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by  
Gene  
Hunter

**FINAL BARRIER**

by Alan E. Nourse



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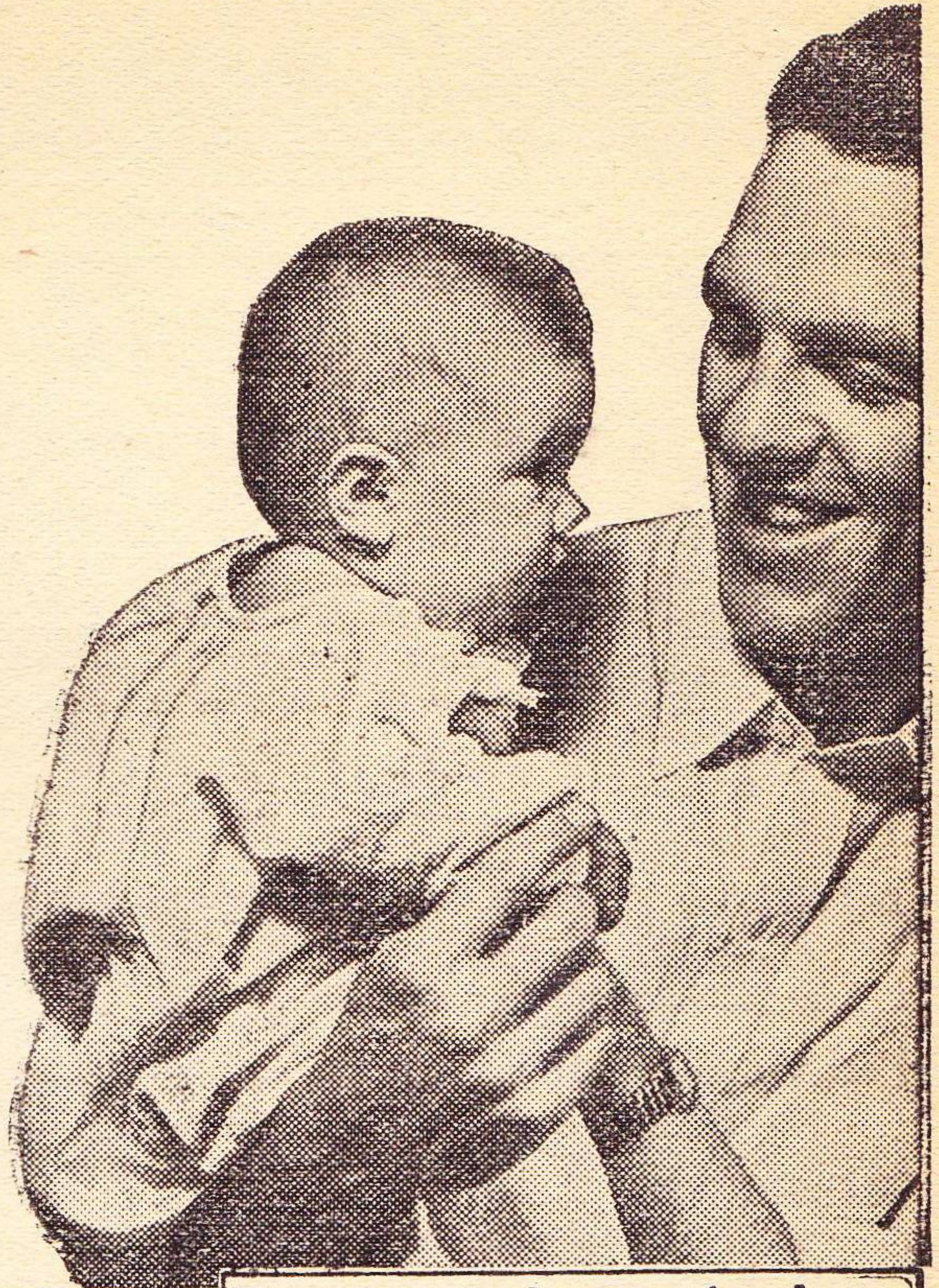
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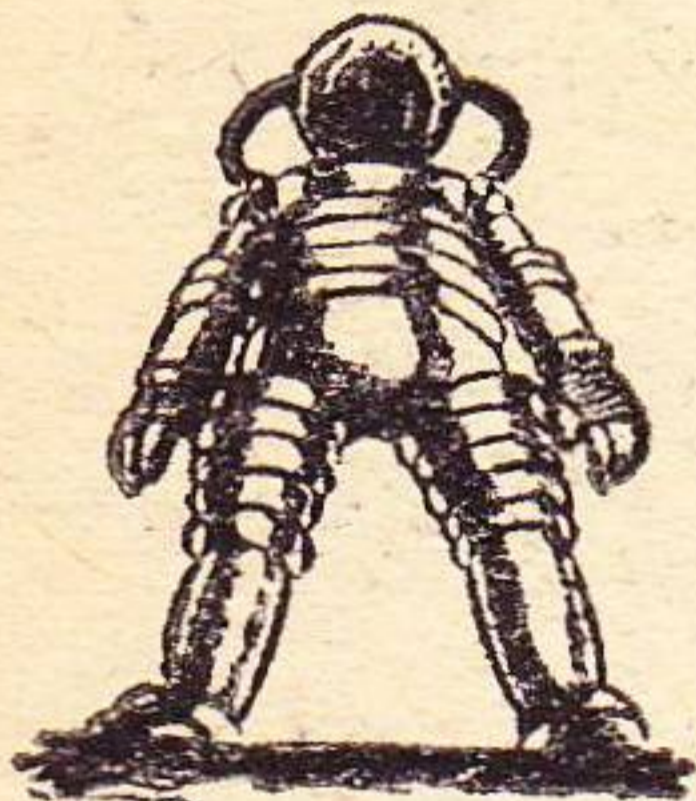
Robert W.  
Lowndes,  
*Editor*

Volume 3

September, 1952

Number 3

*Feature Novels*



**THE GODS FEAR LOVE** ..... Gene Hunter 10

The other expedition members laugh at Rorn's attraction to this primitive woman, until . . .

**WE WILL INHERIT** .. Wallace West 46

"Your ancestors fled to another world, but ours remained here and survived; we shall inherit this world, now!"

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All shades of opinion and all kinds of controversies in science-fiction are welcome here. Your editor is MC.

**FINAL BARRIER** ..... Alan E. Nourse 27

No one has foreseen the real reason why ships to Mars remain!

**SMALL FRY** ..... Hunt Collins 37

It isn't a dream — this is a bunch of kids, armed for invasion!

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Here's the consensus of opinion on our May issue.

**READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON** ..... 98

We like letters better, but if you just want to vote, here's a simple way to accomplish it.

*Cover by Peter Poulton, from "Small Fry"*

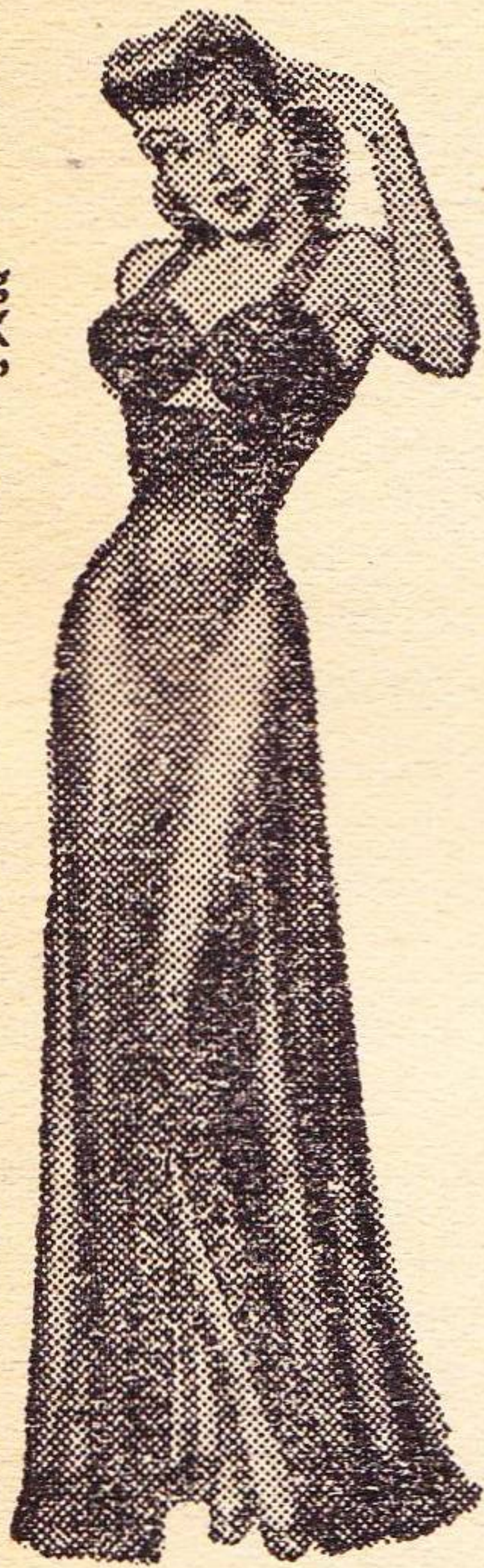
*Interior Illustrations by Luross and Murphy*

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A Department For Science-Fictionists



THE FANTASY Veterans Association held their second annual convention a little while back, and I was happy to attend—particularly since the hall was only a short distance from where I live; I do not care for traveling—as a “panel” guest. What this turned out to be was simply that, along with a number of other knights of the blue pencil, I sat up on a platform while the fans and readers below fired questions. The general idea was that a question could be addressed to a specific editor, or to the panel in general—in either case, any member of the panel could chip in when the person addressed had finished.

So, the audience wanted to know—you’ve guessed it: girly covers, particularly those showing men fully clad (somewhere between hither and yon, astronomically speaking) while the gals wore the least that showed the best. I gave them the same answer you’ve seen in our letter column. Later on, we had a chance to fire questions at the fans; but alas, I forgot to ask them—just out of idle curiosity, you understand—why so many fan magazines have nudes on their covers.

The younger readers, and fans, however, have been asking this same ques-

tion for at least twenty years. Just recently, I looked through some old copies of *Astounding Stories*, vintage 1931 and 1932. In a 1932 issue was a most indignant letter bemoaning the besmirchment of the fair name of science-fiction with SEX, and lambasting the “lascivious” cover on the October, 1931 issue. I read the letter aloud to Lester del Rey, and some others who had dropped over, then dug out the cover for exhibition; the response made me wonder if some of the fans who are protesting so loudly today will find these same covers so hilariously funny, and un-erotic, by comparison, twenty years hence. And let’s be honest: I didn’t like some of those early-girly covers at the time, either; don’t remember writing any letters, but I telepathed dissent. Also, like today’s fans, I felt *sure* that covers like this would ruin the magazine, would repel potential readers, etc.

To get back to the Fan Vets: I’d been hearing them mentioned for quite a while, but had no idea as to what the organization was all about. It isn’t exactly what it seems to be—just a club composed of science-fictionists,

[Turn To Page 8]

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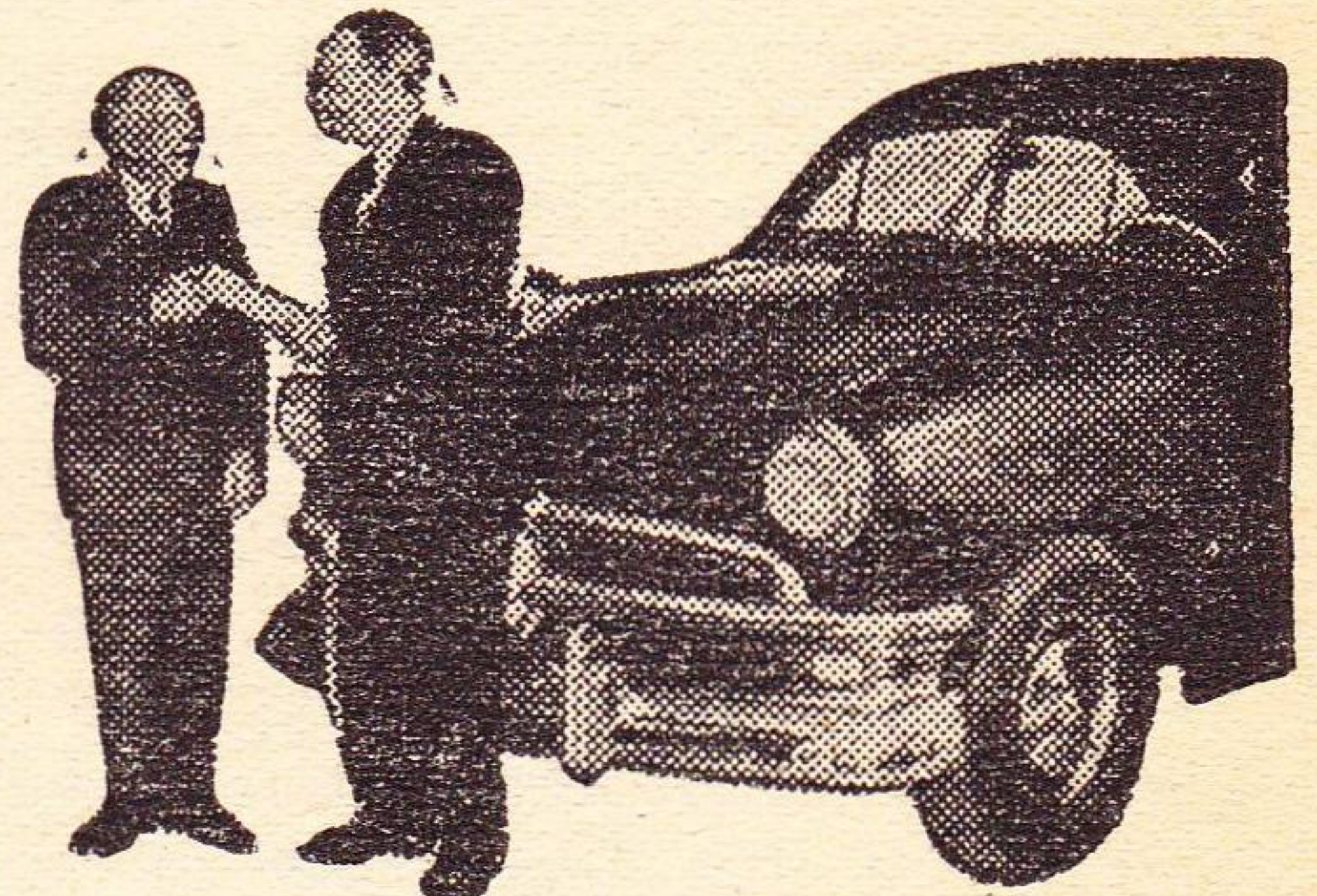
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and fantasy-lovers, who were, or are, in service.

James V. Taurasi—who publishes a very fine news-sheet called *Fantasy Times*—and some friends formulated the idea during the last war, when they were overseas: A small organization whose function will be to help supply science-fiction and fantasy fans with copies of their favorite publications while they were away. It's not just for accredited "fans"; anyone who reads science-fiction and/or fantasy, is eligible for this service. The Fan-Vets will do as much as they can with what they can raise—proceeds of conventions (which are usually profitable, since originals, etc., are sold at auction there), donations, etc.

So I like to make a suggestion to any of you who do not keep your copies of *Future*, or other science-fiction or fantasy publications: don't throw them away. Send them to James V. Taurasi, 137-07 32d. Avenue, Flushing 54, New York. You won't save any lives this way, but you'll help some of the guys and gals remember that this—access to the kind of reading-matter they want—is one of the things they're risking their hides to protect.

## Letters

### MORE ON PREDICTIONS

Dear Bob:

Re Mr. King's letter (FSF, My '52, p. 87f): yes, there have been people who foresaw events without actually having had a hand in them. The cases are rare, and can I think be accounted for as either "rational predictions from material facts" (same issue, my letter, p. 94) or as a fortunate guess.

The case of John Quincy Adams and the Civil War is outstanding: he hit the nail on the head in 1820, but had the good sense to confine the prediction to his diary, and so avoided being denounced as a madman. But Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, who came after him and were among

the ablest men of their time, did not foresee the war.

Practically the only man to foresee the trench-warfare stalemate of World War I before it happened was the Polish banker, I. Bloch. The tank was clearly foreseen before World War I by only three people: H. G. Wells (in a story, *The Land Iron-clads*); Cyrus R. Teed, who founded a cult on the curious belief that the earth was a hollow sphere with us *inside* (in a prophetic novel, *The Great Red Dragon*); and Col. Sir Ernest D. Swinton of the British Army (in a short story). Col. Swinton, however, doesn't count because he later became one of the actual inventors of the tank!

There were also many early speculations about machines whereby men could fly, travel under water, etc., though without telling how to do it. Roger Bacon suggested, from his study of optics, that it should be possible to make a microscope or a telescope, though he doesn't seem to have made any himself.

But the successes are no more remarkable than the failures to see some approaching historical event when—to us, who have the benefit of hindsight—the imminence of the event seems obvious. For instance, Edward Gibbon had as good a grasp of the movement of history as any man of his time; yet he didn't foresee the French Revolution, though the events leading up to it took place right under his nose during his long residence in Switzerland. That's why I say that there must be a considerable element of luck in the successes. The trouble with rational predictions from material facts in human affairs is that there are entirely too many pertinent facts. Nobody can learn them, let alone take them all into account in drawing his inferences.

And James Blish errs in supposing that in my reply to his last letter but one, I was trying to butter him up rather than to answer his criticisms. I actually thought, and still think, that his main criticism was based upon a semantic incongruity: the fact that he and I were using "perpendicular" in different senses. So, naturally, I explained and defended my usage. I can't help it if he takes that as an exercise of my fatal charm.

L. Sprague de Camp, Wallingford, Penn.

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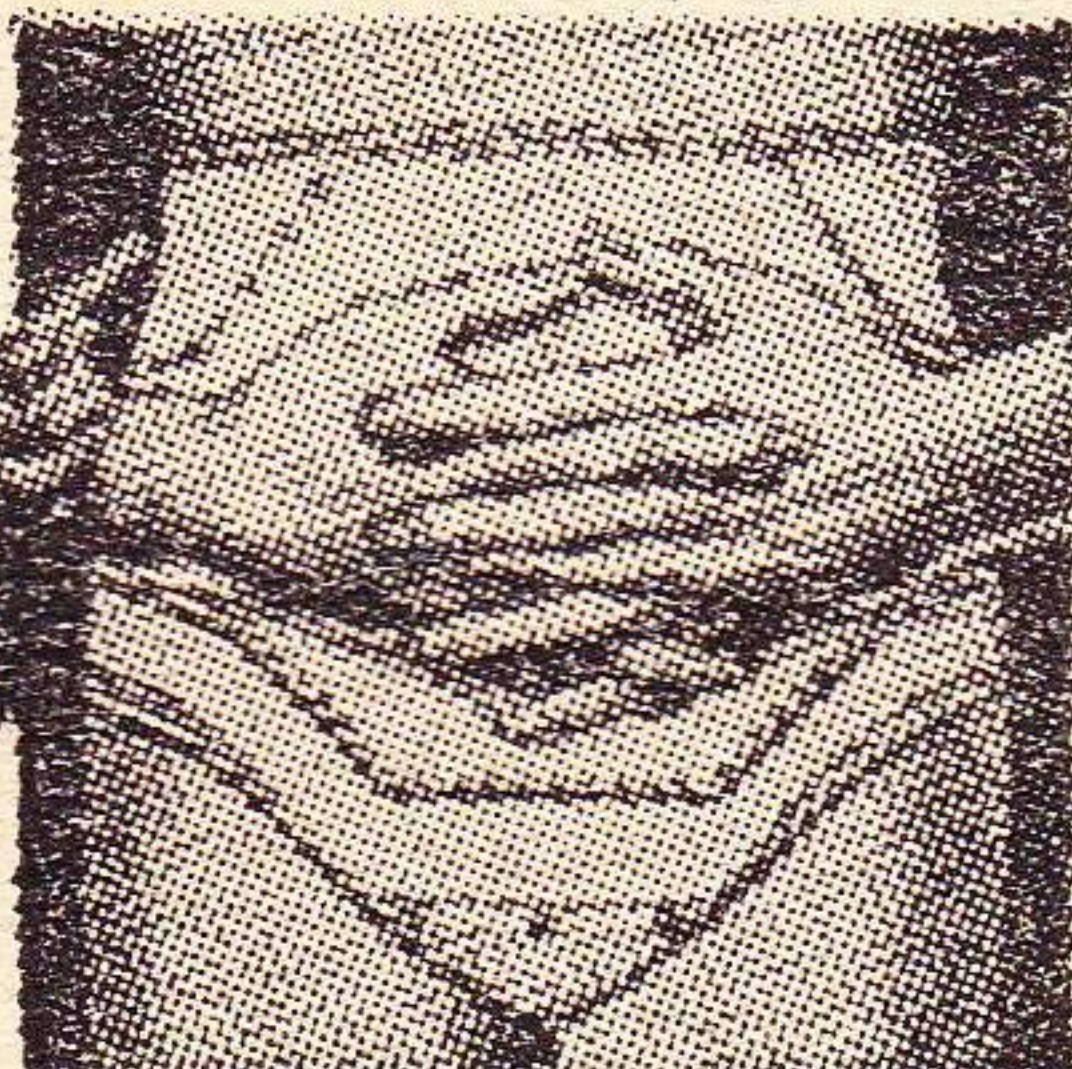
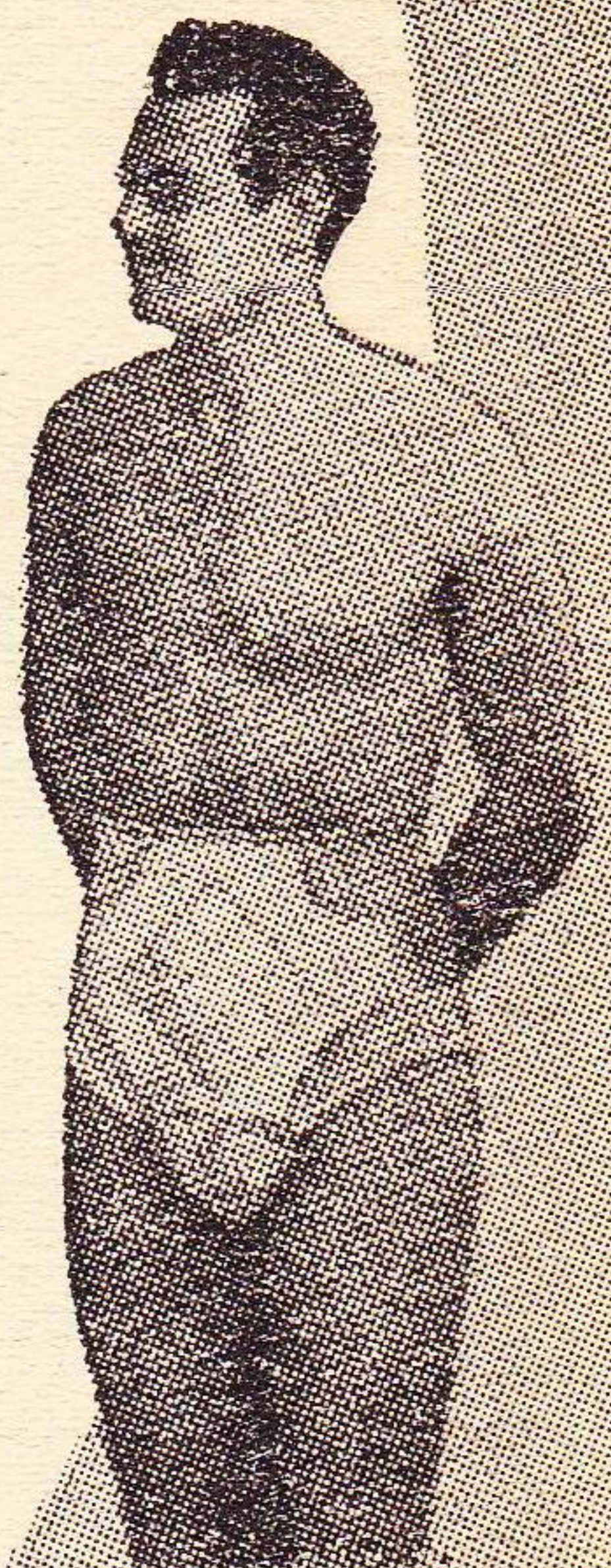
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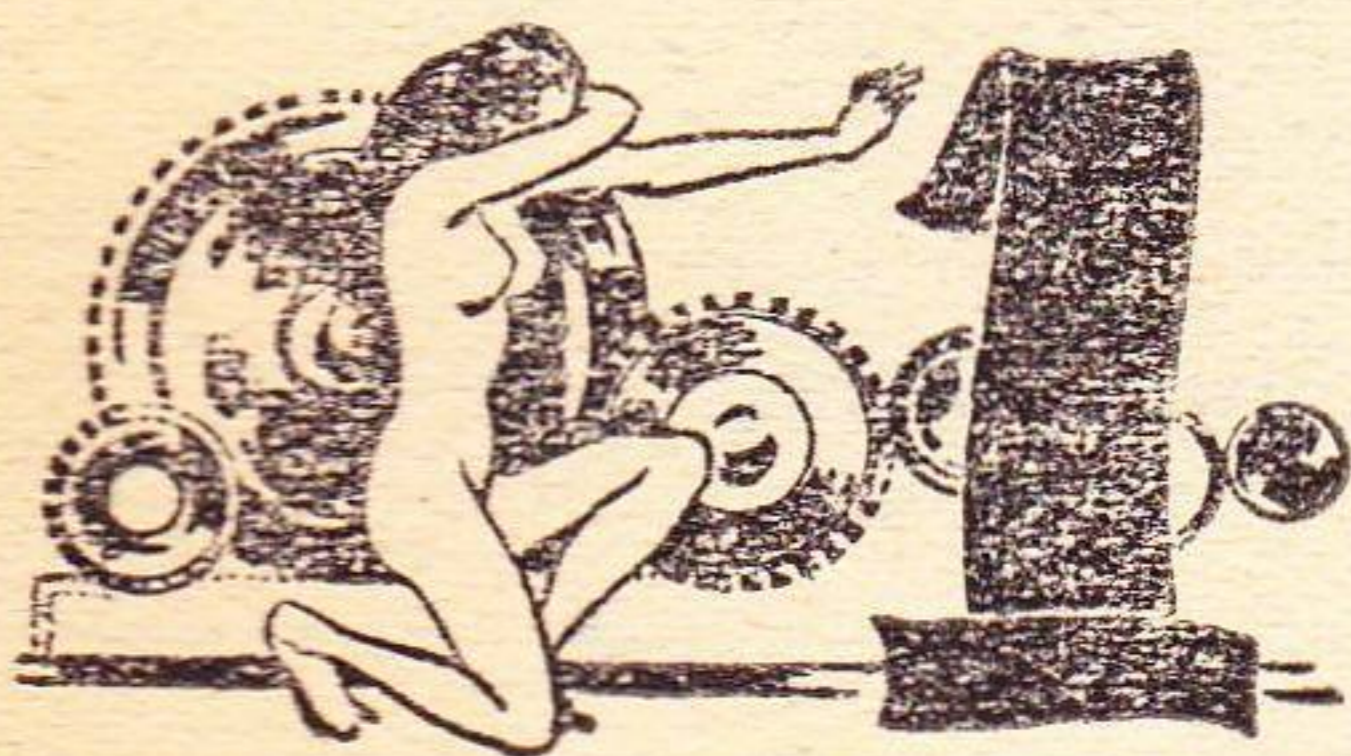


*The members of the expedition looked with amused contempt upon this primitive woman, except for Rorn. Rorn's reaction distressed them.*

# Feature Novelet

## By Gene Hunter

They prided themselves on their evolutionary development . . . emotions were for primitive peoples. But when one of their own number started to behave like a human being . . .



**K**ERI STIFLED a yawn. After listening to Vanda's nagging, every day for a week, he was becoming a trifle bored. Of course, he reflected, this world's weeks weren't nearly so long as those back home on Dorjala, and mentally he thanked Center for that. "I'm Captain of the ship, Vanda," he explained for the hundredth time, "but I've no authority in a case like this."

"He was nothing," Vanda said bitterly. "Nobody. A child. I taught him

THE  
GODS  
FEAR  
LOVE

everything he knows. Many's the time I felt like taking a cue from one of the barbarian worlds we've visited and drumming things into his head with my fists. I covered up his mistakes, corrected his charts, made him the best damned astrogator on any expedition. And now—this."

"I'm neutral," Keri insisted, "both because I have to be, and because I want to. I'm nothing more than a coordinator. This is a problem the whole crew will have to thresh out together—or with Rorn."

"He *has* to come back to the ship," Vanda replied. "One person can't run the atomos, chart our courses and map the planets. We need Rorn; we have to get him back—by force, if necessary."

"And lower ourselves to the level of these savages? I hardly think anyone will agree to that."

"Then you believe with the rest of them that we can spare Rorn? Nonsense; every member of the expedition is nonexpendable."

Such reasoning, Keri knew, was false. Aeons before, a man would have shrugged his shoulders at an illogical woman and evaded the issue as best he could, but Keri had never studied ancient psychology. The theory of female inferiority was unknown to his people; so, being a true Dorjalan, Keri attempted to reason with his Engineer.

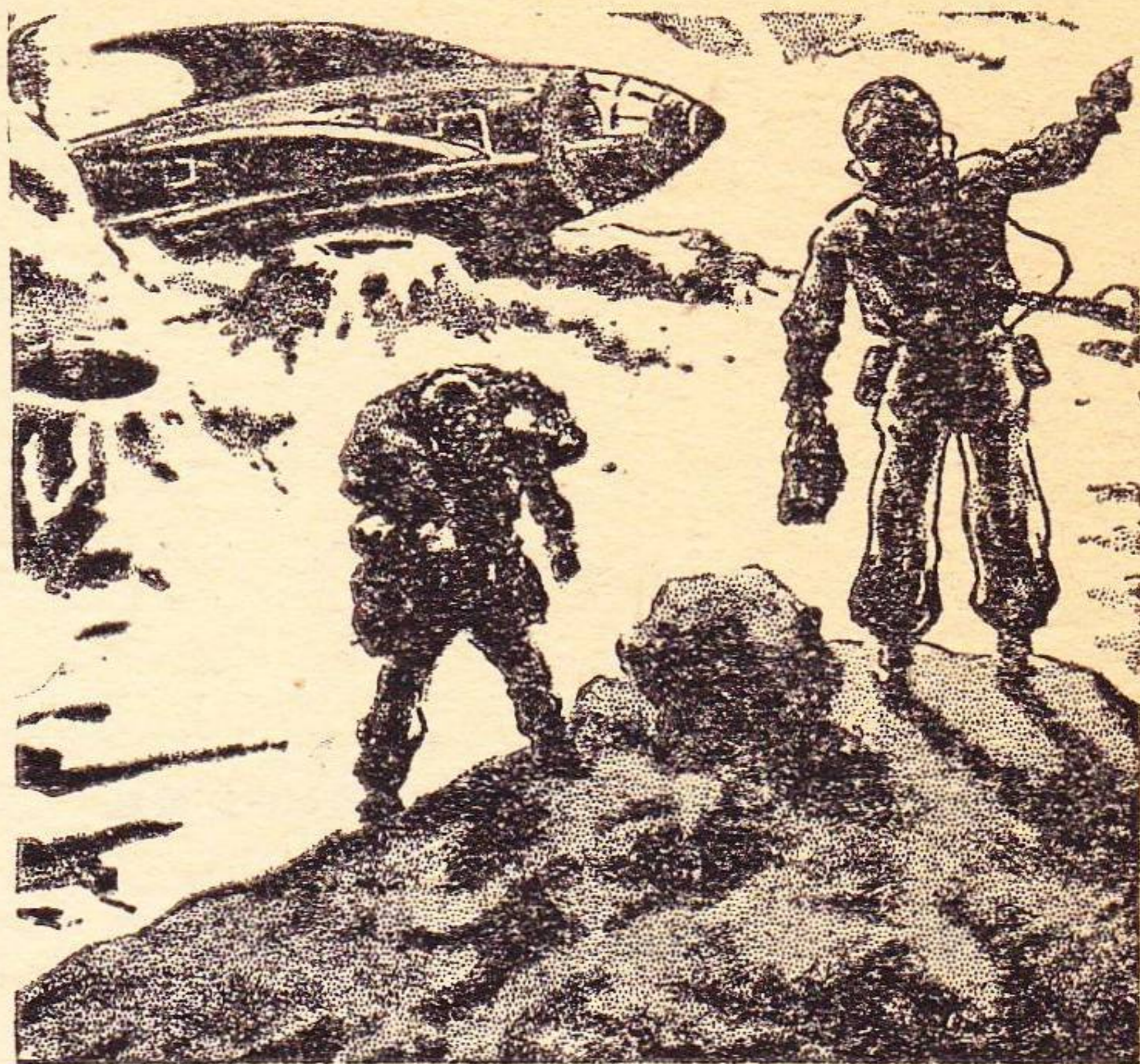
"I didn't say that," he explained. "I told you I was *forced* to remain neutral. My position as Captain extends only to the actual operation of the ship. The crew members are reasoning human beings; they'll have to decide among themselves."

"And soon," Vanda glowered. "We've already wasted too much time on this miserable planet."

Keri glanced out the spaceship's port at the world outside. Insignificant, a minute speck in the heavens that was nine-tenths water and unknown until now to the Empire, it whirled close around its inferior sun, Raalkaar, the smallest inhabited planet

ever recorded, was holding up an exploring-expedition from a civilization so far advanced from its own as to be incomparable.

"I'll call a meeting tonight," Keri



assured the woman. "We'll come to a final decision. Whatever it is, I agree that it will have to be decided immediately; we've wasted too much time already. Raalkaar is unimportant..."

Appeased, but still angry, Vanda left the Captain's cabin and walked to her own. She threw herself down on the soft bunk, hands behind her head. For a long time she stared up at the overhead before she finally fell into a restless sleep.

**TORNAN**, swearing at the multitude of stickers and burrs that had gathered on his tunic, knocked resoundingly on the door of the hut. Hald, the expedition's Semanticist, standing calmly beside him, irritated the doctor with his poise. Nerves, Torman reflected, were becoming frayed by this delay.

A yawning, perspiring Rorn opened the rickety door. He rubbed his hands on his loin cloth, the only garment he wore, and swept his lengthening blond hair back from his forehead.

Tornan sniffed in disgust. "Very unsanitary," he said, and it was dif-

difficult to tell whether he meant the hut or its occupant.

"Expected you sooner," Rorn said; "it's been almost a week."

"A week exactly," Hald reminded him.

Rorn yawned again. "Oh? Well, time doesn't mean very much to us Raalkaarians." He grinned insolently, stepping back and motioning for them to enter.

Tornan, glancing about the hut, sniffed again. "Where," he asked, "is your woman?"

Rorn flopped down on a pile of skins. He picked up a piece of *dida* bark from a clay bowl and munched on it. The doctor, knowing the slight narcotic content of the wood, was horrified.

"Evidently," Rorn said, "you haven't read Clerid's report. He could tell you that the Raalkaarians are an extremely moral people—more so than most of the worlds we've charted. Fara and I aren't living together; we won't until the expedition has blasted off and we have been duly united in tribal ceremony."

"Tribal ceremony!" Hald snorted. "You may have regressed, Rorn, but not *that* far."

"Perhaps I used the wrong phrase," Rorn said. "It's merely a custom—the same as our own legal joining of a man and a woman."

"Which is done to insure that the race will survive at an established level," the Semanticist stated. "I wouldn't be surprised if these—these savages didn't mate every few months!"

Rorn grinned. "Now I *know* you haven't read our esteemed Psychologists report on this world."

There was silence for several moments while each of them pondered the problem. Finally Tornan asked, "You know, of course, that we've come here to ask you to change your mind?"

"Naturally."

The Dorjalans had not expected so candid an answer. Tornan, finding

himself at a loss for words, turned helplessly to the Semanticist.

"Atavism," Hald said "is not a state of being expected from a Dorjaland; it's merely a word we apply to backward races we encounter."

"This may surprise you, but I've discovered that happiness is much the same thing," Rorn countered.

"It so happens," the young man went on, "that I've found happiness here on Raalkaar. True, I never showed dissatisfaction or atavistic tendencies in any of my psychotests. It's something that just happened—that came over me when I came to this world. I like it here; I love Fara; I'm going to stay."

"Love!" Tornan spat. "I know nothing of such things. Is 'love' the promiscuous relationship that these pagans practice? If so, I much prefer to remain in ignorance."

"Their ways are utterly opposed to ours," Hald said. "How can you a member of the only civilized race in the Universe, feel a kinship to these people?"

Rorn shrugged. "I like it here," he repeated. "That's all I can tell you."

TORNAN finished, "...and that's all there is; he absolutely refuses to return to the ship."

"Disgusting," Vanda murmured, bitterly.

Feln, the expedition's Botanist, said: "Absolutely without precedent. I suggest we leave as soon as possible and let the man shift for himself on this abominable world."

"That would imperil the expedition," Vanda objected; "I can't handle both our duties."

"I can give you some help," Keri told her. "When we return to Dorjala next year we can pick up another Assistant Engineer. Until then, we can manage all right—if you'll only try."

Vanda sank back in her chair, brooding.

"Actually," Keri continued, "I disagree with Feln. I don't think this is such an 'abominable' world at all. It's one of the most beautiful we've charted. Of course the natives..."

Tornan leaned forward. "Now don't tell me..."

"Don't misunderstand; Raalkaar means nothing to me. I realize we can't be concerned with the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the planets we visit. This business had put us a week behind schedule already; if we can't convince Rorn that he should return, then we may as well forget about him and blast off."

"Give me a little more time, Keri," Vanda pleaded, "a few more days. We can't leave him here; it would be desertion."

"All he can think about is 'love'," Tornan said, "and this girl, Fara. Can you imagine him feeling an attraction for one of these savages?"

Clerid, the Psychologist, spoke up for the first time. "He could," he pointed out, "If he were a true atavist."

"I thought you were keeping a little too quiet," Keri commented.

"I've been listening," Clerid explained, "and taking notes. There's a lot more to this, psychologically, than we know. I can't understand why none of these tendencies never showed up in Rorn's psychotests."

"He said it was something he 'felt' when he came to Raalkaar," Hald asserted, "and when he first saw Fara. But his words mean nothing, really; he's trying to justify his aberration with emotion, that's all."

Clerid nodded. "Although I'm not a semanticist, I agree. Still, there must be some reason for such feelings on Rorn's part; didn't he give you any other hints?"

"Outside of an attraction for this Fara person, I can't recall anything," Tornan said, frowning thoughtfully.

"I've studied the psychology of the Ancients—our own forebears," Clerid went on. "Unfortunately, they always

thought of 'love' and 'happiness' as being the same thing. Often, it wasn't; the former sometimes cancelled out the latter. Eventually the human race had its choice. It could have returned to the animal stage in regard to love and sex, but that would have meant regression of the species. Hence we evolved to our present state, where sex has been sublimated almost to nonexistence."

