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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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OCTOBER, 1954

NOVELET

OF SUCH AS THESE.....*Irving Cox, Jr.* 26

SHORT STORIES

DEAD ON DEPARTURE.....*Milton Lesser* 6
MEDDLER.....*Philip K. Dick* 61
DESPITE ALL VALOR.....*Algis Budrys* 73
THE CRIME THERAPIST.....*Marion Zimmer Bradley* 93
CONVENTIONAL ENDING.....*Theodore R. Cogswell* 106
THE SILENT COLONY.....*Bob Silverberg* 111

ARTICLE

BLAME IT ON SUNSPOTS.....*R. S. Richardson* 87

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL..... 4
THE RECKONING..... 86
READIN' AND WRITHIN' (Book Reviews).....*Damon Knight* 101
INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION.....*Robert A. Madle* 114
DOWN TO EARTH..... 121

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“MATURITY” IN SCIENCE FICTION

THERE are quotation marks around the word in the title, and for a very definite reason: to draw your attention to the fact that the word is being used in a special sense. Science-fictionists have been talking about “maturity” in science fiction for some time; but they have not meant, in such discussions, that science fiction was ripe, or that it is in a perfected condition, or that it has achieved its full development. Those who claim “maturity” for present-day science fiction have meant that it is now being produced mainly for an adult audience, and for an adult audience with generally high literary tastes. There is the inference that science fiction is now worth the serious critic’s attention.

An interested outsider might ask, at this point, “What are the differences between ‘mature’ and ‘immature’ science fiction?”

Let’s examine the elements largely found in early magazine science fiction, and note if some of the outstanding ones persist to the present

day. Perhaps some of the differences will be apparent in such a comparison.

1. *Pedantry as a base.* In its early years, science fiction was regarded chiefly as a vehicle for scientific lectures and speculations. In Jules Verne’s “Robur the Conqueror”, for example, we get a history of aeronautics up to the time of Robur’s wonderful machine; the action consists largely of an air voyage around the world, wherein the author is thus able to discourse on world geography, topography, etc. Characters in such stories could be often divided into the lecturers and the lecturees, and such plots and action as were present were mostly devised to lead from one seminar to another.

In present-day science fiction, while discourses and explanations may play a part, they play no larger a part than in any other kind of fiction. There is enough exposition to portray the background convincingly, just as a story in a present-day

steel mill has to work in some details which will be commonplace to a man who works there, but will be necessary for the orientation of the reader who knows nothing of it.

2. *Idiot, Phoithboinder, and “Ronnie Who?”* plots. The idiot plot (by no means confined to science fiction) is one where the story is held together solely by the fact that the chief characters behave like idiots. All the trouble could have been easily avoided in the first place, if someone hadn't been so incredibly stupid; and, in order to keep the story going, the stupidity persists, takes new forms, leaps from character to character like a plague whenever it becomes obvious that otherwise the problems are going to be solved very simply. A favorite science fiction version was the inventor or scientist whom no one would believe, and who managed to make an imbecilic error, or otherwise louse himself up, when he finally got a chance to show he was right. Meanwhile, cosmic mice continued to nibble away at Earth, etc.

In present-day science fiction, the idiot plot, where it appears, is more likely to take Hollywood and Soap Opera forms: if she hadn't been such a little fool, she'd have listened to him explain that it was really his long-lost sister and not his mistress; and if he hadn't been such an idiot, he wouldn't have gone out and gotten so plastered he wound up with a real scarlet woman, etc.

The phoithboinder plot (with a tip of my hat to Colonel Stoopnagle, inventor of the phoithboinder) devolves upon the fact that our heroes can invent any kind of gimmick, weapon, or whatever they may need — when the pinch is strong enough. This form of response to challenge does not make for an enduring story, or believable people, or anything else worth reading: it merely proves that the situation wasn't really very bad in the first place, and the author was making a sucker out of the reader by pretending the heroes were in mortal danger. Obviously, even if someone gets hurt or tortured by Things, it's all a fake — because the heroes have already proved they can boind foith.

In present-day science fiction, the phoith is most likely to be psychic rather than tangible, and our heroes boind paraphysically, juggling telepathy, teleportation, telekenesis and tell a woman as the last resort.

The “*Ronnie Who?*” plot (with hardly any thanks to whoever dreamed up the interminable shaggy-dog story whose non-punch line is “*Ronnie Who?*”) is found only in very long stories, jam-packed with excitement and derring-do which, in the end, turns out to have been pointless — unless you are interested in action for its own sake.

One example is the story dealing with the exhausting search for a mysterious weapon which alone can finish off the menace; at the end, it

[turn to page 128]



DEAD ON DEPARTURE

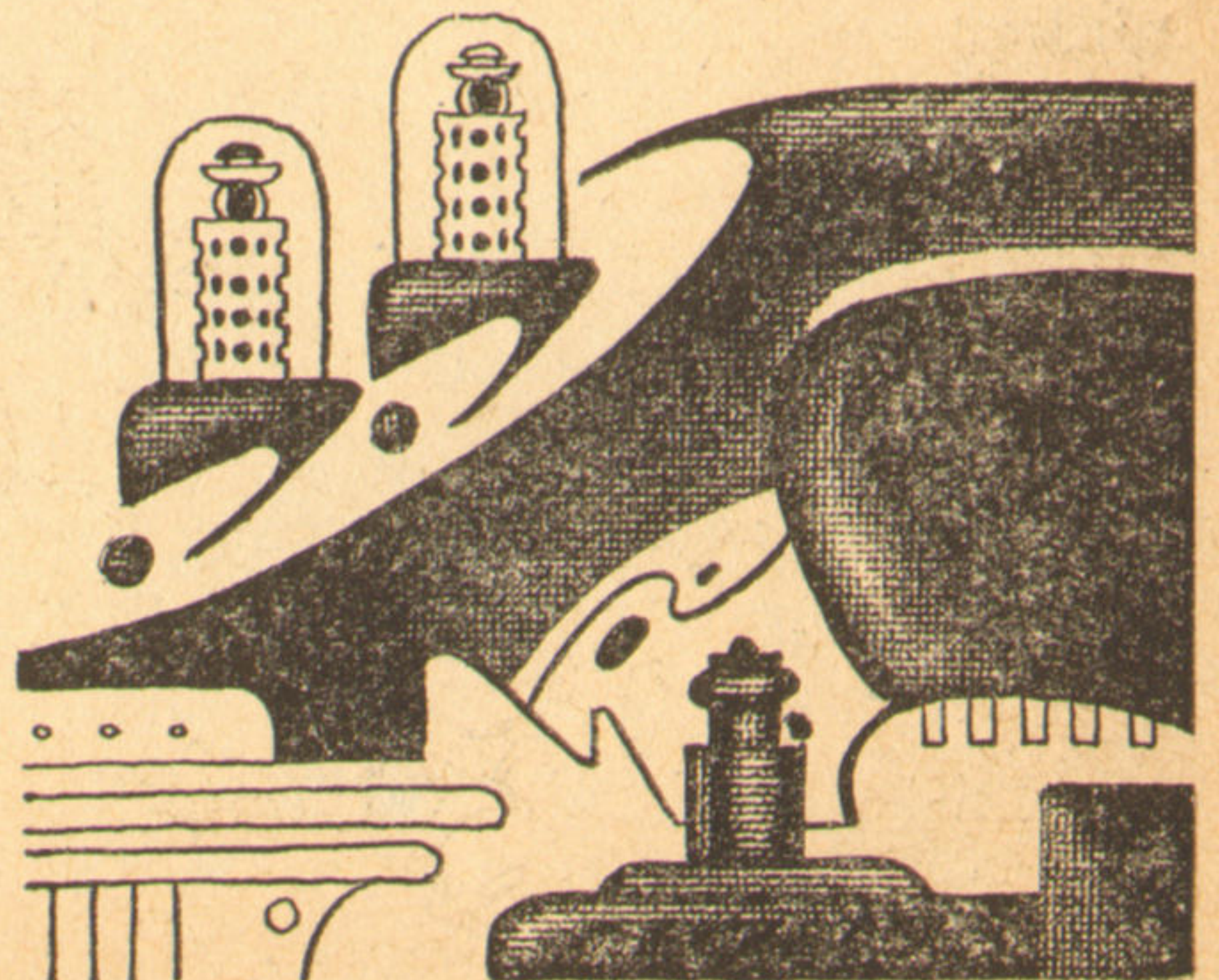
If you have a goal, if you think you're going somewhere you want to go, then perhaps the jagged edges of the here-and-now can be blunted . . .

By MILTON LESSER

"Oh, they're much better off that way, Doctor. They have their own world and they look hopefully to the future."

"Well . . ."

"If only you could get aboard one of the ships and see, but of course, that's impossible."



illustrated by FREAS



Armas

STATUES cluttered up the spaceship. Statues of spacemen and spacewomen blocked the radar screen, one tall woman with red polish on her fingernails forever pointing at a pip on the screen. A gray-haired statue sat at the pilot table, muscular hand inches from a lever, poised. Other statues stood cemented in your way in the corridors. You had to walk around them and you said it was queer because sometimes you'd see a foot resting on air as if waiting to take a step. Men and women statues and a few children statues, faces scrubbed but hair oddly not in place, slumbered in the bunk rooms. One woman statue stood stonily naked under a running shower, beautiful in her lack of motion with the water gleaming on her white skin; all the men visitors stopped and gaped. Jill made Lonnie turn away for he was ten and beginning to understand things, and he shouldn't see a naked woman like that while other men leered — even if she were a statue.

You should think they'd get in the crew's way, thought Jill. *And so realistic.*

"The main salon has been emptied for us," said the guide. Everyone followed him to the main salon, past the statues in the corridor, some with their mouths open as if they were talking; some carved as if to walk but eternally on the brink of taking just one step; some leaning with their elbows on the

bulkheads, their legs crossed easily. You wondered what held them up.

The real people, a dozen of them including Lonnie and his mother Jill, entered the main salon and soon sat around on the comfortable lounge chairs. Someone had thought to paint the signs of the Zodiac, glowing in three dimensions and in color, on the walls of the salon. It was very appropriate.

"What did you think of the statues?" said the guide, a trim man in a tailored, conservative uniform.

"Extraordinary."

"Beautiful."

"So real."

"Wax?"

The guide lit a perfumed cigarette, blew smoke rings and scented the salon delicately.

"I should think they'd get in the crew's way," said Jill.

"They are the crew," said the guide, talking to children, "and the passengers."

"Are the crew?"

"The crew?"

"No!"

"Yes," said the guide. "If you wondered why no one comes back from the stars, this is your answer. A thousand years to reach the Sirius System."

Someone laughed. "Oh, come off it."

"Really . . ."

"You were brought here to change your mind," said the guide. "Knowing the facts, we anticipate

it; most of you will change your mind and go home. Everything at home will be dead a thousand years when you reach Sirius. No news from home, no letters, no messages. Visitors, maybe, if they start out a year or two after you. Your local registration agencies are instructed to list you as Dead on Departure."

"He's not joking."

"Lord, it's like traveling through time. A thousand years."

A MAN stood up, scowling. Plump and approaching middle age, he wore expensive clothing. "My wife's been nagging, so I thought a trial separation would do us good. A trial separation." He chuckled at some obscure joke. "I'm going home." He got to his feet, waddled across the salon, clomped away down the corridor.

"Good," said the guide. "Any others? We apply a brake to your bodily functions, like slowing down a motion picture. You live a thousand times more slowly than other people; as far as you're concerned, you'll reach Sirius in a year. Subjective time, they call it. You have half an hour to decide." The guide plugged a phone into his ear and began listening to a magazine.

"Well," someone said.

"Yes," said someone else. In the beginning, meaningless little words filled the gap of incomprehension.

"Soon we'll be statues, and maybe people will come and look at us and say but they're so real."

"So what?"

"So what he says."

"What we don't know won't bother us; think the statues saw us?"

"Dunno."

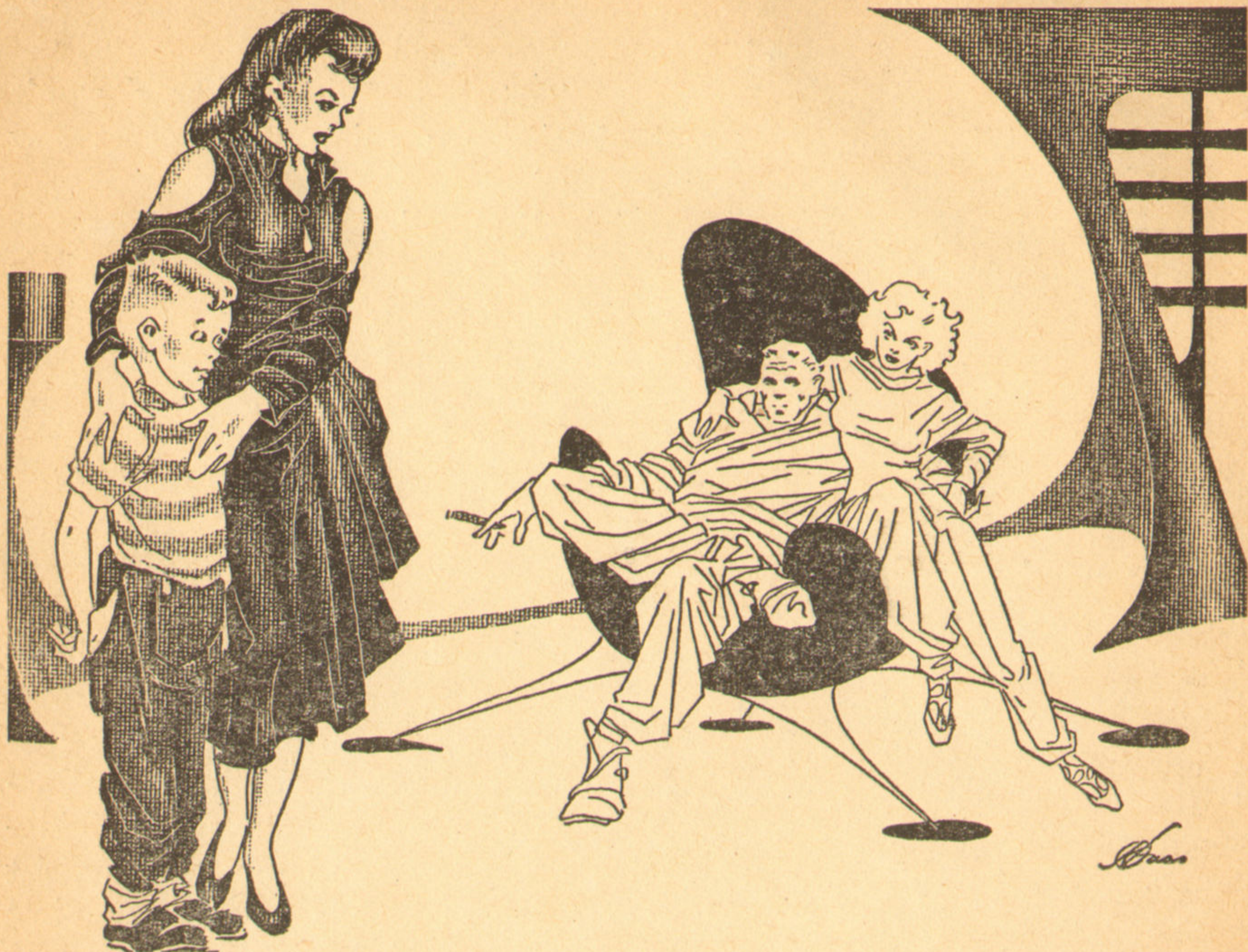
"I'll tell you; they didn't. We move too fast."

"Oh," said a ponderous fat man, secretly delighted. Perhaps he thought he'd keep on visiting the outgoing ships and watching all the slow, slow people.

There was only one other woman, Jill realized, and no children at all for Lonnie to play with. For a thousand years. No, that was silly; one year. The other woman, somewhat younger than Jill and attractive in a tight-sweatered, clinging-slacked, made-up sort of way, sat together with a large, quiet man in a chair not big enough for both of them. The man had his large arm around her shoulder and she'd thrust her tight-sweatered chest up against his side, sitting twisted around on a small part of the chair, one tight-slacked buttock hanging over the edge. Some of the other men in the room looked at her and the large, quiet man seemed uneasy.

"Did the soldier mean I would be a statue and everything?" said Lonnie showing neither pleasure nor aversion at the idea but only a certain amount of curiosity.

"No," Jill told him after a while. It was true enough, for once they were made statues, they'd none of them know it.



"If that babe over there didn't have 'personal property' stamped all over her I might stay and enjoy the ride," declared an ectomorphic young man with gangling legs and sandy hair. Having asserted his masculinity that way, because his guts rebelled at a thousand years, he got up and left the salon.

The tight-sweatered woman's eyes followed him and told him to go off into a corner somewhere and die — quietly or noisily, they didn't care which.

"Once we get started everything will be all right," the large man said, and lapsed into silence once more.

"We're almost ready," said the

guide, pressing his fingers against the arm of his chair and making a clock appear briefly in the curve of Scorpio's stinger on the wall. "How many of you will go on to Sirius?"

INERTIA almost kept the ponderous fat man in his seat, but after a time, while he watched four of the remaining ten people leave the room, he climbed to his feet, jowls wagging, breath wheezing in his throat, and lumbered out into the corridor. He took a long time in doing it, moving with the complete gracelessness of a poorly-animated cartoon.

"That leaves five of you," the guide observed. "More than I expected, I must admit. You are sure, all of you? Positively sure?"

I'm doing it for Lonnie as much as myself, Jill told herself. A boy should have a father — to teach him ball-playing, to take him fishing and swimming and hiking, to laugh with him and understand when he cries, not like a mother, but a man.

Already Lonnie had shown signs of being fatherless — hardly ever during the week, unless some mother learned about Lonnie's father. It was on weekends, when none of the other boys would come outside and play with him because they were going somewhere with their fathers. Jill would try her best to make him happy, but really, it wasn't the same. And Lonnie would understand she was trying, and smile when he was supposed to; but he missed his father, who had been on his way to a thousand years away for more than a year.

Maybe I'm rationalizing, Jill thought, for Lord knows I want Joel too, probably more than Lonnie does — his arms around me and his voice in my ear and the way he smiles, and his big gentle hands, and the quiet peaceful way he looks when he sleeps — not like an ex-convict who can't get a decent job, or live in a decent neighborhood on Earth, because in a fit of passion he killed a man once, but like a baby, almost.

And maybe a thousand years in the deep black, echoless nothing

of space, with the stars not dancing nervously like they do through an ocean of air but looking at you steadily, unblinking — without malice but with a bright, clear understanding of all your sins and your unrequited desire to repent — would help. A thousand years rolled into one across the gulf of space with no top, no bottom, not even emptiness really because emptiness has got to fill something . . . perhaps space would have room for expiation, for Joel had killed the man because she . . . but he had forgiven her where she could not forgive herself. Oh, they'd try. She and Lonnie would certainly try.

The guide flamed another perfumed cigarette and made the clock appear in Scorpio again. "It's time," he said, "Goodbye, good luck." He left without another word.

"Kiss me, John," said the tight-sweatered woman, squirming on her part of the chair and thrusting herself more tightly against him. The large man kissed her quietly but thoroughly and Jill began to tell Lonnie stories, so he shouldn't watch, but he was watching anyway.

SOMEONE rushed into the room, breathless. "Had an argument with that skinny little man in the hall. I had to be briefed, and I wasn't briefed, he said. So I told him, 'Brief me,' and he said, 'A thousand years and everyone else will be dead and you'll have no one, absolutely no one, and no memories

that are real. Nothing.' So I laughed and told him it was like being immortal in a way, because everyone you know will be dead almost a thousand years, and you'll just be beginning to live. He looked awful surprised, as if maybe he ought to tell that to someone as a selling-point, or something and he said I could go if I was absolutely sure. Man, was I ever sure! We're immortal almost, and what's the difference if you move like the hour hand of a clock for a thousand years if everyone else around you moves like that too? Man. Jason Carmody is my name."

And Carmody, a tall, thin young man with bright-darting eyes and a rather handsome face, went around the room, shaking everyone's hand with an enthusiastic urgency. He shook Lonnie's hand first, saying, "Hello there. I'm Jason Carmody. Call me Jase." And then he shook Jill's hand; he had a nice, firm grip.

He shook hands with the large quiet man, introducing himself again and with the tight-sweatered girl whose eyes appraised him, and this time said nothing, absolutely nothing. He shook hands with the final passenger, a burly, dark-haired man, neither young nor old, who sat silently in a corner, a magazine-phone plugged in his ear, and a look of almost lewd excitement on his large-featured face.

No one knew it, but while the enthusiastic young man named Jason Carmody went around shaking

hands, they all became statues.

II

AFTER dinner, after meeting the statues who no longer seemed statues because now everyone functioned at the same speed, the half dozen new passengers returned to their lounge, their own private lounge it seemed, for no one bothered them. Jill found a spool of *Boy's Digest* and plugged it into Lonnie's ear, watching him listen avidly. She stood up, stretching languidly, thinking they would retire early, since it had been a trying day for both of them; but when she saw Lonnie's face she decided to let him listen some more.

"Really, we should be a close-knit group, almost like a family," Jason Carmody was saying. "Traveling across a thousand years together, and how many miles?"

"They don't measure it in miles," said the burly, neither young nor old dark-haired man whose name was George Fuller. "Almost nine light years, I think."

"That's right," said Jill.

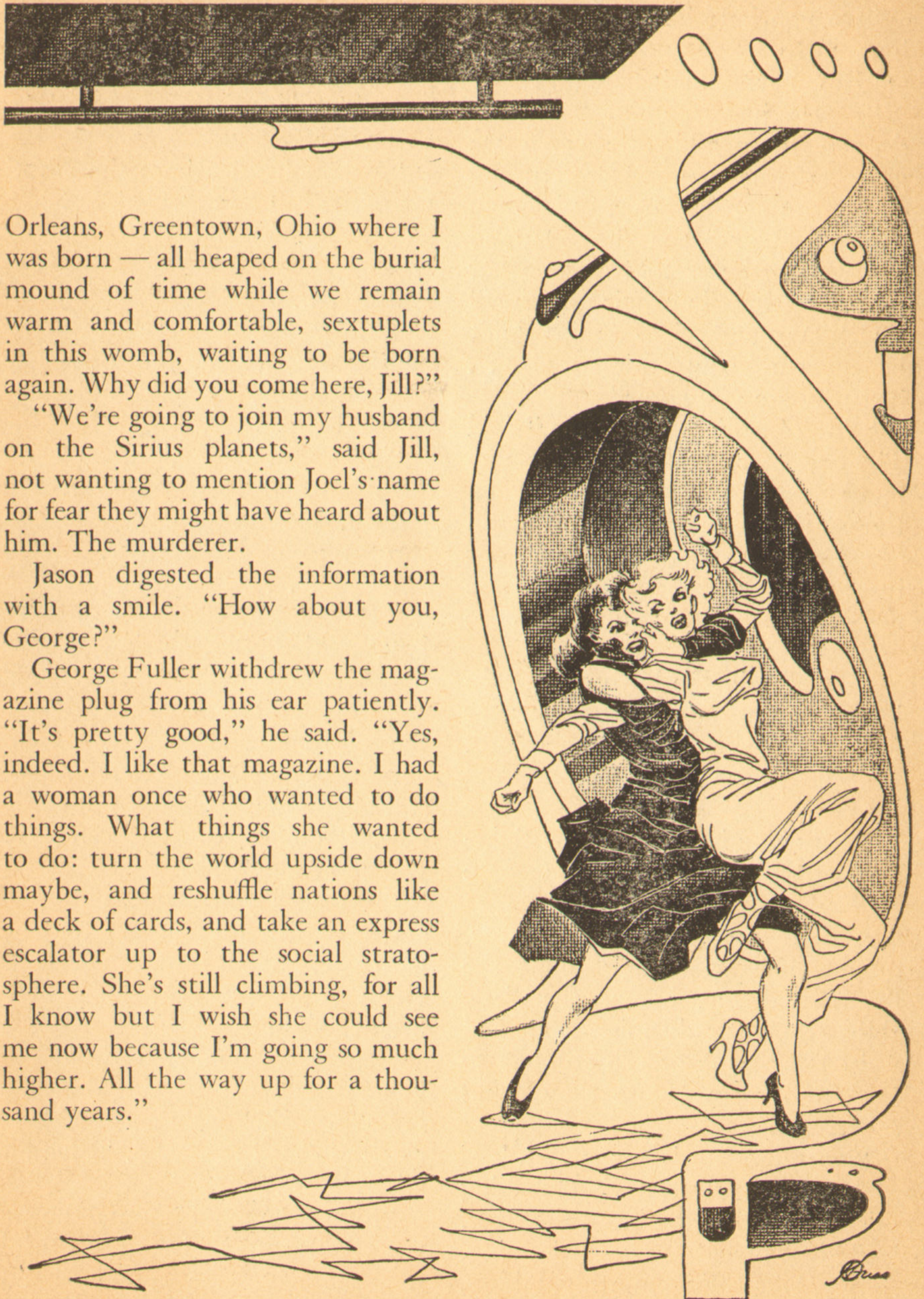
"We are here like brothers and sisters, like twins," said Jason Carmody, looking around. "Sextuplets, I guess. All together in this place, immortal for a thousand years, everyone of us immortal for a thousand years for a different reason. They only forge structural steel to last a century back home. New York will be dust; London crumbled into rust and ruin; Paris, Chicago, New

Orleans, Greentown, Ohio where I was born — all heaped on the burial mound of time while we remain warm and comfortable, sextuplets in this womb, waiting to be born again. Why did you come here, Jill?"

"We're going to join my husband on the Sirius planets," said Jill, not wanting to mention Joel's name for fear they might have heard about him. The murderer.

Jason digested the information with a smile. "How about you, George?"

George Fuller withdrew the magazine plug from his ear patiently. "It's pretty good," he said. "Yes, indeed. I like that magazine. I had a woman once who wanted to do things. What things she wanted to do: turn the world upside down maybe, and reshuffle nations like a deck of cards, and take an express escalator up to the social stratosphere. She's still climbing, for all I know but I wish she could see me now because I'm going so much higher. All the way up for a thousand years."



"Do you hate her?" Jason asked innocently.

"Hate her? I don't hate anyone."

"I was just thinking she'll be dead a thousand years when we get where we're going." Jason turned to the couple, the large, quiet man named John and the tight-sweatered girl who had not told anyone her name, sitting in their too-small chair. "Mr. and Mrs. — uh, I don't believe we know your name . . . just why are you here?"

"You're a nice boy, Jason," said Tight-sweater, "so why don't you mind your own business?" Then those eyes of hers appraised Jason again, not saying anything but just looking, and she added: "We're not Mr. and Mrs. anybody; we're not married."

"Well," said the burly man, taking the magazine plug from his ear for the first time of his own accord.

"I wish you hadn't," John told the girl.

"My name is Phyllis," the tight-sweatered girl told Jason and George Fuller.

And then everyone but large, quiet John was talking about the little things at home, the little things they already missed but had waited for some of the stiffness to leave the room before they could say it.

"No more sunrise or sunset."

And the autumn wind shaking crisp scurrying flame from the trees.

And ice skating or swimming, fishing, bike-riding, hunting, hiking,

golfing, tennis, new performances of masterworks, or whatever you liked.

And leg room, elbow room, living room.

"Although sometimes the emptiest places can be crowded," George Fuller said.

AND Earth.

With people talking and walking and looking at you, a lot of people, all sizes, colors, shapes, complexions, convictions, smells.

"That's all wrong," Jason cried. "We have brotherhood here. Fraternity. No six people were ever thrown so close together. All for one and . . . well, you know."

"Three men, two women and a boy," said Phyllis, getting up from her shared chair and lighting Jason's cigarette for him. She breathed in the perfume and sighed. "That's very masculine. And a boy. He'll still be a boy a thousand years from now. Thinking of that can drive you crazy almost."

"It makes you shout and laugh and cry with joy," Jason told her patiently. "We'll outlive everyone; George, tell me how long we've been traveling."

George remembered what the guide had done, squeezing the yielding arm of his chair and making a clock appear in Scorpio. "Five and a half hours."

"Five thousand hours normal time!" Jason shrieked. "Quick, someone give me a pencil and

paper." It was Lonnie who found them in a desk, brought them to Jason. "Thank you, young man; thank you." Jason began scribbling furiously. "Five thousand hours," he mumbled. "Twenty four hours in a day. Five thousand divided by . . . let me see." He crumpled one sheet of paper into a ball, discarded it. "Thirty days in a month . . ." He held the final sheet aloft like a new Magna Carta.

"Seven months," he sighed tremulously. "A million people died; a million were born, screaming, into the world. Lovers quarrelled, battles were fought. It rained; crops grew, were parched by the sun, harvested. It became cold and snowed. It snowed on two and a half billion people living so fast they'll be dead before we really get to know each other." Pirouetting gracefully, he withdrew the cigarette from his mouth and kissed Phyllis full on the lips. "I love all of you."

"You shouldn't have," Phyllis told him, not retreating, smiling inches from his face with her full red lips.

"Phyllis," said John.

Jill stood up and told Lonnie to shut off the magazine. "It's been a long day," she said to no one in particular. "Lonnie and I are going to bed."

"Wonderful," Jason told her. "It's quite wonderful."

"Hey, Mom, is he crazy or something?" Lonnie wanted to know as they left the salon.

"For Heaven's sake, Lonnie. Mind your manners. Jason is exuberant, that's all."

"Ex . . . well, I like him anyway."

He should be going on eleven, but he's still only ten, Jill thought as she showered and got into bed. She found herself liking the idea, and wondered if Jason's enthusiasm was contagious. More than a year, Earth time, would elapse while they slept, but ten-year-old Lonnie would greet her in the morning. Jason never would have made a mathematician: how long it took him to figure that simple problem in his childish eagerness! Lonnie would want to see Jason as much as possible, she thought dreamily. Lonnie and Jason . . .

Joel, how far away across infinity are you right now?

III

As if by some common accord, five of them gathered in their salon prior to breakfast. Jason was there first, and perhaps he hadn't slept at all; but he greeted each one as he entered with "Good morning, immortal." Jason looked as well-rested as any.

Five of them, with large, taciturn John surrendering his chair, shedding it regretfully almost like some cherished item of clothing, and pacing the floor in moody silence. He swallowed his pride or deflated it with a self-inflicted needle. He said, "Has anyone seen Phyllis?"

"Has anyone here seen Phyllis?" Jason intoned boyishly then looked at John and said he was sorry. "No," he added a hasty amendment, "not since last evening."

George Fuller shook his head blankly, sitting down to enjoy the sound of his pre-breakfast magazine. What kind of magazine did a dilettante listen to on an empty stomach, Jill wondered. Sundries, she thought. Yes, sundries. Little pithy tidbits served up, soft-voiced, like a dish of hors d'oeuvres. "I'll try some of *those*," she could almost hear George Fuller thinking. "Ah . . ." he licked his lips.

Phyllis ran stumbling into the salon fifteen minutes later, pursued by invisible demons, screaming and screaming.

She threw herself against John's chest, sobbing, and he must have thought to comfort her for he raised his hands clumsily and stroked her hair. But she beat at his ribs with her small hard fists and began screaming again, a long piercing wail which rolled soft then loud, soft then loud. "You keep your hands off me! Keep your filthy . . . (and some other words) . . . hands off me." Then she was screaming again, and all the others words which meant "filthy" were lost in the sound.

"Mom, why's the lady crying?" asked Lonnie. "What's the matter?"

"Now, Phyllis," said John in confusion, but shrieking, she flung herself away from him, cupping her

face in her hands, her fingernails furrowing her own temples.

Jason came to her, touching her back with his hand almost delicately. "You!" she cried. "You're worse than all of them. You with your immortality and bliss and brotherhood. Go outside and tell me how immortal you feel. Go on outside, all of you . . . I hope you're satisfied, John; oh, I hope you are. This was the way to get away from my husband, was it? This was the way to end clandestine meetings, to avoid hiding and stolen moments. No more cheap, tawdry ugliness for us, oh, no."

Jason's hand retreated. "I'm sure John doesn't want you to bring up the past," he said, "not when we have our glorious present and magnificent future."

"She doesn't know what she's saying," John explained.

"Magnificent future, that's good!"

"A thousand years of space-voyaging and a new home far away among the stars after the things we knew and the people born with us are the dust of centuries."

"That's rich, that is. Jason's circumscribed little thousand year world came tumbling down around his ears." Phyllis' sobs and screams subsided. "Go outside, all of you."

George Fuller shrugged, unplugging his magazine. Jill led Lonnie by the hand, John looked at his woman's stiff-arched back, then followed regretfully. Jason led them

into the corridor with an eager, bouncing gait.

The statues had returned.

THEY stood cemented in the corridor in idle haphazard postures. One of them had his mouth open to laugh and perhaps he was laughing at time, for as far as Jill could see time had lost its meaning for him. Another posed ridiculously as some latter-day Napoleon, hand thrust into tunic front; but on closer scrutiny, Jill could see his raised knuckles and figured, ludicrously, he was scratching himself. How long, she wondered, would it take Napoleon to relieve himself of the itch? Another, a woman, had handkerchief to nose daintily and Jill looked in horror as Lonnie reached up laughing and slipped the lacy square from her immobile fingers. The woman stood there, hand to nose, lacking the reflexes to realize what had happened.

Warming to his task, Lonnie removed Napoleon's hand from his tunic forcing it down to his side.

"Lonnie, stop that. Don't touch them!" Jill screamed.

"Smatter, Mom? Someone brought the statues back, that's all. For us to play with."

"This is terrible," George Fuller said.

During the night, during the long obscuring night which was almost a year, something had gone wrong. Wheels had stopped spinning, or radiation had been screened, or per-

haps a day (almost two years) before, the guide had botched his work. The statues had returned. Subjectively, everyone aboard ship except the six newcomers had become statues again.

Objectively, something else had happened. Objectively, it was worse. Horror came on invisible wings, alighting on everyone's chest.

"We've been speeded up," said George Fuller. "We're normal again."

Jason laughed nervously. "Certainly not. Oh, no. We've merely been singled out, the six of us. All the others have been slowed still further — a million times, maybe. We're all right."

"Can you prove that?" George Fuller asked hopefully.

"Dear me, no; it's merely an idea."

"A ridiculous idea," Jill told him. "We are normal again. I — I can feel it." She could too, although she did not know how.

"Terrible," John said.

George Fuller sighed. "They don't have many magazines, really; enough for a year if I paced myself. But now —"

"Now you'll be memorizing every word," said Phyllis, who had regained her composure sufficiently to join them. "Now you'll commit everything to memory and one fine day you'll start babbling, and we'll all be babbling by then because I'll tell you what's going to happen: we're going to grow old in space and

watch the years go by and one by one we'll die of starvation, or old age or something, and when the last of us is a corpse, this space ship will hardly have started its journey.

"We'll see the statues in the hall here and soon we'll grow to hate them because while we get older they'll keep right on living waiting to see Sirius and the Sirius planets. They won't see us till we die and suddenly they'll wonder in their slow way where the corpses of old men and women came from — except little Lonnie, who should outlive all of us. And then after a time we'll get to hate each other and fight so help me if any of you comes near me I'll scratch his eyes out, because we're all in this together and friends and twins, like Jason said." She laughed insanely. "Aren't we all twins, Jason?"

JASON SAID, "Yes, of course."

"Shut up. Well, listen. You can all sulk off into corners and hang your heads and wail all you want. I've cried my share already. Not me, not this girl, you won't find me doing that. If this is where I have to live I'm going to live by God, because life always treated me like this anyway, kicking me in the teeth. I'll eat what I want and if we see we don't have enough food, better not look for it because I'll have it all. And I'll sleep with whom I want, all three of you, when I say so, not when you do —"

"Really, Phyllis." John was shak-

ing his head in stoic bewilderment.

"Don't you 'really Phyllis' me. That's what I'll do and don't try to stop me because if I killed myself you'd only have Jill here. That's a laugh — Jill who'll be waiting forever for the husband she'll never see, and he'll be finding a new woman nine hundred years after they take Jill's old withered corpse into space."

"Please," Jill pleaded. "Think of the boy."

"I'll think of him, all right! He's ten now, and growing up; he started growing last night, and at fourteen he'll be old enough to —"

Crack! Jill swung her hand wildly against Phyllis' cheek, striking it, numbing her own fingers and leaving their white imprint on the blood-reddened flesh. And then Jill was sobbing and running off down the corridor, weaving in and out among the statues, dimly aware that Phyllis had become hysterical again and was screaming. Let her scream while she could for no — what was that ugly word? — no nymphomaniac would take Lonnie and pervert him and . . . no, pervert was the wrong word, but he was so young and Jill wanted him to stay that way, young. Let her scream, because one day soon they might find her how she couldn't scream anymore, ever; and Lonnie was still a little boy.

Running thus, Jill collided with a statue and reintroduced it temporarily to normal time. The statue

tottered, no expression on its face. It fell with what Jill imagined was a great crash and when she crouched to look, the faintest flicker of surprise had tinged the features, and would probably remain for many minutes before pain replaced it.

Jill got up, plunging forward blindly, once more a flitting wraith among the statues. A wraith which finally dizzied, turned around, stumbled, fell in a huddled, sobbing heap.

SHE awoke in the salon, grave faces peering at her from out of the Zodiac background. "How much time has passed?" she demanded. She could almost feel her life slipping away, while the ship went absolutely nowhere, except for the statues.

"Only a few hours," said Jason.

"And are they —"

"Still statues," George Fuller finished for her.

"I don't care, Mom," Lonnie whispered tremulously, "as long as you're all right."

"Lonnie." She brought his head down to her, but he fidgeted, was restless.

"Aw, Mom. Hey, Mom. Listen, those statues are fun to play with after you catch on. You can make them do anything you want; and if they're set up one way, you can set them up another way and all."

"Lonnie, you shouldn't." After all, it was like being — what were those things called? — *poltergeists*,

mischievous ghosts who went around changing things, throwing things, breaking things.

"If they're standing, you can make them sit, and if they're sitting, you can just push them off the chair; and if they're eating, you can take the food away and . . ."

"We found Lonnie in the dining room," George Fuller explained, "giving some people eight course dinners, starving others, spilling food on laps, unsetting set tables. He was having quite a time."

"I was looking for you, Mom, only I couldn't find you. But those statues, I haven't had so much fun since Daddy —"

"We mustn't talk about your father, ever again; we're never going to see your father, do you understand me? Not ever."

"Aw, Mom. You said . . ."

