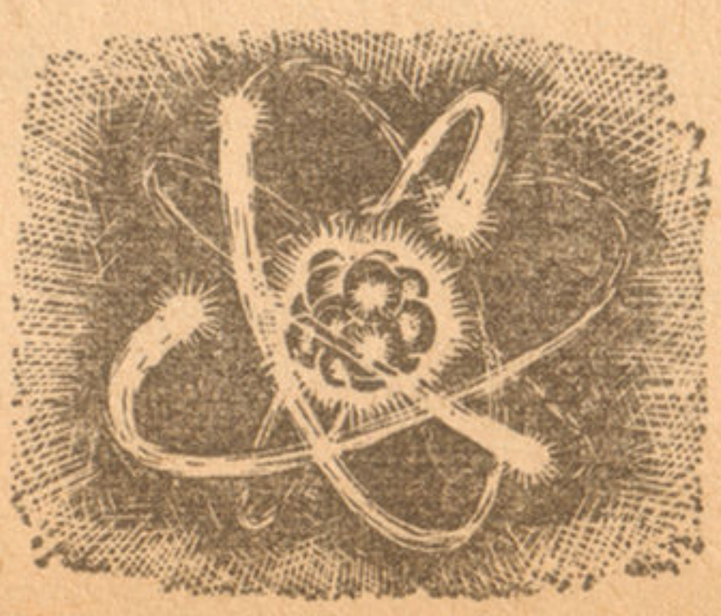
"Listen, Harmon! My men will be here in a minute. You know where the civilian with the gun is. Atkinson is an idiot. We can make a deal!"

Josiah Harmon looked pityingly at Vincent Jones. He moved his hand aside. The weapon glittered silently on the table, and did not have to speak.

Jones stared at it, ashen-lipped. His spine slumped, and he took a faltering step backward.

"I see," he said. He smiled uncertainly. "Well," he said, forcing the philosophical attitude into his voice, but trembling in defeat. "It seems the scales have tipped away from me."

THIS IS EARTH. THESE ARE EARTHMEN. AND THIS IS THE WAY FREEDOM COMES. ANYTIME. IN ANY AGE.



miracle in the molluccas

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Modern science may persuade some men to fly kites—and others to perform miracles. But never was there such a miracle as this!

ALL THIS talk about the guided missiles they *hope* to fly three thousand miles or more sounds a bit out of date to me, sir, as it would to your old friend, Dr. Burley, who sent me to you.

I can tell you now that the thousand-mile-an-hour guided missile was built and flown years ago—in nineteen-forty-five, to be exact. And it flew not a mere three thousand miles, or ten thousand, but right around the world, non-stop, in a day.

I don't expect you to believe me right now, although I think you will when I say Dr. Burley did it. But I know you will when you go through the doctor's papers that I'm handing over to you. At any rate, I was with him on Cape York Peninsula and helped him do it—and I know.

It doesn't seem, now, that Dr. Burley will ever get back from his attempt to go beyond the Earth's atmosphere into space. Most likely, as he feared if anything went wrong, he's out there now, between us and the moon, swinging in an orbit around the Earth.

There is a quality of vitally evocative genuineness about F. B. Bryning's science-fiction yarns which invites instant comparison with the work of the foremost practitioners in the genre. Heinlein, for instance, in the memorable first stories which made him famous—or Bradbury at his imaginative best in the closely allied realm of science-fantasy. We are proud to have introduced this brilliant young Australian writer to an American audience.

"I might become the Earth's second satellite," he said to me once.

I hope not, for he was a fine man, and a pleasure to work for, so I haven't given up hope yet. But now it's time for me to do what I promised him—hand over to you, sir, as head of the School of Physics, and as his friend and one-time collaborator, this package, and to report to you what I know of our east-west projectile.

I know what's in the package—the key to Dr. Burley's safe-deposit box, authority for you to receive the contents, and a long letter explaining the why and wherefor. All the designs and the mathematics of the doctor's east-west projectile, and also of his spaceship, which combined the same principles with rocket propulsion, are in the safe deposit. These are to be the property of the School of Physics, to be used by it or handed on at its discretion. Meanwhile, is it okay for me to tell you now about . . . ?

Thanks . . . You wouldn't remember me, but I was Dr. Burley's mechanic whenever he needed me. You knew him well before he went into war work, and you'll agree that he had plenty of need for a good mechanic.

First time I saw the east-west projectile in action was at the doctor's old home and laboratory out Altham way. You remember, he owned a dairy farm there, run by a manager and his family, and the doctor boarded with them. He had finished his wartime work soon after VE-Day and had secured my release from the ordnance workshops before the middle of nineteen-forty-five. When I reached Altham he gave me lunch and then took me out to his barn.

That barn was, as you may know, a first-class engineering workshop. Dr. Burley sat me at one end of a bench placed with its other end just inside an open doorway on the western side. About fifty yards away was a haystack, and against the stack was a pile of filled chaff-bags.

Along the bench ran a pair of light rails, about three inches apart and inclined upwards so that they were about four inches higher at the doorway end than at my end. Resting on the rails was something like a torpedo, but quite small—three feet long and about six inches in diameter.

Dr. Burley plugged an ordinary two-pin electric socket on a flex over two brass pins in the tail of the torpedo. Then he switched on the current.

"It takes about a minute to rev up," he told me, looking at his wrist watch. After a time he said: "Forty seconds—watch the projectile."

Nothing happened for about twenty seconds. The torpedo lay there humming smoothly, the note rising steadily in pitch. Then it was gone!

The socket and flex kicked up like the head of a striking snake and dropped on the rails. In the

same instant one of the chaffbags out by the haystack jumped like a shot rabbit and tumbled off the pile with a steam of chaff running out of it.

"What's that you've got, Doctor?" I asked him. "It can move some!"

Dr. Burley flicked off his switch and smiled at me.

"Actually it didn't move at all," he said. "It just *stopped* moving for a moment, while you and I and that haystack kept on going."

Now Dr. Burley wasn't one to make silly jokes. You know that. I just sat looking at him, trying to puzzle out what he meant. Then he said: "Let's collect the projectile and I'll show you how it works."

We pulled the torpedo out of the haystack—it had gone right through the bag of chaff and was half its own length into that stack—and carried it back to the bench.

As he took a screwdriver to it, Dr. Burley explained. While the torpedo was resting on the rails it was actually moving with the rails, the bench, the workshop, ourselves and everything around it—at about seven hundred miles an hour, from west to east, because of the rotary motion of the Earth.

If we had been at or near the equator the speed would have been about one thousand miles an hour. If we had been near either pole the speed would have been next to nothing. All Dr. Burley had done was to disassociate the torpedo for a moment from that rotary motion. In the midst of everything in its vicinity rushing towards the east it had stood still!

At that moment the bench, the workshop and we had rushed away from the torpedo towards the east. The haystack and chaffbags had rushed at it from the west, hitting it and carrying it along again with its mechanism deranged or running down.

Dr. Burley slid out the insides of the torpedo on a sort of chassis and showed me a spiral framework in which were mounted about two dozen solid little wheels. That was the essential part, he told me.

All those wheels were gyroscopes. Their spinning axes were all at slightly different angles from one another, according to their positions in the spiral framework. They were in two sets, each set driven by a separate electric motor and working partly in series with and partly in opposition to the other set.

When all the gyros were revving at their prescribed speeds the entire framework, or "nexus" as Dr. Burley called it, became independent of the acquired velocity it possessed in common with all things in its vicinity; in other words, it retained its position in space while the Earth spun beneath it. By necessity, then, it left that vicinity—or, more correctly, it was left behind by that vicinity and everything in it.

You will see what that principle could mean if applied to transport and communications. Around the

world in a day, from east to west, wherever you might be. Always east to west, of course—never the opposite way and never north-south or south-north.

There are obvious limitations, of course, to a projectile that can travel in only one direction, yet you can see that the idea could have a great number of useful applications, too.

Dr. Burley had one particular application of his own: to combine it with rocket propulsion in a ship that would get free of the Earth's atmosphere and gravitation and be able to navigate in interplanetary space. As I said before, I don't know how he got on with that. We built the ship and he took off in it—but that's the last I saw of him.

Well, right after he showed me the first little torpedo he took me through into the larger section of his workshop and showed me a full-sized, partly constructed projectile about as big as a naval torpedo.

"This one is going to fly around the world in a day," he told me. "I need your help to assemble it and operate it."

This one had a pair of stubby wings—they were more like the side fins, if they are fins, of a stingray—and a tail assembly,. so that it could be controlled in taking off and landing. Dr. Burley pointed out the various items to go into it.

There was a large gyro unit with the motors to drive it. There were a radio transmitter to signal us all the time she was in flight, and a radio receiver through which we would control her in taking off and landing. There was a robot pilot to hold her on her course while she was beyond reach of the radio control. And there were two batteries, each about the size of a six-volt motor cycle battery.

I thought you'd be interested in those batteries! Dr. Burley told me you and he had tried to develop such a battery years ago. Well, instead of using a lead or nickel compound as you did in those days he developed a soft allotropic iron—it's all in his papers—into which he succeeded in packing an incredible charge of electricity.

Without that battery, of course, nothing yet known could have powered such a flight for a whole day and at the same time have fitted into space. There were two of them, one as an emergency, for one alone was more than enough for the job.

Right up north, beyond Temple Bay on Cape York Peninsula, we went to fly the projectile. Our position was about twelve degrees south of the equator. There, the Earth's circumference is very nearly the same as at the equator, and our projectile had to fly very near to twenty-four thousand miles in the day.

Dr. Burley had known the spot from a previous visit and it was well suited to our purpose. With his batteries to drive the projectile

and batteries to run our ground radio control, we were independent of power supplies or waterfalls to generate power. Mainly, we needed wide, uninhabited spaces to the west, sea to the east, and the equatorial latitude.

We sent the projectile off at nine o'clock in the morning from an inclined runway at the top of a low hill a quarter of a mile back from the beach. For about three hours we kept it under radio control—until it was flying well out over the Indian Ocean at about forty thousand feet. Then we turned it over to robot control and simply listened in to its regular radio signal.

Five miles on each side of our camp, in a line of the projectile, we had set up receivers with direction-finding antennae. Thus, for the first few hundred miles we could keep a quite accurate check on its course, and for the first thousand or so could plot it pretty well. We would also be able to pick it up at the same distances as it came in from the east next day, and, we hoped, bring it down on the sea and run it up on the beach below us under radio control.

We took turns at listening to the radio signal throughout the day. Dr. Burley plotted the course, first with the aid of our direction-finders and then by dead reckoning. Even though the projectile was in rarefied air, Dr. Burley calculated there would be an appreciable drag which would slow it down. He considered it would be nearly noon next day before it reappeared in the east.

"And I think we'll have to steer it back from a bit to the north-east," he told me. "My last reliable check on it seemed to show it was veering slightly north. We calculated pretty well its natural tendency to slip a little southward because of the lessening of the Earth's circumference to the south and the consequent easier flying there. But perhaps we over-compensated for it, and she's veering northwards."

This was the first sign I had that there might be anything going wrong, but I didn't think about it at the time. In any case, there was nothing we could have done then.

At about ten o'clock that evening the radio signals were very weak.

Dr. Burley said, quite calmly: "In about half an hour they should be at their weakest. At that time she should be almost exactly on the opposite side of the world from here. Then the signals should begin to grow stronger as they come round the other side of the Earth, from the east."

Actually, there was a short period at about ten-thirty-five when the signals unexpectedly increased in strength. Dr. Burley judged that as the time when the projectile was exactly half-way. "We are probably getting the signals from both sides in equal strength," he said. "I should have expected that. In

fact, they will be coming from every point of the compass in about equal strength at this time—over the polar regions as well—although our directional antennae will be picking up mainly those from the west and the east."

Soon after that the signals weakened again and Dr. Burley went off to bed. He slept like a top until three in the morning, when he relieved me. By then the signals were coming in clearly from the east, and with gradually increasing strength. The Doctor was very pleased.

I didn't think I could sleep, because I was getting a bit excited, myself. But I went off as soon as I hit the pillow. I was more tired than I realized.

When he woke me at seven-thirty Dr. Burley was not quite so happy. "She's still going well enough," he said. "But she's veering too far north. I have been plotting her position each quarter-hour since six o'clock. She's about over Brazil now and on a course that will take her over Malaya if we don't correct it."

By ten o'clock we were really worried. Not only was the projectile off course, too far north, but she would not answer our radio control. The robot control would not give up, for some reason. We tried and tried to take over, but we couldn't.

"If we don't get control," Dr. Burley said, "she'll go on until either the two batteries are exhausted or the bearings of some of the gyros break down. Or perhaps what's gone wrong with our control might make her steer itself down and crash."

He also reckoned that if she went on for another day or two she would end up near the North Pole. "Once across the equator," he said, "she'll veer rapidly north because of the natural tendency to do so, plus our over-compensation of the southward-veering tendency."

But she didn't cross the equator. Quite suddenly, when she passed our longitude and was over the Moluccas, the signals stopped.

It was exactly twelve-forty-seven. She had passed our longitude at twelve-twenty-three — just twenty-seven hours, twenty-three minutes to go around the world—and was twenty-four minutes' flying-time further on.

Right up to the last moment the signals had been coming in strongly. We had a close check on her position and were trying to the last to take control. Our radio direction line ran right across the Halmahera Strait from our position. It crossed Dr. Burley's plotted course of the projectile in about the middle of the Strait.

Our belief was that the projectile had crashed in that area, having, perhaps, lost height as a result of our struggle to take over from the robot control.

Before Dr. Burley went away this last time he provided the nec-

essary finances and left me the job of finding out what had happened up there in the Moluccas.

I spent nearly two months there without learning a thing, and I was just about to give up when I heard of the Reverend Johns' miracle.

The Reverend Johns was a missionary working amongst the little islands between the Obi Islands and the westermost tip of New Guinea. He was well-liked—and I found him a nice enough little chap when I met him, even if he was a bit stubborn in his ideas. He was considered to be a little bit—well—eccentric because of his belief that miracles were constantly being worked all around him.

He very kindly took me in an outrigger canoe out on the lagoon of his headquarters island—out near a channel through the reef leading in from the ocean. There he shipped his paddle and took up a four-foot length of wide galvanized iron tubing such as they use for downpipes. He stuck one end of the tube in the water and looked into the other end.

"It was about here, it happened," he said. "Most people laugh at me when I talk about my miracles, but for this one at least, I have concrete proof." He handed me the tube, holding it at a particular angle. "Look there and you will see how Satan's vessel and his henchmen were smitten by the Lord and consumed by His fire!" he declared.

I looked, and there on the bottom was what looked like a naval pinnace lying on its side, with its back broken, its top-hammer smashed and charred, and a cleft through it from the port side, forward, to the starboard side, near the stern. It was weed-grown and barnacled, and the fish were swimming in and out of it.

"It happened soon after the war ended," the Reverend Johns said while I was still looking down the tube. "A Japanese naval officer with a working party, who had been ashore on one of the islands up north when their ship was sunk, were living by piracy and looting and raping in these parts."

These pirates had never been so far south before, it seems. But when the Reverend Johns learned by radio that they were coming, he knew what drew them to his island group. He straightaway took his launch across to a small island about two miles away to take off the mission girls—about twenty of them. His idea was that, on a larger island, they could take to the bush and they'd never be caught.

They got away from the near side of the little island just as the Jap and his men landed on the other side. But they were seen and promptly followed in the pinnace.

Against the fast pinnace their only chance lay in the fact that their pursuers had first to go around one end of the island. By pushing his old launch to the limit the Reverend Johns made a race of it to the entrance of the channel through his own reef and swung

suddenly into it in the hope that the pinnace might overrun the entrance and pile up on the rocks. It was only about fifty yards behind, and coming fast.

"But Satan steered them through after us," the Reverend Johns told me, "and we were done, for then. They had not fired on us but now they trained a sub-machine gun on me and yelled at me—no doubt demanding we stop. I told my boys to keep going hard and went down on my knees to pray to Almighty God . . ."

The Reverend Johns gave me a sort of fighting look, then, and his eyes shone like lamps.

"He answered at once—with a miracle!" he went on. "I heard a volley of cracks like gunshots—but not from behind me. They came from over there where you see that gap cut through the line of palms." He pointed to some coconut palms on a sandspit beyond the lagoon. "I opened my eyes and saw that gap for the first time. It had not been there two seconds before!

"Then," he said, "something hit the water between that gap and here. It was a big silver shark about twenty feet long. It skipped like a flat stone about fifty feet up and then came down at us."

He gave me another "believe-it-or-not" kind of look, and went on.

"But the hand of the Almighty was guiding it. It passed between the top of our mast and the engine housing with a screaming that tore at our insides and a wind blast that nearly lifted us out of the launch. Then it took that pinnace at the waterline.

"You saw how it ploughed through that vessel, young man?" he demanded, and I nodded. "Well, it sheared that fiend with the rifle clean in halves, and it ripped open a fuel tank and fired it. There was a great, flaming explosion, and the pinnace and the water around it were consumed with fire.

"At the same time, as if it were a sign to us like the rainbow to Noah, the silver shark shot high in the air over the reef and stood poised for an instant, making a shining cross in the sky. Then it broke apart and out of its insides came a shower of whirling stars which fell with the rest of it into the deep water outside the reef."

It seems there were no survivors from the pinnace. In half a minute it had sunk amid the flames, leaving only a burning patch of fuel oil on the water.

"I am grateful that you do not scoff," the Reverend Johns said to me. "I can see that you believe this miracle happened, young man."

"I believe everything happened just as told me," I said. "But I'm not a believer in miracles. Can you tell me what date it was?"

"It was on the Sabbath day," he answered at once. "Sunday, September the second, nineteen-forty-five."

"At exactly eleven-forty-seven in the forenoon, by your time," I

added. "Or twelve-forty-seven Sydney time."

His eyes widened, and then he looked suspiciously at me. "You are mocking me," he said. "No man knows that. I have never known the exact minute myself. It was, I believe about a quarter to twelve."

"Your guess was close," I said.

I told him how I knew. He listened with an intense but joyful sort of interest, nodding his head approvingly towards the end. He took it very well, considering, I thought. I thought he'd be a bit upset as I debunked his miracle—but not he. I should have left it at that, of course, but I couldn't help adding:

"So you see, it was no miracle, Dr. Burley and I did that without any supernatural effects. It's modern science you have to thank."

It was no use. His belief wasn't even scratched.

"Was it Dr. Burley's intention—or yours—to save us?" he asked me.

"Of course not," I said. "We didn't even know you existed. It was just a lucky accident for you that something went wrong with our projectile."

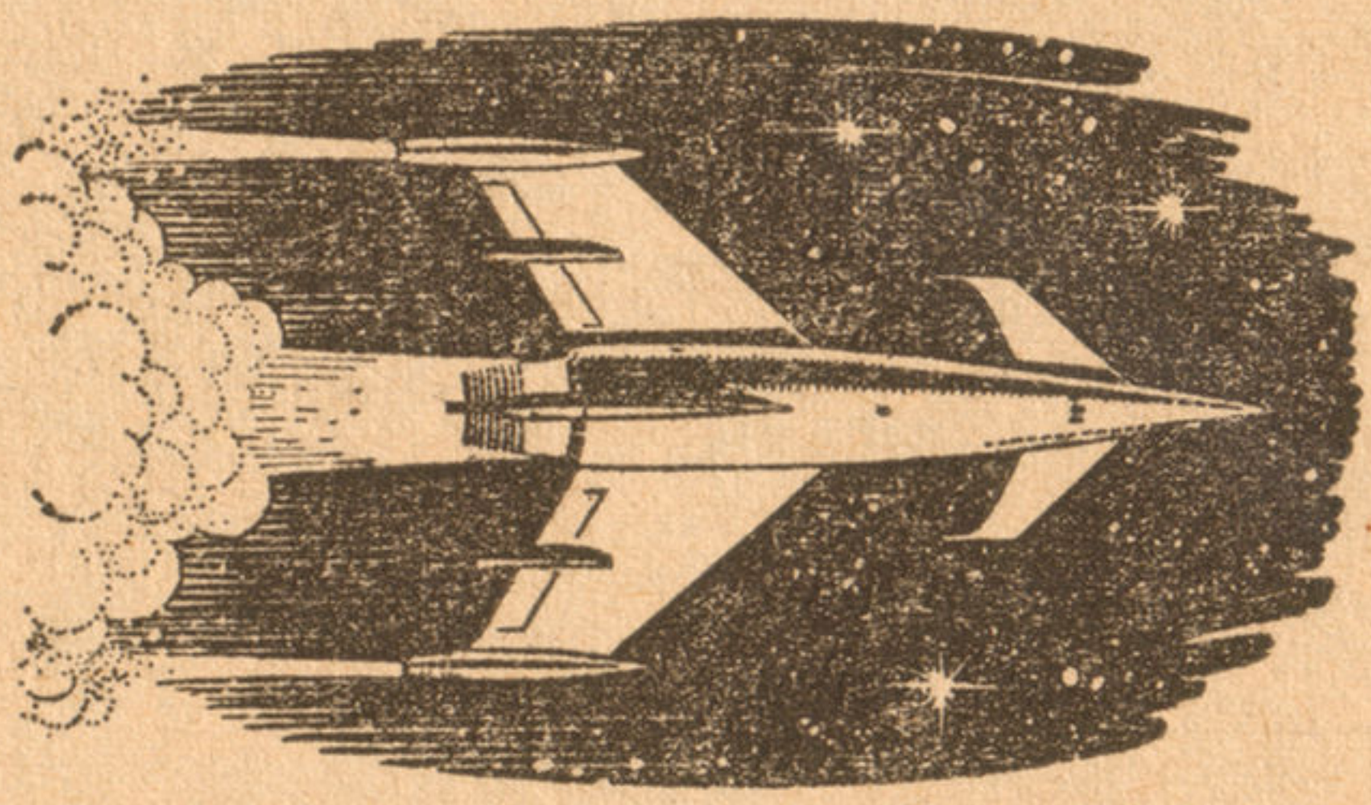
"Do you know *what* went wrong?" he asked.

I shook my head. "We never will," I said. "It's a shame we can't salvage the projectile to find out."

"Young man," he came back at me, "I grieve for you. I grieve that you do not recognize the Hand that has found you worthy as an instrument of its Divine Purpose! You should rejoice that when you merely aimed to fly a kite it was given to you to perform a miracle!"

I gave it away after that.

"Dr. Burley fly a kite! *Me* perform a miracle!"



You've only a month to wait for a reading pleasure treat of the very first magnitude, a fast-moving, oustanding job of future science writing with a smashing climax, THE WHITE RAIN CAME, *by Jacques Jean Ferrat. It's the featured short novel in our next issue—a truly amazing sequel to an earlier story by an author whose gifted pen has evoked a new kind of story magic from the tumultous frontier life of strife-torn Mars.*

who?

by . . . Algis Budrys

Everything Lucas Martini would have died to save had been most cruelly shattered—except the flame-bright heritage of a man.

THE CONCRETE ROOM was stifling in its smallness. Rogers had turned off the rattling air conditioners in order to keep the discussion below the level of a shout. The other men were sweating and mopping their faces, blinking their eyes against the sting of perspiration. But so was Rogers, and as it was his office no one protested.

Rogers looked around at them all.

"Well?"

They all looked at Barrister. Rogers could have meant any one of them, or all of them in general. But, in any group, Barrister was the one who spoke first.

He took the bit of his pipe out of his teeth and shook his head. "I don't know. I'm running tests. I'll have no results, one way or the other, for at least a week. That's the best I can do."

Finchley, next to him, was wordier. "How do you get *at* somebody like that?" He looked around at the other men and gestured helplessly. "He's like a big egg. You can look at him all day. You can try

---

So powerfully evocative and moving in its utter, stark realism is this new Budrys' story of an almost inhumanly courageous man that it doesn't even read like a work of fiction. It seems rather an incredibly encapsulated small world of the living, separated from the larger world for purposes of keen observation and enduring truth, and presented in all humility as the strongest plea we know of for the preservation of human dignity in the endless tomorrows science-fantasy has made so invincibly real.

---

to get inside him. Half your instruments are no good. You can't even get an electrocardiogram. Any electrical equipment isn't worth a damn on him." He dropped his voice as though apologizing. "It hurts him if you try. He screams."

Rogers grimaced distastefully. "But he *is* Martini?"

Bowen shrugged. "What fingerprints he has, check out. If he isn't Martini, he's got five of his fingers."

Rogers slammed his fist against the top of his desk. "What the hell are we going to do!"

"Get a can opener," Willis suggested.

"Look at this," Finchley said. He touched a switch, and the film projector hummed as the room lights automatically went dim.

"Overhead pickup," Finchley explained. "Infra-red lighting. We believe he can't see it. We think he was asleep."

Martini—Rogers called him that against his better judgment—was lying on his bed. The larger crescent in his metal skull was shuttered from the inside. The smaller one was open. The impression created was that of a man with eyes shut, breathing through his mouth. Rogers forcibly reminded himself that it was just an impression; that this was not necessarily the case at all, that it might not even be Martini. How could anyone be sure?

"This was taken at about two in the morning, today," Finchley said. "He'd been lying there for a little over an hour and a half. I wish to God he'd breathe!"

Rogers frowned. All right, it was uncanny, not even having a respiratory rhythm to tell you whether the man was asleep or not. But he didn't like Finchley's being so upset about it.

A cue spot flickered on the film.

"All right," Finchley said, "now listen." The little speaker beside the screen crackled.

Martini began to thrash on his bed, his metal arm striking sparks from the concrete wall as it was flung about.

Rogers winced.

Abruptly, Martini began to babble in his sleep. The words poured out, each syllable distinct, the voice harsh, but the words twice as fast as normal:

"Name! Name! Name!

"Name Lucas Martini born Bridgeton, New Jersey, May 10, 1938!

"Name! Name! Detail . . . *Halt!*

"Name Lucas Martini born Bridgeton, New Jersey, May 10, 1938 about . . . *face! For*ward . . . march!"

Rogers turned to Finchley. "Think they were walking him?"

Finchley shrugged. "*If* that's a genuine nightmare, and if that's Martini, then, yes, it sounds very much like they were walking him back and forth in a small room and firing questions at him. Keep 'em on their feet, keep 'em moving, keep asking questions, change interrogation teams every four hours,

don't let 'em sleep. You know their technique."

"If that's really Martini."

"Yeah."

"If it's really Martini," I said.

"I heard you."

A man named Lucas Martini had been chief of research at the Mare Imbrium technical development center. One day the bubble housing the center had blown—from the inside. A medical team from the Soviet sector had gotten there first.

It had been three days before Washington realized that Martini was unaccounted for. It had been a month before Moscow released the information that Martini was indeed still in one of their hospitals, undergoing "extensive treatment." Unfortunately, the hospital was located in a military zone, and no Western doctors could be permitted to examine him. Nor was examination necessary. While Martini could not be moved, he was responding well to his treatment by "teams of excellent specialists." When he was convalescent, the government of the People's Democracies would be happy to restore him to the brother democracies of the West.