"'Love'," Hald said, "is a strictly primitive expression which has been bred out of our existence centuries ago; I've studied a little ancient history, myself. But we've seen other backward worlds where promiscuous sex was tolerated—often encouraged—for pleasure alone. Rorn has never shown previous tendencies..."

"Conditions weren't right," Clerid told him. "Here, they are. What those conditions may be, we don't know. Perhaps that is what we'll have to discover before we can understand Rorn; unfortunately, we haven't the time to go into it thoroughly."

"Right," Keri said, standing up and stretching. "Vanda, I'll allow another two days. If Rorn doesn't return by then—and voluntarily—we blast off for our next destination."

The informal meeting dissolved. The crew members drifted off in little groups, leaving the ship's lounge deserted except for Clerid and Tornan.

"**WE'VE** ALWAYS been friends," the doctor said, "but we don't agree on this matter. Just what do you think about it all—privately, I mean."

"Just about what I said; but I'm beginning to get a few ideas I didn't mention, because they have no scientific basis as yet."

"For instance?"

"In the week since Rorn deserted the expedition, I've done a lot of thinking, about us and the entire Dorjalan civilization. I wonder if it isn't possible that all of us still retain some of the basic tendencies of our ancestors?"

"That fail to show up in the psychotests? I doubt it."

The Psychologist stood up. "We think we know all there is to know about the human mind, but even in our advanced culture there still remains a good portion of the brain that isn't used. Who knows what stray corner the psychotests haven't probed? As the race developed, perhaps a vestige of the 'subconscious mind' of the Ancients kept hiding away, scuttling first here, then there. We can breed brilliant scientists or unspirited slaves, depending on our requirements, but the whole of the brain is still beyond us; perhaps it always will be."

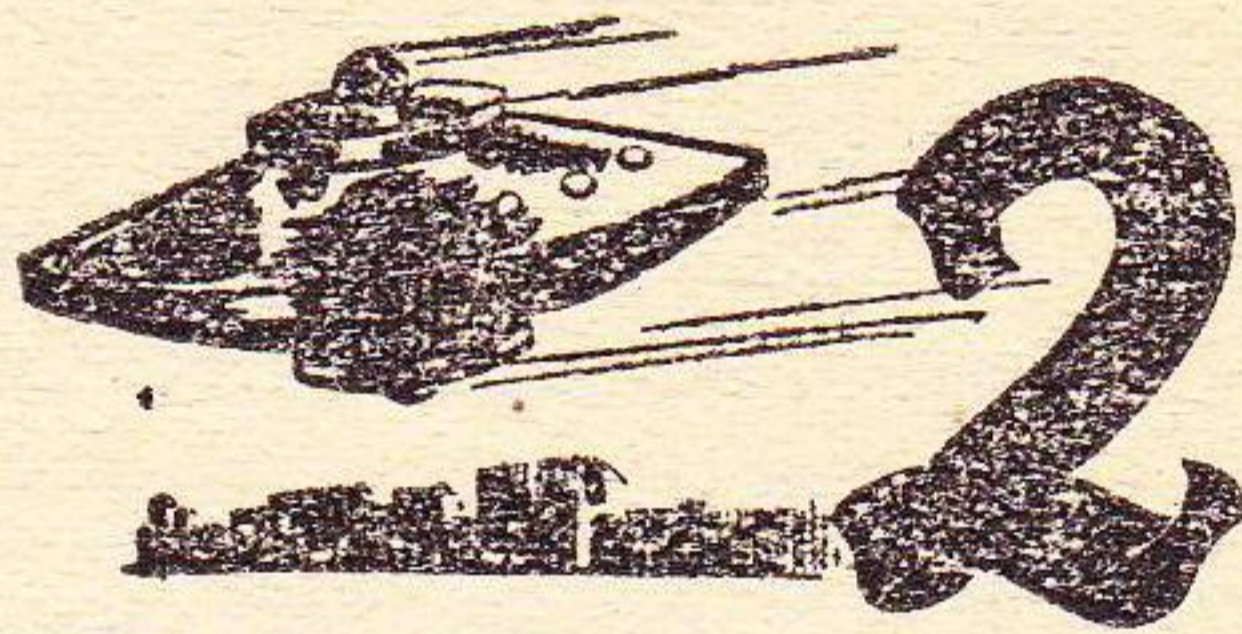
"That might be reasonable," Tor-nan agreed, "If you had any basis for such a belief."

"Perhaps I have. Take Vanda, for instance. She wants Rorn's return—obstensibly because the ship can't proceed without him. Yet logical reasoning tells us that this is not the case; Keri can help her until we are assigned another Assistant Engineer. The expeditions are set up so that every member is expendable—we can operate at half-complement, if necessary. If something happens to the Engineer, the Assistant and the Captain can take over his job. Hald and I have enough training to replace you, the doctor. Conar, our Biologist, could replace Sortal, our Chemist...and so on.

"Vanda knows all this, yet she still insists that Rorn return. Does she really want him back for the reasons she maintains? We say the 'subconscious mind' has been eliminated, but if it hasn't...? She could be subconsciously jealous of his attachment to Fara; emotion might enter into her reasoning, after all, even though we're convinced such a thing is impossible."

"All my life I've been taught that such things *are* impossible," the Doctor said. "I've never had the reason or the opportunity to think otherwise." He rose, clasping a hand on Clerid's shoulder. "We've served on many an expedition together, and heretofore I've never had reason to doubt your ability; but this time I'm afraid

you're wrong. Even so, Rorn's weakness frightens me a little. We have to get him over these ideas, to assure the sanity of all of us. By 'all of us', I mean the race. I'm going to do all I can to get him back in these next two days; if he doesn't return, it will mean insanity is possible in a Dorjalan. I wouldn't like that."



**T**HE BABY waves lapped casually up to the white sand, then retreated quickly back to the mother sea like cubs afraid of an unaccustomed world.

Vanda and Keri strode along the beach, the Captain lagging a few steps behind his Engineer, watching brown-skinned children playing idly along the water's edge. He wondered momentarily what it might be like to raise your own offspring rather than turn them over to a government nursery, and decided it would be too much bother and worry. At any moment he expected to see one of the little tykes tumble head-first into the water, but none of them did. The older ones were expert swimmers; he could see some of them playing now, far out in the water.

He looked up, to see Vanda several hundred yards ahead of him, and hastened his steps. Insane idea this, Keri decided. He would prefer to see Rorn himself, rather than talk to this Fara wench. However, he sighed, there was only one more day. After that they would leave Raalkaar and Rorn could be forgotten; privately, the Captain had given up hope of the Assistant Engineer's return, but he had decided to do all he could to help Vanda in order to speed blast-off time as much as possible.

The house where Fara lived with her uncle—Nolo, chief of the Raalkaarians—was better than most of the thatch shacks which housed the natives. Keri decided he might almost

like to spend a short holiday there himself, then shook his head as if to clear it of such a notion.

Vanda knocked purposefully on the door. It opened almost immediately, and the Dorjalans found themselves critically looking over the infamous Fara. Nearly nude, she wore a loose-fitting skin garment about her hips that rustled slightly in the sea breeze. She brushed her long, blue-black hair back in a gesture that they had learned, from explorations on other worlds, was a truly feminine one. She stared back at them for a moment, then a sly smile began to play on her child-like face.

"Our visitors from the faraway lights in the night sky," she said in her liquid, flowing language, so rapidly that the foreigners could barely follow her. "In the name of my uncle, I welcome you."

Her words were formal, but Keri suspected that she was laughing at them, secretly. The Captain had opened his mouth to reply, intending to engage her in the small-talk that always preceded a serious Raalkaarian discussion, but Vanda was already talking.

"I'm the wife of the Dorjolan who wants to remain here," she told the girl; "I'm told you're the person who could convince him how foolish his attitude is."

There was no expression on Fara's face. "If it were wrong for Rorn to remain on Raalkaar, I could convince him."

"And you think that it isn't?"

"Rorn has told me something of your way of life. I think ours is better, and so does he. He will be happy here with me, and I will be happy; therefore it is best that he stays."

Keri gave Vanda a warning glance. "Rorn," he said to Fara, "is not—well." He pointed a finger to his head. "If he were, he could have no desire to give up his own way of life for one so utterly alien to him. Rorn is my friend; I want to help him become well again."

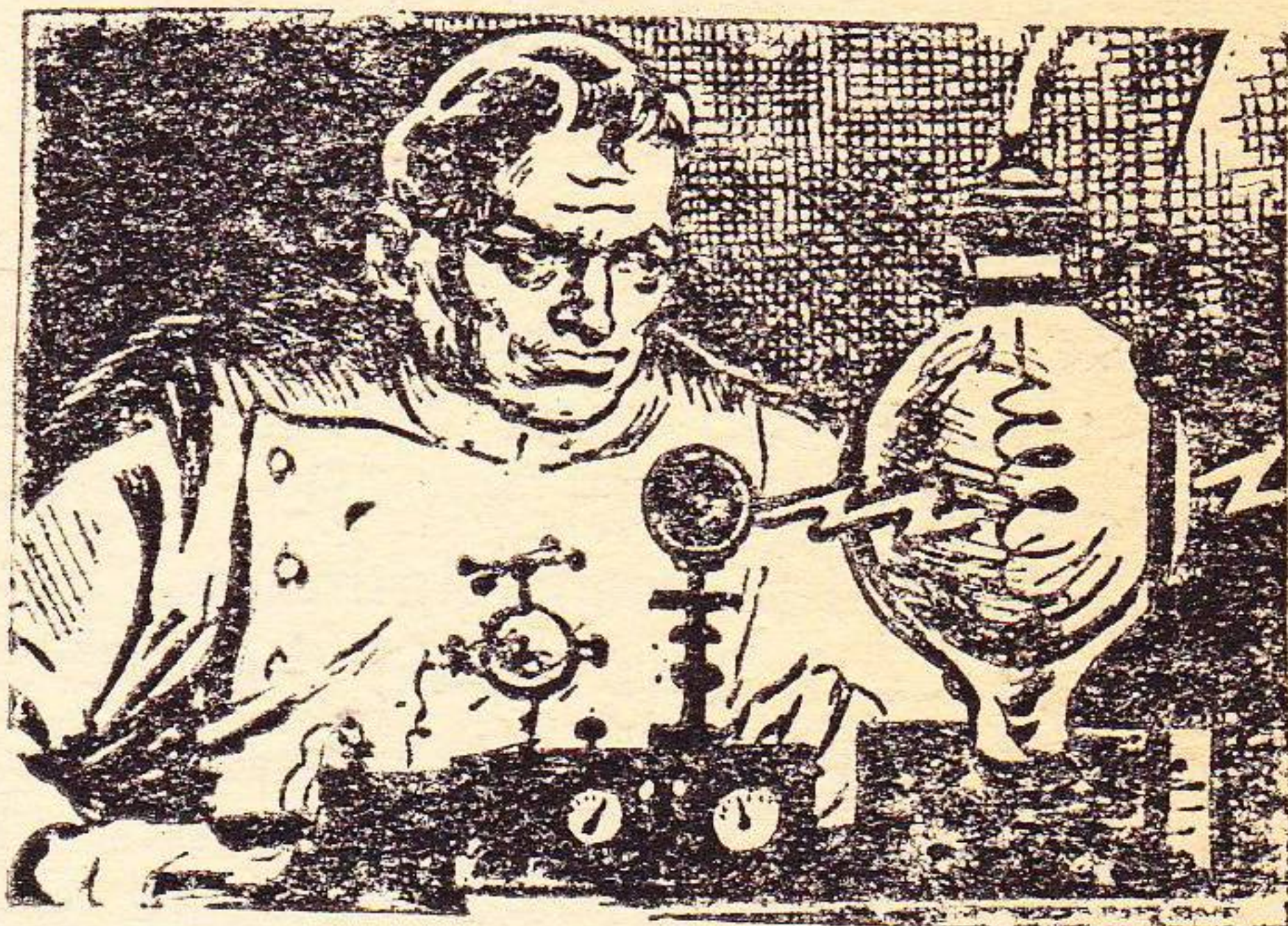
Fara smiled. "His is a charming illness." She gestured to the interior of the hut. "I have neglected the way in which my uncle instructed me to receive you; please make yourselves comfortable."

She led the way inside, pointing out the most comfortable seats—soft, skin-bound cushions in the center of the hut's largest room. Both Keri and Vanda declined the inevitable bowl of *didā* bark, with obvious distaste; members of expeditions were conditioned to immunity against the habits and vices of the worlds they visited—at least, so they had thought before Rorn decided to adopt Raalkaar.

AFTER THEY were seated Vanda tried to speak, but the girl interrupted her. "Tell me," she said naively, "why do you crop your hair so close?"

Vanda was taken aback. "Why, because long hair on a female is—is barbarous; besides, it would interfere with my work."

"Rorn was your mate for a long time," Fara said. "Did he never tell you he preferred long hair?" She added innocently: "We had hardly met before he mentioned how much he liked mine."



Vanda's eyes narrowed. "If he hadn't met you," she said, "I'm certain he'd never have considered admiring long hair."

"Thank you," the Raalkaarian smiled.

"I didn't intend..." Vanda began, but Keri stopped her.

"Look here, Fara. If you want Rorn



to be happy—that is, if you..."He stumbled hopelessly.

"Wait," Fara said. "Let me tell you how Rorn and I met. Perhaps then you will understand a little of how he feels—about both me and Raalkaar.

"It was near the end of the festival, after you had landed on Raalkaar and introduced yourselves and we had accepted you as friends. Someone had persuaded Rorn to sip *ghrana* with us, and although he was doubtful, he tried it and found it good. I was sitting beside Noko and had admired Rorn, but he paid me little attention. He looked about at the sea, and the forest, and our village and mentioned to my uncle that he thought he might come to love our world.

"Remember, up until the day you landed we did not suspect the lights in the night sky might be worlds like our own, with beings such as you or ourselves upon them. It has been a great shock to us; perhaps many do not fully realize what it means. It has never occurred to us to like or dislike Raalkaar; we were here, we had always been here, we shall always be here. There is—or there was—no place else. If one was dissatisfied on this island, he moved to another and that was the end of it.

"But we listened to your stories of Dorjala, and your Empire, and we were frightened and awed. My uncle thought it a great honor when Rorn expressed a liking for our simple life; soon Rorn had drunk *ghrana* and soon he was talking to me."

She looked at Vanda and shrugged her shoulders. "After all, I am a woman. Perhaps that means nothing to you, since in your civilization men and women are equals. There is no love, and you mate only for the creation of children. Here, it is not so; a woman must exert all her wiles, must make herself beautiful and desirable, in order to attract the man she wants. You say you have visited many other worlds. Is such a thing unheard-of on the other lights?"

"On backward, savage, out-of-the-way planets we have encountered such things," Vanda admitted, "both among human and non-human life; but such paganism has never before affected a Dorjalan."

"Then why it should here, I do not know," Fara went on. "But soon Rorn and I had left the festival and were walking in the forest. I wanted him to tell me more of Dorjala, and the other wonderful places he had been, but he wanted to hear only of Raalkaar and our people. There was little to tell, but he was fascinated." She looked away from them, letting her gaze rest on the floor of the hut. "I was glad.

"Soon we were walking hand-in-hand, and he did not seem surprised or shocked. Finally we stopped to rest and I held him and kissed him. I felt him close to me and he seemed no stranger to such things; he was a man."

Suddenly, Vanda rose. "This is ridiculous," she told Keri. "The man is mad—utterly insane."

Keri shook his head, bewildered and confused. "He must be," he agreed. "This—it's unheard-of."

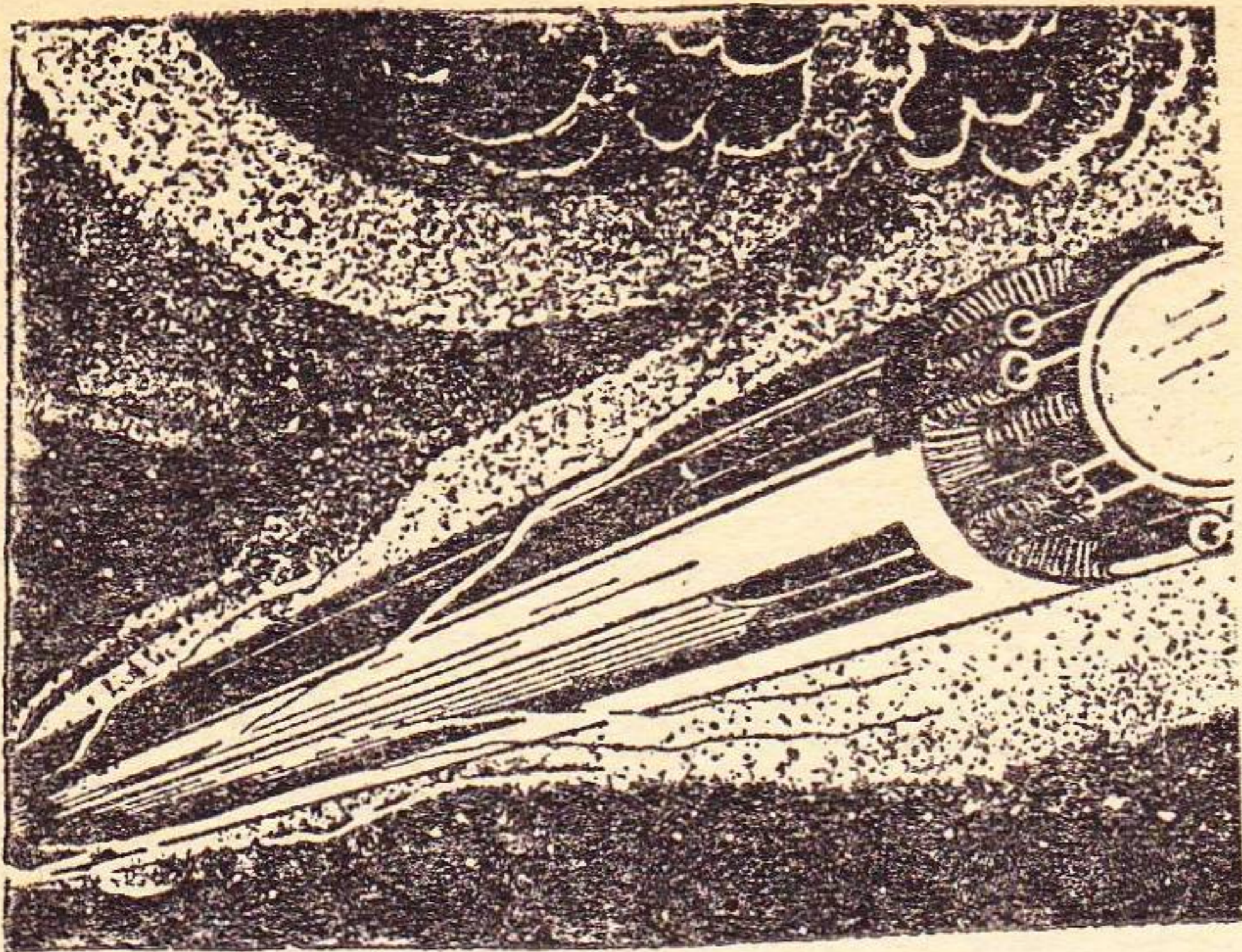
"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Vanda insisted. She turned to Fara. "Rorn is coming back to the ship," she said with finality. "If he will not agree, or if you Raalkaarians try to prevent it, we can use force."

●

"AND SO WE wound up," Keri told the rest of the Expedition. "threatening to take Rorn back by force."

"Bad," Clerid said. "Such talk could make the Raalkaarians afraid of us; they'll take steps to protect Rorn, now. Any move we make might be suspicious to them." A frown lingered on the Psychologist's face.

"Feren, Dekla and I," Tornan said, nodding toward his Archeologist wife and the Expedition's Agriculturist,



“found Noko in the village this morning. He and a group of natives were mending fish nets.”

“What did *he* have to say?” Vanda asked.

The Doctor shrugged. “Noko doesn’t seem to mind the infusion of alien blood among his people. He pointed out the fact there are only slight physical differences between Dorjalans and Raalkaarians.”

“According to local custom,” his wife put in, “a woman cannot become chief of Raalkaar, but Fara’s son—if she were to have a son—would be next in line. Noko seems to think Rorn’s blood would be a welcome addition to his tribe’s—that Rorn’s son would make a superior chief.”

“The trouble is,” Tornan pointed out, “he’s right—rather, he *would* be if Rorn were not abnormal. No telling what quirks might show up in his progeny, though.”

Keri scratched his head thoughtfully. “Hmmm. Did you try to convince Noko that Rorn is obviously—” he groped for a word—“demented?”

“We mentioned it, I think. Come to think of it, however, we didn’t particularly dwell on the point.”

“You should have,” the Captain said. He turned to Clerid. “You’re our psychologist for extra-Dorjolan species. Just how should a barbarian leader react if he thought there was danger of his tribe being led by an insane man? What would he do if he thought his own bloodline might become contaminated with insanity?”

Clerid smiled “He’d be violently against it, of course. That is, if he knew what insanity was.”

“By Center,” Keri swore. “that’s right; I haven’t heard of a case of insanity on Raalkaar.”

“Didn’t you read my report?” the Psychologist asked.

Keri was embarrassed. “Well, I had intended to. This all came up, and . . .”

Vanda helped him to save face by saying: “We mentioned to Fara that Rorn wasn’t ‘well’. She didn’t seem to mind; perhaps she didn’t understand.”

“Because there is no such thing as ‘insanity’ on this world,” Clerid told her. “Let’s review what we know about the inhabitants. They’re simple, perfectly adjusted primitives. There are few deaths—except those due to old age—since they are a peace-loving people, and the only carnivorous animals on their planet. They’re naturally expert swimmers, so few of them ever drown. Food is plentiful, and there are no serious illnesses; no storms; no volcanoes or tidal waves—in short, no natural catastrophes to beset them. Because of that, they have no need for a deity. It is only among troubled, unhappy people that we have found religion, or even progress. True, we’re well-adjusted ourselves, but we certainly do represent progress, and our reverence of Center—our government—has taken the place of a faith. Most extra-Dorjalans of the Raalkaarian their type have at least a god or goddess of fertility, but the few islands that make up the land-mass would have become over-run long ago if too many children were born; evidently they’re not a very fertile people.”

“You’re right,” Tornan said. “A Raalkaarian female conceives only twice in a lifetime at most—often only once. Nature regulates the birth-rate.”

“Where is all this getting us?” Vanda asked impatiently.

“Don’t you see?” the Doctor said, rising to his feet. “Noko has no conception of the meaning of insanity. If

we can make him understand what it is, and convince him that Rorn is demented, he'll be afraid of Rorn's tainting the race. He'll force him to leave." He turned to Hald. "You're the Semanticist; this looks like a job for you."

"Explaining to Noko just what 'madness' is, therefore causing him to reject Rorn," Hald mused. "By Center, it's a challenge—but worth a try."



**I**T HAD been Noko's great-great-grandfather who had unified the several island tribes of Raalkaar into one happy, prosperous world-nation; since then there had been no war. The Raalkaarians had everything they needed. Their laws were few, and just; by now, the chief was merely one who led the others on hunting-expeditions, and settled the petty differences that occasionally came up among his people.

The day of warrior-chiefs was over for Raalkaar, but it was proud, courageous blood that flowed in Noko's veins. Like all good leaders, he bristled when he thought his people might be in danger; he bristled now, as he listened to Valk and Tornan.

"I know it is hard for you to understand, Noko," the Semanticist was saying patiently. "Your gallant people cannot fathom the meaning of such things as we speak of, but Rorn has a sickness—a sickness that could affect the whole future of Raalkaar."

"I have heard my grandfather speak of plagues that once visited our people," the old chief said. "I know what you mean when you speak of 'sickness'." He frowned and spread his gnarled, brown hands. "But those plagues caused our ancestors to wither and grow ugly and die. Rorn seems a

healthy youth—stronger and more handsome than the rest of your tribe."

"His is a sickness that is unknown to you," Tornan told him. "I am a man of medicine; I know the signs."

"Consider one of your own people," Hald said. "Take one who has been your close friend, a companion on many hunting and fishing trips. You trust him and like him and see nothing unusual about him. Then one day you find that he is acting entirely the opposite of his natural self. He might try, for instance, to kill himself—or to kill you or another friend. He might look as he has always looked, and yet because he did these things he would be ill. Can you understand?"

Noko's eyes widened in horror. "No one could think of doing away with himself intentionally. It—it is impossible; everyone wants to live as long as he can, because life is good." He shook his head, wonderingly.

"Exactly!" Hald continued, seeing an advantage. "And that is how we know Rorn is ill. He is doing something completely against his nature—against the nature of all Dorjalans."

"And," the Doctor put in, "if he has a child by Fara, the child, too might be ill, and its children, and so on. Can you picture what could happen to Raalkaar in a few generations?"

Noko was frowning again. "But what has he done that is so different? Show me how he is ill."

"There are many signs; for instance, Dorjalans feel no physical attraction for members of the opposite sex. We mate only to continue the species—the race."

"Rorn," Tornan said, "is attracted to Fara. For one of your own people, that is natural; for us it is not."

Noko nodded, comprehendingly. "I have seen your women," he said. "I can see why there is no attraction. But Fara—she is a beautiful girl."

"To a Raalkaarian, yes—but to us she is nothing; only Rorn finds her beautiful. Have any of the rest of us

become enamored of one of your women?"

Noko faltered. "No," he said at last.

"And the chewing of *dida* bark," Tornan continued. "That is an old Raalkaarian custom, no doubt, but *dida* is a mild intoxicant. Dorjalans ordinarily feel no need for such stimulation, yet Rorn slipped into the habit immediately. But notice—not one of your people has become interested in spending hours reading our books, although plenty of chances have been provided."

"Reading," Hald stated, "is a Dorjalan—er, habit. Your people, being normal Raalkaarians, have no desire to learn it, just as we have no desire to engage in the partaking of *dida* bark—except for Rorn, who is ill."

"If Rorn is returned to us," Tornan said, "I'm sure we can cure him. But if you will not help us..."

Noko rose. The old man's sharp black eyes were troubled. He ran a hand through his thick mane of white hair.

"I like Rorn," he said simply. "I had thought he would be a welcome addition to our tribe. My niece loves him, and he could make her happy. Yet the well-being of my race is more important than her happiness—or mine or Rorn's."

The old chief stood up, looking down on them. "I cannot take a chance on Rorn's sickness spreading to my people, but it will hurt me to see him go. I cannot envy you of Dorjala; I hope none of you ever reaches our world again, for we wish nothing you have to offer."

The proud oldster turned and walking stiff and straight, strode away across the green field that separated his village from the Dorjalan ship. He did not turn back to look at them. He would not have been ashamed for one of his own kind to see him weep, but he did not want these strangers to see tears in his eyes.

DESPITE their unemotional nature, the Dorjalans spent a good deal of that evening congratulating Hald and Tornan on their victory.

"Just when," Vanda inquired, "does Noko intend to return Rorn to us?"

"He didn't say," Tornan replied, "but I imagine it will be in the morning. We might as well make preparations for blast-off."

"Praise Center," Feren said. "May we never hit a planet like this again."

"We won't," Clerid mused. He stood looking out the porthole over the darkened ocean. "In all the cosmos, I doubt if there is another Raalkaar."

Keri was lounging in his chair, his hands behind his head, relaxed for the first time in weeks. "Is that bad, my philosophical companion?" he asked.

Clerid was silent for several moments. "No," he said at last, "I don't suppose so. It would be an awful jolt to find out that another savage, barbarous world might pervert one of us."

"That's rather strong, isn't it?" Vanda asked him. "I hardly think anyone has been 'perverted'. Rorn's mind is not right, and that is a frightening thing; but perhaps he can be cured. Probably when we get away from Raalkaar he'll be well again and we won't even have to make a report on this disgusting business."

Keri rubbed his cheek. "As Captain," he told Vanda, "I'm required to make a full report of everything that happens to the expedition. If Rorn does recover, perhaps Center will take no action, but I can't guarantee anything."

"In other words," Clerid stated, "we stand a good chance of losing Rorn no matter what happens. I don't think any of us considered that before; seems rather a disappointing climax, don't you think?"

Tornan was uneasy. "I told you once before, Clerid, that what hap-

pened to Rorn here, might shake the foundations of our whole civilization. He most certainly *will* recover when we get him back aboard. When he does, I'm certain that Center will take no action, despite what has happened."

Clerid smiled. "Perhaps you're right. At any rate, now that the whole problem of bringing Rorn back to the ship is settled, I think I'm rather tired."

At the door, he stopped and turned to them. "Our race has always known that the goal of evolution is intelligence," he said. "When we have learned all there is to know, about the universe and the things that are in it, then mankind's quest will be complete. But first we must learn comparison. What we think is savagery and barbarism may actually be the pure intelligence for which we have searched for a millenium."

"Now what in Center," Keri asked after the Psychologist had left the lounge, "do you suppose he meant by that?"

CLERID lay meditating on his bunk for several hours, until the rest of the crew was asleep; then he dressed and slipped out into the Raalkaarian night. Because he carried no light, and had not yet learned to see in the darkness of the moonless little world, he stumbled several times in the underbrush between the ship and the village.

There were a few flickering lights still shining in the settlement, and here and there an infant wailed lonesomely as some dark-skinned mother awakened and prepared to feed her offspring. Walking quietly down the main street, Clerid found himself wondering how many lovers might be wrapped in each other's arms in those darkened huts or how many were sleeping now after an interlude of physical intimacy.

He took a breath of cool night air to clear his head and made his way

on through the village to the little hill where Rorn's hut stood alone, looking down on the town from one direction and the ocean and Noko's house from the other. Here the Psychologist felt a final pang of conscience, but he hesitated only a moment before knocking on the crude door.

After a long wait, Rorn appeared, a lighted candle in his hand. "Clerid," he said, "haven't you people given up yet?"

"You haven't seen Noko today?" Clerid asked.

"No, not since early this morning; I've been out trying to learn to fish all day with some of the natives."

"Noko," Clerid told him flatly, "is going to return you to the ship."

"I don't believe it."

"Hald and Tornan talked to him this afternoon; they've convinced him that you're insane and might contaminate the whole race with your progeny. The expedition expects to blast off tomorrow—with you on board."

Rorn smiled sardonically. "And you, the Psychologist, came here to warn me?"

"Perhaps I did it *because* I am the Psychologist—not in spite of it. I don't mean to set myself up as more intelligent than the rest of the Expedition—we're all supposed to be on the same intelligence level—but perhaps I have more of an insight into what is emotionally right and wrong than the rest of them. I'm convinced it is right for you to stay here; that's why I came."

Rorn scratched his towseled head. "Just what do you suggest, Clerid?"

"You know Noko's personality better than I," the other said. "What would happen if the rest of us were to leave and you were found hiding here later? Would Noko let you live?"

Rorn shrugged. "The Raalkaarians have little use for violence, but I don't know just how far I could go. I'm willing to find out."

"Good. Now, the next thing—where can you go?"

"I don't know; Fara could tell me."

"Can you get in touch with her tonight?"

Rorn snuffed out the candle and sat it just inside the door. "I think so," he said. "Come on—let's give it a try."

**F**ARA SHIVERED in the cool Raal-kaarian night.

"Did your uncle wake up?" Rorn whispered.

"No—I don't think so. I was still awake; besides, I would know your signal anywhere."

Listening to them, Clerid felt a sensation that was almost paternal, although, even with his training, he was unable to identify it within himself. Quickly he and Rorn told the girl of Noko's decision.

"When your people have finally gone," she said, "I know it will be safe for us to come out of hiding. You can convince my uncle that you are well, and he will forgive us."

"Wait, Fara," Rorn said gently; "I'm looking for a safe place to hide myself, not you."

Fara smiled. "You do not know our islands as I do; you would be found in a few hours if I left you alone. Remember, you are still a stranger here; you will never really be a Raal-kaarian until the Dorjalans have gone back into the sky. Until then, I'm going to hide with you."

Rorn would have protested further, but Clerid spoke up. "I think she's right, Rorn. You'll be happier in hiding if she's with you, and not so apt to go nosing about and let them spot you. If Fara can find a good hiding-place, I think it would be safe for her to go, too."

"I know the place," the girl told them. "When I was a little girl, Noko and my father and mother lived on the island of Seryan, a few miles over

the horizon. That was before Noko's father died and he became chief of the tribe and we moved here to the big island where the chiefs are required to live.

"There are not many people on Seryan, and they're mostly all located on the southern tip. At the other end, there is an almost unapproachable valley. Once, when I was still a child, I went on a fishing-trip with Noko and my father, a rare thing for a girl. We came near the valley and I asked Noko why no-one lived there. He told me it was because crops did not grow well there and the harbor is so poor. But I think there should be plenty of wild game, and I can fix much food from roots and berries." She smiled up at the blond Dorjalan. "Now do you see how much you need me, my Rorn?"

Rorn put his arm around her gently, saying nothing.

"You don't suppose your uncle will remember the place and expect you to go there?" Clerid asked.

"Of course not; old men pay little attention to the questions of children."

"What about the harbor?" Rorn inquired.

"There are many rocks and whirlpools," Fara admitted, "but I can steer a boat as well as any man."

"Then that's where we'll go," Rorn said; "let's get a boat from one of the moorings."

**T**HE THREE of them ran down to the beach where several small fishing boats lay squirming idly in the gentle surf, Clerid puffing to keep up with the younger pair.

Rorn grabbed one of the boats and steadied it while the Psychologist helped Fara aboard. As he lifted the lithe young body, the Dorjalan felt a strange feeling creeping over him. He could not have been more astounded if he had suddenly grown a third arm. His skin burned and his pulse quickened. There was an almost enjoyable ache in his groin; for the first time

in his life, Clerid was feeling real, physical desire.

Rorn turned and faced him. "You're a true friend, Clerid," he said humbly, "and I mean that in the Raalkaarian sense of the word, not the Dorjalan."

He clasped Clerid's hand for a few seconds, then turned and took up one of the little craft's two oars. The Psychologist stood for a long time on the sand, watching until they disappeared in the darkness. Then with a sigh he started walking slowly back in the direction of the spaceship.



**T**HEIR FLIGHT to the neighboring island of Seryan had taken place so quickly and with so little forewarning, that neither Rorn nor Fara had stopped to think of just what might happen when two young people in love were forced to spend an indefinite time in such an isolated spot. It was on the afternoon following their arrival, after they had made the beginnings of a rude encampment, that the two youngsters experienced their first intimacy. There was no thought of seduction in the minds of either; they lay on the cool green grass of a forest edge beside a wide and peaceful river, talking as lightly as possible of their problems, when at last they slipped quietly into each other's arms. For a few brief minutes the rest of the cosmos was forgotten...

If Rorn had found happiness on the planet of Raalkaar, that happiness was doubled, now that he and Fara were alone on Seryan Island. The young Dorjalan, although unaccustomed to the rigors of shifting for himself or providing for a mate, was strong, and what was more important, in love. Unobtrusively, for Raalkaarian women knew how to keep their men bewitched,

Fara let him learn the secrets of catching *murak* and *chiro*, the two commonest four-footed animals on Raalkaar. With her own native culinary talents she prepared them, along with root and grass delicacies, and fed Rorn the most delectable food he had found on any world during his several years as a member of an exploring Expedition.

Except for brief hunting-forays, and abortive attempts to fish from Seryan's rocky coast, they had little to do except talk and make love. Fara never tired of hearing of the many strange races and cultures Rorn had visited and the Dorjalan loved to watch the expressions on her tan face as he talked.

Finally, when Rorn's store of adventures was exhausted at last, and they were looking for new diversions, they made little explorations up the ebon river into the thick jungle. Eventually, they discovered a small clearing that offered them more protection than their camp by the sea, and they moved there. The hunting in their new shelter was even better than in the old, and Fara was able to prepare Rorn even more delicious dishes than before.

Here she discovered a rare species of the hollow reed from which the Raalkaarians made their native flute-like instruments, and while Rorn was mastering the art of playing the device she would hum little tunes with him. He composed a poem, which he taught her, and she spent many evenings singing it for him as he played.

She sang of their cool, still river and their quiet jungle home, the bright sun of day, and the stars that basked it all in a silver-green glow at night. She could not understand the various allusions, and comparisons to other places Rorn had been, but the song was the song of all wanderers who have found at last the one place where they want to take root away from whatever civilization they might have left behind.

●

IT WAS NOT difficult for either Noko's people or the Dorjalans to understand that Fara and Rorn had fled. The problem facing both factions was how the pair might have known of Noko's decision, and during the many heated discussions of the subject aboard the Expedition's ship Clerid had kept uncomfortably quiet.

The Dorjalans had discovered numerous unique problems in their explorations of other planets, but always before—through their superior intellect or the tools and weapons of their advanced culture—such problems had been overcome. Raalkaar had been the only one to present a serious obstacle. It was not a pleasant situation, and this last anti-climax had done nothing to improve the tense condition of the explorers. Supermen they might be, but stasis is the one frustration a superman cannot abide.

Despite Clerid's violent objections, the rest had voted to delay blast-off indefinitely—until they could discover what had become of Rorn and Fara. Now, after weeks of fruitless searching and waiting, tempers were growing even shorter than before. During one meeting Keri brought this to the attention of the others.

"We're beginning to argue and moan like a bunch of savages," he said. "Before, I tended to be neutral; now I've a hunch that if we don't get away from here soon, we might be permanently affected by this debacle. It may sound unbelievable that a group of intelligent, superior Dorjalans could be emotionally jarred like this, but..."

"You're more right than you might imagine," Clerid interrupted, seeing a chance to solve his problem at last. "Our behavior is a sign we're becoming aberrated. I've a diagnosis, and all signs point to my being right."

He turned to the Expedition's doctor. "Tornan—just what are the prop-

erties of the Raalkaarian atmosphere?"

"Why, it's somewhat similar to Dorjala's. Predominately nitrogen and oxygen—about three percent water vapor, with traces of helium, ozone and a few lesser elements we've never catalogued before."

"Would you say any of these gases are harmful to us?"

The doctor was angered. "Certainly not. We conducted extensive tests before anyone was allowed on the surface without a spacesuit; are you questioning my ability?"

Clerid laughed nervously. "Of course not. But have we ever encountered exactly the same proportion of gases on any other world we were able to explore without suits?"

"I've checked that," Tornan said. "We haven't; it would be most unusual to find exactly the same proportions—or even the same gases—on two different planets."

"Then I have a suggestion. I think it's possible that the particular combinations in Raalkaar's atmosphere might be having a harmful effect on us. Would that be impossible?"

"N—no," the doctor hesitated, "I suppose not. But it would be highly unlikely."

THE OTHERS were leaning forward, excited by the Psychologist's implications.

"By Center," Sortal, the Chemist, swore. "Clerid, it isn't impossible at all. Remember that planet in Sirius? We could breathe the atmosphere, but after a few minutes we were complaining of all the aches and pains our bodies had room for; we never did find out the exact cause."