"Never." A lump caught painfully in Jill's throat. A month would go by for Joel — swiftly because he looked to the future eagerly, as they had — and they would be dead. A month while Joel would count himself that much closer to journey's end, but a whole lifetime of sameness and hopelessness for them — and then they would be blown out into space with garbage, all kinds of refuse. Then, centuries later, Joel would reach the Sirius planets, build a home, get a job — and wait. The ship would come in and he wouldn't find them. Maybe the statues would know about them and be able to tell him, and maybe

they wouldn't know. Perhaps that would be better for him, because he might talk himself into believing they'd changed their minds, stayed on Earth and lived normally.

"You can make them do anything," said Lonnie again.

"Perhaps we are no longer immortal," Jason admitted, but still eagerly. "Perhaps there has been some error and, well, those things happen, I suppose. What I mean is if the statues are helpless before our speed — and they are — we might be able to turn this spaceship around and back to Earth, get everything fixed, and start out again."

There was a silence while George Fuller and Jill paid quiet homage to their Saviour.

"Why didn't we think of it sooner?" Jill asked. "Two years out and two back, that's only four years. Four years, Jason; we could start all over again after that." It was better than nothing, but Lonnie would be fourteen by the time they began again, and fifteen when they reached Sirius planets. Fifteen isn't old but Lonnie would be approaching manhood so fast, and if he had to spend the in-between years on a spaceship, on the same spaceship with that Phyllis . . .

"Do you know anything about driving one of these things?" said George Fuller.

JASON looked at him blankly. "What things?"

"Spaceships, this spaceship."

"You don't drive a spaceship, you pilot it; you astrogate it. Now that you mention it, no. You?"

"Not me," said George Fuller. "Been meaning to listen to one of those how-to magazines, but never got around to it. Maybe Jill . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Jill; "I don't even drive a copter."

"How about that?" George Fuller asked glumly. "We have the idea to get us out of this mess but we can't use it."

"You're forgetting Phyllis and John," Jason reminded him. "Perhaps one of them . . ."

"I have a hunch the only thing Phyllis can drive," Jill said spitefully, "is a hard bargain. As for John, I really couldn't say; he's so quiet though." As if you had to spit sparks and flaming gas to pilot a spaceship, she thought, amused by her own illogic.

"He's very, very, quiet."

They all looked around.

It was Phyllis, with blood on her hands. "He's quiet, all right. My God, you never saw someone so quiet."

She sat down in what had been their shared chair and started to laugh. "He made a . . . great big fuss . . . for a while and I never . . . could stand great big fusses, which is why I left my husband and . . . John should have known better."

George Fuller swore softly. "Where is he?"

"We shared a bedroom, too."

George Fuller had been agitated from his ear-plug lethargy for the first time. "I'll go see."

Jill drew a glass of water from the bar, but Phyllis wouldn't drink it. "Hello, Lonnie," she said, making eyes at him.

IV

JILL SAID, "For Heaven's sake, Phyllis. He's a baby. You're more than twice his age." *And a murderer, besides*, Jill was thinking, but didn't say it both because it would make a scene and further upset Lonnie and because Joel, too, was a murderer. Couldn't you say, if you got right down to it, they had both murdered for the same reason, more or less? Joel because he would not share something, Phyllis because she *wanted* to share something? And if a little child never grew up and never encountered that kind of ugliness, wouldn't he be far happier?

Phyllis was tickling Lonnie with her still-bloody hands and at first Lonnie seemed nonplussed, but presently he began to laugh; Phyllis helped him get into the spirit of things and she kept on tickling him and he kept on laughing.

"You stop that at once," said Jill, still holding the glass of water in her hand.

"She's merely playing with him," Jason told Jill calmly; "a boy needs playing."

"And a man?" Phyllis looked up long enough to ask. "Doesn't a man, Jason?"

Jason blushed. "There was a woman I liked once, but —"

Phyllis snorted and poked her long fingers in Lonnie's ribs again, smiling when he laughed. Jill shuddered. There was so much which *could* corrupt an impressionable child, a boy. It never ended happily, even for adults. Joel had killed a man, and Joel was on his way to the Sirius planets where he would wait for his wife who would never arrive. And Jill, Jill foolishly had had evanescent joy with two men once — and the price was a dead man, a convict and an exile in space — with no one happy. A too-ambitious woman had driven George Fuller to *his* exile in space, and Jason was extremely exuberant from the neck up — probably because he had lost all exuberance from the neck down.

Phyllis stopped to catch her breath.

"More!" Lonnie cried in delight, and Jill sloshed the contents of her water glass full in Phyllis' face.

Phyllis shrieked, and so did Lonnie. Phyllis leaped at her, clawing. "Hold it!" George Fuller cried, entering the salon. "I thought you'd all like to know John is dead."

"I told you," said Phyllis.

"Three gashes in his chest, and all bloody, and the knife lies at his side. Phyllis you must be punished for this." George Fuller blubbered. "Why did you have to ruin everything? We got back to Earth or we didn't, we stayed fast or we became slow — I didn't care. I liked it

here, I liked it fine, but because you had to go and kill a man, and there are moral laws which say you must be punished . . . you've certainly made a mess of things."

"Can you pilot a spaceship?" Jason asked Phyllis.

"Pilot a spaceship? Don't be ridiculous. And you mind your own business, George; John had it coming to him. I did it for you, anyway. You and Jason. And Lonnie." She blotted her face with a handkerchief.

"Why don't we leave them a note?" Jason demanded abruptly. "That will stay in one place long enough for them to see it."

"Do what you want," George Fuller mumbled.

"A note," said Jill, not very enthusiastically. "Yes, it would work."

Jason found paper and pencil, began to write. When he finished, he read it to them. "*Dear Sirs: Something went wrong with whatever slows people down, because there are five of us who are living normally. That means we'll die in space long before we reach Sirius unless, in your magnanimity, you do something about it. Turn this ship back to Earth for repairs and we can all start out again. But please hurry, for it may take weeks of normal time before you see this letter. Our fate is in your hands and God's.*" Jason grinned self-consciously. "Well, what do you think?"

"That's splendid," Jill told him. Strangely, it failed to stir her.

"I'll leave it in the control-room," said Jason.

"Wait," Jill said on impulse. "Let me; you men will want to discuss the murder anyway."

"I suppose we must," George admitted. "That was a terrible thing, Phyllis; there's always got to be someone to spoil things."

"I'll go with you," Phyllis told Jill, who was so surprised she found herself nodding as Jason carefully folded the letter and gave it to her.

"'S'long, Mom. When can we play more, Phyllis?" Lonnie called after them.

THEY walked among the familiar statues in silence, until Phyllis finally said: "Some day we're going to hate them terribly."

"Who?"

"The statues. Unless this note works. You know, Jill, I probably have seen more of this ship than all of you put together. I've done a lot of walking around, found some interesting things. Here, for instance."

Phyllis steered Jill down a short corridor. It ended in a dozen paces. The whole wall was a huge metal door with a glass window in it.

"Take a look," Phyllis suggested.

Jill peered through the window. "Why, it's a little room with another door at the other end."

"It's an airlock," Phyllis explained. "That's how you get into and out of a spaceship. Here, watch." There were four buttons on the wall, with printing under each one. *Open inner door. Close inner door. Open outer door. Close outer door.*

Phyllis pressed the first button and Jill heard the distant whirring of machinery. The ponderous door swung in toward them, revealing layer after layer of thick, rubberlike insulation. There was something frightening about the small room thus revealed, as if it had its own private ghosts to haunt whoever stepped inside.

"Come on in," Phyllis invited.

"N-no, thanks."

Phyllis got hold of her arm, yanked her. "Come on."

"Please."

Phyllis wrestled her inside the little room. "You're the only one who can spoil my plans with your righteousness. I could spend a pretty good life on this ship doing what I want, and if I wait long enough —"

She was strong. Jill was only beginning to fathom her intention, and found to her horror she could not seem to do anything about it.

"—if I wait long enough . . . there's Lonnie."

Jill sobbed, suddenly stronger. She writhed free, stumbled through the open door, kicking out with her foot when Phyllis tried to stop her. Her heel struck something soft and yielding. There was a scream, and then Jill stood in the corridor again. Panting, she pressed the button which said: *Close inner door.*

The ponderous door swung shut.

Phyllis' face appeared at the glass window, beseechingly. She clawed the smooth thick glass soundlessly with her fingernails. Tears rolled

down her cheeks. She pounded on the glass and made not a sound.

She's ugly and unclean. She wanted to kill me. She doesn't deserve to live. The murderer.

Jill pressed the button which said: *Open outer door.* A great invisible hand seemed to catch Phyllis up like a flake of confetti and draw her out, twisting and tumbling into the blackness thus revealed.

Jill closed the outer door and walked on, slowly among the statues, toward the control room.

She wouldn't know what had happened to Phyllis, of course; Phyllis just walked off. Let them try to find her; let them prove anything. Now Lonnie was hers again, all hers, and after the statues had the letter and a sufficient length of time to read it, they would turn the great ship around for Earth and one day soon all of them would be statues again and on their way to Sirius . . . and Joel. (Phyllis was a murderer, too.)

LONNIE was so young and innocent, and he didn't know it; but he was happy that way. Much happier, yes. As he matured, the problems of growing up would beset him and then he would grow too big to come crying to his mother and he would have to suffer in pouting throat-lumped silence. Children were so pure and clean and — well, inviolate. All children, she supposed, but most of all, Lonnie.

She'd been a child once, but so

long ago it seemed. One day she'd been playing down on the beach; she'd walked home alone and a big, ugly man had followed her and tried to do things. She'd screamed and screamed until the police came, but sometimes still she had nightmares about it. Joel's victim had screamed that way, almost, and to this day she never knew why she let Charles do what he did. But Joel had never asked her, merely choking the life out of Charles, there, right in front of her. Then he called the police and not saying anything to her all the while, but wrote to her from prison, forgiving her and being so sweet — because maybe he loved Lonnie, too, and Lonnie was only three then.

Well, let it be. If everything worked out they would reach the Sirius planets and Joel one day in the future — and that would be that. But still . . . although Phyllis was dead, drifting off, a meteor, in space, could she really say Lonnie was safe? There would be other girls, other women, more subtle than Phyllis, yes, but more painful because of it.

If only Lonnie could stay the way he was, a little boy, without ever having to grow up, or . . . but suppose he did grow up, in a world that never changed, where all he knew were the arms of his mother, protective and not insistent, and so remained a child, happy and guileless all his life? Could they really expect happiness on the Sirius planets? Sirius had seemed so far

away and so impossible that she'd said, "Yes, yes, I'll go." But not that they really could reach Sirius. Why should Sirius be any different from Earth? Change of scenery, but the same people, she suspected.

George Fuller and his magazines wouldn't give them any trouble. Jason's exuberance was harmless, and Jason would cheerfully spend the rest of his life trying to find immortality again. If ever she had to . . . submit to one of them, so what? As long as Lonnie didn't know, didn't suspect, didn't learn . . .

She read the note again. *Our fate is in your hands and God's.*

Oh, it would be pleasant, just floating on serenely through the void, going nowhere, absolutely nowhere, in a tight little world which offers up no serious problems. With a little boy to care for and teach and comfort, all your life.

She tore the note into tiny pieces and stuffed them in one of the statue's pockets, thought better of it and scattered the hundreds of snips among several pockets, several statues. Rubbish, accumulated from somewhere and to be thrown away, the statues would think. George Fuller and Jason would find nothing, and if Jason asked about the note (George Fuller wouldn't) she would tell him everything was all right. And if Jason thought after a time to make another note, she would carefully make sure the same thing happened.

She was doing it for Lonnie, of course.

The strains of her own secret symphony stirring in her ear, she returned to the salon, where George Fuller was sitting, magazine plugged into his ear, a look of bovine contentment on his face. Jason rubbed his hands together gleefully. "Now that they've got the note, we'll all be immortal again before long. Sirius, here we come!"

"What shall I do now, Mom?" Lonnie asked, not even thinking of Phyllis. Jill said she would tell him a story. A twinge of pain entered her consciousness when she thought of far Joel for the last time, but maybe Joel would want to kill someone else some day and she must never think of him again.

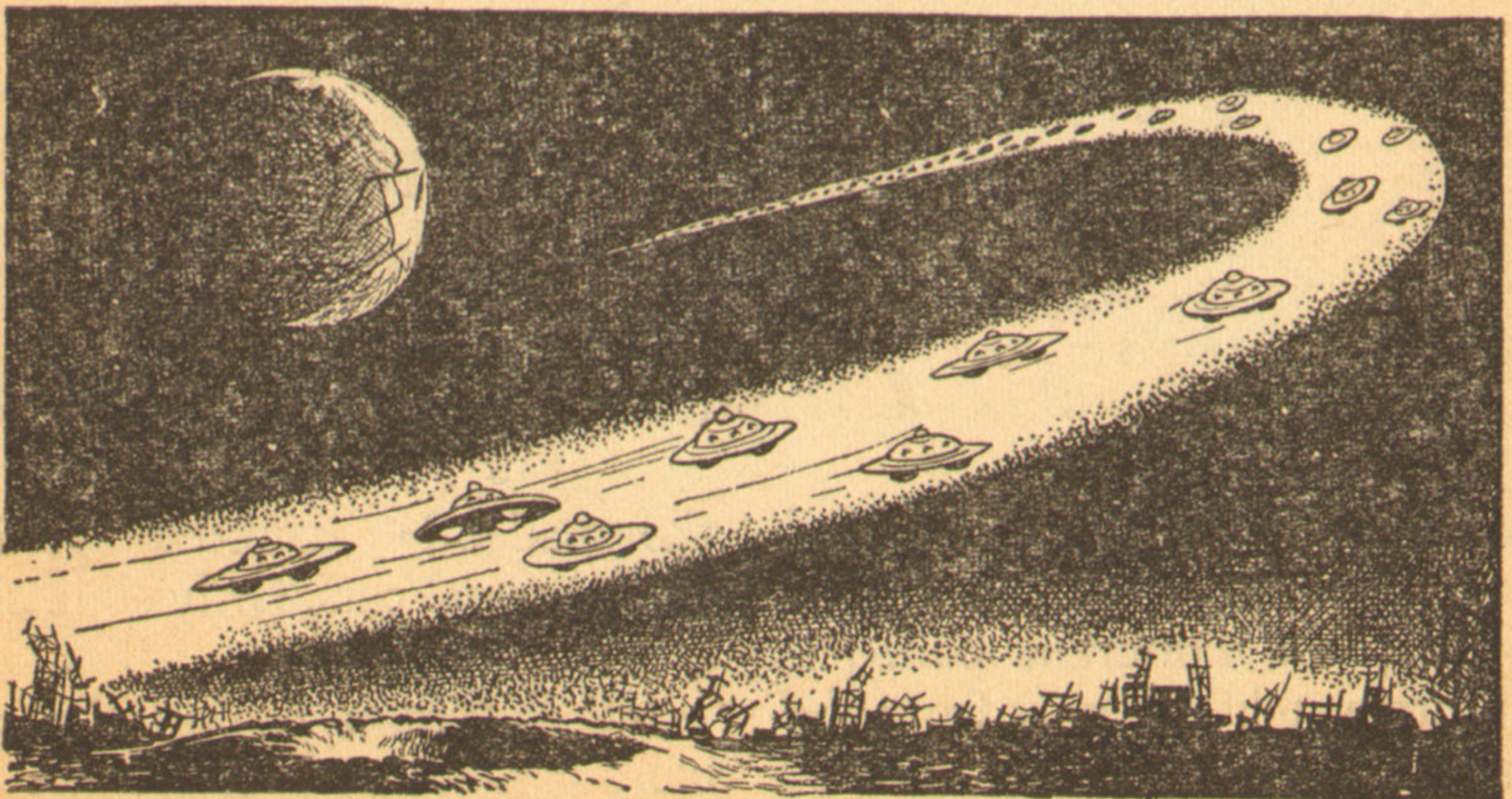
"I'm feeling great," said Jason.

"It must be something in the air," said Jill, "for so am I."

"Everything is perfect, doctor. From what we can gather on the open radio circuits we use occasionally, it gets them every time. The statues look so real. The mental cases actually believe they're going someplace, not just space-drifting all their lives. They're happy as a consequence. When the statues lose their animation, we believe the passengers will spend the rest of their natural lives trying to fix things. And so be happy, always. As far as Earth is concerned, we've developed a completely painless, deathless euthanasia. It's expensive, but what do you think?"

"What about those who change their minds?"

"Oh, we try 'em again in a month or so. Eventually all of them go. It's the best thing for them, don't you agree?"

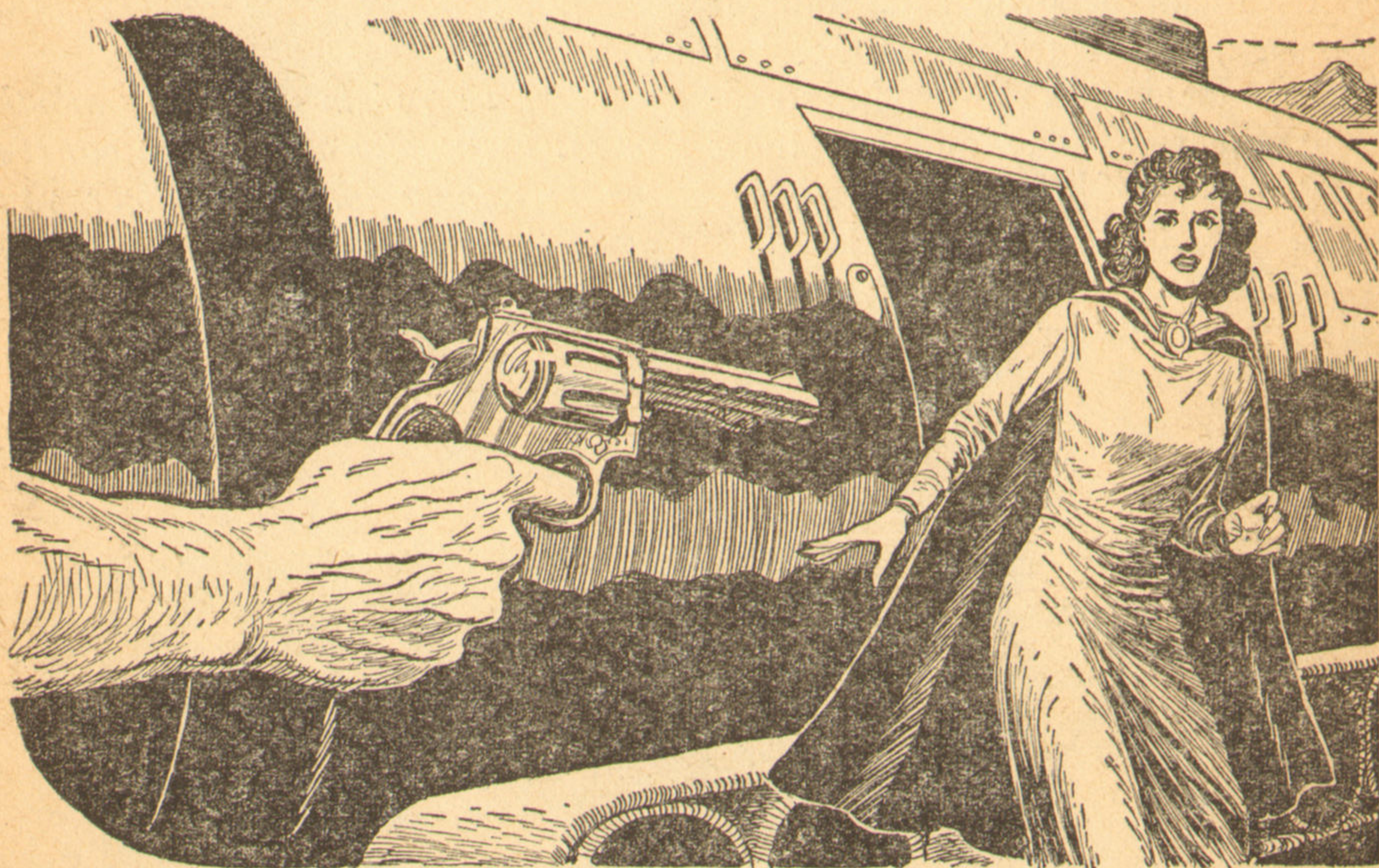


NOVELET

OF SUCH AS THESE

Even a new world, built from a clean slate, needs solid tradition behind its rules . . .

By IRVING COX, JR.



FAR BELOW, in the red-rocked canyon, the highway train ground steadily up the mountain road. Jeff the White watched grimly from the Desert View cutout at the crest of

the grade. He counted the interlocked metal cars. Only six! And no sign of a guard.

Jeff slid from behind the crumbling parapet and crossed the high-

way, where Slim and Cass stood waiting. A bent, rusting sign lay partly hidden in the tangled mesquite, but the symbols on it were still readable: "*Arizona, U. S. 89.*" The Wise One, of course, had taught Jeff to read, but this sign had no significance to him. He leaned against it casually while he talked.

"There's no guard," he explained; "and it's a six-car job."

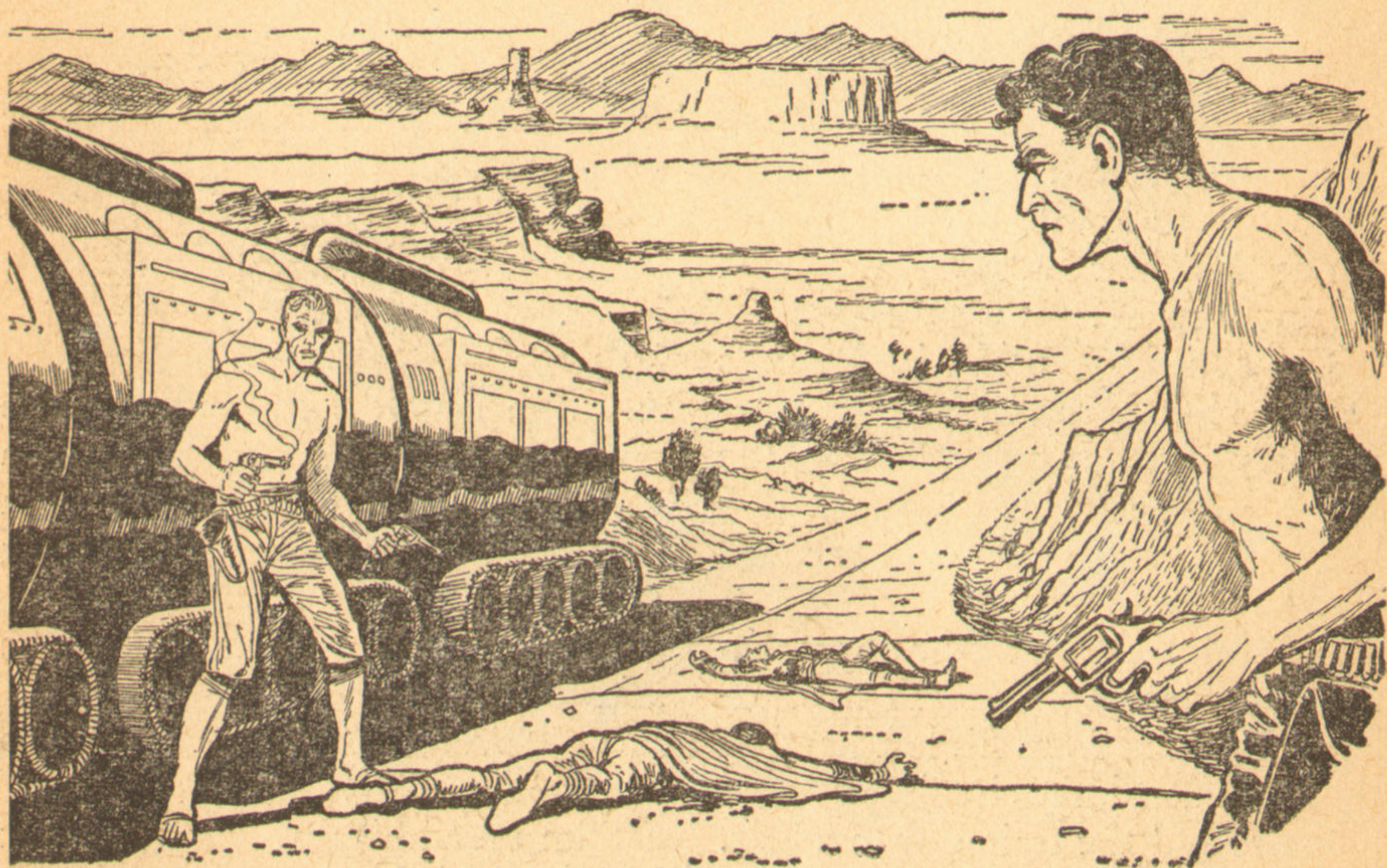
"Guns?" Slim asked.

"Should be, the Blues usually send guns in the metal vans."

He drew his revolver and ran his hand along the gleaming barrel. "Slim, you and Cass knock out the windows in the robot car as soon as the train hits the top of the grade; I'll get the control box."

Holding the rank of explorer, Jeff the White commanded the raid, it was his duty to plan the attack. Slim and Cass nodded, and Jeff sauntered back across the road. Out of habit he walked in a crouched position, taking care to keep himself concealed from the approaching

illustrated by EMSH



Suddenly Cass laughed. "No, there won't be a guard, not in this country."

"The Southerners are chicken-livered," Jeff spat emotionlessly.

train. He was as certain as a man could be that no Blues were aboard, they seldom rode the supply cars. When the Blues traveled between their metal cities, they invariably

used their soaring, graceful — and deadly — helio-disks.

Jeff clenched his jaw. One day he would capture a disk, too, everything in time. Hand-weapons first, the brutal fire-guns of the Blues. After that the border forts. It was the only way back from oblivion, precarious and hedged with terror.

Jeff lay flat behind the broken wall at Desert View and surveyed the highway. He was a tall, lean young man in his early twenties. He wore moccasins of hand-sewn animal hide and knee-length, homespun trousers. Two cartridge-belts were slung around his waist, along with twin revolvers in badly worn holsters. Above the waist he was naked. His hard-muscled chest and arms were burned brown by the sun and wind; his hair was an unkempt platinum mane.

On churning, rubberized treads the metal train roared past the summit. Two pistols cracked from the side of the highway, Slim and Cass had broken the windows in the lead car.

Jeff sprinted toward the approaching vans, leaping to catch a handhold. He fired from his left hand at the robot panel, the circuit sputtered blue fire and the train slid to a halt. Jeff jerked open the door as the cars began to slide backward down the grade, out of control. He poked at the unfamiliar buttons until he found the one that set the manual brake.

As Slim and Cass tore open the

doors of the first supply-car, Jeff heard a terrified scream. Two Blues sprang out of the box, gesturing helplessly and shouting an avalanche of words in their disharmonic tongue. Jeff recognized them as males — but their dress was different from anything he had seen before, even when he had gone with the trading caravans to the border forts.

The two Blues were unarmed and they were terrified, they turned and ran. Slim took deliberate aim and fired. The Blues sprawled on the highway, their blood spilling in red pools upon the broken asphalt. A surge of savage joy filled Jeff's soul. These were the first Blues he had seen die, and their deaths dissipated the legend of invincibility which had haunted his mind.

A THIRD Blue came timidly to the open door of the metal van — a woman, dressed as the men were, in flaming scarlet with a yellow cloak tied around her shoulders.

"We do not mean you harm," she said slowly in the language Jeff knew. "We are Savers, we came to help your people."

Slim raised his revolver again but Jeff knocked the gun from his hand. "She can't hurt us," he said scornfully. "And she might be useful."

"As a hostage?" Slim grinned. "I hadn't thought of that, if she's a big enough wheel, maybe we can trade her for a helio-disk."

Slim ripped her cloak into strips and used them to bind her feet and hands, while Jeff and Cass broke open the other cars in the train. Their find was bewildering and disappointing. Not a weapon anywhere. One car was filled with food, the saccharine, oily synthetics used by the Blues; the other cars were crammed to the metal ceilings with books. Jeff pulled one free and examined it. The tissue-thin pages were printed in English.

. . . *"The peace of Gannon, maker of all things, mover of the eternal universe, be our gift to all who read and believe. Gannon is the power, Gannon is the strength, Gannon is the only truth — the immortal spirit of the electron, the unity of nebula and galaxy . . ."*

He flung the book aside. He had come a thousand miles into the pacified Southern Plantation to raid an arms train; instead, he had captured a shipment of religious tracts. He strode along the road to the place where the bound woman lay on the gravel shoulder. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Sister Rakjak. We are your friends. Please believe —"

"And your destination?"

"The Southern Plantation. My Brothers and I bear the first commission to teach you the Way of Gannon." She moved her head awkwardly to keep it in the shadow, squinting against the glare of the sun.

"We are men of the North, Sister

Rakjak — not your chicken-livered Southerners."

"The North?" Her mouth widened in fear, and the pale blue of her face deepened to a sickly purple. "The Unsubdued! But they told us in the temple the roads were safe."

"The Blues are sometimes wrong."

"Do you — do you intend to murder me, as you did the Brothers?"

"You misjudge us, Sister Rakjak." Jeff bowed mockingly. "We want you to go with us; my people are starving to learn the Gannon Way."

She missed the sarcasm. When she tried to reply a pink froth bubbled on her lips, and she twisted her head in agony. "Please! Put me in the car; we cannot endure the glare of your sun."

The Wise One had taught Jeff that, too. It was the reason the Blues built their metal-roofed cities; it explained why Sister Rakjak and the Brothers had traveled through the desert heat in a closed, metal van. The only known physical weakness of the enemy: for years Jeff had tried to find a way to exploit it.

He carried her to the lead car, putting her on the cushioned seat in the dark, oven-like box behind the robot control booth. Then, with Slim and Cass, he detached the useless five cars of the train, pushing them into the ditch at the side of the road.

THE three men climbed into the robot car, squatting on the floor behind the control panel. Jeff's bullet had been skilfully fired; he had broken only the guide cable which fed directives from the electronic brain to the turbines. The manual controls, used when a Blue pilot took over the supply train after it entered a metal city, were undamaged. After some experiment, Jeff found the proper controls. The rubberized treads began to turn.

"At least we ride home in style," Slim said.

"We still must find guns."

"But we can't make another raid now!"

"Why not? It'll be days before they find the vans we've wrecked. The Blues have the South pacified; they don't send out guards with robot trains unless it's necessary."

Until nightfall Jeff kept the car grinding along the highway. Freed of the weight of the train, the robot van moved at top speed. They were well into Oak Creek Canyon before they stopped for the night. The highway had been slowly decaying for more than half a century, but the Blues had no reason to keep the roads in repair. The treads of the robot vans were designed to cushion the shock of the potholes, to span the storm-cut ruts of erosion. On mountain highways, where sections of the road had been completely washed away, the claw arms of the truck pushed a flat path through the rubble.

They stopped beside an abandoned vacation home in the canyon. While Cass built a fire, Jeff and Slim cut through the tangled brush and broke into the cottage. It was a commonplace practice with them, whenever they traveled beyond their own territory. Deserted homes — sometimes whole villages — provided them with a shadow of the abundance enjoyed by their ancestors.

In a kitchen cabinet they found the familiar store of canned foods — meat, fruit, juices, soups: an excellent cache relatively untouched by other raiders. Jeff and Slim carried ample armloads of the food outside to the fire, along with three unrusted saucepans that hung above the stove. The three men heated the food and gulped it crudely. They ate far more than they needed, because they could not be sure how soon they would find food again.

When his belly was full and he felt the comfortable lassitude in his muscles, Jeff went to the car and released Sister Rakjak. She walked stiffly to the fire, shielding her eyes from its glare. Cass scooped food from a saucepan into an empty can and handed it to her. She bent her head and whispered, "I give thanks to Gannon, all powerful and all merciful."

She picked at the food, forcing it between her lips. But suddenly she put down the can and turned away, convulsed with nausea. Jeff caught her as she collapsed.

After a moment of agony she smiled weakly. "Your food is — we cannot eat it."

He shrugged. "It's all we have."

"Not the meat; the vegetable matter — I will try to get used to it. I am a Saver of Gannon; I want to live among your people as one of you." She picked up her can and began to eat again. Obviously the food sickened her, but she forced it down. Jeff found himself grudgingly admiring her determination.

He studied her face in the dying firelight, and realized that she was very beautiful. The blue color of her skin was not too obvious; and, in any case, the Wise One said that the color made no real difference. The Blues were biologically human; they had simply evolved on another planet where the quality of the sunlight was different. The blueness was caused by a tissue transparency which made the tiny network of skin veins visible.

JEFF dropped on the ground beside Sister Rakjak. In the tight-fitting, scarlet gown, her body was very attractive. It had been a long time since he had left his women in the valley. His hand slid toward her, pulsing with excitement, filmed with sweat.

"Why do your people hate us?" she asked abruptly.

That jerked him back to reality. The Blues were the enemy; how could he have forgotten? He answered curtly, "Why not, Sister

Rakjak? You stole our world."

"No! We came to help you."

"By burning our cities with fire-guns? By making us slaves on the Plantations?"

"Because you resisted us; because you would never make peace. We had to establish order first."

"You Blues have a high-minded justification for every kind of savagery," he sneered. "You murder a world — in the name of good intentions!"

"It may seem so, but do you know what your world was like before we came?"

"We lived in the cities, then; we were safe. We had our own machines to work for us, or own government, our own —"

"But it was chaos!" She turned toward him earnestly. "Your planet was broken up into dozens of separate nations, always more or less at war with each other. You were tormented — driven neurotic — by social and economic inconsistencies. Your scholars and your scientists were straight-jacketed by prejudice and superstition. The majority of your statesmen were fools."

"I know nothing of that, Sister Rakjak; but . . . bad as it may have been, it was still *our* world then; we were free to make what we could of it."

"We waited a long time before we intervened; our leaders prayed earnestly to Gannon. But they saw no sign — no hope — that you could ever help yourselves."

"And that gave you the right to destroy us?"

Tears swam in her eyes; she reached blindly for his hand. "It wasn't meant to end like this! Everything went wrong. After we had once landed, it was impossible for us to retreat until your world was pacified and mature. You forced us to become conquerors."

"It's a wonderful thing when you can find words to make anything you do seem noble in your own eyes."

"It's true!"

"That's the truth as you want it to be; that much I'll grant. But to us, Sister Rakjak, the Blues will always be the savage conquerors who came to destroy us."

SHE stood up slowly; her voice was choked. "From your point of view — I have never considered it that way before. Take me back to the van, please; I want to pray to Gannon."

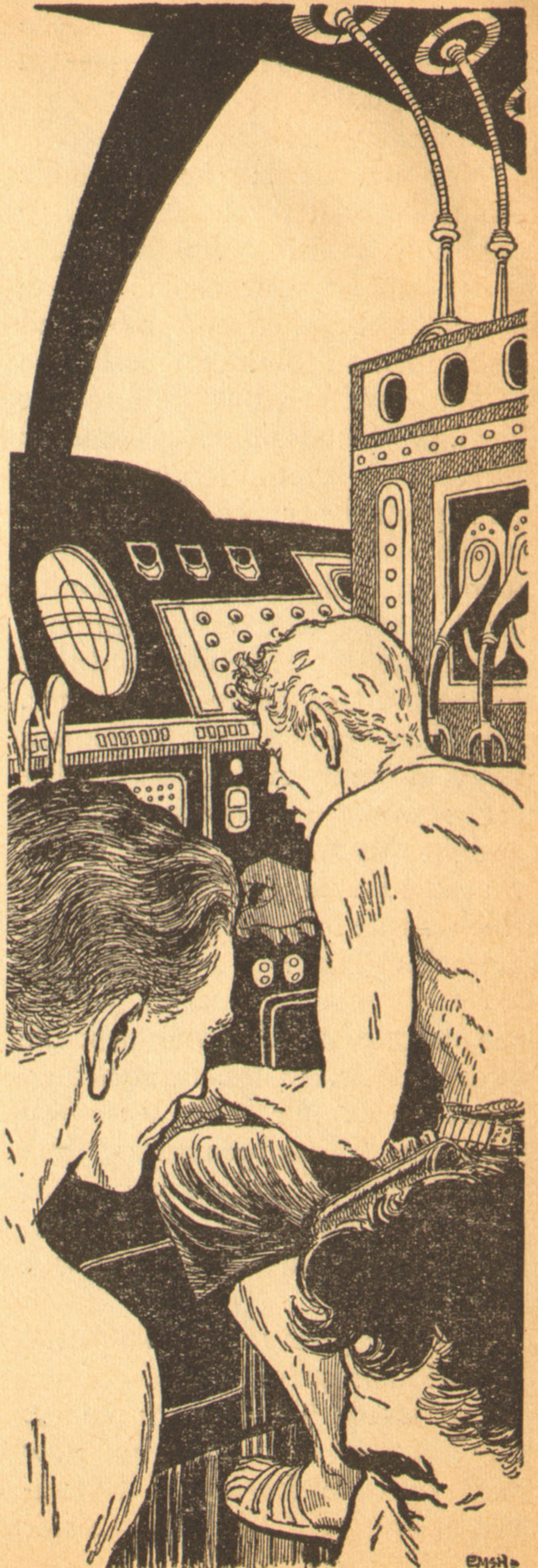
He walked with her to the edge of the clearing and lifted her through the open door of the treaded car. She held out the yellow cords which had been made from her cloak; but Jeff pushed them aside.

"I'm your prisoner," she reminded him.

"You won't escape."

"Then you trust me?"

Trust was by no means what he meant; escape in this canyon, scores of miles from the nearest metal city, would have been suicide for Sister



Rakjak and he expected her to understand that. But he shrugged his shoulders; it mattered very little what she thought.

She smiled ecstatically and touched his mane of white hair lightly with her hand. "Thank you, my friend. Trust is the first step toward mutual understanding. I'll pray to Gannon for that; I ask nothing more."

Jeff walked back to the embers of the fire, where Slim and Cass were already curled under blankets they had taken from the house. Although it would have been more comfortable, they never slept indoors when they were away from the valley. Here they had a better chance to escape any Blue patrol that might happen to come upon them. Actually, there was very little risk of that. The barbaric fury of the conquest was long passed. The fire-gun Blue patrols were no longer on the roads; the helio-disks no longer soared over the burning cities. If the three men had been taken prisoner, they would simply have been sent to the Southern Plantation for a process called orientational training. Escape from the Plantation, they had heard was absurdly easy.

They left their Oak Creek Canyon camp before dawn, as soon as it was light enough to drive the stolen robot van over the roads under manual control. Beneath the seat Sister Rakjak found one of the red-tinted face-visors which the Blues wore when they left the sheltered darkness of their metal cities. With

that to protect her from the glare, she rode in the control cabin with the three men.