It had been four months, despite the heaviest possible pressure, before Lucas Martini was declared convalescent.

What made it a tricky situation was the fact that Lucas Martini had been carrying the plans of the new K-88 in his head.

And the head of the man who was eventually returned—who might even be Martini—together with a number of other critical organs, was no longer of flesh and bone. It was metal.

* * *

"All right, Mike, what's the breakdown?" Rogers sighed.

Barrister laid the first sheet down on Rogers' desk.

"This is what his head works like—we think. It's a tough proposition, not being able to X-ray."

Rogers looked down at the mark-up sketch and grunted. Barrister took the pipe out of his mouth and began pointing out specific details, using the pipestem to tap the drawing at the indicated places.

"That's his eye assembly. He's got binocular vision, with servo-motored focussing and tracking. The motors run off that miniature pile in his chest cavity, just like the rest of his mechanical components. It's interesting to note that he's got a complete selection of filters for his eye lenses. They did the job up brown. By the way, he *can* see by infra-red."

Rogers spat a shred of cigarette tobacco off his lip. "That's interesting."

Barrister grunted. "Now—right here, on each side of the eye assembly, is an acoustical pickup. Those are his ears. They must have felt it was better design to include both functions in that one central skull opening. It's directional, but not so good as God intended. Here's something else; that shutter is tough—

armored to protect his eyes. Result: he's deaf when his eyes are closed. Probably sleeps more restfully for it."

"When he isn't faking nightmares, yeah."

"Or having them." Barrister shrugged. "Not my department."

Rogers nodded agreement with an expression indicating that he wished it wasn't his, either. "What about his mouth?"

"The jaws and saliva ducts are mechanical. The tongue isn't. The inside of the mouth is plastic-lined —teflon, probably, or one of its kin. My boys are having a tough time analyzing it. He's pretty cooperative about letting us chip off samples."

Rogers swallowed uncertainly. His nervous stomach was keeping him near the edge of nausea almost constantly. "Okay—fine," he said in a brusque attempt to cover up, "but how's all this hooked to his brain?"

Barrister shook his head. "I don't know. He's cooperative, but I'm not the boy to start disassembling any of this—we might not be able to put him back together again. All I know is that somewhere, behind all this hardware, there's a human brain inside that skull. How it controls the mechanical functions of its body, I don't know. The Russians have a good head start on us there. They've been monkeying with this kind of stuff since before and during World War II."

He laid another sheet atop the first, paying no attention to the pallor of Rogers' face. His chief's physiological reflexes weren't his department either.

"Here's his powerplant. It's located where his lungs used to be, next to the blower that lets him talk and the most ingenious oxygen circulator I've ever seen. The power's electrical, of course, tapping off a fairly ordinary small pile. It runs his arm, his jaws, his audiovisual equipment, the blower, and the blood oxygenation system."

"How well is it shielded?"

Barrister let a measured amount of professional admiration show in his voice. "Well enough so we can X-ray around it. There's *some* leakage. He'll die in about fifteen years."

Rogers grunted.

"Well, look, man," Barrister pointed out, "if they cared whether he lived or died, they'd have supplied us with blueprints."

Rogers caught him with a glance. "They must have cared at one time —they put in enough effort keeping him alive. And fifteen years might be long enough for them, if this isn't Martini."

Rogers looked at Bowen, and both of them shrugged hopelessly at the same time. "All right," Rogers said, "the technical staff is showing slow progress, but that's not our main problem. Let's go down and talk to him again."

Bowen nodded bleakly. He was attached to Rogers' staff, but his training and primary obligation were FBI. So far, his reports had

mostly consisted of short words surrounding long absences of significant information.

But he and Rogers had talked to Martini before. Aside from the fact that it was a disquieting experience, it was also, thus far, an unrewarding one. Martini wasn't much help in explaining himself.

* * *

Martini's room was as small as all the others in the Project. Rogers and his team had been fired up to the Moon in a hurry. The only available facilities had never been designed with this sort of operation in mind.

But then, Rogers thought with a touch of bitterness, what facilities had? Just as they'd jury-rigged their testing equipment, so they were jury-rigging their methods, devising their rules as they went along.

Only they weren't going anywhere.

"Now, Mr. Martini," Bowen was saying politely, "I know I've asked before, but have you remembered anything since our last talk?"

The overhead light winked on polished metal. It was only after a second or two that Rogers realized Martini had shaken his head.

"No," Martini said. "Not a thing. I remember being caught in the original blast—it looked like it was coming straight at my face and chest." He barked a throaty, savage laugh. "I guess it was. I woke up in their hospital and put my one hand up to my head." His right arm—the fleshly one—went up to his hard cheek as though to help him remember. It jerked back down abruptly, almost in shock, as though that were exactly what had happened.

"Uh-huh," Bowen said quickly. "Then what?"

"After a couple of days, they shot a needle full of some anesthetic into my spine. When I woke up again, I had this arm."

The motorized limb flashed up, and his knuckles rang faintly against his skull. Either from the conducted sound or the memory of that first shocked moment, Martini winced visibly.

His face fascinated Rogers. The two lenses of his eyes, collecting light from all over the room, glinted darkly in their recess. The grilled shutter which set flush in his mouth when he wasn't eating looked like a row of dark teeth bared in a desperate grimace.

Of course, behind that facade, a man who wasn't Martini might be smiling in thin laughter at the team's efforts to crack past the armor.

"Lucas," Rogers said softly, fogging the verbal pitch low and inside.

Martini's head turned toward him without a second's hesitation.

Ball one.

"Yes, Mr. Rogers?" If he'd been trained, he'd been well trained.

"Did they interrogate you very extensively?"

Martini nodded. "Of course, I don't know what you'd consider ex-

tensive, in a case like this. But I was up and around after two months. They were able to talk to me for several weeks before that. In all, I'd say they spent about six weeks trying to get me to tell them something they didn't know."

"Something about the K-88, you mean?"

Martini shook his head. "I didn't mention the K-88. I don't think they knew about it. They just asked general questions: what lines of investigation we were pursuing, things like that."

Ball two.

"Well, look, Mr. Martini," Bowen said, drawing the man's attention, "they went to a lot of trouble with you. Frankly, if we'd gotten to you first, there's a chance you might be alive today, but you wouldn't like yourself very much."

Martini's metal arm twitched sharply against the edge of a desk. There was an over-long silence. Rogers half-expected some bitter answer from the man.

"Yes, I see what you mean," Martini said with shocking detachment. "They wouldn't have done it if they hadn't expected some pretty positive return on their investment."

Bowen looked helplessly at Rogers. Then he shrugged. "I guess you've said it about as specifically as possible," he told Martini frankly.

"They didn't get it, Mr. Bowen," Martini said. "Maybe because they outdid themselves. It's pretty tough to crack a man who doesn't show his nerves."

A home run, over the centerfield bleachers and still rising when last seen.

Rogers pushed his chair back with a scrape against the concrete floor. "I think that's all for today, Mr. Martini. We'll be in to see you again, I'm afraid."

Martini nodded. "I understand. But it's all right with me. The quicker you get through with me, the faster I can get back on my job." He flexed his metal arm, his hand rotating through 360 degrees at the wrist. "Ought to be able to pull some pretty fancy stunts with this, don't you think?"

Rogers bit his lip. "I'm afraid that's not going to be for quite a while, Mr. Martini." He gestured lamely. "I'm sorry."

Martini looked quickly from him to Bowen's guilty face and back again. Rogers could have sworn his eyes glowed with a light of their own.

There was a splintering crack and Rogers stared incredulously at the edge of the desk where Martini's hand had closed on it convulsively.

"I'm not going back, am I?" the man demanded.

He pushed himself away from the desk and stood as though his muscles, too, had been replaced by cables under tension.

Rogers shook his head. "I couldn't say, definitely."

"But you don't think so." Martini paced three steps toward the

end of the room, spun, and paced back. "They've washed out the K-88 program, haven't they?"

"I'm afraid so." He found himself apologizing to the man. "They couldn't take the risk. They're probably trying some alternate approach to the problem K-88 was supposed to handle."

Martini slapped his thigh.

"Probably that monstrosity of Besser's," he muttered. He sat down abruptly, facing away from them. His hand fumbled at his shirt pocket and he pushed the end of a cigarette through his mouth grille. A motor whined, and the soft-rubber inner gasket closed around it. He lit the cigarette with hasty motions of his good arm.

"Damn it," he muttered savagely, "K-88 was *the* answer. They'll go broke trying to make that thing of Besser's work." He took a savage drag on the cigarette.

Abruptly, he spun his head around and looked squarely at Rogers. "What the hell are *you* staring at? I've got a throat and a tongue. Why shouldn't I smoke?"

"We know that, Mr. Martini," Bowen said gently.

Martini's red gaze shifted. "You just think you do," he said in a throttled voice. He turned back to face the wall. "You said you were through for today," he said.

Rogers nodded silently before he spoke. "Yes. Yes, we were, Mr. Martini. We'll be going. Sorry."

"All right." He sat without speaking until they were almost out the door. Then he said: "Can you get me some lens tissues?"

"I'll send some in right away," Rogers said. He closed the door gently. "I guess his eyes must get dirty, at that," he commented to Bowen.

The FBI man nodded absently, walking along the hall beside him. "That was quite a show he put on," Rogers said uncomfortably. "If he is Martini, I don't blame him."

Bowen grimaced. "And if he isn't, I don't blame him either." His brow was still furrowed in concentration. Finally he turned to Bowen. "Say, remember that Russian leader —whatzizname, back during World War II?"

Rogers nodded. "Uh-huh. Stalin. Why?"

Bowen nodded rapidly. "That's it. I was trying to remember it. Read something about it, once. Know what 'Stalin' means, in Russian?"

Rogers shook his head. "No. What?"

"Man of steel."

* * *

Rogers looked dully at Willis, the psychologist. It was early in the morning of the arbitrary day, and the ashtrays were spilling onto the desk.

"Look," he said, "if they were going to let him go, why did they carefully make an exhibition piece out of him?"

Willis rubbed a hand over his stubble. "Assuming he is Martini,

there's a strong possibility they had no intention of ever doing so. I'd say, in that case, they figured he'd be grateful enough to them so he'd volunteer his help. Particularly since he's an engineer. It seems reasonable he'd be impressed with their work on a purely professional level, as well. *I'm* impressed—but then I'm no engineer."

"Barrister's impressed," Rogers told him. "So am I." He lit a new cigarette, grimacing at the taste. "We've been over this before. What does it prove?"

"Well, as I said, they may not have had any intention of ever letting us see him. But if he *did* hold out, despite their calculations and interrogations, that puts a new face on it. Our side put an awful lot of pressure on them. They may have decided, later, that he wasn't the gold mine they'd expected. Let's say they've got something else planned—next month, say, or next week. They figure if they give us Martini, maybe they can get away with their next stunt."

Rogers crushed the cigarette out. "What's he got to say on the subject?"

Willis shrugged. "He says they made him some offers. He figured they were just bait, so he turned them down. He says they interrogated him and he didn't crack."

"Think it's possible?"

"Anything's possible. He hasn't gone insane yet. That's something in itself. He was always a pretty well-balanced individual."

Rogers snorted. "Look—they've cracked everybody they ever wanted to crack. Why not him?"

Willis shrugged again. "I'm not saying they didn't. But there's a possibility he's Grade A. Maybe they didn't have enough time. Maybe he *did* have an advantage. Not having mobile features and a convulsive respiratory cycle to show when they had him close to the ragged edge. His heartbeat's no indicator, either, with a good part of its load taken over by his powerplant. His whole metabolic cycle's non-kosher."

Willis threw up his hands. "How much do you know about Russians?" he asked.

Rogers looked at him curiously. "About as much as the next guy. *Nyet, nichevo, harasho, panimayet Parusski?* Why?"

Willis shrugged. "Well, it's a trap to generalize about these things. But I keep thinking; whether it started out that way or not, every one of them that knows about Martini is laughing his hair off at us. They go in for practical jokes. Deadpan. I've got a vision of the boys, clustered around the vodka, laughing and laughing and laughing.

"It all adds spice to the cake."

Rogers grunted sourly and wiped a hand across his sweated upper lip. "Look," he said doggedly, ticking off each point on his fingers, "there are three main possibilities:

"One, he's Martini and he didn't crack.

"Two, he's Martini and he did crack.

"Three, he isn't Martini. I'll give him credit. If he isn't, he knows he's getting closer to a permanent disappearance every minute. He's not showing it.

"Now—if he belongs in the first category, he'll be all right. He'll be shipped to some quiet place and given a lot of gadgets to tinker with while he's waiting for that pile to kill him. If he's in the second, substantially the same thing'll happen to him."

"Until the pressure of knowing he's a dead man piles up on top of what he's already like, and he goes insane," Willis said.

"Or until," Rogers acknowledged. "*But*—I don't have to worry so much about that second category. All I have to do is reach a decision as to whether he is or isn't Martini. Anything I may find out in the process is pure gravy. It doesn't really matter, immediately, if he cracked. K-88 has definitely been scrubbed, and that's the only big thing he could have helped them on.

"Once he's put away somewhere, we've got the rest of his life to do a careful psychological analysis. All I need right now is one clue—just one sign that he's Martini. Let's face it—despite everything we've tried, we can't prove he isn't. All it takes to tip the scale one way or the other is a strong hint.

"But until I find out, we're stalled. If he isn't Martini, he might be anything. He might have abilities we don't know anything about. He might be primed to fission that pile in the middle of Leyport—with subsequent regrets and explanations of unavoidable mechanical failure from our neighbor People's Democracies."

Willis nodded in sympathy. "What's this about his fingerprints, though?"

Rogers almost cursed. "His right shoulder's a mass of scar tissue. If they can substitute mechanical parts for eyes and ears and lungs—if they can motorize an arm, and hook the whole thing to his appropriate brain centers . . ."

Willis turned pale. "You mean—that isn't necessarily Martini, but it's definitely Martini's right arm."

"Exactly."

* * *

Rogers could feel the trembling in his calves. They'd had Martini for three weeks, now.

You take specialists. You get the best mechanical engineer on the Moon, and give him a staff. You take the FBI's top agent. You borrow the best psychometrician and steal the President's personal psychologist. You give them assistants. You fling them at that iron mask—and watch them bounce helplessly away.

If your name is Sam Rogers, you're ready to crack.

How do you pry open the mask and get at somebody who, maybe, was once Luke Martini, a kid fist-

fighting his way to and from grammar school in Bridgeton, New Jersey, USA?

How did you go about it?

Or had he been a tow-headed, blocky kid carrying the banner of the Komsomol? And fist-fighting on his way home from the parade, of course. Particularly if there were some kids with Asiatic blood living where he was.

Good Lord!

* * *

Rogers burst open the door of Martini's room. The man was lying on his bunk, smoking. His head jerked up as the door rebounded against the wall.

"All right," Rogers grated savagely, *"on your feet, Wop!"*

Martini half-sprang at him, the metallic curse ringing in his mouth. Then he stopped, his murderous hand slowly dropping to his side, along with the fleshly one. His eyeshutter snapped wide open.

Rogers sighed slowly. Then he grinned. "Okay, Martini, you pass," he said. He backed out of the room, closing the door gently. Even when they were sobs of relief, it was unsettling to hear a man cry if he had no tears.

the quality of mercy

by . . . Robert F. Young

Men may stand as children before the most weighty event in human history. But on Mars in the days of its glory Orlinne stood as a man.

THE ROMANTICS had been right after all. There had once been life on Mars, and the memorials of its splendor were buried deep in the rust red sands, and seemed to hover still like ghostly presences over dead cities and blue canals. There were dead sea bottoms too, and eroded hills, and there was even an atmosphere—deficient in oxygen content of course, but bearable enough if you *had* to breathe it.

One of the cities was better preserved than the others and it was in the middle of its central plaza that Captain Farrell had brought the life raft down. He stood now with his crew of two—Lieutenants Tanner and Binns—staring at the mysterious and exotic buildings that rose like pink cliffs into the cloudless purple sky, listening to the tinkling of the wind among the glass leaves of the crystal trees that lined the white stone streets.

After a century of hopes and dreams, Marsfall was a reality.

An unpleasant reality.

The three men shivered in the raw wind. It had not been enough

---

We have never before said of any story appearing in these pages that the writing itself, with all the elusive qualities inherent in its inmost texture, bore the unmistakable stamp of genius. It is a daring statement, and we hesitate to make it now. But this is certainly Robert Young's finest story, and so lyrically splendid have been his contributions in the past that we may perhaps be forgiven for feeling about him as we do, and for believing that the great pleasure he has given us will be widely shared.

---

for them to go down in human history as the first Earthmen to reach Mars. Their fame would not stop there. They would also go down in history as the first Earthmen to die on Mars.

The life raft carried enough provisions for a week, and by careful rationing they could eke out their lives for a month. But a month was not nearly long enough. It would be many months, perhaps years, before the second ship arrived, and even if by some miracle it did arrive in time, there was no assurance that it would fare any better than had the first ship. There was a quality in the Martian atmosphere that was unkind to atomic drives, that precipitated wholesale disintegration of metal.

Presently the captain said: "Let's take a look around."

Tanner and Binns nodded and the three men started moving away from the raft. They walked unsteadily in the tenuous gravity, stumbling on the glacéed surface of the ancient plaza. Desolation was everywhere.

"Wonder what killed them," Tanner said.

"Probably they starved to death," the captain replied. "There isn't an ounce of topsoil on the whole planet."

"From the looks of the buildings they've been dead for centuries," Tanner mused.

"A good two thousand years," the captain agreed. "Even their bones have turned to dust."

"And blown away." Tanner shuddered in the wind, tightened the hood of his parka around his blunt face.

They came to one of the buildings and paused. Pink rubble choked its ornate entrance, and cracks and fissures zig-zagged up and down its elaborate façade. Its narrow windows were sad staring eyes.

"Ozymandias," the captain said.

Binns was standing beside him. "Beg pardon, sir?"

"Never mind. It's a poor analogy —from Shelley. I don't think it was like that with them."

They went on to the next building and it was the same. Crystal trees stood unconcernedly by in little square plots of listless soil, their quaint leaves sparkling like zircons in the wan afternoon sunlight, tinkling like glass chimes when the wind blew through them.

After a while they came to a structure much larger than the rest. It was fronted by towering marble columns and beyond the columns, at the top of a wide flight of marble steps, was a recessed entrance, free from obstructing rubble. They paused at the feet of the columns, staring at the lofty windows.

The captain started up the steps and Tanner followed. Binns held back. "Do you think it's safe, sir?" he asked.

The captain turned. A smile softened the line of his lips, briefly banished the years from his face. "Safe, Binns? Possibly not. But

we're in a position where we can afford to take chances, don't you think?"

Binns' boyish face reddened. "I—I forgot," he said. "That was stupid of me, wasn't it? Forgetting that—"

"Come on!" Tanner said quickly. "We'll never find anything, standing here talking. There might be food in there."

Massive portals confronted them when they reached the entrance, but they creaked open when Tanner applied his heavy shoulders. They stepped into a large vestibule. The dust of centuries covered everything, walls, floor, ceiling. There was a recess in the wall to the right of the door and a small statuette stood upon its single shelf. Otherwise the vestibule was empty.

"Looks almost like a church," Tanner said.

"Maybe it is," said Binns. "They must have had some kind of religion."

The captain stepped over to the recess. Shadows filled it, half-hiding the lonely statuette. He moved closer, straining his eyes in the gloom. Then, wonderingly, he reached in and lifted the statuette from the shelf.

He examined it closely. It was exquisitely sculptured from an Earth-like granite and its subject was so familiar that for a moment the incongruity of his finding it thirty-five million miles from home did not occur to him. When it did occur to him he was speechless.

There was a superimposed alien-age in the design of course, and there was an unusual quantity of detail. But there was no mistaking that uniquely human implement of torture, and there was no mistaking the tortured figure nailed upon it: the pain-racked body, the thin suffering face, the dark haunting eyes, compassionate even in death—

The statuette was a crucifix.

"But *we* don't know, sir," Binns said. "They *could* have had a Christ."

The captain shook his head. He had never been a religious man, but there were some things he knew were true. "There was only one Christ," he said.

"But how—"

"I don't know. Perhaps we'll find out." The captain returned the statuette to the shelf, setting it carefully in the small dust-free area where it had reposed for two thousand years. Then he walked across the vestibule to the inner doors. Tanner and Binns followed.

The doors opened at the captain's touch and the three Earthmen entered an enormous chamber. Far above them was a great prismatic dome through which the weak sunlight filtered in a wan rainbow of light. Below the dome were curved stately walls enhanced by three dimensional murals. Circular benches, regularly interspersed by radiating aisles, covered the floor, encompassing a central dais upon which was mounted a twelve-foot sculp-

tured cross with a life-size sculptured figure nailed upon it.

The captain recovered from his inertia first and began walking slowly down the nearest aisle. After a moment, Binns moved after him, and then Tanner. At the base of the dais the captain stopped. Before him, on a marble lectern, lay a thin metallic volume. He touched it with trembling fingers. Tentatively he raised the cover, exposing three paper-thin metallic sheets stamped with tiny characters.

"Binns," he said, breaking the silence that had reigned for two thousand years, "you're the linguist. Come here."

Binns came forward diffidently, leaned over the ancient volume. "I can't make any of the characters out, sir," he said. "The light's too dim."

The captain felt in his pockets, and produced a torch. He flicked it on. He heard Binns gasp. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Why—why it's incredible, sir! I can't believe it!"

"What's incredible? What can't you believe?"

"The book, sir. This Martian book. It's written in Aramaic."

The silence that had reigned for two thousand years reigned again. Binns' face was white in the unsteady light of the captain's torch and Tanner had become an ungainly statue. The immobile figures in the concave murals gazed mutely out at the scene, unaware that for the first time in millennia it had changed.

And then the silence rolled back again, grudgingly making room for the captain's voice: "Read it, Binns."

"But, sir, do you think we ought to? I mean, isn't it kind of sacrilegious even to *be* here?"

"I think it's appropriate for us to be here. Churches are built to help men die. Even Martian churches."

The statue of Tanner quivered, came to life. "Sir, I don't think—"

"I think you're both afraid," the captain said. "I think you're both afraid that we'll discover something here that will make it harder for us to die." He looked up at the silent figure on the cross, at the haggard face and the pain-filled eyes. "There's nothing here to be afraid of," he went on softly. "Absolutely nothing . . . Read it, Binns."

"Yes, sir." Binns bent over the metallic sheets.

"The Scripture of Saint Orlinne:

"On the sixty-third day we commenced orbital descent and established Duide's hypothesis that Earth skies are blue. The land rose up, deeply green, and vast seas, green too, but of a paler green than the land. We remained in the upper atmosphere until the scanners had located the center of the civilized sector, then we descended to within tele-view distance of the cities.

"The main city, situated on a mountainous peninsula that jutted into a small sea, told us all we needed to know concerning the ruling race. The architecture betrayed the

builders, as it invariably does. It was ponderous in this instance, and heavily ostentatious, with incongruous touches here and there of simple beauty which in turn betrayed the influence of another race, greater, though obviously less proficient in the art of war, than the race in power.

"I consulted with M'naith and Preith as to the advisability of conducting our pre-invasion study on the peninsula. We concurred unanimously that such a procedure would involve useless risk, and that the information we required could be garnered in any of the nearby occupied countries. We chose an extremely primitive one at the eastern end of the elongated sea and waited for the pre-dawn belt to cross it. When this transpired we landed cautiously within convenient distance of a small white city.

"We concealed our ship in a deep ravine and at dawn we set out for the city. It was a land of rocky hillsides. The soil was barren, as barren almost as the soil of our native planet. Primitive stone dwellings were scattered among the hills, and on the road primitive people rode or led fantastic double-humped beasts of burden. We attracted little attention. Our simple robes and sandals approximated the prevailing dress of the natives, and though most of the men wore beards, there were a few who did not—enough to save our own smooth faces from being conspicuous.

"Physically, of course, there was very little difference between us and the Earthmen. As Therin has pointed out in his third law of intelligence: 'Given an ecology fundamentally the same, there can be no racial variation in the physical structure of intelligent beings, regardless of the distance that separates their planetary habitats'.

"The morning light grew stronger around us and traffic increased on the dusty road. We moved as rapidly as we could but nevertheless our pace was slow. The heat was oppressive after the coolness of our own land, and the stronger gravity, despite our conditioning, dragged at our sandaled feet. The sun, tremendous to our alien eyes, rose blindingly into the amazing blue of the sky, and the city shimmered like an enchanted dhu *in the distance.*

"Half the morning had passed before we arrived at the walls. M'naith had his concealed microcamera in operation by then, and Preith had begun to record the conversation of the people around us for a later analysis of the language. We reconnoitered at the base of a small hill, discussing the obvious technological immaturity of the simple culture we had chosen for our study, all of us agreeing that unless the race in power was on a vastly higher technological level, invasion could begin at once.

"As we stood there a column of people began to emerge from the city.

"In the vanguard were a number of men mounted on handsome four-legged animals. They wore crude metal breastplates, and crested metal helmets adorned their heads. Barbaric sandals were laced halfway up their naked calfs. Their faces held a suggestion of nobility, but the nobility was marred by arrogance, contorted by brutality. They were laughing and talking in hoarse voices, sometimes slapping their muscular thighs to accentuate their amusement.

"We realized immediately that they were warriors from the kingdom on the distant peninsula.

"Behind them were others like them, but these were walking. And in their midst another walked, or tried to walk—a man in a scarlet robe, a man wearing a crown of thorns, a man overburdened by the weight of a huge wooden cross, a man racked with pain, marked with the bruises and lacerations of a recent scourging . . ."

Silence shouldered back into the chamber as Binns paused. The rainbow light from the dome lay softly on the sculptured figure on the huge granite cross, bathed the anguished face in gentle radiance as though trying to alleviate its pain.

The captain's voice was hoarse: "Go on, Binns."

"Sir, do you realize what we've found? Why, it's unbelievable! It's—"

"I said, 'Go on!' "

"Yes, sir."

"As we watched, the overburdened man faltered and fell. Immediately the nearest warrior turned upon him and began to beat his shoulders and back with a barbed whip. A huge crowd of men and women had followed the column from the city. Some of them cheered the brutal warrior, some of them stood by indifferently. A few of them stared at the ground, their faces white, and a very few of them wept.

"The man managed to regain his feet and tried to shoulder the cross. He went a few more steps, then staggered and fell again. The merciless lashing was resumed. None of us spoke. I could see Preith's delicate face writhing in agony with each descent of the whip, and I could see the horror in his eyes. M'naith's features were impassive, but knowing his gentle nature, his empathy and kindness, I knew the chaos of this thoughts.

"And I knew the chaos of my own thoughts; I knew my helpless rage. Involuntarily I moved closer to the stricken man, forcing my way through the crowd. And then, for the first time, I saw the man's eyes. I saw the suffering in them, and I saw the pain, and behind the suffering and the pain, shining like a gentle light out of the darkness of his torture, I saw the pity—

"The pity for the child-men who were maltreating him.