"And which of us was the most seriously affected?" Clerid asked.

Tornan snapped his fingers. "Center! Rorn! And he was the first to complain, too."

"Sometimes," Clerid nodded, "we forget that we're human, but we shouldn't. We aren't automatons—yet."



Perhaps, when we reach the stage where we can be bred artificially in laboratories, we will be. Until then, some must be weaker, some stronger; among every group there must be those who will succumb first to illness or disease."

Vanda, unconvinced, laughed. "Are you suggesting that if we remain here we'll all take off our clothes, grab a native, and live in a grass hut?"

"Not at all," Clerid assured her. "I am saying that it's possible for some of us to become affected by the Raalkaarian atmosphere in some way. Our arguing and bickering, our nervousness, are ample proof of that. Anyone of us might be next. Myself, you, Hald—anybody. I think we should leave Raalkaar as soon as possible; it will take some time for us to completely recover, I imagine."

"Rorn was drinking the native liquor," Keri pointed out. "*Ghrana*, I think it's called. Could that have made him more susceptible?"

"Of course," Tornan said. "As far as I know, Rorn was the only one of us to touch the stuff; but I know from my experiments that it has a high alcoholic content and several peculiar properties."

"Sort of 'creeps up on one'," Clerid said, translating a Raalkaarian phrase.

**BY MORNING** the entire crew had reached what was, for them, a state bordering on panic. Immediate preparations had been made to blast off from this frightening little world, leaving Rorn to whatever fate Raalkaar and Fara might hold for him.

They were making last-minute checks of the ship's instruments, and Clerid was feeling secure and comfortable for the first time in days, when they heard the sound of stones being pelted against the spaceship's hull—the signal that the Raalkaarians wanted to contact them.

The Psychologist stood by, nervously, as Keri opened the airlock. Noko, surrounded by an honor guard, armed with spears and stone knives, stood outside. His old face seemed even more lined and drawn than usual. There were traces of tears in his stern eyes and he kept his hands clasped tightly at his sides.

"What is it?" Keri asked, looking over the group.

"By accident," the chieftain said, "Rorn and Fara were discovered. My people on the island of Seryan were running out of *murak*, their favorite food, and..."

Vanda, always impatient with Raalkaarian ways, stamped impatiently. "Get to the point, old man," she told him.

"They had sent hunting parties to various unsettled parts of the island in search of more," Noko said, ignoring her entirely. "One party came upon Rorn and my niece, camping at the far end of the island."

"Did they bring them back?" Keri asked. The other member of the Expedition were crowding close around him.

"We brought them," Noko said sadly. He turned and motioned to the group behind him. Four huge warriors stepped out of the crowd; between them they carried a crude litter, covered with a blood-stained fabric.

"The hunters were curious," Noko explained. "Rorn became frightened. When he tried to attack them..."

The chief's voice trailed off as his bearers sat their bundle down on the ground beside the spaceship. As Tornan and Keri stepped out, there was a stir of fear from the crowd waiting a short distance behind Noko. The Raalkaarians had no doubt that these men from space would bring immediate retribution for Rorn's death—perhaps by blasting all of Raalkaar to bits.

**AS THE** Doctor and the Captain bent over Rorn, Fara came run-

ning toward the ship, scratches and bruises on her arms where she had been restrained by some of her people. Her face was grimy with dirt and tears, her skirt was ripped in a dozen places.

Half naked, she knelt by Rorn's body and buried her face on his chest. Awkwardly, Tornan and Keri stood aside. There were several seconds of absolute quiet, broken only by Fara's sobbing. Finally, turning her anguished face toward the Dorjalan's, the girl cried, "Now you're free to leave Raalkaar! You leave nothing behind! You need have no fear of our corrupting Rorn now!"

She got up and walked slowly to the airlock where Vanda stood. The Engineer retreated a pace.

"You couldn't have Rorn," Fara said between sobs, "and now neither can I. But I had something from him for a little while that you could never have in all your years with him. I had his love—his tenderness and affection.

"Even now I'm carrying the germ of him inside me. I'm lucky enough to be the one to have Rorn's child—something of his to love and train and watch grow the way he would have wanted."

Calmer now, she turned to her uncle. "Look, Noko. These are the god-people—the voyagers from the sky. Rorn was killed because he had the courage to fight when he thought he and I were in danger. He fought with

his bare hands to protect me. Do you think any of these would have done the same?"

Noko squirmed uncomfortably and said nothing.

"You don't have to fear what Rorn's child might be like now, uncle. It will be like Rorn, and Rorn was as different from them as we are. It took his death to prove it, but we could have kept him here with us if they hadn't been so worried about their precious ideals." She turned back to the Dorjalans. "You ought to wish that you—all of you—could become as Rorn became—*human!*"

Then she turned and walked back to her people, ignoring her uncle, never glancing at Rorn's blood-soaked body on the ground beside the spaceship.



A calm had settled over most of the crew. Death had removed the problem confronting them; only Clerid, of all the Dorjalans, felt sorrow at leaving the tiny world. Watching the tableau below from the ship's vision screen, the Psychologist realized he had little kinship toward his own people.

Back on Raalkaar, by the edge of the calm blue sea, the natives were digging a grave...



**Coming Next Issue**

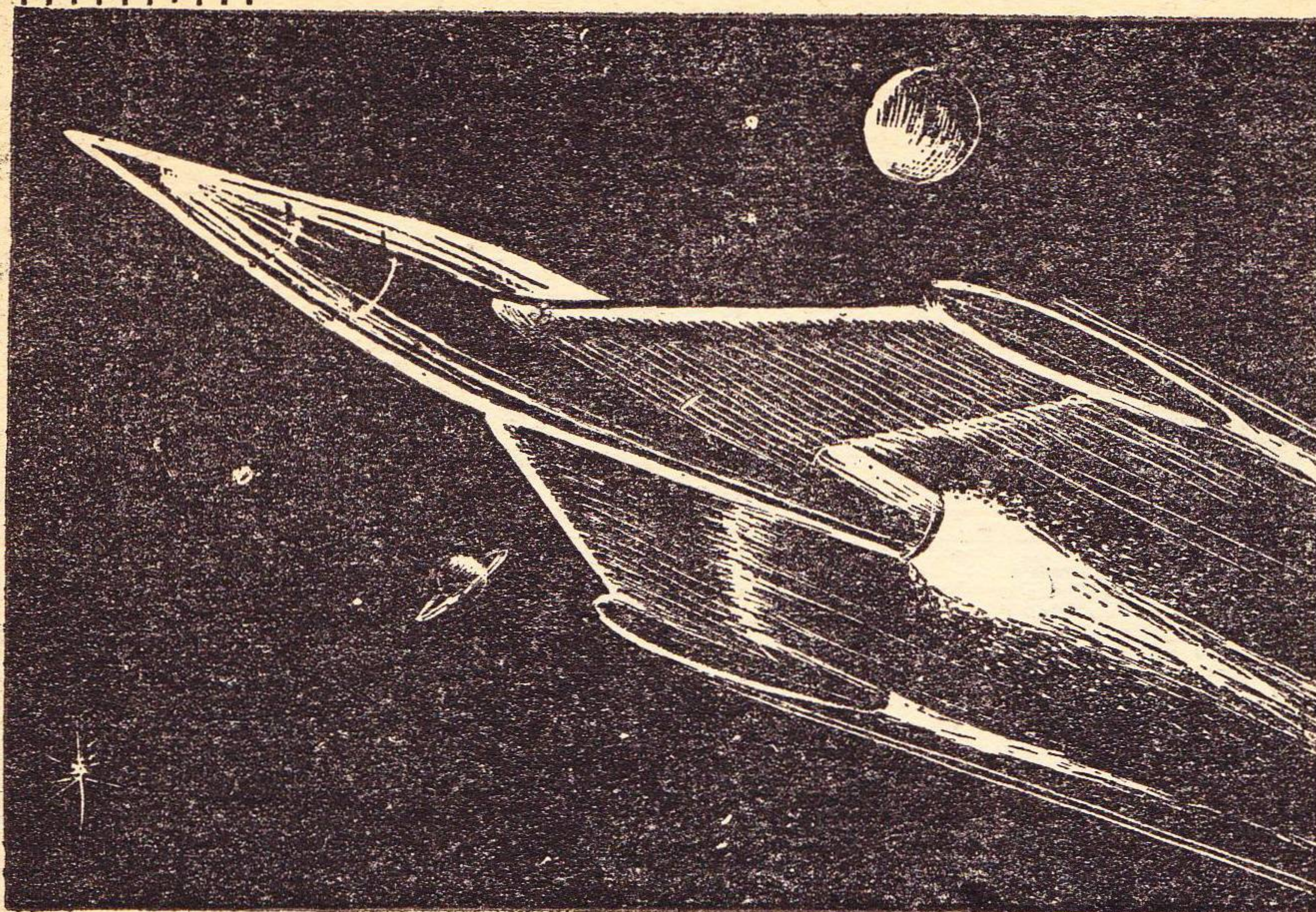
**A Powerful Novelet Which Could Be Fact!**



**DOOMSDAY'S  
COLOR PRESS**

**by Raymond F. Jones**

Look for it in our November  
issue — cover by A. Leslie Ross



# FINAL BARRIER

By Alan E. Nourse

In September, 2077, a decade before the onset of the Four-Days War, the scientists of the world announced that the final barrier had been crossed. The successful Moon-exploration of the past dozen years had provided a solution for the last technological problems; man could now reach for the planets. Sponsored by the combined Europeo-American governments, the Spaceship *Argonaut* blasted from White Sands, New Mexico, in 2078, and vanished without a trace. Its fate remained for many years a mystery. Manned by four skilled and experienced spacemen, the ship was known to have reached a safe landing on the Red Planet; but one day later, radio communication stopped abruptly. No further word was ever heard from them.

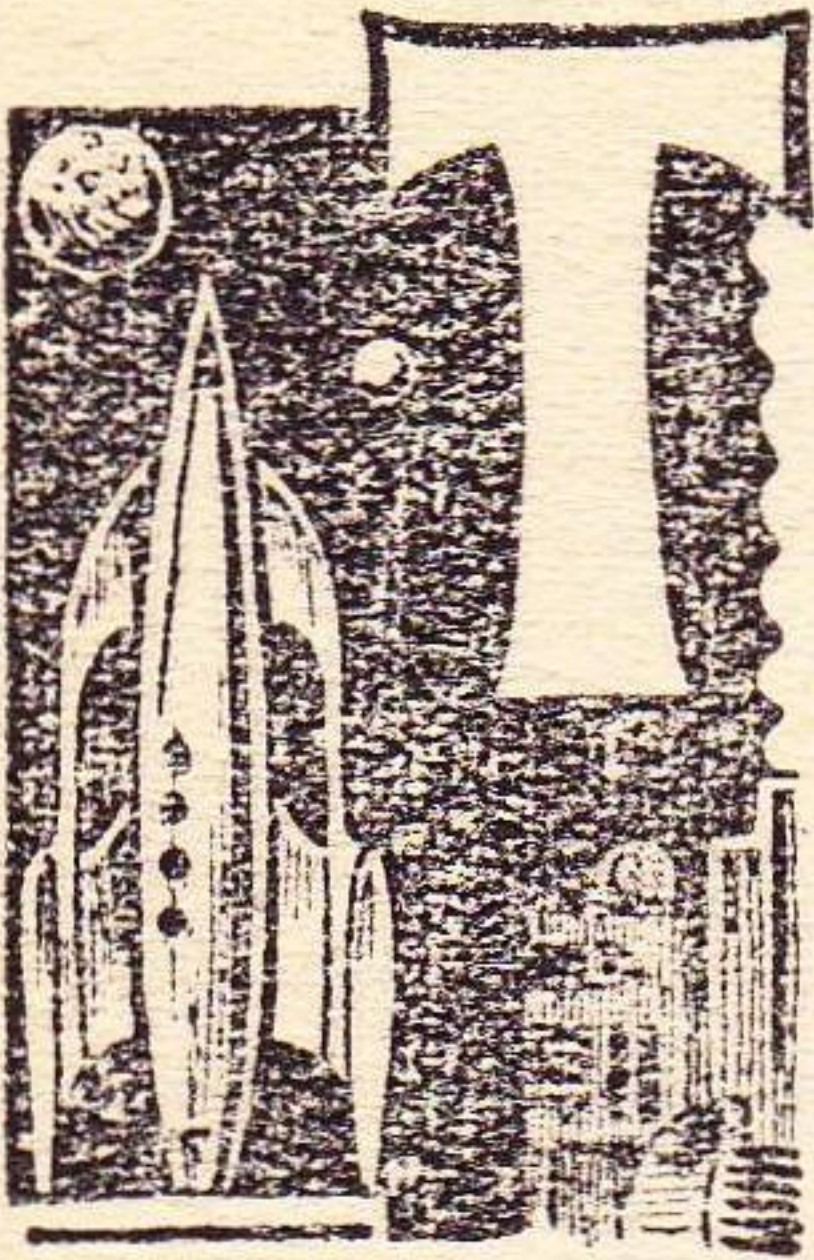
The long debate that followed was finally settled when the government agreed to

**They'd solved all the technical problems, and one ship had landed safely on Mars. But there was a more important problem they hadn't considered!**

finance a second ship to search for the first. On the 3rd of August, 2085, just eight years after the first ship blasted, the *Argonaut II* was launched for Mars with its crew of four. Their commission was brief: to explore the surface of Mars for

mineral resources, and to determine the fate of the first ship. With the *Argonaut II* went the heartfelt prayers of many men. They did not know, then, that the final barrier to the stars lay not in technology, but in the very nature of man himself—

Simon, L. B. *History of Earth Before the Four Days War*; Grauer & Blaniki Co., New Denver, Mars; 2231 AD



HE SHIP gleamed, a silver streak in the bright sunrise, and settled gently on its billowing jets to the surface of Mars. It stood like a silver finger, pointing up toward the reaches of space through which it had come.

It rested in a low valley, protected from the gentle wind which sighed through the red crags and across the rough terrain.

For several hours, the ship stood silent; then a port opened near the top of the silvery column, and the ladder pegs squeaked out from the hull. Four men descended the ladder, cautiously, hesitantly—descended and stood in a group at the base of the ship. They had been careful, fearfully careful in their tests. The temperature of the atmosphere had been recorded, the oxygen concentration painstakingly calculated; culture-plates had been thrust out to the wind, and withdrawn for accelerated growth and study. All other possible dangers of the alien atmosphere had been considered. Then careful scanning of the surrounding terrain, photographing and studying the negatives—a painstaking search for danger in every visible crevice and cranny. Finally the cautious descent to the ground. The men had no choice; they *had* to be careful.

The leader of the group motioned the others around him in a clumsy signal; his voice was metallic through the headphones in the space helmets. "The first thing we have to do," he said, "is to organize a search for the

other ship. It's up here, somewhere; we've got to find it."

Carefully, he unbuckled the helmet-strap, heard the hiss of pressure as the oxygen-rich air inside the helmet hissed out. He lifted the helmet from his shoulders, breathed deep of the cold rare atmosphere. He took two or three deep breaths, then smiled. "Good," he said, half to himself. "The air is breathable; we'll be able to work without these to encumber us." Slowly he stripped the plasticoid spacesuit from his shoulders.

He was a large man, fair-haired, with sharp blue eyes, and a face that revealed habits of deep thoughtfulness and careful reflection. Captain Addy was older than one would expect of a spaceship captain, older still in knowledge and experience. His mission was grave, his responsibility great. Young, reckless men could follow later; the groundwork required sound judgement and great strength.

The other three followed their leader's example, stripping off the plasticoid suits. Harris—young and impulsive, his glib tongue and easy friendliness concealing the clever mechanical mind, but revealing clearly a deep love of life, an urge to mingle in companionship with his fellows. Blanke—thin and frail, the philosopher, the physician, the healer. An older man than the captain, his heart was young and his spirit high; and his mind was rich in the knowledge of men. An finally Mariel—the giant, whose huge body gave the false impression of slow lugubrious clumsiness, whose lips seldom smiled, whose impassive battle-scarred face was a solid mask to his true thoughts, but whose detailed knowledge of rocket motors and space navigation made him indispensable to the crew. Three men and their leader, and a task that was grave.

CAPTAIN Addy skimmed the red horizon with binoculars, examining the deep sandy cleft where the ship rested, the rocky crags, the wirey vine-like plant growth that twined

among the rocks. He turned to the men. "Harris, let's see the chart now."

The four crouched around the chart, prepared by the Lunar Observatory, mapping the areas of the planet's surface. In the southern portion, south of the equator by one or two latitudinal degrees, a small spot was marked.

"That's where the *Argonaut* landed," growled Mariel. "Or near there. They plotted their landing place as they descended, and radioed their position regularly. We're practically on the equator; we should be within fifty earth miles of their ship, roughly speaking."

"Yes," said Addy; "they radioed every hour for the first seven hours after they landed. Then they radioed every two hours for the first day. Then finally they didn't radio at all." He looked at his men closely, his face grim. "Something happened on the second day that they were here; we have a job on our hands."

"A mere nothing," grinned Harris, cheerfully. "With the 'copter units, we should be able to cover our immediate area in a day or less. A hundred-mile diameter could be covered in a matter of a week." He jumped up, clapping his hands in the still air. "Why so grim? This is Mars, boy! This is the real thing!"

Mariel watched him sourly. "How about it, Doc?" he asked. "Think it's safe without the suits?"

Blanke shrugged his thin shoulders. "Good way to prove it is to try it; culture-plates were perfectly clear. The first ship reported finding no bacterial forms at all, and we can see that there's enough oxygen to manage, what with the lower gravity, and less need for exertion. Let's try it; if we need suits, we can always put them on."

"So—what are the orders?"

Addy checked his chronometer. "The testing and pictures took longer than I had planned. We have less than three hours before the sun goes, and it'll be getting bitter cold in another hour. Let's take a close look at

this valley we're sitting in; tomorrow we can start a broader search."

Harris was away before the captain had finished, scrambling nimbly to the top of the rocky ridge above the ship. Climbing was easy, the gravitational pull weak, and he crawled quickly to the top. He carried a metal pole in his hand; with a bow and a flourish to his shipmates he withdrew a large red bandana, secured it to the pole. With great determination he rammed it into a crevice in the rock, and stood back, his eager face flushed. "How about that, boys?" he cried out. "How does that look for a flag?"

"Better make a speech," growled Mariel.

"If you say so." The younger man made a deep bow to the party below. "Mars, old chap, if you haven't been claimed before, I now claim you, in the name of all men from Earth!"

The captain and Blanke clapped in mock applause, grinning at each other. But Mariel didn't clap.

The morning sun flashed brightly off the slim ship's hull as the men descended to the ground on the morning of the second day. Mariel set to work checking the 'copter units carefully, test-running each one. "Don't really need these," he said to the captain. "With this gravity, it would be no trick at all to travel forty miles in a day."

Addy smiled grimly. "Getting back would be another story, though; with these units a man can jump and glide on the rotor blades, and take half a mile at a clip. Remember, last night was cold—bitter cold. We'll have to be back in the ship at night, or else sleep in the space-suits."

Mariel, Blanke, and Harris slipped into the shoulder-straps of the 'copter units. They were lightweight, streamlined jobs—built for special use in a combination of rarified atmosphere and light gravity. Captain Addy straightened the antenna on the radio set, opened the control-panel,

and flicked the radio on to warm up. "Got the plans straight?"

The men nodded. Blanke said, "Each of us takes about a third of a twenty-mile circle, with you and the radio in the center. We travel low, searching. Report any abnormality we see to you by radio; any sign of the other ship, or any of the men, and we notify you."

Addy nodded briskly. "At once. Also, in case of trouble. Accident, danger of any sort. We've seen some of the plant life here—" he kicked at vine-like weeds growing among the rocks—"but we haven't seen it all, and we haven't seen any sign of animal life. Keep your eyes open. You've got good judgement—use it." He nodded to the short-wave set. "I'll stay right by the radio, and let you know if I see any trouble. Try to keep your orientation as straight as possible, in case you want to get back to the ship in a hurry."

The three men shook hands briefly. Mariel stepped aside, and started the 'copter unit motor. The rotor began revolving, faster and faster, whining slightly in the thin air. With a short leap, the man rose into the air, gliding on the rotor, and landed lightly on the crags above the ship. "This should be a cinch!" he called back.

**CAPTAIN ADDY** kept close to the radio after the three had disappeared over the ridge, in different directions. The reports from the men came in regularly. Addy sat on a camp-stool, writing the report that would go back to his headquarters on Earth. He was intent on the radio and the writing—so intent that, at first, he didn't notice the stealthy movement of the vine-like plants near his feet. Gently, almost imperceptibly they moved toward his shoe, the steel-toed safety shoe with the heavy magnetic bottom. Climbed slowly up, clinging to the steel, moving around the root, running small tendrils into the metal eyelets—

Addy withdrew his foot with a

startled jerk, staring down at the shoe. In the hour he had been sitting there the plants had almost encircled his shoe. He watched, fascinated, as the shootlets started to move toward the new position of the shoe, slowly. He reached down and plucked a shoot; it broke, raggedly, and moist sap oozed from the broken stem.

Addy stood up and walked away from the radio-stool, watching closely. One shoot of the vine had twined around the steel stand that held the radio, twisting almost up to the shelf. The aluminum legs of the camp stool were thickly entwined in the greenish tendrils.

*In one hour!*

Swiftly he ran down into the hollow where the ship stood. Plants had grown almost a foot up the tail fins, moving in from the two-yard circle around the spot where the metal touched the ground. The stems and vine clung closely to the shiny surface, held on tenuously when he jerked it loose. With his foot he scraped away the invading weed, ripping it out by the root from the sandy soil—

He stood panting. The tendrils had parted from the metal, reluctantly, but completely. Such rapacious growth—and directed toward metal! Like a tropism, the plants inclined toward the metal. Addy glanced up at the ridge above the valley, saw the bandana waving feebly from the top of the thick column of weed that had wound up the metal flagstaff.

Addy wiped his forehead. Call the men and tell them—? But why? There was no real danger; plants could be cleaned away from the ship every day, without any danger. He went back to the radio, undecided. Finally he sat down again and thoughtfully continued the entry in the log. After all, why bother them? They would be back before dark. He'd have to keep an eye on it, though. He settled back on the camp stool, his first alarm wearing off. Just keep an eye on it. It could get out of hand—

MARIEL glided slowly down into the valley, several miles from the ship. The radio in his ear had just blipped an 'all's well' signal. From high above, he scanned the barren landscape with binoculars, and settled easily down to stand on an outcropping of rock.

Odd, he thought, that there had been no sign of danger. The wind soughed gently down through the cleft between the crags, stirring the peaceful sand. Peace and quiet; no violence. But there *had* been violence, on the other ship; something had happened to stop four good men, to silence them forever. On a lonely planet. No life apparent beyond the scrub-vine that grew in such abundance on the rocks. Mariel stretched wearily, his mind uneasy. What could have happened—?

He scraped up some of the loose gravel from the ground, tossing it idly into the wind, pebble after pebble, as he rested. One of the pebbles glinted in the sun, caught his eye—

He ran to where it had fallen, and picked it up. It gleamed dully in the sun as he rubbed a finger over its almost-greasy surface. Then his eyes blazed, greedily, and he fell to his knees on the ground, scraping, digging—

Another. And another. A chunk as big as his fist. Two more, even larger. Huge chunks, gleaming dull grey as they lay in an open vein under his feet. He stood up, stunned, the blood pounding through his head—

*Diamond!* Raw, uncut diamond!

The chunk in his hand was heavy, almost half a pound in weight. Mariel held it, fondled it in his hand, his eyes blazing. *Diamond!* The scarcest mineral, the most valuable gem in Earth's economy. *Diamond,* the stone that had driven men to violence down through the long years of history.

Frantically he ran to the rocky cliff, chipping, scraping, examining. A whole vein of it, raw, open to the surface. He raced down the cleft to

the bottom. More diamond! Snapping on the 'copter unit, Mariel rose to the top of the cliff, carefully, scanned the far side of the ridge with eager eyes. Another vein, and another. Unbelieving, he stood for fifteen minutes, counting seven large veins of uncut diamond—

The radio bleeped in his ear. Addy's voice cut into his racing mind. "*Anything new, Mariel?*"

Mariel held his breath for a moment, forced his mind into quieter channels. "Nothing new," he muttered into the transmitter, his voice shaking. "I'm taking a short rest. Then I'm going on."

He flew across to the next ridge, wildly excited. *Diamond.* The wealth of nations. Wealth such as he had never known. He could take enough diamond home to make him wealthy for life, to give him everything he desired, to fulfill his most fabulous dream. Feed it into the market, a little at a time, a chunk of uncut stone here, a fragment there, bringing prices undreamed of. He could realize only a small percentage of their real value, and still be wealthy—

A cold thought forced itself into his mind. Military and governmental priority. *All natural resources, all minerals and other materials of value will become the property of the combined Euro-po-American governments, for the benefit of all men.* That was what the orders had said. That was what Addy had said. "*Report whatever you find. That's one reason we're up here, to see if there's a commercial basis for the exploitation of Mars.*" Addy would never allow him to take diamonds back. Perhaps he could smuggle some—but so very few, to escape the captain's notice—

Another scheme popped into Mariel's mind, and his hand trembled as he thought of it. Perhaps the other men hadn't noticed, or hadn't even seen any of the veins. The idea exploded in his mind, almost frightening him. Why not? Who would argue with him? Who could prove him

false? Who would question his word —if he were the only man to come back?

“ADDY! QUICK! Get the others over to me!” Mariel waited, breathless, for an answer.

“What’s up, Mariel?” The captain’s voice was tense, alarmed.

“Can’t—talk now. Send them my position. And for Lord’s sake, hurry!” Mariel snapped out his location from the ship, and flicked off the radio with a tight smile. Moving into a crevice in the red rock, he half concealed himself, and settled down to wait.

Harris arrived first, swooping down crazily from two thousand feet. He settled gently onto the rock just below Mariel, his brown hair kinky in the breeze. “Yo-ho!” he shouted. “Where are you?”

He didn’t see the man behind him, never knew what hit him; the rock broke his skull like an eggshell, and he dropped, pitifully, like a stone.

Mariel, panting, crawled back to the crevice. He saw Blanke coming, but Blanke saw him, too. “Hey, there,” he cried, easing down onto the ridge above. “What’s the trouble?”

“Caught!” shouted Mariel. “Can’t get loose!” He twisted his face in a grimace of pain.

Blanke sailed down in two big leaps. Stopping ten feet from Mariel, his face suddenly blackened with suspicion. “What are you talking about?” he whispered. “You aren’t caught!”

The huge man was on him like a cat, smashing him to the ground. The heavy fist crunched down into the doctor’s face, a sinewy arm locked around his throat, wrenched, twisted. Mariel felt a dull crunch, and released the man’s lifeless body; blank horror was still on the doctor’s face.

Carefully, Mariel lifted the body onto his shoulders, flicked on the ‘copter unit motor. A high leap took him sailing into the thin air, the rotors screaming against the extra load. He searched out a deep gorge in the red rock, sailed over, and dropped the limp body. Then he settled onto the rim of the gorge, panting. Carefully he checked his compass.

He would have to get back to Addy. One man couldn’t make the search for the first ship, alone. Even if one man did come home alone, he’d *have* to have information about the other ship. But two men could travel together, and find the other ship, if it was to be found. Addy could be useful, up to a certain point—

Mariel secured the ‘copter unit more squarely on his shoulders, and soared into the air. He rose higher and higher, scanning the far horizon, binoculars piercing the thin, clean atmosphere. And silhouetted against the horizon, far to the South, he saw the column standing up against the clear sky. No glinting metal, no shining ports, but the shape was unmistakable. Mariel watched for a long moment, noting in his mind the direction from his vantage point. Then he heaved a sigh of relief, and turned in the direction of his ship. There was no mistake about the tall, thin column pointing up from the southern horizon; he had located the first ship.

Captain Addy stared down at the crumpled body before him, his face cold. “It’s incredible! I simply can’t believe that this man would get himself killed—just flying around.” He looked up at Mariel suspiciously.

Mariel’s eyes were sullen. “You know how reckless he was.”

“So he was a little reckless! But the boy had good sense! He didn’t take wild chances. And Blanke! Was *he* reckless? Why did he have an accident?”



Mariel shrugged. "Look," he said. "I don't know anything about it. I was caught, up there in that crevice. Got my boot caught, and couldn't get loose. It scared me; I called for help, and those two came when you sent them. I saw Harris come, swooping down into this gorge like a hell-driver. I saw him clip himself on the rock as he came by, and I saw him fall; I never did see Blanke, until I got loose and went to look for him."

"Why didn't you radio me?"

Mariel shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Didn't think of it at the time; too startled, I guess." He kicked nervously at a boulder, his eyes on the ground. "Too scared, maybe; I don't know. This business is no fun; you know, banging around out here. There aren't any men around. No noise, no signs of life; it gets on your nerves."

Addy wiped his forehead and scowled. "I don't like this."

"Do you think *I* do? I saw the kid crack up! But what are you going to do?"

The captain turned to him suddenly. "You said you spotted the first ship?"

The huge man waved a hand toward the hills. "Way over there, no doubt about it. It looked—odd, but it's there."

"How far?"

"Maybe two days journey; maybe three; maybe more. Can't tell, the air's so clear. Might be a hundred miles; and these 'copters don't travel very fast."

"Well, we'll have to get there. We can go back to our ship now, and leave in the morning. How about these bodies?"

Mariel shrugged. "What would you do with them? Take them back home? Maybe you want them around—I'm sure I don't. They're casualties. We can do without the added weight when we blast off this place; leave them here."

Addy scowled and shrugged in resignation. "That's the practical out-

look, I suppose," he said acidly. "Let's get back."

The sun was almost down when the two men arrived; the air was sharp with cold. Addy spread the chart out on the ground. "We should take a route like this," he said, pointing with a finger down through the lower right quadrant of the map. "If that's the ship, they were way off on their location."

"Maybe they shifted after they landed—After their last broadcast."

"Maybe." Addy walked in silence to the ship. "Better come aboard; it's cold. We'll need spacesuits against the cold tomorrow. The trip may take some time." He kicked savagely at the vines which were clinging again to the tail-fin of the ship, his mind vastly uneasy. "Coming up, Mariel?"

The big man watched the captain with cold eyes. "Right away."

**T**HE TRIP took four days. Each day, the dark finger pointing to the sky became clearer and clearer, until finally the two men stood on the brink of the valley where the ship rested. It stood upright on a sandy slope, smaller than the second ship, but straight and proud. A towering, magnificent pile of infested wreckage.

Vines were a foot thick around its base, twisting around the tail-fins, growing up and up like gigantic beanstalks to the pointed tip. Little shootlets had worked into the crevices in the metal, grown in, expanded, splitting open the hull plates. Thousands of tendrils growing, infesting the once-mighty ship, twisting, clenching, squeezing, wrecking. Addy took a deep breath. The ship was anchored to the sandy soil with roots that no man could break; the hull was split open in a dozen places, plates bent and twisted. And the air was deathly still.

Mariel ran down to the base of the ship. A radio-tent stood nearby, the set a twisted mass of shoots and sprouts. And sprawled near the radio tent, white in the sun, were two human skeletons—

Addy was on his knees before them. They lay ten feet apart, the bony hand of one still gripping the pistol which was anchored to the ground by its own little growth of the vine. The other skeleton had a small hole in the skull, just above the right eye.

"They killed each other!" Addy gasped, his eyes bulging. "This one had a bullet hole in his pelvis—and that one in the skull. They shot each other—" He looked up at Mariel with haggard eyes. "This doesn't make sense, Mariel. I just—don't get it!"

Mariel's voice was cold. "Look closer," he said.

Addy looked, searching the ground around the bones. His glance ran across the greyish rock briefly, came back to it, and froze. He took the chunk from between the bony fingers, and examined it with horror in his eyes. "Diamond!" he whispered.

"That's right," said Mariel, indifferently. "Diamond."

Addy stood up, his hands shaking. "They found diamond here. But that's incredible. Why should they kill each other—for diamond? Where are the others? There were four of them—"

"You'll probably find the others down there somewhere," said Mariel, icily. He jerked a thumb toward the cleft. "Down in a gorge, maybe—"

Addy turned slowly toward the huge man, his eyes wide with horror. "Mariel!" he whispered. "You found diamond, too!"

Mariel's voice was heavy with contempt. "You must have been blind. I don't see how you could have missed it. The place is filthy with it. Enough diamond to keep two men rich beyond words. For the rest of their lives."

"And you killed Blanke—and Harris—"

Mariel kicked at the skeleton with his foot. "Four men couldn't keep a secret. This has to be done carefully. A whole story has to be devised, false entries into the log. *Keep your hands in sight, Addy, and listen!*" Mariel's eyes were cold, and his voice cut through the air sharply. Addy saw the blue muzzle of an automatic pointing at his chest.

MARIEL shrugged. "This was pointless," he said, nodding toward the piles of bones. "They needn't have done that, two men *can* keep a secret. Those two. Or even you and I. We could load ourselves with diamond—all our baggage, all our pockets. We could go back, and tell them that we couldn't find the first ship, that there wasn't anything up here worth coming back for. They'd never build another ship, Addy; they'd never check on us. And we feed the diamonds to the market, under cover, never enough to upset things, but enough to be rich!"

Addy's voice was a hoarse whisper. "You could kill two men like animals, and sell out your countrymen—your race—Mariel, you're out of your mind—"

"Listen!" Mariel's face twisted in hate, his voice grating. "My race, my countrymen—*why should I do anything for my race or my countrymen?* Listen to me, Addy. I've fought in three wars for my race and my countrymen. Three horrible, bloody wars! The first took my mother, my sister—it almost got me. The second took the best friend I ever had, and left me to rot in a stinking mire, left me to be whipped and starved by some prize specimens of my beloved race. And the last one took my wife, my children, wiped out my business, stripped me of everything I ever had. What do I care about my race and my countrymen?"

His eyes blazed, his voice lashing out, bitter. "Why do you think I came on this trip? For glory? I've

eaten too much glory. Money? They pay us a pittance, a nice big 'thank you', and a clap on the back. I came here to be free of my race and my countrymen, Addy. Let them line up and butcher each other—why should I care about them? I'll go back, all right; I'll take the glory—and I'll take the money, too. More money than I ever dreamed of; I'll be rich. I'll not fight in another war—I'll buy my way out of it. I'll sit back in the safe places and laugh while they blast themselves to perdition. I'll be rich, and...untouchable." Mariel threw back his head, laughing. "Not very pretty, eh? You can come with me, Addy, or stay; take your choice."

The captain's face was grey, his shoulders stooped. He spread his hands. "You're wrong, Mariel! There won't be another war; this last one was the last there'll be. Man can reach for the stars now! Doesn't that mean anything to you? The planets are the first step, then the stars. Man has fought man for a long time—now he can fight for something bigger. He can go to the stars, Mariel—if you'll let him. He has the technical ability, the money, the motive, the drive. He can make it, and *all* men will be rich, not just one."

The captain choked, and turned from the huge man to stare at the wreckage of the old ship. "There's the first ship, Mariel," he cried. "It should have ushered in a glorious age for all men—but it's still here, a wreck. *Why?* Why can't men get above their greed, get beyond themselves, beyond individual desires, so that they can *get* to the stars? They've broken every barrier but the last one—man himself. And

that's the final barrier, the toughest barrier to cross."

Addy turned and walked toward the giant, his eyes pleading. "Men can be gods, Mariel, but *they can't be gods until they stop being men!* You've got to go back with me. *You've got to go back and tell the world what happened to the first ship!*"

Coldly, deliberately, the huge man raised his hand, and fired three quick shots into the captain's brain.

HE STOPPED in the valley, just below the ship, and collected the stones. The best size—not the largest one, but the ones that would go most easily in the market. The cleanest, the shiniest, the most perfectly-formed. He loaded a dozen fortunes into his pockets, into his pack. Not much weight to carry, easy to conceal.

Mariel laughed to himself. The men on the first ship had been fools; they had found the diamonds, and fought each other for them. They should have been smarter; but they shot each other down; this time it would be a different story.

It wouldn't be hard. He could handle the ship, could navigate it home. He could keep in contact with earth by radio, and could prepare the logs on the way home, tell the story that they would have to accept. The first ship had been moved after the first landing, and had crashed, killing all hands. As for his own crew, Addy, Blanke, Harris—all died in explorations. Accidental deaths. They could never doubt his word; they would never send another ship, for his report would declare the planet Mars an empty, fruitless desert.

He packed the stones, and leaped gently into the air, the 'copter blades whining softly above him. Over the ridge, and down into the valley where the ship rested. The ship to take him home. He settled easily to the ground...and stood rooted in horror.



The weeds had grown during the eight days he'd been gone, climbing—ever climbing up the gleaming sides of the rocket, twining around and around the tail fin, up into the jets. Heavy trunks of vine, five, six inches thick, clinging, grappling the ship to the ground.

Mariel ran down the slope, kicked ineffectually at the vines. He unclasped a knife, hacked at the base of the trunks. The blade cut into the vine stickily, as though it were cutting through thick molasses. A pick lay on the ground nearby, almost anchored solid by the small greenish tendrils around it; Mariel wrenched it loose with a cry, swung heavily on the imprisoning weed. And the pick sank deep into the soft trunk, and stuck, solid—

His mind raced desperately. Already the tendrils had eaten into the lower hull plates, infiltrating the crevices, springing the strong metal loose along the seam. In another day the ship would be leaking like a sieve. Huge masses of vine were growing up one shiny side, the sunny side. He watched, and even as he watched a hull plate sprang out with a sharp metallic clang—

Frantically Mariel rushed up the ladder pegs, into the port. Blast! That was the only thing to do. Quickly, before he was anchored so solidly that blasting would be futile. *Blast!* The fire of the jet would burn him free, get him off the planet—

He slammed the hatch, locked it down, and settled eagerly before the controls. The engines warmed, hummed, and the ship throbbed in readiness. He snapped down the switch, and felt the throbbing strain of the jets.

The fire came out, withering the bottoms of the vines, turning them into roaring flame. Resting on its fiery tail for a few seconds, the ship rose slowly, ever so slowly into the air, higher and higher, free of the planet that held it—

And the weight of the invading vine, still clinging in great masses to the sunny side of the hull, made the ship wobble uncertainly. The gyros hissed in frantic effort to straighten the mighty hull, hissed and set off the alarm-bell. Mariel sat frozen to the controls, fighting, as the ship rose higher and higher, wobbling on its course. Slowly it began to curve in the direction of the unbalancing weight, spinning, a glistening finger wobbling through the clear Martian atmosphere, curving in a monstrous long parabola, and plunging with incredible speed for the rocky ground below—

The ship struck, crumpled against the rock, and dug deeper and deeper, until it could dig no further, the fiery jet spitting a futile column of flame into the thin air until the fuel failed.

And then the jets were still.