The colors of early spring were lush in the Arizona canyon. New leaves on the cottonwoods formed a delicate lacework against the walls of red rock. A blazing carpet of flowers spread on both sides of the rotting highway. Deer, rabbits, a host of small game were in the shadows along the creek bed; man and the encroaching machines of his civilization had been gone for half a century, and the animals had reclaimed their world.

II

WITHIN an hour the rubber-treaded truck reached the crumbling town of Flagstaff, on the plateau above the canyon. Jeff stopped the van in front of a market building which was still relatively intact. While the three men loaded cases of canned foods into the back of the truck, Sister Rakjak walked disconsolate in the street debris. She was awed and a little frightened by the ruins — skeletal walls and broken roofs, gaunt against the bright blue sky; the glittering, jewel-like pattern of shattered glass on the streets.

Jeff paused in the sun to mop the beads of sweat from his chest. Sister Rakjak moved toward him uneasily, her face troubled behind the red mask. "This destruction!" She whispered. "Are my people — did we —"

"Not your helio-disks, if that's

any consolation," he replied. He picked up one of the bricks and scraped it with his finger. "This town wasn't burned; you only destroyed the large cities. There were probably riots here during the first panic, and after that the people ran away before your patrols caught them."

"Is it like this everywhere?"

"Yes, wherever I've been."

"I've seen very little of your world. The Brothers and I came less than a year ago; we spent all our time in the Temple of Gannon learning your language and your history."

His jaw hardened. "It's different in the North. You haven't set up any plantations for us there. We've rebuilt our city; we've learned how to make machines again, and —"

"That's what we want you to do! Rebuild your civilization sanely. We've used every technique we know to encourage it on the Plantations."

"And you've failed. You know why? Because you demand our surrender first."

"To establish order, so we can teach —"

"When men become slaves, they die. The people on the Plantations work when you give the orders; you've beaten obedience into them. But that's all you've done. The creativeness — the thing that makes us human — is gone. On the Plantations our species is dying; the slaves just don't have children, do they?" Jeff grinned savagely. "In the North that's different, too. Our

population has doubled in five years; I'm not twenty-five, Sister Rakjak, and already I have four sons."

"Sons to hate us; sons to make war against us someday!" She twisted her thin, blue hands and her voice became husky with grief. "We came to help you; we came because otherwise you would have destroyed yourselves. That is the Way of Gannon; I know it's right; and yet — yet —" She gestured emptily toward the rubble of the dead town. "We did this. What you say is right, too. I — I can't understand! How could a good thing bring so much evil?"

Slim and Cass lugged a carton of odds and ends from the store and pushed it into the truck. "That's about everything worth taking."

Jeff counted over the stores in the van. "A week's supply," he guessed. "Maybe two. We'll head west from here, I think; we should be able to knock off a weapons train between here and the coast."

Sister Rakjak gripped Jeff's arm with shaking fingers. "Is that why you came to the Southern Plantation?"

"Of course." He smiled mockingly. "Charming as it was, our meeting with you was entirely coincidental."

"Then — then you mean to fight back so soon?" When he made no reply, she turned slowly away from the three men, raising her masked face toward the sky. Beneath the visor her lips moved silently. She

twisted her hands in supplication. Her body became rigid and tense. There was no sound except the distant chatter of birds, the capricious sighing of the spring wind.

For a moment her voice was audible, “. . . for guidance, O Gannon, a sign to guide me in the Way of Gannon . . .”

Suddenly they heard the distant grinding of treaded wheels. Jeff climbed to the roof of the van, shielding his eyes to view the highway east of Flagstaff. “An eight-car train!” he cried. “Without a guard!”

The men ran toward the road, their revolvers in their hands; they repeated the maneuver by which they had captured the first train, and it was equally effective a second time. Eagerly they tore open the van doors and inspected the cargo. Two of the eight trucks contained weapons, twenty thousand tiny, deadly fire-guns.

They fastened the weapon cars behind their van, and in less than ten minutes the stolen train was headed north. Sister Rakjak again sat in the control cab with her captors. She deliberately removed her red visor and set it aside, squinting painfully against the glare.

“I want to get used to it,” she said softly. There was a strangely beautiful and withdrawn smile on her face: the calm compliance of martyrdom.

IN THREE days the train was in the North country. The three men had

no fuel-problem with the robot van. The turbines were driven by sealed fission cores, designed to power the truck for the life of the vehicle.

They made camp the first night on the shore of a large, salt sea, near the site of a city which had been burned five decades before by heliodisks. The flat desert of charred, dead ground, swept bare by the wind, shocked Sister Rakjak far less than the empty, decaying villages through which they passed. She strove doggedly to conform to the habits of her captors. She learned to subsist on their food; she removed her visor for longer and longer periods at a time. By the second day angry heat blisters appeared on the blue skin of her face and hands.

Yet she never complained, nor expected sympathy. “It is the will of Gannon,” she repeated again and again, like a primitive incantation.

“Don’t be a fool,” Jeff said to her one night.

“I won’t permit myself to be different,” she answered. By that time her lips were cracked and raw; it was obviously painful for her to talk. “I want to live in your world as you do — face the hardships and the discomforts we’ve brought to your people.”

“Hardships hell! We’re used to the sun.”

“I will be, too.”

“Will that change anything for us?”

“For me, Jeff.” She touched his hand gently and tried to smile.

“When I feel as you feel, when my heart beats with yours — then I’ll be ready to teach you the Way of Gannon.”

“We’ve been instructed in that rather thoroughly for the past fifty years.”

“But the Gannon Way isn’t destruction and hatred. That’s so terribly wrong. Gannon is goodness and power, an eternal understanding . . .” She continued to talk in her low, earnest voice. It was the same sanctimonious proselyting he had heard from other Blues when he had gone with the Wise One to the metal cities to trade. But Sister Rakjak was sincere; she honestly believed the semantic cant. Jeff found himself pitying her, and pity sapped his hatred. Perhaps, in their own terms, the Blues actually meant what they said. It was the first time he had ever considered that, and the idea was very disturbing. It blasted a devastating rift of emptiness through the settled certainty of his convictions.

Early on the third day Jeff drove the stolen train across the border of the Southern Plantation, following the dry bed of a canyon to avoid the paved highways. The border was rimmed with a closely-spaced chain of small metal cities, and the area between them was regularly patrolled.

At one time, the metal cities had been forts, marking the outer limits of the Blue invasion; in recent years they had become trade-cities, where

the Unsubdued from the North were encouraged to bring their handiwork.

Jeff the White had been half a dozen times to the trade cities in caravans led by the Wise One. In the beginning, when the forts had first been opened to trade, the Unsubdued had feared a trick. But the Wise One had insisted on organizing the first caravans. He dressed the traders in homespun and moccasins. The gee-gaws they took to trade were crudely hand-made. The first trading began when Jeff was a boy; the same deceptive pattern had been followed for more than a decade.

And the ruse had worked. The caravans which went to the border forts four times a year were the only contact the Blues had with the Unsubdued in the North. The primitive trade goods and the poor homespun were the only data by which the Blues evaluated the strength of the Unsubdued — false data, deliberately contrived. Sister Rakjak would be the first Blue to see the truth.

IT WAS mid-afternoon before the weapons train ascended the pass into the valley. The trail snaked unmarked through windswept canyons, so twisted, so barren that no Blue patrol could have stumbled on it by chance. Twice Jeff fired his pistol in a prearranged pattern of shots to signal the lookouts posted in the rocky wasteland.

They crossed the crest suddenly.

Below them lay a broad, flat valley, walled with snow-capped peaks. A stream wandered through the thick pine forest, becoming a narrow thread of dazzling silver in the far distance. A handful of scattered, one-room cabins were sheltered by the trees. Part of the forest had been cleared and converted to farmland. But the valley itself was only a secondary, peripheral impression to the newcomer. The thing that caught Sister Rakjak's attention first and caused her to gasp in surprise — or was it fear? — was the city in the heart of the valley, an island of crisp, white buildings, gleaming like carved crystal in the afternoon sunlight.

"Home," Jeff told her.

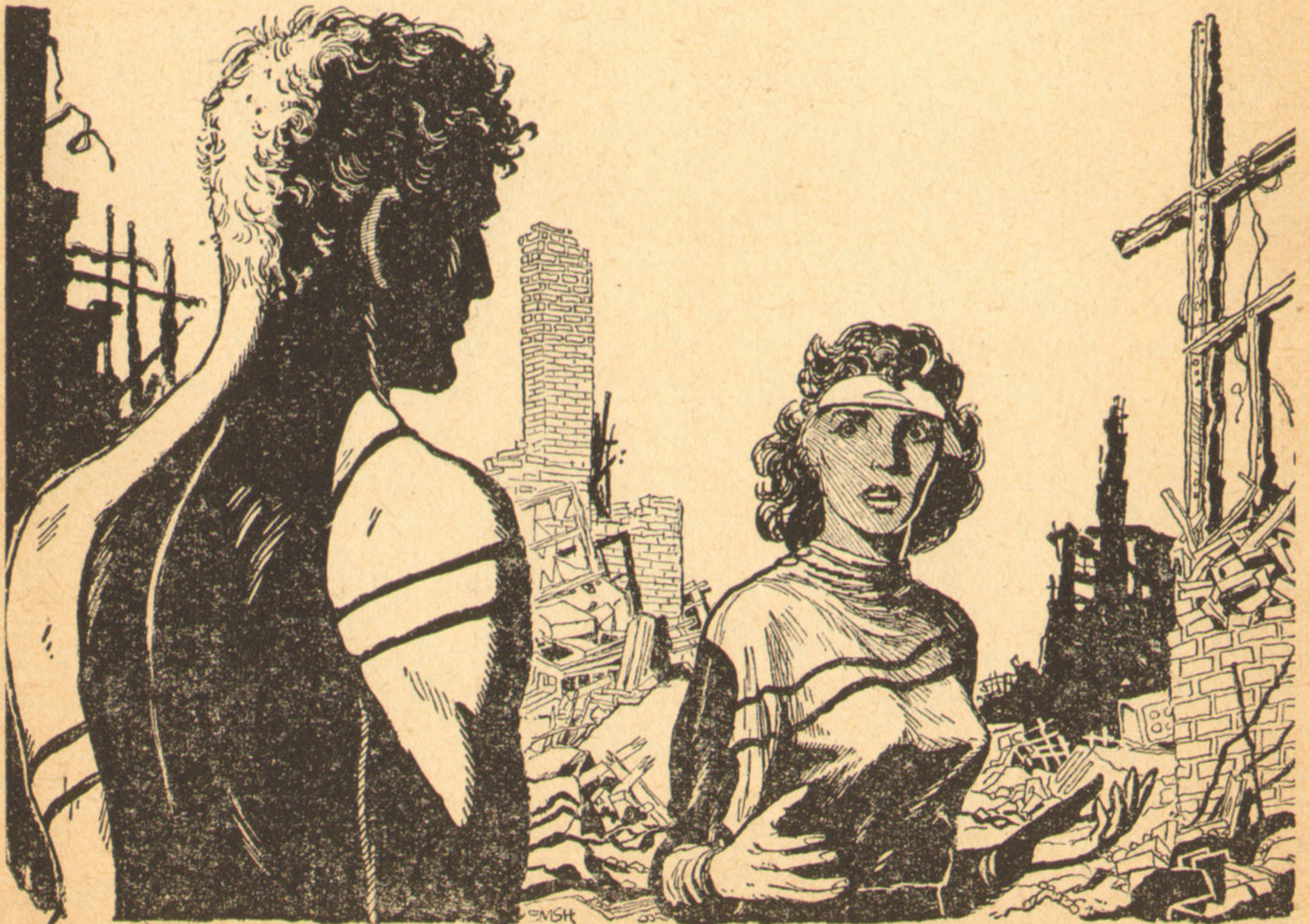
She reached uncertainly for his hand. "It isn't — it isn't exactly what I expected."

Slim laughed humorlessly. "No, you Blues think we're savages."

"Not savages, Slim — poor, and misled, and —" She shook her head. "But we're wrong about that, too; I've been a fool."

"It's what we wanted you to believe," Cass said, "until the plan was ready —" His voice trailed off and, for a moment, no one spoke.

Then Slim put in uneasily, "We know you mean what you say, Sister Rakjak — about wanting to help us. Maybe all the Blues do. For as long as we can remember



we've planned for the time when we could start taking back what's ours. Now that we've talked to you — well, it doesn't seem such a good idea, any more."

Jeff jabbed angrily at the controls and the train ground down into the valley. "We have to talk to the Wise One," he decided; "there must be another way out."

The train rolled along a broad, gravel road past open fields. Sister Rakjak saw people working the farms, and machines moving along the furrows or pumping water into irrigation ditches from the bank of the stream. The machines were powered through flexible poles running on overhead wires. When Jeff noticed her curiosity, he explained, "Our machines — everything we have, even the building blocks used in the city — are made from plastics."

"It's a formula based on the soy bean," Slim added; "the largest crop we grow in the valley."

"Here in the North," Jeff went on, "the resources of metal are extremely limited. We save all the iron to make guns and cartridge cases. Our only source of power is hydroelectricity — from the falls of the stream, at the other end of the valley — so our machines must be driven by electricity."

"A miracle," she said softly, her eyes on the sky. "You've dragged yourselves up from defeat to —"

"This is no miracle, Sister Rakjak; we're the Unsubdued because we never accepted defeat."

"You've saved the culture of man exactly as it was?"

"Without the slightest change, Sister Rakjak; the Wise One insists on that. He reads to us from the old books and tells us the old stories, so we'll always remember."

His last statement puzzled her. "The Wise One reads to you? Can't you read the books for yourselves?"

"We know how, of course," Cass explained, "but we don't have the paper to reprint the old books, and we've been able to save only single copies of most of them. If we all tried to read those copies, we'd wear them out and our children would have nothing."

THE train turned a sharp corner in the road and the white city loomed abruptly above the pines. It stood on an artificial island, two feet above the soil. The island was an enormous sandwich of plastic disks and thick, fibrous insulation. A treaded bridge led from the gravel road to the street level of the city.

Sister Rakjak trembled when she saw the insulation. "So you know that, too?" she asked.

"How the helio-disks destroyed our cities?" Jeff nodded gravely. "We worked out the theory five years ago by watching the disks burn out swamp areas on the Plantations. Until we knew that, it wasn't safe to rebuild our city, and we lived in the cabins. We discovered that certain small areas in the swamps always survived, and they had one thing in

common: a natural insulation of some sort. That gave us the answer, of course. The helio-disks create an induced heat by forming a closed circuit with the ground. If the circuit couldn't be completed, the helio-disks would be powerless."

"You've stolen our most powerful weapon."

"Not the weapon, Sister Rakjak; we've only devised a defense against it. We still want disks of our own."

Her lips quivered, but she lifted her head proudly. "I'm glad, Jeff. It makes us equals, and equals can always find a way to live together in peace."

What reply could he make? Her naïve innocence left him feeling vaguely ashamed.

The weapons train moved along a plastic-surfaced street, past the clean, white buildings toward the center of the city. The walks were thronged. Some of the people stood on the curbing to stare curiously at the enemy trucks. Sister Rakjak saw the faces of Negroes, Orientals, a handful of Polynesians scattered among the tall, weather-tanned people like Jeff. They were all similarly dressed. The men wore white, knee-length shorts and open-necked jackets. Some, like Jeff, were naked above the waist — hardy souls, for the spring air in the valley was still crisp with the chilly touch of winter. The women were similarly dressed, but in place of the jackets they substituted loose, bright-colored blouses.

And children were everywhere — scores of them; hundreds of them — playing in noisy droves; black-faced children and white and every conceivable gradation of color between. Any dignity the city may have possessed was lost in the genial, nursery-school atmosphere. Sister Rakjak saw crowded playgrounds everywhere. Letters wrought in plastic circled the open gates with the same legend, "*Of Such as These.*"

Jeff explained, "It's a religious quotation — corrupted a little by the Wise One. He had it cut over his cabin door when we went there to school."

In the heart of the city the plastic street circled a tiny park, twenty feet in diameter. Symmetrical beds of red tulips surrounded a circle of poles. From the top of each pole a different, bright-colored flag fluttered in the wind: the old national flags of the earth, preserved here in this island of freedom.

III

THE government building was beyond the park. Jeff drove the captured train into the adjoining armory. The turbines ground to a stop. Men swarmed around the vans, shouting their welcome and pounding the trucks in triumph. With laughter on their lips they reached up to help the three men out of the control cab.

Then, ominously, the chattering voices fell silent. The men had seen Sister Rakjak. They backed slowly

away as she slid from the van. Jeff looked into their faces, and he saw the familiar hatred. Sister Rakjak recognized it, too; she said gently, "I am not an enemy. I have come here as a friend, to help —"

"Prisoner?" someone in the crowd shot at Jeff.

Jeff clenched his fists. If he admitted he had taken her as a hostage, the men would be satisfied. But Sister Rakjak would be imprisoned in one of the abandoned cabins; no one would care if she lived or died.

Would Slim and Cass support him if he lied? He glanced at them uncertainly where they stood shuffling their moccasined feet against the plastic floor. In their eyes he saw an agony of indecision, a mute appeal. What could they say? Jeff was the explorer; he had commanded the raid; he must make the explanations.

"What she says is true," Jeff answered slowly. Cass and Slim nodded; their faces were relieved. "Of her own free will she has come to join us."

"A Blue?" someone demanded skeptically. "She's willing to become a valley woman?"

"Yes." Jeff's voice dropped to a whisper. "I — I gave her the marriage offer." Sister Rakjak looked at him with a puzzled expression; he avoided her eye and went on hastily, "If the Wise One consents, of course."

Almost immediately the tension relaxed. One of the men abruptly

shook Sister Rakjak's hand. "Better get something for your face," he advised with gruff friendliness. "You've had one hell of a sunburn, kid."

"A salve might help," another added. He brought a tube of white grease from a first-aid box and spread it liberally on her blistered face. He looked at Jeff and his young face broke into an uneasy grin. "You know, she's not bad-looking; not bad at all. Maybe, when we take the border forts, I'll pick up a Blue for myself."

As the armory workers began to unload the fire-guns from the vans, Jeff and Cass and Slim walked with Sister Rakjak to the adjoining government building. In her flaming, scarlet gown Sister Rakjak couldn't avoid being conspicuous. The adults on the street stared at her open-mouthed, with frank hatred. Children ran along beside her, peering at her curiously as they would have looked at a venomous reptile.

Sister Rakjak, nearly blinded by the glare of the sunlight on the white buildings, clung fiercely to Jeff's hand. "What's the marriage offer?" she whispered.

"You're my wife. It's the law; every valley woman —"

"But you said you were already married — with four sons!"

"What does that have to do with it?" He frowned; her comment didn't make sense. "Maybe you'd rather take Cass or Slim?"

"I — I don't understand." She glanced at the scores of flags flutter-

ing above the park and shook her head. "You said you'd saved your old world, Jeff, just as it was."

"Every detail; everything that the Wise One reads to us from the old books."

They ascended two steps and Jeff pushed open a side door of the government building. They entered a dark, dimly lit reception room. "The Wise One lives in the Council Hall," Jeff said.

"It's so restfully dark!" she answered, with some surprise. "Like one of our own metal cities."

"The Wise One is very old — in his eighties — and he's become a little eccentric since we built the city. He probably won't see us, but he'll talk, of course."

THE three men and Sister Rakjak sat on a cushioned lounge facing a speaker-grid set in a blank wall. Slim pushed a switch and a small, red light glared in the gloom above the grid. After a short wait they heard the clear voice of the Wise One. Crisply the three men reported the success of their raid.

"Twenty thousand fire-guns!" the Wise One exulted. "You have earned our gratitude. We'll assemble the council tomorrow and decide our final plans; within a week we'll be ready to attack the border forts."

"Not so soon, Wise One," Jeff protested. "Perhaps — perhaps we should try something else first."

The voice became very persuasive. "You have more to report, Jeff?"

"We brought back a stranger, a new woman for the valley."

"One of the ninnies from the Southern Plantation? We take only children, Jeff; you know the law!"

"Sister Rakjak is a Blue."

The voice exploded in an angry hiss. "You brought one of their women here? Have you lost your mind?"

"She's a Saver of Gannon, Wise One; she told us —"

"The Savers are a pack of rattle-brained idiots!"

"But what she says makes sense, Wise One. In our own way, maybe we're as wrong as the Blues are. If you'll listen to her —"

"No!" The word was a scream, a cry of agony. "Not a Blue! She came here to divide us, to make us doubt ourselves; she's the enemy, Jeff. Have you forgotten that? Condemn her; destroy her —"

"I gave her the marriage offer. She accepted, Wise One; she's one of us." Originally Jeff had not intended to lie to the Wise One; it was unthinkable. To the Unsubdued, the Wise One was a unified, complex symbol of government and religion. In the old days, when Jeff was growing up, the Wise One had been the only teacher the children had ever known. He taught them faith; he read them the old books; he arbitrated their quarrels, shared their childish pleasures. And subconsciously he had become a kind of god: infallible, just, gentle, and infinitely wise. All that had changed since the city

had been built four years ago. The Wise One had withdrawn into the government building, showing himself rarely in public. The new generation — Jeff's four sons — were taught by ordinary teachers, and to them the legend of the Wise One was little more than an amusing myth. But it still counted heavily with Jeff, and he was surprised that the lie came so easily.

"The marriage offer," the Wise One repeated after a long hesitation. The agony was gone from his voice; the tone was without expression. "You know what that means, Jeff; the children may be —"

"They will be the Unsubdued. I ask nothing else."

"Take her, Jeff; the law applies." For the first time the voice of the Wise One seemed old. "The council secretary will make the usual announcement."

The red light above the grid winked out. The three men and Sister Rakjak left the reception room. It was late in the afternoon, then, and the sun was setting behind the distant mountains. The white faces of the buildings were washed with pink light; long, blue shadows angled across the plastic streets.

The men separated. Jeff led Sister Rakjak to a building not far from the park. They took a sliding incline to the third floor. Eagerly Jeff flung back one of the doors that opened from the corridor. Sister Rakjak's first impression of the room was a painful glare of brilliance, for

the outer wall was transparent and the blood of the dying sun filled the room. Slowly she became aware of the furnishings, simply designed chairs and lounges made in tinted plastics. Music purred gently from a wall speaker. Far away she heard the gay chatter of children.

"Angela!" Jeff called lustily. "Joan! Ruth!"

A side door slid open. Three women ran smiling into the room. They embraced Jeff simultaneously, crying their pleasure. Four small boys crowded at their heels, shouting shrilly. Then one of them saw Sister Rakjak.

"A Blue!" he screamed. And the other children took up the name, "Daddy's brought home a Blue!"

The three women and their sons were abruptly quiet. Jeff smiled awkwardly. "Sister Rakjak, my wives — and our sons."

She said huskily, "Don't be frightened, please."

"Who's scared?" one of the boys demanded. "Someday we're going to kill all the Blues." It was the clear voice of hatred.

Sister Rakjak shrank toward Jeff. He picked up the child, spanking him playfully. "Sister Rakjak is one of us," he said evenly, "a valley woman. Never forget that."

The youngest child tugged at his mother's shorts. "Are we going to have a Blue mommy, too?"

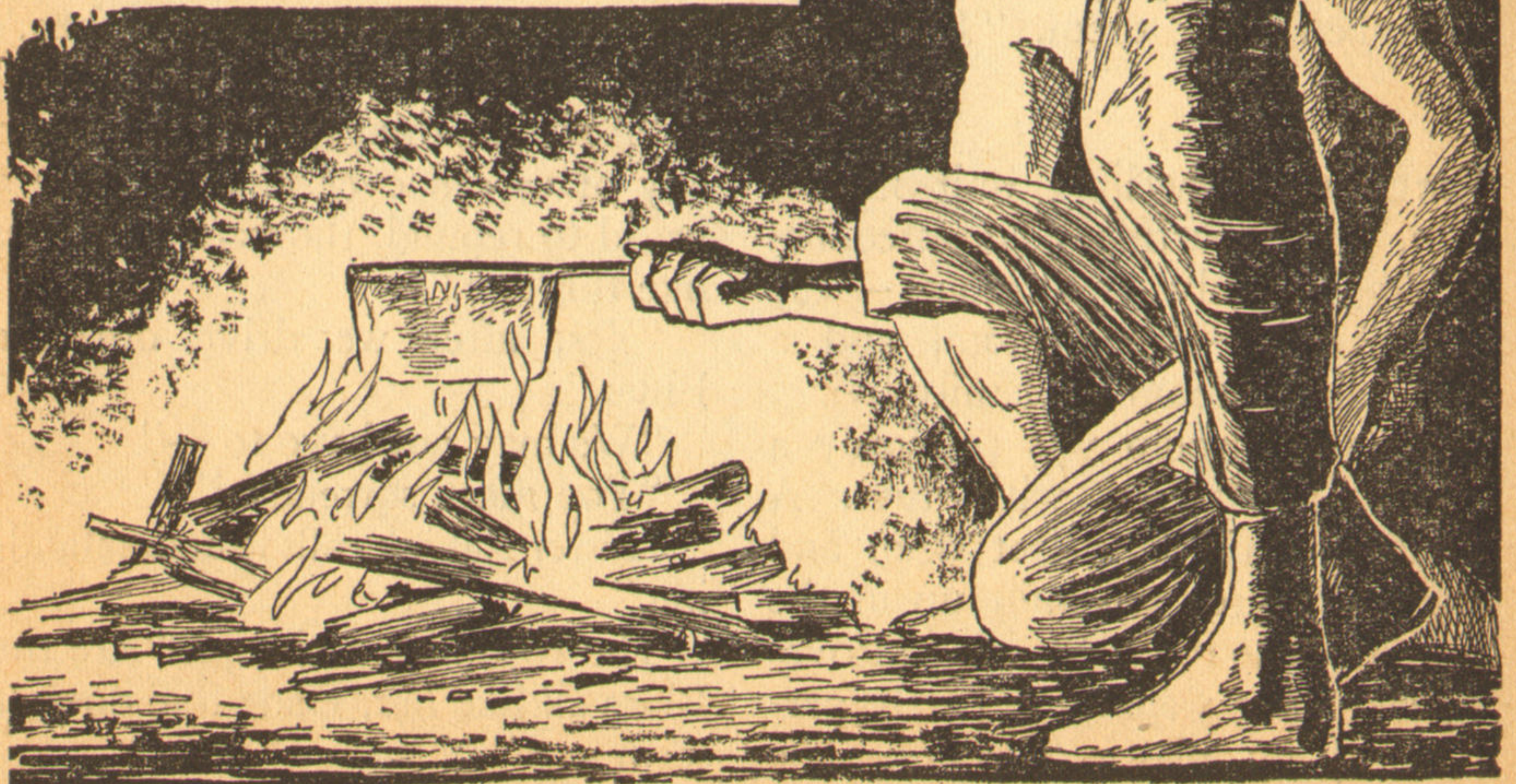
"Certainly not!" the woman whose name was Angela responded quickly,

pulling the child into her arms. When Jeff didn't immediately echo the denial, she looked at him with a frown. "Or are we, Jeff?"

The music coming from the wall speaker faded, and they heard the voice of the council secretary, "A Blue has come to live among us, Sister Rakjak by name. Jeff the White, of the regular explorer corps, claims citizenship for her by marriage; the law must not be violated. You are urged to receive her as a friend, to think of her as one of us, one of the Unsubdued. This is the official ruling of the Wise One."

The music faded in again. Jeff stood looking at his wives; their faces were impassive. He lifted his shoulders helplessly. "What else could I do? Let them condemn her to the cabins?"

Angela smiled. "No, Jeff; of course you couldn't."



Joan bit her lip doubtfully. "But is she compatible, Jeff?"

"We had no time to take the tests. She talks the way we do; she believes in the sort of thing we do; that's what counts."

Their doubts were resolved. The three women moved toward Sister Rakjak simultaneously. Ruth said, with throaty sympathy, "You poor dear! You must have had a miserable time on the road."

Joan added, "I've a skin balm I use for the children; it'll do wonders for your face."

And Angela said, "I know you want to get out of that ugly thing you're wearing and put on something more comfortable. My supplementary outfit ought to do."

The women led the bewildered Sister of Gannon through the side door. Jeff followed, stripping off his cartridge belts and his dusty homespun. "Give me half an hour to clean up and play with the kids," he called after them. "Then let's eat."

LIKE every dwelling unit in the city, Jeff's apartment consisted basically of only two rooms — the formal, glass-walled room, and a much larger room for family living. The family room was primarily a nursery, cluttered with toys. A bathing tank, four feet deep and twelve square, was built up in the center of the room. Sleeping alcoves against three walls were partly partitioned by plastic curtains. The

outer wall of the family room was again transparent; a door opened on a toy-crowded balcony overlooking the street.

The women took Sister Rakjak into one of the alcoves. Jeff plunged naked into the clear, cold water of the pool. As they always did, his sons pulled off their white trunks and played in the water with him. The enjoyment of his children was the most satisfying pleasure in Jeff's life. Now, as he ran through the usual games with his sons, he told them the story of his raid on the Southern Plantation. He dressed it instinctively in epic clothes, because the delight of childhood was closely identical with his own.

When Jeff had finished his tale, Chris, the oldest child, said with starry eyes, "I hope I can be as brave as you are when it's time for me to raid the Plantations."

Jeff slipped his arm around the boy's wet shoulder. "Perhaps, Chris, we won't be making any raids then."

"But — but what else is there?"

"A million things; more work than any of us can ever finish. We've a world to rebuild, thousands of cities like this one."

"Yes, after we drive out the Blues."

"We may not have to —"

"You mean surrender?"

"Sister Rakjak calls it understanding."

The boy pursed his lips. "Are the Blues all like her, Dad? She doesn't seem so awful."

"They're people, just as we are; some good, some bad."

"There can't be any good ones; they destroyed our world!"

"Not ours, Chris; we've kept it just as it was. No one can destroy our world, unless we do it ourselves."

"We're the Unsubdued," the boy echoed. "I never thought of it like that, Dad. It makes things kind of — kind of different."

Jeff's mind sang with hope. If he could eventually persuade Chris to understand, he could others, too. Jeff valued Chris' opinion highly. There was a difference of not quite fifteen years in their ages, and as time passed that counted less and less.

The three women brought Sister Rakjak out of the alcove and led her toward the pool. When she saw Jeff and the children, she gasped and hid modestly behind the partition.

"What's eating her?" Chris asked.

"Damned if I know."

"Do you suppose the Blues don't bathe, Dad?"

Jeff considered that, but shook his head. "Perhaps they're afraid of cold water."

He pulled himself out of the pool and stood drying himself in the hot light of the sun lamps. The four boys imitated him exactly, shifting their positions every time he did his, flexing the same muscles. While Jeff ran a comb through his unruly crown of platinum hair, Ruth slipped

out of the alcove and put her arm around his shoulder, drawing his ear close to her lips. Her face was convulsed with irrepressible amusement.

"The Blue needs a bath," she whispered, "but she's too shy to use the pool while you're here — not unless you put something on."

"Clothes in the water? It's a waste of material; what good would it do?"

"It seems to be one of their customs — something to do with moral values. She tried to explain it, but I don't understand it either. She's a stranger, Jeff, and at the beginning I think we ought to humor her whims." She brushed his cheek with her lips. "Put on your house-trunks and wait for us in the other room."

He laughed uproariously.

"We've been talking to her, Jeff. It's going to work out, I think; she'll be compatible. Give her time to get used to our ways. You know, she's quite a pretty little thing, isn't she?"

JEFF took the boys and went into the formal room. When his wives joined them, they took the sliding incline to the dining room on the lower floor of the apartment building. The room was crowded, seething with noise. A mob of children were playing on the slides and swings and teeter-totters at one end of the room, while a wife from each family worked at one of the electric ranges lined against the back wall. Other

women prepared the tables, or tended the very smallest children. The din was like the roar of a storm wind, but no one seemed to mind it.

Sister Rakjak clung to Jeff's hand. She tried to talk to him, but her timid little voice was a tenuous grace note lost in the thundering pandemonium. At intervals every adult in the room made a point of speaking to her. Their faces were friendly; their handclasps were warm and vigorous. They had all heard the announcement of the council secretary, and they were indicating their acceptance of the ruling.

"You're one of us, now," Jeff cried in her ear, grinning broadly. He put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close. She was trembling, and that puzzled him. Why should she be afraid here, in the fellowship of the dining room?

Gradually the noise decreased as the various tables were spread and the different sets of children were called away from the play area. Then, after a fashion, Sister Rakjak was able to make herself heard. "Do you always eat like this, Jeff? In such confusion?"

"There's nothing confusing about this!"

"In our cities we have separate dining rooms, in our own homes."

He was shocked. "But that's barbaric, Sister Rakjak! The meal hour is the most important time of the day for children. They must feel relaxed; they must have companionship; they must —"

"You go through all this for them?"

"Naturally; we're a civilized people."

"In a common dining room like this, how in the world do you work out the cost of the food? Who pays for what?"

"All the food belongs to all of us. It's a necessity, like air; you don't pay money for that. Luxuries, yes — an extra blouse, the furniture in your apartment, or a pool like the one I bought for my family room."

"And this is your old world, Jeff, exactly as it used to be?"

"To the last detail. Why do you keep harping on that? It should be obvious by this time."

Angela brought platters of steak to the table. With a whoop of animal joy the four boys leaped into their chairs. They began to wolf their food the way Jeff had on the road. Only Chris had any semblance of restraint which might remotely be defined as manners. The three women smiled when they noticed Sister Rakjak's pained expression.

"We bother very little about appearances," Ruth said. "A happy meal hour is so much more important to the children."

IV

SISTER RAKJAK toyed dejectedly with her steak. She had taught herself to eat their canned vegetables without flinching; but she could not adjust to meats. And there was nothing else on the table.

Jeff smiled encouragingly. "Try the steak."

Unwillingly she cut a small piece, and when it touched her lips she did not feel the usual nausea.

"I thought it would be all right," Jeff said. "It isn't really meat, Sister Rakjak — just another chemical compound we've developed from the soy bean; we've never been able to raise cattle very satisfactorily in our valley."

When the meal was finished Jean and Ruth cleared the table by scooping all the plastic plates, platters and flatware into waste containers. Sister Rakjak was disturbed by such needless destruction, until Jeff told her that the discards would be reduced to a chemical compound and reprocessed into dinnerware.

Ruth and Angela joined other wives in a game of cards. Chris went to play with the older children; in the play area they were putting on an impromptu drama for an audience of fathers. Joan herded the three younger boys up to bed. Jeff and Sister Rakjak followed them up the sliding incline to his apartment.

"The others will leave us the formal room tonight," he told her as he shut the outer door. "It's the custom when a man takes a new wife."

"It's done so easily, Jeff? Without a ceremony, without my consent —"

"Our marriage was legalized when I made the announcement to the Wise One."

"You never asked me, Jeff."

"There was no time. I had to lie; it was the only thing I could think of to save you from the cabins."

"You might have said you love me."

"You're a woman; I'm a man; we're undoubtedly compatible: that's love, isn't it?"

"You have three other wives; do you mean to tell me you love them too, in the same way?"

"Of course. There's nothing unusual about that. I married Angela when we were still kids in school; the compatibility placement tests gave me Joan and Ruth later. That's the way we've always done it; it's the law. All women want a home and children of their own. It just happens that we've taken more girls than boys from the Plantations; the valley women outnumber the men about three to one, so every man has three wives."

He stood with his back to the transparent wall, his broad shoulders silhouetted against the moonlit sky. His voice was sharp with exasperation. Why did she ask such inane questions? Surely the Blues must have a similar arrangement. He added angrily, "It's always been a custom among men."

"No, Jeff. When the Blues invaded your world, your marriage customs were much like ours; and they were, to an extent, responsible for the neurotic maladjustments of your world. Plural marriage was a

crime; and if you and Angela had even considered marriage as school-children, you'd have been punished."

"The Wise One has read us the old books; I know what it was like." He came and sat on the lounge beside her, reaching for her hand. "You're lying, Sister Rakjak. Not deliberately, of course; you simply have your facts wrong."

HER next question confused him completely; it seemed to bear no relation to the others. "Jeff, do you know that one of your wives is colored?"

"Ruth? Of course; she's black-skinned, the way you're a Blue."

"But you're married to her!"

"And why shouldn't I be? We hit the top correlation bracket on the compatibility tests."

Sister Rakjak turned toward him, her eyes glowing. "You *have* made over your world, Jeff: everything the Blues came to do for you. There's no reason, now, for you to hate us."

He drew her gently into his arms.

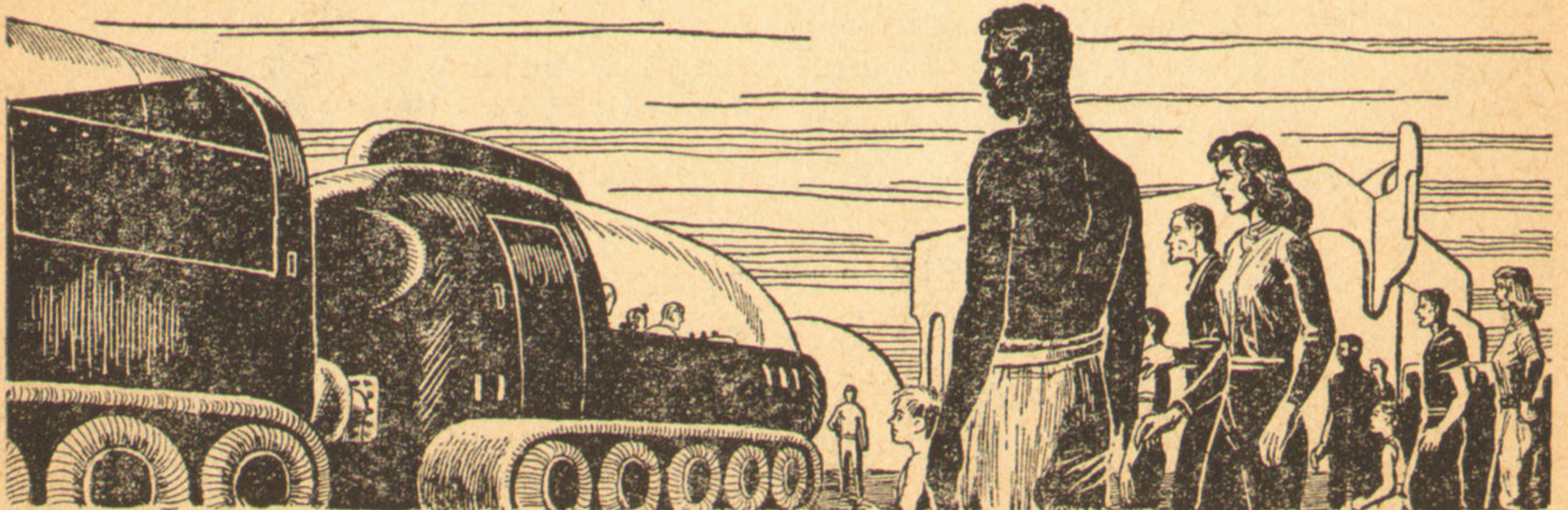
As her lips touched his, she whispered, "Understanding — that's all we need, Jeff; if your Wise One would only listen to me —" The whisper became a sigh.