"I stepped back then, shocked, for I had not expected to find emotional maturity in so youthful a

civilization. Certainly not an emotional maturity so deep and penetrating that it made my own seem petty and contemptible by contrast. Suddenly I saw myself and my surroundings in a new perspective. I saw myself standing there in a crowd of children, a child myself, less vindictive perhaps, but no less cruel than the other children.

"My inhumanity was refined and carefully rationalized, but it was no better than the inhumanity of the warriors and the crowd. In a way it was far worse, for I was an integral part of a complex operation the object of which was to rob an entire people of their birthplace.

"Finally even the warrior with the lash realized that the condemned man was physically unable to carry his cross and he impressed a man from the crowd to bear it. The column began ascending the small hill just without the walls of the city. Preith, M'naith and myself fell in behind it with the rest of the people, and I noticed for the first time that there were two other men bearing crosses. But these were totally unlike the first man. They were big, insensitive, brutal—and there was nothing but the fear of death in their eyes.

"At the summit of the hill the column came to a halt.

"I am not qualified to record the scene that followed. There is a magnificence shining through it that is far too transcendant for a man as simple as myself to put into words, especially alien words. I am not qualified to record it but I must record it, for if there be a particular task for each human to perform during his life span, surely the task of writing the first Martian scripture is mine.

"The two insensitive men were tied to their crosses and their crosses were raised against the sky. He who had fallen was divested of his scarlet robe and his hands were nailed to the wooden arms and his feet were nailed to the wooden shaft and a placard was hung about his neck; and his cross was raised against a sky from which the blue had fled.

"The warriors took his robe and spread it upon the ground and began to cast white cubes upon it. A silence settled over the land, broken only by the rattling of the cubes, the coarse laughter of the warriors and the weeping of women. Three of the women stood a little apart from the rest, looking up at the drawn gray face above them, and in their misted eyes there was a love so vast that it radiated from them, enveloping the agonized figure on the cross in a gentle, almost perceptible aura.

"None of us spoke, neither Preith nor M'naith nor myself. We stood there silently on the hilltop, our mission forgotten, each of us nailed upon his own cross, staring up into the face that was dying against the lowering sky.

"Time passed. A wind came up, a desert wind, but cold, and swept across the land.

"He cried out once in a feeble voice. One of the warriors glanced up, then, laughing, affixed a sponge to a pole, wetted it from an earthen container, and held it aloft. The pain on the face deepened as the lips touched the liquid, and the thin body writhed. The warrior laughed louder, and his companions joined in, but their laughter was a small sound in the vastness of the darkening day.

"I looked up into his eyes, marveling at the compassion that still shone from their depths, and suddenly he saw me. He saw me and he knew me instantly: knew me for what I was, for what I stood for; recognized me as a member of a race that was dying and that was too emotionally immature to confront the reality of death.

"And his eyes filled with pity: pity for me, pity for my race; pity for all peoples who go through life as children, whose psychological growth lags far behind their physical and technological maturity. Shame overcame me then, and suddenly I understood the meaning of an ancient idea, an idea which we have neglected for so long that we have nearly forgotten its existence —the idea of humility . . .

"Presently his eyes left mine and moved over the crowd and over the city at the base of the hill; and his lips quivered and words came, words that had no meaning to me then because I did not understand the language in which they were spoken, words that had no meaning to the barbaric Earth people either, for although they understood the language in which the words were spoken, they were too immature to understand their concept.

" 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

"His head dropped upon his breast. There was a sound of thunder in the distance—"

"Let's get out of here!" Tanner said. "Martian scripture isn't going to help us, even if it is written in coined Greek, even if it does have the same theme as our own. We should be looking for food!"

"I'm afraid that this is the only food we're going to find on Mars," the captain said. "And in the last analysis it's the kind we need most." The hoarseness had left his voice and his torch had steadied. "Read the rest of it, Binns," he said.

"There isn't much more, sir—"

"—and the approaching storm cast a sickly shadow over the land.

"On the hilltop all was motionless. The crosses, with their anguished bodies, the warriors, frozen in the midst of their game, the awed crowd, the three weeping women; M'naith, Preith and myself. There was a sense of waiting, of expectation.

"Abruptly, a great bolt of lightning cleft the sky like a macrocosmic sword. Its thunder crashed and the rain began. It was a cold rain, falling slowly at first, then coming

down in huge drops, the rising wind catching them and throwing them in blinding sheets against the hillside. The crowd began to disperse, hurrying toward the city like frightened tli.

"M'naith and Preith took my arms and led me away, for I could not see. The rain was in my eyes, but there were tears in them also, and as I cried the last vestiges of my childhood fell away.

"I became the first Martian capable of facing the extinction of the Martian race . . .

"I write this now in the ship during Earth-Mars trajectory, using the language spoken by him who died upon the cross. It is appropriate that this should be so, and that is why I would not leave Earth till I had mastered both the written and spoken dialect of the district where the crucifixion took place. As I write, Preith and M'naith are at my side, approving of every word I set down, approving, too, of my decision to return to our planet and spread the gospel that I divined on Golgotha.

"We shall never conquer Earth. We do not have the right. Our race is an old race, yet it has never produced a single mature individual. It has built prodigiously of sticks and stones, but its structures of the mind are stunted affairs, scarcely worth a second glance. It lacks the ideology which a race needs to justify its continued existence.

"It is true, as Therin states in 'Land and Man,' that 'the longevity of a race is commensurable to the longevity of its native planet.' If it is to have a greater longevity it must be worthy of it. Our race is not.

"We have lived out our years. We have known this truth for centuries but we have refused to face it. We have evaded it by developing one hopeless soil stimulant after another, by building space ships, by planning the conquest of our nearest planetary neighbor. But we can evade it no longer. Maturity encompasses many things, but most of all it encompasses mercy. In the final analysis, it is *mercy. And if we consider ourselves a mature race, then we must comport ourselves like mature people.*

"This was the insight I divined on Golgotha, and this is the gospel I shall spread, with Preith's and M'naith's assistance, upon my return. It will not be difficult, for the entire incident is recorded on M'naith's microfilm and Preith's tapes. One need merely look into the crucified man's eyes to know that the time has come for Earth to live and the time has come for Mars to die—

"With quiet dignity . . ."

The three Earthmen stood silently in the Martian cathedral. Above them loomed the huge crucifix, and around them the empty benches curved. Dust motes iridesced like microcosmic suns in the rainbow light of the dome.

Binns spoke first. "You were

right, sir," he said to the captain. "They didn't have a Christ . . . But they needed one."

"And they found one," the captain said. "They found ours. That's something we never did. They interpreted him differently, of course, but that was because they were an alien race, a relatively mature race. They worshipped him as men. We worship him as children."

"Sounds like a gruesome religion to me," Tanner said. "Let's get out of here!"

The captain looked at him. Then he raised his eyes to the immobile face on the cross. "All right," he said finally. "We really don't belong here after all."

They walked up the aisle in the deep dead silence. The rainbow light was paler now, and they knew that the long Martian afternoon had nearly ended. The captain paused before the mural nearest the entrance, gazing at the ancient life-like figures. Tanner and Binns joined him.

The mural showed an old man in a white robe standing on an eroded hill. To his right was an oval screen depicting the crucifixion. People covered the slopes of the hill, their faces rapt as they stared at the screen. They were unquestionably Martians, but except for an intangible alienage of feature they could have passed for Caucasians anywhere on Earth.

Beneath the mural was an inscription etched into the marble wall. The captain pointed to it with his torch. "Can you read it, Binns?" he asked.

Binns leaned forward. "Yes, sir," he said presently. "It's in Aramaic too. 'Saint Orlinne teaching the New Maturity.' "

"What in hell difference does it make!" Tanner shouted suddenly. "So they died! So what?"

"I was just wondering how they did it," the captain said softly. "We're going to need to know."

Outside the pallor of late afternoon filled the plaza. Tanner built a fire in the lee of the life raft and the three of them sat around it while the stars came brightly out. The wind sprang up in the streets and played sad songs in the crystal trees.

After a while Tanner got up and entered the life raft. He returned with a bottle. "I've been saving this for a long time," he said.

The captain got up and walked around the fire. He took the bottle out of Tanner's hands and threw it into the darkness. There was a lonely sound of glass shattering. The captain returned to his place by the fire and sat down.

"We too shall die with quiet dignity," he said.

life, incorporated

by . . . Alice Eleanor Jones

As radiantly beautiful as a dream of paradise was Kryl, its citizens generous and trusting. But Baxter bore with him the serpent's sting.

"And this," explained Ané the Kryllan, waving a graceful hand toward the soaring white building, "is the Office of Engraving."

Baxter looked at the towering edifice thoughtfully. "Print money there, do they?"

"Money?" Ané looked bewildered. "I'm afraid I don't understand. Some of your telepathic images are not quite . . . oh, *credits,* you mean. Yes, those, too. But credits are of no great importance. What is really vital is the manufacture of life tags."

Baxter frowned and shook his head. "I still don't understand," he said. "At the risk of trying your patience I'll have to ask you to explain it to me again."

Ané smiled. "I can see how it must be difficult for you. You have nothing like it on Earth, you say."

The Earthman laughed shortly. "On our planet, if a man knows exactly how long he's going to live, he's either afflicted with an incurable disease or he's in a death cell. You can be sure we don't envy him."

"You've lost me again," Ané

There are many likable scoundrels in imaginative fiction, and not a few in the darkest jungles of the here and now on Earth. Many of them are itinerant peddlers tramping green hills and valleys with an effrontery quite unmanageable. With high-fidelity realism Alice Jones, shining conspicuously amidst our bright galactic cluster of women writers, has here transplanted one such to an alien world, with an age-old curse upon him.

---

said, beginning to climb the shimmering steps of the Office of Engraving. "Incurable disease. Death cell! We have no such concepts here. Perhaps as you observe how the tags are made I can explain our way of life to you more clearly."

The Office of Engraving was a factory-planner's dream of perfection—airy, beautiful, and formidably efficient. The rooms hummed with industry, the machines sparkled with energy, and the workers all smiled. The Kryllans were a good-looking race—humanoid, with a physical development remarkably like man's, a not too surprising evolutionary parallel in view of the fact that Kryl was remarkably like Earth. There were dissimilarities, of course. The air of Kryl was a little thinner, the sky a little bluer—and the pattern of stars very different.

"Your people seem to like it here," Baxter remarked.

Ané raised his handsome eyebrows. "Naturally. No one works where he is not perfectly happy and well-adjusted. Is it not so on Earth?"

"Not exactly," said Baxter drily. "May I see one of those?" He pointed to the disc on which the worker directly in front of him was busily engraving an intricate pattern.

"Of course." Ané lifted the shining disc from the worker's hands, and passed it to Baxter. "You can't read our symbols, naturally. It says, roughly, 'Male. One hundred. Krylla, the Giver of Life, be praised.' There is space below for the wearer's name and other pertinent information concerning him. This is the *new* tag section, you see. Corrections are made in the annexes."

Ané gravely returned the tag to the engraver and passed on, Baxter following with a look of startlement in his keen gray eyes.

"You mean these tags are for newborn infants?" the Earthman asked.

"Yes," Ané replied, nodding. "There will be a need for them very soon, for the next birth season is close at hand."

"You mean to say that every baby who comes into the world," Baxter exclaimed incredulously, "will live for exactly one hundred years?"

"Barring accidents, yes. How long did you say your people customarily live on Earth?"

"It's hard to tell," Baxter replied. "The average life span is about ninety years. By the way, didn't your mathematician say our year comes within a month of yours?"

Ané nodded.

"Ninety years then—as we measure time on Earth. But no one ever knows whether he'll live to reach ninety. Some live longer, of course."

Ané shook his head. "Amazing!" he marveled. "It must make for an extremely disorganized society."

"Tell me about the corrections,"

Baxter said. "That's the part I can't understand."

Ané motioned to an alcove at the end of the room. "Let's sit down while we talk," he said. "It will be more comfortable."

Several of the brightly-colored couches were already occupied by workers resting or taking refreshments. Baxter was struck once more by the wonderful quiet which pervaded the entire building. Except for the subdued hum of the machines there was no sound. Kryl was an entirely telepathic society, and yet, so perfect was the mental-plane communication that even after so little practice Baxter seemed to hear, deep in his mind, every nuance, every reflection of mood that passed between the seated men and women.

A smiling woman brought Baxter and Ané glasses of kando, an effervescent beverage which the Earthman had already learned to like. It possessed, he had discovered, the stimulating qualities of very strong coffee without any of the irritating effects of caffeine.

"I have already told you," Ané began, sipping his kando with enjoyment, "that life can be bought and sold here, exactly like any other commodity. What precisely bothers you about that?"

"I don't understand it," said Baxter. "I just don't see how you can do it."

"It's very simple. The Government runs what is called the *Life Bank*. The individual who wishes to buy, and the one who is willing to sell go before the local banker —in this district, myself—and make known their intention. It is possible to have a private transaction, but most people prefer to let the bank handle everything. There is a short religious ceremony which amounts to a declaration of brotherhood, Baxter. The bond between two persons who have done this thing together is so strong, so close. . . . But I doubt if you could understand the emotional factors involved."

"It sounds like a simple business deal to me," said Baxter. "They both get something they want."

Ané smiled. "To be sure. But do you think that makes the bond less strong? How strange an Earthman's mind is! . . . Well, then, as the priest, I take the two life tags belonging to the seller and the buyer, and send them here to be corrected. The transaction would be valid even if I failed to record it, but it helps to keep the records straight. The number of years each person has to live is always kept scrupulously up to date. Even if no transaction is ever made, the life tags must be altered each year."

"You said 'banker,' " Baxter said, "and then you said 'priest.' Are you both of them?"

Ané looked surprised. "Yes, of course. Who else should rule Kryl but the priests of Krylla?"

"I can think of several other alternatives," Baxter said. "But tell me this. One of the first things

you told me when I landed here was that everything important on Kryl is done according to the divine will of Krylla. Now it seems to me that when you tamper with the number of years your god gave you to live you're not following his will at all . . . Did I say something wrong?"

Ané smiled again. "No. I didn't answer at once because I was thinking of a way to make that point clear to you. Picture a banquet table, Baxter, at which everyone is given an equal amount of food. Will the host be angry if some do not wish to eat all that has been set before them? Will he object if some are very hungry, and come to an amicable agreement to share their neighbors' portions? I think not. A certain amount of food is given; a certain amount of life is given. It can be divided in any way the people choose. Krylla does not care."

"And it works?"

"Yes, it works."

Baxter shook his head. "It still sounds utterly crazy to me. What's to prevent one Kryllan from holding up another and making him sign over a certain number of years to him by threats of violence?"

Ané frowned. "I said 'an amicable agreement,' Baxter. No one can be 'held up,' as you put it."

"But still—"

"On Earth, perhaps," said Ané disdainfully. "Not on Kryl."

"Or else," Baxter persisted, "somebody could sell more time than he had. A man could get rich that way."

"Impossible. He would die."

"But there must be some way a man could make himself a little money—I mean a few extra credits. Tags could be juggled, or forged. I'll bet there's a black market in tags that you boys don't know anything about. Now I *know* I said something wrong."

To Baxter's surprise Ané laughed. "You have an amazing mind, Baxter. What would be the purpose of juggling or forging tags? If 'black market' means what I think it does, then you can be very sure there is none on Kryl. The idea is inconceivable to us, because the thing itself is impossible."

"Now, Ané, don't tell me *nobody* has ever tried anything tricky?"

Ané's eyes grew suddenly cold. "If anybody did," he said, "he was severely punished. If you plan to live here, Baxter, as you have expressed a desire to do, I advise you not to continue thinking along such lines. Do I make myself clear?"

Baxter nodded. "Very clear. Don't worry, Ané. I want to stay on Kryl. I like it here."

Ané's eyes warmed a little. "You are welcome," he said. "We have always welcomed strangers—although we don't seek them out. We have had space travel for centuries, Baxter, but we never use it, except to go to one of our own moons. Two of them are pleasure

resorts, you may remember, and one is for—well, exiles. You have traveled a long way to get here."

"It took a space warp to accomplish it," confirmed Baxter, "and I know damned well I can't ever go back again."

"I have the impression," Ané said, looking hard at him, "that you don't want to go back."

Baxter flushed. "You're right about that. I had a little—trouble at home."

"I thought so," said Ané. "That doesn't matter here, if you obey our laws."

"Oh, I'll obey them!" Baxter said quickly, and smiled. "And if I do, will I live to reach my hundredth birthday?"

Ané looked at him gravely. "You were brought here by Krylla," he said. "Perhaps you have already been given Krylla's unpurchasable gift of life."

"You don't really believe that?"

Ané shrugged. "Who knows? If you prefer the scientific approach—there are cosmic rays here that never touched your body on Earth. Our tests have proved conclusively that you are constructed much like us. This radiation that has shaped our destiny may therefore make you as we are."

"There's one certain way to find out," Baxter said lightly. "I'm thirty-six by Earth time, thirty-nine by Kryllan. Wait around for sixty-one of our years—or sixty-four of yours."

"I regret," said Ané courteously, "that I have but fifty years more to live."

"Perhaps I'll sell you some of mine," said Baxter. "Make me an offer."

Ané's green eyes blazed. "A foreigner does not say such things," he said in a furious voice. "You are making a mockery of sacred matters."

"All right," said Baxter hastily. "I spoke in jest."

Ané's eyes still smouldered. "Krylla is not mocked!"

"I said I was sorry," Baxter said sullenly.

"Yes . . ." Ané relented as suddenly as he had grown angry. "Let it be forgotten between us. Have you seen enough for today?"

"I've seen where I want to work," said Baxter. "I want to be an engraver. I've had experience . . ."

On Ané's recommendation and political authority as a priest of Krylla Baxter was enrolled in the Engravers' Guild, and such was his aptitude and perseverance that he was shortly advanced to the grade of Assistant, and then to Associate, and finally to Master.

Baxter was an expert workman, and so eager to learn new skills that he soon became the most accomplished worker in the entire Office of Engraving. He moved diligently through all the annexes, and learned how to print everything that needed to be printed on Kryl, including new tags, corrections, and credits. The acquisition and

mastery of all this knowledge took him three years.

During his progress through the Office he acquired, without bothering to mention the theft to anyone, inks, dies, plates, stamps and special tools—also a supply of heavy credit paper, and a hundred blank tags with accompanying chains. These he secreted in his clothes and was able without any difficulty to walk undetected with the purloined material down the shimmering steps and out the unguarded Office gates.

It took hardly any of his skill as a burglar to accomplish the theft, and Baxter hoped that when the time was ripe he would be equally successful in using his considerable talents as a forger.

He had by this time become accepted almost as a native by everyone in the town. The Kryllans took to calling him Bax, a name more like their own. They stopped by to exchange pleasantries with him on their way to the bath, the tavern or the temple, and even tried to find him a wife. But Baxter had no intention of marrying. He was not precisely sure what kind of progeny a mixture of Earth genes and Kryllan genes would produce, and he dared not ask a girl to forego the marvelous pageantry of the birth season. Besides, women were curious, and Baxter had things hidden in his house which no wife could be permitted to find.

Baxter waited one more year, and then he started his enterprises. He was by this time in charge of a complete section of the Office. There were fifty men and women under him, and it was only natural that they should come to him with their troubles. Even in an idyllic society people had troubles, as Baxter, with his cynical turn of mind, was not at all surprised to learn.

There was Val, the pretty redhead at the tracing machine—Val who was in love with Moru, who in turn was in love with another girl, Sété. Val was wretchedly unhappy, and she thought that some new clothes might help. If they failed to attract Moru's attention they would at least make Sété furious with envy. Unfortunately, Val had used all her credits for the period—she was, in fact, living on the good-natured charity of her sister—and there was such a darling dress in the shop! If Bax could advance her just a little—

Baxter looked grave. Surely she knew that it was against the rules. Still, in the cause of romance, it could perhaps be arranged. "I am a very sentimental man," said Baxter.

Of course there would have to be a slight charge for the inconvenience. Val was surprised but Baxter quickly convinced her of the reasonableness of the demand and she cheerfully agreed to pay him ten per cent on the loan. Baxter gave her some of the credits he had been carefully forging in the cellar of his house. She passed them without trouble—convincing

proof that he had not lost his touch.

Val spread the word about the advance, and soon there were others. Baxter was presently creditor to half the section, and ran a kind of pawnshop on the side. Between the interest on his investments and the counterfeit credits which he cautiously distributed from time to time, he began to accumulate a growing hoard of credits which he hid under a loose stone in his cellar. He was careful to keep only good money, which he acquired in exchange for the credits he made himself.

Next Baxter started the office pools. Naturally enough, the Kryllans were great gamblers, but nobody had yet thought of laying bets on the serial numbers of tags or credits, or the number of drinking cups that would be used in a week—Baxter bribed the janitor to count them—or any of a dozen other things which Baxter thought up. As manager of the pools and holder of the bets he took a percentage of everything that was paid in and everything that was paid out. Soon the hoard in the cellar required several stones to conceal it.

The Kryllans were perfectly satisfied. They were having a wonderful time, and when workers were transferred from Baxter's section, as occasionally happened, they were utterly miserable and begged to return.

"I am glad you are doing so well," Ané said. "I hear great things of you." He had dropped in to visit Baxter, as he frequently did, and the two of them sat sipping kando on Baxter's little balcony, and watching the three moons riding low in the green evening sky.

Lyra, the largest, had always attracted Baxter's particular interest because Ané had told him it was the prison satellite—the place where the misfits and the malcontents were exiled. There were not very many, Ané said, but Baxter had never ceased to wonder about them. He had a fellow feeling for misfits and malcontents.

"I can't complain," he said cautiously.

"Your staff is very happy," Ané went on. "They have an exceptional spirit of loyalty and devotion to you."

"More kando?" asked Baxter politely.

"Thank you, no. I understand you have introduced certain—innovations—into your section. They have become very popular, have they not?"

Baxter said nothing.

"I mean the games, of course," Ané continued tranquilly. "Most ingenious."

Baxter looked at him keenly. "Nobody objects, do they?"

"Why should anyone object?" Ané appeared surprised. "The workers are happy, and you are happy. I believe there is a handsome profit in those games, Bax."

Baxter flushed. "I take a small

percentage for my trouble. Wages, you might say."

Ané smiled. "You might. You are a clever rascal, Bax. You will soon be buying a villa in the country."

Baxter, who was contemplating doing just that, made a deprecating gesture.

Ané's smile faded. "There is just one thing, Bax. About the credits—"

Baxter froze. He hoped he did not look as pale as he felt.

"Don't you think," Ané continued, staring intently into his kando glass, "that a charge of ten credits for a loan of a hundred is just a little excessive?"

Baxter breathed again. "I—I hadn't thought so, Ané. It's the usual rate on Earth."

"But a little high for Kryl," said Ané decisively. "We have never had any charge at all, you know."

Baxter managed to smile. "Such generosity is unbusinesslike, if I may say so, Ané . . . Oh, by the way, have the priests decided on the new murals yet for the temple?"

"There is the question of expense, Bax," Ané said calmly, "as *you* very well know. And if you are attempting to suggest what I think you are, the answer is no. And I ought to have you punished for attempting to bribe a priest of Krylla."

Baxter widened his eyes. "Me? Would I do a thing like that?"

Ané looked at him, and smiled.

Baxter sighed. "How much interest can I charge, Ané?"

"Five per cent," said Ané firmly.

"Seven?" persisted Baxter hopefully.

"Five."

Baxter spread his hands. "All right . . . Now surely you'll have more kando, Ané?"

"Thank you, Bax, I believe I will . . ."

Baxter did not make any more counterfeit credits. He had had a bad scare. He did not waste time brooding, however, over his diminution of income. Something had happened which set him off in an entirely new direction. It was risky —but it was a beautiful scheme! He could not resist it.

Lué, a handsome dark girl who mended life tag chains, came to him one day in tears. She had been corresponding with a friend of a friend who lived in another district. Lué adored writing letters and had pen pals the length and breadth of Kryl, and now she had fallen in love with her handsomest correspondent, and he with her. He had asked her to visit his family, and she was wild to go.

"I know he'll ask me to marry him," she said between sobs, "and I w-want to."

"Well, then," asked Baxter reasonably, "what's the trouble?"

"I told him I'm eighteen because he's only twenty. But I'm really twenty-six—and when he finds out I've lied to him I'm afraid he won't

forgive me or want to marry me!"

"How can he find out if you don't tell him?" he asked, puzzled.

"By the life tag, of course—during the ceremony when we dip them in the ceremonial wine." She looked at him with mournful hope. "Help me, Bax. You're so clever. You have so many ideas."

Baxter returned her gaze thoughtfully. "Well . . . let's see. Come back tomorrow, Lué, and perhaps we can work something out."

What Baxter worked out was an exquisitely forged life tag engraved with the name of Lué, aged eighteen. When she saw it she gasped with mingled horror and delight. "Oh, Bax, where did you get it? It's beautiful!"

"Never mind where I got it," he replied. "Do you want it?"

"Of course I want it! Only—only I'm scared." She frowned. "It's wrong, Bax. Krylla wouldn't like it."

"Ah!" Baxter scoffed. "Do you think Krylla would begrudge you a little innocent vanity?"

Her brow cleared slightly. "I—I guess he wouldn't." Then abruptly her eyes filled with tears. "But it will all come out eventually—when I die."

Baxter gave a shout of laughter. "My dear girl, do you think anybody is going to care by then? Women on my planet lie about their ages every waking hour."

She looked at him wonderingly. "They do?"

"Sure they do, and nobody gives a hoot. Go on, take it," and he held the life tag out to her, swinging it enticingly on its chain.

Quickly and possessively her hand closed around it. "You don't think I'll get caught?"

"Why should you?" Baxter demanded impatiently. "Nobody will come around and check the records, will they?—jealous mother-in-law, or anybody like that?"

Lué was shocked. "A mother-in-law would *never* do such a thing!"

"Well, then."

She smiled with sudden excitement. "I'll take it, Bax! How much is it?"

He hesitated, quickly calculating the amount of her salary and how much of it she had probably saved. "One thousand credits," he said.

She gasped. "Oh, Bax, that's too much! Can't you make it five hundred?"

Baxter sighed. "I'm afraid I had all my trouble for nothing. Seven-fifty."

She let the tears come into her eyes again. "Bax, be reasonable! I have to buy my wedding clothes. Seven hundred is all I have."

"Seven-fifty," he said inexorably, and then, as she still hesitated, he reached for the tag. "All right—hand it over."

"Never mind," she said quickly. "I'll pay. Bax, you're a robber, but I love you!"

Though he had pledged her to secrecy Bax knew very well that Lué would find the secret too good

to keep from her twenty or thirty closest friends. Sure enough, he soon had other requests from women who wished, for one reason or another, to be thought younger than their years. Baxter's hoard began to grow rapidly.