The ship gleamed, a silver streak in the bright sunrise, and settled gently down on its jets on the surface of Mars. It stood motionless, like a tall silver finger, pointing up toward the reaches of space through which it had come. It rested in a low valley, protected from the gentle wind which sighed through the red crags and across the rough terrain.

For several hours the ship stood silent. Then a port opened near the top of the silvery column, and the ladder pegs squeaked out from the hull. Four men descended the ladder, cautiously, hesitantly, descended and stood in a group at the base of the ship.

The leader turned to the other three. "This is it, men," he said quietly. "The first thing we have to do is to organize a search for the other ships. They're up here somewhere. It's our job to find them—"

The *Argonaut III* had made a safe landing on Mars.



# SMALL FRY

By Hunt Collins



*The occupants of the ship  
were all youngsters . . .*

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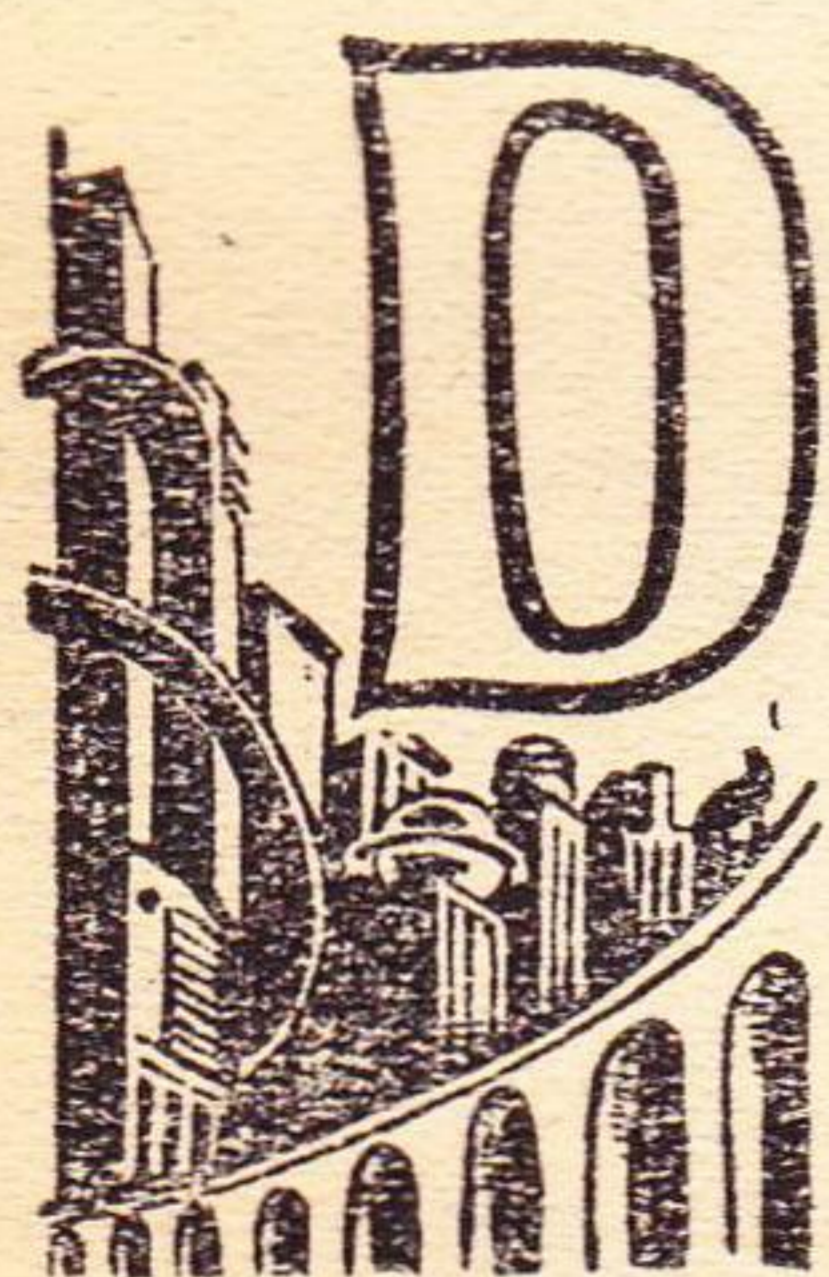
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**D**EIRDRE knew that Lan would be furious; she had solemnly promised him—as long ago as the first eruption—that she would never again step outside when the volcanoes were acting up.

She shrugged her shoulders within the plastic suit that covered her rounded body. The suit would protect her from the radioactive dust that belched up from within, she knew, but it wouldn't help her much if she were caught in a shower of rock and boiling lava.

She grinned, remembering this as the very same argument Lan had used. Her lips parted as she heard a deep rumbling in the distance. That would

**The kid's story sounded convincing, and they certainly acted as if they'd come to conquer the planet . . . but certain aspects of their behaviour just didn't jibe . . .**

be Agra Dao, always the first to erupt; after that, the others would follow like obedient children, rumbling their protest across the waist of the planet. And then, when their thunder had been spent, they would subside until the next big eruption, three months later.

She tilted her blonde head back, hair

cropped close beneath the protecting plastic. There was always excitement during an eruption—an electric, tingling excitement that vibrated in the air and growled deep in the bowels of the earth. She stood watching the majestic peak of Agra Dao, waiting for the next vicious upheaval of sparks and gas, waiting for the white hot lava to pour over the lip of the crater.

Lightly-clothed as she was, she could almost feel the excitement pressing against her skin, feel it tightening her thighs.

*I'm behaving like a child,* she thought. *The Governor's wife sneaking out to watch an erupting volcano—after she's been forbidden to do so.* Her lips tilted upward at the edges, splitting her finely-sculpted features with a crimson smile.

Agra Dao growled ominously, and her eyes widened as steam poured from the crater. *Soon,* she thought.

And then suddenly, quite without warning, the rumbling became an explosive roar. Steam geysered up from the crater, tossing rocks into the air. An orange-red liquid spilled over the lip, began pouring down the side of the volcano. She watched excitedly as the lava pushed down the slope, uprooting trees, burning a fiery path as it moved forward.

She watched the lip of the crater slowly crumble as the lava overran it, sliding over the volcanic ash that had been constantly added to over the centuries. *Gandera may not be the nicest planet to live on,* she mused, *but it is certainly the most exciting.* She allowed herself the luxury of one more look at the unleashed fury of Agra Dao, then turned to run back to the big green house. *Lan will be fuming by now,* she thought. *But he'll get over it, even before the volcanoes subside; Lan is that way.*

In the distance, she heard Yura Dal add its thunder to Agra Dao's. She'd best hurry; the entire belt would soon be active. She began to run more quickly, her toes barely

touching the trembling ground beneath her.

And then, below the bellow of the volcanoes, she heard the fainter, steadier sound of a mechanical contrivance. She turned her head over her shoulder, hearing the plastic rustle with her sudden movement. Her blue eyes widened, and her lips parted in surprise.

**B**EHIND Agra Dao, swooping down out of the spiraling steam, was a ship of strange design. It gleamed redly in the glare of the volcano, light dancing off its polished metal surface. A long finger of light suddenly reached out from its lower portion, blinding Deirdre with its brilliance. The light staggered over the ground erratically, then pinpointed Deirdre, held her in its penetrating glare. She turned, fear edging its way up her back. She was not one to panic easily, but she felt an unreasoning terror, now, as her legs carried her over the rocks and ashes on the ground.

She kept turning her head at spaced intervals, watching the strange craft as it dropped lower and lower. She heard another mechanical whine ahead of her, turned her head abruptly to see another ship drop out of the sky. And suddenly the sky was full of alien ships, spilling out of the steam, ringing her in a tight metal band that descended rapidly.

She stopped running as the first ship touched the ground, clumsily, bounced awkwardly, and shuddered to a stop. Hopelessly, she wished she'd taken a blaster with her, or even a small stun-gun. The other ships were bouncing onto the ground now, metal scraping against bare rock, grinding, complaining as the ships screeched and shivered to stops. She stood stock-still, waiting, hoping that the ships had been seen from one of the towers, wishing that perhaps Lan himself had seen them.

A port opened in the side of the ship that had landed first, and a band of small creatures in spacesuits tum-

bled onto the ash. They waddled heavily toward her, carrying enormous weapons in their small hands. The other ships were discharging their crews now, and they closed in on her like an army of marauderants, their suits gray, their weapons shiny and lethal-looking.

She caught her breath, dug her fingernails into the palms of her hands, her fists clenched into tight little balls.

The creatures moved closer, treading clumsily in their bulky space suits. They tightened the circle around her, moving in to where they were no further than three feet away. They stood shoulder to shoulder, and she stared at the wall of faces beneath the heavy plastic globes on their heads.

She put her hand to her mouth, suppressed a giggle. "Why, you're children!" she said aloud.

She was surprised by her discovery, more surprised that she had voiced it. Sceptically, her eyes travelled over the faces surrounding her again. Why yes, they were children. Just children. But...

ONE OF the boys stepped out of the ring, moved closer to her. He gestured with the weapon, his finger impatiently hovering over a button on its right side. He had blond hair, and it fell impudently over one blue eye; he was full-lipped, with a snub nose that sported a brace of rampant freckles. "Get 'em up!" he commanded.

She almost giggled again at the boyish squeak that was his voice coming through the speaker of his plastic helmet. "Get what up?" she asked, trying to keep the amusement out of her voice.

"Your hands," the squeaky voice explained; "lift them over your head."

She hesitated, saw the boy's finger move dangerously close to the button on his weapon. Her eyes narrowed, and she stared into the boy's helmet, trying to read his expressionless face. He couldn't have been more than ten

years old, but she saw something there that frightened her; quickly, she lifted her hands.

"That's better. We're well-armed, lady; one false move and you're dead."

Behind the squeak of the voice, Deirdre heard the bellow of the volcano belt, angrily protesting to the skies.

One of the boys turned his head, glanced over his shoulder. "We'd better get inside, Captain," he said; "those mountains sound dangerous."

"Yeah," the leader answered. He pointed with the oversized weapon again. "Take us to your house, lady."

She nodded, her hands still over her head. Lan would know what to do; Lan would be able to handle them. The humor of the situation struck her again, and she bit her lower lip to stop a smile. The Governor's wife leading a gang of children to the Governor's house. Would Lan be surprised!

"Funny planet," she heard a voice behind her say.

"Yeah, all those mountains blowing up. I wonder where..."

"Shut up!" a third voice commanded.

They walked up to the green house in silence. She pressed the tabs that opened the airtight lock, a necessary precaution during the eruptions. In the distance, the volcanoes were beginning to subside already. The children piled into the lock behind her, their boots clanking against the flooring. She closed the outside lock behind them, opened the one leading into the house.

Lan turned as he heard her come into the room. His brown eyebrows shot up, and he glanced hastily toward the kitchen. He was wearing lounging shorts, and his tunic was open at the throat. He took his pipe from his mouth with a slow, deliberate movement. "I thought you promised me..." he started angrily. He stopped abruptly when he noticed the small

space-suited creatures behind her. "What's all this?"

"They..." she began. She shrugged helplessly and wiggled out of her plastic suit. The leader of the boys removed his helmet, sent it arcing toward a foam-chair in the corner. Lan's eyes followed the helmet's path hostilely. "Say, youngster..."

"Who's he?" the leader asked Deirdre.

"My husband," Deirdre answered.

The boy turned to Lan. "What's your name, mister?"

"My name is...by the stars, what am I saying? I've never heard such impudence." He turned questioningly to Deirdre. "Where'd you get this crew? Do their mothers know they're out during an eruption?"

Deirdre pleaded with her eyes, begged Lan to look at the weapons the boys held.

"I'm Kar-Berno," the leader said. "Captain of the Stokian fleet."

"Huh?" Lan grunted, completely surprised.

The boy's eyes steadily held Lan's. "These weapons have been known to burn a man into powdery dust," he said menacingly.

**L**AN LOOKED at the boy curiously. The other boys had removed their helmets and gloves. They stood behind their leader now, faces serious. "What fleet did you say?"

The Stokian fleet; we're from the planet Stoka."

Is that in our system?" Deirdre asked.

It's the fourth planet," Lan said hurriedly. He looked at the boy's weapon again, his brows knitted together.

"What's your name?" Kar-Berno asked.

"I'm Lan Erran, Governor of the planet Gandera," Lan said. "Are... are your parents coming in?" he asked warily.

Kar-Berno grinned. "No; we're alone." He turned to a red-headed boy

on his right. "Did you hear that? Governor! We really hit it good, didn't we?"

"Yeah!" the red-headed youngster answered enthusiastically.

Kar-Berno faced Lan again. "You're really the Governor, huh?"

"Of course!" Lan said. Deirdre studied his face, saw the faint twitching of his jaw muscles, the twitching that telegraphed Lan's rising uneasiness.

"That's good," Kar-Berno said, grinning now; "you see, we're conquering the planet."

He said it so matter-of-factly that Deirdre wanted to laugh, but a quick look at Lan's face told her this would have been unwise. She looked pleadingly at her husband, shrugging slightly, a shrug that plainly said, "Really, Lan, I had nothing whatever to do with this foolishness."

Lan took one last stab at it. "Look, boys, why don't you all go back to your houses? The volcanoes are calming down, and you can..."

"He still don't get it," the red-headed boy said.

Kar-Berno smiled. "I'll explain, Lieutenant." Deirdre looked at the the boys' collars, visible now that their helmets had been removed; she saw no sign of rank there. The red-headed boy moved closer to Kar-Berno. He was smaller than the leader, with warm brown eyes straddling a small, straight nose. A tooth was missing in the front of his mouth. Deirdre guessed he was about eight years old.

"Maybe you'd better explain," Lan said impatiently. "I'm not sure I like all this non..."

"Shut up!" Kar-Berno shouted, his thin voice drowning out Lan's deeper one. "Who asked you what you like? Who asked you? We're giving the orders around here."

"Yeah," the redhead affirmed.

There was something terribly familiar about all this, and Deirdre tried desperately to remember just *what*.



KAR-BERNO began pacing back and forth before Lan. "You know anything about Stoka?"

"Very little," Lan said.

"It's a big planet," the boy explained. "Very big."

"How big?" Lan wanted to know.

"Very big; we have a lot of gravity, too." He turned to his lieutenant. "That's right, ain't it, Dak-Lafe?"

"That's right," the redhead replied. "Lots of gravity."

"That means it's hard for ships to leave the planet," Kar-Berno said; "they have to be real light so they can blast off."

Lan nodded. "What's all this got to do with..."

"Our people always wanted to be conquerors," Kar-Berno said.

"So we planned for centuries on how to get off the planet," Dak-Lafe added.

"That's right. It was hard because of the gravity, so the scientists had to make the ships very light," Kar-Berno continued.

A boy behind the leader, a thin boy with a crew cut, put up his hand excitedly, waving it anxiously. Kar-Berno nodded to him, and the boy said, "But even the lightest ships would hold no more than two grownups."

"Yeah," Kar-Berno said. "Yeah." The boy with the crew cut grinned broadly, pleased with his leader's approval. "So..."

"So our people decided to send kids up in the ships," Dak-Lafe interrupted; "that way we could have a bigger invasion force."

Kar-Berno nodded enthusiastically. "Of course. So they trained us from when we were born, taught us how to fly and shoot..."

"And navigate," a boy in the rear added.

"And everything about all the planets," another chimed in.

"Sure, all that stuff," Kar-Berno said, his eyes glowing; "then we took off for this planet."

The boy with the crew-cut didn't

raise his hand this time. He burst out, "This is only the first one; we're going to take over the whole universe."

Kar-Berno nodded his approval again, and then turned his grin on Lan.

"Well!" Lan exclaimed.

"Well..." Deirdre faltered.

"Look," Kar-Berno said impulsively. He turned the weapon toward a large vase atop the video in the corner, and his finger stretched for the button, pressed it. An orange flame lanced out of the barrel, reaching out across the room, embracing the vase in a fiery grip. The vase shuddered, crumbled, became a small pile of gray ashes. Kar-Berno released the button.

"See?" he said, a smug look of power on his face.

"Why...why did you pick on Gandera?" Deirdre asked tremulously.

"We didn't know..." Dak-Lafe started.

"We didn't know you called it Gandera," Kar-Berno interrupted; "we have a different name for it back home. But we picked it because it was closest."

Lan spread his palms wide in a gesture of helplessness. Deirdre bit her lip, wanting to throw her arms about her husband's neck.

"My men will need food and rest," Kar-Berno said.

*My men. Surely this is a bad dream,* Deirdre thought. *Little boys acting like men. Conquering planets.* She shook her head in mute wonder.

"But first you'll broadcast to your people, tell them we're holding you and your wife prisoners. You'll tell them we're going to..." He paused, a puzzled look on his face. "We'll talk about that in the morning. Where's your transmitter?"

Lan sighed deeply. "This way," he said.

Dak-Lafe motioned to two boys, who quickly took positions behind Lan, their weapons thrust out before them, enormous in their small hands. Lan

looked at Deirdre, then wearily led the boys to the transmitter room.

"Take the lady to her room," Kar-Berno said. He pointed to two boys, who gestured impatiently with their weapons. Deirdre left Kar-Berno in the living room with the remainder of the boys, climbing the steps to her bedroom. The two boys clumped along behind her. When they reached her door, they took the key, waited for her to enter.

She stepped inside, heard the key click in the lock behind her. She heard the excited voices of the boys outside in the hall, muffled by the heavy door.

She lay down on the bed, stretching out her long legs. But she didn't sleep much that night.

**T**HE NEW regime started the next morning. Deirdre heard sounds beneath her window, hurriedly leaped out of bed. She brought her hand to her mouth when she saw what was happening outside.

It was a clear morning, with Artos—the ever-visible satellite—hanging close to the horizon. Stretching to that horizon, from the door of her house, was a line of sullen, complaining people, the citizens of Gandra. Patrolling the line, weapons in hand, were the arrogant children of Stoka.

Deirdre rushed to the door, tried the knob. "Open up!" she said.

"Hold your horses," she heard a boyish voice warn. She waited patiently while the key turned in the lock. The door swung wide, and she met the wide-spaced green eyes of a smiling young face.

"Good morning," the boy said.

Deirdre grunted and started off toward the stairs. The boys quickly followed her, their heavy-soled boots thudding against the carpeting. In the living-room, she met Lan; she knew instantly that he, too, had spent a sleepless night.

"This is insane," he said, holding

her close. "These damn kids have got all the people registering; they're going to conduct a house-to-house search for hidden weapons as soon as registration is over. I tried to tell them that our citizens aren't allowed to keep weapons in their homes, that only officials and members of the military..."

"That's enough of that talking," the guard warned.

"See what I mean? They don't trust anyone or anything. They act like pirates in a Grade-B..."

"I said that's enough," the boy said, his voice sterner this time.

Deirdre felt the muscles on Lan's arms tighten, and she glanced up hastily at his face. "Look, sonny," Lan started, moving Deirdre aside.

"You'd better shut up now, mister," the boy said.

Deirdre saw the warning flashes in Lan's eyes, and suddenly he shouted, "I'll say whatever the hell I damn please in my own house!"

He took one step forward, reaching out with a big hand. The boy backed away, his eyes frightened for a moment. He hesitated, seemed to weigh the weapon in his hands. "Don't move!" he piped.

**L**AN TOOK another step forward, and the boy's finger found the button on the weapon. He turned the snout toward the floor, pressed the button. The orange flame leaped and danced at Lan's feet, burning into the rug.

"Easy does it," a voice commanded.

Deirdre turned to see Kar-Berno striding across the living room. "What's the trouble here?" he said.

"I'm sorry Kar... Captain. But he was going to..."

"All right, Governor," Kar-Berno said slowly. "We warned you. We're going to take your wife to my ship; if we have any more trouble from you, we'll kill her."

"You kids..."

"That's enough, Governor!" Kar-Berno dismissed Lan abruptly. "Take her away," he told the boys.

"If you touch one hair..."

"You're asking for trouble, Governor," Kar-Berno said softly; "take her away, men."

Deirdre nodded consolingly at her husband and fell in between the two boys. Lan was clenching and unclenching his fists in silent rage when she left him.

Outside, milling people on the line started cheering when Deirdre passed. Quickly, the guards silenced them, brandishing their weapons with menacing efficiency. Incongruously, one of the Stokian guards was sucking on a lollipop, holding the long weapon in his other hand. Deirdre didn't smile; she no longer found it funny.

In the distance, she saw the now-smoldering peak of Agra Dao, and her mind ran back over the incidents leading to this very moment. It still seemed like a bad dream, something from which she would awaken soon, something she would laughingly relate to Lan over the breakfast table. But her mind logically insisted that it was all reality, and she busily sought a solution as they walked toward one of the space ships.

Bribery, perhaps. Give the kids all the ice cream, lollipops, candy, cake that they wanted. Pack their ships with it, all there was on the planet, if they would leave peacefully. No, that wouldn't work; to the victor belongs the spoils, and the kids were certainly victors and could plunder all the goodies they desired.

She forgot, for a moment that the invaders were indeed children, and her mind pictured a vision of herself in a low cut-gown playing the seductress to the Captain of the fleet. Perhaps she could get them to leave that way. Perhaps...and then she remembered their age, and a smile covered her face; even if she were capable of playing the sultry enchantress—which she strongly doubted—Kar-Berno and his

"men" wouldn't know sex from kiddy-cars.

"Inside here," one of the boys said.

He waited on the top step of the small flight leading into the space ship. She climbed the sturdy steps, brushed past him, her bare arm swiping against the material of his suit, rough and tweedy to her touch.

**T**HE SHIP was larger than she expected it would be. She looked around, then turned to the boy for instructions.

"We'll be outside," he said; "no monkey-business now."

"No monkey-business," she promised. The boy turned and stationed himself outside the airlock. Curiously, she began to walk around the ship. It was circular in design, with a large transparent viewplate running in a complete circle around the side of the ship. A panel of instruments occupied a long area beneath one segment of the viewplate, and a bank of six swivel-chairs, welded to the deck, stood before the instruments. Apparently, this was the control-room, and the boys sat in those chairs when navigating the ship.

She shrugged. Actually, she knew very little about space travel, being only vaguely acquainted with the experiments now in progress on Gandra. But she assumed there would be acceleration couches of some sort, especially when an enormous gravitational pull had to be overcome.

Wearily, she sank into one of the chairs, wondering how Lan was making out back at the house. She looked at the instruments, tried to make herself comfortable in the chair. She stretched her long legs, and noted with surprise that they didn't reach the deck. A frown crossed her forehead; why should a ship designed for boys have seats that...

On impulse, she slid down in the chair, her head slipping lower until it rested on a point about halfway up the back of the seat. From this posi-

tion, she could not see over the instrument panel, could not see through the viewplate.

Her feet touched the floor. Quickly, she got out of the chair and began walking around the ship. The door of one of the lockers was slightly ajar, and she walked to it rapidly. Her fingers ran over the heavy metal, lingered there.

*But hadn't they said...?*

She opened the door. A space-suit hung in the locker, a large suit, the legs of which trailed on the metal floor of the locker. A large plastic globe rested on a small shelf over the suit, a globe much larger than any of the boys had worn. She touched the material of the suit. It felt like rubber, softer perhaps, but with the same smooth, strong feel. She recalled the tweedy feel of the space-suit the boy outside the lock was wearing. Hastily, she slammed the locker door shut.

A chart hung from a metal hook to the left of the row of lockers. She walked to this, studied the handwriting on it. It seemed to be a plan, or schedule of the day, with entries written in alongside printed time figures. Her eyes ran over the entries.

0930: *Inspection, all decks.*

1000: *Inspection, personnel.*

1030: *Reception and welcome committees take stations.*

1040: *ETA Public School 135*

She stopped reading, snapped her fingers. By the stars, this was...

"Guard!" she shouted. "Guard!"

The boy ran up the steps, his eyes wide in anticipation, his heavy weapon in his hands. "Take me to your Captain," she said.

"My orders are..."

"Take me to your Captain," she repeated. She eyed the boy steadily, then added, "Or shoot me; you can take your choice."

She walked to the lock, started down the steps while the boy followed silently behind her. The other guard looked up in surprise at the smile on her lips.

KAR-BERNO'S thin voice was high and raucous. "I thought I told you to keep her at the ship!"

"She..."

"I forced him to bring me here. I want to talk to you, Captain."

"Go ahead," Kar-Berno said petulantly. "Talk."

"What I have to say is private."

"Leave us alone," Kar-Berno said, waving the boys outside with a sweep of his hand. Deirdre waited until they were gone. She faced Kar-Berno with a knowing smile on her lips, then, and said, "Are there no penalties for truancy on Stoka?"

"What?"

"Or is Public School 135 having a vacation?"

Kar-Berno's mouth fell open; he stared at her in amazement.

"Don't be so surprised," she said softly. "The children on Gandra are often treated to outings, too. It must have been quite a treat for your school to be allowed to visit a *real* spaceship base." She paused. "Or are they called bases?"

"Space...spaceports," Kar-Berno stammered.

"Oh!" Deirdre said. "Nonetheless, it afforded you and your classmates an opportunity to dress up in your play space-suits and have a real holiday."

"We..." Kar-Berno said, his face beginning to crumble.

"I can't understand how you managed to get away with so many ships, though; ten of them, aren't there?"

"They went to eat," he stammered. "The crew, I mean. We stayed behind and began playing with the dials. It's...it's easy; you just set them. I...I mean...it's sort of automatic."

"And when your ship took off, the rest followed; is that it?"

"Well, sort of," Kar-Berno said, biting his lip. "I kind of told them to follow. On the teleo, you know."

Deirdre smiled. "You had a little

difficulty with your landing, didn't you?"

"Well..."

"Can you get back to your own planet—by just setting a dial?"

"Yes. You see, they explained to us...the crew-members, I mean... that it was possible to visit any planet in the system. But the planets aren't ready yet, they said, so they were waiting. We thought it would be fun to..."

"I see. That's too bad."

"What? What's too bad? You mean our coming here?" His jaw set stubbornly. "Well, we're not leaving; we're having fun. You can't make us go, either."

"Don't misunderstand me," Deirdre said; "we wouldn't allow you to go even if you wanted to."

"What?" Kar-Berno was visibly shocked.

"We have too much to learn from you. Why even the imagination displayed in your 'invasion' story is far greater than any on our planet. Light metals, indeed; heavy gravity; trained from infancy." She shook her head in wonder.

"I...I don't understand," Kar-Berno said.

"It's simple. Now that we've finally been contacted by such an advanced culture, we're going to take advantage of it; we'll fight tooth and nail to keep you on this planet."

"But..."

"Just try us and see, Captain. You'll never leave this planet."

"But... I..."

"No buts about it, Captain." She paused for effect and then said stern-

ly, "We absolutely forbid your departure!"

THE STOKIAN ships thundered into life less than an hour later; one by one, they lifted from the ground, roaring up past Agra Dao into the sky.

Lan and Deirdre stood watching them from the window of the big greenhouse. Outside, the citizens of Gandera watched the skies, too—surprised but pleased by the hasty departure.

"Good riddance," Lan said, his arm around Deirdre's waist.

"They'll be back some day," Deirdre said softly; "they'll be older and wiser, and there won't be any invasion talk—but they'll be back."

"A good spanking is what they all need," Lan said sternly. And then he seemed to remember something. "And by the way, young lady, I thought I told you never to wander outside during an eruption."

"You did, darling," she said.

"Well, perhaps you didn't understand me. Perhaps the point wasn't clear enough."

Deirdre looked up into his eyes. She loved him so when he was playing the stern protector. "Perhaps, Lan," she said softly.

"Well, I'll repeat it now, and I don't expect to remind you again. I absolutely forbid you to step outside during an eruption; is that clear?"

Her eyes glowed mischievously. "Yes, darling," she said.

Coming Next Issue

WE ARE ALONE

An Unusual Tale  
by Robert Sheckley





The pterodactyl took to the air,  
the half-conscious Teraf astride.

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# WE WILL INHERIT . .

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feature novel of the great legend by Wallace West

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There was a small chance that this sortie might succeed, that Prince Teraf could clip the Pharaoh's claws. But, even if he won, could the inevitable be postponed?

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*"'Skin me, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'snatch out my eyeballs, t'ar out my years by de roots, en cut off my legs,' sezee, 'but do please, Brer Fox, don't fling me in dat brier-patch,' sezee."*

Uncle Remus. Joel Chandler Harris.

**T**HE LEADER of a forlorn hope is seldom forlorn; otherwise he would not be the leader. Teraf, newly-crowned King of Hellas—subject, of course to the will of Zeus Pitar, the gouty greybeard ordained

by the gods of Mars to rule the kingdoms of earth for the good of their souls, and the enrichment of the red planet—felt lighthearted, and almost lightheaded.

Here he was, head of an escort which was to take an Egyptian princess back to Sais, the capital of her magic-and-priest ridden homeland. The chances were about a hundred to one that Pharaoh Plu Toh Ra, who was in more or less successful revolt against Martian rule, would dismember both Teraf and the others as soon as they placed themselves in his power. To make things worse, they were deprived of rapid transit for their journey—and of the protection of radiation-cannon—because the Pharaoh had succeeded in crip-

pling Bab El, the tower which previously had pumped limitless power into the ether for use by anyone equipped with machines which could tap it.

Yet, as has been said, King Teraf had a song in his heart as he stood in the Pitaric Palace at Atlan, awaiting final instructions. Why? Perhaps the fact that Princess Pan Doh Ra (panther-lean, willful offspring of the greatest ruler Egypt had ever had, and the loveliest woman Mars had ever known in its endless millenia of history) stood by his side, had something to do with Teraf's nonchalance.

"My boy," the Pitar was saying, "I regret to the bottom of my soul that it is necessary to send you on this expedition. I do so because Atlan's situation is desperate, so long as Egypt retains possession of our only source of radioactive energy—the orichalcum that some traitor among us stole from the vaults of Bab El. I am gambling you and fifty of my best men on the forlorn chance that you can get to that orichalcum and escape with it—or, at last resort, explode it. This, frankly, is a suicide-mission; you are free not to go if you prefer."

"I'll go, your Pitarship." Teraf felt every inch a king.

"No," cried Pan Doh Ra, shaking back her strange golden-black hair. "It is hopeless. The whole party will be...will be minced!"

"I'm not so sure, my dear; and, since you have convinced me that you are loyal to Atlan—even though you took part in the attack on Bab El—I will let you in on a secret." Zeus pointed his jagged sceptre at three small flat packages before him. "Here are three weapons which I believe can be smuggled into Sais. Dr. Vanya will explain their use to Teraf before he seals them on his royal hide in such a way as to defy detection by anything except X-rays."

"Use them well," he continued to the Hellene. "If you do, I have the faintest of hopes that you can best

that man in Sais. The escort will be technically under the command of Captain Jason of the Pitaric Guard, because protocol requires it; but final decisions will be up to you, Teraf." The Pitar shifted his painful foot impatiently and rumbled on. "I'm sending Heracles along at his own request. The big boy is not too bright, but he can be depended on. You'll have Theseus, one of my best men. I'm also sending Nestor; he's old, but he knows Egypt like the palm of his hand. Castor and Pollux are both good navigators and..."

"Navigators?" puzzled the Hellene.

"Yes, since all our aircraft are grounded, I'm sending you on the *Argo*...you know, the sailing-yacht I use for trips on the lake. It will take you right up the Nile to Sais." He fingered his beard. "That's about all, except this: Princess, if Teraf fails, I shall depend on you to keep us informed of goings-on in Egypt."

"Of course," answered the girl, lifting her dark head, proudly. "But I still think Teraf is too valuable a man to be sent on this mission; there's Hellas to consider, too."

"Is that all?" The Pitar frowned slightly.

PAN DO RAH limped forward, leaned her small fists on the desk and looked the Pitar straight in the eye. "No it isn't! If you must know—I'm in love with that redhaired Hellene and I don't want to see him chewed by a pterodactyl or bitten by an asp!"

"Well," Zeus chuckled at Teraf's startled gasp, "I can see your point under those circumstances. But can you see mine: That the empire is bigger than the best of its citizens?"

For a moment longer the princess stared into those wise old eyes. Then she bowed gravely, fingertips to forehead.

"The Pitar has spoken," she replied, in the old Egyptian formula. "From now on it's up to me to keep Teraf in one piece; when do we start?"



"Now see here, young lady," stormed Teraf, coming out of the coma into which her astonishing series of declarations had thrown him. "I'm perfectly able to keep myself in one piece."

"You've not been to Egypt recently," she replied blandly; "we have devised more unpleasant ways of killing people than any country on earth."

"But I won't have you acting as if you owned me. Why, I scarcely know you, and you have the impudence to say..."

"Now, now, my boy, don't get excited," warned Zeus, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "I had been worried about Pan, this last year or so—thought her father had bewitched her, or something. But now she's acting like the kid who used to throw this palace into an uproar every time she came to Atlan.... Remember, Pan, when you and Hermes set up that three-dimensional movie projector and sent the image of a sabertooth galloping right through the grand ball-room?"

"Will I ever forget it...or the spanking you gave me afterward?"

"Hera made me do that; spoiled one of her fanciest parties. My hand still hurts when I think of it. We were afraid for a while it might cause an inter-colonial incident."

"Oh, for the sake of Chronus, stop it," groaned Teraf. "You two act as if I were a pawn in a chess-game; don't I have anything to say about my love life?"

"I'm afraid not," chuckled the Pitara. "If Pan says she wants you, she'll get you... And I'm not worried as I was before about your returning from Sais." His voice became suddenly grave. "Now run along to Vanya with these weapon-packages before I become maudlin and keep both of you here, empire or no empire."

to be the toughest collection of dare-devils he had met since he used to hang around the spaceport as a boy. Every one of them had played a big role in the development of Atlantis and now they were raring to go on their new mission.

"Nothing to it," boasted the tall, slightly-cockeyed Theseus as he paced the silver-inlaid bridge and thumped his mighty chest. "I helped whip the Mayas into line, and they were plenty tough. Plute, here we come."

"Pyramids! Pyramids and sphinxes!" That's all the Egyptians know how to build," agreed Heracles. "Now my dam..."

Old Nestor caressed his long nose, "It won't be so easy," he muttered. "The priests of Sais know a lot of tricks; they've kept alive much of the psychological knowledge of old Lemuria."

"Magic," jeered handsome young Pollux, who had wandered up with his inseparable brother. "Magic is no match for Mastian science."

"Maybe so. Maybe so." Nestor scratched his grey head. "But, just the same, I was talking to a renegade Egyptian on the dock awhile ago. He was dithering about what he called the clashing islands, which guard the harbor of Sais; he held that Medea was pure poison. And he said neither our radios nor our sails might work when we got into the Nile."

"I'm glad the *Argo* has a bank of oars, and I've brought along a crate of carrier pigeons—just in case we are cut off from Atlan."

"Worrying as usual, Nestor?" chuckled Jason as he signalled for the mooring-lines to be cast off. "You needn't, so long as I'm in command."

The old man muttered something highly uncomplimentary and trudged off to feed his birds.

Accustomed as the Argonauts were to the lightning-speeds of interplanetary and stratosphere travel, the snail-like pace of the yacht became irksome to the extreme after the first day out. Not only that, but the wa-

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**T**ERAF FOUND the *Argo* to be a spanking little craft and its crew

ter was rough and most of the crew soon found themselves green with seasickness. About the only persons on board not affected were Teraf, and the princess.

The Hellene, still miffed by Pan Doh Ra's amorous avowal, tried to avoid her—at first; but he had to admit that she was very easy to look at as she laughed and joked with members of the queasy crew. Apparently she had not a care in the world, but out of the corner of his eye he often caught her watching him with a deeply worried-expression. At last he could stand it no longer.

"Why did you tell Zeus you loved me?" he demanded as he leaned against the swaying rail beside her and stared out across the water toward the blue mountains of distant Crete.

"Perhaps because I meant it; perhaps to save your precious hide." She grinned impishly at him over a slim shoulder. "Let's forget it, anyway, and try to plan some way for you and the others to escape from prison."

"But why are you so sure we'll be imprisoned?" He tried not to notice what a pretty picture she made with her curly black hair flying in the breeze. "I'm betting that your father will load us down with gifts for bringing you home safely, then try to pack us out of the country before we have a chance to learn anything of value to Atlan."

She looked at him with lacklustre eyes. "You've been away too long, Teraf; Egypt doesn't abide by the old customs any more. Give you free passage!" She snorted. "Privately, I think Zeus must be in his dotage. If I didn't know you were a stubborn fool, I'd ask you to tell Jason to turn this boat around immediately."

"Look!" His voice was savage. "There was a girl at Minos who talked to me the way you do; I finally had to tan her hide for it."

"I can well imagine, you big brute." She cuddled up against him and giggled. "But I've been spanked by better men than you and it didn't do

any good. I'm immune. Now stop making love to me and listen..."

SHE LAUNCHED into a description of the prisons in Sais which made his skin crawl. Festering, lightless dungeons; a diabolic torture chambers; jailers anxious to simplify their labors—all became much too real as she described them to the last detail.

"There's only one possible means of escape from the palace, once you're inside of it," she continued. "Our brood of pterodactyls is kept in the sunken palace courtyard, next to the dungeons. According to a quaint old Egyptian custom, they must be fed on human flesh; enough prisoners are kept always on hand to glut their appetites."

Teraf was feeling slightly ill. "But what's all this got to do with my escape? Must I arise like a phoenix after being devoured by those reptiles?"

"Well, for all practical purposes, yes. Here's my plan. When Plu Toh Ra finally announces your imminent departure from this life, display an awful terror of the 'dactyls. Beg him to kill you in any way but that; get down and grovel on the floor, if necessary. It's an old trick, but I think it will work.

"Your pleas will so delight the Pharaoh, that he will immediately consign you to the feeding pens. These are next to the den and divided from it only by heavy iron bars. Often one of the creatures will thrust its head through those bars, grip one of the prisoners before his time comes to die and... Oh, I'm sorry... (Teraf was livid)... "There's a streak of Plu Toh Ra's sadism in me, I'm afraid; we'll talk no more about that."

She waited while the crew brought the *Argo* about on the other tack, to the shouted orders of Castor and Pollux, then, when the booming sails had quieted, continued gravely. "My idea is just this. All the 'dactyls will follow me like chickens. I've trained them for years and have that control

over them...call it telepathy if you will...which good jockeys have over racehorses. I can even talk to them after a fashion... Like this....." She set up a shrill keening through her firm little teeth. It was half musical, half discordant, and somehow disturbing—even to Teraf.

"You see? Well, after you are placed in the feeding-pens, I'll slip into your cell, some night: I imagine one of those packages Vanya gave you contains some sort of jailbreaking device. So you'll cut the bars and I'll lead you to safety; Father will conclude that you have been eaten. If you are still lucky, you can make your escape to Atlan with some information, at least."

"It sounds snakey to me," groaned Teraf, "but if you think I can't possibly escape from the prison proper, I suppose it's our best bet. Now please talk of Atlan, or Minos, or... the principles of interstellar travel... something far removed from 'dactyls as possible."