THE four boys tumbled Jeff awake at the first light of dawn. In playful anger he pursued them around the family room. Screaming with delight, they tossed a barrage of cushions at him. He caught his sons, one by one, and flung them into the bathing tank. Jeff splashed in the water with them until Joan came to the side of the tank and said, "Out, you kids! And that means you, too, Jeff. Time to give your mummies a chance."

As Jeff slid over the wall of the tank, she added, "For the first week or so, I don't believe we ought to assign Sister Rakjak any community duties; let her visit in the city for a while and get better acquainted."

"Good idea. What kind of work do you think she'll do?"

"It'll have to be inside, because of the sun. She might make a good



teacher, Jeff; she seems to hit it off all right with our kids."

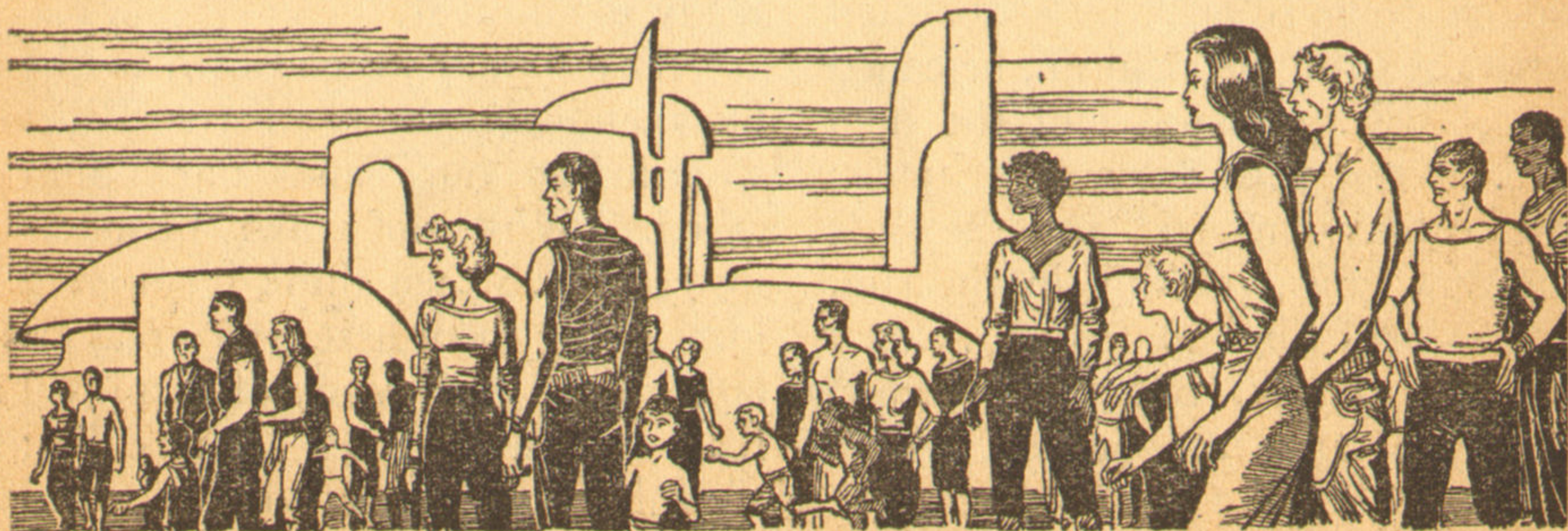
Jeff and his sons lay under the sun lamps while the women bathed. He was pleased when he saw Sister Rakjak join the others. Then, slowly, his warm sense of well-being departed, as he remembered what she had said to him the night before. If the old world had not been preserved here in the valley, what had happened? Jeff did not doubt that what he had was good; but if this wasn't the old culture of man, what was it? The people in the valley thought they had saved everything, even to the detail of the national flags which hung over the park — though what they had been used for no one quite knew. This was certainly what the Wise One read them from the old books; and the Wise One was the only man alive who could actually remember the invasion of the Blues. Conceivably the Wise One could have lied; but why? What possible reason could he have had for making the people in the valley believe a myth? He had taught them to fight to defend their

culture; yet if Sister Rakjak spoke the truth that culture was already dead.

As Jeff and his family left the apartment to go to breakfast, the wall speaker in the formal room chattered suddenly with the voice of the council secretary announcing the morning session of the council. At the same time the council summoned all regular raiders for maneuvers in the lower valley.

JEFF was in the regular service, with the rank of explorer. He had hoped to have a week's leave after the raid on the Southern Plantation, but the reason for the emergency order was obvious: the council would use the new fire-guns to make an immediate attack on the border forts and the men had to be ready.

Jeff walked, after breakfast, to the lower valley, where the ten thousand regulars were assembling in a clearing beside the stream. The commander of the corps explained that the maneuvers had been scheduled to give the men experience in handling the new guns. The tradi-



tional plan would be followed. Three hundred caravans would penetrate the border forts at the same time, as traders from the north; they were to take the defenses by surprise.

"We will show no mercy." The commander read off the long-established general orders without feeling. "We will give no quarter. When our attack is finished, let no Blue remain alive, let no fort remain standing."

As an explorer, Jeff commanded a caravan, but his authority had a logical rather than a disciplinary basis. His rank meant that he had had considerable experience with individual raids on the Plantations; he knew the roads and he knew the Blues. The commander of the corps, speaking for the council or the Wise One, issued the general orders; each caravan executed them as it saw fit. If Jeff suggested a plan of attack which the majority of the men under him considered foolish, they ignored it. No man in the valley would have understood any other form of authority.

Jeff issued the fire-guns to the men in his caravan. When he considered them sufficiently acquainted with the firing mechanism, he called a rest halt. A handful of the men still labored with the new weapons; the others dropped on the soft meadow grass, relaxing in the sun.

Cass and Slim joined Jeff. They wanted to talk, but they seemed awkward and tongue-tied. After half a dozen false starts, they made

themselves clear enough for Jeff to get the point. He threw back his head and laughed. "Of course it went all right; Sister Rakjak'll make a damn' fine wife."

"We've been thinking, Jeff — and talking to the men about it, too. Sister Rakjak fits in; some of the other Blues might, too."

Cass added, "Like she says, Jeff: maybe all we have to do is make them understand us."

Jeff asked thoughtfully, "How do the men feel about it?"

"It makes sense; why start a war if you don't have to?"

"The war: that's what bothers us," Slim admitted. "It's one thing to raid the Plantations. The Blues are used to that. But what happens when we knock out the border forts? The Blues still hold all the cards; if they want to, they can wipe us out."

"If the Blues are like Sister Rakjak, if they really came here to help us —" Cass shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Sure, I know they destroyed our world — or tried to. But they haven't won. The Plantations have failed; they're about ready to admit it."

"Why should we go down to the forts and slaughter all the Blues we can lay our hands on?" Slim asked. "Why not take prisoners instead? The men think it's a good idea. Bring them here. It's a reasonable guess a good many of them will react the way Sister Rakjak has; they'll see we've saved the world

they came to destroy, and nothing short of annihilation will change us. Then we could send them back to their own people; we might get a treaty out of the deal."

"Send back a band of converts," Jeff repeated softly; "the way of man instead of the Way of Gannon." He stood up, his face bright with sudden hope. "I'll ask permission to present your plan to the council; they'll have to change the general orders before we send out the caravans."

AS SOON as the maneuvers came to an end, in mid-afternoon, Jeff hurried back to the city. The council session had ended for the day, but he filed a request for a hearing and the secretary assigned him the opening hour of the morning session. In theory any citizen could address the council, just as every citizen was considered a member of it. But for practical purposes, as the population of the valley had grown, the council was limited to elected representatives, and petitioners to individuals who could represent well-defined groups. As an explorer, it was Jeff's responsibility to speak for any of his men who had a valid request to make of the council. In this case he would be speaking for himself as well. He knew the scheme suggested by Slim and Cass would work; it was logical. He had no doubt that the council would accept it.

Sister Rakjak met him as he returned to his apartment, with an

enthusiasm to match his own. "I've been everywhere in the city, Jeff; I've seen it all. It's magnificent what you've done."

He touched the blisters on her face gently. "They look a little better, I think."

"Jeff, do you understand what I'm saying? You've completely rebuilt your culture. You've kept everything worth saving, and junked the rest — all the neurotic inconsistency, all the prejudice, all the national hatreds. Today I met Chinese and Negroes and Whites all living together and working together in harmony."

"All men are brothers; we've always believed that."

"How can I make it clear to you? This is what your old world believed in, yes — but *not* what it practiced. You used the same words, then, but they meant nothing. Jeff, your people have no reason to live in isolation any longer; you mustn't begin the old war again now!" She caught his hand eagerly. "Could I talk to the Wise One?"

"Any citizen has that privilege."

"I want to explain to him how the Blues feel. We could send them an ambassador, or invite one here — anything, Jeff, but war. We've everything to lose and nothing to gain."

"It might be a good idea, but don't count too much on the Wise One. He's very old, Sister Rakjak; it's difficult for him to change the way he's thought since the invasion.

I'll walk up to the government house with you after dinner; we'll see what we can do."

JEFF'S vague misgivings were thoroughly justified. When they sat in the dismal reception room facing the speaker grid and the glowing red light, the Wise One refused to listen to her. "I will talk to no Blue," he said tonelessly. "Under the law, Sister Rakjak, you have qualified for citizenship; be content with that." The light went out.

"It's so foolish, Jeff!" Sister Rakjak said when they were outside again. "He's thinking with his prejudices — the kind of warped logic your world used to use."

"That's natural, I suppose; he's the only living survivor."

"Have you ever known any others?"

"No, they all died in the first five years after they came to the valley. Only their children were left, and the Wise One had to be mother and father to them all."

"Isn't that something of a coincidence, that every adult should have died?"

"Their lives were hard; they had nothing when they came here."

"But the children lived," she repeated thoughtfully, "and the Wise One brought them up, teaching them what he chose and — and literally creating a new world. How many children were there, Jeff?"

"Nearly a hundred."

"There must be a hundred thou-

sand people in the valley now. How could so few —"

"Later on we brought in recruits when we raided the Plantations. Always children; the Wise One wouldn't permit us to kidnap adults. We've sent explorers to all the Plantations, even as far away as Europe and Africa. The Wise One wanted us to know every part of our planet, because someday we'd reconquer it."

"He's done all this — and still won't listen to me; it just doesn't make sense."

"Ever since the city was built, he's been eccentric; I told you that."

"Did something happen to him then, Jeff?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, for an old man. He was taken sick on a trading expedition to the border forts. Rheumatism, maybe, or a heart attack; we've never known. He came back to the valley in a closed litter and shut himself up in the government building. We haven't seen him more than half a dozen times since. He even had a shuttered gallery built in the council hall so he could attend sessions without being seen."

"It's obviously senility. Jeff, would you let an old man who's lost his ability to think drive you to war?"

"He won't. The council gives the orders — and I have permission to address them in the morning."

Jeff counted on that. The representatives in the council were logical men. True, the Wise One was tech-

nically the presiding officer, with veto authority. But not in Jeff's lifetime had he actually intervened to change a council ruling.

V

IMMEDIATELY after the opening of the morning session, Jeff the White presented his petition to the governing body. He spoke from the rostrum; above him hung the latticed gallery of the Wise One. No one in the hall was ever sure whether the Wise One was present or not; the hanging box, like the man himself, had become a symbol for power, remote and silent and forever infallible.

The council received Jeff's proposed change in the general orders with overwhelming approval; he realized that at once. They had been reluctant to give the orders which might begin a new war with the Blues. They were as eager as Jeff to find a saner solution. When the vote was taken, it was unanimous.

Jeff left the rostrum and walked toward the exit hall. Behind him he heard the muffled banging of a gavel and, from the shuttered gallery, the angry voice of the Wise One. "The ruling is vetoed; we will attack the border forts according to the plan."

For a moment the representatives sat in stunned silence; then a dozen men began talking at once. The hidden gavel banged them to order. A woman arose and faced her fellow delegates. "The Wise One has ex-

pressed his opinion — the opinion of a man we love and respect, but still the opinion of one man; I propose that we vote again on the same petition."

From the balcony the Wise One cried, "My authority is final!"

The woman answered, "We govern ourselves; you have taught us that."

A delegate seconded her motion.

"We cannot discard the plan," the Wise One pleaded with them. "We have worked for this hour all our lives — for the time when men will defeat the Blues in battle. After that make peace with them, yes; on our terms, proudly, as conquerors, with a culture the Blues have been unable to destroy. What else will give us equality? The man who asks us to surrender the plan —"

"He asks only a minor change," the woman corrected him firmly; "an elimination of needless brutality."

"This man, Jeff the White, has married a Blue. How can we know the lies she has told him? Why has she come to the valley? To spy on us? To undermine our spirit?"

"That isn't the issue; we lose nothing by taking prisoners of war."

"The council has never been divided on an important issue. I ask you now to call a recess before you vote again. Wait until tomorrow; give yourselves time to think."

The representatives agreed to that. Slowly they moved out of their seats. A number of them milled

around Jeff, asking him about his Blue wife. He invited them to talk to her for themselves, and more than three-fourths of the council went with him. They met Sister Rakjak in the dining room of Jeff's apartment building. She was anxious to talk to them and her sincerity impressed them all.

As the meeting broke up, a messenger brought her a note. She tore it open and her face lit with pleasure.

"From the Wise One, Jeff; he says he'll see me."

"Want me to go along?"

She glanced at the note. "I'm to come alone."

TEN minutes after she had left, the wall-speakers throughout the city hummed with the voice of the council secretary. On orders from the Wise One, all regular raiders were called to caravan stations. Jeff trudged to the assembly field above the city. The emergency orders disturbed him; it could only mean that the attack on the forts had been launched.

The council was not in session; the Wise One, then, had given the order and the general plan would be followed because the council had not voted for the change. Was this the pettish senility of a stubborn old man? Would the Wise One risk losing everything he had built simply to have his own way?

The commander made an explanation of sorts: an explorer reported that the Blue patrols in the border forts were being changed. This was

the ideal moment to strike, before the new men learned the potential dangers of the border. But who was the explorer? When had he come back to the valley? Who had seen him but the Wise One?

Another lie? How many times before this had the Wise One lied? How often had he maneuvered them all, like docile children? Children! The word rang bitterly in Jeff's mind. The Wise One had made himself the great, all-knowing father; they were all his children, in a sense; this was his world, created with children he had reared.

Were the old books lies, too? Sister Rakjak had told Jeff the truth: the valley had not preserved the old world. They had saved nothing; this had all been created by the Wise One. That seemed self-evident. Jeff was surprised at his own calm acceptance of the situation. He felt neither bitterness nor resentment. This culture, made by the Wise One, fabricated from falsehood, was a world worth fighting for; no sane man would lift a finger to restore the old chaos.

Within an hour three hundred caravans were moving out of the valley toward the pass. They departed in such haste the men were not given the traditional leave-hour with their wives. The raiders wore the customary homespun and moccasins; but beneath their cartridge belts were concealed clips of stolen fire-guns. They rode bedraggled, shaggy ponies, raised in the valley

and kept more or less untamed. An explorer was expected to raid a Plantation on foot, or by means of any transportation he had the initiative to improvise on the trail; but the wild-maned ponies were considered a necessary part of the costuming for a caravan.

They made camp the first night on the arid, windy plane at the foot of the pass—a motley army of thirty thousand men. For another day they would march together, before breaking up into three hundred separate units, each destined for one of the chain of border trading cities. That was the long-established strategy of the plan, to strike simultaneously against the entire border. It would have the maximum psychological effect upon the Blues; it would convince them that the Unsubdued were stronger than they actually were.

This was the climactic hour of their lives, the decisive crisis in their civilization. They had every assurance that they would win, at least in the initial attack. The men should have been boisterous with anticipation, raucous as they sat in caravan groups around their campfires. But the army was silent, seething with a muttered unrest.

Every man knew what had happened that morning in the council; the city speakers, as always, had carried a summary of the proceedings. To each of the men Jeff's proposal had seemed entirely sane and logical. Yet they were moving on the forts

now under the original orders to burn and slaughter.

THE commander called a meeting of the caravan leaders. The three hundred men met around a campfire built in the mouth of a canyon. The towering walls of jumbled rock protected them from the wind and made it easier for individual voices to be heard.

“The council does not expect us to follow orders blindly,” the commander agreed, after listening to the petitions of half a dozen explorers. “We govern ourselves. We must act unanimously on a clear majority decision, of course; and in this case it is entirely evident what the council intends. The actual vote is a matter of form. They'll send a messenger with new orders as soon as they convene tomorrow morning. Go back and tell your men that.”

Someone demanded, “What happens if the Wise One uses the veto again?”

“No one man has the right to set himself up as the law.”

“We've always said the Wise One was infallible; when we've had a problem we couldn't solve, we've run to him for help.”

“And he taught us to depend upon ourselves. He is an old man, now, and his mind is infirm. Naturally we shall always respect him for what he has done. But this is our world, not his alone; it's up to us to run it our way. If the council messenger doesn't reach us before night-

fall tomorrow, we'll take a vote among ourselves and act upon that decision." The voice of the commander was crisp and calmly reasonable. It would not have occurred to him to resort to bombast, nor to the men to expect it. Only subconsciously was Jeff aware that his commander had proclaimed a revolution: an army in the field was to determine the validity of orders under which it marched.

The leaders carried the promise back to their caravans and the unrest dwindled. The camp relaxed; here and there groups of men began to sing.

AT dawn the army began to move south again. Three hours later they saw the spiraling cloud of an approaching horseman behind them. The long, ragged line of caravans ground to a stop. Sporadic cheering swept the men. Surely this was the messenger from the council, bringing them saner orders.

But they were wrong. It was Joan. As soon as Jeff recognized his wife, he jabbed his moccasined heels into the flanks of his pony and rode out to meet her. Her face was drawn with fatigue, gray with the shadow of an incomprehensible fear. "You must come home, Jeff!" she gasped. "Your new wife —"

"Calm down, Joan; rest a minute and get your breath."

She swayed in the saddle, but with an effort she controlled her voice. "Sister Rakjak went to see the

Wise One yesterday; she never came home. All last night we worried, but what could we do? We kept saying to ourselves nothing could happen to her, not in the government house. Then — then this morning —"

"Yes? Tell me!"

"WHEN the council met, Sister Rakjak spoke to them from the Wise One's box. The shutters were open; everyone saw her. She said she had lied — to you, to the delegates when they talked to her, to all of us. She was sorry, now, and she wanted to make amends. She said we had to carry out the plan, just as we had made it; she told the council the Blues had sent her here to divide us, to weaken us, to —"

"That's impossible. She couldn't have been sent. She was on her way to the Plantation; this is nothing the Blues could have arranged."

"Even the council knows that, Jeff; she's lying *now*, for some reason. Something has happened to her, but no one's allowed to see her. You have to get her out of the government house; they'll release her to you, Jeff. You're her husband; it's the law."

"Has the council voted?"

"They would have, but the Wise One asked for another recess — this time so they could consider what Sister Rakjak said. She's going to be in his box again this afternoon."

Jeff clenched his jaw; the muscles in his face hardened. "She is like hell!"

JEFF cantered back to his caravan. After a brief explanation, he put Slim and Cass jointly in charge, and took a fresh mount for Joan. No more formal a leave-taking was expected of him; to every man the affairs of his family took precedence over all other things.

Jeff and his wife followed the twisting trail back to the valley. Two people, unencumbered, could travel far more rapidly than a host of thirty thousand men. Within four hours Jeff and Joan clattered across the treaded bridge into the white city.

He left his wife at his apartment, and sprinted across the flag-ornamented park toward the government building. The outer doors of the council hall were open for the convenience of a throng gathered on the plastic-surfaced street. Jeff shouldered his way into the building.

From the back of the crowded hall he saw his Blue wife in the gallery of the Wise One. The shutters were parted. Sister Rakjak was clinging to the ornamental rail, her eyes cast down to avoid the glare of amber and purple sunlight that fell through the transparent ceiling panels.

“How many times must I repeat the same thing?” she asked wearily. “You have a good plan; for generations you have lived in order to achieve it. Afterwards, yes — then make peace with the Blues.”

A delegate replied, with a voice as weary as hers, “Sister Rakjak, you

have done nothing to influence our decision, one way or the other. We have given you the courtesy of a hearing; now if we may resume the business of the council —”

“I lied to you yesterday; do you understand that?”

“You made that same statement earlier; it has no bearing that we can see.”

“I told you that you had created a new culture; I said this was what the Blues had come here to achieve — you must not believe that. This is your world, exactly as it always was. You must defend it in your own way, in the way the Wise One has taught you.” She twisted her hands in agony; her voice was weak with inner torment.

A fury of anger and shame swept Jeff’s mind. This was a farce, and his wife was playing the fool. Couldn’t she see that? The illogic was ridiculously obvious: to argue for violence, in the name of peaceful understanding.

Jeff pushed through the crowd and sprinted around the building to the entrance to the living quarters. He slammed open the door and stumbled blindly up the steps. He stood panting at the back of the shuttered balcony while his eyes adjusted to the gloom.

He heard his wife’s voice, hoarse with fatigue. In a dark corner of the box he saw the Wise One, a brittle old man hunched deep in a cushioned chair, his face and hands chalk-white. Jeff sprang toward Sister Rak-

jak, pulling her away from the railing.

She screamed. "No, Jeff! You can't interfere now!"

The Wise One stood up. "Let her go!" he whispered. In his hand the old man held a fire-gun.

JEFF turned slowly, and the muscles in his back stiffened as he clenched his fists; the Wise One held the vicious weapon steady. For a moment neither man moved. Jeff tried to estimate how much age would have slowed the Wise One's reaction-time: it seemed worth the gamble.

He sprang forward suddenly, as lithe as a cat; the old man jabbed the firing dial a split-second too late. The needle-fire cut harmlessly into the shutter studding, and the shutters fell away from the front of the box. The sudden flood of multicolored sunlight was blinding. The old man flung his arm protectively over his eyes as Jeff struck his feet.

The two men rolled together on the narrow floor. As he grappled for a hold, Jeff's hand dragged across the old man's face.

And ice was in Jeff's soul. A terrifying fear and emptiness caught at his viscera. He stood up weakly, moving back against the wall and staring stupidly at the white mask that had come free in his hand.

The Wise One was a Blue.

The sheltering shutters were gone. Every delegate in the council hall saw the Blue.

"Now you know, Jeff," Sister

Rakjak whispered; "and you've destroyed your world."

The emptiness swam in his mind; vaguely he knew what she meant, and he fought the shapeless wraith of the nightmare.

In the deadly silence, Jeff heard a whisper from the hall, "Then what she said is true: they have tried to help us."

The old man groped his way to the railing. Holding his hand to shield his eyes, he said, "You've rebuilt your world yourselves; please believe that. Your Wise One was one of you, but he died four years ago when he was in the trading city. We knew you couldn't survive without a leader, and the Brothers of Gannon elected me to take his place. You have no reason to feel shame; we have imposed nothing; all this world is your own making."

The emptiness was gone from Jeff's mind as quickly as it had come. The tension washed out of his muscles and he grinned broadly as he took his Blue wife in his arms. The old man continued his patient appeal to the delegates, until one of the representatives interrupted with a motion that treaty negotiations should begin at once with the Blues. It was seconded. The council started to debate the selection of an ambassador.

The Blue turned uncertainly toward Jeff and Sister Rakjak. "I expected confusion. This quiet acceptance of the truth — it's very puzzling."

“Why not?” Jeff asked. “Now we can solve our problem without war.”

“The dejection and the loss of initiative comes slowly, I suppose. Sister Rakjak saw at once what you faced when she talked to me; that’s why she was willing to help. Jeff . . . the challenge is gone, the thing that held your people together —”

“Challenge?” he repeated without understanding.

“Revenge on the Blues. As long as you built to defeat us, you had a goal; but now —” The old man spread his hands helplessly.

“Now we make a treaty.” Jeff nodded toward the council hall.

“Your people — the Unsubdued — have created a new society. Years ago we began watching you quietly, helping where we could. We had to make sure you survived. If you hated us, that didn’t matter. You might make peace after you took the border forts; that was the original plan of the Wise One. You needed a victory to counterbalance the bitter memory of defeat.”

“But we’re not children. Why didn’t you simply tell us the truth?”

THE old man sighed. “I meant to, when I took the Wise One’s place. Then I read the notes he had kept. He had been a scientist of some sort — a biochemist, I’d guess, since he based your economy on the by-products of the soy bean. He deliberately set out to make a new culture, by avoiding all the social misconceptions which had caused

disaster in the past. He began with untrained children. And, to make sure there would be no social heritage, he murdered all their parents and reared the children himself. It’s strange, isn’t it, that so much good should arise from that act of evil; and so much sorrow from the good we intended when we came?”

“On the whole, the Wise One planned well; but he was convinced that a society had to face a constant challenge in order to grow. He used the Blues for that, and he built hatred of us into everything you did.” His voice dropped to a helpless whisper. “The challenge is gone, now; your people know it never existed. What other goal do you have?”

“To rebuild a planet,” Jeff answered simply. Sister Rakjak slid her hand into his and smiled reassuringly.

“That’s too abstract; it hasn’t the clear-cut force of revenge.”

“For my world it does. Perhaps the Wise One wasn’t as clever as you suppose — or perhaps he built better than he knew. You see, he taught us sanity. Hatred and vengeance are symptoms of madness; we operate logically — nothing else makes sense to us. That’s why the display you persuaded my wife to make was so obvious for exactly what it was. Of course the council listened — ordinary courtesy for a stranger; but when the vote came, they wouldn’t have changed their minds.”

“I — I think I knew that, which is why I kept asking for a further

recess." Abruptly the aging Blue's face brightened. "And there may be hope in that. You have enough confidence in yourselves to defy your own highest authority, your own Wise One. With a maturity like that—" His voice became troubled again. "The army, Jeff! They'll attack the forts under the old orders. And even that sacrifice, which we Blues were willing to make—it's pointless now."

"Can't we stop them?" Sister Rakjak asked.

Jeff laughed easily. "They'll take a vote tonight and change the orders themselves; it's the logical thing to do, isn't it?" He took her hand and led her gently toward the stairway. "You've been through enough, Sister Rakjak; it's time I took you home."

His eyes adjusted slowly to the darkness of the stairwell and he stumbled. She caught his elbow and asked, with some surprise, "Can't you see in the dark, Jeff?"

"Of course not."

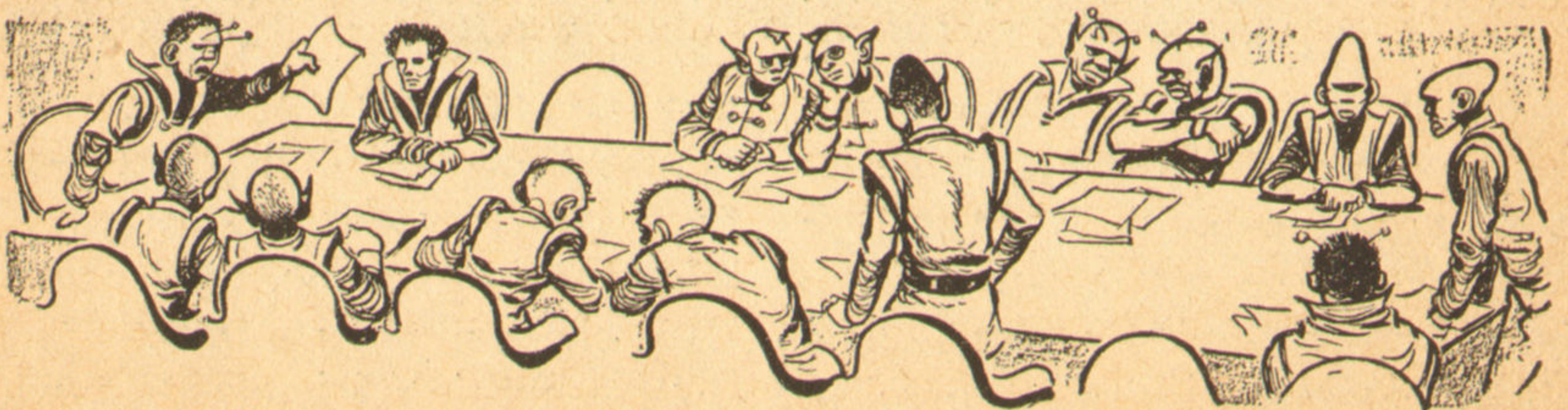
"Why, I thought all men—strange, we never knew that about

your people." After a pause, she added shyly, "Do you think our child—I mean, if we have a child—"

"Half a dozen, if you like. And they won't be like either of us, Sister Rakjak; just themselves. That's why kids are fun."

"You know, Jeff, that's the real answer. Your Wise One may have meant to make hatred the core of your society. But, without knowing it, he gave you something else: the family, this worship of children. There's a saying of Gannon, 'You achieve the infinite peace of eternity, when you learn to see with the innocent eyes of a little child.'"

He smiled. "And in our belief, too, '*For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.*'" They left the government building and on the bright, sunlit street they were engulfed in the ever-present swarms of noisy, laughing children. Over the gates of their playground the plastic letters gleamed in the sun, "*Of such as these.*"

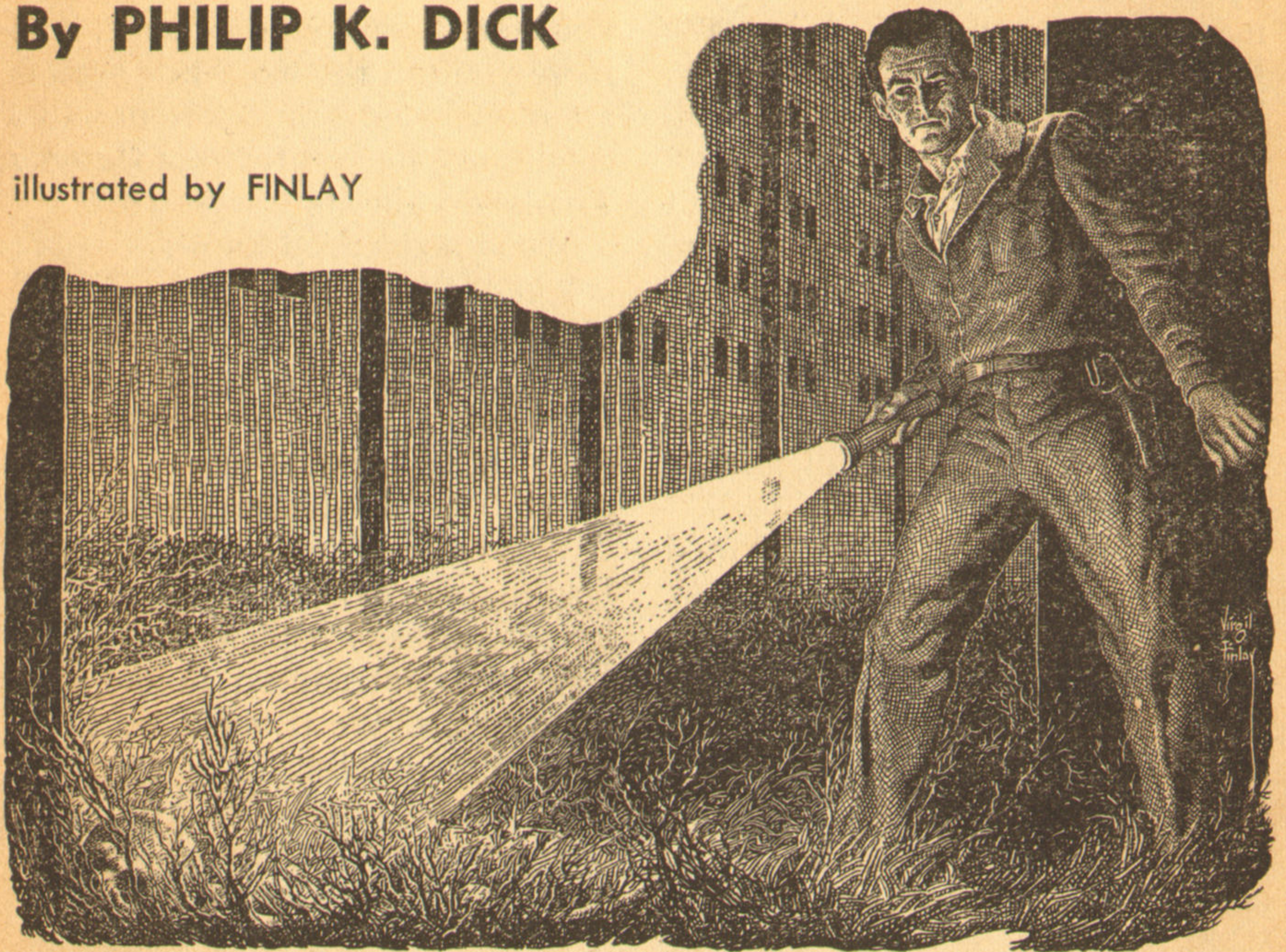


The hardest part of the "preordained" thesis to grasp is that the thesis itself is part of what must and shall be.

MEDDLER

By **PHILIP K. DICK**

illustrated by **FINLAY**



THEY entered the great chamber. At the far end, technicians hovered around an immense illuminated board, following a complex pattern of lights that shifted rapidly, flashing through seemingly endless combina-

tions. At long tables machines whirred — computers, human-operated and robot. Wall-charts covered every inch of vertical space. Hasten gazed around him in amazement.

Wood laughed. "Come over here

and I'll really show you something. You recognize *this*, don't you?" He pointed to a hulking machine surrounded by silent men and women in white lab robes.

"I recognize it," Hasten said slowly. "It's something like our own Dip, but perhaps twenty times larger. What do you haul up? And *when* do you haul?" He fingered the surface-plate of the Dip, then squatted down, peering into the maw. The maw was locked shut; the Dip was in operation. "You know, if we had any idea this existed, Histo-Research would have —"

"You know now." Wood bent down beside him. "Listen, Hasten, you're the first man from outside the Department ever to get into this room. You saw the guards. No one gets in here unauthorized; the guards have orders to kill anyone trying to enter illegally."

"To hide this? A machine? You'd shoot to —"

They stood, Wood facing him, his jaw hard. "*Your* Dip digs back into antiquity. Rome. Greece. Dust and old volumes." Wood touched the big Dip beside them. "This Dip is different. We guard it with our lives, and anyone else's lives; do you know why?"

Hasten stared at it.

"This Dip is set, not for antiquity, but — for the future." Wood looked directly into Hasten's face. "Do you understand? The future."

"You're dredging the future? But you can't! It's forbidden by law; you

know that!" Hasten drew back. "If the Executive Council knew this they'd break this building apart. You know the dangers. Berkowsky himself demonstrated them in his original thesis."

Hasten paced angrily. "I can't understand you, using a future-oriented Dip. When you pull material from the future you automatically introduce new factors into the present; the future is altered — you start a never-ending shift. The more you dip the more new factors are brought in. You create unstable conditions for centuries to come. That's why the law was passed."

Wood nodded. "I know."

"And you still keep dipping?" Hasten gestured at the machine and the technicians. "Stop, for God's sake! Stop before you introduce some lethal element that can't be erased. Why do you keep —"

Wood sagged suddenly. "All right, Hasten, don't lecture us. It's too late; it's already happened. A lethal factor was introduced in our first experiments. We thought we knew what we were doing . . ." He looked up. "And that's why you were brought here. Sit down — you're going to hear all about it."

THEY faced each other across the desk. Wood folded his hands. "I'm going to put it straight on the line. You are considered an expert, *the* expert at Histo-Research. You know more about using a Time Dip than anyone alive; that's why you've

been shown our work, our illegal work."

"And you've already got into trouble?"

"Plenty of trouble, and every attempt to meddle further makes it that much worse. Unless we do something, we'll be the most culpable organization in history."

"Please start at the beginning," Hasten said.

"The Dip was authorized by the Political Science Council; they wanted to know the results of some of their decisions. At first we objected, giving Berkowsky's theory; but the idea is hypnotic, you know. We gave in, and the Dip was built — secretly, of course.

"We made our first dredge about one year hence. To protect ourselves against Berkowsky's factor we tried a subterfuge; we actually brought nothing back. This Dip is geared to pick up nothing. No object is scooped; it merely photographs from a high altitude. The film comes back to us and we make enlargements and try to gestalt the conditions.

"Results were all right, at first. No more wars, cities growing, much better looking. Blow-ups of street scenes show many people, well-content, apparently. Pace a little slower.

"Then we went ahead fifty years. Even better: cities on the decrease. People not so dependent on machines. More grass, parks. Same general conditions, peace, happiness, much leisure. Less frenetic waste, hurry.

"We went on, skipping ahead. Of course, with such an indirect viewing method we couldn't be certain of anything, but it all looked fine. We relayed our information to the Council and they went ahead with their planning. And then it happened."

"What, exactly?" Hasten said, leaning forward.

"We decided to revisit a period we had already photographed, about a hundred years hence. We sent out the Dip, got it back with a full reel. The men developed it and we watched the run." Wood paused.

"And?"

"And it wasn't the same. It was different. Everything was changed. War — war and destruction everywhere." Wood shuddered. "We were appalled; we sent the Dip back at once to make absolutely certain."

"And what did you find this time?"

Wood's fists clenched. "Changed again, and for worse! Ruins, vast ruins. People poking around. Ruin and death everywhere. Slag. The *end* of war, the last phase."

"I see," Hasten said, nodding.

"That's not the worst! We conveyed the news to the Council. It ceased all activity and went into a two-week conference; it canceled all ordinances and withdrew every plan formed on the basis of our reports. It was a month before the Council got in touch with us again. The members wanted us to try once more, take one more Dip to the

same period. We said no, but they insisted. It could be no worse, they argued.

"So we sent the Dip out again. It came back and we ran the film. Hasten, there are things worse than war. You wouldn't believe what we saw. There was no human life; none at all, not a single human being."

"Everything was destroyed?"

"No! No destruction, cities big and stately, roads, buildings, lakes, fields. But no human life; the cities empty, functioning mechanically, every machine and wire untouched. But no living people."

"What was it?"