He blessed the traits of courtesy and good taste which prohibited Kryllans from questioning the figures on a life tag. The tag was usually worn hidden, anyhow, unless the wearer had adorned it with jewels and wished to display it for purposes of vanity. And of course —except in the case of Lué, and Lué was safely gone—the true life tags were always used for official or ceremonial occasions.

It was on this traditionally unalterable fact that Baxter relied for his defense when the whole story should come out. For he knew that it would come out. He knew that he was doing something dangerous, as he had known from the beginning, and he was sure that he would be caught. But he could not seem to put a stop to his knavery.

"It's the way I am," he told himself philosophically. "I can no more help being what I am than Ané can, with his ridiculous worship of Krylla."

Although women of all countries, and presumably all planets, are supposed not to be able to keep a secret, the women of Kryl kept this one from their men for a surprisingly long time. The first leak became apparent when Sati came to Baxter's house one night, looking as guilty as if he had just murdered his mother.

Sati was a retired engraver who had left the Office long before Baxter's arrival, but Baxter had made his acquaintance at the baths. He was well over a hundred years old, having made several life purchases at various times, but he looked by Earth standards scarcely fifty. According to Sati's tag he had but one more year to live, and he was desperately worried.

"I don't want to die," he explained with despairing bitterness. "I have had such a splendid life and I'm still hale and vigorous. Surely my body has another twenty years of life to give me. But I can't go to the Life Bank; I just don't have the credits. Oh, they've been very good about it. The last time the priests even found a donor for me who was willing to take a cut rate. Poor fellow, he was mad —going to commit suicide anyway."

Baxter was bewildered. "But nobody runs out of money on Kryl," he said. "At least, not for long."

Sati smiled sadly. "I'm a gambler, Bax. Gambling has been a consuming passion with me all my life. No matter how much money I had I would gamble it all away."

Baxter looked at him thoughtfully. "You always lose, hm?"

Sati nodded mournfully. "Always. And I have finally exhausted all of my resources."

"But why come to me? Do you

want me to lend you some money?"

"Oh, no, Bax. I could never pay you back."

Baxter had never ceased to marvel at the honesty of these people, and he marveled now. "Then why did you come?"

"Some of the women have life tags that are not—that make them appear younger than they are," Sati said with delicacy.

"Sure," said Baxter bluntly. "I make 'em. But you don't actually think I can make anybody younger, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Sati quickly. "I just thought that since you are so clever, and have thought of so many—well, unusual things—you might be able to think of a way to help me."

Baxter laughed. "You and Lué! I don't know, Sati, I really don't know. I'll tell you what. Come back tomorrow and perhaps I can do something. But don't count on it," he added hastily, as Sati's fine eyes filled with tears of gratitude. "I can't promise . . ."

"What it boils down to is this," Baxter said the next evening, as he and Sati sipped their kando on the little balcony. "I certainly can't find you another life seller if the priests can't. But I have an idea. How much money do you have, Sati?"

"Until the next period, seven hundred credits, and a house in the country that's too big to sell." Sati looked hopefully at Baxter. "Would you like to buy it, Bax?"

"I might. What's the value of the house?"

"Fifty thousand credits."

Baxter whistled. "You're sitting on a thing like that, and yet you can't get credits?"

"I tell you it's too big. Big houses have gone out of style."

"Couldn't you get a mortgage on it?"

"A what?"

Baxter sighed and explained to Sati exactly what a mortgage was.

Sati brightened. "Would you consider taking a mortgage, Bax?"

"I was thinking of that," Baxter replied slowly. "I want a house in the country, and I would prefer a big one. But I couldn't afford to let you have more than five thousand credits. At the Life Bank five thousand would buy five years."

"Five would help," Sati said, "but my heart was set on twenty."

"What about this," said Baxter abruptly. "You give me your house outright and I give you twenty years of my life—in a strictly private transaction."

Sati grew pale. "But you can't!" he whispered. "You're not a Kryllan. You don't even have a life tag."

"How do you know I can't?" demanded Baxter. "I've been living here for more than five years, haven't I? If that doesn't make me a Kryllan I don't know what does. In every country on Earth," he continued, inventing recklessly, "you automatically become a citizen after a single year's residence.

"You do?" Sati asked, amazed.

"Sure you do."

"But this isn't the same thing at all!" Sati said fearfully. "It's a question of genes, and radiation, and—and Krylla."

"I know," said Baxter eagerly. "But I've been exposed to all that for over five years now. Doesn't it seem likely to you that I've become —truly a Kryllan?"

"I don't know." Sati was still doubtful. "You might not have twenty years to give. It might not work at all."

"That's a chance you'll have to take. Think of it, Sati: five years surely—or twenty years in all probability. Where's your gambling spirit?"

Sati's cheeks blushed and his eyes began to sparkle. "Done! I'll take the twenty years! I have a feeling that this time I shall not lose."

Baxter beamed at him. He had wanted Sati's house very much.

The private transaction was brief. It consisted merely of a statement of intent by both parties, together with certain prayers to Krylla in which Sati scrupulously prompted Baxter, and the drinking of kando in lieu of ceremonial wine. After it was over Baxter gave Sati the forged life tag which he had prepared in advance, and Sati departed, ostensibly for a visit to a son who lived in another district. It was understood that he would not be coming back.

"I shall be sorry to leave my home," Sati said soberly to Baxter, "but since I cannot turn in my life tag for correction, it is out of the question to continue living here. After all, I can draw my credits anywhere—and there will always be games to play!"

Somewhere on his journey Sati talked, and a small procession of people began to come to Baxter: old men and women who for some reason or another could not legitimately buy life from the Life Bank. In return for things which Baxter desired, he sold them his own spurious allotment, usually in small amounts, for they were timid and poor. The transactions went on for six months without incident.

And then Ané came to see him.

As soon as Baxter saw his face, he knew that the time of judgment had come. Ané looked pale and cold, and his eyes glittered. He carried a small jeweled box, which he handled delicately.

"Come in and sit down," Baxter said. "Will you have kando?"

"Nothing, thank you," said Ané with deadly courtesy. "And I will come in, but I will not sit down."

Baxter summoned courtesy to his aid. "You haven't been here as often as I could have wished," he said. "I'm glad to see you."

"This will be my last visit," said Ané, and stepped inside. He put the box on a table and transfixed Baxter with a freezing look. "Bax this time you've transgressed unforgivably."

Baxter could not meet those

large, accusing eyes. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Don't you?" Ané's mouth curled. "The games we tolerated, and the loans, and the forged credits—"

Baxter gasped. "You knew about those?"

Ané's smile was contemptuous. "We have removed all your counterfeits from our supply. It rather amused us that you should have valued the credits so much. We did not even stop you from making false life tags for so many silly women."

"Oh, no!" Baxter cried. "You never knew about those!"

Ané laughed. "Do you take us for fools? We let you alone, to see how far you would go. You had not yet done anything that really mattered, you see, and we—I, at least—hoped you would not. To my everlasting shame and regret, I liked you, Bax."

"And I liked you, Ané," Baxter said inadequately. "I—I wish you would sit down."

Ané said scornfully, "You may sit down, if your knees tremble. I shall stand . . . You have gone too far, Bax. You have desecrated something that you do not even understand. You have taken a sacred mystery and made a mockery of it." His face twisted. "You—you disgust me!"

"I can understand how you feel, Ané," Baxter said humbly. "But I swear to you I didn't desecrate anything."

"How can you dare to say that!" cried Ané passionately. "We know about Sati and the others."

Baxter gave a long sigh. "All right, so you know. I guess it wouldn't help to say I'm sorry."

"No," Ané said, "it would not help in the least."

"I was afraid it wouldn't. Maybe you'll let me explain though. You see, Ané, I'm a swindler. I've always been a swindler. Agile knavery is my profession. It's the way I think—the way I like to live. I ran away from Earth because the police were after me for forgery. They would have caught me, too, if I hadn't hit the space warp, or whatever it was. And then I met you people—you nice, friendly, trusting, innocent people. Are you listening, Ané?"

"I'm listening," said Ané.

"Well, it was a perfect situation for me. You just stood up and begged to be taken advantage of—and I'm a swindler. About Sati and the rest—poor Sati, he lost his last gamble!— I told them I had life to sell, but I knew I hadn't. All I did was *cheat* them, Ané. I didn't desecrate anything."

"I don't see the distinction," Ané said bitterly. "Krylla is the Giver of Life, and the transfer of His gift is a sacrament that—" He stopped abruptly, as if his voice had gone out of control. He was trembling.

Baxter looked at him wonderingly. "You really believe that, don't you?" he said softly. "And all the

time I thought you and the other priests were just—well, that it was a racket you had, to keep the people happy so they'd let you run things. I'm sorry, Ané, but that's the way my mind works."

"It doesn't matter," Ané said wearily. "Get out your books."

"My what?"

"Your ledgers, your records. You must have kept lists of the men and women you sold your life to. Get them out!"

Baxter looked at Ané's face and said no more. He went to the desk in the corner, unlocked it and brought out a large leather book. Silently he opened it to a page near the middle, and offered it to Ané.

"You sold fifty-two years," Ané announced after a moment.

"Did I? Is that what it adds up to?"

"Precisely. How old are you, Bax?"

"Why, you know how old I am," Baxter said in a bewildered voice. "I'm forty-one by Earth time, nearly forty-five by yours."

"I was just making sure," said Ané. "Bax, sell me ten years."

Baxter's mouth fell open. "What did you say?"

"I said sell me ten years."

Baxter looked bewildered. "But whichever way you count it that would make—"

"Yes," agreed Ané.

Baxter went white. "But Ané, suppose—"

Ané's smile was terrible. "You said you didn't believe in Krylla's sacraments, Bax. You said you only swindled people."

Baxter could feel beads of sweat on his forehead. "Ané, what are you trying to do to me!"

"I am just making sure," Ané said bleakly. "We have to know, you see. And all those people you cheated: *they* have to know. They are being terribly punished, Bax. The uncertainty they must feel—the tormented wondering—is the most dreadful thing you could have done to them. Some of them came to us without waiting for us to seek them out. Our people are, as you said, innocent. Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" Baxter asked in a strangled voice.

"For the sale, of course. I think we'll make it a private transaction. It will be quicker."

"You can't force me to do this!" Baxter cried suddenly. "You told me that yourself once."

Ané's eyes were green stones. "No, I can't force you. But I think you will do it, Bax, because you are not a coward."

Baxter tried to smile. "The hell I'm not! I'm so scared I can hardly stand up . . ." He moved restlessly about the little room. Ané did not speak. "All right," Baxter said at last. "I'll do it. You knew I would, didn't you? But will you tell me something first, Ané?"

Ané merely looked at him.

"I won't ask what will happen if I die, because I don't care. But if I live—"

For the first time Ané's face showed compassion. "You will be exiled, Bax. We shall send you to Lyra for the rest of your life. We cannot have you here. You are—corrupt."

Baxter's laugh was almost a sob. "A fine choice you give me! Well, let's get on with it."

Ané opened the jeweled box reverently and took out a flask and two goblets, beautifully carved. Into each goblet he poured a measure of wine from the flask and set them on a low table.

"Kneel!" he commanded Baxter, and they both knelt before the table.

"Repeat my words after me," Ané said. "It must be done exactly. Do you understand?"

Baxter nodded. "I've done it before."

"Krylla, Giver of Life," Ané began, and Baxter looked at him in surprise. His voice had utterly changed, had become deeper, softer, and vibrant with emotion. Just as Baxter thought this, Ané spoke to him fiercely, and his tone was momentarily sharp again. "Repeat after me!"

"Krylla, Giver of Life," Baxter said hastily. His own voice was faint.

"We kneel in Thy presence to share Thy most precious gift."

"We kneel in Thy presence to share Thy most precious gift."

"As Thou has commanded in the Holy Book."

"As Thou has commanded in the Holy Book."

"I, Ané, do lovingly receive—Say, 'I, Bax, do lovingly give'—"

"I, Bax, do lovingly give—"

"—ten years of Thy life, to Thine honor and glory."

"—ten years of Thy life, to Thine honor and glory."

Ané reached for the goblets and handed one to Baxter. His fingers moved over the golden carving with love. "Now say, 'I drink, my brother,'" he commanded softly, "and do it."

"I drink, my brother," said Baxter, and drank.

"I drink, my brother," said Ané, and drained the goblet.

Baxter's hands were shaking so badly that he nearly dropped the cup. As he replaced it on the table he stole a glance at the other's face. He drew in his breath sharply, for Ané's face was beautiful.

Ané turned to Baxter. "Now take my hands. Say, 'I believe. Krylla, I believe.'"

Ané's hands were warm and strong. Baxter found himself clinging to them. He could hardly speak. "I believe," he said. "Krylla—I—believe."

"I believe," said Ané in that deep, gentle voice. "Krylla—I believe!"

They remained kneeling for what seemed to Baxter like hours. At last Ané spoke. He sounded very tired. "That is all."

Baxter looked at him, dazed. *"All?"*

Ané got up from his knees. He looked exhausted. "It was all for nothing. You are no Kryllan."

Strength flowed back to Baxter's legs. "I told you, Ané."

Ané nodded slowly. He was putting the goblets delicately back into the box. "Yes, you told me." He held the box in his hands and moved toward the door. "Someone will come tomorrow to help you make arrangements to go to Lyra."

"Won't you come?" Baxter asked him.

Ané shook his head. "No, you will not see me again. Good-bye, Bax."

"Good-bye, Ané." Baxter felt strangely bereft. "I wish—never mind."

Ané looked at him with eyes dark with fatigue. "I wish it, too. Good-bye, my brother."

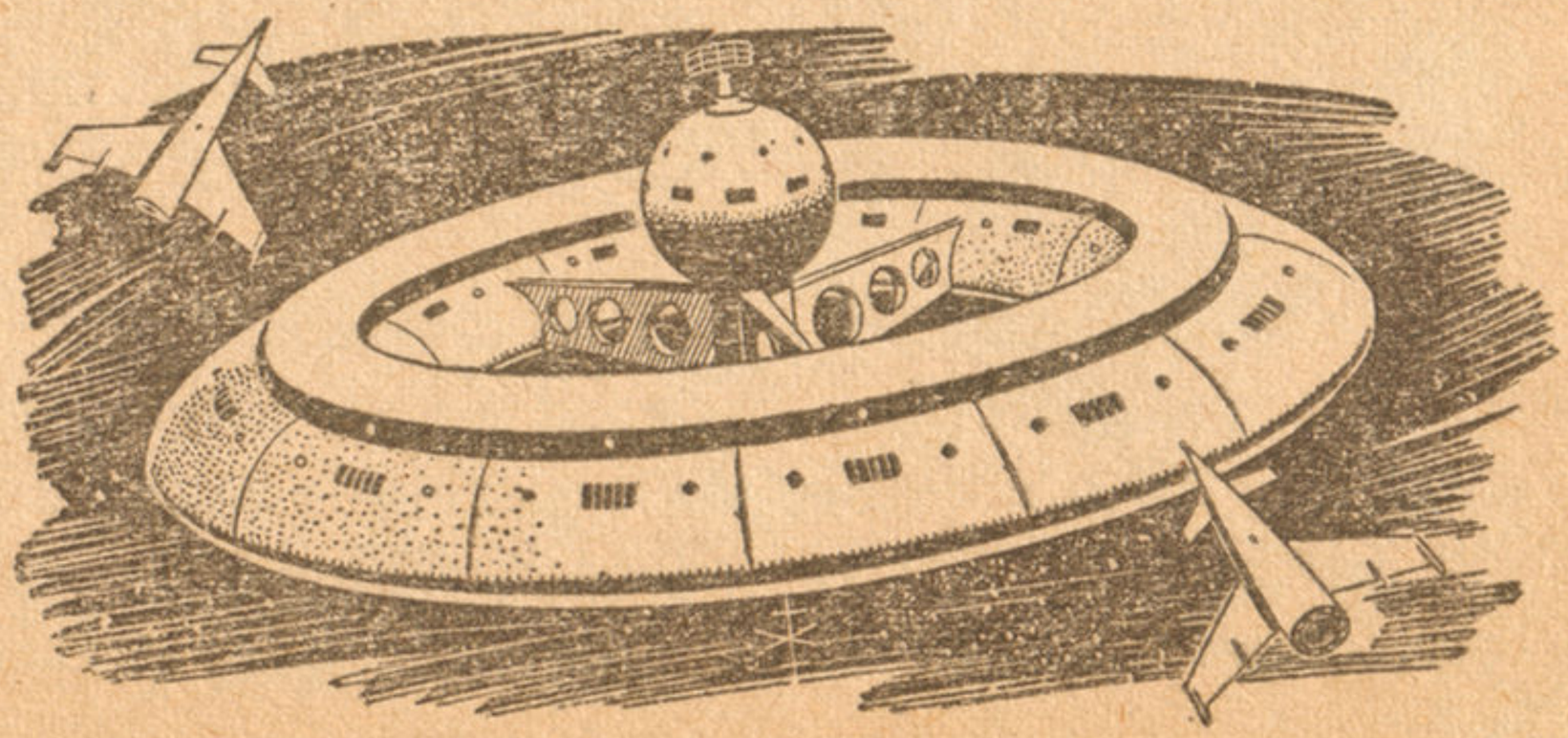
Baxter stood and watched him go.

After a moment he took a deep breath, and looked around his room. He thought of all the treasured belongings in his house. Some he would have to return, of course, but the rest—he wondered how much of the rest he would be allowed to take with him to Lyra. With reviving interest he pondered expedients.

"I'll take my engraver's tools," he said aloud. "Not the ones I stole—they'll make me give all those back. But I'll take the ones I brought for my job. Of course I'll take the plates if I can, and the life tags I have left. Where can I hide them?"

He moved to the window and looked out at Lyra, riding low and serene in the green evening sky. "It won't be so bad," he said with quickening excitement. "A new place, new people—probably very interesting people, quite unlike the Kryllans here, more of a challenge. And if I don't like Lyra, there are ways, there must be ways—"

He lingered at the window. Far up the wide street he could still see Ané walking, tall and proud. Slowly Baxter turned away. In his mind was the problem of manufacturing, between now and morning, some kind of suitcase with a false bottom. But in his eyes was the sting of tears—he who had not cried since he was five years old.



witch hunt

by . . . Len Guttridge

Surely without life there could be no intelligence, no serious threat to man's conquest of the stars. Was Slade then quite mad?

SENATOR TILSON scowled in angry resentment. "Just answer the question," he admonished, "with a straight 'yes' or 'no.'"

The man before and slightly below him inclined his head. He seemed impaled by the beams of the floodlights and the stares of a thousand eyes. The TV cameras clicked dispassionately.

He touched the sweat on his face and looked up. "No . . . it was not life," he groaned. "It was something far more—" He shuddered convulsively.

"Something you saw?" demanded Tilson.

"Not exactly."

"Something you heard then?"

"In a way I could hear it. But not as I hear you now."

"And you say it moved?"

"It did, yes. I've told you it did."

The Senator slumped in his chair under the huge Earth flag and spread his arms appealingly. He addressed the light-spangled ceiling.

"Man, if you heard it, and it moved, then it existed. And if it

---

Reason and will are so inextricably associated with biological life as we know it on Earth that it is difficult to conceive of a completely disembodied intelligence. Even ghosts are usually envisaged as clinging to a tenuous lifeline leading back to the physical. But suppose a man of daring were to draw a complex mathematical figure and affirm: "This too is alive!" Could anyone refute him? In this utterly chilling yarn Len Guttridge gives that startling idea a spin, in Jovian thunderbolt fashion.

---

had substance and form and movement it most assuredly lived."

Impressed by Tilson's dubious logic a few spectators applauded. The Senator adopted a more conciliatory attitude.

"Look, Slade," he said almost leniently, "you've been stumping the country for months claiming that the first planet we've ever reached is already inhabited. Now what kind of talk is that? People listen to you and the other cranks because you were on those early exploratory missions. You were just a handful of greaseball crew members. But human nature being what it is, people listen. And pretty soon they'll start doubting the official reports which your own officers compiled.

"Hell," Tilson flashed a boyish look of apology to the TV cameras, "are you deliberately suggesting that your own captains are liars, and their reports rigged?"

The man Slade closed his eyes. Wearily he said, "It happened to only a few of us. We weren't believed. The official reports were based on majority evidence. And it wasn't *life,* as I've already told you. Not even a very unusual form of life." He shuddered. "Maybe you ought to go out there, and see for yourself."

The Senator turned indignantly to his Committee counsel. "Hear that? We should go out there."

He swung back to Slade. "If your crazy conspiracy is permitted to go on unchecked we'll have built our last spaceship. You'll have succeeded in sabotaging our every attempt at commercial interplanetary travel."

His eyes narrowed. "I've been patient with you, Slade. You've evaded every single one of my questions. Where has it got you? The facts are already clearly established. Ever since you left Space Exploration Service you've been engaged in constant sabotaging activity. You've spread fear. Not only you, but hundreds of ex-SES men. Only yours is an exceptionally bad case."

Slade said nothing.

Tilson glared down at him, and continued. "Earth expeditions have been landing on our first mission objective for half a decade. Those planets should be flourishing colonies by now, centers of commerce, outposts of our global way of life. But we're still making no headway despite repeated SES reports that no form of life exists on them. Think, man, all that virgin territory waiting for—er—enlightened exploitation."

His voice thickened. "Central Government continues to withhold sanction for free space enterprise for just one reason. You space witches have been at least partially successful with your lunatic propaganda."

A mutter of approval rose from the spectators. They turned to one another, nodding their heads. Space witches seemed a peculiarly apt and damning name. Trust Senator Til-

son to find the one right word for characters like Slade.

There weren't many of them. A few hundred, at most. But even a small percentage of SES veterans could trip the march of progress with their vague mouthings of unnameable horrors from beyond the sky.

And when you cornered a space witch, what did you get? There's *something,* but it's not life. Yes, it's harmful. No, it's not tangible. Life is not life, something is nothing. Fair is foul and foul is fair. Witch jargon. Space witch jargon. But the Senator had these babies figured dead to rights. Trust Senator Tilson.

"That's why we subpoenaed you," the Senator was saying. "Central Government legislation forbids interference with progress. It's my belief you are doing just that. Why, there's even a crazy rumor that these space bogies of yours have endowed you with the power to call on them whenever you need them."

"Against our will, heaven help us!" Slade covered his face with his hands.

The Senator narrowed his eyes and thrust his head forward. "Interference with progress. I could quote you ninety-five relevant statutes. You must have broken one in there somewhere."

There was instant, loud laughter from the public gallery.

The Senator gave a tolerant tap with his gavel.

Slade looked up. He studied his inquisitor for some minutes, then said slowly, "How can I convince you without—?"

"You don't have to convince me," the Senator cut in. "You have to convince the court of final appeal." He pointed to the gallery and a tremor entered his voice. "The people.

"The people have a right to know the facts," he added solemnly. A spirit of near-piety touched some of the watchers and several lowered their eyes. But two of the TV technicians exchanged winks and smiled.

Slade said, "There are realities you can't describe."

"Try."

Slade was silent.

"The Committee directs you to try."

"We've been over all this before."

"In closed session, yes. But the people have a right—"

"To know the facts. You've just made that plain. And some have the urge to bait a witch."

The Senator's face darkened. "Proceed, Slade. About Mason. Tell us exactly what happened when he died."

"Mason." Slade brushed a hand across his brow. "Mason was a colleague in Third Navigator Unit. He was some yards up in front when it happened. He screamed and I ran to him. His limbs jerked. He seemed to be having a convulsion. Catalepsy, I thought. After a

minute he said, 'It's behind you, Slade. A toad. It's big, Slade. Purple. It wants me!' Then he didn't say anymore.

"But, don't you see," Slade cried, "It wasn't really a toad. Only to Mason's eyes it had to manifest itself in a familiar shape. A horrible one, but familiar."

"The toad was Mason's familiar? Is that what you're trying to say? Did you actually see it yourself?"

"No, but two others did. Back near the ship. They saw it clearly."

"Yes." The Senator nodded grimly. "Sitwell and Jenks, I believe. More space witches."

A Committee counselman was tugging at his arm. Heads came together whispering. When the Senator looked at Slade again a faint triumphant smirk touched his mouth. "We've served subpoenas on Sitwell and Jenks. Jenks will appear before this Committee next Monday."

The Senator waited, savoring the chill expectancy which had descended on the chamber. Slade frowned.

"And Sitwell?" he asked.

"Sitwell hanged himself this morning."

Excitement swirled through the chamber and the Senator rapped his gavel. "The case for the purple toad seems to be dwindling," he said mildly. "You didn't see—"

"I felt it." A hardness had settled on Slade's face. He sat erect, in an attitude of fresh purpose. But the Senator seemed not to notice. He stared straight before him as if lost in contemplation of his present audience and the other, vaster one beyond the cameras.

"You felt it," he murmured. "You mean it *touched* you?"

"No. But it was there."

"There," repeated the Senator. The taunt was replaced by simulated anger. "There, there, *there*. It was a form of life, wasn't it? It was life on a neighbor world, in the face of irrefutable proof of life's non-existence."

"Not a form of *life.*" Slade's lips were white. "I have never said it was alive. You cannot make me say it."

The Senator yawned at the TV cameras and brandished a document. "This is the casualty report from the SES expedition of which Slade was a member. There were four fatalities including Mason. They are all listed as accidental."

Patiently, he glanced down at Slade. "And the big black hen. That's your pet familiar, isn't it, Slade? Tell the Committee about the big black hen."

Slade was silent.

"Then I will. On your second trip out the expedition lost two men. You came back to Earth locked in your ship's brig, gibbering about a great black hen which walked all over your unfortunate comrades."

"But this report," Tilson held the document up, looking about him with an expression of mock surprise, "says both men were killed by a rock fall. No mention of

black hens. How about it, Slade? Do you still think you were in a barnyard?"

Something like outrage brightened Slade's eyes. "Be careful," he breathed. "In heaven's name be careful."

The Senator shrugged. "Of what, Slade? Tell me. Tell *them*." He gestured at the public gallery. "And these," a wave at the cameras. "Tell your unseen audience what we have to fear out there."

"You want me to confess I've been warning everyone against the existence of life on our first mission objective, don't you?" Slade's eyes glittered. "And that's a criminal offence, isn't it, because Authority says there can't be any life at all out there. Well, Authority's right." He gazed around the chamber. "What is out there ruled our planet once. Then *life* came to challenge it. Life evolved and grew strong on Earth, though the enemy is still with us, waging a constant guerilla warfare. It scores hourly victories all over the planet. But in the great and timeless battle, life prevails and is gaining."

The Senator stared in tight-lipped silence. The assembly in the chamber shifted restlessly.

"Out there on the other planets, the great Opponent of life still rules. It is determined not to suffer the defeats which it has met with here. With no life there to challenge its supremacy it takes no action against us. But since man threatens to bring life to the domain of lifelessness, it is on guard. In a million terrifying forms the Arch-Enemy of life is on guard out there."