**I**T WAS early morning of the third day when the Argonauts sighted the two squat stone towers which guarded the narrow entrance to the river port of Sais. As they crept slowly toward shore they had plenty of time for misgivings. The most intrepid of them realized that fifty men—even though equipped with guns which could melt everything in their paths—were still no match for an army of heaven-knew-how-many thousand wild-eyed barbarians.

"I, for one, wish I were safely back in Atlan, sipping nectar in some tavern," Castor had the courage to mutter.

"Those clashing islands, now," mumbled old Nestor, who had at last

recovered from a severe attack of seasickness; "what do you suppose they might be?"

"Maybe those ugly towers," Teraf mused. "Pan, do you know?"

"There's something about them," frowned the girl, "but it's a military secret. I'm not sure..."

Using oars against the current because the breeze had died, they edged the boat forward.

"I have an idea...for once," boomed Heracles, his flat face expressing genuine astonishment at his cleverness. "Let's send something ahead of us into the port and see what happens."

"What?" jeered Theseus.

"How about Nestor's crate of carrier-pigeons; it's about the only thing on board that isn't made of metal."

And so...to make a legend, though they did not realize it...this was done after a makeshift sail had been rigged atop the box.

The sun had not yet risen; the great river and harbor seemed asleep as the Argonauts rested on their oars and waited. Slowly, the crate drifted toward the towers; when it was squarely between them, the massive pieces of masonry started to move. Silently they slid toward each other across the channel, as though operating on well-oiled grooves. They met in mid-stream, crushed the box as delicately and completely as a fine trip-hammer can crack a walnut and started a leisurely retreat toward shore. One pigeon, minus its tail-feathers, fluttered out of the wreckage.

"Pull, boys!" Teraf shouted to the goggling oarsmen. "I think we can get through before the towers have returned to position and are ready to close again; maybe we can get ashore unobserved. This devil's device will make the Egyptians careless."

The men put their backs into the work, while Jason handled the wheel and Castor and Pollux trimmed sail. The *Argo* reached the downstream edge of the moving-towers before they were back in position, but it was only half-way through the channel when

the juggernaut began its second murderous advance.

"Pull!" yelled Teraf. "Pull or we're all dead men."

The *Argo* leaped like a racehorse under the impulse of fifty pairs of straining arms, but the towers slid forward inexorably.

The Hellene shut his eyes, after gripping Pan Doh Ra's hand, tightly; seconds later there was a rending crash and he commended both their souls to heaven. But, after that, nothing happened; Teraf opened his eyes and stared stupidly at Jason, who was spinning the wheel aimlessly.

"The rudder," gulped the captain, staring over his shoulder at the solid barrier behind them. "The towers pinched it off as our stern slipped through."

INSIDE, the crowded port was still asleep in the sunrise, not a soldier in sight. They grounded the crippled boat and stepped onto the nearest quay, a shivering and thoroughly scared company.

"Now what?" asked Teraf.

No one answered.

"Pan, have you any idea where that orichalcum might be cached?"

"Oh, yes." She chuckled. "It's somewhere in the palace. Why? Are you planning to storm the place?"

The Hellene's quandary was solved by a most extraordinary phenomenon. At first, it appeared that a whirling cloud of dust—one of those tiny, funnel-shaped twisters which often sweep across the landscape in summer—was building itself up before him on the quay. But there was no wind, and the water was calm as a mirror.

As they stared, the outline of the cloud sharpened; its nucleus darkened. Then, in a flash, its diaphanous quality vanished as it assumed the form of one of the most beautiful women they had ever beheld.

She was divinely tall...all of six feet...with raven-black hair and

eyes, finely-chiseled features and the bearing and garb of a goddess. Her piercing glance surveyed the Argonauts, one by one, and finally settled with approval upon Jason's robust physique.

"Our Brother, the Pharaoh," the newcomer spoke in a deep, resonant voice which somehow suggested the tolling of death bells, "bids us congratulate you on your clever escape from the clashing islands and requests that all of you...with the shameless exception of the former princess Pan Doh Ra...be his guests."

"But...But..." floundered Jason, his eyes wide. Teraf could see that, despite his astonishment at her materialization, the captain was infatuated at first sight, and was cudgeling his little-used brain for some gallant reply.

"Say you accept, idiot!" whispered the former out of one corner of his mouth. And try to make love to her, unless you want to be fed to the fish; it's our only chance now."

"We accept the Pharaoh's invitation with pleasure," gulped the poor fellow. "To whom do we owe such a generous welcome?" He wasn't doing too badly, now that he had started.

"Oh, that's my aunt Medea," snapped Pan Doh Ra, her face an icy mask; "she always turns up where she's least wanted."

"Quiet, brat!" The words dripped venom. Then, with a flash of her brilliant smile at Jason. "Yes, we are Medea. And we are most happy that you accept our invitation, even though it will deprive us of the pleasure of seeing you tortured. Follow us."

CONSIDERABLY shaken by that last remark, the little company followed the princess through the awakening streets of that monstrous town, past avenues of stoney-eyed sandstone sphinxes, and vast temples, which had taken the toil of tens of thousands of slaves to erect.

Teraf noted that the early-rising townspeople seemed little interested in their progress, only surveying them for a moment with dull eyes before continuing with their labors. Since the cutting off of radio-power, the city had returned to manual labor; he caught sight of a gang of sweating slaves engaged in some sort of military construction.

"Your people take their loss of freedom calmly," he whispered to Pan.

"They never were free, except when officials from Atlan visited Egypt," was her bitter reply. "They pretended to be happy when foreigners questioned them; they knew they would taste the whip later, if they did otherwise."

All fell silent as Teraf cudged his brain to make it remember bits of gossip which had drifted into Atlan from the rival court at Sais. Medea, he recalled, was said to be a sorceress who knew as many of the secrets of ancient Lemuria as her cunning half-mad brother. It was rumored that she dreamed of ruling Egypt, but that the rigid law of succession decreed that—in the event of Plu-Toh-Ra's death—the crown must go to her younger brother, Absyrtus and, after him, to Pan Doh Ra.

"And Medea knows how to turn old men into young ones, and vice versa, through some drug she possesses," spoke up Pan Doh Ra, who must have been following his thoughts. "If you don't believe this, look at Jason; already she has him behaving like a bashful boy, instead of the heart-crusher he claims to be. You may see him wearing diapers, tomorrow."

Further conversation was halted because, at this point, they reached the palace. They had made the trip from the quay without being challenged by a single guard or soldier; Plu Toh Ra seemed content in the power of his magic to protect himself and his sister.

The Argonauts trailed into that dull red structure in silence, elbowed and overawed by the sphinxes and frown-

ing, black-clad priests with which it abounded.

Jason went ahead with Medea, and Teraf was well content with this—even though he admitted that the witch had sinuous hips and shoulders that would make a sculptor weep for joy. They passed, first, through an incense-clouded temple, where other priests, clothed in white, swung censers and chanted monotonous anthems before shadowy altars. The place was alive with sacred cats, whose green eyes slitted from dark corners, or from the tops of the altars themselves.

They all breathed more freely when they passed out of those oppressive precincts and entered the throne room. There the Great Man...or was it the Great God?...lounged on his lion-headed chair, surrounded by lovely women, perfumed courtiers, and slaves waving ostrich feather fans. One of his jeweled hands stroked the ears of a huge yellow cat, which purred huskily under the caresses. Both Pharaoh and cat surveyed the newcomers coldly as they halted at the entrance to the room.

"You will turn over all your weapons to us now," said Medea, and waited serenely until all the thunderbolts had been collected by two shiny Nubians. Then she led them across the rectangular chamber paved with balata stones of violently clashing colors.

**T**ERAF STUDIED the ruler closely, as they took the one hundred ceremonial steps to the throne. Plu Toh Ra, though still young, looked surprisingly like his own mummy; the dark skin was drawn tightly over the bones of his face until it shone like parchment, and splendid robes of state could not conceal the equal gauntness of his mighty frame. Yet this was emaciation without a trace of weakness; the Pharaoh resembled some engine of destruction from which every superfluous ounce of weight had been hewn away.

"Welcome, oh men of Mars," he said when the Argonauts were grouped

before the dais. "We have awaited your coming with impatience. It is a pleasure to receive—ah—ambassadors from besieged Atlan, particularly when they return to us our precious daughter."

The Egyptian clapped his hands and, when Nubians appeared out of the shadows commanded that food and drink be brought.

"Maybe it's poisoned," whispered Nestor as the visitors sat down before a sumptuous breakfast of milk, honey and strange fruits.

"Don't be a fool; he's playing with us, as his cat would with mice," Teraf answered between mouthfuls. "I'm pinning my hopes on Jason; watch him work."

Truth to tell, if looks could do it, the captain was laying his scarred heart at Medea's feet, and she was relishing the experience.

Plu Toh Ra waited in sardonic silence until his guests had appeased their appetites; then he dismissed the slaves and turned abruptly to Teraf. "So you had yourself named as escort for our daughter," the Egyptian sneered. "Not content with the opportunity you had in the Cave of the Oracle, we see." Suddenly pretending to recognize Pan Doh Ra who, until then, might have been the invisible woman, he roared: "To your quarters, harlot; out of our sight!"

Teraf's face went white. He took a long step forward. The yellow cat bristled to twice its size and guards about the throne swung their spears toward his throat.

"Your Majesty jests," he choked. "Zeus Pitar has magnanimously returned your gallant daughter, who was wounded in the attack upon Atlan."

"So 'tis said. So 'tis said. 'Tis also whispered that her escort hopes to return and report upon the military strength and activities of Egypt."

Teraf said nothing, but his heart thundered. Was Hermes' wild speculation about Aphrodite correct? The Egyptian's thin lips spread into a grimace at his discomforture.

"We regret to tell you, our altruistic benefactor, that all is fair in love and war. Ha!" He beckoned to a scribe who stood nearby, stylus and tablet in hand. "We have coined a phrase. '*All is fair in love and war.*' Write that down for posterity, slave."

He picked up the cat and stroked it thoughtfully, "No, my dear boy, we fear that you and your companions can never return to Atlan. Prison, and then—when the Martians have been exterminated, and we have more time to be amused—the asp, a slow poison or possibly the pterodactyls."

TERAF WONDERED whether this was his cue to grovel, but he did not move, even when soldiers, at a signal from the Pharaoh, stepped forward and gripped Pan Doh Ra by the arms.

"We see Heracles among you," the living skeleton rambled on. "It was very thoughtful of poor old Zeus to send him along; we need an engineer at Sais to tell us how to build a Bab El of our own."

"But I'm a *civil* engineer," rumbled the big fellow. "I don't know nothin' about electronics. I can build a bridge or a dam, but..."

"Too bad. You will have to learn, then, and with great rapidity." The Pharaoh's ivory teeth flashed. "For your friends will be allowed to live only if you provide us with radio-power. Then your red-skinned fellows at Atlan will be given the choice of submitting to Egypt or being destroyed. "Oh," he cried, his face lighting up with a frenzied ecstasy, "We know that you Martians claim the earth as your rightful heritage. We know that your ancestors fled to the red planet when the ice-mountains overwhelmed Earth. We know that Mars is becoming a desert, now, and that you are returning in haste to the world you deserted so basely."

"But do not forget." He rose from the throne, threw back his proud head and lifted clenched fists. "Do not forget that others, who were not cowards,

remained on Earth and through millennia of hardship kept alive a portion of the knowledge of ancient days. *We*, not you, shall inherit Earth!"

He recovered his composure somewhat and turned again to Heracles. "Your companions will be held as hostages while you teach us electronics. If you serve us well, you and they will receive high honor and office in Egypt...and in Atlan."

"And if I refuse?" Heracles, his stupid face paling, uncoiled to his full height of eight feet and slouched forward.

For answer, Plu Toh Ra clapped his hands. At the sound, linen curtains which covered the right hand wall of the chamber parted. From them stood forth at least 200 warriors, their armor flashing and swords unsheathed.

It was then that Teraf played his ace; reaching inside his tunic, he ripped the first of Vanya's packages from his chest, tore it open with his teeth and hurled its contents into the faces of the soldiers. Instantly a pall of midnight-blackness spread over their half of the chamber. Behind it, the Egyptians could be heard screaming and coughing. Vulcan's invention was doing its work well.

"Seize the Pharaoh," the Hellene shouted, realizing that the pall would last only a few moments.

The Argonauts turned to obey, but they were too late; the dais was vacant, except for the golden cat which licked its chops and grinned at them with more than animal intelligence.

"Make a break for it!" he yelled, as soldiers began groping through the cloud. Then he darted down a corridor which opened on the opposite wall of the throne room with the other heroes pell mell on his heels.

Down one interminable hall after another they dashed, turning and twisting, while the sound of pursuit began pounding behind them. Again and again they crashed into locked doors, but always managed to find an open exit.

After a while they began to get worried; this wild race wasn't leading them into the open, but rather into the bowels of the earth. Yet there could be no turning back; their lead over the pursuit was decreasing rapidly.

At last, at the junction of two more corridors, Teraf thought he perceived a faint gleam of daylight to the left. "This way," he called, and dashed in that direction, only to collide with a crash against some obstruction, not fifty paces farther on.

The blow partially dazed him but he staggered to his feet to discover that he was staring through a grating of heavy iron bars into a sunken courtyard; and in the center of that yard were fluttering a multitude of squealing pterodactyls!

He shook the bars but they did not budge. He stumbled along the barrier in search of a door. There was one, but it was locked. Desperately he ordered the others to return the way they had come. Before they could do so, the inner door to the chamber slammed shut with a clang and they heard the grating of heavy locks.

"You have fallen neatly into our trap, Men of Mars," the voice of the Pharaoh came faintly through the door. "We wait your decision...for one day!"

**I**N THAT dark and noisome cellar, Jason called the roll and found that everyone was present—although most were badly battered. As they were preparing to hold a council of war, a faint moaning attracted their attention. It came from the farthest corner of the room, and seemed to issue from a bundle of rags. Turning this over Jason revealed the pale and haggard features of the once-proud Atlantean ambassador to Sais.

"For Chronus' sake, keep them off me!" the prisoner screamed when the light struck his eyes. "Ow! They'll tear me to pieces. Help!"

"Keep what off you?" Teraf reached down and shook the quaking ambassador until his teeth rattled. "Snap out of it. I'm Teraf of Hellas; the others are friends, here to help you."

The man partially recovered from his delirium and pointed a shaking hand toward the bars which formed one entire wall of the cell. "The dragons," he whimpered. "They keep reaching for me; I'm going mad." Then he hid his face and burst into another fit of blubbering.

It was only then that the Argonauts turned their attention to the courtyard; what they saw caused the hair to stir on their heads and make them feel like blubbering, too.

Creeping toward them was a line of the most horrible creatures ever seen outside of an attack of delirium tremens. Teraf was somewhat prepared for the sight but the others were dumbfounded. Large as horses, with scrawny necks all of ten feet long and wicked little triangular heads in which burned eyes as old and cruel as the fires of hell. They were stirring up clouds of dust by beating their leathery wings on the ground as they advanced; there must have been a hundred or more of the black devils. Soon, all were chirping and hissing as they thrust snake-like necks between the bars and tried to grip the prisoners with their long yellow teeth. The Argonauts crowded back against the inside wall and stared silently at the nightmare brood.

"They feed prisoners to them," gabbled the ambassador. "I'm to die that way, tomorrow, unless I tell Plu Toh Ra how to generate power from his stolen orichalcum. And I don't know! Save me!" The former dandy and favorite of the court was reduced to tears once more.

"Shut up! Pull yourself together man; we'll get you out of this."

But how? Teraf couldn't think of any possibility of escape. A check revealed no weapons but a few knives;

even if they could pick the lock on the cell door, guards must be swarming outside, ready to toss them to the reptiles.

As if to prove this latter theory correct, a door was opened on the other side of the courtyard and soldiers thrust two trembling wretches into the den. There was a flurry of wings as the 'dactyls half-flew, half-ran toward their breakfast. Awful screams rang out as the Argonauts turned their heads away and were sick.

That long day and the night which followed were grisly nightmares. They crouched against the dripping wall as far as possible from the grill, saying little but thinking much on their sins.

When dawn came at last, the corridor door creaked open; guards shoved a big jug of water into the cell and tossed hunks of sour bread on the floor. Then two of the soldiers gripped Teraf by the arms and dragged him back to the throne room where the Pharaoh and his cat were sitting as though they had never moved.

**T**HE EGYPTIAN began without preamble. "You are clever, Helene. We have talked to our daughter," he nodded toward Pan Doh Ra, who had entered at that moment and was pacing sedately across the balata pavement. "She feels that we have wronged you... that with a little, ah, conditioning, you might become a useful ally—like your brother. No. Do not answer yet; take time to think it over. Because of this, we have arranged to remove you from the dungeon and give you quarters more worthy of your high estate."

Remembering his previous conversation with Pan Doh Ra, Teraf was panic-stricken. He *had* to stay in the dungeon. In the emergency he did the first thing that came to mind... spat on the sacred cat, which had advanced from the throne and was fawning at his feet.

The results were electrical! The cat



spat back at him and clawed his legs. Plu Toh Ra leaped to his feet, screaming with horror. And a trio of priests leaped forward to wipe the fur of their god.

"Blasphemer!" gabbled the ruler when he found voice to do so. "To the pterodactyls with him!" No!" as guards sprang forward, "something better than that...the poison called curare which comes from across the sea. We, personally, will...."

Sensing that his only chance was slipping away, Teraf fell groveling to his knees.

"Oh, your gracious majesty," he screamed, "thanks for your mercy. I can face poison...anything, but not...not the pterodactyl den again. Spare me that. Remember that I did bring back your daughter. I call Chronus to witness that I did not harm her. Chop off my head! Burn me! Poison me! But don't, I pray you...don't throw me into the den."

For a moment, Teraf thought he had overdone it, but he saw that monarch swallowed his plea entire. Stepping from the throne, he prodded the Titan gingerly with the toe of his up-turned sandal.

"So that's the way the wind blows? (Aha, slave, make a note of that pretty phrase.) Well, by our Ka, the 'dactyls are really not so bad as you think.... Still, feeling as you do, you shall have a chance to examine their good points at close quarters."

Detesting the part he had to play, yet remembering Pan's declaration that it was the only possible way out, Teraf writhed with head on floor and tried to kiss the prodding foot. "But my brother," he sobbed. "Surely Refo, your ally, would not wish..."

"Refo hates you. He thinks you smirched his betrothed and would delight to see you tied over an ant hill. But now let us question our beloved daughter." He sank back on the throne. "Pan Doh Ra, we absolve you in return for your having lured one

of the most important Atlanteans to his doom, as you promised you would do. Claims he's King of Hellas, doesn't he? What do you suggest that we do with such an honorable guest?"

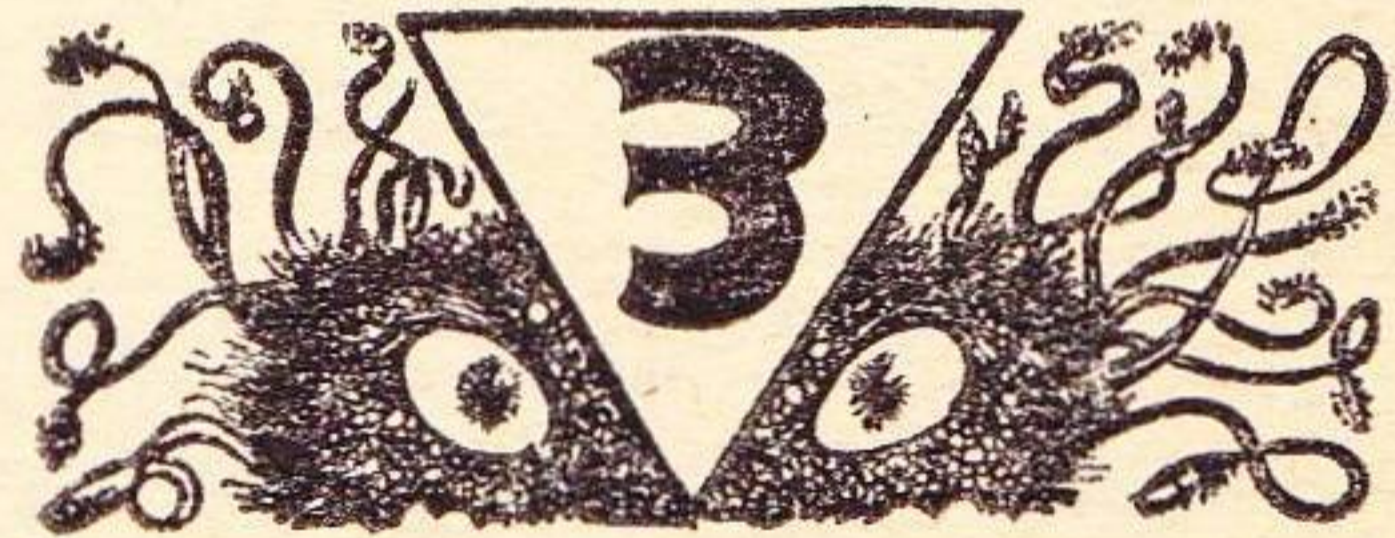
"Oh, *throw* him to the 'dactyls, for all I care." The girl lifted one bare shoulder carelessly. "But not just yet; let him suffer a little more, first."

"Spoken like the true daughter of a pharaoh."

"I followed instructions pretty well, didn't I," she preened. "It was easy; he's just another red fool like Zeus. But please send him away, now; his craven face nauseates me."

"Quite so." The Pharaoh grimaced with pleasure. Then, with another of his lightning changes of mood he added: "But just in case you take us for a fool, too, daughter, you will be confined to your room under close guard until the Hellene has been eaten."

Wondering if he had suddenly gone mad, Teraf was jerked to his feet and hustled out of the room. The sacred cat followed him to the door, yowling vindictively and leaping at his throat.



*No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick...on account of the darkness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor, I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!*

The Cask of Amontillado. Poe.

**O**UT OF the light of day, down through tier after tier of dungeons he was pushed and prodded until a door clanged open and

the guards thrust him headlong into his old cell.

"Careful the bars," warned one of the soldiers, "or you'll spoil the Pharaoh's fun."

As he rose to a sitting posture, Teraf's cellmates clustered 'round to hear of his experience. Their concerted movement must have roused the birds outside, for the space behind the bars at once became crowded with solemn, horselike heads. After a moment of inspection the creatures, which had not yet been fed, hurled their bodies against the bars and thrust their long necks between them, snapping their teeth like pairs of scissors. Every space was filled, while Teraf and the others crouched against the farther wall, shaking as with ague.

They reminded him in some fantastic way of cows thrusting their heads through the bars of their mangers at milking-time and this resemblance seemed at last to steady his nerves somewhat.

"Well, what did you learn?" Jason rasped when the commotion had died down somewhat.

Haltingly, the newcomer told of his interview.

"I thought so," grunted Nestor; "I also thought that girl was a spy who would betray us in the end. If you'd just listen to old Nestor."

"Shut up," snarled Teraf; "shut up, all of you, unless you can suggest a way out of this mess."

"Well," sniggered the greybeard. "I think I do have something to contribute." He reached inside his filthy smock and pulled out a fluttering mass of feathers.

"What's that?" the others demanded in chorus.

"The last of the carrier pigeons; I saved it from the crate. We can still send a message to Atlan."

"And tell them to send a relief expedition?" snorted Theseus. "Fat chance, with Bab El down."

"No, wait." Heracles screwed his face into a mask of concentration. "I

think Vulcan told me that in a few days he would have enough repairs made so he could get one ship into the air, if he beamed all the power in one direction."

There were shouts of enthusiasm, but Teraf quelled them. "One ship," he snorted. "Do you think it can storm this place?"

"No, but..." Jason, thinking fast, strode up and down the narrow space in the cell which was safe from the 'dactyls. "No, but maybe we could ask the ship to hover until we managed to break out into the open some way. Then it could swoop down and pick us up; surely, Teraf, one of the weapons Vanya gave you could help us."

"I have a package of acid," the Hellene admitted. "Perhaps I could cut the bars if those devils would give me a chance. But then what? Without our guns we would just be chicken-feed, once we were outside."

"We'll be chicken-feed in here pretty soon," yelled someone from the edge of the crowd. "I vote we give Nestor's idea a try." A shout of unanimous assent answered him.

As Nestor scribbled his S.O.S., Teraf carefully charted the area of safety in the cell. It was a space about ten feet wide and running the length of the room. Realizing that the horrors outside would be his playmates until he was cast to them, went mad, or managed to escape, he started pacing the cell, coming as near as he dared to the gnashing teeth.

He had become quite brave when there was a commotion in the line. One of the heads was jerked backward, and another took its place; this 'dactyl was much larger, and a lash of its whiplike neck sent the Hellene leaping for his life. He surveyed the newcomer thoughtfully. Pan Doh Ra had said there was only one such giant.

"Whoa, Sonny," he coaxed. "Wouldn't eat an old acquaintance, would you?"

THE THING closed its jaws and regarded him sagely. Could it be, Teraf wondered, that such were the beasts which had given rise to the legend of the cockatrice, that flying reptile which could kill with a breath or a glance. Well, if looks or breaths could kill, he would already have been a long time dead, Teraf decided, as he tried to stare down the long line of glaring eyes, half-suffocated by their noxious exhalation. Only Sonny seemed in a receptive mood.

"I believe he recognizes me," muttered the prisoner and began a queer humming which he had learned from an Arabian jockey, years ago. It was somewhat like Pan Doh Ra's keening; if it worked with horses, why not with reptiles?

As he hummed, the line of hissing heads gradually subsided into silence, though the eyes still watched him hungrily. So far so good; perhaps he could subdue the things as Pan Doh Ra had done. What did trainers say about looking wild beasts in the eye? But there were too many eyes for that.

Gingerly he approached Sonny, still keeping up his humming, and thrust a tentative hand toward the mouselike snout. The monster responded nobly by curling himself against the bars and almost catching the hand in his yellow teeth.

"Too soon," chuckled a watching Argonaut. "But you're making progress; keep it up and you'll have 'em all tamed... in a year or two."

Ignoring the remark, Teraf started pacing again as he tried to puzzle out the last words of Pan Doh Ra. Obviously a trick to fool her father—or had she neatly doublecrossed him instead? If the latter, guards would come presently to strip him of Vanya's packets; if the former, there was still hope of escape.

The day waned without incident, until Teraf and the others crouched in darkness lighted only by glittering

eyes and a dim murkiness toward the far end of the 'dactyl den. Evidently there was a barred gate, or door, from the den to the side of the cliff upon which the palace was built. He wished for a hand-lantern so that he could explore the awful cavern with its beams.

Hours passed and no guards appeared. Then, just as his confidence in the princess was waning, the lock of the cell grated and the corridor door swung open. But it was only a detail of bored soldiers bringing food and a candle. Their sergeant gave the Hellene to understand that the provisions were sent as a great favor, due to the high standing of the Argonauts. Most prisoners, they intimated, were allowed to starve or live on vermin in the dark.

After that the little company lost count of the hours. They slept fitfully, waking in a cold sweat many times after dreaming that they had rolled from the far wall within reach of the waiting beaks. The light was there again when they awoke as the door opened to admit more food and a pitifully scant supply of water.

THE SECOND day, when the monsters had somewhat lost interest and hung themselves head downward from their perches, Teraf decided the time had come for action. With much twisting and cursing he managed to tear the package of acid from his chest. Working carefully by the light of the flaring candle he mixed some of the powdered contents with water. He found a needle packed with the acid and, timing himself so as not to be interrupted by the guards, started work on the bars.

At first he aroused the interest of the reptiles, which dived at him whenever he approached the wall. But gradually they went back to sleep and he worked undisturbed, cutting the metal of several bars near the floor almost through. His comrades offered to relieve him, after long hours of lying on

his belly had made the work almost unendurable; but whenever a new face approached the lattice the 'dactyls went wild and he had to retire.

After a day of toil, made more difficult by the raging thirst from which Teraf and the others now suffered, the task was finished. Five bars were weakened so that a quick lunge near the floor would break them. Teraf was so pleased, while inspecting his success, that a black shape crept upon him and managed to slash his shoulder before he could roll to safety. The wound was slight, however; after cauterizing it with a weak solution of acid, he crouched down beside the others to wait.

To wait for what? Even if Pan Doh Ra were loyal to Atlan, she was locked in her room.

"And if the pigeon got through," growled Theseus, "who knows whether a ship could be sent, or how long it will wait for a signal from us."



Time passed; interminable hours; days. In their half-stupor, they even imagined that weeks had gone by. Conversation lagged; the dice games petered out. The odor from the den stifled them. The coarse food and inadequate water nauseated and infuriated them. The ambassador died and they actually sighed with relief when his ravings were heard no more; some of the prisoners began holding long, obscene conversations with the monsters, which still inspected them wistfully just before feeding-time.

Those feeding-periods brought their own particular horror. At the clang of a gong, the distant door at the outer side of the den would swing open and several shrieking unfortunates would be thrust through it. With a great flapping of wings and gnashing of teeth, the 'dactyls would drop from their perches and race for the living food. Sometimes victims would escape for a time by dashing round and round

the den; once a poor wretch clung to the bars of the cell, screaming, until he was slashed to fragments. After that, Teraf gave orders for the Argonauts to bury their heads in their filthy blankets during this ordeal.

TIME DRAGGED on with no message. But one night, when the Hellene was debating whether he should not poison his companions with the remains of the acid and put them out of their misery, the corridor door creaked and opened, inch by inch.

"Pan Doh Ra?" whispered Teraf.

There was no answer, except the sound of stealthy footsteps.

"Who goes there?" he rasped, thinking that perhaps Plu Toh Ra had decided to get rid of them at once and was opening the gate into the den.

"It is us, Medea," came the answer then; "for Isis' sake, be silent.

A tall, black-draped figure slipped through the door. Behind it came a much smaller shadow, also draped in black. The door swung shut, leaving them standing in the light of the guttering candle.

Teraf leaned over and shook Jason awake; whatever happened from now on, he surmised, would be up to the handsome captain.

Jason responded nobly. "Medea... darling," he breathed; "you have come to save us."

"Perhaps," she answered, and Teraf thought he caught a faint flicker of amusement in her tone. The woman was no one's fool.

"You do love me, then?" Jason implored; "I was sure I saw it in your eyes."

This was going pretty fast, but Teraf dared say nothing.

"Maybe," she replied. "As a princess I have never had an opportunity to know real love until now... Are the rest asleep?"

"All but Teraf, I think."

"Very well, then. Listen." She crouched down beside him. "Perhaps we love you Jason; we do not know.

But you affect us strangely...here." She touched her heart. "Or perhaps it is because we know much of ancient magic and can read in the stars that Atlantis is strong...strong. Or... still another perhaps...we do not desire longer to be subject to the whims of our brother, who has transferred all of his affections to his cub in recent days." Her voice rang like bells on a frosty night. "Tell me, Jason; if you escaped, and got back to Atlan on the ship which circles high above Sais, would you be rewarded?"

"I had had no thought of that."

"Jason will be rewarded," Teraf interrupted; "Iberia has had no king since the death of Cadmus."

"And might we be Queen of Iberia, if Jason were king?"

"I'll vouch for that—especially if he brings back his comrades and... and the orichalcum which Plu Toh Ra stole."

"We cannot bring you the burning metal..." She started to rise. "But we can tell you much about the disposition of Egypt's armed forces."

"So be it." The Hellene found himself adopting her way of talking. "If it suits Jason, I think you may become an Iberian queen."

"It will suit Jason," she purred as she lowered crossed arms to disclose the guns of the Argonauts, which she had been carrying in her mantle.

"And who is that with you?" Teraf asked.

"It is our younger brother, Absyrtus, whom we have brought along as a hostage." She threw back a fold of cloth to disclose the face of a sleepy boy about twelve years old.

**T**ERAF SHOOK the rest of the company awake and had a hard time keeping them from having hysterics when he distributed the weapons. Next he ordered them to make improvised gas-masks by tearing their blankets into strips and dipping the cloth in the last of their water. And finally

he put Jason, Heracles, Theseus and two lesser strong-men to work on the bars. Heracles was through in no time, and back to help the others, who were having difficulty bending the massive metal strips.

They had thought the pterodactyls asleep, but no! Squealing and snapping, they began dropping from their perches for an attack as soon as the prisoners entered their den.

"But how can we signal the ship?" puzzled the big engineer. "We have no flares."

"Fire a gun three times at the zenith," Teraf barked; "that should bring them."

For a long moment...just long enough for the 'dactyls to get under way...the guns traced fifty lines of scarlet into the night sky. Then they were forced to concentrate on targets nearer at hand.

Flesh shriveled and stank as the flying horde swept down. But, being reptiles with very low-order nervous systems, they did not seem to know when they had been killed. Even with wings, legs and parts of their bodies burned away, they swept on to overwhelm the humans. It was only a matter of seconds before naught would be left of the Argonauts.

However, the Atlantean ship had received their signal, had spotted them and was dropping swiftly toward the center of the courtyard, spraying the scene with the brilliance of its searchlights. Yet it would be nip and tuck; the 'dactyls were closing in fast, and it seemed impossible that fifty-three persons could squeeze through the ship's hatch before many had been torn to shreds.

Teraf heard Medea, running beside him, draw in her breath with a sharp hiss.

"Here then," she snarled; "we always hated the brat anyway."

Before he could make a move to stop her, she seized the boy Absyrtus in her strong, round arms, swung him

over her head and hurled him straight into the midst of the onrushing monsters.

That stopped them, but only for a shriek-filled moment which gave the ship an opportunity to land. Then, looking like rearing winged horses or black-sheeted spectres, the beasts once more loomed above their cursing victims, as the latter finally broke in panic and sprinted for the hatch.

At that, Teraf played his last card; ripping off the third packet without noticing the skin which came with it, he shouted a warning against gas, then hurled the contents as far as possible.

Though they were almost immune to blasting, the 'dactyls were in difficulty as soon as the powder disintegrated into a cloud of white, phosphorescent vapor. They fluttered and flopped, for all the world like chickens with their heads cut off. Their wings, beating in the agony of suffocation, quickly spread the gas to all parts of the chamber. A few continued to strike at the enemy and even at each other, but their movements had become wildly uncoordinated.

But now, a new danger threatened. Aroused by the commotion, the palace guard came pouring into the courtyard. They are well-armed with stolen Atlantean weapons, and looked like animated mummies in the gas-masks they had delayed to improvise. The guard charged in wedge formation, their guns slashing viciously at the few Argonauts still outside the ship.

"Take her up," shouted Teraf as he pushed the laggards inside. He reached for the hand-rail to hoist himself aboard...



**T**HE HELLENE recovered consciousness with the conviction that he had died and been thrown into a sewer. He could see nothing; all about him was a stench which passed all understanding. He tried to move, but was confined by some wet rub-

bery substance; his head ached as though it had been beaten with a hammer.

"How many of them did we get?" The words spoken in Egyptian, came muffled and faint.

"Twelve of the sons. But they killed every 'dactyl in the yard. Take a good long look at the sun, Turo; the Pharaoh will make certain that you never see it rise again."

"But I thought I tagged their leader, just as the ship rose," came the answer in the unhappiest of voices. "If I could find his body, the Pharaoh might relent enough, merely cut off my hand, or something. Where in Tophet did that Hellene get to?"

"Maybe the 'dactyls tore him to pieces in their death-struggles after he fell; I'll call slaves to clear the den."

"I'll go with you; this stink turns my stomach."

The voices receded. Teraf, aware now of his true condition, fought blindly to crawl from under the reptilian corpse which was lying across his body. Finally he pushed aside a crumpled wing and peered about him. The guards were just re-entering their quarters; for a moment, the courtyard was given over to its dead.

He started to rise, then sank back with a groan. The bolt which had creased his temple still had him groggy. And what was the use of further struggle? His fate was sealed when the slaves came and discovered him.

Then, when hope seemed dead, a monster to the right of him stirred and coughed ever so slightly. A moment later it tried to heave itself from among its suffocated fellows. By the light of torches which the guards had posted on the walls, he recognized it by its giant size as Sonny, Pan Doh Ra's pet.

A desperate plan forming in his mind, Teraf wriggled free and crawled toward the reviving brute. Recalling that the princess once had told him that pterodactyls could not dislodge, or strike at, a rider on their backs, he

rose, tottered forward and fell between the wildly flopping wings. As he had suspected, those wings were hobbled; he tore at the thongs until his fingers bled, got them untied at last and began beating at Sonny's sagging head and neck, drumming on its ribs with his heels.

"Sonny! Sonny Boy," he gabbled. "Get me out of here, old timer."

He fought his numbed brain in an effort to remember the tone Pan Doh Ra had used in humming to her pets. Was it C or F; he tried F.

The animal beneath him struggled with more vigor. Its neck lifted. Its wings flapped wildly, stirring up a storm of dust.

A shout from the guardhouse told him that his efforts had been noticed. Seizing a stone, he hammered Sonny over the head with it.

The brute screamed in pain. Its wings roared; just as one of the approaching guards lashed out at it with his sword the last of the pterodactyls took the air in crazy, lopsided flight, with the half-conscious King of Hellas clinging to its back.



*For there was a time, Solon, before the great deluge of all, when the city which now is Athens, was first in war and in every way the best governed of all cities, and is said to have performed the noblest deeds and to have had the fairest constitution of any of which tradition tells under the face of heaven.*

Plato's Timaeus.

**F**OR HOURS, Sonny flapped dazedly northwestward while Teraf lay between his wings, almost unconscious. Then the deadening effect of the poison wore off and the Hellene felt almost himself again except for a splitting headache.

At the same time his steed became restless; again and again it cast a baleful eye back at him, as if puzzling how a stranger had got on its back. Then it began to snap and scratch at him. But teeth and claws could not quite reach their objective. So it started diving and rolling in an effort to dislodge him.

At last Sonny started a rapid glide. Teraf tried coaxing, belaboring and crooning, but the beast kept sliding down the air like a shadow.

They were over a great forest, now; according to the prince's hazy reckoning, he was far beyond the confines of Egypt, and in the kingdom of Crete or even Hellas. But there was nothing hazy about the fact that Sonny was seeking a clearing in which to land and rid himself of his rider. He swept low over the trees, but as he passed not ten feet above the top of a huge pine, Teraf slipped from his perch, trusting to fate to afford him a grip on some branch.

Some minutes later, he crouched at the bottom of the pine, bruised and breathless, but rid of flying reptiles. The 'dactyl's thirty-foot wings made it impossible for him to invade the underbrush.

The Hellene had escaped one peril, only to fall into another. In the forest it was already quite dark and the night-life had begun to awake. Far away he heard the laughter of a giant jackal; near at hand sounded the pad, pad, of some beast looking for supper. Teraf thanked heaven that he had no trail of scent to betray him.

But a night spent in the open did not intrigue him. Even if he stayed where he was, Teraf could not hope to escape the attentions of jackals, five-foot-tall timber-wolves and—worst of all—saber-tooth tigers, those terrors of hunters from one end of Atlantis to the other.

Fearfully, he left what little protection the tree afforded and walked slowly forward, hoping to see some sign of a clearing. Instead, he caught

sight of a gleam of yellow light in the distance; it blinked a friendly welcome as he stumbled toward it.