"We sent the Dip on ahead, at fifty year leaps. Nothing. Nothing each time. Cities, roads, buildings, but no human life. Everyone dead. Plague, radiation, or what, we don't know. But *something* killed them. Where did it come from? We don't know. It wasn't there at first, not in our original dips.

"Somehow, *we* introduced it, the lethal factor. *We* brought it, with our meddling. It wasn't there when we started; it was done by us, Hasten." Wood stared at him, his face a white mask. "We brought it and now we've got to find what it is and get rid of it."

"How are you going to do that?"

"We've built a Time Car, capable of carrying one human observer into the future. We're sending a man there to see what it is. Photographs don't tell us enough; we have to know more! When did it first ap-

pear? How? What were the first signs? *What is it?* Once we know, maybe we can eliminate it, the factor, trace it down and remove it. Someone must go into the future and find out what it was we began. It's the only way."

Wood stood up, and Hasten rose, too.

"You're that person," Wood said. "You're going, the most competent person available. The Time Car is outside, in an open square, carefully guarded." Wood gave a signal. Two soldiers came toward the desk.

"Sir?"

"Come with us," Wood said. "We're going outside to the square; make sure no one follows after us." He turned to Hasten. "Ready?"

Hasten hesitated. "Wait a minute. I'll have to go over your work, study what's been done. Examine the Time Car itself. I can't —"

The two soldiers moved closer, looking to Wood. Wood put his hand on Hasten's shoulder. "I'm sorry," he said, "we have no time to waste; come along with me."

ALL around him blackness moved, swirling toward him and then receding. He sat down on the stool before the bank of controls, wiping the perspiration from his face. He was on his way, for better or worse. Briefly, Wood had outlined the operation of the Time Car. A few moments of instruction, the controls set for him, and then the metal door slammed behind him.



Hasten looked around him. It was cold in the sphere; the air was thin and chilly. He watched the moving dials for awhile, but presently the cold began to make him uncomfortable. He went over to the equipment-locker and slid the door back. A jacket, a heavy jacket, and a flash gun. He held the gun for a minute, studying it. And tools, all kinds of tools and equipment. He was just putting the gun away when the dull chugging under him suddenly ceased. For one terrible second he was floating, drifting aimlessly, then the feeling was gone.

Sunlight flowed through the window, spreading out over the floor. He snapped the artificial lights off and went to the window to see. Wood had set the controls for a hundred years hence; bracing himself, he looked out.

A meadow, flowers and grass, rolling off into the distance. Blue sky and wandering clouds. Some animals grazed a long way off, standing together in the shade of a tree. He went to the door and unlocked it, stepping out. Warm sunlight struck him, and he felt better at once. Now he could see the animals were cows.

He stood for a long time at the door, his hands on his hips. Could the plague have been bacterial? Air-carried? If it *were* a plague. He reached up, feeling the protective helmet resting on his shoulders. Better to keep it on.

He went back and got the gun

from the locker. Then he returned to the lip of the sphere, checked the door-lock to be certain it would remain closed during his absence. Only then, Hasten stepped down onto the grass of the meadow. He closed the door and looked around him. Presently he began to walk quickly away from the sphere, toward the top of a long hill that stretched out half a mile away. As he strode along, he examined the click-band on his wrist which would guide him back to the metal sphere, the Time Car, if he could not find the way himself.

He came to the cows, passing by their tree. The cows got up and moved away from him. He noticed something that gave him a sudden chill; their udders were small and wrinkled. Not herd cows.

When he reached the top of the hill he stopped, lifting his glasses from his waist. The earth fell away, mile after mile of it, dry green fields without pattern or design, rolling like waves as far as the eye could see. Nothing else? He turned, sweeping the horizon.

He stiffened, adjusting the sight. Far off to the left, at the very limit of vision, the vague perpendiculars of a city rose up. He lowered the glasses and hitched up his heavy boots. Then he walked down the other side of the hill, taking big steps; he had a long way to go.

HASTEN had not walked more than half an hour when he saw butterflies.

They rose up suddenly a few yards in front of him, dancing and fluttering in the sunlight. He stopped to rest, watching them. They were all colors, red and blue, with splashes of yellow and green. They were the largest butterflies he had ever seen. Perhaps they had come from some zoo, escaped and bred wild after man left the scene. The butterflies rose higher and higher in the air. They took no notice of him but struck out toward the distant spires of the city; in a moment they were gone.

Hasten started up again. It was hard to imagine the death of man in such circumstances, butterflies and grass and cows in the shade. What a quiet and lovely world was left, without the human race!

Suddenly one last butterfly fluttered up, almost in his face, rising quickly from the grass. He put his arm up automatically, batting at it. The butterfly dashed against his hand. He began to laugh —

Pain made him sick; he fell half to his knees, gasping and retching. He rolled over on his face, hunching himself up, burying his face in the ground. His arm ached, and pain knotted him up; his head swam and he closed his eyes.

When Hasten turned over at last, the butterfly was gone; it had not lingered.

He lay for a time in the grass, then he sat up slowly, getting shakily to his feet. He stripped off his shirt and examined his hand and

wrist. The flesh was black, hard and already swelling. He glanced down at it and then at the distant city. The butterflies had gone there . . .

He made his way back to the Time Car.

HASTEN reached the sphere a little after the sun had begun to drop into evening darkness. The door slid back to his touch and he stepped inside. He dressed his hand and arm with salve from the medicine kit and then sat down on the stool, deep in thought, staring at his arm. A small sting, accidental, in fact. The butterfly had not even noticed. Suppose the whole pack —

He waited until the sun had completely set and it was pitch black outside the sphere. At night all the bees and butterflies disappeared; or at least, those he knew did. Well, he would have to take a chance. His arm still ached dully, throbbing without respite. The salve had done no good; he felt dizzy, and there was a fever taste in his mouth.

Before he went out he opened the locker and brought all the things out. He examined the flash gun but put it aside. A moment later he found what he wanted. A blowtorch, and a flashlight. He put all the other things back and stood up. Now he was ready — if that were the word for it. As ready as he would ever be.

He stepped out into the darkness, flashing the light ahead of him. He walked quickly. It was a dark and lonely night; only a few stars shone

above him, and his was the only earthly light. He passed up the hill and down the other side. A grove of trees loomed up, and then he was on a level plain, feeling his way toward the city by the beam of the flashlight.

WHEN he reached the city he was very tired. He had gone a long way, and his breath was beginning to come hard. Huge ghostly outlines rose up ahead of him, disappearing above, vanishing into darkness. It was not a large city, apparently, but its design was strange to Hasten, more vertical and slim than he was used to.

He went through the gate. Grass was growing from the stone pavement of the streets. He stopped, looking down. Grass and weeds everywhere; and in the corners, by the buildings were bones, little heaps of bones and dust. He walked on, flashing his light against the sides of the slender buildings. His footsteps echoed hollowly. There was no light except his own.

The buildings began to thin out. Soon he found himself entering a great tangled square, overgrown with bushes and vines. At the far end a building larger than the others rose. He walked toward it, across the empty, desolate square, flashing his light from side to side. He walked up a half-buried step and onto a concrete plaza. All at once he stopped. To his right, another building reared up, catching his

attention. His heart thudded. Above the doorway his light made out a word cut expertly into the arch:

Bibliotheca

This was what he wanted, the library. He went up the steps toward the dark entrance. Wood boards gave under his feet. He reached the entrance and found himself facing a heavy wood door with metal handles. When he took hold of the handles the door fell toward him, crashing past him, down the steps and into the darkness. The odor of decay and dust choked him.

He went inside. Spider webs brushed against his helmet as he passed along silent halls. He chose a room at random and entered it. Here were more heaps of dust and grey bits of bones. Low tables and shelves ran along the walls. He went to the shelves and took down a handful of books. They powdered and broke in his hands, showering bits of paper and thread onto him. Had only a century passed since his own time?

HASTEN sat down at one of the tables and opened one of the books that was in better condition. The words were no language he knew, a Romance language that he knew must be artificial. He turned page after page. At last he took a handful of books at random and moved back toward the door. Suddenly his heart jumped. He went over to the wall, his hands trembling. Newspapers.

He took the brittle, cracking sheets carefully down, holding them to the light. The same language, of course. Bold, black headlines. He managed to roll some of the papers together and add them to his load of books. Then he went through the door, out into the corridor, back the way he had come.

When he stepped out onto the steps cold fresh air struck him, tingling his nose. He looked around at the dim outlines rising up on all sides of the square. Then he walked down and across the square, feeling his way carefully along. He came to the gate of the city, and a moment later he was outside, on the flat plain again, heading back toward the Time Car.

For an endless time he walked, his head bent down, plodding along. Finally fatigue made him stop, swaying back and forth, breathing deeply. He set down his load and looked around him. Far off, at the edge of the horizon, a long streak of grey had appeared, silently coming into existence while he was walking. Dawn. The sun coming up.

A cold wind moved through the air, eddying against him. In the forming grey light the trees and hills were beginning to take shape, a hard, unbending outline. He turned toward the city. Bleak and thin, the shafts of the deserted buildings stuck up. For a moment he watched, fascinated by the first color of day as it struck the shafts and towers. Then the color faded, and

a drifting mist moved between him and the city. All at once he bent down and grabbed up his load. He began to walk, hurrying as best he could, chill fear moving through him.

From the city a black speck had leaped up into the sky and was hovering over it.

AFTER a time, a long time, Hasten looked back. The speck was still there — but it had grown. And it was no longer black; in the clear light of day the speck was beginning to flash, shining with many colors.

He increased his pace; he went down the side of a hill and up another. For a second he paused to snap on his click-band. It spoke loudly; he was not far from the sphere. He waved his arm and the clicks rose and fell. To the right. Wiping the perspiration from his hands he went on.

A few minutes later he looked down from the top of a ridge and saw a gleaming metal sphere resting silently on the grass, dripping with cold dew from the night. The Time Car; sliding and running, he leaped down the hill toward it.

He was just pushing the door open with his shoulder when the first cloud of butterflies appeared at the top of the hill, moving quietly toward him.

He locked the door and set his armload down, flexing his muscles. His hand ached, burning now with an intense pain. He had no time

for that — He hurried to the window and peered out. The butterflies were swarming toward the sphere, darting and dancing above him, flashing with color. They began to settle down onto the metal, even onto the window. Abruptly, his gaze was cut off by gleaming bodies, soft and pulpy, their beating wings mashed together. He listened. He could hear them, a muffled, echoing sound that came from all sides of him. The interior of the sphere dimmed into darkness as the butterflies sealed off the window. He lit the artificial lights.

Time passed. He examined the newspapers, uncertain of what to do. Go back? Or ahead? Better jump ahead fifty years or so. The butterflies were dangerous, but perhaps not the real thing, the lethal factor that he was looking for. He looked at his hand. The skin was black and hard, a dead area that was increasing. A faint shadow of worry went through him; it was getting worse, not better.

The scratching sound on all sides of him began to annoy him, filling him with an uneasy restlessness. He put down the books and paced back and forth. How could insects, even immense insects such as these destroy the human race? Surely human beings could combat them. Dusts, poisons, sprays.

A bit of metal, a little particle drifted down onto his sleeve. He brushed it off. A second particle fell, and then some tiny fragments.

He leaped, his head jerking up.

A circle was forming above his head. Another circle appeared to the right of it, and then a third. All around him circles were forming in the walls and roof of the sphere. He ran to the control board and closed the safety switch. The board hummed into life. He began to set the indicator panel, working rapidly, frantically. Now pieces of metal were dropping down, a rain of metal fragments onto the floor. Corrosive, some kind of substance exuded from them. Acid? Natural secretion of some sort. A large piece of metal fell; he turned.

Into the sphere the butterflies came, fluttering and dancing toward him. The piece that had fallen was a circle of metal, cut cleanly through. He did not have time even to notice it; he snatched up the blowtorch and snapped it on. The flame sucked and gurgled. As the butterflies came toward him he pressed the handle and held the spout up. The air burst alive with burning particles that rained down all over him, and a furious odor reeked through the sphere.

He closed the last switches. The indicator lights flickered, the floor chugged under him. He threw the main lever. More butterflies were pushing in, crowding each other eagerly, struggling to get through. A second circle of metal crashed to the floor suddenly, emitting a new horde. Hasten cringed, backing away, the blowtorch up, spouting

flame. The butterflies came on, more and more of them.

Then sudden silence settled over everything, a quiet so abrupt that he blinked. The endless, insistent scratching had ceased. He was alone, except for a cloud of ashes and particles over the floor and walls, the remains of the butterflies that had got into the sphere. Hasten sat down on the stool, trembling. He was safe, on his way back to his own time; and there was no doubt, no possible doubt that he had found the lethal factor. It was there, in the heap of ashes on the floor, in the circles neatly cut in the hull of the car. Corrosive secretion? He smiled grimly.

His last vision of them, of the swelling horde had told him what he wanted to know. Clutched carefully against the first butterflies through the circles were tools, tiny cutting tools. They had cut their way in, bored through; they had come carrying their own equipment.

He sat down, waiting for the Time Car to complete its journey.

DEPARTMENT guards caught hold of him, helping him from the Car. He stepped down unsteadily, leaning against them. "Thanks," he murmured.

Wood hurried up. "Hasten, you're all right?"

He nodded. "Yes. Except my hand."

"Let's get inside at once." They went through the door, into the

great chamber. "Sit down." Wood waved his hand impatiently, and a soldier hurried a chair over. "Get him some hot coffee."

Coffee was brought. Hasten sat sipping. At last he pushed the cup away and leaned back.

"Can you tell us now?" Wood asked.

"Yes."

"Fine." Wood sat down across from him. A tape recorder whirred into life and a camera began to photograph Hasten's face as he talked. "Go on. What did you find?"

WHEN he had finished the room was silent. None of the guards or technicians spoke.

Wood stood up, trembling. "God. So it's a form of toxic life that got them. I thought it was something like that. But butterflies? And intelligent. Planning attacks. Probably rapid breeding, quick adaptation."

"Maybe the books and newspapers will help us."

"But where did they come from? Mutation of some existing form? Or from some other planet. Maybe space travel brought them in. We've got to find out."

"They attacked only human beings," Hasten said. "They left the cows. Just people."

"Maybe we can stop them." Wood snapped on the vidphone. "I'll have the Council convene an emergency session. We'll give them

your description and recommendations. We'll start a program, organize units all over the planet. Now that we know what it is, we have a chance. Thanks to you, Hasten, maybe we can stop them in time!"

The operator appeared and Wood gave the Council's code letter. Hasten watched dully. At last he got to his feet and wandered around the room. His arm throbbed unmercifully. Presently he went back outside, through the doorway into the open square. Some soldiers were examining the Time Car curiously. Hasten watched them without feeling, his mind blank.

"What is this, sir?" one asked.

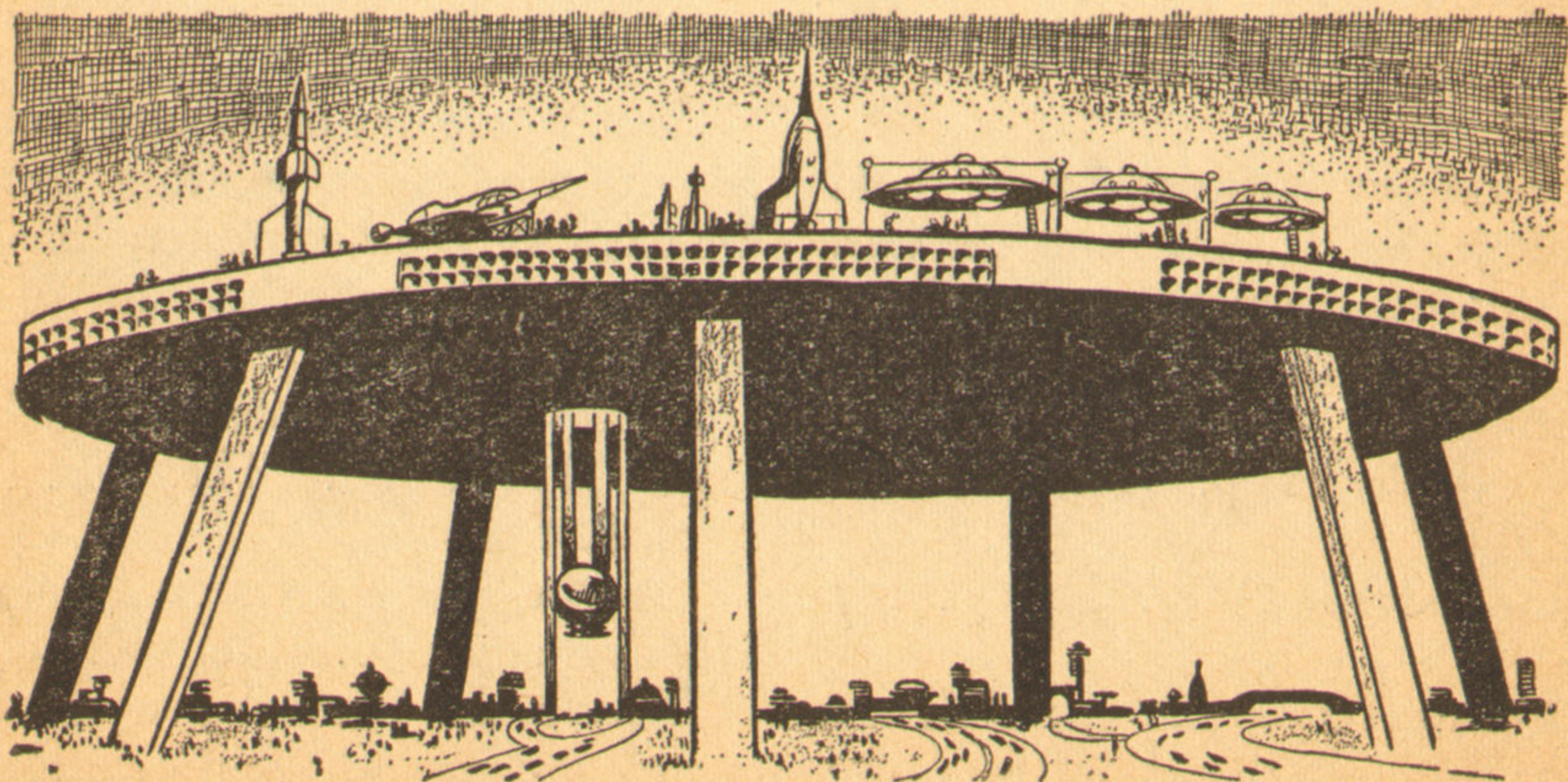
"That?" Hasten roused himself, going slowly over. "That's a Time Car."

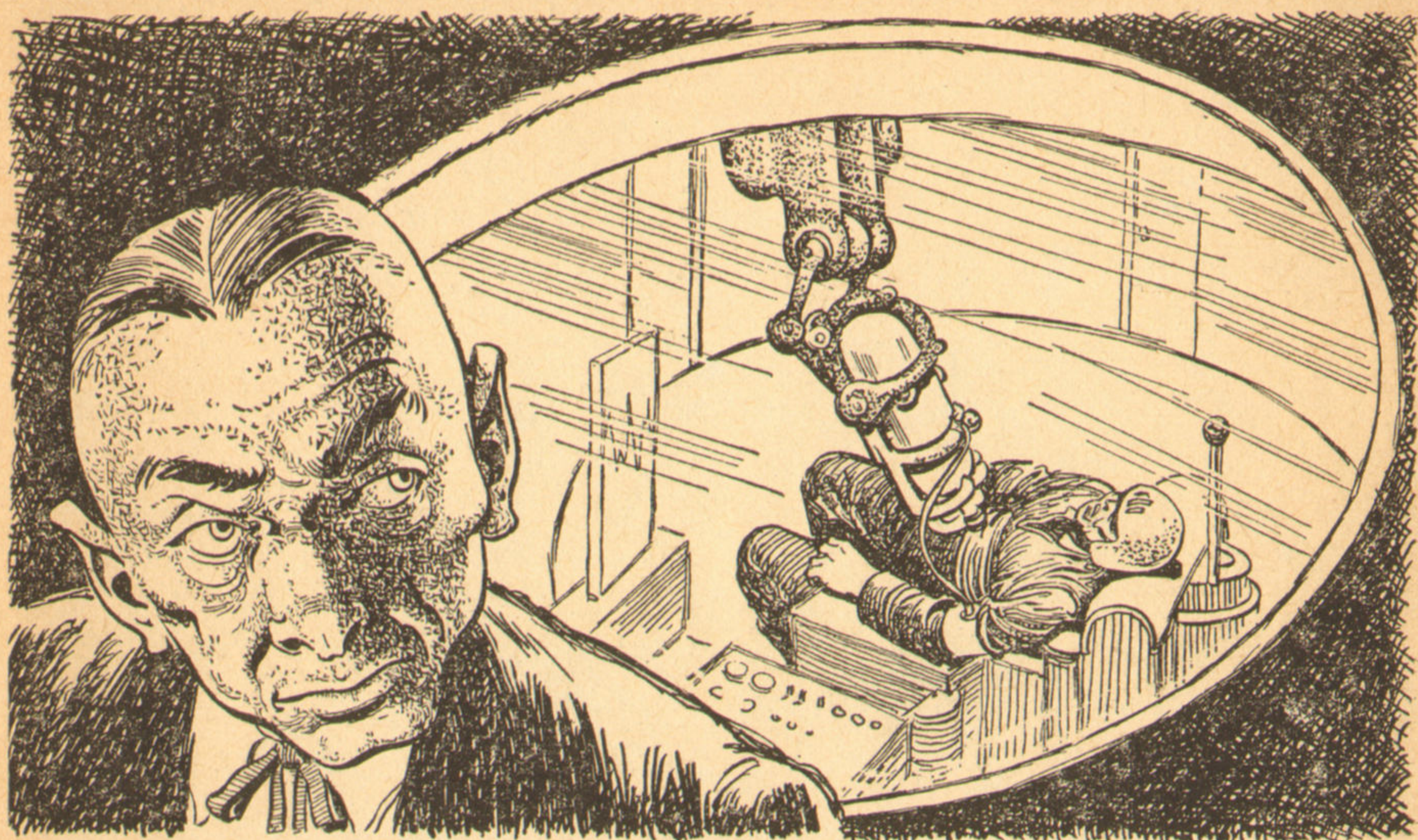
"No, I mean this." The soldier pointed to something on the hull. "This, sir; it wasn't on there when the Car went out."

Hasten's heart stopped beating. He pushed past them, staring up. At first he saw nothing on the metal hull, only the corroded metal surface. Then chill fright rushed through him.

Something small and brown and furry was there, on the surface. He reached out, touching it. A sack, a stiff little brown sack. It was dry, dry and empty. There was nothing in it; it was open at one end. He stared up. All across the hull of the Car were little brown sacks, some still full, but most of them already empty.

Cocoons.





He was a hero on a dozen worlds, under a dozen names. But who cheered Smith?

DESPITE ALL VALOR

By **ALGIS BUDRYS**

illustrated by LUTON

SMITH settled down into the acceleration chair, reclining in the nest of cushions and pneumatic bladders. He patted the heavy headgear with its unfamiliar insignia, making sure it was exactly in place, and finally laid his arms down on their rests.

“All right, Sub-Colonel Kardin?” the government’s representative asked with a faintly ironic twist in his lips.

Smith nodded shortly. “All right,” he said, snatching a sidelong look at the heart.

“It will function perfectly, I

assure you," the Casseopian said, intercepting the glance. "It was installed by one of your own experts. Your crew has been told that you were invalidated out of the service some years ago, but that your special skills are precisely those which we now require. I think it's best to stay as close to the truth as possible, don't you?" The smile intensified, and his voice, too, carried out the impression of a vague sneer.

Nobody likes a mercenary, Smith thought — especially not a mercenary who had to be handled like a china doll, for fear he'd break.

He gestured impatiently at the heart, and the government man swung it over on its bearings, dipping it down until it was pointed at his chest like a gun. He flicked a switch, and deep within the heart gaskets slapped and sucked as it made its first, slow, beat. *Th . . . lunk.*

The probe beam hit his chest, and he knew the metal heart was examining its fleshly, weak counterpart.

Thlunk.

Once again, as at the start of every one of these things, he realized how much he hated and feared that heart; but he could not fight a ship and live without it.

He reached over and adjusted the manometer cuff on his sleeve. Then he sighed and relaxed his neck, letting the couch and head-gear cup his skull. "All right,"

he told the government's man. "I'm set."

"Fine, Sub-Colonel," the Casseopian said. He turned to go. "You will win the war for us, won't you?" he said over his shoulder.

"I'll win it," Smith told him.

"Thank you," the Casseopian said, and left; the airlock shut behind him.

"And come back," Smith said to the empty control room. He hit his energizer switches, and the ship whined into life around him. Over it all, the heart gauged the strain on him, and he felt his own heart ease up as more of its duties were surrogated. *Thlunk. Th . . . lunk. Thlunk.*

He kicked the firing bar, and screamed. His skin rippled, and the ship shrieked skyward, and the heart hovered over him.

Thlunk, thlunk, thlunk. Because of it, he lived, and was a hero.

And finally it was over; he brought the fleet back to Casseopia's planet, and he could at last sit in stillness.

HE STOPPED at the head of the ramp from the open airlock down to the field, listening to the roar of the thick crowd while bursts of light from photographers' flashguns exploded around him. He sucked in a deep breath which became a worn sigh.

All right, Smith, here we go again, he told himself, but then, because

the blood was still cantering erratically through his system, he had to lean a shoulder against the lock's jamb until the momentary dizzy spell drifted away. Then he pushed himself away from the lock and walked slowly down the ramp, while the ecstatic crowd burst out repeatedly.

Kardin! Kardin! Kardin!

The sound beat against wall and hull, almost a scream, not quite a bellow; Smith thought, as he'd thought before, that he could understand what that sound could do to a man — how he might do almost anything to hear it again. He could understand, as he walked slowly toward the microphones and cameras, what could make a man a hero.

Afterwards, he slumped in a chair, at last able to sit down, while the crowd's noises came dimly through the walls and closed windows of the spaceport's administration building. Now there were the newsmen, waiting impatiently to flesh out the photographs and official releases with interviews; but the worst part, thank God, was over.

"Tell me, Sub-Colonel Kardin, what did you think about when it looked like their destroyers had trapped your ship?"

"Do you think the Eign will ever rise to threaten us again?"

"Do you have any special sex-friends, Sub-Colonel?"

He answered correctly, too skilled, even in his exhausted condition, to confuse this culture with some of the many others he knew.

"Well, mostly I thought of my First-Father," he told the first reporter. "He was killed, fighting the Eign, when I was just a small boy."

"They might, I suppose," he told the second, with a slight smile, "But I imagine the Casseopian Navy will still be here, even on that far-off day." Everyone chuckled.

"Sex-friends?" He smiled another kind of smile. "No special ones, no, it's a sailor's life, gentlemen."

That was about it. The standard interview format.

"Sub-Colonel Kardin — have you ever been on liaison duty with the Castorian fleet?"

Smith looked up casually, trying to keep an expression of vague puzzlement on his face. The question had been injected sharply, unexpectedly. The man who had asked it, he realized, abruptly remembering, was the same representative of Terran Dispatches, United, who had interviewed him on Castor — how many years ago?

"Castor? No," he shook his head, "I was never there." Even the other reporters were looking at the Terran curiously, not understanding his line of inquiry.

The reporter shrugged uncomfortably. "Sorry. My error. Probably a chance resemblance, I thought I'd seen you out there, once."

Smith continued to look at the TDU man under the screen of his thick salt-and-pepper eyebrows, and sweat trickled slowly down the sides of his chest.

THE interview concluded shortly thereafter, and he got up to go, grateful at the thought of approaching rest, while the reporters left by the main doors. He turned toward the exit behind which a car was waiting for him.

"You're an Agency man, aren't you?" the Terran said, suddenly at his elbow. The TDU man rushed on hurriedly, not giving him a chance to speak. "I can spot a fellow-Earthman in a minute, you're no more a Casseopian than I am." The reporter was looking at him shrewdly.

But Smith had had time to recover from the shock. He stared blankly at the man. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, and pushed the door open. "I'm sorry, but there's a car waiting." He shook loose from the hand on his sleeve, but the reporter followed him.

"Look — I won't spill on you," he was saying. "If these people haven't got the jets to produce a tactician of their own and their government has to call in the Agency on the sly, that's not my worry. It's not even my story, if I want to look at it that way. Now, come on — break down."

Shorter than the TDU man by

inches, Smith could not see past him to the car, but he heard the doors spring open, and the quick footsteps of the two men assigned to him. He flashed them the pre-arranged trouble-sign with almost desperate haste, and watched them close in on the reporter. They were both burly, expressionless members of the Casseopian secret police, anesthetizing their man, holding him erect, and signaling another car with rapidly efficient, practiced motions. The second car pulled up, the unconscious reporter was lifted in, and the car drove away, leaving Smith with his two escorts.

No one spoke as they climbed into the remaining car. The policemen probably knew that "Kardin" was a sham, but Smith could not risk that probability in conversation. The two men either pretended or reflected ignorance, simply driving him far beyond the city's farthest reaches, where they left him at the edge of the carefully-cleared area to which the Agency's pickup ship would come that night.

Smith watched them drive back down the road, then turned and hid himself in a nest of shrubbery, where he lit his first cigarette in two months from the duffle bag they'd returned to him. He coughed mildly at the first inhalations, but his system re-acclimated itself rapidly, and he smoked until his fingers grew uncomfortably warm from the approaching ember.

Nevertheless, he saw that those

fingertips were still trembling, and that the smoke had not really relaxed him at all. He knew he should have been almost completely untroubled, but he was not. The thought struck him that Sub-Colonel Dow Kardin of the Casseopian Interstellar Military Marine may have been barely edging onto middle age, but that Howard Myron Smith was fifty-three.

THE Agency was housed in a block of offices that wasted no thought on decoration. Smith, at the end of his long trip home, walked down a hall crowded with filing cabinets and stepped into a familiar desk-packed room. His supervisor looked up from the report which the ship had sent ahead, waved shortly at the chair squeezed between the desk and a wall, and went on reading as Smith sat stiffly down.

Time passed, while Smith waited. From time to time he rubbed his itching face, his fingers slowly becoming re-accustomed to the old texture of his natural skin. He waited without urgency, since there was nothing else for him to do. He watched the roomful of supervisors, none of whom he really knew, and only occasionally forgot himself enough to begin to reach for a cigarette. Finally, his supervisor put the report down. "Smith."

"Yes, Mr. Purcell?"

Purcell riffled through the papers. "There's a good follow-up letter here from the Casseopian govern-

ment; I thought you'd like to know."

Smith nodded slowly. He'd done a good job for them, but it was nice to know they'd realized it.

"Seems they want you to do a monograph on the tactics you used. Their war college put in the request." Purcell smiled thinly.

Smith put a similar smile on his face. Very few people outside the Agency — even some of its best customers — had any real idea of how the Agency operated. The smile was the standard expression worn by insiders whenever one of the outsiders revealed his naïveté.

But Smith himself was smiling only because it was the expected professional reaction, and because Purcell was bound to be watching him closely, even if he didn't look it.

A tactical monograph. Even under Kardin's name, it would be something to have. Even under Kardin's name, and even if he'd never dare keep a copy where it might be found.

Smith caught himself sharply, and the wavering expression refocused on his face. There was as much chance of that happening as there was of Purcell's ever looking at him with human warmth.

"We decided it was a good idea," Purcell said.

Smith stared at him.

"So we're putting one of our literary-minded trainees on it. He'll have your reports to work from,

and if there's anything he doesn't get, he can talk to you, or fake it."

"But that wouldn't be right —!" Smith protested, surprised at himself.

Purcell raised an eyebrow, and Smith realized he'd made a serious mistake. But he had to bull it through, now. "I mean — it wouldn't be honest. Me not doing it myself. You can't just come out cold with a résumé of tactics. There are dozens of alternatives I'd have used depending on the enemies' making different moves in response to mine. That's something your trainee isn't going to be able to fake. And what about . . ." He trailed off and stopped.

"Yes, Smith?" Purcell said coldly.

"Nothing," Smith finished lamely. He had gone much too far — even farther than he'd thought, the look in Purcell's eyes told him. "I'm sorry."

But Purcell wasn't going to let it go by. Nor, looking at it from the strictly professional point of view, should he.

PURCELL began with cold patience, "First, I'd like to remind you that it doesn't matter a bit whether one Dow Kardin or another writes that monograph. You are not Dow Kardin. Dow Kardin is a hero — a character — who could be played by any one of a dozen actors; you have absolutely no proprietary interest in him. Nor is it your decision as to who will play the

part; that's our business. We contracted to supply a hero. We did not contract to supply somebody named Smith."

Smith nodded, for there was nothing else to do.

"Second," Purcell said, shuffling through the papers and extracting one of them, "The only reason we have approved this project — thus running the risk of having a future historian discover that the book's author has no existence in fact — is because there is an immediate danger of discovery, and we want to bolster Kardin's personality. And that, Smith," — Purcell jabbed his pencil toward Smith — "is your fault."

"My fault? That reporter recognized me. I didn't let anything slip; he just plain recognized me. I specifically pointed out in my report that it had to be Makeup's fault." Smith was conscious that he was being over-vehement, but this was something completely unexpected.

Purcell's lips pinched together, and he threw the sheet of paper across the desk. It was a memorandum from Makeup, with comparative photographs of Smith in his Castorian and Casseopian personalities. Looking at them, Smith had to admit that there was little superficial resemblance.

"Stereos can be deceptive," he parried clumsily, conscious of the answer's lameness. He'd always felt that Makeup wasn't disguising basic cranial structure well enough, but

he'd never said so, because it would have sounded unprofessional.

Purcell shook his head. "That won't get you anywhere, Smith," he said. "You probably made some sort of unconscious personality-slip." He held up a quick hand. "I'll grant you, you didn't know it; you were probably tired."

His voice grew less abrupt, and his manner softened an equal — and doubtless well-calculated — amount. "Smith, I realize you know the importance of secrecy as well as I do. I'm sure you're quite aware that our main selling point is the secrecy with which we inject our personnel into the mainstream of an alien culture, not making it seem that the culture was unable to produce its own leaders. But, while I'm convinced you're a good man, the fact remains that the reporter recognized you, and that the price of his silence came high.

"Now, the Agency realizes there's some reasonable doubt on your side; therefore, we're only deducting part of the expense out of your salary. We're willing to spread it over an eighteen-month period, and, under that plan, your share works out to —" He went over the papers on his desk again. "Just a little over sixteen dollars a month."

SMITH'S home was on the West Side of Manhattan — to be near the Agency — and he did not take a bus after he left, walking slowly. In the dusk, he crossed Seventh

Avenue and turned toward Hudson Street, any one of a number of thin-faced, anonymous people, bearing no more resemblance to any of the heroes he had been than they did.

He noticed that the city was echoing with repeated hammer-blows and sawings of sound, and that was a measure of how long he'd been away. He knew that by next week he would re-accept the city as his standard of normalcy, and that quiet and cleanliness would seem unusual when he returned to them on some foreign planet.

Even the night that fell as he walked was not a clean darkness, and not a tranquil one. It echoed with the noise of engines, of transports of all kinds and descriptions, of conveyor-belts, of elevators, hoists, booms, freight cars, fork-lifts, and wheelbarrows. Not even at the center of the city — or so he'd been told — as far away as possible from the airports, the docks, or the spacefields, was New York ever quiet or clean. It is impossible to support an interstellar civilization without a staging base of some kind, and New York City was like a revolving door to the stars.

He crossed the dim street and turned into the old, narrow thoroughfare on which his house was located. It was only after the outer door had closed behind him that he could hear the sound of his own footsteps, climbing the three flights to his apartment. They

were regular enough, but they were slower than they had been last year, and last year it had seemed that they were slower than the year before . . .

Which was only natural, he told himself, and fumbled with his keys. And, as always, the sound was like some signal he had arranged for himself, and he was free of all else in his pre-eminent gratitude at being home. He unlocked the door and waited with a feeling close to youth as Lucy came walking hastily out of the front room. He took her awkwardly in his arms in the narrow hall, and kissed her. They stood together, no longer as graceful or as bonelessly yielding to each other as they once had been, but nevertheless together, and finally she said, "I'm glad you're back, Howard."

He put his arms down and turned to hang up his coat, even less able to find expressive words than she had been. He sighed at last, and said, "I hope there's some extra money in the bank, Lu."

AT NIGHT, when they lay in the dark, it was always Lucy who first fell asleep. Smith would lie hunched on the extreme edge of his half of the mattress, trying not to disturb his wife as the tension of his thoughts translated itself into restless movements of his body.

Perhaps he should have been firmer, down at the Agency. Whether Purcell admitted it or not, he was one of their steadiest and

most dependable men, and they had certain obligations to him. As a matter of fact, Purcell's whole attitude obviously stemmed from the fact that they felt the same way, but were unwilling to risk setting a precedent by letting that operate in his favor.

Yes, he probably should have spoken up more strongly — but that would have been a violation of all the professional ethics he had ever been taught. He was a businessman, and the Agency was a business. If you didn't stick to a business basis, where were you?

Where were you if you did? he asked himself insidiously. He was drawing a flat two-fifty a month — less deductions. He and Lucy had a little more than three thousand in the bank. By the time jobs got so far between that he might as well retire, they might have another thousand. Then what? His pension?

He realized, occasionally, that it was only lately he'd been thinking in terms like these. Only a few years ago, it hadn't really mattered. Those had been the days when he'd barely been given time to snatch a week or ten days of rest before the Agency was on the phone again, with another job. But not even Makeup could work the miracle of making him a boyish hero anymore. Not even Medical could beef him up to the point where a young man's reflexes were superimposed on his synapses. Now it was his brain and experience alone

that were for sale, and the knowledge he'd piled up might be a match for any general's, but knowledge wasn't as attractive an item.

He wished, often, that he could somehow have written that monograph. Perhaps he could even have incorporated some of his ideas on naval architecture. There was a crying need for a class of spaceship that could combine the advantages of a destroyer's speed with a battleship's striking power. And it could be done. Space wasn't like water; greater size didn't necessarily mean slower speed.

But that was pretty much wishful thinking. He was assigned to specific jobs, and hired for definite purposes. The Agency wasn't interested, and none of the clients would take his word, of course, since he wasn't really one of them.

And sometimes, rigid on the brink of the mattress, he realized that he was not really waiting for the Agency's next call with the same anticipation he'd been feeling. It was still *an* anticipation — not of adventure, but of further weariness.

And much too often, when he slept at last, he melted into a dream of himself, plastered helplessly into an acceleration couch, while the heart dipped nearer and nearer his chest, until finally it bored past his ribcage and it was his own heart that beat mechanically, *thlunk, thlunk, thlunk*.