Abruptly he stopped. His head tilted curiously.

The Senator blinked as if he'd just awakened from a repulsive nightmare. "Are you finished?" he asked. He withdrew another document from the pile at his elbow and held it aloft.

"Psychiatric statement on Slade," he announced briskly. "Issued by SES on his discharge. It's pretty long, but it summarizes Slade's mental condition as being quite unstable. It makes frequent reference to his, quote—extreme hallucinatory condition—unquote. It cites two instances of Slade's allegedly having seen a huge black hen hovering outside the psychiatrist's window. And it recommends his suitability only for civilian posts of minor responsibility."

The Senator turned to Slade. "The record of this Committee's investigations into your sabotaging activities will be sent to Central Government for whatever action they decide to take. Whether your dissemination of lies and fears is due to a disordered mind or to a desire for publicity will be for them to determine. I hope they'll take steps to put you away. You'll serve as an example to other space witches. And if they persist in their attempts to interfere with our destined march across space they'll get the same medicine."

The spectators clapped vigorously. Some cheered. A cloud passed the windows but nobody noticed. The Senator cleared his throat, shuffled his papers. As the uproar subsided Slade's voice rose in bitter challenge.

"That's what you want, isn't it, Senator? The bearers of warning must be crushed, the witches burned so that the greedy men can range unhampered beyond the sky. How much will you get from the commercial space lines for removing this last threat to their expansion? How much from the real estate lords once the soil of Mars and Jupiter has been carved and sliced and parceled out to be profited from?

"What is your promised cut from the super-theatre moguls, and the TV tycoons, already eager to drug the masses, who'll be out there gouging the land for Earth's industrialists? And what will you get from the industrialists, oh Senator-in-the-pocket-of-the-profitmen?"

Senator Tilson was on his feet spluttering, his face the color of ripe grape. Half the audience was standing, too, and swaying confusedly.

"Fool," shouted the Senator. "Liar. Ten thousand like you won't stop us. No one will. Because there's no life out there, do you hear?" He towered over Slade, his figure a burly threat. "No form of life. Nothing."

He motioned for the guards to remove his accuser.

"No form of *life,*" cried Slade as they closed in, "Only—"

There was a scraping on the roof. Slade looked around, and up. The cameras caught his expression which was later described as mingled recognition, horror and relief.

Then it was that every TV screen in the land blacked out. A vast shadow burst into the chamber to swathe the lamps and smother camera lenses. With a brief wail came the beat of cold wings. And a shriek.

It was over in a second. The lights, bright once more, shone on a frightened crowd swarming like blind ants for the exits. The TV cameras watched again and on ten million screens appeared the Senator, still clutching his gavel and quite dead, the imprint of a giant claw stamped on his staring face.

the visitor from space

by . . . J. Harvey Haggard

There was life in outer space, chill, deadly and unknown. But what it sought on Earth it found.

"NORTHERN FEDERATION ARMIES REPULSE HUGE ATTACK BY SOUTH HEMIS IN ANTARCTICA!"

That was the headline.

Nothing to give anyone the d.t.'s. It had been going on for twelve years now. The war between the upper and lower hemispheres had run the full gamut of horror and atrocity. Upon its initial outbreak in 1996, the most terrible weapon of all had been the Z-bomb, manufacturers of this annihilative weapon having scaled the entire alphabet in destructive omnipotence.

Three years later came the quinti-ray.

On the seventh anniversary of the conflagration the South Hemiglobers introduced the necro-annihilant. But somehow the secrets of atomic disruption have a habit of slipping through the fingers of mere men. So both sides had the new weapons after a short time.

The twelfth year—but I have just given you the headlines.

More important was the newscast going on in a subterranean chamber in the upper part of the Northern Hemiglobe.

J. Harvey Haggard's science-fiction stories of a decade ago are quite as exciting in retrospect as this, his newest, yarn. And that is just about the highest tribute we could pay him, for the present yarn is as skillful a blend of future science and surmise, of prophetic insight and awareness of current trends, as any seeker after such qualities could desire. It is not surprising he has remained one of the best known writers in the field.

A very excited voice was saying hoarsely over the Hertzian waves, ". . . We know now that we must seek grounds for some common understanding, some bond of unity, between ourselves and a visitor from the depths of space."

Yes, it could not be argued away. A neighbor had come in from the cold abyss of nothingness, from the interplanetary depths that stretch with the curving arms of infinity from star to star, universe to universe, nebulae to nebulae.

The strange blue-tailed comet had soared in toward Earth, leaving a luminous trail, and landing eventually in the hills of what had formerly been Alberta, of the Dominion of Canada. The residue had not been merely interplanetary shrapnel. It had carried a passenger. Within this alien shell was what we call sentience. It had been something that moved and absorbed matter, something that used energy, transforming it from barren radiation to fluid motion, which moreover, had the direction and originality of thought.

Few in that world of 2008 A.D. were surprised by the fact that the creature from space had been a repository of deliberation, capable of weighing causes and reactions, capable of giving explanations and deductions of import.

There was a visitor from space . . . and it thought! Suddenly, terribly, the multitudes of Earth, now engaged in the prosecution of a devastating war, knew a terrible, secret, inner fear. During the decades past the regular succession of ruinous battles had gradually numbed the shock-inducing centers of the myriad brains who participated in the great struggle. It took a thrust from a new angle to really penetrate the mind-consciousness of the race in such a manner as to bring about that most paralyzing of sensations—cold, rationally motivated fear.

Everyone knew that super-intelligences lived in outer interworld space. For nearly a century the existence of a super-race in interstellar depths had been suspected. Twenty-five years ago it had been proved. Yes, beyond any reasonable doubt, there was life in Outer Space vastly superior to anything that had ever been evolved on Earth.

Just what it was no one knew, because it was invisible. Just how it lived or why, no man could fathom. But then, all life is veiled in mystery, and dark surmise. It had taken Gordon Heindrick Fells, Einstein's heir, as he was often called, to prove the existence of super-consciousness in spacial depths. He had proved it convincingly enough, to the satisfaction of all mankind.

But until that night of November 3rd, 2008 A.D., no man had ever been rash enough to say that he had actually seen and conversed with a visitor from beyond the Solar System.

The Prime Benefactor of the Top-half, the Northern Hemiglobe,

made the startling announcement. Bertrand Willington Bedaull was well known to the multitudes, even to the enemies down under, who naturally, hated and despised him. His calm, assured tones had interrupted the holocaust often, speaking by radio, pleading with all men to have patience and faith. But that calmness was gone now. He spoke brokenly, apprehensively into the microphone, and everyone who listened trembled with apprehension.

The strangest of honors had been conferred upon the Earth.

Why? Why? The thoughts went surging through the minds of all the listeners, even before the last reverberations of Bedaull's historical words had died away on the airwaves. Why had a super-intelligent being finally decided to visit this small globe in the Solar System? Had mankind finally fought its way upward to a plane of intelligence that equalled that of the other universes? Or had the superbeing, wearied of what was happening on Earth, arrived now to put an end to it?

In the lower hemiglobe, lying under the Southern Cross, Dictator Garbanzo Calash held a hurried conference. History will record that he acted quickly, that the gestures of his stumpy fingers were faster than usual, and that he was restraining intense and almost overwhelming emotions. Since none in that gathering of ministers was his usual, unperturbed self, no one of importance noticed how Garbanzo Calash trembled.

A momentous decision was reached in the lower war chamber. There would be one fateful, terrific swoop, a concentrated thrust of armed ferocity. All the quinti-rays, concentrated in a highly focused beam, would converge on the superb wing of the main rocket navy. There was one thing that Garbanzo would not consider—leaving of the visitor from space in the hands of the upper enemy.

Subways from every major railway in the upper country led to Mammo Caves like arteries to the heart of some vast, multicellular organism. Here, deep in the bowels of Earth, a tall, gaunt man sat at a desk, compressing his lips and looking agitated.

Prime Benefactor Bedaull stared from a small window into a busy street, where military vehicles raced to and fro like agitated termites beneath an unexpectedly overturned nest.

Mammo City was buried deep. But under the glowing of tiny artificial suns in the cavern ceiling it would have been hard to distinguish this lower city from a surface metropolis of fifty years before. The government buildings comprised a central fortress, ringed in by frowning bulwarks of quinti-ray repulsors, each manned by numerous uniformed guards provided with the deadliest of weapons. Prime Benefactor Bedaull turned eagerly as an academic man clad

in white tropicals hurried into the room.

"Well, Dr. Emsley?" demanded Bedaull. He leaned forward as he spoke, his eyes searching the newcomer's face.

The medical man shook his head dubiously. His face was gaunt almost to the point of emaciation and his gray eyes wavered when they met the other's inquiring gaze.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid . . . I don't know what to say. You see the creature—whatever its nature—has necessarily been living in an entirely different environment, exposed to direct cosmic rays."

Bedaull frowned impatiently. He began speaking in a hoarse, disturbed tone, relating the sequence of events to emphasize their gravity. "His rocket was out of control when it swept in toward Earth. Luckily our radar warned us of its approach. We were able to send out repulsor beams that cushioned the fall, and helped make the landing possible."

"Yes. I know that, of course."

"We averted a possible accident. Whoever he is—or whatever *it* is—should appreciate what we did. Confound it, doctor, what is the matter then?"

The other was still frowning in obvious puzzlement. "Well, sir," he began, and stopped.

"Out with it, Dr. Emsley. As my personal physician, you may speak your mind. Surely you must know that."

"What I would say is that naturally this creature has not existed in an atmosphere of any sort. Somewhere in interspatial depths, he existed by an alien means. His body absorbed cosmic radiation. But the air pressure of our Earth-surface level would have been fatal. If we hadn't suspended him in a vacuum almost instantly, he'd have died."

"Maybe we're making too much fuss over him," said Prime Benefactor Bedaull. "Asking him those questions, hounding him night and day."

Dr. Emsley shrugged lean, tired shoulders.

"No, that doesn't seem to bother him. He solved the problem of quinti-ray defense, *just like that.*" He snapped his fingers loudly. "Also he explained the nature of light quantum, an old problem that's defied us, when you come down to it. The information he's placed in our hands will undoubtedly result in our vanquishing the lower hemiglobe. There's no doubt about it but . . ."

Suddenly the atmosphere trembled under a terrific impact, interrupting the smile of gratification that was spreading over Bedaull's face. Almost instantly, vast amplifiers began to shriek a warning of enemy attack.

The red-uniformed man looked at his personal physician. Dr. Emsley stared back at Prime Benefactor Bedaull. Bedaull rubbed his hands together. He continued his smile of satisfaction.

"It's just as I expected. Garbanzo couldn't resist what he felt was an opportunity when he found out about our visitor from space. So he's attacking—with quinti-rays."

"Yes," breathed Dr. Emsley, looking upward as though he were actually observing the beginning attack. "And our visitor has already shown us how to repulse their bombardment."

They watched the upper air battle from a visor-screen. On its oval they saw squadron after squadron of dart-shaped ships hurtle down toward the upper surface above Mammo City. Every time the crimson quinti-ray beams knifed down, a purple corpuscular substance absorbed it, dissolving the redness, causing the aircraft to vanish into a thin mist of disintegrating particles. After thirty minutes, more than a thousand of the Lower Down aircraft had been reduced to flaming wreckage.

"Confound it!" burst out Bedaull angrily, following with more picturesque expletives. "Three of them got away."

"But only three," emphasized Dr. Emsley. "That's pretty good shooting, if I may say so. A mighty good average."

"Yes," put in Bedaull irritably, "but with the instruments they've got they'll be certain to analyze the repulsor for the quinti-rays. We'll be on an even keel again by next week. Stalemate again."

Following the attack, the chief physician had relaxed. He looked very worn and tired again.

"It's an old story," he said wearily.

"But at least," exclaimed the Prime Benefactor, "we still have our visitor. He'll be able to give us new and still greater weapons. Don't forget that. We should be everlastingly grateful he thought it advisable to visit us rather than our enemies Down Under."

"I—I'm not sure," said Dr. Emsley hesitantly. "I think it advisable, sir, for you to accompany me to the side of Kryzal Kaght."

Something in the physician's manner warned Prime Benefactor Bedaull that a trying ordeal lay ahead. He withdrew a tiny silver phial from his pocket, and removed from it two tiny pills. He swallowed them, scowling.

"Neuro-energizers," he explained to Dr. Emsley. "Small wonder I have to take artificial stimulation."

Passing many militant guards, they walked into a high-walled, brightly lighted corridor and descended deeper into the bowels of the Earth.

There, suspended in a great vacuum tube in an inner chamber, loomed the visitor from space, Kryzal Kaght.

Tall, gelatinous, almost transparent except for the green pulsations that seemed to serve as energy supply streams, Kryzal Kaght stood surveying them. A dark lamp was trained upon him from inside the

tube. Much of his visibility came from fluorescence, particularly noticeable in the two shimmering columns, corresponding to human legs, which held him upright.

A series of writhing upper tentacles performed a manual function, but perhaps the creature's most striking characteristic was the noble evanescent head, covered with tiny tendrils that swept back like a magnificent crest. The tendrils vibrated delicately as thought-waves thundered into Bedaull's mind. The limbs below the head changed shape, sometimes quivering like thin flat ribbons, and at others coiling and jerking in more deliberate fashion. A dull phosphorescence pervaded the visitor's inner being, but the glow of deep light seemed to be growing steadily dimmer.

The Prime Benefactor inclined his head. He stood very erect and stiff in his crimson uniform, not accustomed at all to paying homage to anyone. Even the ring of soldiery, guarding the circle of the inner cavern, seemed startled.

"Kryzal Kaght," he said solemnly. "You have done us the greatest of honors. We are deeply indebted to you and highly appreciative of your visit."

Dr. Emsley leaned against the tubed glassite of the chamber that housed the space visitor, peering worriedly at the indistinct blob of matter that housed its brain.

Inside the vacuum chamber, the iridescent play of light swirled hurriedly for a moment, then subsided slowly. A thought-wave came into their minds. There was no effort to the transport of intelligence. It arrived, full-fledged and unquestioned, in their consciousness. At the same time they sensed anew the strange weakness in their visitor.

"I am very pleased, men of Earth, that you greet me so," came the thought.

"Why should we not honor and respect you?" said the Prime Benefactor. "In a few short hours you have solved atomic mysteries that have puzzled our scientists for years."

Kryzal Kaght remained strangely impassive.

"There are other mysteries," said the thought-wave knowingly. "Greater ones. The solution of one question inevitably leads to the asking of another. That, in a sense, is the eternal equation."

"Wait!" Dr. Emsley said. "How do you feel? Is something bothering you? . . . your physical being?"

"No," came the answering thought-wave. Yet there was a growing lassitude in the creature's manner. He conveyed a curious, mystifying feeling of completion and satisfaction with the negation. "I'll be all right. For centuries I've longed for something also. Now I stand upon the threshold of achieving it."

"Here on Earth?" asked Prime Benefactor Bedaull wonderingly.

"Yes. I shall find it here. You

are a gracious host, men of Earth."

Abruptly a ringing noise vibrated through the chamber, seeming to issue from nowhere. Almost instantly, a three-dimensional image materialized. A hated, familiar figure, it was clad in the rough leather garb of the Down-Under Barbarians. At its emergence, a thousand heat-guns appeared in the hands of the circling soldiery, were aimed, and steadied. But a thundrous thought-wave sent them reeling.

"Do nothing rash," warned Kryzal Kaght. "You are looking upon a projected image of the other dictator, Garbanzo Calash. He has a right to be here. It is my duty to be impartial."

"You—you—" Unable to control himself, Bedaull flung himself at the apparition, burying his fingers in the throat of Garbanzo. But his fingers passed through thin air.

Garbanzo laughed harshly, looking around with amused understanding.

"Some day we'll meet face to face in reality," he promised. Then the dictator from Down Under turned to offer his respect to Kryzal Kaght.

Inside the vacuum chamber, the nebulous visitor slumped against the wall. For a moment a sound like a low moan came to their minds. At one side, the physician wrung his hands, his mouth twisted into a tortured pattern.

"Your position is hopeless, Bedaull," Garbanzo said tauntingly. "By this time you ought to know it. We've launched an attack against the Peninsula. With three fronts active, our victory is assured."

"Well, now that you've said it," retorted Prime Benefactor Bedaull, "I'll just admit that the front in Asia has been broadened considerably. It now includes Africana. Garbanzo, you weren't expecting that, were you?"

The visitor from space said nothing. Only an amoebic mass of matter remained, dripping down the glass wall. It made a shuddering puddle on the floor.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Prime Benefactor Bedaull.

"Look here!" exclaimed Garbanzo. "If you've done anything to injure him, I'll . . ."

"Wait!" It was Dr. Enoch Emsley. "I'm afraid it's no use."

"But the visitor from space," protested the Prime Benefactor. "What's the matter with him, doctor?"

"He has what he came for," returned Dr. Emsley, refusing to meet Bedaull's gaze, one hand tugging wearily at the lobe of his ear. "You've given him the greatest gift you could have bestowed."

"What's that?" demanded the image of Garbanzo Calash in bewilderment.

"Successful culmination," returned Dr. Emsley. "He is of a race of superior beings. He and others of his kind are intensely aware that they are as superior to us as we are to the lower animals. That's

why they've never made an effort to contact us. Far out in space, at the end of evolution's road, they live through eternal time, knowing no limitations of thought, creation, and positive power. They have everything—except one thing. Even perfection, sirs, must have its flaw."

He paused, nodding.

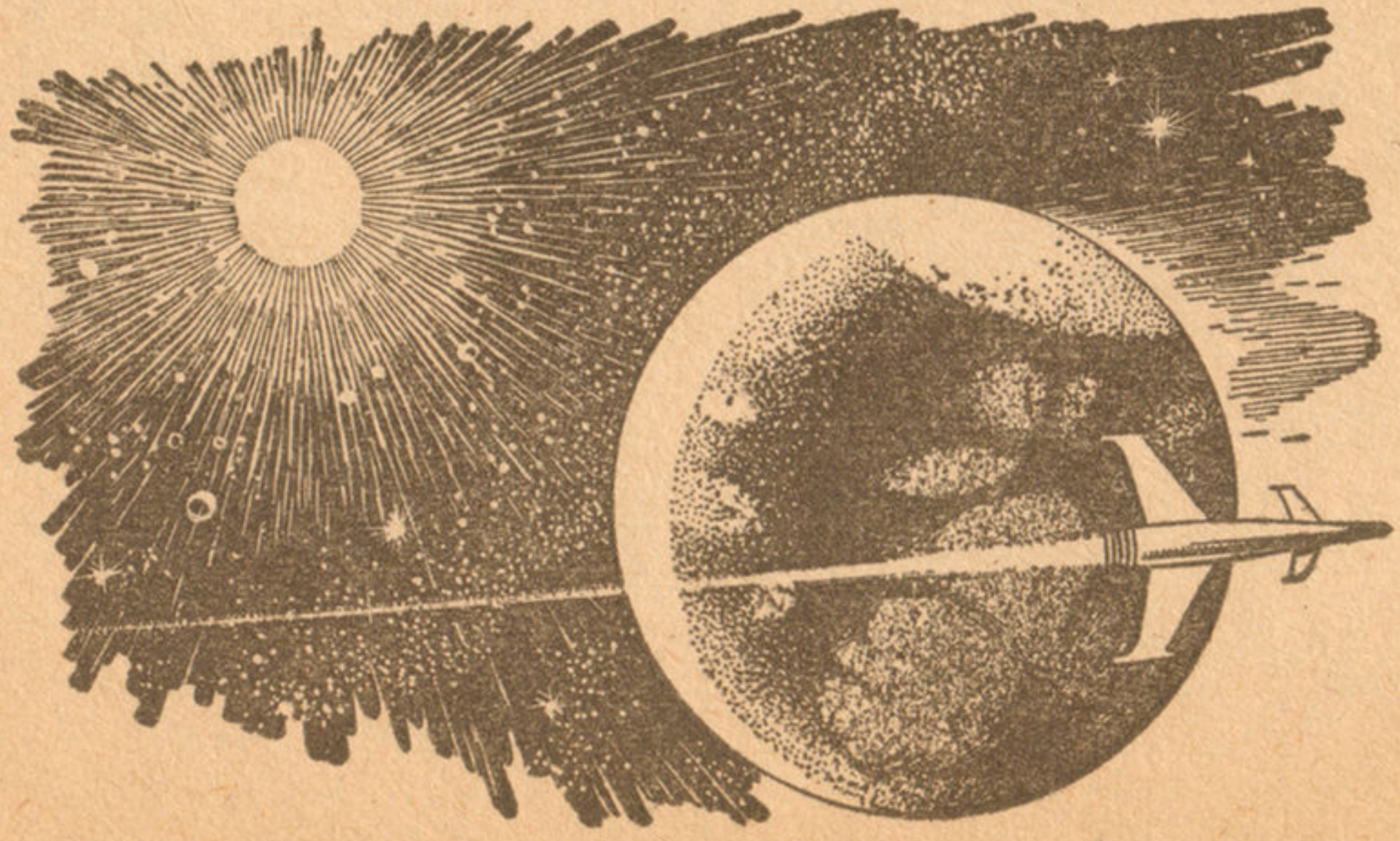
"Out with it!" The two dictators spoke together. Bedaull continued, "What is his reason for visiting Earth? What precious thing do we have here which he cannot attain in Outer Space?"

Dr. Emsley turned his gaunt face toward the dictators fearfully. One of them was a reality of flesh and blood. The other was only a projected image. Yet he felt almost afraid to speak his tremendous knowledge. At length his thin lips moved to form words.

"There would seem to be nothing on this Earth that Kryzal Kaght could ever want," he said exhaustedly. "Nothing on Earth. Neither wars, nor pestilences, nor famine, hunger nor agony did he desire. We have only one thing on Earth that he can't have in Outer Space. That is death. Death might have come to him through the impact of his rocket on the Earth. We averted that. Death could result from the poisons and pressure of an atmosphere his body isn't equipped to withstand. Since cosmic radiation does not penetrate the Earth's envelope of air in the primitive form he needs, we are unable to avert this latter form of destruction.

"Gentlemen, the only reason this super-intelligent being from Outer Space ever came to Earth was that he wanted to commit suicide!"

Garbanzo's image faded slowly. Prime Benefactor Bedaull of the Upper Hemiglobe stood with clenched fists. The quivering puddle of expiring matter in the vacuum tube pulsated a last feeble thought of deepest gratitude.



bye, bye, mindy

by . . . Milton Lesser

Some babies crave affection, and loving care. But little Mindy just liked to cuddle up to folks with a bent for quick suicide.

AS A PRACTICING pediatrician of some years experience Dr. Simon Cover had a peculiarly reliable arsenal of evasive techniques at his command. Upon interviewing a new patient he could always manage to look sympathetic without in any way committing himself.

"We've just moved into the neighborhood," Mrs. Oswald Langston told him on their first meeting. "Little Mindy is all I've got, Doctor. If there's something wrong with her, I'd rather you told me. I want you to be frank."

Mrs. Langston was a small, attractively-dressed woman with a pretty face, and the most intense, doleful eyes that Dr. Cover had ever seen. He immediately catalogued her as the nervous type. Someday pediatrics would emerge from the swaddling clothes stage of development and become a branch of medicine worthy of respect.

But until it did, Dr. Cover told himself bitterly, only a few far-seeing practitioners like himself would realize that the care and feeding of parents was as important to the baby's well-being as the care of the

---

Those of you who were cosmically bewitched and enchanted by the dark magic of Milton Lesser's THE DOUBLE OCCUPATION *in a recent issue will find more magic here of a kind rare in science-fantasy even when it delves into the depth-within-depths mysteriousness of very young minds. What other baby, indeed, ever went quite so chillingly far as Mr. Lesser's little Mindy—a brain-child infant terrible—in a yarn so convincingly told?*

---

baby itself. How, for instance, could an agitated, twitching, nervous woman like Mrs. Langston bring up a child without making a physical and mental wreck out of it.

While the nervous mother watched with an almost hysterical solicitude Dr. Cover put Mindy through her pediatric paces. She was a beautiful child with a head of jet black ringlets, and enormous blue eyes. She kept grinning all the time and didn't seem to mind the examination in the least. The only thing she objected to was Dr. Cover's cold stethoscope. She flinched when he placed it on her chest, then scowled at him and pouted.

"Now, Mindy," Mrs. Langston said. "That's only a stethoscope. You mustn't let it frighten you, darling."

"Cope-cope," lisped Mindy, still pouting. It was an unusual word, and the fifteen-months'-old child seemed to relish the sound of it. "Cope-cope," she said again. "Cope-cope—cope-cope!"

"She's an alert little baby," Dr. Cover nodded at Mrs. Langston, finishing his examination. "Would you mind telling me what made you think there was something wrong with her?"

"You tell me, Doctor. I'm prepared."

"My dear Mrs. Langston, calm yourself." Dr. Cover began putting away his instruments while Mrs. Langston dressed the child. "Hasn't your husband ever told you how detrimental to a child's development an over-anxious parent can be? Hasn't *anyone* ever told you?"

"My husband is dead, Doctor."

"Oh. I'm sorry." Well that did go a long way toward explaining the nervousness. A widow! It was a shame, really. Mrs. Langston couldn't have been a day over twenty-five.

"I'll be perfectly frank with you, Mrs. Langston," Dr. Cover said. "There isn't a thing wrong with your child. She's a perfectly normal, perfectly healthy little girl."

"But Doctor . . ."

"Now you listen to me, young lady. I can't over-stress the importance of this child's environment and your attitude as a mother. It has been my experience that a woman in your unfortunate predicament tends to be over-protective, and too much neurotic 'mothering' can do a developing baby more harm than poor diet or lack of sleep. It's almost like a chronic disease, you see."

Just then Mindy, now fully dressed and toddling around the examination room, discovered the tip of Dr. Cover's stethoscope dangling from the instrument table. Grabbing it firmly in her plump little hands, she cried: "Bye bye, cope-cope. Bye bye!"

Mrs. Langston screamed, immediately drawing Dr. Cover's attention to herself.

"That's what I mean," he said sternly. "There's no *reason* for you to be so jumpy. What could be more normal than what Mindy just

said? She doesn't like the stethoscope, so she tried to make it disappear by telling it to go away. In a child her age such alertness is admirable—virtually an observance of cause and effect.

"Whenever someone leaves your home, I'm sure you usually say 'goodbye.' Mindy has observed this, but in her alert little mind she has put the cart before the horse, so to speak. When you say 'goodbye,' someone goes away. Wanting the stethoscope to go away, Mindy uses the same verbal formula. That's quite precocious, Mrs. Langston."

"But you don't understand, Doctor. Before we moved here, Mindy was just starting to play with the neighborhood children. She walked early and is large for her age, so she played with the two-year-olds. But they didn't like her, Doctor."