Around him, the forest had come alive with the screams and snarls of animals either pursued or pursuing. Once he imagined he heard some beast snuffling at his heels and had to fight down an insane desire to dash wildly and noisily toward the light. But he held himself in check until he reached the door of a rough cabin through the chinks of which a lamp was twinkling.

He knocked. A wrinkled face topped by a mass of touseled white hair surveyed him for a long moment through a wicket. Then a bar was lifted.

"Welcome to the hut of Hardish, the charcoal-burner," cackled the old man as Teraf entered blinking. "'Tis a long, long way you must have come this day. And wearing the garb of an Atlantean, too. It's been months since I had such a pleasure. Seat yourself, sir; you must be hungry. I have little enough, but you are welcome."

Hardish brought dried meat, nuts, berries and coarse bread which he set before his exhausted guest who huddled on a rude bench beside the roaring fire.

**T**ERAF ATE ravenously, stopping from time to time to answer as best he could the questions of the charcoal-burner. He remained reticent about most of his own adventures, but was forced to admit that he had fallen from the back of a tamed pterodactyl while enroute from Sais...here he stumbled slightly...to Atlan.

"He! He! And 'tis far off your course you are," snickered the hermit. "I'm told there's war between Egypt and Atlan, too. Well! Well! It's no soot off my fingers if they kill each other." And, as Teraf's head drooped, he added: "I'll fix your bed. You look half dead."

Hobbling about with remarkable agility for his age, Hardish spread a pallet of straw and furs on the floor.

Teraf's head hardly had touched the pillow before he was asleep.

He dreamed that, once more, he was lying paralyzed in the Cave of the Oracle and awoke to find his dream come true. Try as he would, he could not move hand nor foot. Had the after-effects of the gas paralyzed his nerve centers? Sheer horror gripped him and turned his bones to water.

Managing to lift his head, Teraf discovered that he was not paralyzed, but strapped tightly to a board. Rolling his eyes, he made out the hermit seated on a nearby bench, hands between knees, rocking with silent mirth.

"He! He!" the old man chortled. "Thought I was a halfwit, didn't ye? Thought I wouldn't know you for a damned Atlantean spy sent to find out what he could about our great King Refo and his plans? Heigh ho! I shall turn a pretty penny by taking you to Athens."

Hardish left off his rocking and jerked aside a leathern curtain. Behind it was revealed a tiny vision screen.

"Oh, I've been listening," he jeered. "I know all about the war. Zeus and his cursed foreigners have their backs to the wall. They would bring in all that electricity and spoil a poor old charcoal burner's means of making a living, would they? He! He! But I'm busier than ever these last few weeks."

Teraf kept silent under this tirade.

Hardish also became silent at last. Rising, he dragged his prisoner out of the cabin and, with much pulling and puffing, loaded him like a sack of grain or charcoal into a waiting ox cart.

For two endless days, the wooden-wheeled vehicle bumped slowly over the rough byways of Hellas. Fearful that his precious prisoner might be taken from him by the military, Hardish drove to Athens by a roundabout way which almost shook Teraf's bones through his skin.



But the hermit was careful of his victim's health. At night he stopped, loosened the bonds somewhat, coaxed food and mocked the Hellene until he dropped off to sleep. In vain Teraf tried pleadings, bribery and threats. The old man almost went into hysterics when he finally revealed that he was Refo's brother.

"He! He! So I have caught a king," he sniggered. "Well, you are in good company. I am your long-lost grandfather."

After an eternity of such agony, the prisoner perceived through the cracks in the side of the cart that they were entering the capital. Quite different from arriving at the head of a conquering army.

Hardish drove up to the gates of the palace. There he turned his snooty captive over to the guard and hobbled excitedly after them, demanding payment for his trouble, as they carried Teraf inside.

No one recognized the rightful king, of course, and he was placed in a cell to await Refo's disposal. Released from his bonds, Teraf could not stand at first, while returning circulation made him sweat with pain. At last, however, he managed to eat and drink and fell into a troubled slumber. He was awakened when a kilted soldier shook him.

"The king would have speech with you. Arise!" commanded the guard.

**W**ONDERING what the next act of drama would be, Teraf gathered his rags about him, stumbled to his feet and was ushered from the cell through a long, cool corridor and into the throne-room.

The serene beauty of the place enthralled him as it had in his childhood. It did not imitate the grandeur of the palace at Atlan, but achieved its effect by long sweeping lines, simple Ionic columns and marbles so beautiful that they seemed almost to breathe.

On a dias near an arch overlooking the mountains sat the king. He was dressed in a simple white tunic. His

chin rested on one hand as he stared into the distance. He turned tired eyes toward Teraf. For a moment he stared at the dirty spectre then leaped to his feet.

Teraf achieved a grin. "Hail, your majesty; receive our kingly blessing."

"What do you mean by bringing a prince of Hellas to me in this condition?" Refo stormed at the guards. "Go. Prepare baths. Bring food and clothing. Brother, rest yourself; we will talk later."

"We will talk now, if you please." The grin was gone.

Impatiently the king waved away his attendants. When they were alone he drew his brother to a seat beside him on the throne. He either ignored or had forgotten the bitterness of their last meeting.

"The only chance I may ever have of sitting here," chuckled Teraf. "Well, brother, speak up."

"I'm sorry for what has happened, but it cannot be undone," the king began without preamble. "Sometimes I think I was a fool, and that my people would be better off as well-fed slaves of the Martians than as starving-free-men."

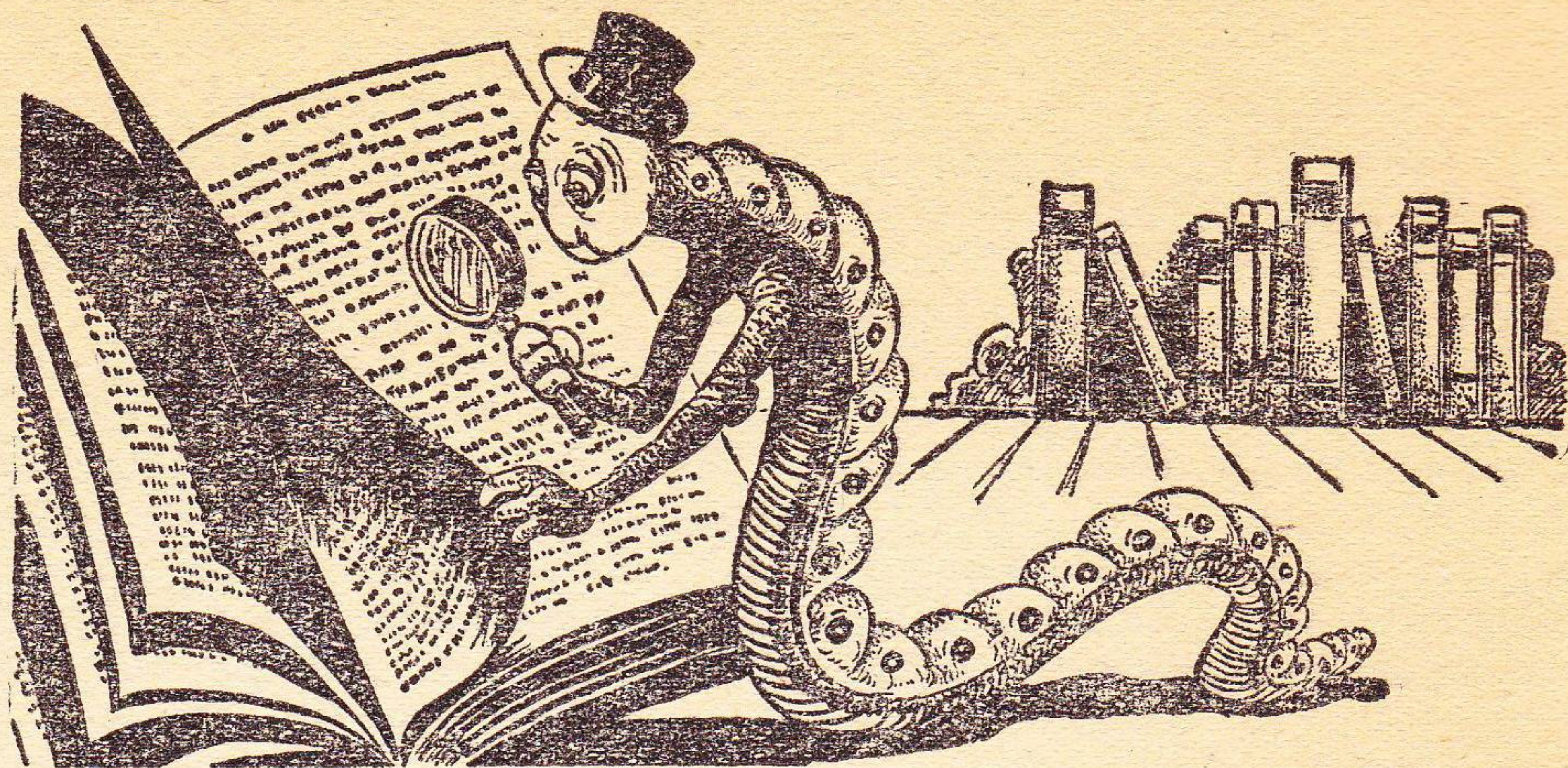
"No matter; I have put my hand to the plough. There will be a period of struggle and readjustment after we win, but the Pharaoh and I have pledged ourselves to give independence to all minority peoples."

"Fair words," grunted Teraf. "But in the meantime your subjects are hungry."

"Yes. I know." Refo shifted uneasily. "With the destruction of Bab El, all our factories have stopped. I am besieged by starving people on the streets. He passed a hand over his face as if to brush away an evil dream.

Teraf said, "It's not too late to turn back; Zeus will forgive you, even now. As for Plu Toh Ra, he's a lying son of a scarab and not to be trusted." He then outlined his recent experiences in Sais.

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# Reading' and Writin'

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Evolution of Scientific Thought from Newton to Einstein*, by A. d'Abro. Dover Publications, New York, 1950 (2nd edition); 482 pp., 21 diagrams, Appendix. \$3.95

SINCE this book was first published by Boni & Liveright in 1927, it has become widely known as the best non-mathematical textbook on relativity in English. It deserves that reputation. By the time one finishes the second page of d'Abro's opening exposition of dimensionality, one realizes that d'Abro is one of the rarest species in the physical sciences: a great teacher.

Many a man, of course, is a whiz on the lecture platform and a failure as a writer; but d'Abro, whatever his platform presence might be like, writes with remarkable lucidity—all the more remarkable considering the murkiness of the subject he has tackled.

The book allows comparison with other works of similar intent only in a negative way. All other non-mathematical expositions of Einsteinian relativity known to me, "talk down" to the reader in infuriating fashion. Worse, they attempt to deal with the characteristic features of the discipline in terms of analogies which are only marginally applicable, when not downright false to the theory. One of the worst books of this kind is also one of the most popular: E. G. Slosson's *Easy Lessons In Einstein*.

Nothing of this sort is detectable in d'Abro; nor does his intention to give the reader a non-mathematical discussion (at least, for the most part) lead him to assert anywhere that the reader can get along in

relativity without some grasp of the mathematical *concepts* involved. On the contrary: d'Abro knows that no understanding of Einstein can possibly come through, unless a previous understanding of such concepts as coordinate-systems, non-Euclidean geometries, and covariance has been laid down.

Prof. d'Abro proceeds to lay down the basis for such understanding, with great patience and amazing clarity, taking 125 close-packed pages to do the job. Only thereafter are the first and most elementary principles of Einsteinian relativity introduced. As in the opening section, the approach is historical, designed to show the reader how each step evolved out of the previous one by logical necessity. By the time one reaches the late pages of the book, one finds one's self travelling in the company of Weyl's variable-gauge systems, and Eddington's 40-element manifold built of in-tensors and in-invariants, without the least sensation of discomfort.

To achieve such clarity in so complicated a field is a remarkable achievement. It is no reflection on d'Abro, but only of the inherent complexity of the material, that the reader cannot afford to skip so much as a single line of the main argument. If he does, he will find himself irrevocably lost.

After all, there is really no easy way into relativity. What d'Abro has done is to make it possible for an intelligent and interested reader to grasp the material *if* he is willing to pay close attention—a condition most readers and writers of science-fiction should have no difficulty in accepting.

It seems probable that most of the weird distortions of relativity perpetrated by science-fiction writers (and hence, unfortu-

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# CONFIDENCE

It must be comforting to hold so high an opinion of one's own value — and, at times, it can be more than comforting!

By H. B. FYFE



*A riot was impending, and Lyhud wondered if this Terran, Carter, could put on his big act now.*

CARTER, the black-haired Terran consultant, wandered into the control room to watch the landing on Bika V. Lyhud rather wished that the engineer had remained in the compartment set aside for him until the maneuver had been completed.

*He will tell me now how much easier it would be with one of the more advanced Terran ships, he thought. Then, in my annoyance, I shall probably handle the ship bumpily, and prove him correct!*

There was one consolation to be had. Since the controls were designed

for the convenience of Bikan tentacles rather than Terran hands, Carter could not reasonably offer to demonstrate his superior Terran piloting. Otherwise, Lyhud was sure, he would.

As it was, the visitor was pretty well restricted to comments in *tercon*, the artificial language used throughout the Terran Confederation, and learned also by neighbors who had to deal with them.

"Well, won't be long now," said Carter, rubbing together the hands Lyhud had been thinking of. "Pretty soon, when I get a look at this water-conservation project of yours, I'll be able to tell you whether it's worth going ahead with."

He peered at the view on the tele-screen when they entered the atmosphere of Bika V, as if searching for signs of errors committed by the Bikan engineers. "How long did you say the colony has been there?" he asked.

"Several hundred of our years," replied Lyhud, wishing the Terran would leave him alone long enough to check his fuel consumption.

"Seems to me that in all that time your own scientists could have done something about the situation."

"Perhaps it is more convenient to seek Terran advice now," remarked Lyhud, wondering how Carter could remain unaware of the diplomatic background of his mission.

"I suppose so, now that there's talk of admitting you to the Confederation. Still, with all that time—"

"Oh, many suggestions were put forward," admitted Lyhud. "Unfortunately, the condition did not become obviously grave until recently; the colonists are still inclined to be turbulent and suspicious of directives sent from Bika IV."

"You ought to keep firmer control," Carter admonished, fiddling with the computing machine set into the control board.

Lyhud could all but hear the thoughts behind the round Terran

face. That Carter was accustomed to using much more advanced mathematical aids was painfully apparent. The Bikan ran the tip of one tentacle gently over his own long features, and wondered at the surface similarity between the two races.

**E**XCEPT that the Terran was shorter and chunkier, and had jointed limbs and broader features, there was little difference in their general appearance. Lyhud's clothes, since he was covered by nature by a soft, pearl-gray down, were less complicated. He wore a loosely-belted blue tunic and had plastic sheaths on the ends of his walking tentacles. Although his auditory nerves were located in tendrils atop his long head, the rest of the Bikan's facial organs corresponded roughly in function with those of the Terran.

Lyhud knew that the internal differences must be more remarkable, but with them he was not concerned. He wondered instead if the visiting engineer could be considered sufficiently normal in looks to be welcome on Bika V.

"In the Terran Confederation," Carter said, "we have seen to it that proper use of natural resources is understood on all planets. Science seems to have more prestige among us than here in the Bikan system."

"A fortunate situation," sighed Lyhud.

"Of course, the Terran Engineering Department lives up to its position and responsibilities. I don't mean to criticize..."

*Then why do you?* thought Lyhud.

"...but don't you think your government might have done better than to have sent just two of us over here in a small ship to survey the situation?"

"How do you mean?" asked Lyhud politely.

"Well... I expected you to send along a fleet with equipment and technicians, so that if this project is worth-

while we could go to work improving it with no loss of time. That's what Terrans would have done."

"There is plenty of time, I think," said Lyhud, reaching out a tentacle to re-set a constant on his computing machine.

Carter laughed as he sank into a padded seat before the auxiliary controls. "Sometimes there isn't so much time as you'd think," he retorted.

He went on to tell a long story of an adventure on one of the other worlds of the Confederation, ostensibly to illustrate the fact that a few minutes saved by a prompt decision could result in the preservation of a colony on an airless planet.

Actually, Lyhud decided, the real point he was intended to notice was that Carter's own briskness had been responsible for averting the disaster from the air-domes of the settlement.

*It must be indeed comforting to hold so high an opinion of one's own value, he reflected. Should I introduce him on Bika V at his own valuation . . . or would it be possible?*

He felt the tendrils on his head twitch slightly with the thought. Carter also noticed them. "You must be thinking something that isn't so," he chuckled. "If there's one thing I've learned about Bikan culture, it's that you have to be careful how you try to lie to each other."

"Someone has been telling you our psychological secrets," said Lyhud.

"Wouldn't call it a secret," countered the Terran. "Your chief was telling me how even your businessmen creep around the fringes of the truth because a twitching of tendrils will give them away every time they fake."

"Perhaps I set a wrong number on the computer," said Lyhud.

Despite an attempt at rigid control, he felt one or two small tendrils near the back of his skull move, but Carter seemed not to have seen them.

**T**HE BIKAN let Carter talk until the time came for final deceleration

and landing, when both fastened themselves into the pneumatic seats. Lyhud located the proper spaceport and brought the ship down better than he had expected.

"So this is the metropolis of Kol-Taku!" commented the Terran from the top of the exit ladder.

"Even on Bika IV," said Lyhud, "we do not have cities of such enormous size as those I have heard exist on Terra."

"Well, never mind," Carter comforted him blithely. "You'll get there someday, now that you're joining the Confederation. This is only a colony, at that. Still, I believe I could have laid out those buildings more efficiently."

Lyhud sighed and climbed down to the ground. A small, auto-powered wagon was bumping across the uneven surface from the buildings set in one corner of the landing area. When it arrived, Lyhud identified himself to the local official beside the driver.

"I doubt that you have chosen the best time to begin your survey," said that one immediately, omitting the usual courtesies to be expected in greeting a citizen of a galactic power. "Oh, forgive me—I am Frolfor, chief of the local Conservation Commission."

"Of course," said Lyhud, remembering the name. "You are also from Bika IV."

"As are most of the engineers here. The colonies don't—well, I'll tell you about that in my office."

A few minutes later, they were delivered to the door of a low office building bearing a government sign in the Bikan language. Frolfor ushered them inside as the driver took the conveyance off around a corner.

"Is that the town over beyond the woods?" inquired Carter.

"It would look larger," Lyhud put in, "except for being partly underground. The nights here are cold."

Carter laughed disparagingly, but did not repeat his description of what Terrans considered a country cross-

road. Lyhud was as pleased, having tired of the joke immediately after the first of several tellings during their space hop from Bika IV. He hoped that Carter would be too busy now to favor him with any more tales of the colossal projects engineered in many systems by Terran science.

"What were you about to tell us?" he asked the local official, who still paced nervously about after waving his guests to cushioned benches.

"Ah...well...to be brief," muttered Frolfor, "the political situation here...that is, there has been—"

"Colonial agitation against the project?" Lyhud helped him.

Frolfor glanced apologetically toward Carter. "Especially," he added softly, "when it became known that the government was sending an alien being to assist."

"You mean *me*?" demanded the Terran, indignant and surprised.

Lyhud marveled at how his expression was altered simply by the upward movement of the lines of hair above the Terran's eyes. Lacking eyebrows themselves, Bikans were used to judging astonishment otherwise.

*How could anyone possibly be displeased with him?* Lyhud asked himself ironically.

Frolfor looked embarrassed, though Lyhud doubted that Carter realized it. His tendrils twitched, then calmed as he apparently decided to tell the simple truth. "Unfortunately, I do," he said to Carter. "The native colonials are good enough people, you understand, but life here is a struggle. They do not keep up with the latest developments."

"What you're trying to tell me," snapped the Terran, "is that nobody took the trouble to enlighten them as to the advantages of contact with Terran science."

**F**ROLFOR began a stumbling apology, but Carter interrupted. "I guess you don't realize the relative positions of Bika and the planet that

rules the Confederation!" he said loudly. "I don't think much of the efficiency of your crowd in letting some numbheaded crackpots endanger the proper use of my time here. I wonder if they realize how valuable it is?"

"I am sure they do," said Lyhud, to relieve the misery apparent on Frolfor's visage.

His effort to smooth things over got no farther. At almost the same instant, the three of them noticed a disturbance outside. The sounds suggested a crowd approaching from the town.

"Forgive my absence!" gasped Frolfor, scuttling for the door. "I will go and find out—"

He disappeared, leaving the Terran and Lyhud facing each other. "You should not blame him too much," said the latter. "He has too much work to be also a propagandist."

"Someone should attend to basic details," objected Carter.

"True, but this is, after all, a mere colony. Even Terra has outposts that lack the finer points of organization, has it not?"

"Ye-es," admitted Carter, "but not on our neighboring planets! Our civilization is a little further advanced than that! We colonize planetary systems, not just single worlds."

Lyhud stared reflectively at the ceiling. "You are to be congratulated," he answered, with what he considered commendable tact.

There was an awkward pause. Carter rose and paced to the window behind Frolfor's office table opposite the entrance, but it was too high to offer a view of the exterior.

"Wonder where he got to," muttered the Terran engineer.

Lyhud made no reply. He was listening intently, trying to judge more certainly whether the receding sound he heard was that of a motor. He felt a disquieting suspicion that Frolfor and his driver might have found it inconvenient to return.

Then, as an uproar of voices swelled outside the building, he was sure.

"That sounds like a crowd!" exclaimed Carter.

**B**EFORE Lyhud could reply, the door crashed open. Eight or nine Bikans dressed in tunics of the rough cloth manufactured on Bika V crowded in. Dozens more could be seen outside.

"What do you want?" demanded Lyhud, retreating behind the table to a place beside Carter.

The Terran engineer looked husky, he reflected, from having matured under slightly heavier gravity. If trouble came, it would be just as well to be near him.

The colonists inside the office mumbled and shoved until the mass of them spewed out one who could speak the *tercon* which Lyhud had used.

"What do I see?" challenged this one, a short fellow in a patched gray tunic whose dinginess was a good match for his furry hide. "Are you another out-system monster, or have you forgotten the speech of your kind?"

"You can understand me, I think," retorted Lyhud coolly. "Why do you come here in such a manner? This person is the respected representative of a friendly civilization."

The colonists glowered at Carter.

"We do not like the idea of importing that thing," said the spokesman. "It is bad enough the way you loafers from home keep trying to run our lives. Now you are reaching out to the stars for alien aid in your senseless interference!"

"Now, be reasonable," said Lyhud mildly. "We are both just acting on orders. The government is trying to improve conditions for you."

He hoped he sounded calm; he did not at all like the ugly looks now being cast at him as well as at Carter.

*At times, he thought, even a bureau-*

*crat like myself must earn his stipend. Should they injure this accomplished fool, there will be snarls and demands from among the stars!*

"Would it do any good to tell you that the government will take a severe view of any disorderly interference here?" he asked.

"Not much good," retorted the Bikan in the gray tunic, in an unpleasantly belligerent tone. "We take a pretty severe view of the *government*, if you want to know!"

"Now, now!" pleaded Lyhud, watching the Terran from one eye. "Let us be sensible! What can you gain by intimidation?"

He found a moment to admire Carter's attitude. With lower lip aggressively thrust out, the Terran glared at the crowd in a manner that promised broken bones and dislocated tentacles should they try to seize him.

The spokesman, looking a shade less confident, took courage from the shouts of those still outside the building. "This is how sensible we will be!" he declared. "We will take you and this precious freak back out to the ship you came in!"

"What's the matter with you, Lyhud?" snarled Carter. "You going to let those yokels deport *us*?"

"Oh, we won't just send you away!" said the colonist. "We are tired of having things like you rocketed in here to make life complicated for us. We mean to discourage it for the future!"

"Go on!" Carter urged. "Tell him they're looking for real trouble, Lyhud!"

"You tell him," suggested the Bikan. "I can't think of any legitimate trouble at the moment."

"Don't waste our time!" derided the spokesman. "You can make your speeches out at the ship, while we lay a fuse to the fuel tanks."

*This is serious!* thought Lyhud. *I hope the Terran can think of some good threats. It may be his last chance!*

He spared a second for a bitter reflection as to the ancestry of Frolfor, who had fled so hastily without warning them. Lyhud considered that he had as much desire to live as did the colonial official. Still, no matter how fast he turned over schemes in his mind, he could think of no telling argument that would be certain to calm the incensed natives.

He knew then that he would have to leave it up to the Terran.

CARTER, about that time, recovered his power of speech, after some moments of indignant sputtering. "Listen, you...you...you ignorant, limber-legged ape! You're on the way to getting this piddling, dried-up little planet of yours knocked right out of the universe!"

The spokesman gaped at him, and glanced quickly at the supporters on either side of him.

"Do you think the Terran Confederation is going to let something like this happen to one of its citizens without doing something about it?" demanded Carter, clenching his fists and beginning to turn pink in the face.

"What can they do?" asked the spokesman with a gesture of contempt. "They are too far away. They will know better in the future than to meddle in our affairs!"

Lyhud noted wryly that one or two tendrils twitched on the fellow's head, indicating that he was perhaps not as assured as he strove to sound about the ability of the Terran government to retaliate.

"What can they *do*?" roared Carter. "I'll tell you what they can do, and what they *will* do! Have you ever heard of Terran fleet that blasted the Centaurians?"

There was a muttering among the crowd as those who understood *tercon* translated for their neighbors. Lyhud saw that mention of the famous Terran conquest impressed them.

*Unfortunate*, he thought, *that there*

*is not even one of their ships in our system at the moment.*

"Tell them what will happen, Lyhud!" Carter invited.

Lyhud glanced about the room nonchalantly, or so he fondly hoped. The atmosphere was beginning to turn stuffy with the impassioned overcrowding. "No, you tell them," he declined.

"Sure, I'll tell them! You think you're going to blow us up with our ship and say we crashed, huh?"

He glared at them so savagely that the spokesman squirmed back against those behind him. "Well, it won't work!" yelled Carter. "We've already sent back a report that we landed. If there isn't a follow-up message, the next thing out of space will be a Terran cruiser!"

*He's amazing*, thought Lyhud. *How does he think up lies so fast? I actually think they believe him!*

"Pah! What could one ship do?" demanded the spokesman, but less belligerently.

"It'll scorch the surface of Bika V till the whole ugly place looks like a charred cinder!" threatened Carter, pounding a fist upon the table so hard that a bundle of reports crept to the edge with vibration and fell to the floor. "If you want just a short glimpse of it happening, go ahead and set that fuse of yours! Go on! You'll get a shock at the size of the flare-up it touches off!"

One of the crowd murmured into the spokesman's tendrils.

"You are exaggerating!" the latter accused after a moment's consideration. "You are but one. Who would miss you?"

*About time they realized that*, thought Lyhud. *Even the Terrans would hardly send any but an unimportant junior engineer to open a preliminary survey. I wonder if anyone but his immediate superior knows he is here—or cares?*

"You think so?" asked Carter.



"Lyhud, tell them if I'm exaggerating!"

He accompanied the request with a fierce look that plainly warned the Bikan it was time he lent some assistance.

"Yes, he is exaggerating," said Lyhud, but deliberately wriggled two or three front tendrils so that the crowd noticed.

CARTER choked over an epithet and cast him a pained look, but Lyhud was satisfied.

"I do not exactly like this," complained the spokesman to the colonist on his right, forgetting under tension to revert to native speech.

"Right!" Carter pounced upon the opening. "First unidiotic thing you said yet! We Terrans have an extremely strict code when it comes to protecting or avenging our citizens. Let me tell you about the weapon they will use to blast out any of you who try to escape underground—!"

Lyhud listened with outward calm and inward awe to the lurid description of a weapon he knew would be highly secret if it really existed. The crowd saw no reason why Carter should not boast of it; swallowing the story, they wilted.

When those inside the office had edged through the door, pursued by Carter's extravagant threats, Lyhud reached out a tentacle to grasp the Terran's elbow.

"Let us return to the ship," he said. "I think they will permit us to do that now."

"Go back to the ship? What do you mean? As soon as I finish telling these hicks off, I'm going—"

"To the ship," Lyhud slipped in. "Exactly! If we hurry, we may yet be able to explain all this."

As the lane opened before them, he glanced about to suggest that the explanation would save the colonists

considerable grief. When they had walked out and climbed the ladder to the airlock, however, he explained his real idea to Carter in a low voice.

"To explain, no matter to whom," he pointed out, pulling the lever that would shut the hatch against the scowling faces outside, "we have to stay alive—which we may not do if they have time to think over the wild statements you made. The survey can wait a little while."

Carter grumbled, but followed to the control room.

FOR SOME time, as Lyhud went about the business of taking off, there was an enforced lull in the discussion.

Finally, with the last major correction completed, the creaking of the acceleration seats ceased. Lyhud turned on the artificial gravity and relaxed. "It is best that I get you safely back to Bika IV," he said. "At least, pending better preparation in the colony."

"Well, if you don't care about the survey...!" growled the Terran.

He unfastened the seat straps and stood up. After a moment, he began to pace the cramped compartment, as if the recent scene still rankled. "I must say," he burst out at last, "that *you* weren't much help talking our way out!"

"What could I say?" asked Lyhud. "If I had repeated any of those wild lies of yours, they would have seen clearly that I was telling an untruth."

"Humph! You might have backed me up a little stronger about the Terran government sending to find out about me."

"Please!" said Lyhud wearily. "Just between us, admit that you may never have been missed—at least, not for some time!"

"All right, all right! Maybe I did lay it on too thick. You sure weren't

getting anywhere with that 'let's be reasonable' line!"

Lyhud chuckled contentedly. "That was just my way of prodding you to speak up," he told Carter. "I *knew* you would scare them once you started!"

"What? How should you know that?"

"I have noticed that you Terrans never underestimate yourselves," answered Lyhud.

He remembered the accounts of the

gigantic, unique Terran engineering projects in far planetary systems, with which Carter had bored him during their trip to Bika V.

He excused his next remark with the idea that a being like Carter would hardly feel the sting. "Since you do everything else in such a large way," he added, "it was only logical to expect—given the necessity—that you could *talk* bigger than anyone else too!"



## Readin' and Writhin' (Continued From Page 66)

nately, lodged in the minds of many readers as valid interpretations) have been due to the writers' inability to find a text on the subject which doesn't plunge one immediately head-first into a morass of tensor-equations. If that is the case, d'Abro's book is the answer: it is explicit, rigorous, comprehensive, and above all a real pleasure to read.

The chapter on "The Methodology of Science," unfortunately, is an exception; on this particular subject d'Abro is deadeningly repetitious. These repetitions seem to me to arise from an attitude on d'Abro's part toward Einsteinian relativity which I can only describe as reverent. As a result, a sizable fraction of the book is taken up by lofty and tedious dismissals of various anti-Einsteinian arguments, in a tone reminiscent of 19th Century popular astronomy texts—the kind of tone which made such men as Charles Fort and Anthony Standen angrily accuse scientists of thinking of themselves as a priesthood.

And as a matter of fact, d'Abro scarcely notices—let alone attempts to answer—any really cogent objections to the theory. Most of his debating time is expended in knocking over straw men like Bergson, philosophers whose critiques of Einstein were uncontaminated by any understanding of the concepts involved (as d'Abro accurately points out.) When one considers, however, that this extensive revision was completed in 1949, one wonders why Bridgman's "operational" attack on relativity (sometimes shaky; sometimes, however, devastating) receives no notice, though it was published in 1936; why *one of the revised passages* (p. 462) re-emphasizes a

restrictive action of covariance which Einstein himself was forced to discard in 1918; and why Milne's discoveries, published over the period 1936-43, and which appear to place Einstein's most fundamental assumptions in a dubious light, are passed over entirely.

Of course d'Abro might point out that one cannot expect the writer of a textbook for non-participants to engage in lengthy scientific disputation; and that the arguments to which he does devote himself are specifically those most likely to be brought by a layman. He might also note that the title of his book promises no more than an exposition of relativity up to, but not beyond, Einstein, so that d'Abro might be forgiven for keeping his hands off Milne relativity. The latter is a subject on which a good many fingers have been burned.

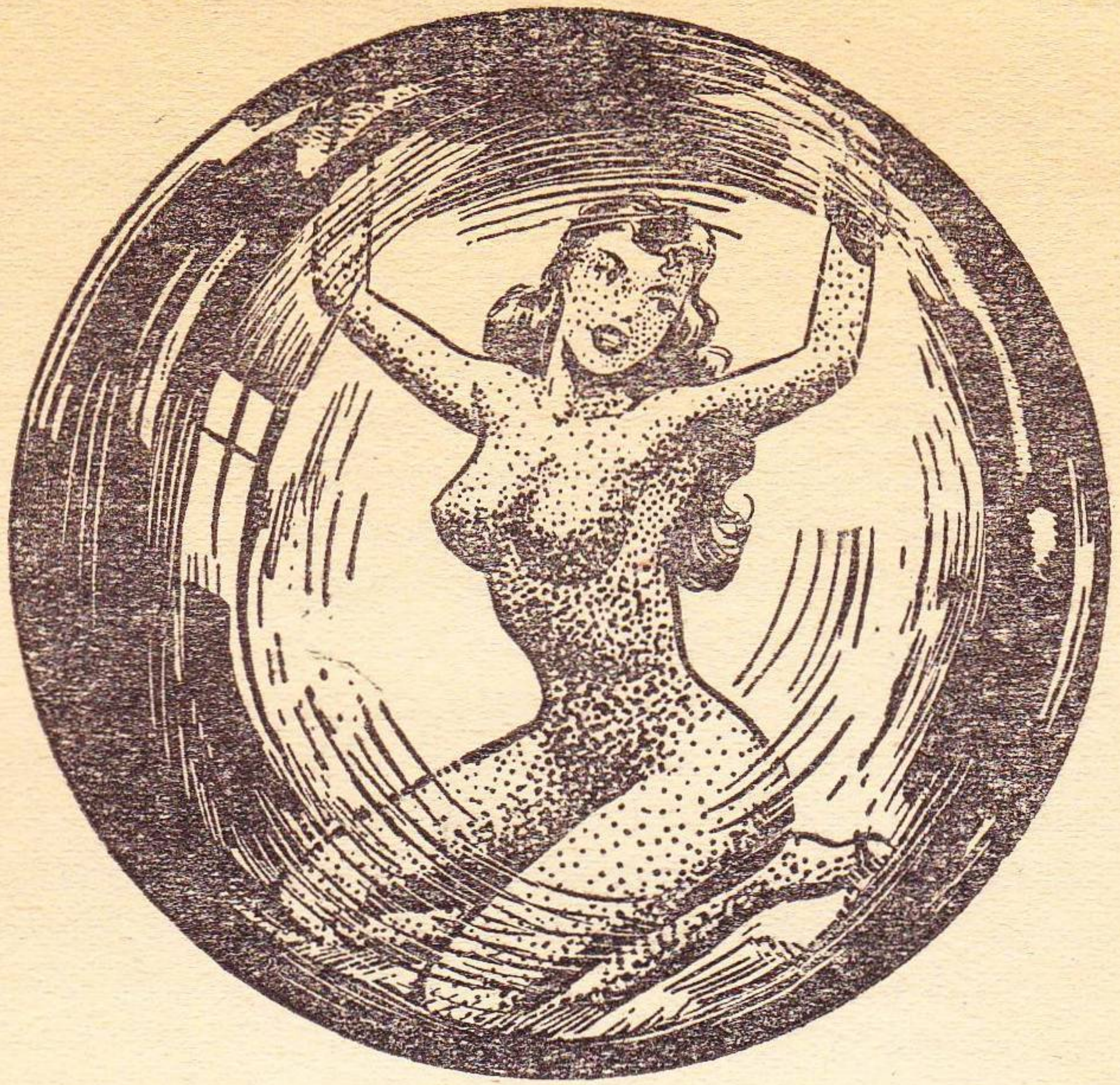
Yet, even while sharing with d'Abro the real pleasure which he communicates in the beauty, elegance, wonder, and seeming simplicity of Einstein's universe, one can't help wondering whether or not d'Abro has committed himself to the discipline too thoroughly. There are times when one suspects him of being in the same state of mind as the captain who feels duty-bound to go down with his ship.

Except for this one reservation, however, *The Evolution of Scientific Thought* is close to being the perfect guide to the major physical theory of our time.

—James Blish



# FACTS OF LIFE



**When sex came to Septimo, a hilarious time was had by all — well, nearly all!**

**By Dave Dryfoos**



**I**N OUR PLANET Septimo there was the ooze and our Mind—and eternal, intelligent tranquility; then a woman came from Earth, and stepped on us, and we found out all about sex.

The woman—her name was Martha Cotton; she was young, brown-eyed, and a psychologist—came in a ship. Not alone—she brought Bert Sommers, a skinny lad and a headful of undigested biological theory.

They braked with the usual spirals and circled our planet a few times to look it over, so our Mind had penetrated their thoughts and speech—widely different—by the time they were ready to land.

Physically ready, that is; Martha had mental reservations. “I don’t know,” she said, long fingers hesitant among the co-pilot’s controls. “I think

maybe we should go back to the Big Ship and get a larger party...”

“Don’t be chicken,” Bert argued. “There’s no sign of life except that green scum; the air tests o.k.; gravity’s close to one—”

“But—”

“Look. Between the Big Ship and this runabout, we’ve been inside metal hulls for over a year. If we go back to headquarters, they’ll send someone else in your place for sure—and probably chain me at a desk, too. So let’s send no signal and just go down for a few minutes and have some fun; it’ll be like getting out of jail!”

“I wouldn’t know!” Martha grinned. Then she frowned. “That feeling of release, though... it scares me, Bert. I mean—well—here on the ship, one or the other of us is busy every minute. But down there, excited and all... Besides, people will talk... I’m afraid—”

“Of me?”

“Nooooo...”

She wouldn't admit she was afraid of herself, so they landed.

Our air smelled good to them. Our green-clad, rolling hills, and greener swampy lowlands, were more different from their metal ships than from their native Earth; they got out, laughing.

At first they shouted and ran aimlessly around like a couple of pups released from the kitchen. Then, swinging joined hands, they walked up and over the nearest hill, too excitedly breathless to talk till they got over the crest.

But when Bert wanted to rest and enjoy the view, Martha objected. "Look at my boots," she pouted. "All smeared with this green slime. We can't sit down, Bert; it'll get all over us."

"I'll scrape off a patch of ground," he said, after exploratory nudgings with his toe. "It's dry, underneath; and the ooze won't hurt you even if it touches your skin. See?"

He held up a slimy finger. "Dirty stuff, but harmless."

**H**AD OUR Mind been emotional, that would have insulted us. The green ooze was us—the living substance of our Mind—billions of trillions of tiny cell-colonies, each just large enough to support a few members in leisured freedom from food-making.

From the leisured cells had evolved our collective Mind, a single mentality for an entire planet—endowed, of course, with far more intelligence than can be possessed by any fractionated individual, human or other. And we needed no physical body, either; we used our collective psychic power to travel through time and space—within our planet and its atmosphere—collect facts and influence matter.