And he wondered if a man ought

to stay alive in situations where he could no longer do so without help. He wondered if a man ought to live so many lives that his own became lost and dim — a page scuffed and gray under a multitude of erasure and corrections.

SMITH looked at his wife as he opened the mail, and shrugged. "They took it off, all right." He passed her the green slip of the Agency check.

"Well," Lucy said with a sigh, "I don't suppose it'll drive us out into the street."

No, Smith thought as he dropped into the worn imitation-Eames armchair in the front room, it wouldn't do that. But, together with his other deductions, it brought his salary down to two hundred a month. Fifty a week, for two people to live on.

Lucy sat down on the chair's stronger arm and rested her hand on his shoulder. It was what she earned, on her own job as a saleswoman, that went into the bank.

He wondered what it was like for a girl who married a brilliant young Lieutenant in the Terrestrial Space Navy to grow up into the fading wife of an Agency tactician named Smith whose work was lost in the obscurity of a hundred valorous pseudonyms.

Probably, in some ways, worse than it was for a brilliant young TSN Lieutenant to grow up into a man named Smith.

"Howard?"

Her voice was low, and he wondered what she wanted.

"Yes, Lu?"

"Howard — suppose there was some reason why you couldn't work for the Agency any more."

"You mean, right now? Suppose the last job really *was* the last one?"

"Yes."

So, in a way, it had all been a last straw for her, too. He sat silently, knowing she would wait patiently while he thought it over, and recalled all the years in which she'd said nothing. But there had to be an end to patience, sometime. Now there weren't enough years left for the two of them to dispense recklessly.

And she still kept the scrapbook, tucked back in a closet, but never dusty, never quite in the same position very long, and he'd always known she still read the clippings over to herself while he was away.

There were quite a few of them, for a junior officer's career. But then, he wouldn't be a good professional if he didn't know his own capabilities almost exactly, and he'd never been false to himself by pretending that he didn't know his trade, even that early.

Did she read the court-martial proceedings, too? Did she sit here in this chair, still trying to decide whether he'd been exceeding his orders, re-trying the case before some bar of personal justice?

For he knew her too well to think

she'd accept his judgements blindly. Follow him, yes. She had more of that ability than he himself had shown, then. But though she followed him, he never knew whether or not she'd decided he'd been right, that time his superior officer and three ships had been lost, but a victory won.

Well, it had been a bad officer and three ships against the price of defeat, and he'd make the decision again, if he had to. Though now, so much later, he could see how he might have won and saved the officer, too.

Among all the other illogical regrets, that was another. And he didn't really think she doubted him, or he'd have found it out by now.

HE SAID to her finally, "Well, for one thing, I'd be quitting before my pension plan took effect."

"But they'd have to refund your deducted death-benefits."

True, they would. "Uh-huh," he agreed. "But how much would it amount to?"

"A little under four thousand dollars," she answered, and he felt something jump in his solar plexus at the thought that she'd actually worked it out; the product, doubtless, of a full day's calculating and searching through records.

"All right," he said, "But that leaves you with nothing, once I'm gone. I'd have to take out a life insurance policy. The premiums'd

be pretty steep, at my age." And in my shape, he added, but he realized it was a weak argument, and then felt surprise that the situation had worked around to the point where it was necessary for arguments to be strong.

"I was thinking . . ." she began hesitantly, and he nodded, wondering how far she'd carried the line of speculation. "I thought that the four thousand would cover expenses like that, and the rent, for quite a while. And we could live on what's in the bank, and on what the two of us would make."

He realized abruptly that they were far beyond hypothetical cases now. That she wanted him to quit. Not in a few years, but now.

He submerged the shock of that thought, and tried to consider the possibility as logically as he could.

Pick up his Agency card, after all this time. And it had been over twenty years since the Agency's contact man had looked them up in the little Middlewestern town to which they'd wandered, sitting gingerly down on the worn chair in the cheap hotel room, his briefcase on his lap, his eyes touching the miserliness of the place.

"Mr. Smith," he'd said, "I'm here to offer you an opportunity."

An opportunity? Yes, it had certainly been that, for a man doing unskilled work at low pay. An opportunity based on the fact that there were many kinds of governments scattered out in the

stars, some of them in desperate need of military brains. The Agency — semi-legal, shadowy, no more than a vague rumor when it was even that much — met that need. Met it with men like Smith, who had the choice of taking the Agency's bare wage or of slowly sinking down through all the levels of poverty.

He realized that he had let his mind wander away with his thoughts, and snapped back.

"On what the two of us would make, Lu?" he asked gently.

Because, actually, he could conceive of no possible job for him, here on Earth.

"Yes," she said almost fiercely. "We'll find something for you."

And he knew she had come to this decision over a long period of time, developing it over the long months of his absences, and that what he had first thought to be the trigger for this reaction had been no more than the opportunity to broach the subject, for which she had been waiting patiently.

THE doorbell rang and saved him. That thought was so graphic that he had to smile, and then he saw that Lucy was actually framing the words with her lips, smiling back at him. He chuckled softly, and got up to go to the door, wondering who it could be, simultaneously reflecting that a man never really got to know everything about what was in his wife's mind.

Almost certainly, it was best that way.

The man at the door was a messenger from the Agency, and Smith felt something go cold in his blood as he silently took the envelope the man handed him. He pulled the flap open and took out the type-written sheets, which were the initial familiarization material for his next job.

And he'd only been home five days. That was faster than it'd ever been. He looked up at the messenger, whom he knew slightly, and raised his eyebrows.

"Any — any verbal message?"

"No, Mr. Smith," the messenger said. He blinked awkwardly at Smith's obvious hope for some further comment. "Something awful big's going on," he said finally, in a strained voice. Strictly speaking, anything beyond simple transmission and delivery of written messages was outside his province. The fact that Smith knew it and had nevertheless probed farther was obviously embarrassing to him.

"All right, thank you," Smith said, and the man left gratefully. Smith shut the door and walked slowly back into the front room, holding the sheets of paper like a shield before him.

SMITH LIT a fresh cigarette, looked at his watch, and saw that he'd been sitting in the chair for over five hours, and that it was almost midnight.

Lucy hadn't said anything, of course. She'd left the decision up to him, as she always had, almost tangibly withdrawing her own opinions so that his thinking would be free of all pressure.

But this time was not the same as all the others. This time, he had known what she'd hope the decision would be, and when she withdrew, though she did it as gently as ever, it could not be unobtrusively. This time, he knew that she was still awake, though she had kissed him goodnight two hours ago.

And he had come to no decision. He'd thought with fierce concentration, twisting and turning the problem every-which-way, but not finding an answer.

He sighed and began reading the information Purcell had sent over. That couldn't hurt.

HE THREW the crumpled, empty pack away, pawed ineffectually at his pockets, then resigned himself to doing without. He tried to read the briefing sheets again, but his eyes refused to maintain focus.

His muscles were cramped and stiff. Almost incredulously, he read the time off his watch, and peered at the gathering gray daylight beyond the windows.

Purcell had tricked him. There was much more information than necessary contained in the briefing. There was enough there to tell him that a large-scale war was

brewing out around Vega, popping up almost out of nowhere, as wars seemed to do when you were ignorant of the preliminaries that must have been shaping up for years.

And there was more than that. Already, he could feel his brain meshing the various factors involved. Whether he liked it or not, the strategist in him had stirred to life.

"I wonder which side I'd be on," he murmured aloud, stubbing his cigarette angrily. It made no difference. He'd go where the Agency put him, if he went. He was a professional.

And he wasn't going, he thought, standing up with his fingers ashake with rage at Purcell's clumsy attempt to bait him into this thing. He dropped the papers and switched off the lights.

Lucy was asleep, finally. He undressed quietly, and slipped into bed as smoothly as he could. He lay back, his hands behind his head, almost unnaturally calm now that he had made his decision.

Except that Purcell hadn't had any reason to think there'd be any question of his taking the job. And then it followed logically that the reason for the extraordinarily comprehensive briefing had been because the job actually called for it. And that meant he'd be top man. The commander in chief.

The realization stiffened his muscles. It meant that he'd be in complete charge of strategy — and

that the Agency knew full well who its best tactician was. Possibly, they were making amends, in indirect fashion.

Almost in agony, he thrashed over on his side and shook Lucy's shoulder.

"Lu!"

She stirred, and he shook her again. "Lu?"

"Yes, How?" she mumbled sleepily, half-turning toward him.

"Lu, *was* I right? When I threw in the reserve force on the upper quadrant — when I left Crofton and his ships exposed — *was* I right?"

"That was years ago, Howard," she said, bewildered at her sudden awakening.

"But was I right? Do you think I was right?"

Her eyes opened, and her voice cleared. As she had always done, she answered his need first, and questioned it later. Now she reached out and clasped his shoulders.

"Listen, Howard," she said with absolute truthfulness unmistakable in her voice, "I'm positive you were right. But that doesn't matter, because it's you who made that decision, years ago, when it had to be made, and even then you were the best commander there was."

"Do you mean that, Lu?"

"I mean it."

He folded his arms around her and kissed her. "Thank you, darling," he said. Then he smiled at her crookedly. "Let's drop down

to Macy's tomorrow and see if they'll hire an old strategist to enfilade Gimbel's, shall we? And now go back to sleep."

The best commander there was . . . He thought about that while he held her and kissed her again, half-listening to her joy.

He was a professional — he *had been* a professional, he corrected — and he'd never doubted his professional ability, or his professional detachment from all extraneous emotion. He'd had no basic need

for approval from anyone, and it had never mattered if no one knew whose the work was, so long as it was well done.

It hadn't? Why, then, was his heart — his *own* heart — beating so strongly? And why, when he slept, later, didn't he dream his old, foregone nightmare? Why, instead, did he seem to hear Lucy's voice, in long-delayed joy, cheering *Smith! Smith! Smith!*



The Reckoning

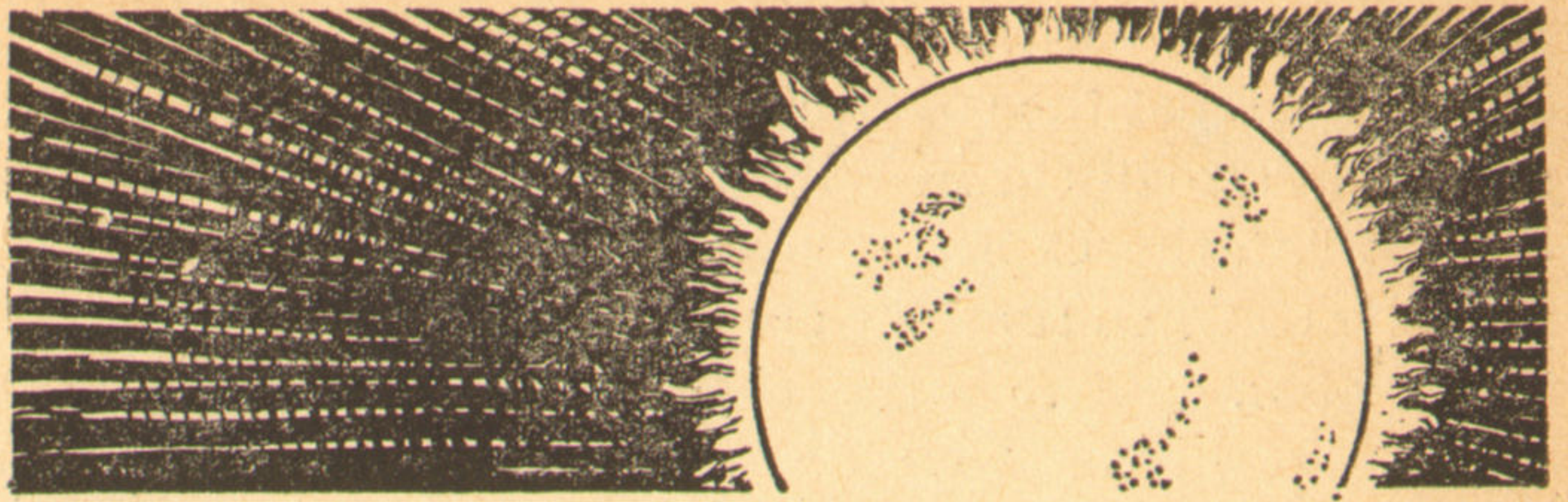
Apparently every story in the June issue except Dickson's was controversial, in that all the others received the full range of returns; no story except "Rescue" escaped a mixture of boos and huzzas, although in every case the cheers drowned out the razberries. "Rescue," however was not listed by anyone as rating lower than 4th place.

For the benefit of newcomers, all readers are invited to write in, listing the stories in each issue, in their order of preference. In my reckoning, a 1st place vote gets one point, a second place two, and so on. (Tie votes are counted as the voter specifies.) There were five stories in the June issue, so a last-place vote got a "5" rating. However, where a reader specified that he thought a story was bad, rather than just not being as good as the other four, I noted a red "x" on my sheet, and counted it for 6 points. When the polls closed — roughly, a week or so after that issue went off sale — I added up the total scores, then divided by the number of stories in the issue. The lowest point-scores are therefore the highest-rating stories.

This time, as you will see, the race was a fairly close one, except for the last-place story. They came out like this:

1. <i>Peace on Earth</i> (Irving Cox, Jr.)	2.23
2. <i>Hail to the Chief</i> (Sam Sackett)	2.52
3. <i>Rescue</i> (Gordon Dickson)	2.59
4. <i>The Intimate Invasion</i> (Sam Merwin)	2.66
5. <i>Sales Pitch</i> (Philip K. Dick)	3.40

Preliminary returns show all departments favored approximately 75%.



BLAME IT ON SUNSPOTS

And why not? They don't care if we do . . .

ARTICLE

By R. S. RICHARDSON

IF THERE'S one thing we need in this world it's a universal scapegoat. A man can stand things up to a certain point; after that, he's got to have something to blame for his troubles or break — something definite he can cuss when everything else fails.

My occupation happens to be the rather unusual one of a professional astronomer. My friends who are mostly businessmen don't believe an astronomer ever has any troubles; they believe that only businessmen have troubles. But an astronomer has dark days when his wife isn't speaking to him, and when he feels

he isn't appreciated at the office the same as other people. In my own case, however, I have a scheme which often affords me considerable comfort. When *everything* goes wrong, I'm sure it can't be my fault; I blame it on sunspots.

Sunspots have several features that make them ideally suited for this role. In the first place, they are 93 million miles away, on the surface of the sun, where they can't defend themselves very well. Second, they are dark malignant blotches that look as if they were there for no good purpose. And finally, sunspots *do* occasionally stir up plenty of

trouble on this earth. So much trouble, in fact, that the government has a special department in Washington created for the express purpose of warning us when sunspots are likely to threaten.

Nobody knows who discovered sunspots; certainly they must have been known centuries before the invention of the telescope in 1610. Sometimes a spot — or better a *spot-group* — comes along that is large enough to be seen by the naked eye at sunset when the sun can be viewed directly. Such giant spots aren't as rare as you might suppose; for example, there were fifty-nine of them during 1949 alone.

If you are of a mechanical turn of mind, and are looking for an inexpensive hobby, I can earnestly recommend the pursuit of sunspots. All you need are a clear sky and a small telescope that shouldn't cost more than fifty dollars. The only danger is that collecting sunspots can grow on you until it becomes worse than collecting stamps or match-folders. Nothing stops the confirmed sunspot-addict. During World War II amateur astronomers in Europe went right ahead observing sunspots with bombs crashing all around them. A young friend of mine refused to quit, even when he was drafted into the army — although he was compelled to switch to naked-eye spots. And another friend, before getting married, made it a condition that his wife must not interfere with his sunspot work.

One of the most mysterious and fascinating features about sunspots is the way their number rises and falls in a period of about eleven years. There are times when you may scan the disk of the sun for days without finding a single spot; at other times you may count as many as twenty groups, containing hundreds of individual spots. At present we are near the minimum of sunspot activity, but in a few years they will begin to break out in increasing numbers; and by 1958, they should be very numerous. Then the spots will begin to decline, so that by 1964 the sun should be practically without blemish.

It is necessary to put in plenty of "abouts" and "probablys" when referring to sunspots, because their period of rise and fall isn't exactly eleven years. It is only eleven (11.1) years on the average. The period may be as short as nine years, or as long as thirteen years. If it were exactly eleven years it wouldn't be any fun, for then we could easily predict when sunspots would be numerous and scarce a thousand years in advance. A lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to figure out some combination of curves that will enable them to predict the course of the sunspot curve. Some of these people have toiled for years, just as others have toiled trying to figure out a system to beat the races — with just about the same success. So far the only way you can predict

what sunspots will do with accuracy, is backward.

Curiously enough the man who discovered the famous eleven-year cycle wasn't particularly interested in sunspots originally. He was an apothecary named Heinrich Schwabe in the little town of Dessau, Germany. In 1825 he began observing the sun with a two-inch spyglass in the hope of finding the mythical planet Vulcan. But he became so interested in the ever-changing spots that he soon forgot all about Vulcan. Now there had been other men before Schwabe who had observed the sun, but there certainly had never been one with his degree of persistence. The sun never shone over Dessau without being confronted by his telescope. Schwabe gave each spot a number, depending upon the order of its appearance, and in the course of forty years never changed his method of registration. We are always praising the man who is forever trying to improve his methods; but there is also something to be said for the man whose methods and apparatus may be second-rate, but as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

After thirteen years of observing Schwabe began to suspect there was a rise and fall in the number of sunspots, and after another five years he was pretty sure of it. Finally, in 1843, he got up sufficient courage to announce the discovery in one of the astronomical journals.

The discovery of the sunspot cycle

was one of the most important astronomical events of the last century. It might be supposed, therefore, that its announcement would create a sensation. On the contrary nobody paid the slightest attention to it; apparently nobody read it! After announcing his discovery Schwabe had to wait until somebody discovered *him*.

The story makes an excellent example of the power of publicity. Eventually, Schwabe's researches came to the attention of the illustrious Alexander von Humboldt, the renowned explorer and writer. Whereas Schwabe's paper had reached only a few hundred astronomers, Humboldt spoke to a vast audience that not only read what he had to say, but believed what he said was important when he said it. The outcome was that the announcement hit the world with all the impact of a fresh discovery. Also, it was the first discovery in astronomy that anyone had made for a long time; some even went so far as to cite it as proof that astronomy was not yet an "exhausted" science.

THERE must be few phenomena in nature that have been observed as long and carefully as sunspots, yet about which we know so little. I often feel that we astronomers who study sunspots are in much the same position as pathologists who study cancer. We know a great deal about how sunspots behave; we have day-to-day records of the size and posi-

tion of every spot-group visible on the sun since 1873; our records are fairly good back to 1749, and we have at least a hint as to what sunspots were doing clear back to the invention of the telescope. But we still don't know what causes sunspots. We have theories of sunspots, but no theory of sunspots.

It must not be supposed that all this labor has been in vain. As I said, we need something to blame for our own shortcomings — and in this respect sunspots have proven ideal. Sunspot activity has been correlated with everything from wars and epidemics to the fecundity of fur-bearing animals in Canada. I once had a man call me on the telephone, his voice quivering with emotion, asking for the latest figures on sunspots so he would know which way to play the stock market. One of my colleagues had a woman who used to consult him about her horse racing system; I never got all the details, but it seems it was based on sunspot activity. Of the many correlations that have been suspected, however, only a very few have stood the test of time.

The oldest and best-established correlation is that between sunspots and disturbances in the earth's magnetism. The earth behaves like a magnetized sphere with its north pole near Hudson Bay. That is, the earth is surrounded by a magnetic field similar to the magnetic field around a horseshoe — magnetic with this difference: The magnetic field of

the earth is always changing. On the average, these changes follow the sunspot curve with remarkable fidelity — but only when the averages are taken over a long period, such as a year. When we try to connect short changes in the earth's magnetism with sunspots, we find ourselves following a will-of-the-wisp; they simply don't seem to have anything to do with sunspots.

Occasionally, magnetic records all over the world will be violently disturbed within a minute of one another, as if the whole earth had suddenly received some violent cosmic jolt. These magnetic storms, which may last for a day or two, occur so often when there is a large spot-group on the sun that there must be some relation between the two phenomena. At present, two rival theories hold the field: One ascribes magnetic storms to a stream of charged particles shot from a sunspot like bullets out of a machine-gun; according to the other, magnetic storms are due to bursts of ultra-violet light from the spots. Both theories have their loyal adherents, who refuse to yield an inch to the opposition.

Although we don't know what causes a sunspot we do know what a sunspot is. The temperature of the surface of the sun is 10,000° F. The temperature at the center of a sunspot is about 7500° F. Thus a spot is simply a place on the sun that is cooler than its surroundings. It looks dark, because it doesn't give out as

much light as the rest of the sun; in reality the "dark" spots are quite bright . . . much brighter than a carbon arc.

Sunspots are transient affairs; few last more than a day or two. A moderate-size spot — into which you could drop the earth — might last a week. Some of the big naked eye spots have a lifetime of several months. The longest-lived spot on record appeared on July 26, 1919 and kept going around on the sun for 134 days.

If by a refrigerator we mean a space that is kept below the temperature of its surroundings, then sunspots are nature's greatest refrigerators — for in a spot there is some mechanism beneath the surface that is able to lower the temperature over millions of acres for weeks and months at a time. Comparatively speaking, a spot is an intensely cold region on the sun; spots are icebergs of the solar sea.

BY MEANS of special optical instruments, we can see the sun in the light of one element only; for example, the red light emitted by glowing hydrogen gas. If you ever view the sun in this way you may be startled to see bright patches break out around a spot that certainly weren't there a minute before. The patches grow rapidly, until within ten minutes the whole region is ablaze with brilliant ribbons of flame. Soon the ribbons begin to fade, and after an hour will have vanished without a

trace — leaving the region essentially as it was before. These brilliant outbreaks are called flares.

Flares have been known for a century, but they were never studied intensively until 1935, when they were found to occur simultaneously with sudden fadeouts in high-frequency radio transmission. Usually it is hard as the dickens to prove anything in science; you can get evidence for such-and-such an effect, or show that it probably works in a certain way, but you can't really prove it. The relation between flares and radio fadeouts was one that came easy; the effect is so striking that even the most skeptical were soon silenced.

Apparently the fadeout is caused by a powerful burst of ultra-violet light from a flare that penetrates into our atmosphere, down to within about fifty miles of the surface. Here the light strikes certain molecules knocking electrons loose from them. Radio waves coming from a station set the electrons in motion; but the air fifty miles up is still so dense that the electrons are quickly brought to rest by jostling against other particles. In this way the energy of the radio waves is absorbed in the air, instead of being reflected back to earth as usual. In the early days, before the effect was understood, radio operators often spent hours with a screwdriver trying to find what was wrong with their sets.

Recently a theory has been advanced to account for cosmic rays

which assumes that they are born of flares in the sun and stars. Three big increases in the intensity of cosmic rays have occurred, two soon after brilliant flares, and one after a fade-out indicating a flare. It seems incredible that three such exceptional events could have occurred by chance. (You can alibi the flares that occurred when there wasn't any increase in cosmic rays.) The theory has plenty of difficulties to meet, but it looks like a promising lead, at least.

We could learn much more about the sun if only we didn't have to study it through an ocean of air; even when the air is clear, the upper atmosphere cuts out the far ultraviolet rays as effectively as a stone wall. And these are the very rays that could tell us the most about what is going on in the sun and in solar flares. If we could observe the sun from an artificial satellite, or establish an observatory on the moon, our knowledge of the sun would increase like rabbits.

The ideal site for a solar observatory would be on the innermost planet Mercury. Mercury appears to be an airless world with a barren surface like the moon, but 57 million miles nearer the sun. It is true that living-conditions on Mercury would be a bit rugged; the temperature on the side exposed to the sun is so high that lead would melt. But astronomers are a hardy lot, not easily discouraged by lack of air, water, money, and other essentials to gra-

cious living.

As this is written in January, 1953, we are nearing the end of what is probably the biggest cycle in the 200 years over which we have sunspot records. Certainly this cycle is without rival, when it comes to the size of the individual spots themselves. Previously the record for size was held by the great spot-group of January, 1926, which covered an area on the sun equal to twenty times the entire surface of the earth. When in February, 1946, a spot-group appeared that had an area of 27 earths, we settled back confident that a new record had been established that would last for years to come. But only a year later a moderate size group broke out that might be called a "sleeper" — since at first it gave no hint of the development it was to undergo. In a couple of months, this spot-group had grown until it covered an area equal to 30 earths, extending over six billion square miles of the sun. This is the largest spot-group of which we have any record.

And now what about the cycle that is soon to come?

As I remarked in the beginning, sunspot-predictions haven't been very successful in the past, but — confidentially — I am working on a curve that looks mighty good. Naturally, I don't want to go making any rash promises; but, you see, nobody has ever tried a system like this one before. Come around about 1960 and I'll tell you how it worked.

THE CRIME THERAPIST

The trouble with substitutional expression is that the subject knows he's substituting . . .

By
**MARION
ZIMMER
BRADLEY**

THE Rigellian named Rhoum murmured sibilantly, "You realize, Mr. Colby, that this operation is illegal?"

Colby furtively mopped his brow. "Yes. I thought we'd been all over that before."

It seemed incredible that this place actually existed, here on a modern Earth, where you could

illustrated by ORBAN



have shrimp in California and twenty minutes later, for a fifty-cent traffic-token, have coffee in

Boston; where two weeks passage on a dionite-drive spaceship would take you to Theta Centaurus, and two months to the fourth planet of Antares. Here, where children were carefully conditioned for social adjustment, and crime simply was not.

Yet, that this office was here. The sign on the door said simply:

Dr. Rhoum (Ex-T.), M.D.

Licensed Crime Therapist.

"I just wanted it to be understood, completely," the little Extra-terrestrial breathed hissily, and looked at the puny man in the relaxit. "Unfortunately, your psychotherapeutic authorities do not yet recognize the criminal impulses to be a form of insanity as normal, if I may make a minor paradox, as any other. They treat criminals as socially maladjusted individuals, not as psychoneurotics. And they fail to realize that, in the one type of individual, these impulses cannot be discharged by ordinary rehabilitation methods. Nor can they be sublimated; they need satisfaction."

Rhoum paused. Colby leaned forward, sweating a little with anticipation.

Rhoum continued smoothly, "I had a patient, several weeks ago, who was an arsonist. Or rather, he should have been an arsonist. Most unfortunately, your compulsory childhood social conditioning had sent him into a state of continual sublimation and frustration. Conditioning told him, and he believed it consciously, that arson was an

antisocial impulse, besides, most houses today are flameproof. He was on the verge of total breakdown; fortunately, he was referred to us for treatment — in time."

"I thought you said you weren't legal," growled Colby.

"*We* are not inside Terran law," Rhoum smiled. "The Terran Empire provisions permit us to carry on our business. It is illegal for citizens of Earth to patronize our therapies. But," he smiled, again, "it is to our client's best advantage not to talk. And — the word gets around. Oh, yes; it gets around."

A brief pause, then Rhoum continued, "But I was telling you about my client. At our therapy center, we erected a large building of highly-inflammable material. At his leisure, he burned it down. It made a beautiful blaze — beautiful. Very successful therapy."

". . . Where is he now?" Colby asked, his small, close-set eyes gleaming with excitement.

Rhoum drew his smooth brows together in a little frown. "Well, the case was a peculiar one, Mr. Colby. As a direct result, he contracted severe burns and died. But *he died sane* — and happy, Mr. Colby."

Colby rubbed his scrawny hands. "I see," he murmured, chuckling. "The operation was a success, but the patient died."

Rhoum concealed a look of violent dislike. "You might put it that way, sir."

COLBY suddenly sat bolt upright in the relaxit, pushing his feet to the pneumatic carpet. His tongue slid over thin lips. "That — there wouldn't be any — any danger of anything like that, happening to *me*, would there?" he whispered, looking around furtively.

"Oh, dear me, no, sir! The nature of your ailment is altogether different, if you will allow me to say so. I understand quite well. Arsonists are fanatics; murderers are really a relatively mild form of psychotic, you might say. The arsonist — or pyromaniac, you might say — committed suicide, in an elaborate way. He really wanted to die, you see; his antisocial neurosis built itself up to a self-destruction complex. In immolating the building, he really immolated himself."

"I see." Colby was bored now; he tapped his foot impatiently. "Er — do you handle murderers very *often*?"

"Oh, yes. Homicidal mania is very common — especially since it has been possible to construct such lifelike android robots within a period of three to four weeks. Until the previous decade, you know, it often took several months to make a single model, and the results were often uncertain. The new Centaurian process is most effective. Before, when we had to wait so long for the delivery of androids, the — well, the delay in therapy was often disastrous to the patient. In a case of murder, you see, immediate therapy

is often imperative. Why, just last week — but I am boring you now, Mr. Colby."

Colby leaned forward, the small eyes glowing expectantly. "Oh, no, really I'm not bored, Doctor Rhoum. Really. Please go on," he murmured emphatically. Rhoum's cool, nonhuman eyes surveyed him quizzically.

"Very well. You — we had a patient, last week, a confirmed sadist, and psychiatric examination showed that beneath his conditioning he was a seriously-frustrated potential murderer. Fortunately, another client had just cancelled his appointment for mayhem therapy — oh, yes, we sometimes have spontaneous cures where therapy becomes unnecessary — and we had six young-girl androids on hand, quite perfect models — a few of them had been made for assault therapy. Only one was a standard murder model. They were quite expensive, too — not these assembly-line robot affairs which are just one notch better than the old steel-oid frame jobs. They were genuine female androids, with all the details complete — you follow me?"

Colby smirked. "Nice work!"

Rhoum's professionally lifted eyebrow cut him off. "Within a week of therapy, Mr. Colby, he had murdered them all. His methods — but I fear I must spare you the details." The Rigellian ignored Colby's disappointed frown. "Professional ethics, you will understand."

“What — what happened to *him*?”

“He was discharged yesterday morning, completely sane, my dear sir. *Completely sane.*”

COLBY could not keep back a sigh of relieved satisfaction. “Of course,” he said, smirking again, “I’m not really insane, Dr. Rhoum, you understand. But I feel it would be better to get it out of my system. These minor frustrations, you know; they take it out of my nerves.”

“Ah, yes,” Rhoum was professional and serene. “Now, in your case, sir. A serious hate complex —”

“Oh, hardly serious —” protested Colby deprecatingly.

Rhoum only smiled. “I understand, Mr. Colby, that you want to kill your wife.”

“Well, er, yes. She — you see, she’s such a sloppy dresser. And she wears those old fashioned neonylon housecoats. Then, she *will* wear an earring-alarm to bed, and five times in the past month, it’s gone off and waked me before ten o’clock. Then when I slapped her — just a little knock — she threatened to leave me. We have only a five-year marriage, you see. But it isn’t fair. And, er, well, I understand that after — after this, you make arrangements so I don’t have to meet her again. And, er, there’s this girl at the Sky Harbor Hotel —”

“I quite understand,” Rhoum murmured in his hissing voice. “But why murder, Mr. Colby? Surely that is drastic treatment. A little

mayhem therapy — slapping around one of our substitutes for a few hours every day for a week or so — or you could simply apply for a divorce —”

“Well, er, you see,” Colby smirked again, “well, I’m not really insane, but I feel frustrated over it. Besides, I’ve tried to choke her once or twice, and — well, *she* made me promise to come here. So I decided, if I was going to do the thing at all, I’d do it up right, and kill her properly!” He glared at Rhoum, then suddenly shouted, “Blast it, what do you care? I’ve got the money! If I want to kill my wife, what business is it of yours? You don’t have to try to reform me, do you?”

Rhoum said calmly, “Of course not. But we dislike employing drastic therapy, if a cure can be carried out with milder treatment. It is my professional duty to try to persuade you to employ the simplest therapy. But if you feel you *must* kill your wife, well —”

“It’s the only thing that will make me a sane man again!” Colby said dramatically.

Rhoum’s sharp eyes glanced at him, blinking back. “I fear you are right,” he murmured, “I can see you are in a serious condition. Of course. We can arrange it at once.” He paused to consult a calendar, and asked “Will the third of Einstein suit you? This is only the fifth of Freud, but Einstein third is only five weeks from now. You can wait five weeks, can’t you?”

"Oh, I think so," Colby murmured.

"Well, we might be able to squeeze you in toward the end of this month, but these hurry-up jobs never effect a complete cure. Of course, if you decide to change your mind, and take it out in a simple mayhem therapy, it would only be three or four days —"

Modestly, Colby waved the suggestion away.

Rhoum nodded gravely. "Do you have a recent three-dim photograph of your wife?"

Colby tugged it out of his pocket. "As a matter of fact —"

"Hmmm, yes, she's very pretty. Well, Mr. Colby, you understand that until your appointment you must be a guest at our therapy center. That is to prevent a — well, a normal and a pleasant anticipation from getting uncontrollable."

He paused, "I trust you won't find it unpleasant. I think our facilities for the entertainment of patients are fairly complete. And now — to get down to business —"

The talk became definite. A very large check changed hands.

"Sign here, Mr. Colby."

Colby signed the form which said that he was committing himself voluntarily for treatment. Rhoum pushed a buzzit; an exquisite Centaurian girl in a wisp of neonylon appeared.

"Nurse, take Mr. Colby to his apartments. I hope you will be quite content here, Mr. Colby, just

ask Demella for anything you want."

When the smirking little man had gone, quite willingly, Dr. Rhoum selected a stylus and made a careful entry in his casebook.

Then he reached for the telephone.

THE therapist said, "Hello. Mrs. Helen Colby? Dr. Rhoum speaking."

The light feminine voice at the end of the telephone sounded disturbed. "Oh! Frank told me he was going there." A pause. "Tell me, doctor. Is it serious?"

Dr. Rhoum made his voice professionally serene, but grave. "I'm afraid so, Mrs. Colby, quite serious. You must try to be brave. You see, he decided on the murder therapy. I suppose you have no objection to being murdered?"

"None whatever, but — oh, that's so drastic!"

"Drastic diseases, you know, Mrs. Colby. Let me see, when can you come down for an appointment? Are you free tomorrow afternoon? We will need samples of blood, hair, and so forth, to make the android — as soon as possible. It's serious."

The appointment was made.

The fifth of Einstein dawned bright and clear. Colby woke up, switching off the all-night hypnotic learner, and ate with a hearty appetite the breakfast that the blue-haired girl from Aldebaran VI brought him. Last week, at his re-

quest, Dr. Rhoum had removed him from Demella's charge; she had been insufferably insubordinate. Besides, he had never cared for those Centaurians — too skinny. Hamilda, now, she was something.

Dr. Rhoum came for him punctually at nine. His face looked stern and terribly grave. "You are certain that you want to go through with this?" he asked quietly. "There is still time to change your mind, you know. We can convert you to a simpler therapy — mayhem, or simply abusive treatment — or you can go home this morning, get a divorce and forget the whole matter. We're quite prepared to give you a refund on the murder fee."

Colby stared at him between tight-squeezed small eyes. "I'm going through with it," he snarled furiously. "Didn't you say you weren't going to try to rehabilitate or reform me?"

Dr. Rhoum shrugged. "Very well," he remarked quietly. "First, remember this: When you murder your wife, you will murder her; we are very thorough. When you leave here this morning," he smiled faintly, "she will, to you, be dead. You will never see her again, or she you. We are very thorough about that — since it would, of course, invalidate the entire therapy, and perhaps drive you into severe psychosis for you to meet the woman you had murdered. That is one reason why the murder therapy is so expensive."

Colby smiled quietly. "It's worth it," he remarked.

Rhoum only shrugged again. "Go down the hall, and into that room," he told him. "And — I'll see you in the office afterward."

Colby stood still for a moment, and Rhoum, watching closely, saw his hands tremble a little, saw his lips thin and set tightly. Then Colby turned and walked down the hall. The door closed behind him, and Rhoum walked into his own office.

The television cameras had been carefully placed, so that Rhoum and the woman could see, on the wide screen, every corner of the room which Colby had just entered, even the young and lovely woman who sat, dressed in a loose neonylon robe, on the divan. Mrs. Colby shuddered as she looked at the woman-image.

"It's — it's terrible —" she breathed in low horror, "she's — why, she's *me*, Doctor —"

"You don't have to watch if it's too painful, Mrs. Colby, but there is a catharsis-therapy in this for you, too. After all, you will never see him again. If you watch him murder you in cold blood, you won't grieve for him," said Rhoum gently. "Remember, he is insane. A man who could murder in cold blood — even when he knows it is a robot — a man who could come here, knowing it to be illusory, and who, after five weeks of waiting, clings to the need to release by killing — he is a very sick man, Mrs. Colby."

"I — I know — *oh!*" Mrs. Colby gave a low scream as the two images on the screen coalesced in terrible conflict, "Oh! Oh!" and covered her eyes with her hands.

Rhoum's voice was low and soothing. "Please try and watch this, Mrs. Colby —"

"Will it — will it cure him?" she faltered.

"Perfectly, madam. He will be discharged, completely cured, sane, this evening."

Helen Colby squeezed her eyes tight shut. "Oh no —" she moaned, "Frank — Frank — don't — did I drive you to this —"

Rhoum's smooth cold eyes watched the screen in professional detachment. "A bad case, Mrs. Colby, a bad case. Sadistic and wild — you were very wise to send him to me when you did. He might have broken down, and —" his voice grew suddenly hard, "it *would* be you lying there now!"

He touched a button on his desk. To the two heavy male nurses who came in, he said curtly, gesturing toward the screen, "Take the patient out of there — the murder cubicle — and clean up the android. And send Demella with a sedative for Mrs. Colby," he added, glancing at the sobbing girl.

He rose from his desk and walked around the divan to Helen Colby, placing a light hand on her shoulder. "Try to be brave," he said. "I'm ordering you a sedative. The nurse will take you upstairs. Lie down

there until you feel better, and then any of the staff will call you a cab and take you home."

He nodded at the Centaurian girl who came in carrying a drinking-glass and a couple of capsules; then left the office and walked down the hall toward the murder cubicle.

COLBY hung, limp and loose, between the male nurses. There was blood on his hands; he was sweating, slack-limbed and slack-mouthed, breathing in little panting sobs. But his eyes were shrewd and alight.

He understood the technique. Complete catharsis of the impulses. He felt cool and clean and released, ready for anything . . . sane again. He glanced up at Rhoum, who stood, tall in his white garments, before him. And he marvelled that his voice was so steady. "Well, Doctor?"

Rhoum's voice was hard. "Excellent, Mr. Colby. You will very soon be discharged as cured."

Colby glanced down at his stained garments. "Can I — get cleaned up a little?"