"They teased her because she was just a little too young for them—out of their age group. Children are like that—"

"No, I mean . . ." Mrs. Langston hesitated, biting her lip, and staring at Mindy. She seemed suddenly to regret her talkativeness, and covered her confusion by quickly and nervously paying Dr. Cover his fee of five dollars for the office visit. He escorted her to the door of the examination room, and watched her walk through the waiting room with Mindy toddling obediently at her side.

Mrs. Langston had an excitingly trim figure. Dr. Cover, himself a divorcé, thought it a shame she had such a nervous, over-wrought temperament. Perhaps that could be rectified by sympathy and understanding. It was time Dr. Cover thought of re-marrying, anyhow. Perhaps he would pay a social call on Mrs. Langston in the near future.

At the door, Mrs. Langston turned to wave goodbye. Mindy turned too. "Say goodbye, Mindy," Dr. Cover called cheerfully. "You'll be a good little girl now, won't you?"

Obediently, Mindy began: "By . . ."

Mrs. Langston clamped a hand firmly over her daughter's mouth. "Oh, God," she moaned, and slammed the office door quickly. In the last glimpse Dr. Cover had of Mindy's pert little face, the child looked very disappointed.

Oddly enough, when he returned to his examination room to await the next patient, he couldn't find his stethoscope anywhere.

* * *

"How do you do, Mrs. Langston?"

"Oh, it's you, Dr. Cover. There must be some mistake. I didn't call . . ."

"I was in the neighborhood, and took the liberty of dropping in. I hope you don't think it presumptuous of me. How is our little Mindy?"

"She's perfectly all right, Doctor. She's out playing now."

Dr. Cover thought it peculiar

that so young a child should be out playing all by herself, and said so.

"Oh, it's all right, Doctor." The confident way in which the words were spoken didn't sound like Mrs. Langston at all. "There's a fenced-in courtyard behind these garden apartments. Nothing could happen to Mindy."

"Do you like your new neighborhood?" he asked.

Mrs. Langston sighed. "Well, frankly, I've been so busy looking for a job that I haven't had an opportunity to see much of it. Unfortunately we haven't been able to collect my husband's insurance yet."

Dr. Cover maintained a discreet silence.

"It's very difficult to find a job which would pay enough to enable me to engage a nursemaid for Mindy and to take care of our living expenses as well."

"I quite understand," Dr. Cover clucked sympathetically.

"I've never had to work before. I just don't know what kind of job I'd be best suited for, or even where to look—"

At that moment, Mindy came running up the sidewalk toward the open door of Mrs. Langston's garden apartment. If she had been in the fenced-in courtyard, she was in it no longer, strengthening Dr. Cover's conviction that the most worrying mothers were also the most careless. Behind her sprinted two other moppets. They were boys, Dr. Cover saw, and easily twice Mindy's age.

"She stole my airplane!" both lads cried out almost simultaneously as they chased Mindy, their faces pink with rage.

"Here, here, children!" Dr. Cover called out as the pint-sized posse and its quarry approached "I'm sure we can settle this peacefully."

With Mrs. Langston, he went out on the stoop, realizing how sorely she needed a steady male hand at the helm of her domestic life.

Did she realize it herself?

When Mindy saw Dr. Cover standing there, she changed her mind about fleeing to the sanctuary of the apartment. Instead, she turned, and ran swiftly out into the street.

"Mindy!" Mrs. Langston screamed, heading in her direction. "You get right out of the gutter this minute!"

"You'll only frighten her. . . ." Dr. Cover began, and froze. A large yellow truck bearing the words MID-QUEENS BEVERAGE COMPANY had turned the corner and was speeding straight down the street toward Mindy. The driver had apparently not seen her at all.

Mrs. Langston screamed and screamed. She couldn't reach her child in time, and she knew it. Without a thought for his own safety Dr. Cover leaped for the curb and shouted, "Mindy, look out for the truck."

He left the curb in a flying leap and dove at her just as the vehicle's brakes began to screech.

The truck couldn't possibly miss her, but—

At the last instant, Mindy glanced up with an alert look on her face, and cried: "T'uck. Bye bye, t'uck."

Dr. Cover went sprawling full length in the street, ripping his tweed trousers. Mindy remained calmly sitting on her plump little behind just out of reach of his scraped fingers. She had a mischievous look on her face.

The truck was nowhere in sight.

My nerves, thought Dr. Cover. There hadn't been any truck. There needn't have been any truck—if Mrs. Langston hadn't seen it too. But surely it was impossible. Mrs. Langston had seemingly seen nothing, either. How could they have seen a truck if there just was no truck to be seen?

He carried Mindy back to the sidewalk, where Mrs. Langston paddled her with a firm hand for running out into the street, in front of a truck that wasn't there. Mrs. Langston said nothing about seeing the truck and neither did Dr. Cover.

But at the final moment, just as a terrible accident had seemed inevitable, he had even *imagined* a truck driver's alarmed face. Now there was nothing but the dwindling memory of an hallucination to torment him. Was neuroticism raised to high C contagious? He snorted and determined to blot the incident from his mind. If Mrs. Langston mentioned the truck, he would claim he never saw it.

The two moppets were waiting with Mrs. Langston on the curb. "She stole my airplane," one of them said again, pointing an accusing finger at Mindy, who was still sobbing from her spanking.

"Airplane," said Mindy happily, no longer sobbing. "Airplane."

"If you took it," Dr. Cover said, "you ought to return it. There's a good girl, Mindy."

Mrs. Langston came vigorously to her daughter's defense. "Where could she possibly hide a toy airplane?" she demanded, staring reproachfully at Dr. Cover.

It was a good question—and a difficult one to answer. Mindy wore a pink ruffled sunsuit which couldn't have concealed an extra diaper, let alone a toy of any size.

"She stole my airplane," the moppet persisted, rubbing dirty little fists against his eyes.

"Did you take the boy's airplane?" Mrs. Langston asked her daughter.

"No, no," Mindy said, looking aggrievedly up at her mother. "No, no, no."

"You better run along home," Mrs. Langston told the two moppets. On the verge of tears, they departed down the street.

"Well," said Dr. Cover.

He began to wish Mrs. Langston would mention the truck. He felt horribly awkward now, and hardly knew what to say. He was almost grateful when Mrs. Langston told him she'd have to go inside and prepare dinner. She invited him to eat

with them, but he knew that she didn't really want him to stay.

Dr. Cover pleaded a previous engagement and returned home to his small bachelor apartment above his office where he had two baloney sandwiches and a bottle of beer.

He had almost forced the incident of the imaginary truck from his mind when he heard the eleven o'clock news broadcast, and the voice of his favorite announcer saying: "Now, here's our item guaranteed *not* to make the headlines. If you know the whereabouts of a big yellow truck belonging to the MID-QUEENS BEVERAGE COMPANY, you're smarter than its owner, Sam Morin of Northern Boulevard. The truck, driver and all, disappeared on its usual route through Kew Gardens this afternoon. Perhaps in this hot weather we've been having, you can't blame the driver too much, as the missing truck was loaded with four hundred cases of premium beer! And that's the cream of the news as this commentator skims it . . ."

Dr. Cover sat up very straight, a measuring worm with an ice-cold abdomen inching its way up his spine.

Then there had been a truck. There had been, there had been!

And now there wasn't.

It was a week before business brought Dr. Cover into Mrs. Langston's neighborhood again on a routine case of German measles. There really had been no urgency for him to make the emergency call at night, but the anxious mother had insisted. Now, at nine-fifteen, it was too late for the double-feature he'd wanted to see in the big Loew's theater on Jamaica Avenue, and on impulse, he decided to visit Mrs. Langston instead.

The incident of the truck still bothered him. It hardly seemed possible under the circumstances that he could have imagined it. A man's peace of mind was valuable, particularly in Dr. Cover's profession and if Mrs. Langston knew the answer, he was now determined to force it out of her. Gently, of course.

Ten minutes later he was standing in Mrs. Langston's elm-shadowed doorway saying, "I was in the neighborhood, and—"

"Come in," said Mrs. Langston. "Come in by all means. You're very welcome, Doctor."

She seemed eager for company. Dr. Cover followed her into the living room, where Mindy was sitting on the floor in a pair of seersucker pajamas.

"It's way past your bed-time, young lady," Dr. Cover said in his best bedside voice, his eyes still fastened on Mrs. Langston.

"I don't usually keep her up this late, Doctor," Mrs. Langston apologized. "But we've been having some trouble, and I've been giving Mindy a lecture."

"A lecture? She can understand a lecture?"

"Well, not really. But she knows from my voice when I'm angry and

when I'm pleased. You know how babies are."

"What kind of trouble were you having?" asked Dr. Cover as Mrs. Langston offered him a glass of lemonade.

"It's nothing, really."

"Mrs. Langston, I've been intending to ask you about something. Actually, it's why I'm here. You remember last week when those boys were chasing Mindy—"

"What boys?" said Mrs. Langston. "I don't remember any boys chasing Mindy." She laughed nervously. "Mindy is rather young for that, isn't she?"

"That's not what I meant. I meant—"

"Well, I'd rather not discuss it."

"She ran out into the street," Dr. Cover persisted. "A truck turned the corner and bore down on her. She was going to be run over. She—"

"Please, please, Doctor . . ." said Mrs. Langston. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The truck disappeared," Dr. Cover said. There *has* to be a rational explanation. He was beginning to feel mildly ridiculous.

"I've been at loose ends ever since my husband died," Mrs. Langston suddenly said. "I'm sorry I can't answer your question. Please don't press me."

What did her husband have to do with it? Her late husband? There had to be some connection, or she wouldn't have mentioned him. Usually a cautious, discreet man, Dr. Cover was now too incensed with the situation to remember that a doctor must always be tactful.

"How did your husband die, Mrs. Langston?" he asked.

"Why, I . . . that's a strange question."

"I beg your pardon. But you're new in this neighborhood. You're all alone. You mentioned difficulties I can sympathize with. I thought perhaps I could help you."

"No, you can't. No one can help me. I'm beyond help." Tragically neurotic all right, diagnosed Dr. Cover. Free-floating anxiety—with probably a fair share of psychosomatic ailments, too. The neurasthenic types usually were like that. What most people failed to realize was that a psychosomatic ailment was not at all like hypochondria. The afflicted were really sick. They could even die from it. But emotional worry, over-anxiety was initially responsible. After that, it could be anything from heart disease to cancer to a ruptured appendix. The psychosomatic person was attacked at his or her weakest point.

"I insist," said Dr. Cover. "I really want to help you. If you'll tell me how your husband met his death . . ."

"All right, I'll tell you. I don't *know* how Harry died. I can't explain it. He—he disappeared."

"He disappeared? He ran out on you, is that what you mean? Then how do you know he's dead?"

No wonder the insurance com-

pany wouldn't pay. In all likelihood Mr. Langston was alive and healthy somewhere, having the time of his life. Naturally, a neurasthenic wife would quickly come to the conclusion that he was dead.

"No, you don't understand. He didn't run out on me. He disappeared right before my eyes."

Before Dr. Cover could reply, the doorbell rang. Mrs. Langston got up, and walked through the living room, across the hall and straight to the door. Dr. Cover heard angry voices, and when she came back a man and a woman were with her.

"I don't care about that," the man was saying. "We're going to call the police."

"That's perfectly ridiculous, and you know it," Mrs. Langston said.

The woman turned to her husband, "I just want Bobby back, that's all. I just want him back." Her voice broke in a sob.

The man nodded, then confronted Mrs. Langston accusingly. "Your Mindy led him off somewhere. He was playing with Mindy. The other children saw them playing together in the street. They went into your backyard, and Mindy came out alone. *Where's Bobby?*"

"Maybe you'd *better* call the police," Mrs. Langston suggested frostily. "I can't help you."

"We've already called them," the man said. "You may as well know. No threat could move you to sympathy or understanding—"

"I never liked that Mindy from the very beginning," the woman said. "She looks too—*alert.*"

"She's a very alert little baby," Dr. Cover said automatically, unaware that he was repeating a verbal stock in trade.

"And just who the hell are you?" the man snapped.

"Mrs. Langston's pediatrician—Dr. Cover."

"Mindy Langston isn't normal, is she, Doctor?" the woman asked, gripping Dr. Cover's arm.

"How do you mean, not normal?"

"Well, she's always stealing things. She never returns them, either. And neither does her mother."

"Bobby is more important, dear," said the man.

"I wish I could help you," Mrs. Langston said. "But why should Mindy be responsible if your son ran away? Anyway, I'm sure the police will find him."

"There's no way out of that backyard except the front way and Mindy came out alone. The other children saw her."

"The other children!" scoffed Mrs. Langston.

"I tell you Mindy hid Bobby somewhere."

Mrs. Langston looked at Dr. Cover and shrugged. A week ago, Dr. Cover would have shrugged back, smiling politely and slightly condescendingly. These over-anxious parents . . . But Dr. Cover wasn't shrugging now.

Sitting on the floor, little Mindy had begun to cry.

"Now see what you've done," Mrs. Langston told her desperate visitors. "I'm afraid you'll have to go. I'm afraid I'd better say good-bye." She clapped a hand to her mouth.

Mindy looked up eagerly. "Bye bye," she said. "Bye bye!"

Mrs. Langston whimpered—and fainted. The man and the woman were no longer in the room. They were no longer—anywhere.

Mindy had stopped crying.

Dr. Cover felt suddenly very weak. Hallucination again? Impossible. There was nothing wrong with him.

The mother was neurasthenic, and hence—psychosomatic. Her mind could make pathological changes in her own body.

Could the changes be more than environmental? Could they be inborn, inheritable? An infant makes no distinction between itself and its environment, thought Dr. Cover with swiftly mounting fear. Long before Mindy's age, naturally, the distinction would normally be made. But in Mindy's case . . .

What is the body—or *any* physical object—but a distinct, finite collocation of tiny particles, energy charges, electromagnetic vibrations? Was a psychosomatic person a mutation? If so, might not the next step be *outward*—an out-going psychosomatism? Not merely the power to make pathological changes in the body, in a physical object, but to somehow *will it out of existence* by making the collocation of atoms disperse back to its original loose energy state?

"This," said Dr. Cover aloud, "is utterly fantastic." But he hadn't moved from his chair, hadn't gone to revive the unconscious Mrs. Langston. And, looking at Mindy, he was afraid.

Mutation?

A monster?

She wasn't a year and a half old yet. There was no telling what her powers would be like when she had matured and learned to channel them. Once that happened, nothing could be done to stop her. Absolutely nothing.

Trembling, Dr. Cover stood up, Mindy looked as if she wanted to say something. He mustn't let her, he told himself wildly. She might want to say goodbye.

Dr. Cover wanted to get out of the room, out of the house fast. But—

"Come here, Mindy," he said.

Mindy looked at him, and obeyed. "There's a nice little girl."

"Turt, turt," she said, grabbing at his shirt with dimpled little fingers. "Bye bye, turt."

Dr. Cover stood trembling and horrified in his undershirt. Mindy looked up at him with a pleased little grin on her face.

"Look at the chair," Dr. Cover said desperately, pointing to a sectional sofa in one corner of the room. "Say goodbye, Mindy. Goodbye, chair."

Obediently, Mindy said, "Bye bye, tair!"

And both sections of the sofa were gone.

Trembling uncontrollably now, Dr. Cover took Mindy into the bedroom. She could be the most extraordinary scientific discovery ever made. Used properly, her powers might revolutionize the world.

But Mindy showed every indication of being a spoiled brat.

I'm too vulnerable, Dr. Cover thought. All humanity is too weak and vulnerable. We're not ready for this. Perhaps we'll never be ready. If there are any more like Mindy, it's all finished. Everything is set to go *pouf*.

But the chances of there being any more seemed to him remote.

Still, if Mindy were a mutation, the mutation would breed true.

The last thing Dr. Cover did before he gave up his medical practice and retreated to the country where he leads the life of a hermit was to hold Mindy up before the bedroom mirror. He told her, "Mindy, say bye bye."

---

a rite for stalek

by . . . Dorothy Madlé

Under Stalek's immortal guidance the genius of early man flourished and the pyramids arose. Why, then, should he fear love's young dream?

As the tourist folders explained, Goblin Cave was an impressive stop on the sightseeing route between Latchstring and Ozark Run. It extended nine hundred feet underground, and its marvels included Fairy Chimes, "The Angel," formed of intertwined stalectites, and in its largest chamber a giant throne fit for some Viking warrior or Druidic deity of legendary renown. Runways and stairs had been thoughtfully provided for the explorers' comfort, and an Intelligent Guide was at their disposal all day long and in the evenings by appointment.

What the folders omitted because it was not generally known, not even to Kerry Dennis, the Intelligent Guide, was that in sober truth an ancient god inhabited Goblin Cave. Stalek, Planner of All Caves, was in solitary residence, leaving his other caverns to the care of subordinates.

Had Stalek been visible at all he would have appeared to consist largely of grey whorls assembled in the approximate shape of a man, one of those curious two-legged creatures who, millennia ago, had

---

There is probably no more over-worked title in dramatic literature, from the Greeks to Anatole France, than "The Death of the Gods." But "The Life of a God!"—there we stand on more fertile soil ploughing a brighter furrow into the unknown, especially when the god in question is as lovable—and as mysterious—as the Stalek of this richly embroidered tale. Dorothy Madlé has a rare talent for evoking magic from "the far away and long ago."

---

adopted Stalek's caves for shelter and himself as their divinity.

For thousands of years he had been called direful names by many respectful tribes. Then gradually human beings had stopped calling on Stalek, and for the last thirty centuries the cave god had been free to devote all of his time to his own work. And that was how he had become acquainted with Kerry Dennis.

Busily engaged in the difficult task of diverting a tiny vein of oxidized copper, Stalek paused just long enough to listen to sounds from the pavilion. Tourists again! Their presence meant, of course, interruption. But it also meant another visit from Kerry, which afforded him the keenest pleasure.

The instant the guide opened the door and flicked on the lights Stalek hurried forward. He assured himself of his subject's continued health, did a quick stubble-count of Kerry's blond hair and made certain there was no look of distress on the young man's face. After that he observed the two tourists.

One was male, solid and brisk. The other was—female and young. Delicately formed she was, her eyes a deep copper and her hair a pale off-bronze tint, just such a tint as Stalek once had planned to produce by skillfully imbedding certain unusual metals in crystal. Idly he tuned into her mind pattern, and—tensed in instant alarm. It was an almost perfect complement to Kerry's. It had, moreover, an incipient awareness of the guide's lean, grey-eyed person.

Stalek drew a weary breath. He had learned to expect dangerous complications whenever he let himself get involved with human beings. Very deliberately he gathered his baleful aspect—wished upon him centuries ago by worshippers who had seemed to think a baleful aspect necessary to a god—and aimed it at the girl.

In ancient times this force would have struck an intruder to the ground and stretched him out lifeless on the cave floor. Not that Stalek had any wish to kill. In the old days he had been compelled to do it now and then, when his subjects needed to be reassured as to his power. But now such vivid demonstrations were not only out of fashion—they were impossible. Now no one believed in Stalek.

His shaft of malignance struck instant, primitive responses. The girl was receptive, to a quite startling degree. She would have made a good priestess, possibly even a sybil. Stalek shook off a foolishly wistful memory of the Ritual of Divination by Flame, when robed priestesses had held their tapers steadily aloft and Stalek, in fine humor, had puffed wisps of force to make their lights caper in the windless dark. It had taken very little energy, and it had made his people happy.

Gooseflesh was rearing on the girl's creamy nape where her remote ancestors would have erected

their fur. She was getting a good enough scare, Stalek decided, to keep her out of Stalek's cave and Kerry's sight for the rest of her days. Good enough, surely, to keep her from ever tempting Kerry away from Stalek into some silly activity aboveground.

Stalek had ambitious plans for Kerry. True, he hadn't meant to take on even one human subject again. He had come to Goblin Cave on business, to correct schedules that had been thrown off by the electric lights. While they glowed, photosynthetic processes halted, and all formation-building stopped. Stalek had also set in motion measures to quicken the removal, or suitable re-designing, of the ugly runways and stairs. Then Kerry, young and eager, and straight out of university, had turned out to be delightfully interested in cave mechanics. He was even familiar with the legends of Stalek's godship. Almost in spite of himself, the god had developed a warm friendship for the guide. If he could repel distractions, Stalek would make of Kerry the greatest geologist on earth.

Stalek had bestowed gifts before. He had been moved to tenderness by the Cro-Magnon people who had painted daylight figures on his cave walls, for the Dark God's amusement. By sealing those caves against time's erosion he had guaranteed the artists an endurance as close to immortality as man would ever know. And to the people of the Sunken Continent of Mu Stalek had given calculus, a system he had devised to figure stresses and time schedules in the many caves over which he held sovereignty. It had spread to a red tribe of Egypt, who had built pyramids with it. It had passed down the centuries, and now Kerry had inherited that early knowledge too.

Stalek returned his attention to the girl's thoughts. She stood with tanned fingers curled firmly on the handrail, staring bewilderedly into the shadows.

This is queer! Something hates having me here, but there's no one but the guide and the middle-aged tourist. But now I'm being silly. You can't feel thoughts. This cave is terrible and lovely . . . swooping folds . . . columns and shadows. My legs have a separate will. To run back . . . to get out into the daylight. It is worse than the first day I taught kindergarten, when the twenty children staring up at me were terrible little beings watching my every movement with wise impersonal derision. I got to like them later . . . This is only imagination. I'll pay attention to the guide . . . I'll interrupt.

"What is the scientific name for getting dizzy in caves?" she asked, and was instantly startled by the way the walls of the cave echoed back her voice.

The guide turned. "Claustrophobia," he said impersonally. "If it gets bad, close your eyes and I'll lead you out."

Anticipating triumph, Stalek put

more power into his assault. If she gave up now, he would win.

"No, thanks," she declined coldly. "I never have claustrophobia."

"You'd better get out if you're nervous, Miss," the male tourist advised.

Jane drew herself half an inch taller. "My question was academic," she said. "I was simply curious—"

Kerry's eyebrows quirked as he led the way through a passage into the Throne Room. Ceilings towered into shadow, crusted with lances and gargoyles, and against the far wall a vast white pedestal loomed against looped stone draperies.

The guide paused near the entrance. Impressively he picked up a small mallet and tapped out an antique pentatonic scale on a row of small stalactites in a recessed niche. Stalek rejoiced inwardly and aimed an extra jet of balefulness at the back of Jane's neck.

"It may be pure coincidence," Kerry said solemnly, "that many caves in Europe—in the region of the Pyrenees—have such natural chimes as this, and even that nearly all contain what seems to be a great throne. But it used to be believed that gods inhabited caves of this nature and that visitors struck the chimes as they entered to celebrate rites of propitiation before his throne."

Jane flicked back a shining wisp of hair with a hand that stubbornly refused to quiver. "Since I already have had a few courses in comparative mythology," she said nastily, "would you mind explaining from the geologist's point of view why certain stalactites resemble icicles and others suggest sculptured drapery?"

Kerry explained, in great detail. The male tourist listened with a look of undisguised astonishment on his heavy face. Stalek listened admiringly. There were times when he was convinced that Kerry, a mere human being, had sufficient intelligence to build a fair sort of cave himself.

Jane stopped before a thick white stalagmite standing waist-high against a wall. Clear water ran over its rounded top and when she put both hands on the top of the column the water rippled through her fingers.

"I am now interrupting one of your forty-million-year processes," she boasted quietly.

Kerry smiled. "You are now performing an ancient rite, purifying your hands in running water before approaching the Throne."

Jane snatched away her hands quickly.

The portly tourist was examining a frail cluster of stalactites on the under side of a concrete rail.

"How long has it been since the runways were built?" he asked.

"Seven years," Kerry informed him. "Ordinarily, formations grow at the rate of one cubic inch every five hundred years. You can see that the calcium in concrete accumulates much faster than in natural rock.

Right now new stalactites are forming under your feet."

Jane's face came alight with gratification and surmise.

"The cave is alive then! About ten thousand years from now some future geologist will re-discover it, and he'll notice the fantastic looking runways. People will call it Gnomes' Walk, or something of the sort, and they'll never suspect that man had anything to do with it."

Stalek leaned against a shelf of rock. It was almost as if the wench could read his mind.

The male tourist's glance said as plain as words that a woman's place was in the home, and that Jane would be a most welcome guest in a home for the feeble-minded. He drew a card from his pocket and handed it to Kerry. Stalek peered. The card read: *Thomas W. Saunders, Saunders Sand and Gravel Company, Junction City.*

"I've been observing you," he told Kerry. "We operate gravel pits throughout the Middle West, and we might be able to use a bright young man with a knowledge of rock formations, and a knack for handling people. I'll be at the inn at Ozark Heights for two days. If you're interested—come and see me.

"I'm sure," he added, "you don't expect to spend the next ten years guiding sightseers through a hole in the ground. It's definitely not a job with a future."

Stalek trembled with fury. Gravel pits! Hole in the ground! He, Stalek, was being maliciously misrepresented as a doddering builder of misshapen formations! By concentrating on protecting Kerry from the girl he had let this abomination among tourists get to the very point of luring Kerry from his appointed future.

"Thank you, sir," Kerry said, taking the card. "I'll think it over. I'd planned to go back to school in the fall."

The industrialist frowned slightly, and inspected a thin gold pocket watch. "I have an appointment at six," he told Kerry. "It's after five now. I'll find my way out, and you may continue the tour. I'll expect you at the inn."

He turned at the foot of the steps in an ingratiating final attempt to influence Kerry. "School's all right," he said. "But don't forget that a young man can miss his best chances by making too inflexible a decision. I earnestly suggest you give my offer considerable thought."

Kerry and Jane continued on alone, descending several steps with an eagerness that greatly increased Stalek's uneasiness.

"This is the deepest part of the cave," Kerry said. "At the end is Fairy Pool. The legends say the cave god always bestows a gift on the person who dips in the pool, but I shouldn't advise it. The water's as cold as ice."

The runway formed a bridge across the shallow white basin. As Kerry walked on ahead, Jane paused an instant to lean over the railing.

The banister, weakened by the sapping of calcium that formed its small clustered stalactites, began to sway and tremble, and then, with appalling suddenness, it gave way completely.

Jane fell into the pool with a terrified scream. Instantly Kerry sprinted back, swung himself down, and lifted her into his arms. He waded from the pool, set her on the wet stone floor, and dabbed at a trickle of blood where her forehead had grazed a jutting piece of limestone.

Both young persons, Stalek noted clinically, were experiencing strange electric sensations which they attributed to sudden contact with cold water.

Suddenly Jane scrambled up, pushing Kerry away. "You and your cave!" she exclaimed, angrily. "I might have been drowned." Then she surveyed the guide's dripping jeans and his expression of horrified concern, and her indignation vanished. She looked down at the sopping ruin of her green dress, and laughed. The sound rippled pleasantly among the stalactites and suddenly Kerry was laughing too. Even the worried Stalek smiled, but with wry restraint.

Kerry sobered. "That cut should be treated," he pointed out. "Will you come back to the pavilion while I call Dr. Sorens?"

Jane took a compact from the shoulder purse, and examined the small wound. "It would be silly to call a doctor for a scratch like this," she said.