By clairvoyance we saw Bert and Martha; by telepathy we read; by

intelligence we understood their thoughts and words. And by psychokinesis we would halt their adventure before they'd walked all over us—they were killing thousands of cells with every step.

But our intellectual interest was so great that we wanted to study these humans before removing them—and to be sure they remained available for study. They were strange to us, with many individual quirks we didn't understand, and a curiously irrational interrelation.

The way they looked at each other, for instance, and fell silent in the middle of a sentence; the way they'd walked together, practically dancing. The way they sat now on the hilltop, half uplifted by excitement, half sunk into a dream. The way Martha would reach out unconsciously for Bert's hand, but withdraw from his clasp whenever she noticed it. Hardly rational, to say the least. Far beyond our experience.

Take the way Bert's Adam's apple bobbed so excitedly. From handholding he'd progressed to waist-encircling; and now, though it seemed to require more courage than a take-off into space, he thought he'd try for a kiss.

"Sex, sex, sex," said Martha, pushing him away. "That's all you biologists think about. I knew this would happen when you set the ship down. Please don't be a nuisance, Bert; you're acting compulsively."

"Compulsively, hell," he snorted; "I want to marry you!"

"Well!" she mocked. "That's interesting news. And how sentimentally you put it, dear!"

"Well..."

"Well, we're *not* married and there's *nobody* here to marry us and we're *not* going to act as if we were married. Some other time, Bert!"

"Aw, for pete's sake!"

"You sound neurotic! If either of us has to become a martyr to conven-

tion, it isn't going to be me! Mother said it was disreputable when I signed up for this trip—I intend to return able to prove she was wrong!”

Intriguing, this—our cells reproduce by budding; we didn't know what a mother was, and our lack of knowledge went on from there.

So, while Bert got up and tramped in futile, murderous circles, our Mind investigated his.

We didn't get far; he was supposed to be a biologist; but biology is the science of life, and his ideas on “what life is” were anything but scientific. And that wasn't the only gap in his knowledge. We thought he should understand how his own kind had evolved, at least; but his ignorance of man's evolution was much more extensive than his understanding of it.

What reason he possessed seemed to be far outweighed by his emotionality. His whole brain was in an angry ferment; he didn't even try to hold Martha's hand when, in sullen silence they trudged back to their landing-place.

●

**T**HEY GASPED when the wreckage came into view. They stared at it, at one another. Then, finding nothing to say they ran frantically down to the ship.

The vessel sprawled on its back with landing-gear pointing skyward like the feet of a dead chick. The hull was crushed and wracked—equipment lay scattered around.

Bert thrust his head through a shattered port, surveyed the jumbled interior, and withdrew, searching for something hopeful to say. The best he could think of was a noncommittal, “No tracks.”

“If no tracks, then tricks,” Martha said. She essayed a giggle, but it came out off-key and she stopped in the middle.

“Wind, maybe,” Bert offered, winning the reluctant respect of our Mind with his good guess. “See how things are scattered!”

“Let's unscatter them,” said Martha, practically; “we've supplies, except not much water. And tents.”

“Let's not use tents,” said Bert. “Rather a sod hut—a dugout with a well-anchored canvas roof. The wind might blow again.”

“Why didn't we feel it and hear it, if it was a wind? Could it have been so minutely localized?”

It could have been, and was; but then, it was a psychic wind, not an atmospheric one.

Bert didn't know that, and said so. “But I go for the dugout idea anyhow,” he added.

“I don't,” said Martha. “Not one dugout, surely; I go for two. You hear?”

“Double work? For what?”

Martha put her hands on her hips. “Think my reputation isn't worth a hole in the ground?”

“Sex, sex, sex,” he mocked. “That's all you psychologists ever think about!” But he dug two holes in the hillside, and covered each with a weighted tarp.

●

They didn't talk-over the possibility of rescue—each knew the planned routine. The Big Ship, that had brought them to our System from yours, would continue to cruise in satellitic motion begun when the side-trips had started. From it would issue a smaller vessel, similar to the one we'd wrecked, but heavily-armed and manned by a trained rescue-squad.

A man with the planet-wide intelligence of our Mind could seize that rescue-ship; with it, surprise and capture the larger one. With that—well, the possibilities opened up in geometric progression. Provided, of course, that our Mind evolved a man from the

ooze. Which seemed possible; according to Bert's system of learning, it had happened on Earth.

WE IMMEDIATELY tried to duplicate the process. Some of our cell-groups gave up all leisure, and formed themselves into balls; the balls subdivided, working out the key to the next stage of development—secretions that influenced the form and position of their multiplying cells.

Meanwhile, paving the way, our Mind tried to impress Bert and Martha with our psychic powers, so they would defer to our man when he'd evolved.

We started with telepathy because it's our normal mode of expression. But here we ran into difficulties. Martha had an ability, absolutely new to us at the time, of simply closing her thoughts to things she didn't wish to believe—and, like most psychologists, she didn't choose to believe in psychic powers.

Bert, though he harbored the notions we planted in his brain, had no desire to act on them; he devoted his time to making Martha comfortable and to thinking up things for the two to do, so that neither would have time for brooding.

And Martha responded to his efforts. Painfully she cultivated a blithe and lighthearted manner, and tried to act as if she and Bert were on a camping trip together. In two days, they'd built themselves an elaborate camp, spread signal-panels visible from the air, and spent fruitless hours trying to rebuild their ruined microwave set. When that proved impossible, Bert gathered up some optical instruments and made a crude, low-power microscope.

We were delighted. The possibilities inherent in a pair of hands were spread before us in a display the more striking because it was improvised; our Mind pressed vigorously forward in our attempt to develop a man.

In those two days, we'd evolved a

primitive fish. Bert missed this, but next day he did see and try to capture our amphibian stage—it was the first animal life he'd seen on Septimo.

Meanwhile, our efforts to impress them had gone on to psychokinesis. We'd been a wind—they were prepared for that. Now we became a sigh in the night, an invisible nuisance that tripped unwary feet, a remembered bird-call lifted from Bert's memory and shrilled in the predawn cold.

We dripped water on sleeping faces, hid necessary objects; we kissed Martha when she slept, so that she awoke, went to Bert's hut, kicked him in the ribs, and argued. In broad daylight we pinched Martha till she slapped him.

To defend himself, he had to mention poltergeists.

"Ghosts are supposed to have no feeling," Martha retorted; this one does nothing else but!"

She drowned out his fervent denials with the first human song ever heard on Septimo: "*Ghoul days, ghou! days, good old gory drool days...*"

But she was more frightened than he.

That is, Martha was more frightened than Bert till, on the fourth thirty-hour day he'd spent on our planet, Bert saw the shrew.

The little mammal—it wasn't exactly like any shrew you've ever seen—entered Bert's tent, where it shredded a few papers, ruined some opened rations, and messed up his bed.

With this physical manifestation added to his telepathic impressions, Bert began to worry. We succeeded in turning his mind toward a matter that had been lifted from it in the first place—the story of Man's origin. He recognized the evolutionary possibilities in the stages he'd seen: primitive cell-colonies, amphibian, mammal.

Of course it never occurred to him that these life-forms hadn't existed before he landed; he under-estimated the physical power of our Mind, and even of his own.

He knew, but refused to consider even with our prompting, that from time immemorial there have been men who claimed the ability to predict the future: he knew that long ago, a "Dr. Rhine" had proved the power of prediction does exist.

He never permitted himself to realize that prediction foreshortens time. But a prediction exists—and, existing, brings the future into the present.

**H**E FOUND out when he saw the primate—a furry, cuddly, affectionate little monkey-like creature. It was I, as were all the other life-forms; that is, it was of our Mind—and so am I.

Needless to say, I didn't spring as a primate directly from the shrew; our Mind had killed the shrew, as we'd killed each of the other forms of life created from the ooze. Each sprang directly from a cell-colony.

We'd learned from Bert the biogenetic rule that every individual re-enacts the history of his kind; we were advancing, stage by stage, from the cell to Man. But we didn't bring two individuals together to produce a third. Bert's mind contained information along these lines, of course, but the only life-form we were interested in was Man. And our purely rational Mind—which has no need for emotion, and experiences none—simple couldn't untangle the emotional skeins that, despite their scientific training, surrounded the word "sex" in the thoughts of Bert and Martha. Our Mind didn't know what "sex" might be; we wanted to find out.

Indirectly, we were learning. I'd been directed by our Mind into Martha's path. Bert, who sat in his hut's entrance, fooling with the mi-

croscope, didn't see me till after Martha and I had made friends.

"This is my new playmate," she announced, carrying me over for him to see, "my 'ittle Zyttl."

"Well!" he said, getting up from his work and coming out to us. "Interesting! Some name you've given him, too; we'll have to study the beast—he's the highest form of life to turn up here."

"Please don't talk like a book," she said, hugging me tight. "He's a pet, not a problem."

Bert was under enough strain to show annoyance. "Don't be a sentimental dope," he said tartly. "You know it's not safe to play with a strange life-form!"

"No?" Martha retorted. "What do you call your business with the slime?"

"Investigation; and I want to investigate your little ape."

"I know your investigations! You've got to find out if he's got the same sort of nervous, and digestive, and reproductive system that's common to vertebrates on Earth. But you're not going to hurt him, see!"

He saw; he saw I was pillowed on Martha's hard round breast—and emoted over the sight. Martha emoted, too.

"See?" she repeated. "And I suppose you want to dissect the poor thing."

"I just don't want you to handle it," he said angrily; "it could have parasites, or something."

"There's nothing wrong with my Zyttl," she stated. "But there is with you! You probably suffered a childhood shock that aroused primitive fears of animals!"

"Nonsense," he said, stealing a page from her book. "But I'll bet you felt unloved in childhood and are using that beast to compensate."

"Love, again!" she jeered. "Sex

stuff! You're probably jealous—jealous of a fuzzy little animal!"

Jealousy was something I'd never experienced as part of our Mind, but I experienced it then—for with a sudden snatch, Bert grabbed me from Martha and began to throttle me.

Violence was new to me, too; I lay limp in his arms, without enough experience to try biting him, even.

But Martha came to my rescue. "You sadist!" she cried. "You leave my Zyttil alone!" She pummelled his ribs till Bert handed me over and walked off muttering.

I'D COME between them. That was our Mind's purpose; we would divide and conquer—and learn, as well.

Consider what we had to find out. Everything about Man that's concerned with emotion was novel to us. Sex—which Martha and Bert had been taught by their respective studies to consider the most important single drive in Man—was strange to our Mind. Only by creating a man for itself, could our Mind experience those things.

But everything had to be timed right; it takes time to recapitulate the phylogeny of so complicated a species as Man. Our Mind would know when the rescue-ship reached our atmosphere, though, and I would evolve from primate to man the night before it landed.

Then, in the morning, I'd enlist the help of Martha.

In the two days that followed, obtaining Martha's help seemed increasingly easy. She would no longer speak to Bert—he'd put the finishing touches on their quarrel with some remarks about Martha's sublimated sex-drive. Because she suspected he was right, she was enraged beyond reconciliation; she spent her days

petting and cleaning and feeding me, and teaching me tricks—which, of course, I learned easily.

Martha lived during those times in a flickering daydream. Often, while she petted me, she was picturing a baby; but more often she thought of a man—tall and muscular and golden of skin and well filled-out—as different from Bert as could be. Our Mind analyzed those daydreams, and decided to fulfill them.

Then our Mind would get the experience it wanted. For if Martha loved me when I was a hairy little monkey, she'd certainly love me when I became her dream-man.

And dream-man I did become—when the time came. A combination of something called "Tarzan" and the "Belvedere Apollo".

It was early in the morning when I went to Martha's hut. She was still asleep—didn't know her pet had gone during the night.

Bert was up. His mind, possibly stimulated to think of flight by hope for rescue, had been dwelling on butterflies, so our Mind conceived a reasonable facsimile of one and decoyed him over a hill.

Perhaps things would have been different if I'd knocked before entering Martha's hut—or if I'd stolen a pair of pants to wear. But I had one advantage: because he was the only man we'd ever heard, my voice was exactly like Bert's.

"Good morning, Martha," I said softly.

She stirred in her sleep.

"Good morning, dear," I said again, and stroked her hair, as yesterday, she'd stroked mine.

She rolled over in her sleeping-bag and smiled; she was waking up, now. "If this is a dream, it's a nice one," she murmured. "Or have you finally got up cour—" She opened her eyes and screamed.



THE SOUND distressed my humanoid ears. "Stop that," I said. "You know me! I'm Zyttil, your pet monkey!"

"Then I *am* dreaming?"

"No, I've just changed my form; how do you like me this way?"

"I'll show you," she said, "if you'll please hand me that boot." I did, and she broke my nose with the heel of it.

"Don't do that!" I objected reasonably. "Even when I was a stinking little monkey—you cuddled me, and held me, and—"

I stopped talking and began to duck—things were flying through the air at me. Words, too. "Make a fool of me, will you? Rubbing your hairy little paws... Watching... I could kill..."

I was in a very unfortunate position. Still, our Mind was getting what we wanted—a knowledge of sex.

However, our Mind lacked combative instincts. So first Martha beat me up; then Bert came, summoned by her scream, and beat me some more.

By the time I'd been trussed up and dumped on the floor, they could hear the rescue-ship approaching.

"We'll keep him as a hostage," Bert said, "and get his story later; meantime he'd better prevent further manifestations, if he knows what's good for him!"

"He looks secured," said Martha. "But I must look a sight." Her lacy nightgown was a rag, her brown hair tousled wantonly.

"It'll be hours before they land," Bert said with a funny look on his

face. "Come on over to my hut and I'll help you get fixed up."

They gathered up some clothes and left me there. They thought they'd defeated our Mind.



But they hadn't. True, they never did set me free—and our Mind, wondering what would happen next, didn't rescue me. That's why they were able to take me with them back to Earth, where I have to live in the lab and give this lecture twice a day.

And it's a fact that our Mind got subdivided by my leaving, so even if I'm no smarter than anyone else down here, there was a slight loss.

But all that's a small and reasonable price to pay. Because, by the time they went to Bert's hut—hours before the rescue ship had even landed, much less taken off again—our superhuman Mind knew it had accomplished its purposes.

That's why we paid so little attention to the activities in Bert's hut that brought them out to meet the rescue party in an oddly glowing condition; we couldn't see much point to their ritual.

But they were leaving, and that's the main thing our Mind wanted.

And also, we'd found out what "sex" is. From Martha, the psychologist, we'd learned the great biological secret: "sex" is what makes a woman cuddle a stinking little ape, and scratch a man's eyes out for touching her.



**Two Thought-Provoking Novelets  
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lead off the current issue of

**SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY**



## DOWN TO EARTH

A Department For Science-Fictionists

(continued from page 8)

(Hmm, all this reminds me of the much-touted science-fictionists' "predictions" of the atomic bomb. Many stories mentioned atoms, and "atomic bombs", but no one foresaw one of the most significant details of its construction—namely that it was one hell of a job getting the thing to *explode* at all. And only a few authors took note of the question of *radiation*—all of them, I believe, *after* work on atomic piles indicated that this would be an important factor. Prior to that, science fiction authors had future-characters tossing "atomic bombs" around as nonchalantly as hand-grenades; matter of fact, old Commander John Hanson often carried a pocketful of 'em, at times.)

### ONE FOR SIR SPRAGUE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I've been reading *Future and Science Fiction Quarterly* for over a year, now, and have always enjoyed your stories and articles—especially those by Sir Sprague. However, this, my first letter to an editor, is to be somewhat derogatory in nature.

In brief, I intensely dislike your lurid covers and very poor artwork and interior illustrations. Whether the illustrations are good or bad, they all look like a big blob of ink which has not quite soaked completely into the paper, to me, and has missed covering some spots on the paper's face. Some of these are completely unrecognizable as pictures. Of course, they may well be 1st class artwork, on the easel or draftsman's board; I've really no way of telling. Could something be done about this? Hope so.

Nevertheless, I shall continue to purchase, and read, your magazines. I like the stories too well to stop, even when the illustrations make me shudder. Some of my shudders are offset by the stories and articles of Sir Sprague, who is my favorite author in *Future and Science Fiction Quarterly*.

Hoping for better artwork next issue, I'll close.

Alan G. Davis, 132 Hudson Street,  
Northboro, Mass.

### WHY, WHY, WHY?

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

In the past few years, since you have been editor of *Future*, you may have noticed that a lot of readers regard your magazine as "something they buy when they have an extra 20¢ around." This is true, to a certain extent of the word. Personally, I don't and never did regard *Future* as such, but some of the people that I have come into contact with lately do.

Their chief remarks are, as Stan Skirvin pointed out, "What can you expect for twenty cents?" The answer is, "not much". How can you expect *Future* to be up among the top pro-mags when you have rough paper, second-class illustrations and covers, and so-so stories, when the other mags are doing just the opposite? You can't unless you change, and soon.

It wouldn't hurt you to have smooth, printable paper that would take illustrations like Finlay's. It's a disgrace to his fine work when you go ahead and smear his delicate line all over paper that soaks up the ink like a blotter. If you don't think it does, just drop some ink on one of the pages and watch.

Also, why not increase that number of pages from one hundred to one hundred and thirty-two? That way you could raise your price to twenty-five cents instead of twenty. In short, and I would like an answer to this question, why aren't you up there with *OW* and *Galaxy*? You could be if you really wanted to, because you have a fine array of authors.

So far, the only issue that I felt I

got my money's worth from was the recent May issue. It has been a long time since I read a story that I enjoyed as much as I did Berryman's "Equations For Destiny." To me, Dutro and Giddons seemed like real people, with a real problem, in a real and plausible world. I think the story could have been a little longer and have been made into a novel.

"Thy Days Are Numbered" seems like the beginning of something new and enjoyable. This, too, seems believable—although I am glad that you are not trying to pass it off as fact. As fiction, it is good fiction—but as fact, it is a farce. This series you are about to run may, alone, hold the interest of the readers of *Future*. I know it will hold mine. Just how long is this legend going to run? Don't spoil its reader-interest by drawing it out too long. When the plot is spent, let it die a natural death.

at the end. A nice piece of work.

Next, comes "The Twice-Told Man", and then "Forgive Us Our Debts". The latter wasn't up the del Ray standards, although readable. "Rejection Slip" should have stayed rejected.

Enough for the story content.

The best letters were, (1) Stan Skirvin, (2) Alice Bullock, (3) Bernard Varjick. I like your enlarging of "Down To Earth's" letter section; it gives a chance for more fans to show their likes and dislikes. But, I think, if you keep putting out issues like the May one, you will have very few letters full of dislikes. None from me, at any rate.

To sum up this missive I would like to say this: *Future* has a very fine editor, and will be a fine magazine if it only goes all out to reach that goal. As long as *Future* comes out, you can count on me as a regular reader, Mr. Lowndes. In parting, I would like to tell you that I wish you the best of luck with *Future* and her companion mag *Science Fiction Quarterly*.

Joel Nydahl, 119 So. Front St.,  
Marquette, Michigan

(Better paper...more pages...better rates to authors and artists...these are not only the fans' and readers' desires; your editor would dearly love to see all these things, too. And the answer, I'm afraid, is the same that it was last time—only still more so: if we used a better grade of paper, we'd have to charge a

higher price for the same number of pages we have now; the paper we use now is nobody's dream but it, too, keeps on going up like the first successful moon-rocket. We want to offer authors and illustrators better rates, and there's a chance for this if the readers continue the fine support they've given us, so far. But there's no chance if we start increasing production costs at the present time.

This issue contains the third story in Mr. West's "Great Legend" series; the final story will appear in our November issue, and we think you'll find the conclusion an enjoyable one.)

## AGIN' SERIES

Dear Bob:

Pardon the familiarity, but since we are going to be friends we may as well start out by dropping the formalities. Now that I am calling you Bob, you have my permission to call me by my first name—

The best of the shorts was "The Rememberers", by Blair. It is one of the few shorts in which the climax does not come which just happens to be Bob, also.

Let's get off that subject, huh? Since we're old friends now I would like to tell you how much I enjoyed your May issue of FSF. It is the first one I have read in some time as I have drifted away from the ranks of the "Fen" for awhile. After listening quietly in my dark corner to the hoots, howls and hurrahs in the various letter "colyums" of other SF mags I have decided to take my life in my hands and emerge into the light with my own indominatable, if somewhat prejudiced, views.

Now to the stories: 1. "Thy Days Are Numbered"—West. Excellent story, altho I'm against the series idea. I hate to see a story left hanging in mid-air the way a series leaves them. 2. "Forgive Us Our Debts"—del Ray. Good story plot, but not gone into deep enough. 3. "Equations For Destiny"—Berryman. Thoroughly enjoyable but third for same reason as above. Underwritten. 4. "The Twice-Told Man"—Raboid. Good, but a wee bit too short.

"The Mislaid Tribes", de Camp; "The Rememberers", Blair; "Rejection Slip", Singer were fifth, sixth and seventh in that order.

I agree with Glen Monroe on his idea

of running contests for the pics instead of just giving them to the letter column winners. How about it?

Give pics to Monroe, Joan Henderson and Bernie Varjick. Incidentally, I disagree with Mr. Varjick on the covers; I believe in alternating between scantily-clad babes and spaceships—but don't get rid of the gals entirely. Give Miss Nan Warner the booby prize. Drop the letter "colyum" indeed!

I'm looking forward to the next installment of "Thy Days Are Numbered". See you next issue.

Bob Hill, 121 Henrietta St. Rochester, N.Y.

(We aren't dropping the gals completely, but I think we'll assume that you-all know enough anatomy for the nonce, except for an occasional refresher.)

### WHERE'S THE SCIENCE?

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I have been reading science-fiction for some time now and I must say that I am disappointed. It seems to me that the term "science-fiction", itself, is terribly abused.

It is my humble opinion that about eighty percent of all stories appearing in so-called science-fiction magazines should actually come under some other heading such as fantasy, weird, occult, horror—and some could even be classified as fairy tales.

For example, how could such a thing as "Thy Days Are Numbered" ever appear in a true science-fiction magazine? Don't you honestly think it pretty silly connect space travel and Martians with Ancient Greece? No author of science-fiction should even think of turning to ancient history and legend for plot.

When I first started reading science-fiction, I thought I would be reading about the future, not the *past*. I thought that in science-fiction, I would find a gateway to the stars—that the stories would be based on science and theory, written in the future, with a possibility of becoming reality at some time in the future. The very last thing I would have thought of finding in science-fiction are stories about ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and the other glorious empires of the early days of history.

Apparently some of your readers are looking for fairy tales. At least, that's the

impression I get from some of the letters in the various fan columns. For them I would suggest Aesop's Fables or the many magazines devoted entirely to fantasy.

As for science-fiction itself, I would like to see more stories of space travel; first landings on other planets; adventures between the stars and galaxies, and stories based on man's future technology. And how about other intelligent beings superior to man?

I enjoyed movies such as "When Worlds Collide", "The Day The Earth Stood Still", "Destination Moon", "Rocketship X-M", "The Thing", "The Man From Planet X", and—to go even further back—I think the old "Flash Gordon" serials and the "Undersea Kingdom" serials were far superior to most of the stories being offered as science-fiction today.

The special articles you've been running are interesting. You should run more of the special articles on science, such as those featured in *Amazing Stories*.

On my preference coupon I didn't give any rating to de Camp's article because I don't believe such articles should be rated with fiction.

While I did try to rate the stories in your May issue as best I could, I didn't consider any of the stories as real good science-fiction. I do hope that the day will come, and soon, when there will be such a thing as a true science-fiction magazine. I would rather pay much more, and be able to read what I like, than just pay twenty cents or a quarter and get about eighty percent fairy tales.

Ted Denomme, 12 Spring St.  
Holyoke, Mass.

(I'm open to conviction as to what themes, if any, should be barred from "science-fiction"—in order to justify the term—and how much "science" a story should have, before it can classify. Anyone want to try drawing up a code?)

### SPARE THAT LETTER DEPARTMENT!

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I don't know how I missed buying your magazine during these past few months of introductory science-fiction reading, but as I stepped up to the magazine stand the other day, I hadn't as yet purchased a copy of *Future*. As I glanced at the price and

the list of stories, and then again at that price, I knew this was the mag for me. Why this issue compares with the *Astoundings* and *Galaxys* in my little collection!

And now I'd like to comment on the letter by a certain Nan Warner that appeared in the May ish. Why print stuff like this denouncing the letter department? I wouldn't look twice at *Future* if I found the letters had been cut from it. What would you do with the space if you had it? Print some muddled non-fiction bit like that of de Camp's that cluttered up this issue, I suppose. I enjoyed Mr. Freeman's letter and his ratings as much as I would any short. So please don't shorten the readers' column; you'll lose at least one prospective fan, who has read and liked his first copy of *Future*.

This "armchair expert" (as the sour Warner letter puts it) would like to express his views on the yarns for May. The two novelets were a little on the dull side in my opinion. "Thy Days Are Numbered!", for some reason, held my attention. Del Ray's short, "Forgive Us Our Debts", is one of the best things I ever remember reading. Adjectives fail me. I really lived this one as I read it. "The Twice-Told Man" had a wonderful plot, ending, and the characterization was good. "The Rememberers" was also great. I found none of stories in the space-opera class.

Thanks for some top-notch reading.

Michael Reynolds (14) 603 S. 2nd St.

Hiawatha, Kans.

(So long as we have a letter-column, it's open to all kinds and shades of opinion—so long as they are mailable, and relevant to this magazine. You wouldn't want me to run only those letters which reflected my own opinions, would you? I don't think you would; thus, you must expect to see some letters opposed to your own views. Miss Warner's comments reflected views contained in a number of communications we've received. Frankly, I want to find out if a majority agrees, even though I enjoy a letter-department myself, and usually look through it first when reading, or looking over, my worthy competition.)

## DUCK, NANI

Gentlemen:

Just thought I'd write in just once to get my opinion recorded. I will get right down

to earth (h-m-m-m) and my opinions.

As to the stories in May ish. I rated them thusly: 1. "Thy Days Are Numbered," by Wallace West.

One of the two best stories I have read this year. A truly great story (Since I liked it, it will get the biggest panning since "Ismail The Outworlder"). This stringing novelets together to get a long novel is by no means new, but it has not been used enough in magazines. Please continue this practice, but also use good long novels.

2. "Forgive Us Our Debts," by Lester del Rey. Almost as good as the front-runner, but I prefer longer stories.

3. "Rejection Slip", by Ben Singer. As you said, a novel twist but the handling of such rated it only a magnificent third. This by far the best copy of *Future* in my young collection.

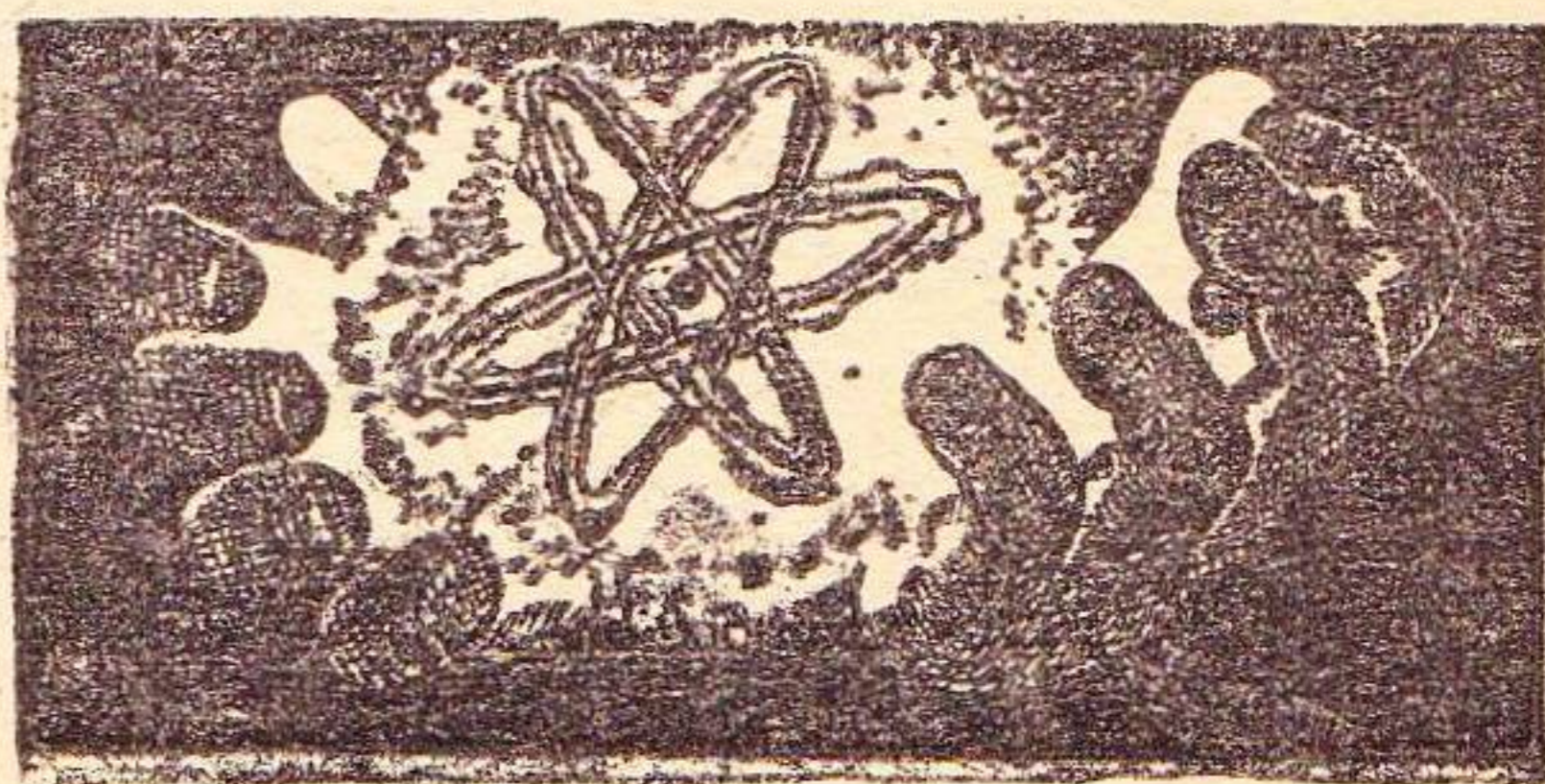
4. "Equations, For Destiny", by John Berryman. Once again, a victim of a great issue. A good plot and writing to measure. Perhaps a sequel?

5. "The Twice-Told Man", by Maurice Raboid. Not bad—but, for some reason I could not put my finger on, it did not go as far as the top four. Rather melodramatic.

6. "The Rememberers", by H. Charles Blair. Still not bad, but I do not appreciate an author trying to nauseate his readers; and that ending belongs in the "His laughter trailed off into a shrill scream" classification.

7. "The Mislaid Tribes", by L. Sprague de Camp. Couldn't get through the first page; can't you get something like autobiographies of the authors—anything other than what you have had. You get it thrown at you from so many sources, that it gets boring after a while.

As to the letters, I can understand why Miss Warner did not want her address printed; it would bring the fiery wrath of most of your readers down on her head. Despite the no-doubt intelligent (presumably) Miss Warner's low opinion of your letter-section, or anyone else's for that matter, that department can make or break



a magazine. This is not to say that "Down to Earth" is the best letter-section of any s-f magazine. As a matter of fact, it is one of the worst, but your comments carry it well enough to make it worth the while.

I also enjoy "The Reckoning", one of your best departments. Also, this cover is the best representing *Future* in my collection. Keep it up.

In closing, I'd like to ask some of the readers of *Future* to send me from Sept. '51 issue back in *Future* and Nov. '51 in SFQ.

I hope you can take constructive criticism, as this letter was intended as such.

PS: Best letters were:

*Willis Freeman, Alice Bullock, and  
Joan L. Henderson.*

PPS: If you print this missile, and I should win an original, I'll take the one to "Thy Days Are Numbered" on pg. 28, preferably—if not that, then the Cover. (If they are counted).

*Jerry Megaban  
9644 Naomi Avenue  
Temple City, California*

(It is common practice, when letters from readers are published, to omit addresses, when a request is made—providing that the writer has supplied an address in the first place. As a rule, letters received without names and addresses are given scant heed. If any reader wishes to argue with Miss Warner personally, we will gladly forward any such letters sent to her in care of this magazine—but accept and assume no responsibility for what happens thereafter!)

## SUNSHINE DEPARTMENT

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I have always looked on pulp magazines as being for the cheaper stories, but since reading *Future*, I have changed my mind. I guess I had better check up on some very smart readers, along with some of the most interesting stories a person could ask for. Then there is that "Down to Earth" thing; I sure got my money's worth out of that.

The covers are very good.

When I read some of the readers' letters, I wonder if they really know about these ultrasonic neutrons, etc. I don't, but I still like to read *Future*.

*Murray Tynes, Hondo, California*

(Oh, for several hundred thousand more readers who feel as you do, Mr. Tynes! But not until the *Future* is good enough to bring it out of them.)

## STRICTLY MAMMILIAN

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

This is the first copy of your book I have ever been able to get hold of, but I am hoping it won't be the last. The stories are excellent, and I especially enjoyed "Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful!" and "Captain Barnes and the Law". There are far too few science-fiction books on the market that are worth a good laugh. Don't think that because I listed those two stories 4 and 5 that they were in any way inferior; I merely felt that they could not be compared with the other, more sober stories.

"Devil's Cargo" also was tops, for its story (refreshingly different) and its humor.

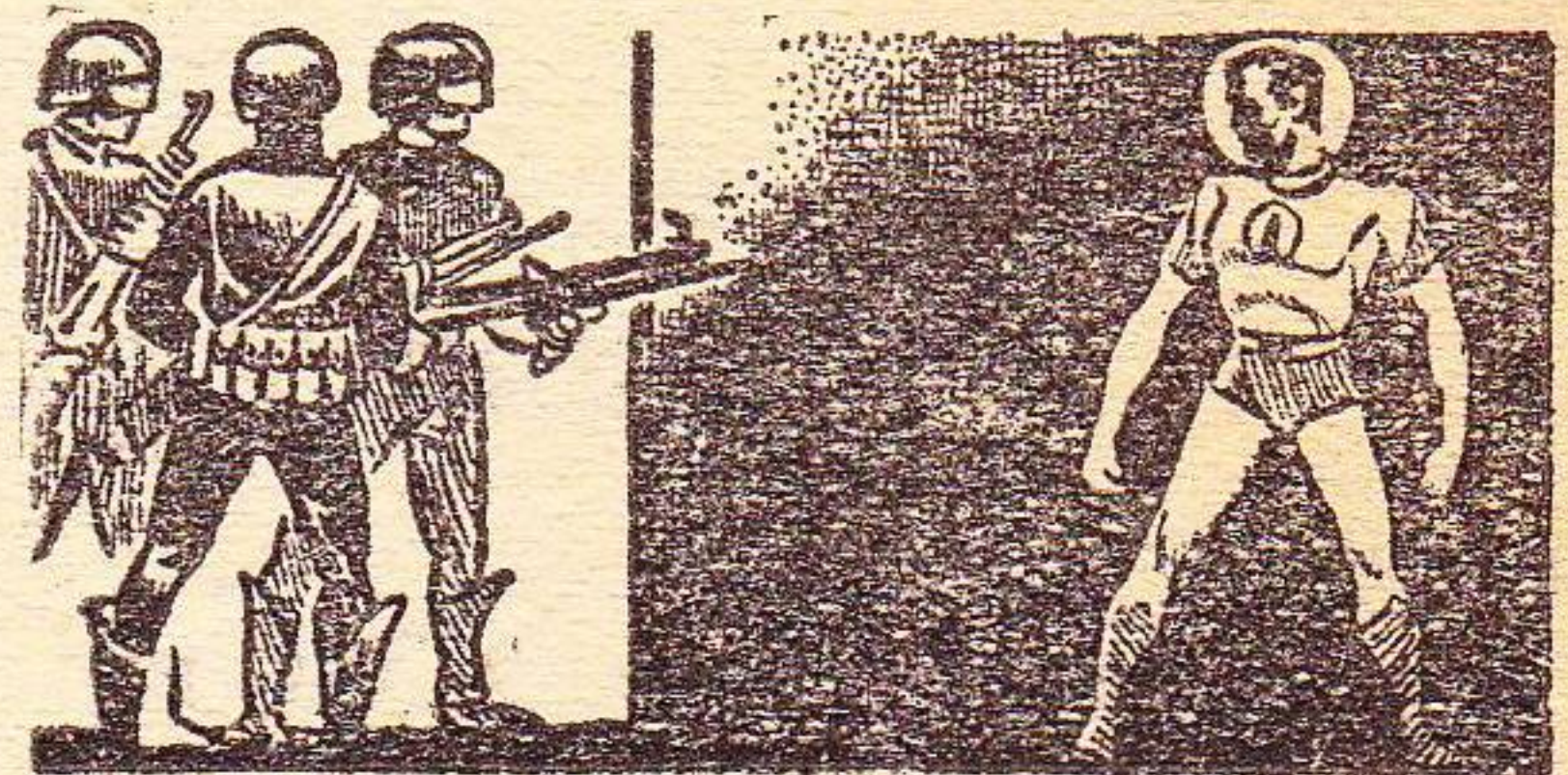
My only complaint is the amount of pointing on the cover; why not use a band along the bottom that won't spoil the picture? My interest in this respect is entirely selfish, as I paste all my science-fiction covers in my scrapbooks.

My husband is strictly a Western magazine reader, but after being coaxed into reading "Captain Barnes and the Law," he admitted it was extremely good and even finished the magazine, grudgingly admitting that he had enjoyed it.

I have no complaint about the format, except as I stated before—the excess printing on the cover. In fact, I don't know how you manage to keep it cheaper and as good (if not better) than your rivals, for only 20c.

The only story I did not enjoy was "Go To the Ant". I guess I am too used to human or animal-inhabited worlds to get used to ants.

I agree with Ann Nelson on your illustrations, the only difference being that I



color them with pencil crayons and use them in my scrapbook, too.

Finlay is tops in art, and as long as you have him, I'll bite.

Last, but not least, I like what you call the "double blurb"; by all means, continue it.

*Margo Hughson, 89 Valley View,  
Kamloops, British Columbia*

(We're cutting down the amount of printing on the covers; whether it'll stay that way depends a lot upon reader response. We want the title-type large enough, and clear enough, so that it can be read at a distance; but I agree that it should not dominate the picture.

Some covers simply wouldn't take to a band at the bottom; with others, it would be all right. The main trouble here, however, is that, more often than not the magazines are placed on the newsstands with just about 1 & 1/2 to 2 inches visible; if we run a title clear across the bottom, then it can't be seen at a glance. This may not sound important to the casual reader, but experience has shown that it often makes a difference. Take our May issue, for example, which features "Equations of Destiny" by John Berryman. Some persons, who may never have purchased *Future*, or any other science-fiction magazine, may be familiar with that name, and stop long enough to look and consider; others may read various science-fiction magazines, now and then, but no particular one regularly. The name might mean something to them, too.