"After a bit, Mr. Colby," Rhoum's voice was smooth and soothing. "Just come with me, now. Just come with me."

Colby hung back; was dragged, suddenly resisting, between the male nurses. "What's this — where are you taking me? The treatment's over, isn't it? I'm a sane man again —"

Rhoum shoved open a door; the male nurses hauled Colby bodily

through it. Colby knew at once where he had been brought. Hard, real and anachronistic in the streamlined, crime-less world — an electric chair is unmistakable anywhere.

“Not quite,” said Rhoum softly, to the slumped and helpless Colby, “Murder, sir, carries the death penalty.” He paused. “You see, your therapy isn’t quite finished yet. You can’t commit a crime without punishment; and the punishment fits the crime.”

Colby suddenly began to struggle wildly. “But I didn’t — I didn’t — it was only an android robot, a duplicate —”

Rhoum came and knelt beside the chair, fastening the final electrodes in place. “A test, sir; a test of your aberration. You might say, a final test. The intention, the means and the method of committing a fatal murder. Were we to leave you without —” he smiled, “without this final therapy, you could not be cured. Either your temperament would demand that you commit more murders, or else you would develop an intense guilt complex, and would, in the end, be more

seriously insane than you are now.” He stood up, moving to the great switch. “There is only one cure for a murderer, Mr. Colby.”

“But you can’t do this . . .” Colby yelled, his voice hoarse, harsh, unrecognizable. “It was a robot — I signed — it’s murder — murder — murder —”

Rhoum threw the switch.

He glanced only briefly at the body as they carried it past his office door.

“Yes,” he said to Mrs. Colby, as he finished signing his name, “he died sane.” He handed her the check with a ceremonious little bow. “Here you are, madam, minus the cost of the robot, and a few other expenses.”

Her voice almost failed, and she left the office with a choked, quiet farewell. Rhoum gazed after her for a moment, smiling faintly; then chose a stylus, and wrote in his log-book, “*Colby, Frank. Discharged cured —*” he glanced at his watch, “11:52, 5th of Einstein, 2467.”

Then he picked up the telephone to make his report to the police psychologists.



READIN' and WRITHIN'

BOOK REVIEWS

by Damon Knight



THE single-background series in science-fantasy is a notable snare & delusion. The temptation to save work by squeezing some more juice out of an already-established background is all but irresistible, even to writers who know the folly of Plotto, and the exasperating stubbornness of the Ouija board; the suggestion that a group of writers should agree on one broad picture of the future and adhere to it, thus saving work on a massive scale, crops up again and again — most recently from Judith Merrill.

Writers aren't wholly to blame, either; readers are in a continual ferment of encouragement for series-stories — naturally enough; when you find something you like, you want more — and editors want them because readers do.

And yet it ought to be no surprise to

anybody that each instalment of such a series is vaguely less satisfying than the last. The background — the set of assumptions that governs the story — *is* the story. Creating it is the hardest work involved in writing speculative fiction — and the only thing that makes it worth writing in the first place.

The more familiar the background, the less speculative: and then you wonder why the Lensman stories seem to be growing murkier and less interesting as they go along; why Asimov's Foundation is getting so dusty; why even the Baldies seem to be marching around in a circle.

"Mutant," by Lewis Padgett (Gnome, 210 pp., \$2.75) is about as strong a case in point as could be asked for. The Kuttners habitually operate on a level of competence that most of us can only strain after;

in "The Piper's Son" they reintroduced to science fiction the idea that a superman story need not be a paranoid's dream of Wagner, and in the three stories that followed it in 1945 — a vintage year — they developed the theme honestly, vigorously and with enormous skill. In 1953 came a fifth story to polish the series off: and here they all are, with an ingenious sandwich-filling between them to reduce the reader's required thought-processes to a minimum. The texture is even; you can open this book anywhere and find the same whetted tension, the same economy. And yet only the first and last stories are memorable.

The last story, because it contains the solution; the first, because all the background is in it. Everything: the decentralization after Blowup; the armed truce; the telepathic Baldies; the paranoids and their Green Man; the hostility of the normal population; the duelling; Baldy occupations; Baldy home life — the first story says it all.

"Three Blind Mice," "The Lion and the Unicorn" and "Beggars In Velvet" will not stick in your mind because they have no substance. "Mice" captures the reader's attention with a trick and a gimmick: the typographical experiments with unspoken dialogue — anticipating Alfred Bester's playfulness in "The Demolished Man" — and the paranoids' "secret wavelength." "Lion" and "Beggars" ring skillful, empty changes on the tragic love-lives of Baldies and non-Baldies, paranoid and sane Baldies; they introduce one more gimmick — the scrambler — and one plot-device, the retreat underground. The three together advance the plot of "The Piper's Son" by an amount the Kuttners would normally consider worth about a thousand words.

But if the Baldy stories had been written as a novel to begin with, wouldn't all the background have been in the first chapter just the same? (a) Certainly not; and (b) despite Gnome's inspired tinkering, this book isn't a novel; the Lord Almighty couldn't make it one without rewriting it from the beginning.

The difference is precisely this: A novel is one structure, built toward a known end. A series is an open-ended Tinkertoy chain; it can go on as long as the editor's and the writer's patience holds out, and you can chop it off anywhere, like liverwurst. Because the first segment has to be complete in itself, it must either use up the postulated background or be a poor story; and since the Kuttners have not written a poor story within the memory of man, they had no choice but to put the rest together out of scraps, pyrotechnics and sleight of hand.

Not many could have done it as well; but nobody could have wanted very badly to do it at all.

EDGAR PANGBORN's first published science-fantasy story was "Angel's Egg" (*Galaxy*, 1951), a novelet whose style and mood perfectly suit the story and its narrator — a gently-loving old man who offers himself up, in a peculiarly moving kind of self-immolation, to an "angel" from another star. The style is leisurely and reflective; the mood is one of blended sorrow and delight. The curious thing is that in Pangborn's two subsequent novels, "West of the Sun" (Doubleday, 219 pp., \$2.75) and "A Mirror For Observers" (Doubleday, 222 pp., \$2.95), style and mood are unchanged, though the first book deals with the adventures of colonists on a strange world, and the second with the highly dramatic maneuverings of two sets of aliens, one Good, one Evil, for the destiny of Earth.

To my mind the disparity between subject and treatment makes "West of the Sun" a totally disorganized novel: everything in it gives an exasperating sense of obscured brightness; the author will not get out of the way, but forces you to look through his own misty substance at what he wants you to see. Even in "A Mirror," whose Martian narrator is as elderly, as kindly, and very nearly as believable as Dr. Bannerman of "Angel's Edd," this metaphysical cloud seems to me at times to dim the story. It's as if the Martian eye

— but this is equally true of all the stories — sees only certain moral and emotional colors, and according as the landscape presents them to a greater or lesser degree, its vision passes through startling changes in depth and chiaroscuro: rather like those pictures of What You Look Like to Your Dog. Believing Pangborn to be human, we can only conclude that he's deliberately blinded himself in half the spectrum in order to see more radiantly in the rest. Certainly, nothing is lacking in these stories for want of skill. It may well be that this is the only song Pangborn was made to sing; and a mournfully beautiful song it is — very like the thing that Stapledon was always talking about and never quite managing to convey: the regretful, ironic, sorrowful, deeply joyous — and purblind — love of the world and all in it.

WHEN he was working at it, some 20 years ago, nobody in this field was a match for Raymond Z. Gallun in the vivid and sympathetic portrayal of alien intelligences; "Old Faithful," "Son of Old Faithful," and "Derelict" are titles that still send remembered shivers up my spine. Since his return to the field a few years ago, Gallun has been working another patch altogether — one that bounds in clear-eyed, ham-handed, freckle-faced, pinheaded young men with cowlicks. But for the last ten years or so a Cambridge science teacher who writes as "Hal Clement" has been quietly fortifying himself in & around the spot Gallun left vacant. His failings are a certain emotional blandness — no Clement character ever gets excited — and a low romantic quotient; where Gallun's monsters are alien and humanly sympathetic at the same time — a damnably difficult thing — Clement's often fail to convince simply because they are too human: more so, in fact, than some of the human characters.

His virtues are a working knowledge of physics, chemistry and mechanics — rare equipment for a modern science-fiction writer — and an almost inhuman thor-

oughness. "Mission of Gravity" (Doubleday, 224 pp., \$2.95) is the result of what must surely have been the most back-breaking job of research ever undertaken to buttress a science-fiction story. Moreover, the result is worth the trouble.

Nowhere before, bar such primitive examples as Dr. Miles J. Breuer's and Clare Winger Harris' "A Baby on Neptune," and the notably unsuccessful "Petrified Planet" volume, has anybody made a really serious effort to explore the problems of life on a planet much different from our own. Mesklin, where this story takes place, is wildly different — see the jacket illustration — and inexorably convincing: it's Clement's sober, careful projection of the superplanet of 61 Cygni, detected in 1943 by Dr. K. Aa. Strand. (At one time, named Osiris, TWL) Clement's article, "Whirligig World" (*Astounding*, June 1953), really ought to have been included in this book; if it weren't for the unreasonable prejudice against prefaces to novels, and the scarcity of books about whose writing problems there is anything to be said, it might have been. There should have been diagrams and maps, too; no amount of detail about this fascinating place could be too much.

The Mesklinites, to return to where we started, are a blend of Clement's virtues and failings: physically, they're as satisfyingly alien as anyone could want; mentally, there's less difference between them and Mr. Clement than between Mr. Clement and a modern Chinese. In spite of the continual annoyance of their familiar thought-processes and their idiomatic English, however, the gartersnake-sized officers and crew of the *Bree* are interesting and likeable; and by the end of the book, although there's not a sermonizing word in it, they've built up as strong a case for the Brotherhood of Creatures as I've ever seen.

FRANCIS RUFUS BELLAMY'S "Atta" (Wyn, 216 pp., \$3.00) should delight the *Time* reviewer who announced, to no one's sur-

prise, that Friday's footprint was preferable to my blob of green gelatin. The burden of his criticism could have been expressed by "Why don't they write like that no more?" Obliging, Bellamy has wrote like that, as nearly as a man can who is writing 200 years after Defoe's death; and the result is just as stale, windy and distempered as anyone but *Time's* idiot might have expected.

The plot concerns a man who is hit by lightning and wakes up to find himself about half an inch tall. He strikes up an Androcles-like friendship with an itinerant warrior ant, name of Atta, goes to live with "him" — the word is Bellamy's, and sets the tone for the astonishing display of ignorance that follows — in a walnut shell; milks aphids; tames a beetle to ride on; uses a needle for a lance; visits Atta's home city and runs into trouble with the local authorities. And so on, and so on, until Atta, his only friend, expires, and apparently out of sheer grief the hero returns to normal size.

Aside from the author's archaic narrative style and his relentless disregard of natural history, the principal irritant in this story is the hero's absolutely impenetrable stupidity. His situation is plain enough to the reader from the beginning, even without the tipoff thoughtfully provided by Wyn's blurb-writer; but the hero can't puzzle it out. He sees trees shaped like dandelions; he sees soil of a texture never met with on any continent or island of Earth; he encounters a six-foot ant, in Heaven's name, and this is not enough. Very well, says the reader, he is suffering from shock; it will take him a little time.

He takes shelter, from pumpkin-sized raindrops, in a discarded thimble: now, says the reader, it will dawn upon him. No. He finds a needle and a piece of thread: *now?* No. So help me, it isn't until page 91, when the man stumbles across a tent-sized piece of metal foil marked "CHOCOLATE," that the great illumination comes.

This book could only have been written by a man who thought his idea was brand-

new. If he had read a little science-fantasy he might have been disabused of this and several dozen other misconceptions; but doubtless he took the word of some respected critic that no worthwhile fantasy has been published since 1719.

J. T. McINTOSH's second novel, "Born Leader" (Doubleday, 221 pp., \$2.95), is a considerable improvement over his inept "World Out of Mind"; so much is good about it, in fact, and the things that are bad are for the most part so obvious and easily reparable, that I'm unable to understand how either the author or his publishers could have let the book stand in its present form.

For example:

The plot concerns two loads of interstellar colonists, fleeing a doomed Earth, who have wound up independently on neighboring planets in the same system. The trip took them about 16 years at near light-speed; and a very minor segment of the plot turns on the exercise machines they used to keep their muscles firm during about 14 years of free fall.

Didn't it occur to *anybody* that 14 years of zero gravity, for a colonists' vessel carrying livestock, is a practical impossibility — or that it could be avoided simply by spinning ship?

The two planets are named Mundis and Secundis — both either dative or ablative plurals, so that the least unlikely interpretation is "to the worlds" and "to the seconds" — which is pretty silly.

Elsewhere, good ideas and bad ones are laid down together like bricks and mortar. The conflict that gives the book its title — the "born leader," who must lead, even if he has to set one half of a peaceful community against the other to do it — is weighted with a lot of foolishness about the elders, the original colonists, having been hypnotically conditioned against the use of atomic power: perfectly futile, because no provision was made to condition the second generation in the same way.

Mundis' flatness is entirely reasonable

and even commendable; writers who describe imaginary planets usually give them mountains, although the mountainous periods in Earth's own geologic history have been mere interludes. McIntosh's suggestion that the tough Mundan grass has leveled the planet, however, is absurd.

The contrast between the democratic, peace-loving Mundans and the tyrants of Secundis is a telling one — spoiled by giving the Mundans such a roster of "pure" Anglo-Saxon names as can't be found even in a random sampling of the British Isles. (This is probably carelessness rather than chauvinism. In the 20's, no character in fiction had any but an aristocratic Anglo-Saxon name, unless he was either a comic handyman or a ruffian; and a surprising number of writers haven't noticed that 30 years have elapsed since then.)

And so on. In chapter 7 Phyllis Barton, a young Secundan and a very well-drawn character, invents a sneaky scheme to cut the ground from under her superior, Commodore Corey. It works, even though Corey's cooperation (to a degree possible only to an intended suicide or an idiot), is a necessary part of it. The story progresses through a series of genuine and interesting problems — none of which, if you look closely, is solved. The author slides past every one and then tells you it's solved — when, with a slightly greater expenditure of thought, he could have shown you.

McIntosh is a young and exceedingly promising writer; it would be remarkable if he had mastered all the demands of his craft in the few years he's been working at it. But when may we expect the editors at Doubleday to learn theirs?

"THE COMING OF CONAN" by Robert E. Howard (Gnome, 224 pp., \$3.00) is of interest to Howard enthusiasts, who will buy it no matter what anyone says, and to students who may find it, as I do, an intriguing companion piece to L. Sprague de Camp's "The Tritonian Ring." Howard's tales lack the verisimilitude of

de Camp's — Howard never tried, or never tried intelligently, to give his preposterous saga the ring of truth — but they have something that de Camp's work hasn't: a vividness, a color, a dream-dust sparkle, even when they're most insulting to the rational mind. Howard had the maniac's advantage of believing whatever he wrote; de Camp is too wise to believe wholeheartedly in anything.

This book contains the one fragment of a Conan story that I remember from *Weird Tale* — Conan tippy-toeing along a ledge with a naked girl held by the hair, and then dropping her carefully into a cesspool — which turns out to be neither as isolated nor as insignificant as I had supposed. Another naked lady friend of the hero's, in another episode, winds up hanged to a yardarm with a rope of jewels; and for that matter, hardly anyone, man or woman, squeaks through the Conan saga without some similar punishment, except only Conan himself.

All the great fantasies, I suppose, have been written by emotionally crippled men. Howard was a recluse and a man so morbidly attached to his mother that when she died he committed suicide; Burroughs had been an ignominious failure at half a dozen professions before he invented Africa; Lovecraft had enough phobias and eccentricities for nine; Merritt was chinless, bald and shaped like a shmoo. The trouble with Tarzan-Conan-Leif-Langdon is that sane writers know the human race never has produced and never could produce such a man. Therefore the sick writers have a monopoly of him. And welcome.

This volume contains seven stories, of which the first two are pre-Conan episodes and deal with a warrior-king named Kull; the difference, except for the name, is not remarkable. The book has been pieced out with snippets of the Howard-Clark essay, "The Hyborian Age," and of Clark's and Miller's "An Informal Biography of Conan the Cimmerian," as well as with

[turn to page 125]

*After all, why should Martians be interested
in the doings of science fiction fans?*

CONVENTIONAL ENDING

By **THEODORE R. COGSWELL**

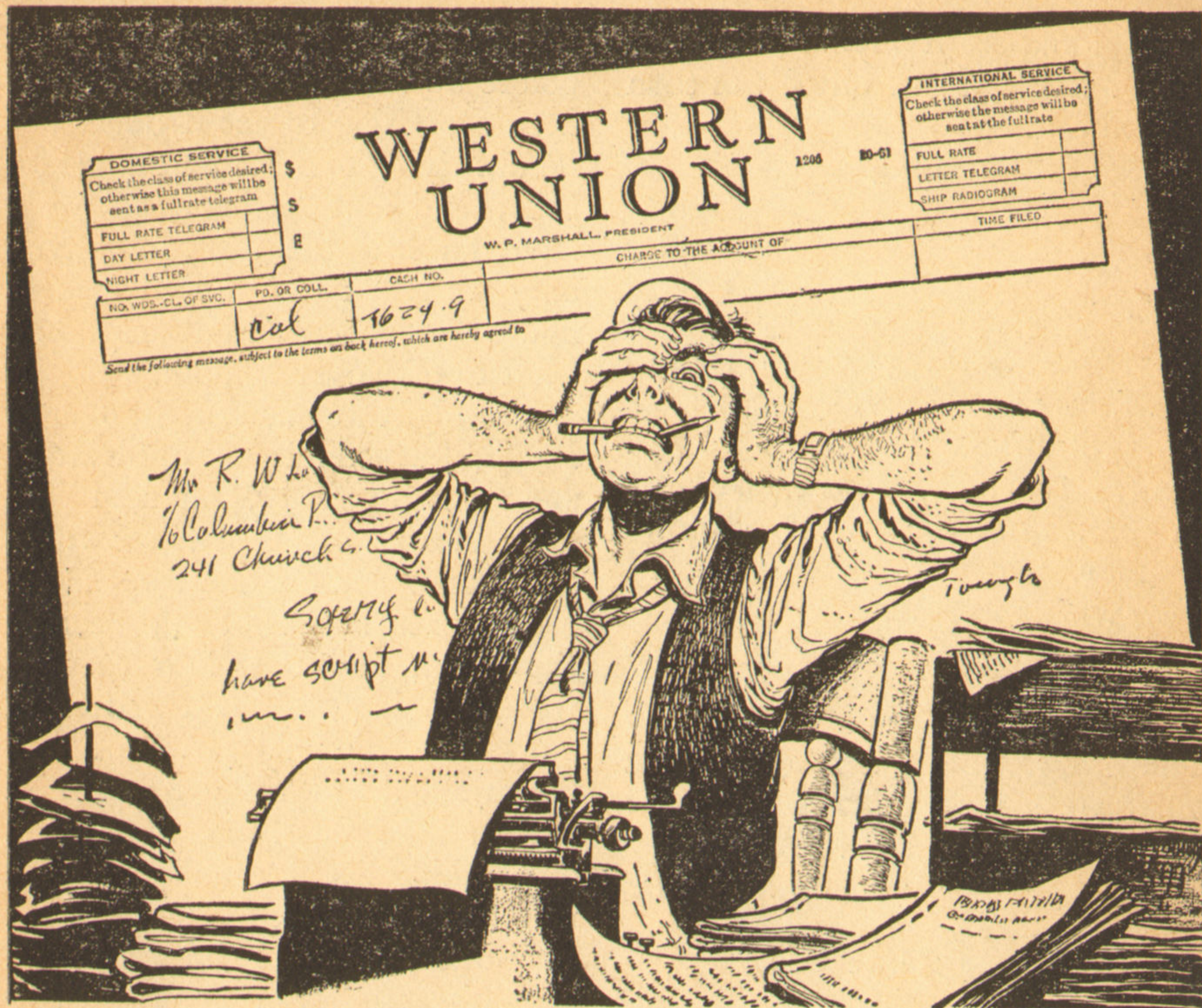
illustrated by LUTON

Scott Meredith Literary Agency,
580 Fifth Avenue,
New York 36, New York.

Dear Scott:

Poul Anderson, Gordon Dickson, and I were over at my place last night batting around story ideas when the subject of science fiction conventions came up. The conversation naturally went on to the high cost of liquor at same, and how we always ended up drinking beer when we were in the mood for Scotch. Then Gordy came up with a won-

derful idea. Why, he said, don't the three of us knock out a special convention story and earmark the proceeds for vintage firewater. I'd just been talking about the strange character who has the apartment upstairs, a chap by the name of Gergen who believes that if he can hook enough junk radios together in the proper fashion he'll be able to talk to Mars — and starting with him we blocked out a nice story idea. We're calling the yarn "Conventional Ending." The gimmick is that a character like the one upstairs actually



does make contact with Mars, and the Martians take over his mind. By a process of mental ingestion he takes over the three of us so that the aliens have an embryonic group-mind at their disposal. The final twist to the story is that the four of us go to the San Francisco science fiction convention, lure the big-name writers and editors up to our hotel room one by one, and absorb them into the Martian group mind. They in turn start inviting fans up. We haven't as yet figured out why the Martians should want to take

over fandom, but Poul is going to do the last third of the story and he'll come up with some sort of a snapper. We're figuring on doing the yarn as a letter-series, and it shouldn't run over two thousand.

Here's where you come in. Since the story has a definite time-place focus, it will have to be placed within the next few weeks if it's going to hit the stands before the convention. The three of us are all pressed for time so we'd like a definite go-ahead signal from somebody before we turn it out. Will you check

around and see if anybody is interested? Let us know on this as soon as you can.

salud,

Ted
Poul
Gordy

WESTERN UNION 1954 APR. 8 PM 0216
LOWNDES LIKES CONVENTIONAL END-
ING ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS WORTH.
WANTS IT FOR OCTOBER ISSUE OF
FUTURE DUE TO HIT STAND ONE
AUGUST. PROMISED HIM STORY IN
TWO WEEKS LATEST. CAN DO?

SCOTT MEREDITH

WESTERN UNION 1954 APR. 9 AM 0917
FOR ONE HUNDRED WE WOULD GIVE
HIM THE SEVENTH STAGE LENSMAN
BY SATURDAY. CAN DO!

TED, POUL, GORDY

1954 APR. 28 PM 0400

WESTERN UNION
WHERE IS THAT STORY?

SCOTT MEREDITH

1954 APR. 29 AM 1127

WESTERN UNION
HAVING TROUBLE WITH POUL. LETTER
FOLLOWS.

TED AND GORDY

29 April, 1954
Minneapolis, Minn.

Scott Meredith Literary Agency,
580 Fifth Avenue,
New York 36, New York.

Dear Scott:

Sorry for the delay on "Conven-
tional Ending." We've been waiting

for Poul to come up with an ending before we turned out our thirds. He kept promising to get it done, but he was trying to finish that novel for Shasta and kept putting us off. We'd have finished the story ourselves, only we still haven't been able to figure out why the Martians would want to take over fandom.

Last night we finally went over to Poul's, dragged him out of his study and over to Ted's, plunked him down in front of a typewriter with a stack of paper on one side and a half-a-dozen bottles of cold beer on the other, and told him that he wasn't leaving until he'd written us out of the hole he'd gotten us into. He threshed and moaned and made a dozen false starts. Finally he came out shaking his head and saying he was completely stuck. So we all went to work on the ending, but we couldn't accomplish any more collectively than he could by himself. Finally he had a flash. Look, he said, maybe if we all go upstairs and have a talk with this mad genius something will pop. Gergen never lets anybody in his apartment, but after a couple of more beers we decided to make a try.

The three of us went up and beat on the door. Gergen finally opened it a crack and peeked out at us. Ted introduced us and said that he'd been telling us about his attempts to contact Mars and that we wondered if he'd mind showing us his apparatus. Gergen didn't say anything for a moment and then he stabbed

one bony forefinger out at Poul. "*He be the only one that be welcome,*" he said.

Poul sort of hung back. He obviously didn't like the idea of being closeted alone with Gergen, but we each grabbed an arm and pushed him in. We waited outside for a while and then went back downstairs. Two hours later Poul still hadn't come down so we went upstairs after him.

After we beat on the door for a good ten minutes, Gergen stuck his head out and snarled, "*He be at home!*" and slammed the door shut again. We beat it downstairs and called Poul's right away. He finally answered the phone but he sounded awfully funny. Finally he said that if Gordy would come by his place in the morning he'd discuss the ending. Gordy suggested that we both drop over, but for some reason Poul vetoed it. We've about lost patience with him. If he doesn't come through this time we'll drop him out of the story, dig up an ending ourselves, and have it come out under a double rather than a triple byline.

If we'd known how much trouble this was going to cost everyone, we'd have stuck to our beer in the first place.

salud,

Ted
Gordy

1954 MAY 1 AM 1131

WESTERN UNION

JUST PHONED LOWNDES. HE SAYS AT THIS LATE DATE ANY STORY IS BETTER

THAN NONE BUT WITHOUT POUL'S NAME ON IT IT IS ONLY WORTH FIFTY. HURRY HURRY HURRY.

SCOTT MEREDITH

1954 MAY 4 AM 1049

WESTERN UNION

HAVING TROUBLE WITH GORDY NOW. WILL LOWNDES TAKE STORY UNDER MY NAME ONLY?

TED

1954 MAY 5 PM 0445

WESTERN UNION

RWL JUST CALLED HOPPING MAD. SAYS HE GOT TELEGRAM FROM GORDY AND POUL THIS PM SAYING QUOTE THERE BE NO REASON WHY MARTIANS BE INTERESTED IN TAKING OVER FANDOM UNQUOTE. WANTED TO KNOW IF EVERYBODY IN MINNEAPOLIS HAD GONE CRAZY. I TOLD HIM YOU WOULD HANDLE THE STORY SOLO. HE SAID OK BECAUSE PRINTER IS HOLDING SPACE OPEN AND HE HAS TO FILL IT BUT TWENTY FIVE WAS AS HIGH AS HE WOULD GO FOR AN ORIGINAL COGSWELL.

SCOTT MEREDITH

17 May 1954

Minneapolis, Minn.

Scott Meredith Literary Agency,
580 Fifth Avenue,
New York 36, New York.

Dear Scott:

Whew! "Conventional Ending" is finally in the mail. After this I'm never going to try a collaboration with anybody. Found a note under

the door this morning saying, "Be over tonight to explain everything. Poul, Gordy, Gergen." All that I can say is that whatever their story is, it better be good. I'll let you know what the gag is as soon as I find out myself.

Does *Future* pay on acceptance or publication, these days?

salud,

Ted

27 May, 1954
New York City, N. Y.

Theodore R. Cogswell
918 University Ave. SE
Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear Ted:

Enclosed is the check for "Conventional Ending." You will notice that after deductions for unnecessary telegrams you are ending up with the grand sum of \$2.67. On this you're going to drink Scotch?

Scott

1954 MAY 31 PM 1147

WESTERN UNION

DEAR SCOTT. WE BE ARRIVING IN NEW YORK SUNDAY PM ON NORTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT FOUR SEVEN. MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR PRIVATE REPEAT PRIVATE CONFERENCE WITH YOU MONDAY MORNING AND LOWNDES MONDAY AFTERNOON ON SPECIAL PLANS FOR SAN FRANCISCO SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION. GERGEN BE LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING BOTH OF YOU.

TED, POUL AND GORDY
The End

Editor's note: This be as good a place as any to put in a plug for the Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention which will be held in San Francisco on Labor Day weekend in September. I be looking forward to meeting as many of you as possible. Individually, of course.



Despite the danger, the Third World showed promise of life

THE SILENT COLONY

by **Bob Silverberg**

SKRID, Emerak, and Ullowa drifted through the dark night of space, searching the worlds that passed below them for some sign of their own kind. The urge to wander had come over them, as it does inevitably to all inhabitants of the Ninth World. They had been drifting through space for eons; but time is no barrier to immortals, and they were patient searchers.

"I think I feel something," said Emerak; "the Third World is giving off signs of life."

They had visited the thriving cities of the Eighth World, and the struggling colonies of the Seventh, and the experienced Skrid had led them to the little-known settlements on the moons of the giant Fifth World. But now they were far from home.

"You're mistaken, youngster," said Skrid. "There can't be any life on a planet so close to the sun as the Third World — think of how warm it is!"

Emerak turned bright white with rage. "Can't you *feel* the life down

there? It's not much, but it's there, maybe you're too old, Skrid."

Skrid ignored the insult. "I think we should turn back, we're putting ourselves in danger by going so close to the sun. We've seen enough."

"No, Skrid, I detect life below." Emerak blazed angrily. "And just because you're leader of this triad doesn't mean that you know everything. It's just that your form is more complex than ours, and it'll only be a matter of time until —"

"Quiet, Emerak." It was the calm voice of Ullowa. "Skrid, I think the hothead's right. I'm picking up weak impressions from the Third World myself; there may be some primitive life-forms evolving there. We'll never forgive ourselves if we turn back now."

"But the sun, Ullowa, the sun! If we go too close —" Skrid was silent, and the three drifted on through the void. After a while he said, "All right, let's investigate."

The three accordingly changed their direction and began to head for the Third World. They spiraled

slowly down through space until the planet hung before them, a mottled bowl spinning endlessly.

Invisibly they slipped down and into its atmosphere, gently drifting toward the planet below. They strained to pick up signs of life, and as they approached the life-impulses grew stronger. Emerak cried out vindictively that Skrid should listen to him more often. They knew now, without doubt, that their kind of life inhabited the planet.

"Hear that, Skrid? Listen to it, old one."

"All right, Emerak," the elder being said, "you've proved your point. I never claimed to be infallible."

"These are pretty strange thought-impulses coming up, Skrid. Listen to them, they have no minds down there," said Ullowa. "They don't think."

"Fine," exulted Skrid. "We can teach them the ways of civilization and raise them to our level. It shouldn't be hard, when time is ours."

"Yes," Ullowa agreed. "they're so mindless that they'll be putty in our hands. Skrid's Colony, we'll call the planet. I can just see the way the Council will go for this. A new colony, discovered by the noted adventurer Skrid, and two fearless companions —"

"Skrid's Colony, I like the sound of that," said Skrid. "Look, there's a drifting colony of them now, falling to earth. Let's join them

and make contact, here's our chance to begin."

THEY entered the colony and drifted slowly to the ground among them. Skrid selected a place where a heap of them lay massed together, and made a skilled landing, touching all six of his delicately-constructed limbs to the ground and sinking almost thankfully into a position of repose. Ullowa and Emerak followed and landed nearby.

"I can't detect any minds among them," complained Emerak, frantically searching through the beings near him. "They look just like us — that is, as close a resemblance as is possible for one of us to have for another. But they don't think."

Skrid sent a prying beam of thought into the heap on which he was lying. He entered first one, then another, of the inhabitants.

"Very strange," he reported. "I think they've just been born, many of them have vague memories of the liquid state, and some can recall as far back as the vapor state. I think we've stumbled over something important, thanks to Emerak."

"This is wonderful!" Ullowa said. "Here's our opportunity to study newborn entities first-hand."

"It's a relief to find some people younger than yourself," Emerak said sardonically. "I'm so used to being the baby of the group that it feels peculiar to have all these infants around."

"It's quite glorious," Ullowa said, as he propelled himself over the ground to where Skrid was examining one of the beings. "It hasn't been for a million ten-years that a newborn has appeared on our world, and here we are with billions of them all around."

"Two million ten-years, Ullowa," Skrid corrected. "Emerak here is of the last generation. And no need for any more, either, not while the mature entities live forever, barring accidents. But this is a big chance for us — we can make a careful study of these newborn ones, and perhaps set up a rudimentary culture here, and report to the council once these babies have learned to govern themselves. We can start completely from scratch on the Third Planet. This discovery will rank with Kodranik's vapor theory!"

"I'm glad you allowed me to come," said Emerak. "It isn't often that a youngster like me gets a chance to —" Emerak's voice tailed off in a cry of amazement and pain.

"Emerak?" questioned Skrid. There was no reply.

"Where did the youngster go? What happened?" Ullowa said.

"Some fool stunt, I suppose. That little speech of his was too good to be true, Ullowa."

"No, I can't seem to locate him anywhere. Can you? Uh, Skrid! Help me! I'm — I'm — Skrid, it's killing me!"

The sense of pain that burst from

Ullowa was very real, and it left Skrid trembling. "Ullowa! Ullowa!"

Skrid felt fear for the first time in more eons than he could remember, and the unfamiliar fright-sensation disturbed his sensitively balanced mind. "Emerak! Ullowa! Why don't you answer?"

Was this the end, Skrid thought, the end of everything? Are we going to perish here after so many years of life? To die alone and unattended, on a dismal planet billions of miles from home? Death was a concept too alien for him to accept.

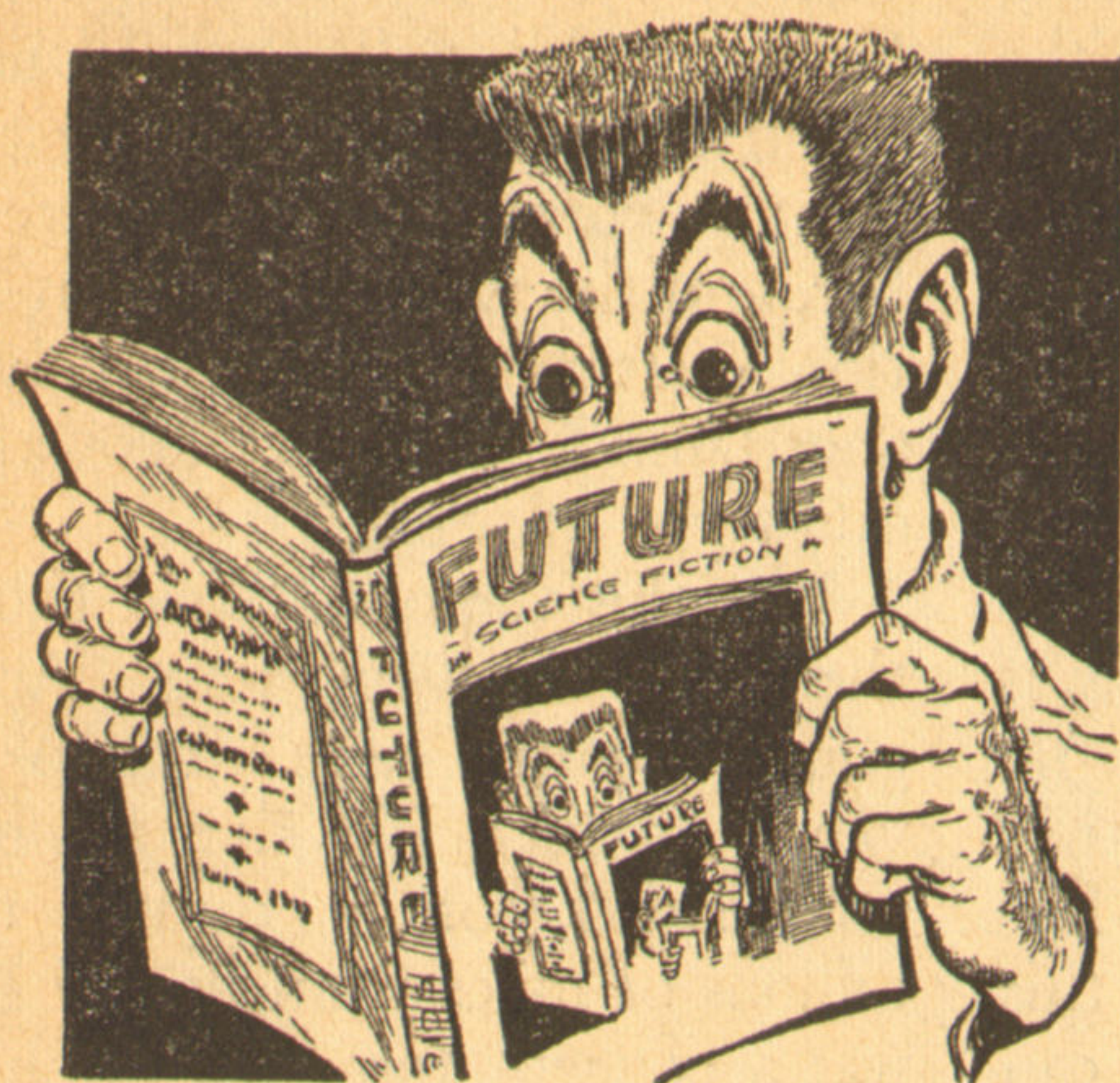
He called again, his impulses stronger, this time. "Emerak! Ullowa! Where are you?"

In panic, he shot beams of thought all around, but the only radiations he picked up were the mindless ones of the newly-born.

"Ullowa!"

There was no answer, and Skrid began to feel his fragile body disintegrating. The limbs he had been so proud of — so complex and finely traced — began to blur and twist. He sent out one more frantic cry, feeling the weight of his great age, and sensing the dying thoughts of the newly-born around him. Then he melted and trickled away over the heap, while the newborn snowflakes of the Third World watched uncomprehending, even as their own doom was upon them. The sun was beginning to climb over the horizon, and its deadly warmth beat down.





INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

By **ROBERT A. MADLE**

SCIENCE FICTION SPOTLIGHT

FROM THE WORLD OF BOOKS: This section of "Inside Science Fiction" has been expanded, because of the obvious importance of the book field to the general literature of science fiction. And because of the vast number of hard and soft-cover books now being published, more aid is needed to the fan and collector who is interested in keeping abreast of the science fiction scene *in toto*.

Ace Books, which just released van Vogt's "The Weapon Shops of Isher," will follow up with "The Weapon Shops." L. Ron Hubbard, Henry Kuttner, and Murray Leinster will also get the "double novel" treatment this year, and Donald A. Woll-

heim, Ace's editor, is compiling an anthology of originals for late 1954 publication. On the stands now is a duo-hit consisting of Clifford D. Simak's "Ring Around the Sun" and de Camp's "Interstellar Manhunt" (née "The Queen of Zamba"). . . . Speaking of Simak, Simon and Schuster are seriously contemplating a volume of short stories by this veteran writer. . . . And, by the time you read this, "Planets For Sale" — a novel of a super-capitalist who attempts to control the entire galactic system — by E. Mayne Hull, will be available under the Frederick Fell imprint.