"But I'm responsible," Kerry insisted. "If that cut should become infected—"

"It won't. And if it does it will be my own fault. I promise not to sue, Mr.—"

"Kerry Dennis. But I'll have to insist on the doctor. It's part of my job."

"Oh, all right!" Jane shrugged and started for the cavern entrance. "I've a great respect for cave-hazard regulations. Aren't you supposed to take down the statistics? Name, Jane Mallory; occupation, school teacher; sex, female; age, twenty-one. Anything more?"

Kerry grinned. "Regulations have their advantages."

"It's ridiculous to bring the doctor here," Jane said. "I'll go with you to his office after I've gone to the hotel for dry clothes. Do you have a change with you?"

"I live back of the pavilion," Kerry replied. "Are you sure you don't mind waiting?"

Stalek watched their dripping retreat. As soon as the lights were out, he told himself, he would start a change of precipitation that in fifty years or so would lower by one thirty-seventh of a note the resonance of the second stalactite in Fairy Chimes. It was off by that much. But for the first time Kerry forgot to turn off the lights, and Stalek could do nothing except think.

It was late when Kerry's key

grated in the pavilion lock. Stalek hoped his friend would remember about the lights, but Kerry passed in an almost trancelike state into his own quarters. Stalek stretched the antennae of his mind as high as he could from the cave door. Only a jumbled exhilaration reached him from Kerry. Stalek sighed. In the morning he would find out just how grievous his failure had been.

And he did. Kerry whistled as he came down with a shovel and a basket for an early morning inspection tour of the cave. He had been disastrously impetuous, the god divined. Not only had he fallen in love, but he had let the bright-haired girl know it on the first evening of their acquaintance. Stalek accepted the inevitable. But as Kerry's elation increased the god's mood darkened. Kerry's plans could only lead to tragedy and remorse.

A car stopped outside. Jane called "Kerry!" in a fresh morning voice and Kerry took the top six steps in two strides and a slight stumble. Warm daylight came with Jane across the threshold. Her skin looked golden against the cream-and-rust brown of her blouse and slacks.

"You invited me for a specially conducted tour, remember?" she laughed, and added quickly: "Complete with climb to The Angel's shoulder. Am I too early?"

Suddenly she stood quiet as if listening. "Strange, yesterday I thought your cave was vindictive. Now it just seems eerie—and almost friendly."

"Yesterday I wasn't in love with you," Kerry reminded her.

They swung themselves up along the wall behind the towering angel. Jane's brown playshoes found toe-room in small crevices and Stalek noted how careful she was not to scuff against delicate, translucent formations. She was as considerate, he reluctantly admitted, as Kerry himself.

At the top they sat on the level edge of a giant wing. Kerry struck a match, and the flame stood for an instant motionless in the damp still air. Their cigarettes met over it.

"When will you marry me?" he whispered, pressing his lips against her hair.

Jane blew out the match and rested her head against his shoulder. "Later rather than right away would be more sensible, I guess. But I don't feel sensible about you, darling. Let's make it *very* soon, and I'll teach in the town where you study. We can manage."

Kerry snapped the burnt match, and let it drop. "That isn't what I have in mind," he said. "I have a date with Saunders today that's going to make you the bride of a guy with a job—and a future."

Jane tried to pull away, but Kerry's arm tightened about her. "Look, I fell in love with a geologist," she protested. "That's important."

Kerry employed both arms in a behavior pattern which Stalek instantly recognized as a male means of concluding female argument.

"Darling, nothing is so important as—"

A gruff hail from the pavilion interrupted him.

"Tourists," Jane whispered. "You'd better take care of them. They won't see me if I duck my head."

Kerry swung himself agilely down from one of the angel's rippling draperies. Before he reached the door it was blocked by the impatient bulk of Thomas W. Saunders.

"I expected you last evening," Saunders said. "Now, quite unexpectedly, I find I am leaving today. I assumed you'd be at least interested in at least some details of the position I had in mind for you. I'm not accustomed to having a prospective employee take his work for granted. Do you want to work for me, or don't you?"

"Y-yes, sir," Kerry stammered. "That is—"

"You will start in a technical capacity. If you make good, I think I can promise an assistant managership of my Junction City plant within the year. After that it's up to you."

A strange singing tone, one note held and swelling, seemed to fill the cave. Kerry flinched. The voice was clear and high, almost but not quite human as it took on crystal overtones among the stalactites. It seemed to be keening, "No-ooo—oohhh—"

Kerry ran a hand wildly through his hair.

"That's one of the weird sound effects of Goblin Cave," he said. "The stalactites pick up wind sounds from the outside and amplify them."

"Humph," Saunders commented. "As I was saying, you'll start at—"

"No—ohh—ohh—nooh—" wailed the stalactites.

"It comes from that damned angel of yours," Saunders announced.

Jane came sliding down the angel's flank, bouncing across the runway and choosing Saunders' padded frame as a check for her momentum.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she exclaimed as she caromed sideways and landed upright beside the industrialist, who now was sitting in a belligerently indignant attitude on the cave floor.

Saunders got swayingly to his feet, red annoyance spreading from his conservative tie to the circle of hair around his bald spot.

"I'm sorry to interrupt a conference," Jane apologized.

Saunders summoned restraint, and ignored her. "We'd better continue our talk outside," he suggested huffily to Kerry.

"All right, let's," Jane agreed.

"Idiot," Saunders exploded.

Jane dug a pathetic fist into one eye and, quite irrationally, Kerry got mad at Saunders.

"You called my fiancee an idiot," he said, furiously. "Get out of here."

Stalek, grinning inwardly, so-

bered the instant he discovered that Kerry's outburst irritated Saunders for only a moment. In the next, the industrialist decided such loyalty and courage was just what the Saunders Sand and Gravel Company needed. Saunders' mind started framing an apology.

Wildly Stalek seized, and discarded possibilities. Crude methods, such as clunking Saunders with a chunk of limestone, were clearly beneath Stalek's dignity. They were also physically impossible, since the god had no power to wield material objects. Then he thought of the small wind-like currents he had once produced to sway the flames of his worshippers' candles. Quickly he made one, iced it and aimed it at the back of Jane's neck, where it instantly struck and crawled horribly toward her left ear.

Jane screamed.

As the sound shrilled and echoed, a thickish three-foot stalactite shivered, broke from the ceiling and fell like a flung weapon. It grazed Saunders' head and splintered at his feet.

"This is a madhouse," Saunders roared. Limping, he stalked toward the sane daylight world.

Stalek relaxed. That stalactite had been eroding thin at its suspension point—so incredibly thin it had been ready to snap under the vibrations of a high-pitched scream.

In his relaxed mood the god gave his attention to the two who were quarreling in his cave. Kerry was being stuffy, Stalek had to admit, and Jane seemed unreasonably angry.

"If you think," Kerry was saying, "that you can manage my affairs for the rest of our lives, you are wrong. Saunders or not, I'll get a job. I'll leave here in two weeks, and it won't be to go back to school."

"I haven't the slightest interest in where you go," Jane flung back. "I don't care if—if Saunders adopts you. I shall know nothing about it, because I'm leaving today."

Jane's steps made angry echoes as she left the cave. Kerry listened dully and in despairing silence to the outraged grinding of a car starting much too fast. The motor sputtered down the hill. Then—silence, chill, heart-rending.

Escorting three tourist parties through the cave took up most of the afternoon, and at each trip the guide's face grew more strained. Stalek's triumph had turned to ash. Kerry was unhappy. Perhaps it would have been better to let him follow his own disastrous impulses. Kerry was wretched, and Stalek saw nothing a god could do about it.

At nightfall Kerry drove away. He usually did that, either to have dinner at the Ozark Lunch, or to return home, and read. This time, Stalek worried. Kerry might—Stalek tried to imagine what a modern young man might do when his heart was broken. A Neanderthal Kerry would surely have rushed out with his club, and depopulated a

neighboring colony of cave-dwellers. A later Kerry might have gone away to sea, forever. Stalek had heard that getting drunk was a popular balm in modern days. He hoped Kerry would do only that.

But Kerry came back in an hour, and for interminable minutes Stalek heard him pacing restlessly. Sometimes there was an angry slamming. Then dull, absent-minded steps. A heavy case was dragged from a closet. Stalek was appalled. Was Kerry packing to go away so soon?

For perhaps ten minutes Kerry fumbled with the box. Then he came out into the pavilion. Stalek heard him settle into a chair. There was silence, pages turning, slappings and impatient mutterings. It must be stuffy up there, Stalek thought, with insects crowding to Kerry's light. Finally, carrying a book and a bundle of papers, Kerry came down into the cool windless quiet of Stalek's cave.

A gentle, high tantara sounded. Jane was on the runway, tapping the Fairy Chimes. Then she flung away the mallet and came down the steps, her tanned legs flashing below white shorts. She carried a white cylindrical package. Kerry stood up slowly. Papers slid to the floor.

What he said sounded obvious, even to Stalek.

"You didn't go."

Jane said, "No," and stopped with a strangely shy, offering gesture.

"Kerry, I was wrong. I caught Saunders before he left and explained the whole situation to him. He wants you to go to St. Louis for an interview."

Kerry stared at her, looking happy.

"No, Jane. You were right. I'm going back to school, and I'm going to be a *geologist.*"

While they kissed in passionate abandonment, an exultant expression spread over Stalek's misty face.

Jane and Kerry drew apart. Her fingers tore wrappings from her parcel.

"I brought a libation. Champagne, for celebration."

Stalek ascended the throne. Libation. Celebration. She had said that. He crouched majestically, looking down at his beloved subject and his new young priestess. His fingers shook, his hands stretched out.

Jane removed two glasses telescoped over the neck of the bottle, and applied the corkscrew. A satisfying pop tingled among the stalactites. Bright liquid shot up and gushed over the foot of Stalek's throne. That was as it should be.

Kerry held the glasses, Jane poured and put the bottle away. She accepted one of the glasses. Almost solemnly they touched rims.

As they drank, Stalek's hands rested unfelt and invisible upon their heads. Strong perfume of that which was spilled upon his altar rose pleasantly to his nostrils. His blessing held benevolence stored up for three thousand years.

arrival at anxiety

by . . . Jerome Bishop

The long trip through space was nerve-shattering to body and mind. But most of all the crew lived in mortal fear of—journey's end.

IT WAS LIKE a speck in the eye—tiny, but impossible to ignore. It hung there in front of them, always in plain view, an infinitesimal beam of light from a far-away sun deflected spaceward by one of its spinning planets. But as the speck grew daily larger and nearer, the crew of the *Golden Queen* grew proportionately more sensitive to it—inversely as the square of the distance.

Shaw, the navigator, spoke for the first time in more than an hour. "Some day," he said, "you won't have to twist your neck into a porthole to see the sky you're riding on. They'll make these ships transparent, and thousands of passengers will sit in lounge chairs and case the entire visible universe. Whenever they like, they'll—"

He stopped without finishing. It occurred to him that he was not only whistling in the dark, but had expressed himself similarly before in practically identical language. His attempt at conversation was greeted with complete silence—a silence that had grown from nervousness to fear. Not that there was

---

The merits of the "surprise twist" as an artistically effective literary device has been debated pro and con by critics of all persuasions since O. Henry first introduced it to popular fiction. We've always believed that when it is added merely as a fillip it cannot redeem an otherwise uninspired story. But as it is used here by Jerome Bishop in a story gem-brilliant throughout it crashes in your brain like a thunderclap.

---

any actual panic on board. The fear was restrained, controlled by proven methods.

Captain Olson was quietly playing solitaire on one end of the tiny table in the middle of the cabin. On the other end Schwartz, the engineer, was studying his notes again. Of the crew of twelve, one was on watch forward, the rest on routine jobs, at recreation or asleep.

Shaw turned his eyes back to his own reading, *Astral Navigation,* a handbook written by a college professor who had never been off the Earth. He resolved that he wouldn't be the first to break the next silence.

The *Golden Queen* had been cruising for forty-nine days—Earth days, divided by her chronometers into twenty-four equal parts—and should reach her destination in less than a week. Like all the Federated Globe craft she was compact, carrying not an ounce of surplus mass, or a cubic inch of unnecessary volume. Oxygen, supplies, food, fuel had been metered impartially into her storage tanks. If she ran short—well, the chemist could produce a little more of anything really vital; enough certainly for a few days.

It had never happened. What did happen was that the whole arrangement was wearing on the nerves. You couldn't make a gesture in the miniature cabin without bumping into something, couldn't relax in a chair without tripping somebody.

Shaw summed it up. "Dammit," he said, "I can't stretch out in the bunk anymore. My hair's grown too much."

Add to this the uncertainty which still attended interplanetary flight, and the fact that, for "security" reasons, no communication could be maintained with Earth, and you came up with a crew that was inevitably jittery. But on this flight there was something more to be added—a dread of their destination.

There was not one of them who, at the takeoff, would have stayed behind, or willingly waited for some future flight. None would have consented to live out his days gravity-shackled to the surface of any planet he had ever seen. From Captain Olson, who had made fifteen major flights and was incredibly old—over thirty-five, it was said—to Shaw, the rookie, space was in their blood. Yet the half-dark, half-brilliant planet that brooded in the ship's eye, the planet that was their landfall, frightened them.

"Lord, it's hot in here!" Schwartz made a quick gesture, and rose from his chair abruptly.

The ship's gravity was not adequate for a move such as this. He hit the foamlite ceiling, pivoted about, returned to the floor and glared at Shaw, who glared back.

It was Shaw's turn to watch the ship's temperature, and he and Schwartz had had this argument before. He got up with exaggerated

carefulness, went to the port side of the cabin and read the instrument.

"Sixty-eight, sir," he said mincingly and added a delicate sneer.

Olson stood up, quickly but with precision, and stepped between them. "Your watch, Mr. Shaw," he said briefly. The chronometer showed four hours of the fiftieth day.

Without effort the *Golden Queen* glided, swimming through space at about fifty thousand miles an hour. The reckoning of speed which could be made by the light entering her eye was reasonably accurate. The Captain could judge almost as well by the rate at which her rockets dwindled as she left a field of heavy force, until finally she was cruising idly, making only the effort to correct her course.

She could easily have been accelerated to any imaginable velocity. But Captain Olson, like every competent commander in space, always reserved more than adequate fuel for the landing. In her shining hull was mirrored all the starry universe. No light or heat entered except by the eye in her bow, which was set on her destination and automatically controlled her course, allowing for the displacement of the planet in its orbit.

So she floated through time and space toward her meeting with the forbidding planet, serenely as a Sun. She was no virgin, perhaps, but she was rarely beautiful.

It was her beauty that lured men aboard to make a crew. On the surface of a planet she was forever poised for space, and the mystery of the stars hung about her like a trailing nebula. They cursed her, though, for her efficiency. Once under weigh, she was almost automatic.

The work of manning her was reduced to a series of periodic checks. Most crewmen, after a few weeks in space, found themselves wishing that they could discover something wrong—even something vitally wrong—just to relieve the boredom of routine. The *Golden Queen's* present crew were no exception. So the common malaise of space travel, a composite of several causes, was growing in them.

Nobody felt apologetic for the fear that was fermenting with uncertainty. It was indefinite but by no means unfounded. There were plenty of stories. Ships landed, and their crews were never heard of again on Earth. Reception parties whisked them away—under the surface, it was supposed—and they were gone. On the other hand, ships frequently settled on the surface of the fateful planet ahead and the crews went about their business unmolested or were even received with special honors. The inhabitants were unpredictable.

If only there were some way of knowing ahead of time, a resourceful and determined ship's crew might find a method of dealing with unfriendly natives, or delay the landing till circumstances changed. But there was no way.

Good luck would make their venture come out right, and no other force known to spacemen could affect it in the least. Captain Olson, therefore, a crafty sailor and a brave man, allowed his ship to hold her course without interference.

Shaw came off watch and spent half his sack time going to sleep. After the alarm roused him and he had unfuzzed his brain with coffee, he looked again at the approaching planet hanging in space like a basketball. A quick calculation showed him clearly now that the satellite which had come from behind the planet two days ago was going to intersect their course. It was a sizeable body and it was essential to avoid not only actual contact with it, but also the sinkhole of its gravity.

It was up to him to calculate an alteration in their course or their velocity which would by-pass the hazard at the least cost in time and fuel. He reported the situation to the Captain and went to work.

As he worked, doubt hung over his shoulder like a shadow. He wanted to impress the Captain with the absolute accuracy of his reckonings. So the altered course must not be too long, too expensive—or too safe. Yet it must take them unerringly past the orbit of the satellite and set up the ship for her final drive straight to the planet. He made the reckoning close, allowing only the slightest deviation from an absolute balance of the vectors.

When he turned it in, Captain Olson studied the figures for several seconds but said nothing. That air of doubt which was the *Golden Queen's* atmosphere had even him in its grip.

In four days everybody aboard was living on sheer nerve and discipline. Their faith in navigational science was being progressively shot to pieces, for the satellite was rushing toward them at a speed that made them shrink away from the ship's bow. By the time Shaw was feverishly rechecking his figures, it had obscured the rest of the universe. Shaw woke up the Captain, who was in fact not asleep.

"There's a mistake, sir. Sorry." It seemed all he could say.

Captain Olson did not reply. Together they made the correction. Rockets roared portside. The satellite shot dizzily across the *Golden Queen's* field of vision and disappeared at such a distance that they could have seen a man on the surface. In that desolate area, however, no men lived.

Shaw, who had read a little psychology, thought he knew how it had happened. In weighing the vectors he had unconsciously been influenced by a deep conviction that a definite crash on the satellite was better than an uncertain landing on the planet. He did not try to explain this to the Captain. He had a feeling that the Captain knew all about it.

The loss of fuel and the sound of their own rockets echoing from

the surface gave them something to think about while the *Queen* drove across the last intervening emptiness and began to circle the planet. Olson personally remained on watch now. He was the first to see their objective, a great landing field at the edge of a waterway.

Then the *Queen's* eye, focused on the thick cross of the distant spaceport, showed a series of tiny dots rising, like bees from a hollyhock. In a matter of minutes these lightning-fast objects were swarming around them.

Shaw manipulated the transmitter furiously, identified his ship. The *Golden Queen* was checking her fall progressively. The little craft kept a tight cordon around her. Into the receiver came, in idiomatic English, exact instructions for landing. Then Shaw put the question.

"Who won?" he said tersely.

"Who won?" The voice in the receiver was puzzled. Then there was a chuckle. "Oh. The Social Conservatives won the election. You're okay."

They all shouted at once, even Olson at the controls. They laughed immoderately in pure pleasure, beating each other on the back. They were safe! The *Golden Queen,* snorting frightful bursts of energy from her nose, settled, hesitated, placed her landing gear gently but irrevocably upon her native Earth—their native Earth. The only planet, Captain Olson often said grimly, where he was ever afraid to make the approach for a landing.

---

thunderbolt

by . . . John A. Sentry

It takes recklessness and shining courage to dare the gulfs between the stars. But an Earthworm in its burrow may be wiser by far.

OUTSIDE, TB-4 stabbed up above the yellow gravel of the field, scattering reflections to the four winds. The big fins of her base stage threw no shadows, for it was almost exactly noon, and the sunlight coming off her hull in complex ricochets took care of the rest.

In spite of the glare in his eyes, Billy Weigand kept finding that his absent glance had drifted back to her. When it happened for the seventh time in ten minutes, he wordlessly pulled his chair around and sat down with his back to the glare. He chewed mechanically on the stub of his cigar, his teak-brown tan crinkling and smoothing in measured rhythm. His startlingly blue eyes made no comment under his bleached eyebrows. It was Colby who put the obvious in words.

He broke off in the middle of a sentence, shook his head slightly, and said, "Can't even stand to look at her, can you?"

Weigand let his blank gaze fall on Colby's face and stay there. The station director fought it for a moment. Then his eyes dropped. Weigand smiled coldly.

Luckily, or perhaps otherwise, none of us will ever be presented with a challenge as madcap-tremendous as the one which confronts Billy Weigand in this dynamic story of a space pilot's first trip to the moon. It might almost be labeled: "An Authoritative Guide to Self-Destruction." Startling indeed is John A. Sentry's uncanny ability to pack into a few brief scenes events and circumstances which plunge undeviatingly to terror's darkling core.

Discomfited, Colby's face turned darker under its tan. "Look!" he said in exasperation. "What am I supposed to do for you? Wreck the whole program?"

Weigand took the cigar out of his mouth. Holding it in his right hand, he brushed some ashes off the legs of his cotton coveralls. Then he clamped his teeth around the cigar again.

There was derision in his eyes.

Colby glared at him. He moved a hand unconsciously. The corners of his mouth twitched. Then he slammed the flat of his hand on his thigh.

"No! No, Weigand, and that's final! I will not forward your request, I will not expend my budget, I will not ask for a supplementary appropriation. I will not authorize you to take the lunger around the Moon—and if you're not careful, I'll wash you out altogether and give Ferris the job you're supposed to do."

Weigand laughed at him silently, and Colby wilted. He gestured helplessly, his voice pleading.

"Look, Billy—I *know* you're the only guy the lunger can be trusted to. I *know* you're the expert on flying the thing. If I was the Secretary, I'd listen to your opinions and damn few others. But I'm just a front-office flunky. Let's face it. That's all I am. I get my orders from the Secretary, and I draw pay for seeing they're carried out. The orders say TB-4 will be used only for research at extreme altitudes. Okay. So you think she's good enough to take around the Moon. Maybe you're right. But the program says we use the lunger only for the research which will show us how to build a bigger, safer ship.

"Be reasonable, Billy—you'll still be in shape when Number Five's built. Wait. Don't act like a little kid who's so eager to get to the party that he leaves two hours early."

Weigand's expression did not change. He stood up, jammed the cigar butt into Colby's ashtray, and walked out . . .

He looked sourly at the lunger as he skirted the edge of the field, his fists knotted up tight.

They had departmentalized the guts out of this racket. They had taken a big, raw idea—a dream, an uppercut at the universe, a shout against the safe, orderly, ordinary lives that human flesh was heir to—and they had labeled it, and classified it, and given its dissected pieces, one here, one there, each to a jealous little department to hold. They had made the eagle beholden to a different god for each feather of its wings.

What hypocrites they were!

They had drawn up a program. They had created schedules. They had talked, and talked, and talked about each little bit of it, until they were used to all the words and did not have to risk the uneasiness of a thrill. They had brought so many blind men to the elephant that they had forestalled the risk of having

anyone realize it was alive, that it had purpose, and will, and meaning.

Weigand looked at the lunger again—at the three stages piled smoothly atop each other.

Stages. There was your key word. Do it by stages. Easy stages.

Build a fifty-foot rocket. Fly it to pieces. Build a fifty-one-foot rocket. Test it for flaws.

Go up twenty miles. Go up repeatedly. Take readings, check data, theorize, extrapolate—but not too far—and go up again. Then take your new rocket—and go up twenty-one miles.

The distance to the Moon was 238,862 miles.

Good Lord, do you listen to the *Moonlight Sonata* at one note a week?

* * *

Dingle, his dresser, shook him awake. Weigand grunted and ran his tongue over his dry lips. He swung his legs over the side of his cot.

"Zero seven hundred, Major," Dingle said.

Weigand nodded brusquely. He scraped some of the grot out of his eyelashes, shook his head to get the remaining fog out, and walked to the shower. He let the icy water stream down over the top of his skull, gasping once as it electrified the muscles of his belly. Then he was awake. He scooped up the soap and began scouring himself. His mouth opened, and he bellowed:

"You'll soon get used to her looks," said he,
"And a very nice girl you'll find her!
"She may very well pass for forty-three
"In the dusk with a light behind her!"

He grinned to himself. He could still sleep like a baby, and, by God, there wasn't anything wrong with his glandular system.

Which, by the looks of it, made him unique on the project.

He turned off the water, grabbed a towel, and rubbed himself dry. The last set of glands left in the whole rocketry racket . . .

He ate lightly from the tray of scrambled eggs Dingle had waiting for him. He only drank half his coffee. You don't throw a TB around on a full stomach—not for long. He patted the flat of his naked belly as he stood up and nodded to Dingle.

The light cotton underwear went on first. You can't scratch an itch through full flying kit. Then the wired undersuit, its electrical connections dangling like the laces of a loosened corset. Then the huff-puff, all rubberized canvas and flaccid air bladders, squeezing his body even in its limp state. Dingle moved around him like a grunting shadow, lacing him up, smoothing wrinkles, tugging and twisting.

He had to fall backwards on the bed so Dingle could get his boots on, and the dresser had to pull him

up to his feet when that was done. Waddling, awkward and as clumsy as any knight at the height of the plate-armor era, he picked up his helmet and went outside.

Colby stopped him at the foot of the gantry crane. "Weigand."

He raised his eyebrows and grunted inquiringly.

"No tricks. You'll follow your flight plan. Try to do anything besides just taking her once around the Earth, and you're up for General Courts. We'll take over on remote control, bring her down, and throw you in solitary, all in one fast motion. Is that clear?"

Weigand grinned. He let Colby fidget for a moment, then nodded. Then he turned around and made winding motions to the crane lift operator. He stood on the platform, one hand gripping a rail, and grinned down at Colby as he rose up above the field, beside the lunger's towering flank.

Earth is a green and brown, breeze-caressed place, with gentle fields and sunlit trees? Think again, brother: Earth is a blue-grey, cloud-wrapped ball, spinning in the black of harsh space. Get out a hundred miles above it, if you imagine otherwise, if you believe your microcosm is the beginning and end, forever and ever. Cite the opinion of two-and-a-half billion people. Go ahead. I'll produce the opinion of a trillion trillion earthworms, who think the Earth is a soft, dank mass of loam. I'll set you to counting the suns in this one galaxy alone, and, being generous, allow that only one in a hundred has planets.

Weigand laughed into his microphone as he dropped his last stage. If you think Earth is more than just a minor speck in the eyes of the stars, come up here with me.

But if you think that makes a rocket, thundering silently in the mighty dark, only a minor achievement—why, you, too, come up here with me.

"Thunderbolt Base to Thunderbolt . . . Base to Thunderbolt. Over."

Weigand clicked his switch.

"Yeah. Over."

"Is anything wrong? Over."

"No. Out."

He lay on his back and looked up through the canopy, where the stars hung without moving, without winking, without giving a damn.

Go ahead, you theoreticians—put that in a box.

He reached out with a foot and kicked the remote controls to scrap. He hit his gyroscope switches and watched the stars revolve. And when Thunderbolt's nose pointed just a few degrees of arc beyond the Moon, he fired off his motors. Pridefully, then, he straightened.

Here I come, ready or not!

He batted Thunderbolt's tail around as he went by the Moon, and fired off again. Thunderbolt Base choked off abruptly as he put the bulk of that scarred wall between himself and their signals.

And then the alarms went off in

a hell of sonic explosion. He looked up through the dome.