A good many things which seem unimportant, or annoying, to the steady reader have proved to be reliable enough practices—in that they have shown positive results throughout many years of pulp-publishing—to be worth while continuing. It would be different, perhaps if everyone who bought the magazine, and liked it, was a "constant reader"; then the many necessary practices which bring moans and gripes from "fans"—and other readers who are well "sold" on the magazine—could be dropped. I've explained the situation before, and I'm willing to discuss it further; I've tried to show that there was reason, based upon experience, behind these practices. It isn't necessary to pretend that I like them all myself; I don't. But most of them, I really feel, are not as bad as some fans make them out to be; they don't make the stories you liked any less likeable, and if we made all the changes, the new appearance wouldn't make stories you thought bad any better.)

## AND, ON THE OTHER HAND...

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Never, since I first began reading science-fiction, 'way back in my youth

when I read Haggard's books, and "Moons of Mars", have I written but one "fan" letter to any magazine! Therefore I heartily agree with the lady who signs her name Nan Warner—address omitted! It is definitely a waste of good pages to print such sickening letters as you now give space to! Over half of these scorers and praisers alike, never pay the full price for any mag. They haunt the places where magazines are exchanged, and get a second hand one for two of their old ones! Then we, who spend our good quarters for a fresh one, are cheated out of a good short story because of their dull, or would-be witty letters! Most of these people have nothing to do but write such letters; they correspond with each other, but their main ambition in life is to see their names in print! It satisfies their ego to reread their own letters and they swell with pride. They want all the world to know such-and-such a mag has thought so much of their criticism and their writing ability that said mag has published their letters! Miss Warner said a mouthful when she said you should cut out these letters, except when there was some sort of intelligent controversy going on!

Another thing which has always puzzled me is: why is it that a writer, who is known for his stories, can occasionally put one over on the editor, and slip in a story which makes any reader with an ounce of sense, throw away the magazine in disgust? These authors only leave a bad taste in the mouth, for your faith in them as real artisans becomes destroyed and the sight of their name in a magazine prompts one to turn in distaste from that same magazine. Both author and publisher lose by such tripe. Let me put it this way, the editor knows Mr. So-and-So or Miss Doo-funny is a popular writer; therefore Mr. Editor never troubles to read the stories sent in, but publishes them forthwith. Again, maybe five or ten unknown beginners will send in stories which are really good, but Mr. Editor—or one of the office underlings who dislikes work, or wants to get home early—will either toss that Mss. in the wastebasket; or if postage is sent, they will return it *unread* with a rejection slip! "Send the thing back, he has no name, we print stories by big names only".

Sometimes, but seldom, an unknown is pointed out by Lady Luck. The editor, or

underling does read a page of his Mss. and, Glory! It's printed and he gets a check. Maybe he clicks and next thing you know he's *known*, and begins to turn out masterpieces(?) like a machine. But they're all good(?); they're all published for he has a "Name" Yeah, I know! But I am not caring about this letter to be published! You can and will do as you please! But I will have the satisfaction of knowing *if* you do myself and thousands of others who *do* buy your mag, think!

I, myself, spend about \$6.00 a month on magazines, besides books, for we are shut-ins and that is all the pleasure we have. When we find a story that is really good, and we actually *live* that tale along with characters in it! If you do print this frank opinion, I also ask you: Do not print my address, as everyone who is a punk critic will write me passionately angry letters, and my fingers aren't as nimble as they used to be!

Mrs. Katherine Rogers

(You ask us a loaded question, much like the famous, "Have you stopped beating your wife? Answer 'yes' or 'no'." It's possible that, at times, stories have been returned to authors, unread, from a given editor or editors; it's also possible that stories have been accepted, unread. Neither is common practice, although there is one type of circumstances where the first practice may be defended: that is where an author sends in a mss. which has been incorrectly prepared for professional submission, or where mss. of types and lengths which the editor *has repeatedly stated that the magazine does not use*, are sent in.

Quite frankly, I have returned weird tales, or 70,000 word novels, addressed to our science-fiction magazines without reading them; it would be a complete waste of time, because I couldn't use either category, regardless of how good any given exhibit might be. And I receive mss. typed single-space, or handwritten, etc., now and then; these are not read, either.

If you went into a store and asked to see what they had in the way of hand-lotion, for example—which, let us say, is all you needed at the moment—would you waste your time looking over a display of toothbrushes which the clerk brought out, instead? Or, if he came back with hand-lotion in little paper drinking cups, saying that he didn't have any bottles, sorry, or didn't know the stuff was supposed to come in bottles, would you consider his wares worth your consideration?

So far as "name" authors "slipping by

the editor" with a story that "any reader with an ounce of sense" would find disgusting, this is a pretty meaningless complaint, since it defines "sense" in terms of the "disgust"; in other words, by the way you put the question, any reader who does *not* find the story *you* disliked "disgusting", just hasn't an "ounce of sense". Also, since you do not name any *specific* story, we have no way of knowing to what extent your dislikes may tally with those of other readers. In a given instance, your opinion *may* be shared by a sizeable majority of readers, but you can never be sure. I have yet to read a story—either one I accepted or one I read elsewhere—which *everyone I asked, or heard from*, agreed upon 100%; some which I haven't cared for too much have also shown up badly in the tally-sheets—but there was always someone who thought it good. And in *Future* there's never been a *unanimous* reaction on anything we've published.

## CHALLENGE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I read with interest and enjoyment the May issue of FSF; and, as usual, the contents were far above average—especially as the magazine sells for five cents below its competitors.

However, the article by Mr. de Camp, "The Mislaid Tribes", can stand a little examination; and I would be grateful if you would transmit this to that gentleman for his possible edification and future dissertation.

To begin, Mr. de Camp states: "...nothing in Irish legend about Jewish immigrants. I recommend; "Secret Societies In Ancient Ireland," *The New Ages* Vol. LIX no. 4

Another: "Jeremiah actually prophesied a never-failing Davidic monarchy, which forecast was plainly falsified by the fall of King Zedekiah, showing the prophesies of Jeremiah to be no more infallible than any other sermons." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Zedekiah was led to rebellion against The Chaldean by the *seeming* contradictions of the prophesies of Ezekial and Jeremiah. Jeremiah forecast that The King would go to Babylon; while Jeremiah foretold that The King would not see Babylon; though seemingly contradictory in their import, yet how truly all came to pass. The King, Zedekiah, was brought before the Chaldean Monarch at Riblah.



The pagan monarch wreaked terrible vengeance upon Judah's unfortunate Prince. After compelling him to witness the slaughter of his children, and the lords of his household, The Chaldean put out his eyes and sent him to Babylon in chains; where he remained until his death. Thus were fulfilled the prophesies of Ezekial and Jeremiah. The King died in Babylon; yet saw it not; and Jerusalem and her Temple were delivered into the hands of a pagan Prince.

Further: "...so that for a post-exilic Jew to trace his descent from this or that tribe was merely a quaint affectation. etc." Mr. de Camp is completely wrong in this assertion. I can assure him that the Sojourners returning from The Captivity were perfectly capable of identifying themselves as true descendants of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. The manner in which they did this is an authentic part of Masonic lore, which I cannot divulge to the profane. The Mighty Solomon, in his wisdom, foresaw complications such as these, and made provision for the same. The harps of The Children Of The Captivity hung idly upon

the willows by the waters of Babel; and the True Descendants of Benjamin and Judah remained pure and uncontaminated by the paganism of the Chaldean Empire. As for: "...the cult of the storm-god Yahveh, with the result that Yahvism gradually became the dominant religion in Palestine." This is tied up, and depends upon the premise that: "...everything before that in the Old Testament— Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses— is more or less legendary." Not so, Mr. de Camp! That is an opinionated assertion, and is the result of insufficient knowledge.

I would like to state that I am not a student of theology; but am, in my own small way, a Masonic scholar. Mr. de Camp, in his article, has unwittingly blundered across things that Masons do know something about, and have a great many facts in their possession regarding this subject.

If the writer of this article, Mr. de Camp, desires to actually know the truth, I invite his correspondence. If I cannot answer his questions, I will be happy to refer him to more erudite sources than myself.

Dr. L. W. Carpenter, 442 East "E" Street, Elizabethton, Tenn.

[Turn Page]

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## RIPOSTE

Dear Sir:

We are consistent readers of science-fiction, being especially interested in the manner in which some writers anticipate real but mostly unknown facts of nature and the potential future.

We have naturally followed Mr. L. Sprague de Camp's work for many years, and have as much respect for him as a fiction writer as we do not have for his abilities and fairness as a critic.

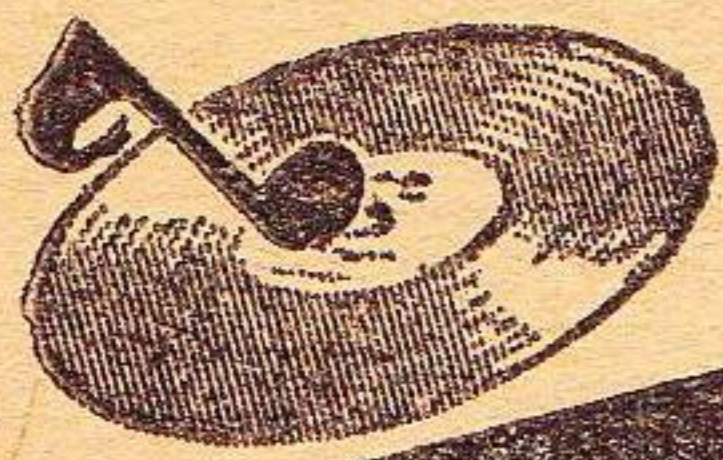
We have in mind particularly his letter on p. 94 of your May issue. He says: "As for the 'Secret Doctrine,' about 60 years ago William E. Coleman traced down the actual sources used by Madame Blavatsky and learned that, far from being based upon occult records written on palm leaves in the Senzar language in Atlantis and purveyed to H.P.B. in trances by her Mahatmas, the work and its predecessor, 'Isis Unveiled,' were derived from contemporary occult and scientific books."

We know about Coleman. He wrote Madame Blavatsky demanding forthwith to be put into communication with the Mahatmas. She replied with a statement of the requirements to be met for such a juxtaposition. (They are difficult.) Coleman happened to be a *paranoid megalomaniac*, who then, on the strength of that one "insult," as he considered it, devoted most of the rest of his life to hating Madame Blavatsky and acting accordingly. It would be hard to find a single paragraph with as many provable falsehoods in it as this one which de Camp writes on Coleman's "authority." In the first place, H.P.B. made no mention of Senzar records in "Isis Unveiled," and never said they were written in Atlantis. She did state in regard to all her work that it was compiled mainly from others; with regard to the "Secret Doctrine," she said that it was "a nosegay of culled flowers; only the string that binds them is my own." She never went into trances nor claimed to. She and her friends denied that she was a trance-medium, or any other kind, and no description can be found by any eye-witness, friend or enemy, of any trance that she ever went into. Coleman's so-called "exposure" can be easily seen for what it is by simply reading "Isis". It is true that Madame Blavatsky, who was accustomed to Oriental rather than Western

usage in the matter of quotations, probably did not consider it necessary to list every quotation by line after having liberally referred the reader to books in question; and anyone with the kind of memory that she had, and who had covered about everything in philosophy, will be found quoting, often in the same language, extracts from other works without intentional plagiarism. As said, however, the distortion in Coleman's report is best evident by reading the book itself. As to her being "profoundly ignorant in all branches of knowledge"—the inquirer might ask several hundred people in all branches of intellectual life who met her personally; and better yet, read what she wrote.

Also by reading the book, the misrepresentation evident in the remarks about the "Secret Doctrine" can be discovered quickly enough. The book was not "based" on the authors and works named; it was based on the "Stanzas of Dzyan" and the secret commentaries thereon, both of which occupy the primary space and a great part of the book. Mr. de Camp will have a sweet time trying to find these anywhere but in Blavatsky. The other authors that he mentions constitute a very partial and poor list of what she actually quoted in support of the thesis developed in the "Stanzas." Significantly, all the recognized scientific sources are ignored, as are all her statements about the then undiscovered laws of matter—since verified for the most part. This means omitting mention of the most important, evidential, and significant aspects of Blavatsky's work. Consistently with this misrepresentation, de Camp mentions only the books of Madame Blavatsky's enemies and entirely ignores the numerous ones written in her defense. He refers, for instance, to V. S. Solovyoff. But *which* Solovyoff? This character first approached Madame Blavatsky with considerable doubts; then became a "convert" and ardent follower; attested to her "phenomena;" had a visit one night from a "Mahatma" which he described to all and sundry. He turned violently against H.P.B. at a later date, and the best explanation he could give for the Mahatma visit was that he must have been nuts; alternating with the possibility of her having hypnotized him. The degree of his

[Turn To Page 92]



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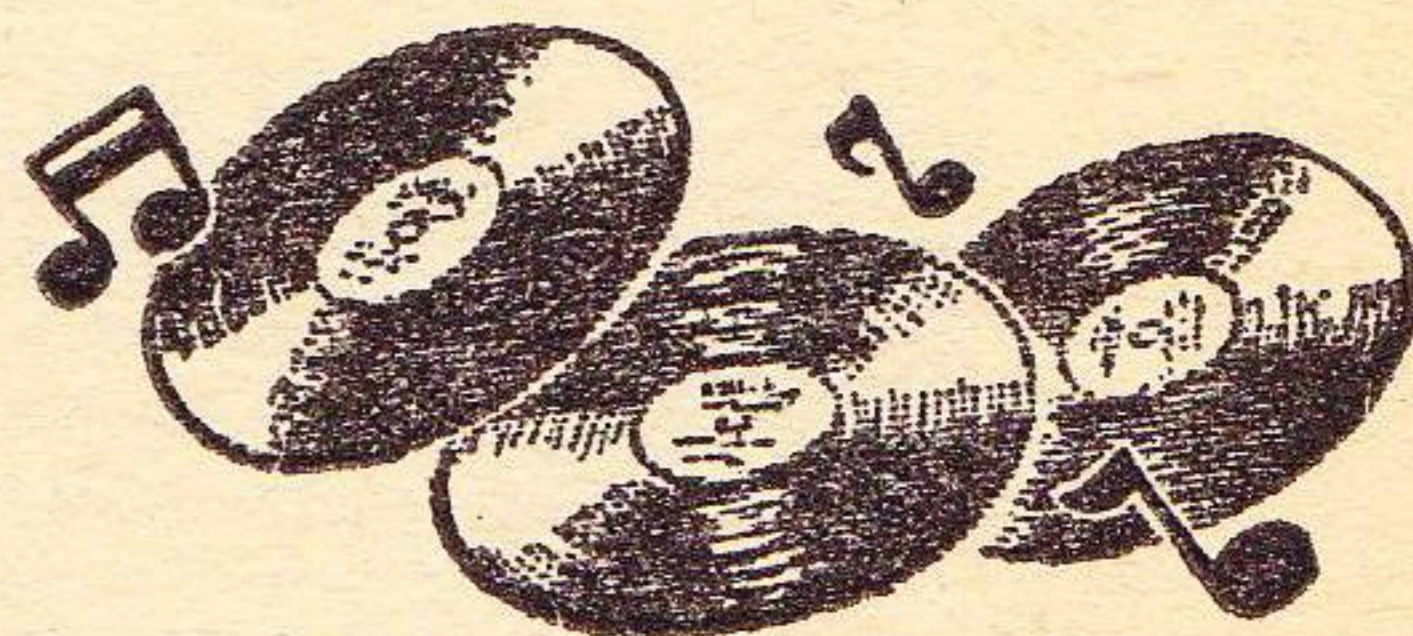
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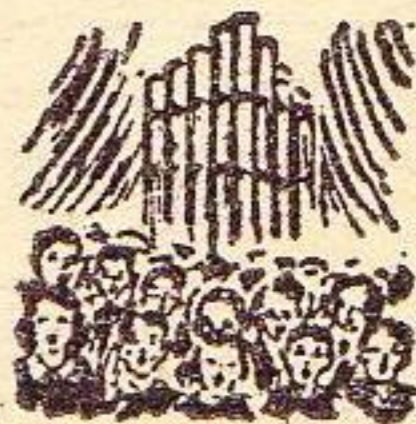
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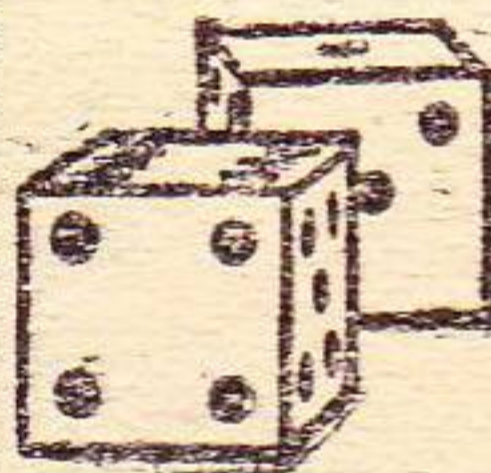
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moral responsibility may be judged by the fact that in submitting a letter from H.P.B. for publication in French, he mutilated it in such a manner as to make her appear to confess to fraud. He got caught on this deal.

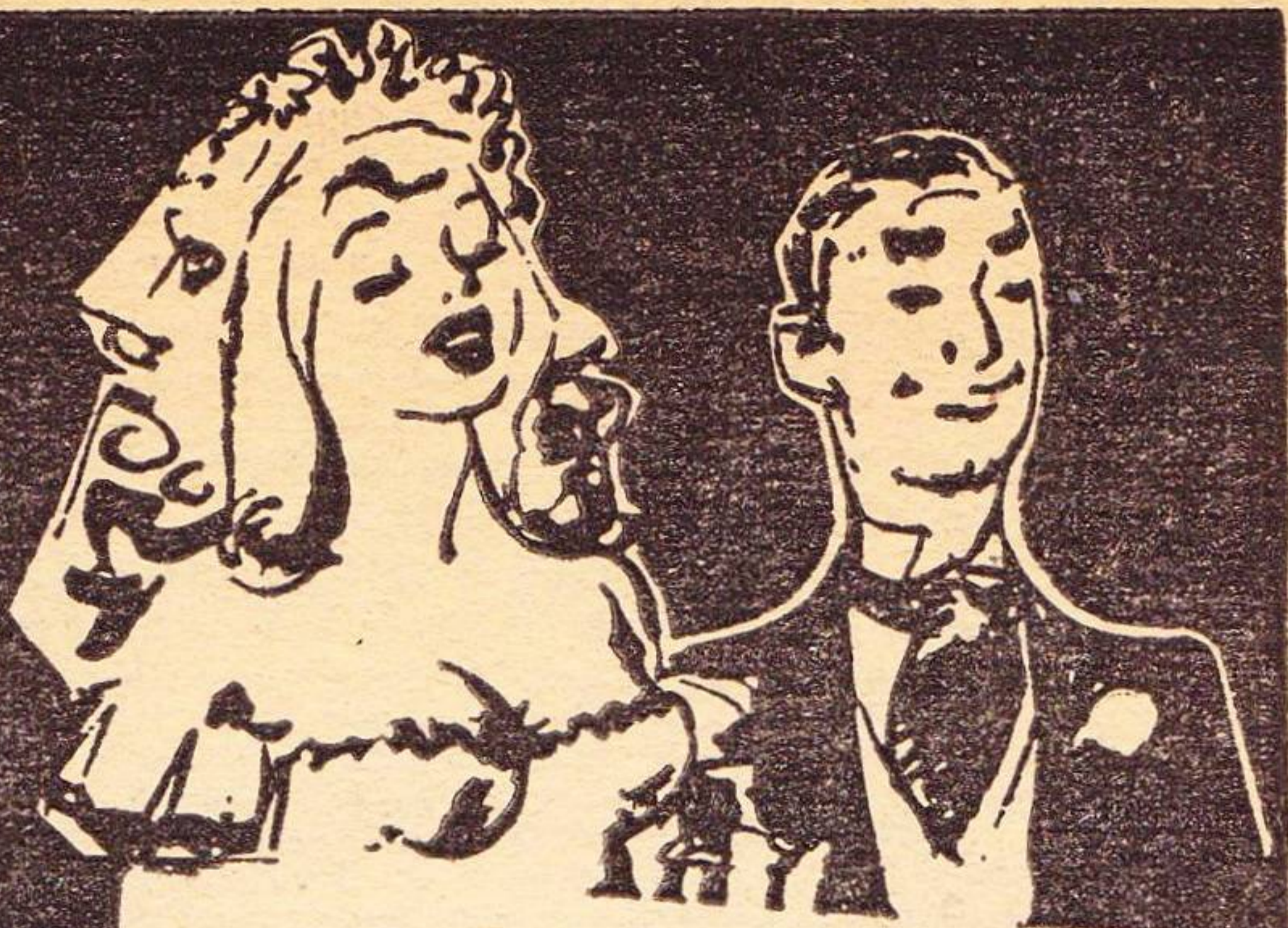
De Camp says: "Therefore, when Rawson claimed to have seen secret documents in the Vatican Library, which appeared to be sources for 'Isis', I conclude that Rawson was romanticizing, especially as others have found the Vatican Library open to qualified scholars of all creeds, without any hint of a 'secret' annex where the abhorrent 'Necronomicon' and similar horrific works are kept." In other words, the eminent painter lied. What he said was: "Through a warm personal friendship with Pope Pius IX, and by special favor of the Pontiff, I was allowed, under surveillance, to examine some books in the secret chamber of the Vatican Library absolutely forbidden to everybody but the Papal Secretary and members of the Sacred College of Cardinals." Obviously, "scholars of all creeds"—"qualified" or not—are not going to get a hint of such a secret annex around the Vatican. It takes a special personal friendship with a particular Pope. We know the Catholic Policy in regard to such works. A friend of ours, who was studying for the priesthood in a Jesuit college, found out the hard way. He got accidentally into a "forbidden" stack in the library, found 'Isis,' sneaked it out, and got caught. He was allowed to stay in college on condition of not telling anybody else about the book. The reasons will be obvious to any reader thereof. De Camp's "fairness" is also shown by his trying to make a fictional association between H.P.B. and the "Necronomicon," a fictional book invented by Lovecraft some thirty years after Madame Blavatsky's death.

Mr. de Camp's method of criticising anything he doesn't like—and it is about time somebody called him on it—may be summarized as follows:

- (1) If the fellow isn't guilty, how did he get arrested?
- (2) Any witness for the defense must be a shady character; otherwise he wouldn't be on that side.
- (3) Any witness for the prosecution must be reliable, or he wouldn't have

[Turn To Page 94]

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## COMBAT

Dear Bob:

Many thanks for forwarding the letters from Dr. Carpenter and *Theosophical Notes*.

To take up the former: I shall be glad to look up *The New Age*, but meantime I note that the standard source of Irish legendary pseudo-history, the "Book of Invasions" (*Leabhar Gabhala*) says Ireland was invaded by the Fomarions from the Western Ocean; the Firbolgs from Greece; Partholan's band; the Nemedians from Scythia; the Tuatha de Danann from Greece; and the Milesians from Spain—not a Jew or Egyptian in the lot. (R. E. Howard fans note: the Fomorian king Conann was slain in battle with the Nemedians.) And Jeremiah says plainly: "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Isreal." (xxxiii, 17) But David wanted one soon enough with the fall of Zedekiah in 587 BC. The monarchy was re-established by Johanan Hyrcanus between 135 and 104 BC, but extinguished again, for good, with the death of Herod Agrippa II in 100 AD. So my statement about the failure of that particular prophecy stands.

As for the inside dope on Hebrew history to which Dr. Carpenter claims access but which he may not divulge, I should be glad to hear these "facts"—but until I do I can only form my opinions on the basis of what I do know. Finally, the statement about true early Hebrew history versus the Biblical version is that held by a respectable body of modern Biblical scholarship—one that, however, approaches this disordered anthology of early Hebrew literature with unscientific *a priori* assumptions of its verity or sanctity.

Now for *Theosophical Notes*: My anonymous critic describes Coleman as a "paranoid megalomaniac". Is that a professional psychiatric opinion? If so, who made the

## DOWN TO EARTH

diagnosis? If not, who's calling names now?

In the first volume of "The Secret Doctrine", p. 64, Mme. Blavatsky says there exists a frightfully old book in the Senzar language, written back in the time of Atlantis, whence the "Sepher Yetzirah", the "Puranas", and other works of occult wisdom are derived. Then in the "Proem" on p. 69 she states: "An archaic Manuscript—collection of palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire, and air, by some specific and unknown process—is before the writer's eye." (Adyar ed., 1888, which some Theosophical sects deem uncanonical.) The impression I got from HPB's nebulous prose was a hint that the ancient book of p. 64 and the ms of p. 69 are both the "Book of Dzyan", which she presently begins to translate and elucidate, though one cannot draw hard-and-fast inferences from such wildly chaotic writing.

There is, however, no mystery about the source of the early part of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*. It is an obvious paraphrase of the "Hymn of Creation" in the "Rig-Veda", as a comparison of the two compositions will readily show. There is one translation of the latter in Lillie's book, and another in Lin Yutang's "Wisdom of China and India" (p. 15).

As for the secret annex to the Vatican Library, that's in the same category as Dr. Carpenter's Masonic secrets; interesting if true, but harder evidence is required before I, at least, will believe in it. I'm sorry if the "Necronomicon" offends—but one of HPB's more endearing qualities was an ebullient sense of humor, a virtue not all her followers share. I have read practically all of HPB's writings, including her unimpressive efforts at fantasy-fiction, but not including all of "Isis", in which I got bogged down. This last is, as she admitted, one of the most confused, disorganized, and generally unreadable hodgepodes ever penned.

L. Sprague de Camp

(Having no first-hand information on any side of this melee, I'll keep out of it, except to note that calling anyone a "paranoid megalomaniac" doesn't make him one, or necessarily prove all his contentions wrong. The pot calls the kettle "black"—at which point the issue is *not the color of the pot*, but the accuracy of the pot's observation and report.)



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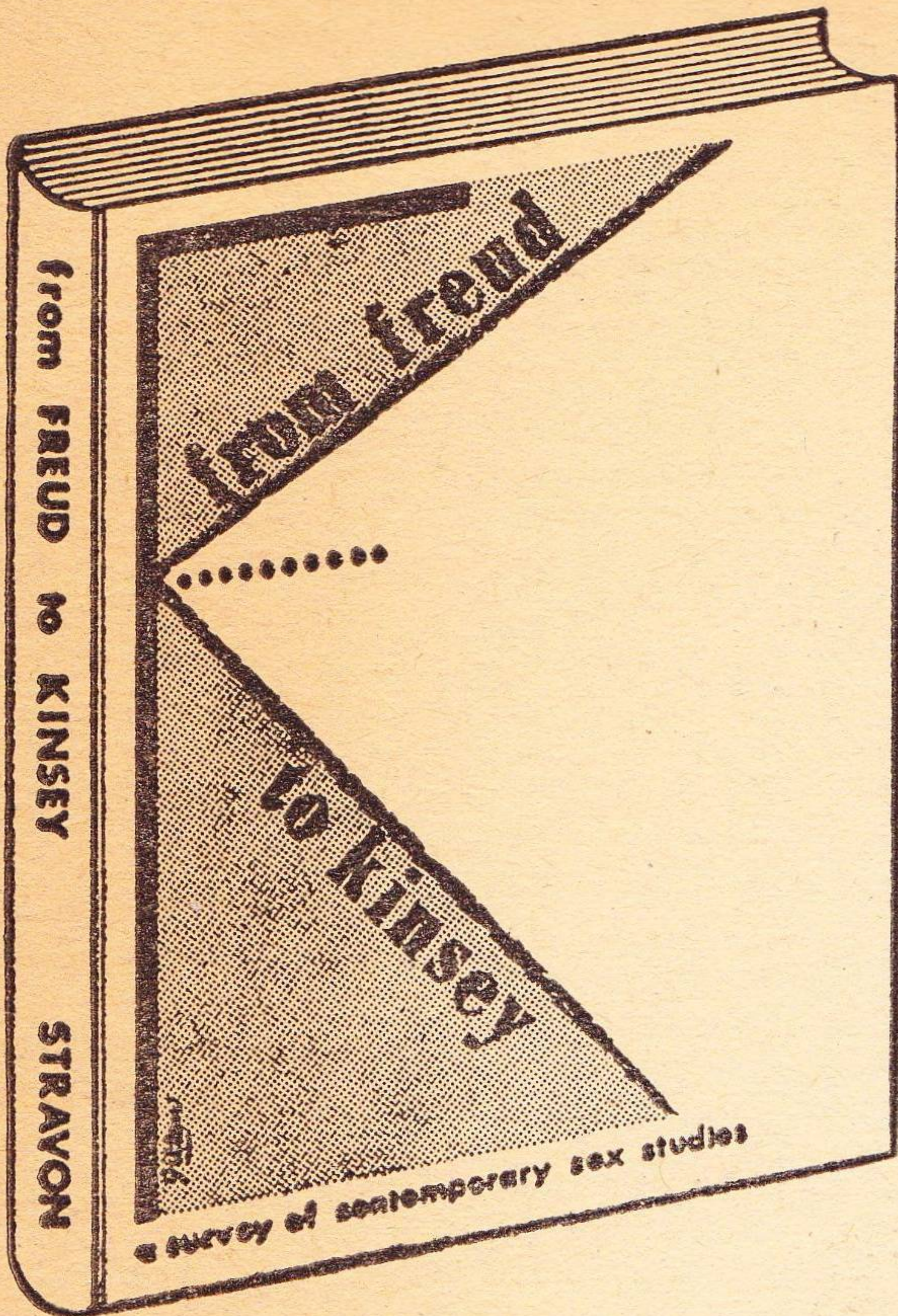
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# THE RECKONING

A Report on Your  
Votes and Comments

Three authors escaped any slings or arrows, in the May ratings: Berryman, del Rey, and Raboid; and only two votes listed the West novelet as a liability. I'm sorry to note that a clear majority felt that "Rejection Slip" should have received just that. Editorial error acknowledged, though I can't help muttering, "But I liked it". I'm continuing the query on the series idea, for those who haven't yet voted, and won't tabulate them until the returns on our November issue, which will wind up the "Great Legend" stories, are in.

Final scores for the May issue, then, were:

1. Equations For Destiny (Berryman)		2.27
2. Forgive Us Our Debts (del Rey)	tied with	
The Twice-Told Man (Raboid)		3.05
3. Thy Days Are Numbered (West)		3.42
4. The Rememberers (Blair)	tied with	
The Mislaid Tribes (de Camp)		4.42
5. Rejection Slip (Singer)		5.88

Actually, there was a difference of one third-place decimal-point between Blair and Sprague, but I felt that listing the difference would be splitting hairs too fine, and the fact that de Camp drew a number of 1st place votes came into it.

There's a strange situation in the letter-voting, since Willis Freeman and Glen Monroe actually came 1st and 3d, (the latter tying with de Camp). But both gentlemen wrote me, after the issue appeared, saying they preferred to waive the illustrations in case a lot of votes came their way. So, this being the case, originals go to (1) Stan Skirvin (2) L. Sprague de Camp (3) Alice Bullock. PS-Nan Warner was close behind Alice!

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★ Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" beside your dislikes.

- 1. The Gods Fear Love (Hunter) .....
- 2. Final Barrier (Nourse) .....
- 3. Small Fry (Collins) .....
- 4. We Will Inherit.. (West) .....
- 5. Confidence (Fyfe) .....
- ★ —6. Facts of Life (Dryfoos) .....

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- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....

General Comment .....

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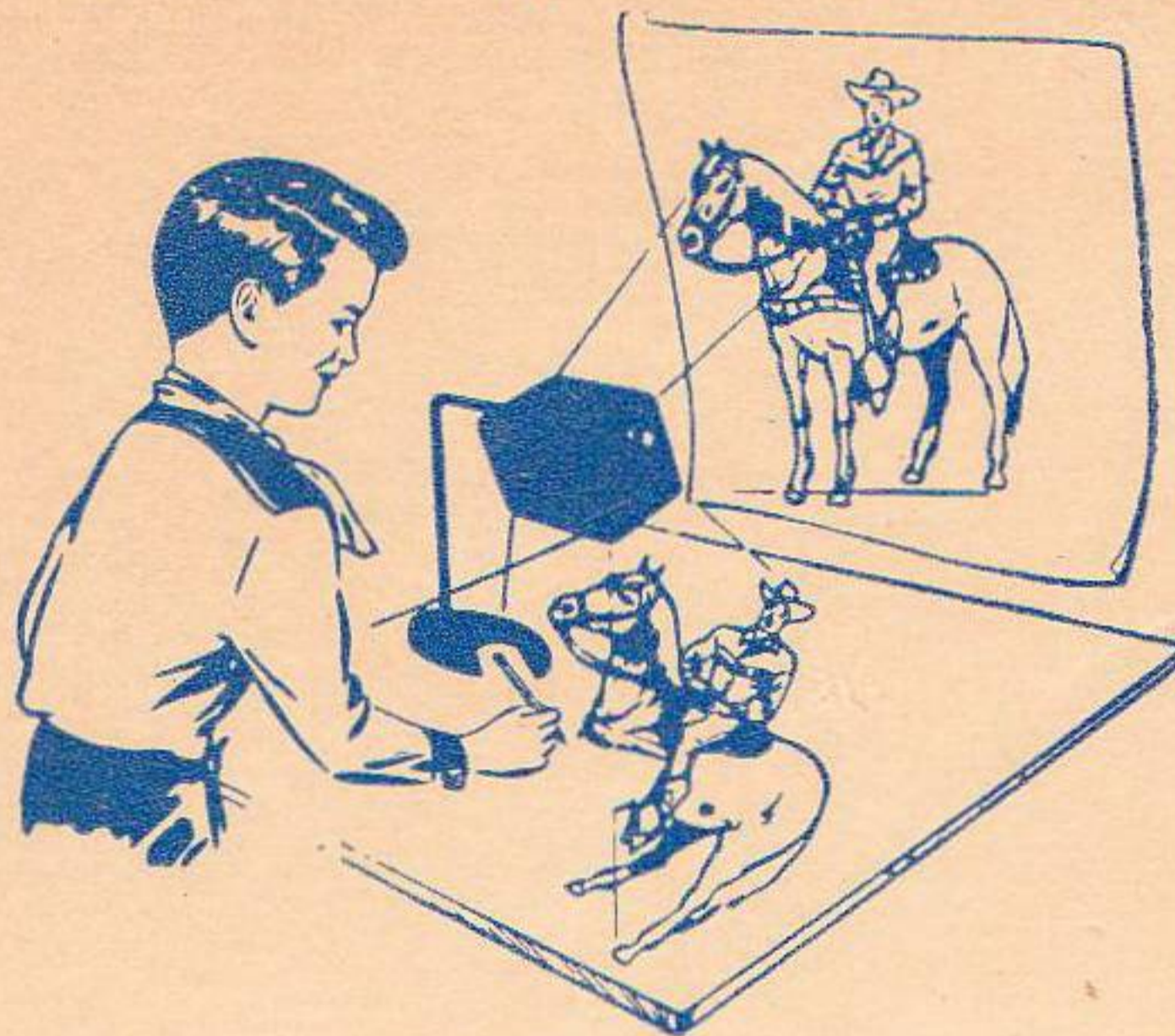
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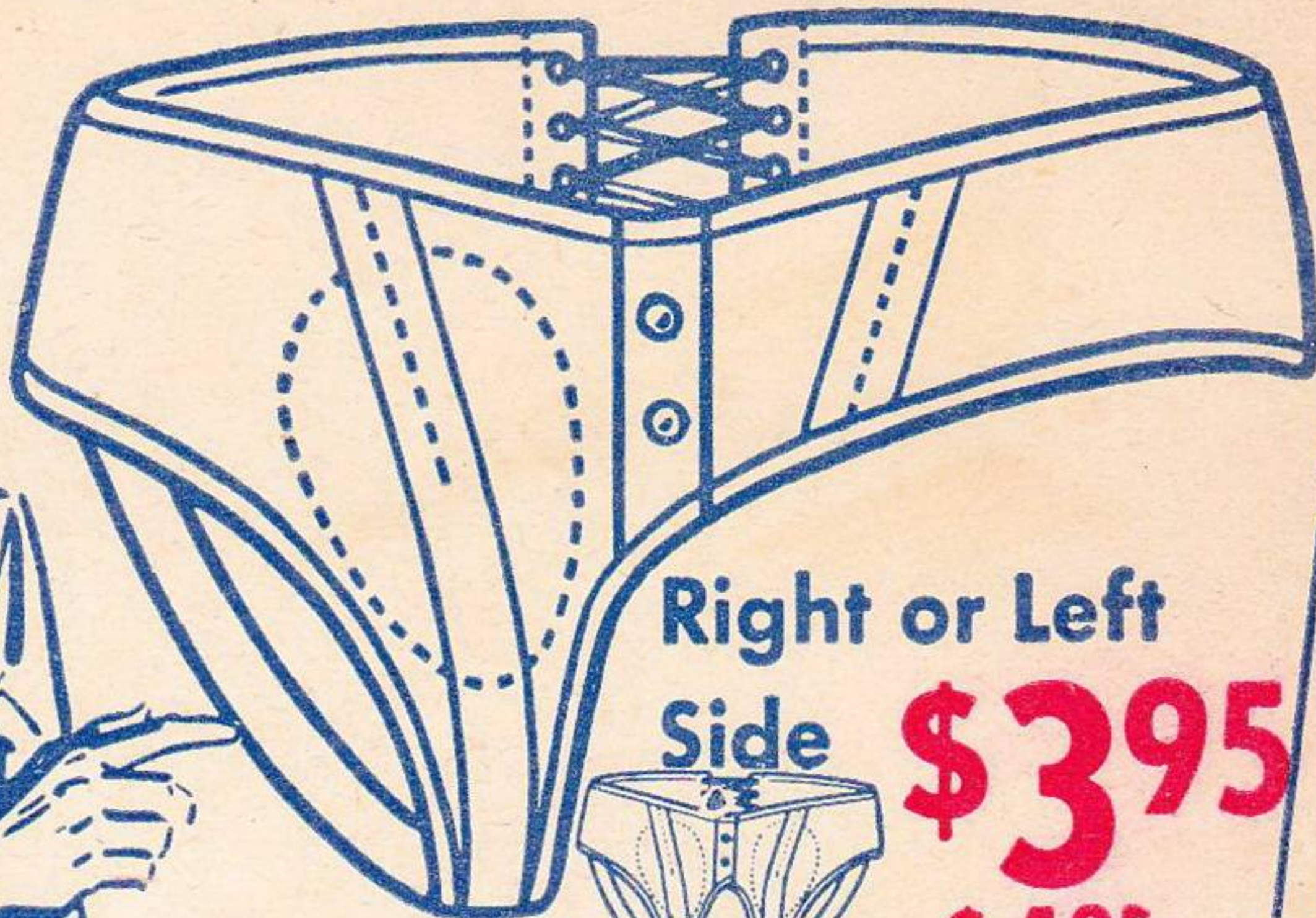
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