The mile-long, golden ship, crashing past the Solar System like a torch, afire with sunlight, snapped him up like a pike gulping a minnow. Without slackening speed or deviating from its course, it grabbed him up and threw him and the Thunderbolt into a cargo hold it happened to have empty. It had not intercepted him. Rather, he had chanced to be in its path, and it found it easier to ingest than to smash him.

Weigand tore his hands loose from their safety straps. He slapped his thighs and roared, his throat wide open, his eyes wet with laughter. He thought of Colby, trying to keep him from going around the Moon. Trying to keep him boxed up in careful graph-paper. Well, he was going a lot farther than around the Moon now, and there were forces in Nature and things in the universe that Colby's charts had never dreamed of, let alone reduced to decimal places.

Go ahead. Go ahead, you dissectors and theoreticians. Explain this!

---

the hollywood habit

by . . . William Morrison

It's exhilarating to change wives with the impulsiveness of a bee sipping nectar. But what if each new wife is a stand-in for the old?

ROGER UPTON was the last man I'd have expected to go Hollywood, so completely the last man, in fact, that when I heard the rumor—only a casual one, as Roger wasn't important enough for a high-voltage rumor campaign—it was natural for me to disbelieve it.

I had known Roger a long time, ever since his high school days. He had always been contemptuous of what some people thought of as glamor, preferring his quiet Betty to the more popular girls who would have liked to be friendly with him. Later on, when he had become well known as a character actor, he had never gone to night clubs or been involved in any of the sensational brawls that took place in and around the city of angels.

His idea of a good time, apparently, was to make something in the machine shop he had set up in his garage, or to do a few experiments in the laboratory he had built later, when he could afford it. He was about as unactorlike an actor as you ever saw.

That was why it was such a shock to learn that the rumor was true.

There's something about a William Morrison fantasy yarn, encased as this one is in a sparkling capsule of completely believable future science, that makes its recommendation a joy under any and all circumstances. So, dear reader, if you are marooned on a desert island and in need of guidance and succor—here is a brightly beckoning avenue of escape down which you may trip in the company of an undaunted, superlatively gifted story teller.

I can't say that I liked his new wife too much. Betty had been soft and gentle and compliant, with mouse-colored hair and wistful features, and when she entered a room she had always been content to remain a part of the background. This one had nothing wistful about her, and she wasn't background. She was loud and brash, and her hair too definitely caught your eye. When she laughed, as she did often when I saw her, you had no doubt that she was amused. She was a complete change from Betty.

One of the good things about Roger was that you could talk to him frankly. He said, "You don't approve, do you, Jim?"

"It's none of my business. But I did like Betty."

"So did I," he agreed. "For years. But when you have to live with a woman day in and day out, the Bettys of his world begin to pall on you." He said this quite coolly. "I felt that I needed a little variety."

"You have it," I said. "How did Betty take it?"

"Better than you'd suppose. You don't have to worry about her."

Then he dropped the subject and showed me a new motor he had built. Outside of wives, nothing else about him had changed.

The new wife lasted two years. There followed a giddy platinum blonde, of whom he tired in less than six months, an olive-skinned brunette, another redhead, with hair less flaming this time, and another blonde, with tresses a soothing lemon. If variety was what Roger wanted, he was getting it.

He had remained stodgy and stolid enough in all other ways, but when it came to changing wives, he was Hollywood at its most characteristic. I was pleased to see, however, that he managed his marital transactions quietly. Being only a character actor, he didn't have the glare of publicity about him that would have made the whole matter distasteful. The gossip reporters heard not a word about divorce and remarriage until the switch had actually been made, and by that time the news was old and unexciting.

During this entire period—all five wives had taken no more than six years—I saw Roger on very rare occasions, and then for only a few hours at a time. One look at his current spouse was always enough for me. They were none of them my type. I wondered that Roger should consider them his.

He had gone on to New Wife Number Six, another brunette, when I arrived in town for a short stay. This time Roger appeared to be a little more lonely than usual—evidently, none of these women were as good company as Betty had been—and he invited me to stay overnight at his house.

At dinner I found myself staring at his current wife a little more often than was polite. There was something odd about her, and it took me a full hour to realize what it was. She wasn't as quiet and re-

tiring as his first had been, nor as loud and aggressive as some of his other wives. But her manner of speech was familiar, her features brought back memories, and her every motion, her gestures—

She was another Betty. A little older, a little harder, but not enough to be spoiled. Some psychologists tell us that a man always falls in love with the same kind of woman. Roger hadn't followed the rule for the past six years. But evidently the rule had followed him, and eventually it had caught up with him.

I said nothing to Roger about it. But I think his wife noticed me staring at her, and a puzzled look came into her eyes.

I didn't have much of a chance to talk to her. The few minutes we were alone she spent in chatting about the polite trifles most of us use as subjects of conversation when we don't know each other very well. Even if she had asked me, however, I don't think I'd have mentioned what I had discovered.

It was another year before I was in town again. This must have been a bad year for Roger, because his name disappeared from the casts of the new movies. For some Hollywood reason or another, Roger had lost popularity as a character actor, and was apparently on his way out.

It's under such circumstances that a man most needs, and appreciates a friend, and I made haste to call him. Roger wasn't at home, but his new wife was, and she invited me over. She wanted very much to talk to me.

This time, when I saw her, she reminded me more of Betty than ever. She evidently reminded herself too, for she asked me, with a bluntness typical of Roger himself, "Do I look like Betty?"

"Very much like her," I replied.

"I move and act like her too, don't I?" she asked.

I nodded uneasily. I didn't like the subject, but I knew that it was useless to try to change it.

Her next question startled me. "Tell me, please, do I resemble Roger's other wives too?"

"Not at all," I assured her. "His other wives were as different from you, and from each other, as women could be—different in every possible way."

"In *every* way? You really think so. I was under the impression that we were all about the same height, and the same weight."

"I wouldn't know about that," I said, noncommittally.

"I do know," she said. "I can wear their shoes. By the way, have you been through the house during the past few years? Have you seen Roger's laboratory?"

I hadn't, and she showed it to me. It was well equipped, as far as I could judge, and there were a great many instruments I couldn't make head or tail of. There were also many books on technical aspects of biochemistry, and several on clinical psychiatry. In a way, I was impressed. Roger had been less

of a dilettante than I had realized.

The really odd thing about the laboratory, however, was the layer of dust that covered most of the reagents and books. "What's wrong?" I asked. "Has Roger lost interest in all this?"

She nodded. "I think he's lost interest permanently. I don't think he's going to use this place any more."

"Why not?"

She didn't answer directly. "You know," she said, "there's something I must tell you. Something I never told Roger himself. At times I have very strange memories."

I murmured something noncommittal. I wasn't sure that I wanted her telling me things she didn't tell her own husband.

She went on as if what I said or left unsaid didn't matter. "I seem to remember things that happened to other people. To Betty, for one thing. To all of Roger's other wives, too. It's as if I had actually been all those women."

"If I were you—" I began.

"No, it's no use advising me to see a psychiatrist. I intended to do that of my own accord, until I realized the truth. The fact is, I *was* all these women."

That stopped me, and it was at that point that I began edging away from her. People who have the delusion that they are someone else are not usually allowed to run around loose for long.

She noticed me shying away, and said, "Don't be silly. You surely aren't afraid of *me*."

"No, but—"

"I *do* have memories that belong to all those other women. I can tell you things they did and places they went to."

"You might have learned about them from Roger," I reminded her.

She shook her head. "On the contrary, Roger never talked about them. Nor did anyone else. Neither the neighbors nor Roger's friends were allowed to become too well acquainted with them. Or rather, too well acquainted with *me*, in my different bodily forms. What I remembered all came to me from my own mind."

I wasn't going to argue with her, and it obviously wouldn't have made any difference if I had. She said, "You still find it hard to believe what Roger did, don't you? You still don't believe he could change my appearance so drastically from one time to the next."

"It takes a little more credulity and willingness to believe than I possess," I told her.

"And yet it's really so simple," she insisted. "All Roger had to do was give me a few of his hormone mixtures, and there'd be a change in my features and in my figure. As for such things as hair color and complexion, they were easy."

"I don't know how easy they'd be," I said. "But you seem to believe that you went through not only a series of different appearances, but a series of personality changes as

well. And from one—incarnation, let's call it—to the next, you lost and acquired a new set of memories."

"Don't you know that hormones produce a personality change in themselves? As for your other objection, it's easy enough to wipe out old memories," she said. "Electric shock treatment does that quite well, especially in combination with drugs. When it came to the acquisition of new memories—that happened gradually. This last time, for instance, the first thing I recall is that I had amnesia. At least that's what Roger told me. And he knew enough about psychology to see that I believed him, when he reminded me of events that were supposed to have taken place."

"It's plausible enough, the way you tell it," I admitted. "But you still haven't convinced me."

"Oh, I didn't expect to convert you right away."

"Especially as I can't think of any reason why Roger should have done such a thing," I said.

"There are several reasons, and at least two of them are good ones." She smiled at me. "Naturally, once the idea struck me, I devoted a great deal of time to it. And I decided that the first reason was financial. Roger wanted his fling, without having to pay too much for it. Can you imagine what it would have meant to be paying alimony to half a dozen wives at one time? It was much less expensive to remain married to me, and to change me from time to time into the kind of person he had taken a momentary fancy to."

"And the second reason?"

"I think," she said slowly, "that Roger had a genuine affection for me, and all through his new adventures, he didn't want to lose me. In this way he was able—well, to eat his cake and have it too."

She fell silent, and I had about decided to go, when she started to talk again. "He didn't stop to think how cruel he was being to me. Every time he destroyed my old personality, I suffered a kind of death." She looked suddenly older. "It isn't good to die too often."

"And finally to be brought back to life again as you were originally."

"Yes," she said. "That was another thing that went wrong. He didn't realize that eventually his methods would become less effective, and that memories of my old selves would break through to my present form."

"If your ideas are correct, he miscalculated badly," I agreed. "However—"

Someone was at the door, with a key. "Roger!" I exclaimed, and looked at her.

She was smiling again. "Not Roger," she said. "By the way, I haven't told you about my new husband."

The man came in, and she said, "I'd like you to meet Ralph."

I stared at Ralph, while I shook his hand mechanically. Even after what she had been saying, I would-

n't have believed it possible. I was certain that this was Roger, although at first glance my eyes had told me differently. She knew it too. He was the only one of us that didn't.

"What's sauce for the goose," she said, "is sauce for the gander."

"What's that, dear?" he asked placidly, much more placidly than Roger would have done.

"Nothing much," she replied. "I've just been saying how happy we were together. We're really a very unusual couple, Ralph. Neither of us believe in that silly Hollywood habit of always changing husbands or wives, do we, dear?"

devil play

by . . . Nathaniel Norsen Weinreb

Proverbially speaking, the Devil can ply his trade almost anywhere. But Big League Baseball—as every one knows—has rules of its own.

"WHY, YOU DON'T even *look* like the devil," Otis commented sourly, watching the pink-skinned, blue-eyed, gray-moustached man of middle age who sat, with a huge briefcase gently balanced on his knees, across the desk. "When I invoked you to appear, I expected to find—"

The devil coughed gently, searched for his neat breastpocket handkerchief, found it, removed it, and started to clean his rimless glasses. Fascinated, Otis watched as the manicured and polished fingernails passed the fine linen over the square-cut shape of the spectacles.

"That is a common misconception," the devil said, his eyes lowered upon his task. "People, when they invoke me, expect to see me with hoof, horn and tail, all surrounded by an odor of brimstone. A terrible, terrible error, Mr. Otis, a medieval notion, fostered by the Faust-Mephistopheles legend and nursed through the ages by superstition. As you can see, Mr. Otis, I am quite normal and quite modern."

The blue eyes looked up and caught Otis in their brilliant, ter-

---

We predict you'll chuckle hugely over this utterly charming little fantasy by the distinguished author of THE BARBARIANS *and* THE SORCERERS, *both best-selling historical novels published by Doubleday and reprinted by Perma. We predict you'll chuckle and then grow grim, for surely no tale of his Satanic Majesty could possibly be hilarious throughout. Or could we be mistaken?*

rible gaze. The full mouth smiled, revealing the tiny baby-teeth, glittering white and perfectly formed. I wonder if he wears porcelain caps, Otis wondered . . .

"But how do I know that you *are* the devil?" Otis insisted stubbornly, talking as he would to one of his clients who didn't want to purchase an additional insurance policy.

"I see." The devil sighed wearily. "You want proof. A miracle. Very well—" and lazily he snapped his fingers, waved his hand, making a table, loaded with dishes and a steaming silver percolator of coffee, appear before Otis' widening eyes. The devil reached for a hot corn muffin and began buttering it carefully.

"We might as well have breakfast together," he said amiably, delicately biting into the muffin, "and talk this over like civilized people. Besides, I haven't eaten for two days. Spent most of the last two nights behind the Iron Curtain . . ." He shook his head, his cheek puffed with muffin. "I am doing a terrific business with souls there. Those Russians! What bargainers . . . Well," and he swallowed the muffin, sipped daintily at the coffee, and tapped his mouth with a napkin, "let's get on with it, shall we?

"You are James Otis, aged forty-two years, an insurance agent, not very successful, unmarried, who wants to trade his soul for two hundred thousand dollars—tax free—to be obtained within six months, with resulting fame and publicity and said monies to be acquired with pleasure and a minimum of effort. Is that correct, Mr. Otis?"

"Roger," said Otis, feeling silly at the old Air Force expression. But the devil reminded him of a weather officer he had known in the 15th Air Force.

"Very well," the devil said briskly. "Request has been granted. The papers are ready." He bent toward the huge briefcase, which opened automatically and from which he took out a long, pink-colored legal document. For a moment, his eyes skimmed over the paper and he hummed slightly, nodded and handed the sheet to Otis.

"You will sign where the double X's are," he informed Otis. "Here . . . use my pen . . ."

The pen, Otis thought, felt slightly hot, but he disregarded it as his experienced eyes swept over the legal wordage. It was all there . . . the sum of two hundred thousand . . . to be acquired within six months, with fame and publicity, and pleasure and a minimum of effort. In return for which one James Otis gave over his soul to the devil.

"There are no options, as you can see," the devil remarked. Otis merely grunted, unscrewed the pen and hastily applied his signature.

"Excellent penmanship," the devil observed, looking at the signature. Carefully, he inserted the document back into the briefcase

which closed itself. "Now. You have started. Within a month, you will be the star relief pitcher for the New York Giants. By the end of the baseball season, you will be the baseball sensation of the sporting world. You will be signed to an exclusive contract, earning you two hundred thousand dollars for the season."

"The Giants . . ." Otis gulped happily.

"Naturally," the devil nodded. "For years, you have been one of the Polo Grounds faithful, yearning for a World Series pennant. Anyone knows what torture it is to be a Giant fan. Why, even where *I* come from, we have no instruments of pain like *that*. However, relief pitcher you will be. You are too old—physically—to go a full game.

"After all, we do have to be reasonable, don't we? But you now have the power. You will try out for spring training with the Giants, paying your own expenses as any unknown does. But you won't be unknown for long."

"Power?" Otis asked. "What power?"

"The power—or supernatural ability, if you want to call it that," the devil smiled gently, "of being able to throw nothing but strikes."

Otis took a deep breath. "You mean . . . that whoever gets up to face me will strike out?"

"Exactly," said the devil and flew out of the window . . .

"Hey, Skipper," Wes Westrum called out to Durocher in the Arizona sunshine, "take a peek at this old-timer who's pitching up there. Caught him myself. He hasn't missed the plate yet and has struck out fifteen in a row."

Grunting, Durocher ambled up to the first base line, watching Otis on the mound. Clad in an old sweat shirt and some faded baseball pants, Otis seemed to be lobbing them up easily. Even as Durocher watched an eager young rookie went swinging to his knees.

Durocher crooked a little finger and three coaches came panting up. "Get those red-necks out of there," the Giant manager rasped, "and send up Irvin, Lockman, Dark and Mays . . ."

And as Irvin, Lockman, Dark and Mays went down swinging on twelve perfectly pitched strikes, Durocher was wondering how much this Otis would cost the Giant management . . .

And, at World Series time, the management decided that Otis was worth every bit of the two hundred thousand he had asked for—and had been given. In addition to shattering every National and American League pitching record, with an earned run average of .000—Otis also used that gifted right-hand to pitch the Giants into the Series with the New York Yankees.

The Stadium team, although a sound one, boasted this year of only one real slugger, burly, blond Kenny Kitchner, a right-fielder, used mainly for pinch-hitting duties on the portside since his discharge

from the front in Korea. So far, Kitchner had been clipping the fences to a .467 rhythm since his return.

In the first six games of the Series, Otis and Kitchner had never met; either the reliefer came in when Kitchner had already batted or Otis wasn't used at all, as happened in the first two games that the Polo Grounders took without the aid of the devil's disciple. A slight cold kept Kitchner out of the third and fourth stanzas, which the Bombers copped. In the fifth, Stengel, masterminding his two-platoon system, sent the blond into the fray in the sixth, with Kenny clearing the bases on a long triple off Turley.

In the seventh, Otis went on to pitch the Giants to a win, striking out nine men in a row. The sixth game went to the Stengeleers, with Otis pitching one inning before Kitchner got up to bat, only to be thrown out of the game on a heated decision over a pitched ball.

Thus . . . in the last game of the series, all knotted up at three-all, the excitement arose to tremendous frenzy in the last of the ninth, with the score deadlocked at zero for both teams and with Kitchner—for the first time in the series—meeting the reliefer, Otis.

Otis was on the mound, facing Kitchner and ready to throw the first ball when his eyes caught sight of a familiar figure with rimless glasses, moustache and briefcase, hovering near the Giant dugout. Something tugged at Otis' heart. He signalled frantically.

Durocher ran over from third base. "Tired?" he asked anxiously.

Otis shook his head. "That little man over there. I just want to see him for a second." And before the manager could protest, Otis had torn off the mound and was chasing after the little man, finally catching up to him under the stands.

"Is anything the matter? Why did you show up now?" Otis demanded.

The devil glared at him, his blue eyes flaming. "My business was with Kitchner, not you," he snapped.

"Kitchner?" Otis' heart raced.

"Yes, Kitchner." The devil smiled wickedly. "You see," he explained, "I have a contract with *him* too. Made it overseas, as a matter of fact. Not as expensive as yours, but good enough. Read it."

The briefcase flew open and the familiar pink contract fluttered in Otis' resin-coated hand. The reliefer's eyes found the vital paragraph:

"And, in return for the soul of Kenneth Wellington Kitchner, pinch-hitter for the New York Yankees, I, the Devil, do promise that said Kenneth Wellington Kitchner will—for the duration of this baseball season—always get a hit whenever he is at bat, no matter who the pitcher may be . . ."

The paper dropped from Otis' fingers.

"Now," the devil smiled gently, "go out and pitch, boy . . ."

—Continued from Back Cover

$1.00 IS ALL YOU PAY FOR ANY 3 OF THESE GREAT BOOKS

when you join the Club

Each One Packed from Cover to Cover With Thrilling, Top-Flight Stories of Science-Fiction

THE TREASURY OF SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS

World-renowned stories that have stood the test of time — by H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley, Philip Wylie, Edgar Allan Poe, E. M. Forster, F. Scott Fitzgerald, etc. 704 pages. (*Publ. ed.* $2.95)

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION

43 top-stories by outstanding authors . . . stories of Wonders of Earth and Man . . . of startling inventions . . . of visitors from Outer Space . . . of Far Traveling . . . Adventures in Dimension . . . Worlds of Tomorrow. 562 pages. (*Publ. ed.* $3.50)

THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY

A story about the first A-Bomb . . . written before it was invented! A story of the movie machine that shows "newsreels" of *any* past event. Plus a score of other best tales from a dozen years of Astounding Science-Fiction magazine by its editor, John W. Campbell, Jr. (*Publ. ed.* $3.95)

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION

Selected stories from *Fantasy and Science-Fiction Magazine*. The woman who became her own daughter . . . atomic power from beans . . . the man that lived 300 years . . . gambling on a strange planet . . . and many others. (*Publ. ed.* $3.25)

CHILDREN OF WONDER

21 remarkable and fantastic tales about some of the most awe-inspiring, charming and monstrous children imaginable, by outstanding authors like Bradbury, Graham Greene, D. H. Lawrence, and others. (*Publ. ed.* $3.00)

ASSIGNMENT IN TOMORROW

A complete short novel, 3 novelettes and 12 short stories combine to make a truly scalp-tingling volume about the cosmic life of the future — edited by Frederik Pohl. Absorbing stories that provide a chilling glimpse into tomorrow. (*Publ. ed.* $3.50)

PORTALS OF TOMORROW

A sparkling crop of weird and wonderful tales selected by expert August Derleth. The man who invented a solid vacuum . . . the Martian ship which lands on Earth on Hallowe'en, and many others. (*Publ. ed.* $3.75)

NOW—THE BEST NEW SCIENCE-FICTION BOOKS FOR ONLY $1.00 EACH!

IMAGINE — ANY 3 of these full-size, brand-new science-fiction anthologies — yours for just $1! Each is crammed with the science thrills of the future . . . written by the most sought-after science-fiction authors of today. A $9.20 to $11.20 value, complete and in handsome permanent bindings.

Each month the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB brings you only the finest brand-new full-length books FOR ONLY $1 EACH (plus a few cents shipping charge) — even though they cost $2.50, $3.00 and up in publishers' editions! Each month's selection is described IN ADVANCE. You take ONLY those books you really want — as few as four a year.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Coupon TODAY!

We KNOW you will enjoy membership in this new book club. To PROVE it, we are making this amazing offer! Your choice of ANY 3 of the new Science-Fiction anthologies — at ONLY $1 FOR ALL THREE. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. This liberal offer may have to be withdrawn at any time. So mail coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. FU-4, Garden City, New York

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, Dept. FU-4, Garden City, New York

Please rush me the 3 anthologies checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only $1 for all three (plus few cents shipping charges), and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus shipping. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member) — and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

SPECIAL NO RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing and this membership will be cancelled!

- ☐ Assignment in Tomorrow
- ☐ Astounding Science-Fiction Anthology
- ☐ Best from Fantasy and Science-Fiction
- ☐ Children of Wonder
- ☐ Omnibus of Science-Fiction
- ☐ Portals of Tomorrow
- ☐ Treasury of Science-Fiction Classics

Name .....

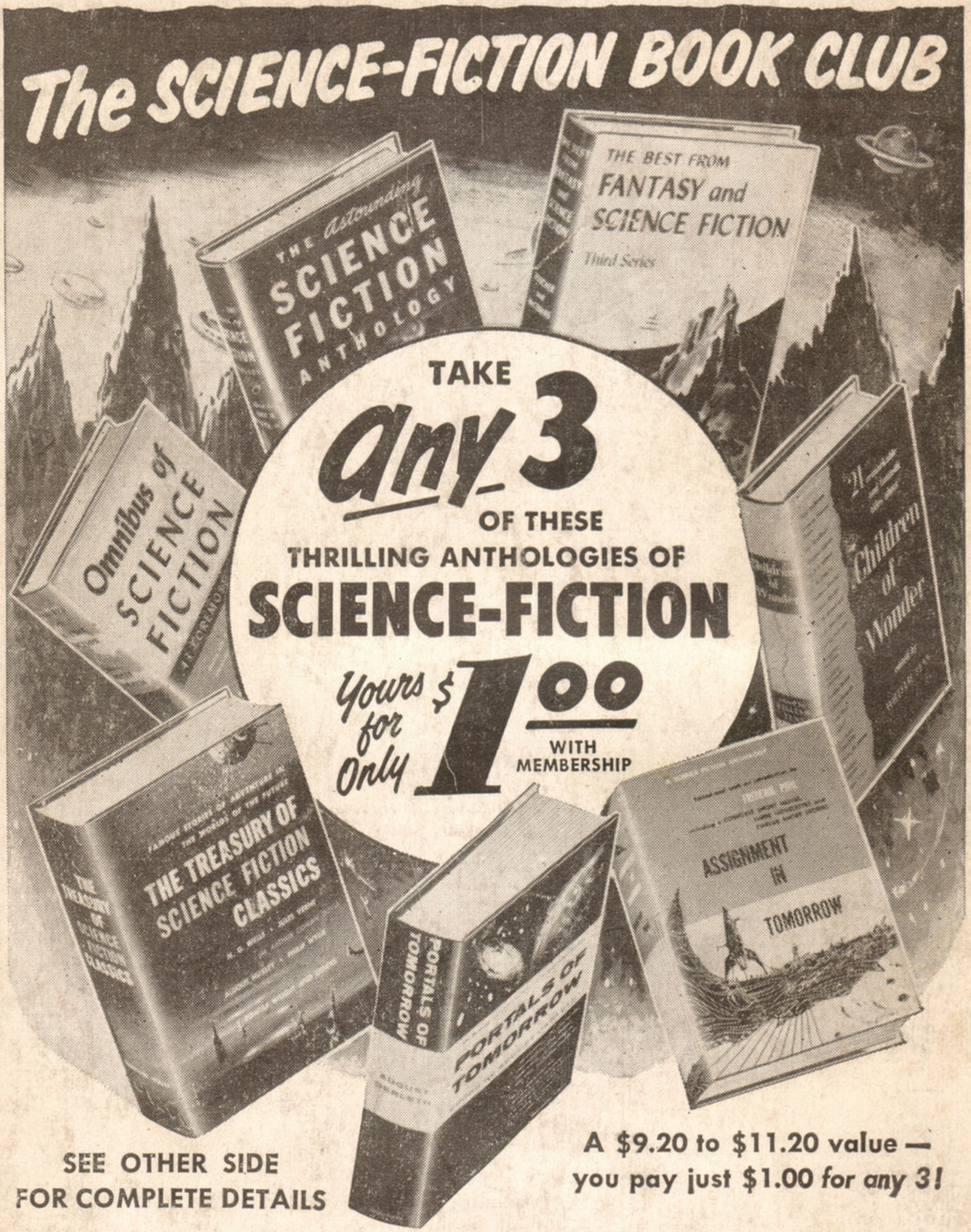
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address .....

City ..... *Zone* ..... *State* .....

Selection price in Canada $1.10 plus shipping. Address Science-Fiction Club, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. (*Offer good only in U. S. and Canada.*)

The Most Generous Offer Ever Made By



SEE OTHER SIDE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

A $9.20 to $11.20 value — you pay just $1.00 *for any 3!*

HERE'S an offer that is as thrilling as the incredible, spine-tingling stories crammed between the covers of these anthologies! These volumes contain not only "top-drawer" science-fiction, but also science *facts* by outstanding authorities. Handsome, permanent bindings. Any 3 of them would normally cost you $9.20 to $11.20 in publishers' original editions — but all you pay is just $1.00 when you join the Club!

This generous offer is made to introduce you to the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, a wonderfully new idea in bringing you the best of the new science-fiction books — *at a mere fraction of their usual cost!* Take advantage of this offer now — pick your 3 anthologies and mail coupon on other side of this page TODAY!