Not science fiction, but of distinct interest to science fiction readers, is the recently issued Henry Holt volume, "Worlds In Space," by Martin Caiden. Magnifi-

cently illustrated, technically accurate, and well written, this book tells just where we are as far as space travel is concerned. . . . Nelson S. Bond fans will be delighted to learn that Avon Publications is finishing up a 25¢ collection of his stories, "No Time Like the Future." Avon intends to increase the tempo of its science fiction output in the near future. . . . Pocket Books also announce a stepped-up science fiction publishing schedule: first on the list is Arthur C. Clarke's "The Exploration of Space," which will be followed by a Leo Margulies-Oscar J. Friend anthology, "My Best Science Fiction Story." . . . And Perma-books, who just issued the old classic by A. Conan Doyle, "The Lost World," and Donald E. Keyhoe's controversial "Flying Saucers From Outer Space" (both in 25¢ editions) will follow up in rapid succession with William Tenn's popular anthology, "Children of Wonder," and Arthur C. Clarke's epic, "Against the Fall of Night."

August W. Derleth's new anthology for Rinehart, originally titled "New Tales of Science Fiction and Fantasy," will appear as "Portals of Tomorrow." Included will be Mr. Derleth's selection of 1953's outstanding short stories. James Blish's unusual *Future Science Fiction* novelet, "Testament of Andros," will appear along with fifteen other stories, seven of which are from the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and only two from *Galaxy* and one from *Astounding*. This book will be indispensable to collectors, for it contains a complete list of all new fantastic stories published in American magazines in 1953. . . . Rinehart will also offer Jerry Sohl's latest novel, "The Altered Ego," in late July.

The latest in John C. Winston's commendable juvenile science fiction series are Don Wollheim's "The Secret of Saturn's Rings"; Philip (Lester del Rey) St. John's "Rockets to Nowhere," and Philadelphia Science Fiction Society President Alan E. Nourse's "Trouble On Titan". del Rey is also the editor of Winston's first s-f anthology, "The Year After Tomorrow." Lester announces that it will contain nine

stories, three of which are Carl Claudy's old *American Boy* "Adventures In the Unknown" series. . . . Also entering the apparently lucrative juvenile science fiction field is Gnome Press with three rapid-fire releases: "Mel Oliver & Space Rover On Mars," by William Morrison; "The Forgotten Planet," by Murray Leinster; and a Fred Pohl-Jack Williamson collaboration, "Undersea Quest."

News and Views: Republican readers of *Future* might be interested to learn that *Democratic Digest* for December, 1953, reprinted H. L. Gold's October, 1953 *Galaxy* editorial, "To the Hills!". . . . Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery — it has been said. There are now about a half-dozen very sad imitations of that comic magazine which burlesques and lampoons everything and everybody, *Mad*. They are, indeed, *Sad*. . . . Speaking of comic magazines, there is one on the stands called *Space Western!* Shades of Gene Autry's first flicker, "The Phantom Empire"! . . . Whitney Bolton recently devoted his syndicated daily column to a discussion of s-f. By his own admission, he read but ten magazines before offering his cynical comments. He did, however, have a few kind words for Michael Fischer's short-short, "Misfit," the cover story for the final issue of *Science Fiction Plus*.

Watch for "If!" It will be a space and time film, in color for magnascreen. And when the credits flash upon the screen, note when the name of the Technical Director appears — Forrest J. Ackerman! Please, Forry, we are depending on you — no red hot meteors in interplanetary space, roaring by the rocket's window like express trains! Ackerman has also been asked by George Pal for assistance on his next scientific film.

Larry B. Farsaci, editor of that fanzine of the late '30's, *Golden Atom*, announces its return as a printed annual. The revival issue will feature one of the most fabulous scoops in all fan publishing history: a lengthy article by Harold Hersey (the man

who published more magazines than anyone). Old-timers will remember Harold Hersey as the editor of the almost-legendary *Thrill Book* (the first s-f and fantasy magazine, published in 1919) and as editor of the rarest of all science fiction magazines, *Miracle, Science and Fantasy Stories* (published two issues in 1931). For the very first time the story behind these magazines will be divulged, *plus* the story behind the starting of *Astounding* in 1930. Send 25¢ to the editor at 187 North Union Street, Rochester, New York.

THE FAN PRESS

DURING the early, formative years of science fiction fandom it was, to all intents and purposes, a man's world. True, there were several female science fiction writers (Clare Winger Harris, Lillith Lorraine, and Amelia Reynolds Long); there were also several young women affiliated with s-f fandom in the dawn age, but so few that their influence was practically nil.

Today, however, the scene has changed vastly. There are innumerable female science fiction writers and readers, and some of the most active fans in recent years have been gal-types; there is even a club whose membership is limited to women. And some of the many fanzines are edited and published by members of the so-called "weaker sex." (But they can handle a mimeograph quite adeptly!)

The latest fanzine to emanate from the ink-stained fingers of an enthusiastic female s-f proponent is *Deviant* (15¢ a copy from Carol McKinney, 377 East 1st North, Provo, Utah). The inaugural issue of this well-mimeod publication is on a par with some of the better fanzines. It contains a little of everything: poetry, articles, short stories, and columns. Lyle Kessler appears with a timely article directed at new fanzine editors, and Vee Hampton tells of a ten-year-old rocket experimenter who has already been recognized by the boys at White Sands. Don Cantin's Ripley-lampoon, "Believe It Or Knot," is humorous, although somewhat nebulous at times.

Again we say, a commendable first issue.

A semi-professional publication of the "little magazine" category is *Inside* (25¢ for a sample copy from Ron Smith, 549 South Tenth Street, San Jose, California). The fourth issue of this photo-offset magazine contains several very impressive pieces of fiction, and a brace of scientifilm articles. Ackerman (who else?) writes on "Films of the Future," and Neal Clark Reynolds reviews several fantasy film classics of the past. "Sundown and Dawning," by Robert Ernest Gilbert, is a story of professional quality which tells of the impending doom to "Homosaur," the reptilian-like human beings who preceded *Homo sapiens*. "Alpha and Omega," by Don Howard Donnell, depicts the strange feelings and thoughts of a group of people on the day the final war commences. And William L. Freeman, in two pages, presents a fictional plea for racial tolerance, with an impact. You can't go wrong on this magazine.

One of the most mature (both in length of existence and type of material used) is *Skyhook*, which is obtainable for 15¢ from Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin Street, N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minnesota. *Skyhook* just celebrated its sixth birthday which, in the ephemeral fanzine field, makes it a hoary old-timer indeed. The current issue publishes "Fan and the Universe," an essay on the influence of the science fiction fan on the literature of science fiction. With the possibility of sounding prosaic, we maintain that this article by Sam Moskowitz is well worth the price of the magazine. "The Issue At Hand," by William Atheling, Jr., is the most analytical and critical commentary on current science fiction being published today. Jack Speer is represented with a clever short story, and there is a very interesting readers' department, which utilizes the also very interesting title of "The Captured Cross-Section." Recommended unqualifiedly.

An extremely well-balanced, well-edited, and well-mimeod publication is *SF* which hits our mailbox approximately bi-monthly. (10¢ will get you a copy from John Magnus,

Federal 203-B, Oberlin, Ohio.) The feature article this time is a well-conceived discussion on the differentiation between science fiction and fantasy. Bill Venable sums up his argument by stating: "... the imaginative element in a science fiction story is knowable and explainable in the context of the story; the imaginative element in a fantasy story is not — in other words, it is mysterious, unexplainable, or unknowable." The very prolific Harlan Ellison writes on 1953's *Midwescon* (Mid-Western States Convention). We are quite sure that, if what Ellison says is factual, the potential attendance at the forthcoming *Midwescon* will more than double. There are also three informative departments (of primary interest to collectors) by John Magnus, Paul Mittlebuscher, and Bob Silverberg.

If you want to be informed as to what is occurring in the professional science fiction field, there is one certain way to obtain this information. Subscribe to science fiction's only newspaper, *Fantasy-Times*. (12 issues for \$1 from James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing 54, New York.) Do you want to know when a new s-f magazine is going to be published, or when one is going to be discontinued? Do you like to keep up with s-f on radio and television? Would you like to have a complete listing of new books as they appear? Or maybe you have difficulty in keeping up with all of the s-f magazines as they appear on the stands? Perhaps you are interested in stories to appear in future issues of your favorite magazines? And important aspects of the fan field receive full coverage also. FT is highly recommended to all, and particularly to readers who are not acquainted with the fanzine field.

Fanzine editors are requested to send copies of their publications for review to: Robert A. Madle, 1620 Anderson Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

TWENTY YEARS AGO IN SCIENCE FICTION

COMMENCING with its January, 1934 issue, *Astounding Stories* — with its inspired edi-

tor, F. Orlin Tremaine, at the helm — presented a galaxy of the fabulous names of science fiction. Stories appeared regularly by Donald Wandrei, Nat Schachner, Jack Williamson, Harl Vincent, Stanton A. Coblentz, Murray Leinster, John Russell Fearn, and other men who had carved a niche for themselves in science fiction.

The August, 1934 *Astounding* added to this list the man who was to science fiction of two decades ago what Heinlein, van Vogt, and Bradbury (all wrapped up in one) are to the field today — Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. And the story was "The Skylark of Valeron," the last of the incredibly popular trilogy. Readers of science fiction will probably marvel forever at the galactic adventures of Richard Seaton, Martin Crane, and the most dynamic villain of science fiction history, Marc DuQuesne. It all began when Seaton liberated atomic energy from copper and built "The Skylark of Space." Into the void went Seaton and his pals and gals and many were the adventures our heroes encountered millions of light years away from earth on the planet *Osnome*. In "Skylark Three" the adventures and concepts became even more fabulous as Seaton and his allies battled the combined forces of DuQuesne and the *Fenachrone*. In the last of the trilogy the fourth dimension was utilized to send the group millions of galaxies away to the planet of Valeron, where the mightiest spaceship of them all was created. And the "Skylark" of Valeron returned to *Osnome* and to ultimate victory over all the opposition.

Despite the fact that DuQuesne was made a pure intellect at the close of the trilogy and sent, via the fourth dimension, so far into the infinite that the trip would consume one hundred thousand millions of years, we always felt that "Skylark" Smith left a loophole for a possible fourth novel. And readers of today's science fiction — the majority of whom are familiar with Smith's mighty concepts — might welcome a grand finale to what is probably the greatest of all super-science fiction series.

"Warriors of Eternity," by Carl Buchanan and Dr. Arch Carr, was a fascinating thought-variant novelet and, to our mind, was one of the best stories of 1934. Futrell invented a method whereby intelligence could be anaesthetically divorced from the body. The experiment was successful but Futrell's assistant and friend, in love with the scientist's wife, destroyed the body so that Futrell's intelligence was doomed to wander through the infinite eternally. However, he was communicated with by a disembodied intelligence from the planet Phenos, billions of light years away, and given a body by the science of this advanced civilization. He assisted the Phenosians in destroying their enemies, and fell in love with the Phenosian maid who had first contacted him.

Nat Schachner, Arthur Leo Zagat, and Frank Belknap Long helped round out an above-average issue which also included part five of Williamson's "The Legion of Space" and Charles Fort's "Lo!" Dold, Brown, and Marchioni illustrated, and Brown almost photographically reproduced "The Skylark of Valeron" on the cover.

Brown and Valeron were again featured on the cover of the September, 1934 *Astounding*. Nat Schachner's thought-variant, "The Living Equation," was another of those intricate tales of an awe-inspiring experiment which got out of control, and almost annihilated the earth before it ran its course. This one dealt with the almost-incomprehensible idea of clothing mathematical equations with physical reality and permitting them to reproduce, so to speak. Frankly, we have always doubted the feasibility of such an experiment.

Frank K. Kelly's "Famine On Mars" was a well-written adventure novelet (no thought-variant concepts), and Wallace West penned a humorous short story involving the Greek Gods, "Dragon's Teeth." There were several other not-too-inspiring shorts by Donald Wandrei, Raymond Z. Gallun, and Paul Ernst. Of course, Charles Fort continued to present

his list of fantastic occurrences, and "The Legion of Space" finally ended. Elliot Dold illustrated throughout, with the exception of a solitary Marchioni contribution. Among the ten pages of microscopically printed letters in "Brass Tacks" was one by Bob Tucker, who suggested vehemently that the editor had better not reprint Verne or Poe. *Astounding* was still the best buy with 160 pulp-size pages for 20¢.

THE ever-present Frank R. Paul painted the cover for *Wonder Stories*, August, 1934. The cover presented an alien landscape from a co-existing world, described in A. L. Burkholder's unimpressive short fourth dimensional yarn, "Dimensional Fate." (Burkholder, incidentally, sold but two stories, and both times was rewarded with fine Paul covers.) Also far below average was the prosaically titled Festus Pragnell offering, "A Visit to Venus"; and then there was an invasion from the future in E. Mantell's only published story, "The Men from Gaylin." With the assistance of one of the future-men, the invasion was repelled. The only complete story of any merit in this issue was "The Return of Tyme," by A. Fedor and Henry Hasse. This was a sequel to "The End of Tyme" (*Wonder*, November, 1933) and was what is now known as a "fan story." Editor Charles D. Hornig, youthful and enthusiastic, was occasionally slipping in a story of this nature. Today, of course, with the subject matter of science fiction of distinct interest to most readers, this "fan story" category is not unusual.

Fedor and Hasse told of the despondent editor of *Future Fiction* and how he was visited by one of the world's greatest scientists who, secretly an s-f fan, had written "The Core," the supreme masterpiece of science fiction. B. Lue Pencil, the editor, realized that this story would change the entire history of science fiction, but unable to pay the rate demanded, was on the verge of suicide, when Tyme appeared out of the future. Tyme saved the

day by showing Pencil that he *did* buy the story (Tyme had with him hundreds of future *Futures*) and that *Future* eventually became one of the world's most dignified periodicals. (An interesting aside on this is that "The Core" was later really written and appeared in the April, 1942 issue of *Future Combined with Science Fiction!* Cyril Kornbluth, using the pseudonym of S. D. Gottesman, was the author.)

The Science Fiction League was making early progress via the suggestions of many of its enthusiastic members, and Paul and Winter illustrated *Wonder's* 128 pages. This, incidentally, was a below-average issue.

"The Man From Beyond," John Beynon Harris's (John Wyndham) excellent novelet of the first trip to Venus, was utilized as the theme for Paul's masterful cover — again an alien landscape. Harris, like many other 1934 authors, had an axe to grind, and contemporary society was treated none too gently. The story has a totally unexpected ending, which will not be divulged here as the tale deserves anthologization, and may be some time in the future. A short story of gigantic concept was "The Living Galaxy," by Laurence Manning, which conceived of a being so incredibly huge that the stars were atoms of its substance, and how immortal man travelled billions of light years to destroy it.

Eando Binder brought his three-part serial, "Enslaved Brains," to an end. Binder described Unitaria, a scientific utopia of 1973, in which everything was operated from the scientific viewpoint. Conflict occurred because of the use of the brains of deceased individuals to control machinery. Our protagonist believed this to be unutterably horrible and the edict (a government order provided for the legal use of such brainpower) was finally rescinded after a great deal of action and intrigue. This wasn't a good novel, but it was mildly interesting, and compares favorably with some of the material being written today.

A French importation, "The Fall of the Eiffel Tower," by Charles de Richter, was

the new serial, about which more will be written next time. Paul and Winter, as usual, did the illustrating, and among the letter writers were Bob Tucker, Donald A. Wollheim, Milton A. Rothman, and David A. Kyle.

THERE is little that can be said concerning the August and September issues of *Amazing Stories*. Despite many rumors concerning its rapid loss of circulation because of its complete lack-lustre and its inability to come up with something new and different, it continued monthly, 144 pulp-size pages. The only outstanding story in the two issues under discussion was David H. Keller's conclusion to his great short novel, "Life Everlasting." As mentioned last issue, an elixir of life, called "The Serum," was perfected; but sterility resulted. In the concluding installment Keller described the longing of childless women, and the invention of robot babies. Finally, an anti-serum was invented, and humanity reverted to normal once again. It is impossible, through a brief retelling of this story, to even suggest its impact and feeling.

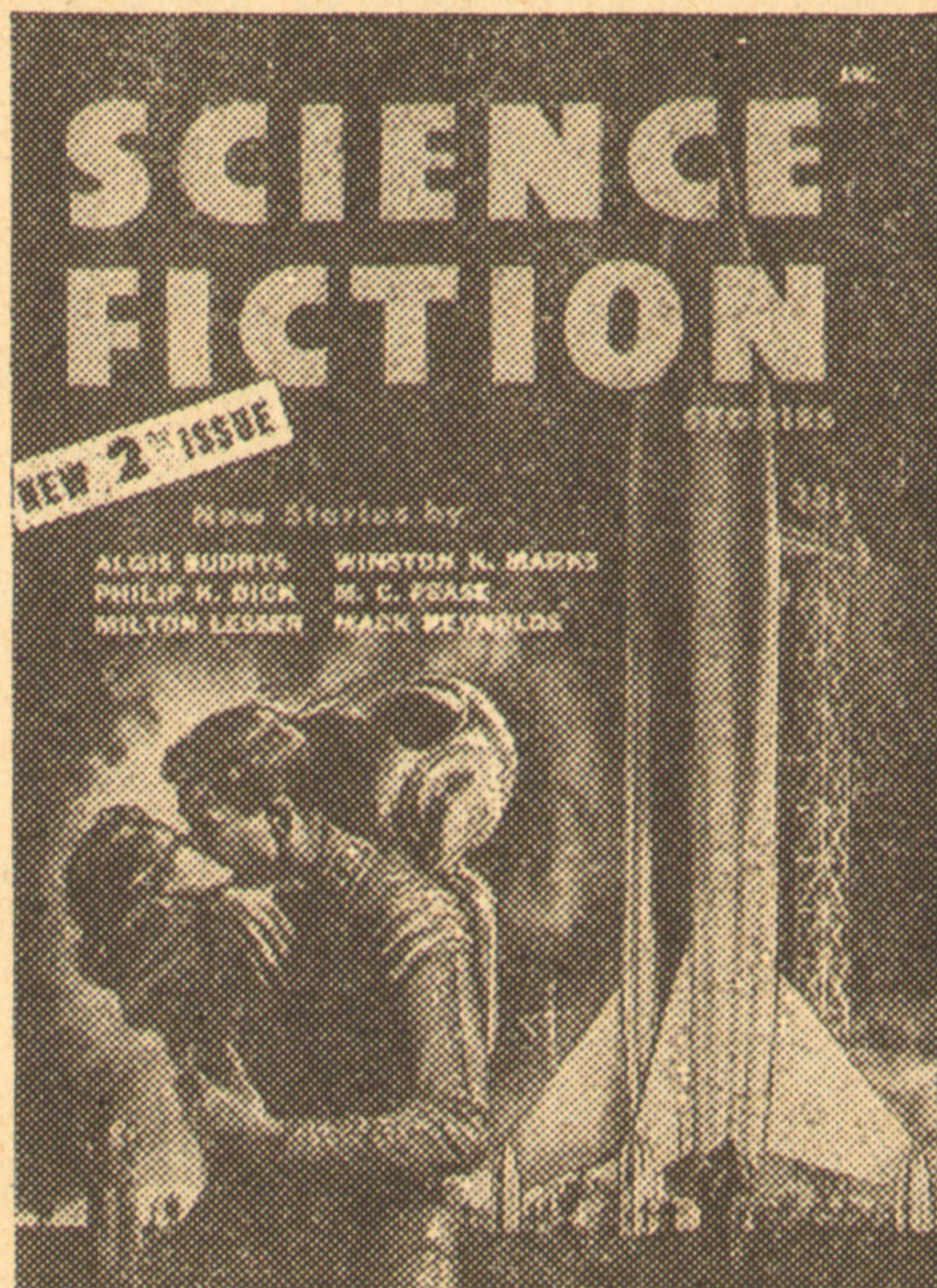
In the 1934 fan world there was a marked increase in activity. In addition to the publication of *Fantasy Magazine* and *The Fantasy Fan* (issues of which have been discussed in previous editions of this department), there were several new ones. William Crawford (now editor of *Spaceway*) brought out a printed, digest-size magazine called *Marvel Tales*. Although Crawford had great plans and featured stories by many of the field's leading writers, the magazine did not last more than five issues. Also of interest was the creation of the International Science Fiction Guild and the International Cosmos Science Club, and the issuance of their publications. The Science Fiction League was expanding rapidly, and a new type of fandom was in the process of incubation. Many of the youthful fans developed in this era were later to become science fiction's leading writers and editors.



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down to earth



Where The Readers Talk Back

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

As a faithful if non-volatile reader of science fiction since 1936, I find it somewhat peculiar to be finally writing a Letter to The Editor. However, here I am, and it would seem that the 5 x 7 (approx.) *Future* has some magnetic quality that the larger issues lacked.

I like Freas and Orban. I like Emsch as much as I like Emsh, and Luton as much as Luros — which is to say that I have no objection to them, and like them better than most. I liked the cover (my wife did not), and I strongly urge the continuation of "Readin' and Writhin'" (possibly under another heading), "Down to Earth," and the editorial. I cannot honestly say the same for "Inside Science Fiction" as reader, for I feel that it is basically meaningless to the large majority of readers. I recognize its value to the minority, but I would be happier to see it replaced by some

other sort of department. (I have no suggestions along that line, however.)

Sackett took first place on two counts — the generally uniform quality of the story, which was reasonably high, and the length over which that quality was sustained. I seriously question the over-facile motivation of all the characters; and I feel that the author made the mistake of depending on the reader's intellectualizations to carry a basically emotional story idea; but I cannot say I actively resented this, and was well-pleased enough with other qualities to rate the story without question.

Sam Merwin took second place after a considerable battle with Dickson. He won out on the basis of fresh gimmicks over Dickson's appealingly wry but minor idea.

I do not like stories of the "Peace On Earth" type, particularly when unconvincingly done.

In the case of "Sales Pitch," I venture

to guess that this is one of the author's early efforts, for it lacks all semblances of resolved plot.

However, ratings are relative. The June *Future* stacks up as the best issue, story-wise as well as in appearance, that I have ever read of this magazine, and certainly a better buy than quite a few of the digest-sized books.

I would not, however, like to see *Science Fiction Quarterly* in the new size. *Future* has not recently been an out-and-out space opera magazine, and I'm happy to see it so; but SFQ should retain the large size as long as it continues to publish action stories — to which I am also devoted. I fail to see the value of a publisher's issuing a string of magazines identical except for their titles, and would much rather have him hit as many categories of science fiction as possible, thus providing a balanced fare. However, I gather that my taste in this respect is somewhat out of the ordinary, and you, as editor, are in a far better position to decide and make recommendations to your publisher.

A tip of my hat to Milton Luros for his excellent layout and design, which is as good for this more dignified appearance as it was when he was designing for the larger size.

In further footnote to Mr. Janke's letter: I have personally participated in laboratory experiments by trained psychologists (not psychiatrists or psychotherapists) endeavoring to establish the validity of dianetic principles. Despite their vested interest in proving these principles — they were engaged in developing a new therapy based, in part, on an extension of dianetics — they were absolutely unable to do so. It is possible, however, to duplicate "dianetic" results by recourse to such older methods as hypnotism and conditioned-reflex therapy. It would seem to me that it has been thoroughly established by now that dianetics is no more than a re-hash and conglomeration of old ideas, most of them outmoded and discarded, some of them dangerous.

In passing, this added comment on the letter by Jim Harmon: Sam Mines, Horace Gold, and Garrett Ford are, of course, beyond question as oldtimers in science fiction; only HLG, however, has been able to produce a successful magazine. Both Mines and Ford reveal weaknesses in their stubborn adherence to one *kind* of science fiction as the only true gospel, to the complete exclusion of all others. On the other hand, of course, the same is true of Palmer, and of *all* science fictionists to some extent. I'm a Campbell man myself — which goes to say the same thing about JWC and myself.

I would propose, diffidently, that the less of this tendency a man has, the more chance there is of his editing a truly popular and satisfactory magazine — so long as it continues to be a strong reflection of his basic personality. The true formula for success, of course, lies in maintaining that inherently delicate balance. JWC seems to have been the most successful, thus far, in maintaining that balance *over a long average*.

"Novella" may be Italian for the French "Novelette" but it is also Baltic for the English "Short Story." The meaning does not lie in the translation but in the connotation. Quite true, most magazine "novellas" are only novelettes in disguise — as are most magazine "complete novels." But there *is* a distinct literary form, known in English as a "novella," which is completely distinct from the novel, the novelette, or the short story, and has its own rules of construction, as do the three better-known forms. Basically, it is a long short-story: that is to say, the development of *one* central character at grips with *one* basic idea, but, in this case, over a longer word-span than in the short story. As you might guess, it is an extremely difficult form, and hence has fallen into obscurity, leaving only its name behind to be borrowed. I refer you to the *Decameron* as the most readily available example of a collection of novellas, but I also warn you that the obscurity of the form and the frequent



borrowing of its name have by now so occluded the issue that the definition given above is only one of many which might be offered.

In final emphasis of the comment on the preference coupon, another vote for Damon Knight. I'm gratified to note how far he has risen above the average product of that (bekenighted?) reading fee mill. Damon, in everything he writes, has always maintained a high standard of thinking, to which the average writer and critic might well repair. As for biases — and I like your clarification, Mr. Lowndes — I'd rather have my work run up against Damon Knight's than against those of some other critics in more monopolistically advantageous positions.

— Paul Lovinsky, New York, N. Y.

Some magazines have policies of specialization, such as you mention, and the individual editors are hired only to administer the policies; it's well to make sure that this condition isn't in effect before blaming any given editor for using only one type of story and excluding all others.

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I want to offer congratulations on *Future's* new format, and its return to a bi-monthly schedule. It might be wiser to use heavier paper — the mag looks rather thin on the stands, compared to others which have no more pages.

As for the contents, "Hail To The Chief" was outstanding; the best story you've published for several issues. "Peace On Earth" was also good, "The Intimate Invasion" about average, and "Rescue" only slightly poorer. I didn't like "Sales Pitch"; it was too much like a poor imitation of "The Humanoids."

Freas' illustrations were very good; Urban's fair but not up to his usual standards, and the stuff by Emsh and Luton (Luros under false whiskers?) could have been better left out. How about getting somebody like Eberle for interiors? I like all the departments, especially the book reviews. If anything has to be cut, let it be the letter columns. The others (including the editorial) are too valuable to leave out.

I have two remarks about the "corruption" of language. First, as you pointed out, it is going to continue, whether Mr. Janke likes it or not; and second, it causes much less confusion than he seems to think. Anyone of reasonable intelligence can usually decide which meaning of a word is implied by reading the context carefully — which he is supposed to be doing, anyway — and a person without reasonable intelligence probably won't know any of the meanings to begin with. Along this line, I'd like to inform Jim Harmon that when an Italian term is used in an English-language magazine, a fairly large majority of the readers are content to let it mean what the editor wants it to mean. So you

know Italian! Hoo, boy! I do agree with Jim, however, in voting against articles.

— Robert Coulson, RR2, Box 65,
Silver Lake Indiana

Who was it who pointed out that the only "pure and perfect" language was a thoroughly dead language?

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

You seem to have followed in the June *Future*, the pattern set by just about every magazine changing to digest size — there seems to be some contagious disease among you — that of picking an entire panel of morbid stories for the first small-size issue. The only ray of light is the silly "Intimate Invasion," which is completely unworthy of Merwin or of RWL — a very dim ray of light indeed!

The size of an SF magazine makes no difference to me — but "downfall of humanity" stories should, in my opinion, run

less than one in twenty, not four of five as in June *Future*.

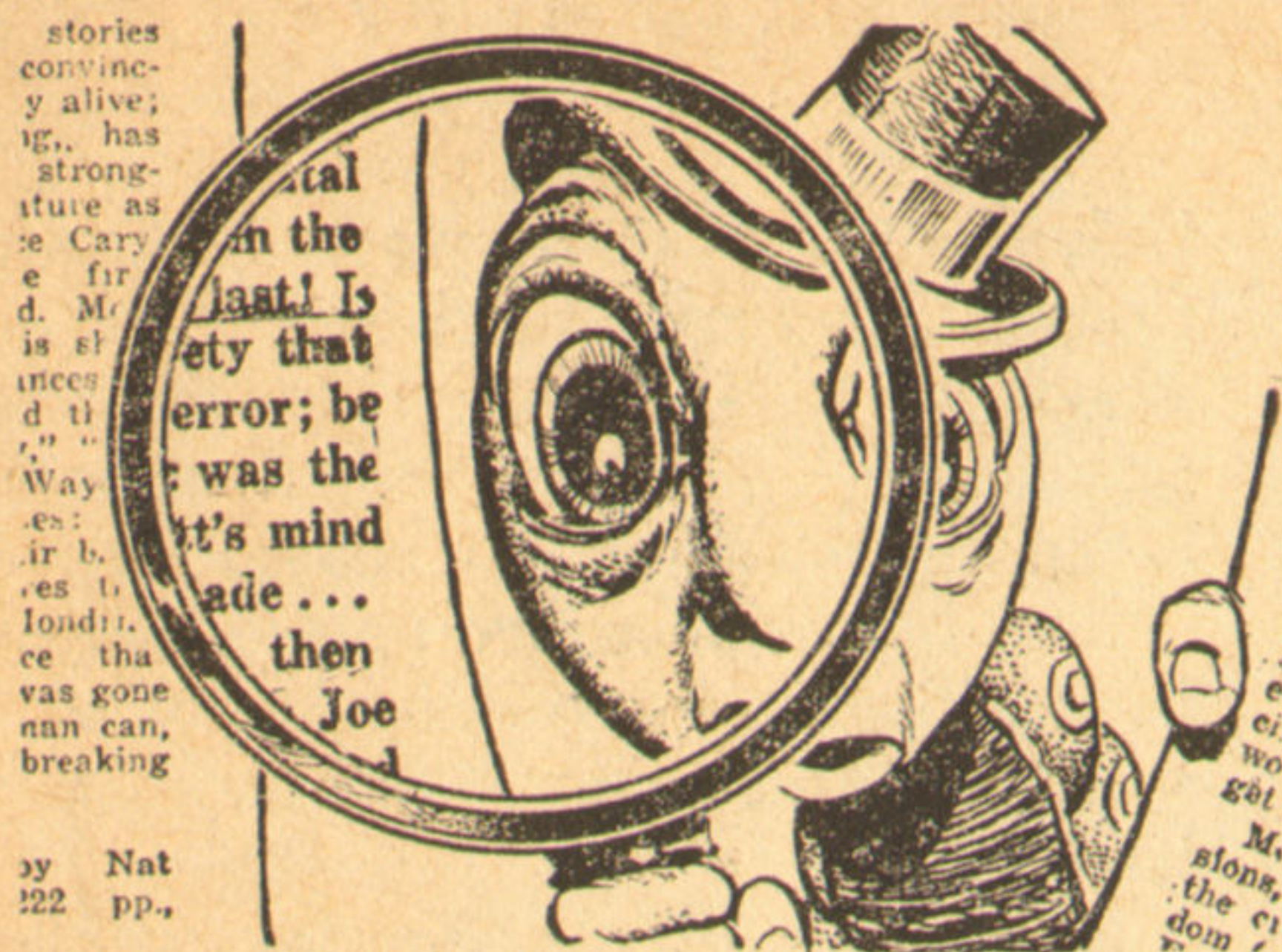
Keeping stories dark, murky, purple and gray does not make for adult reading, as I understand it; it tends more toward psychopathic preferences and surely you're not aiming toward readers from mental hospitals to the exclusion of all others!

I may try *Future* again to see if you've changed your story policy — but subscribe to it? No thanks! Don't you dare do this to your other magazines!

— Sylvia Tzinberg
(address omitted by request)

The only complaint of its kind received. What do you say, Readers? Does Future leave you feeling oppressed, depressed, etc.? Should we swing toward more sweetness and light? In any event, we shall try for better balance!





Readin' and Writhin'

(Continued from page 105)

letters written by Howard and Lovecraft, and a bit of doggerel, "The King and the Oak" — not credited, though it appears as part of "The Hyborian Age," so that we don't know whether to curse Howard or Clark. All this makes a crowded contents page, and a patchwork book; I think it would have been more sensible of Gnome — as well as more honest — to integrate the scholarly notes with the stories and forget them.

I found one passage in "The God In the Bowl" that struck me as unusually fine; since this is one of the two posthumous stories which de Camp edited for publication, I wrote to him to ask if he'd made any changes in the scene that begins with Promero's entrance on page 137, and learned that he had: one word, Promero's last, which to me makes all the difference between climax and anticlimax. It seems a great pity that de Camp and Howard never collaborated while Howard was alive. De Camp has been careful, in this recent work, to edit the stories as little as possible, for fear of making them sound like his rather than Howard's; but if he'd been on hand when they were being written, to put solid ground under Conan's feet and an honest itch on his back — what fantasies might we not have seen then!

WHILE we are on this subject, the Grandon Company, Booksellers and Publishers,

of Providence, R. I., have reissued A. Merritt's "Dwellers In the Mirage" (" 'Back to your den, Salur'da!' I shouted. 'Does Dwayanu come to your call? When I summon you, then see that you obey!' ") and Otis Adelbert Kline's "The Port of Peril" ("Robert Grandon, former Chicago clubman who had fought his way to the throne of Reabon, mightiest empire of Venus, grimly nodded his assent . . ."). Each is \$3.00.

C. M. KORNBLUTH'S vigorous, highly-individual style is so potent that even his collaborations read like nothing on Earth but more-or-less diluted Kornbluth. (The one exception is "Mars Child" — now available from Dell as "Outpost Mars" — which reads like pure Merrill, and the very worst Merrill at that.) The latest mixture, however, is pretty watery. "Search the Sky," by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, 165 pp., \$2.00, 35¢) is a series of episodes hung on a frail thread: Contact is failing among the far-scattered worlds of man's empire, and one man sets out to discover why. The genetic formula which finally explains the problem is an interesting enough nugget of information, but a thundering failure as a surprise climax; and the episodes themselves, with no plot-development whatever to carry them forward, get weaker and weaker. Even the two chief characters, having nothing to do but be the authors' eyepieces for one out-of-

whack civilization after another, gradually fade away to total invisibility.

Episode 1, on a world where life begins at 90, has flashes of the pure Kornbluth deviltry, as when a junior citizen makes the error of addressing an epicene adult as "Ma'am," and the oldster, raging, runs over him with his powered wheelchair until he (the oldster) collapses:

The boy got up with tire marks on him and groaned:

"Oh, lord! I've hurt him." He appealed hysterically: "What'll I do? Is he dead?"

Episode 2, the matriarchy, is enlivened only by the hero's efforts to evade a mass rape. Episode 3 begins well, with a society which has kept up much too thoroughly with the Joneses, but breaks down into a silly chase; episode 4 is the Marching-Morons society, out of which Kornbluth squeezed all the fun years ago.

"6 Great Short Novels of Science Fiction," edited by Groff Conklin (Dell First Editions, 384 pp., 35¢) supplies a long-felt want. Bleiler and Dikty, in their annual "Best Science Fiction Novels," have been dipping into the 15,000-30,000-word pool, where a shocking number of good stories still awaits reprinting, but they've been handicapped by the "Year's Best" restriction and by occasional eccentricities of taste.

Here, at less than a tenth-cent a page, are Stuart Cloete's vivid post-atomic story, "The Blast," Heinlein's "Conventry," Leinster's "The Other World," Anthony Boucher's "Barrier," Blish's "Surface Tension," and Theodore Sturgeon's "Maturity" — this last a triumphant reworking of the disappointing magazine story, and previously available only in Sturgeon's collection, "Without Sorcery." The jacket is by Richard Powers — who else? — and there's an unexpected bonus in the form of six expert brush drawings by David Stone.

In his introduction, Conklin expresses

the hope that this may be only the first of many similar anthologies. Amen.

"The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, Third Series," edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas (252 pp., \$3.25 — why?) is the first to be published by Doubleday and consequently the first to be reviewed here; a murrain upon Little, Brown for making me miss two such delightful volumes as the others must have been.

There are stories here for every enlightened taste. To mine, they range from an Idris Seabright fantasy, dangerously near the borderline of that elfin slop which Rosalie Moore calls "fancy," to Ward Moore's "Lot" — a genuinely distinguished short story, so grippingly good that I have stopped, as of now, wondering what other people see in Moore. Among the other 14, my favorites are R. Bretnor's delightful "Maybe Just a Little One," H. Nearing, Jr.'s "The Maladjusted Classroom," Charles L. Harness's "Child by Chronos" with its outrageous closed-circle time plot, and Boucher's own first fantasy, still as fresh as ever: "Snulbug."

Two other recent anthologies offering superior science fiction at a bargain price are the Permabooks "Shadow of Tomorrow," edited by Frederik Pohl (379 pp., 35¢), and "Crossroads In Time," edited by Groff Conklin (312 pp., an inch taller, 35¢). The Pohl collection contains 17 stories of which, by my count, nine are A's and only five C's: this is almost *too* good. Particularly notable are Heinlein's terrifying "The Year of the Jackpot," Wilson Tucker's "To a Ripe Old Age" — the story in which he took the first few pages of his "The Long Loud Silence," carried them forward in a totally different direction, and wound up on the same impressive level of quality — James Blish's "Common Time," about which I'll have to explode at some later date; there isn't room here; James E. Gunn's "The Miso-

gynist," and Simon Eisner's "The Luckiest Man In Denv."

The Conklin, with 18 stories, stacks up not quite as well with me: there are six A's, seven B's, five C's. The last category unfortunately includes both the novelettes — Clement's "Assumption Unjustified" and M'Intosh's "Made In U. S. A."; Clement's basic assumption is unjustified, and so are half a dozen of M'Intosh's — plus really painful botches by George O. Smith and "W. Norbert." The A's, though, include Joseph Kelleam's well-remembered "The Eagles Gather," Sturgeon's "Derm Fool," Chad Oliver's witty "Technical Advisor," MacLean's "Feedback," "The Time Decelerator" by A. Macfadyen, Jr. — and whatever happened to *him?* — and H. B. Fyfe's wry "Let There Be Light." At these prices, how can you lose?

HENRY KUTTNER'S "Ahead of Time" (Ballantine, 177 pp., \$2.00, 35¢) is an uneven but fascinating collection of 10 stories, dating from '42 to '53. It would take a bigger volume than this to cover the prodigious versatility of the Kuttner-Moore mind, but the present collection does give a hint of the ground these two writers have been over, and perhaps — although I hope not — the direction they're heading for now. Three stories appear to have been written especially for this collection; one, "Or Else," is a bit of gently mocking whimsy about an interstellar peacemaker trying to persuade two feuding Mexicans to stop shooting at each other. The remaining two, "Home Is the Hunter" and "Year Day," are something altogether new from the Kuttners — downbeat stories, fruity exhalations of future-world decadence, each in its own way more unrelentingly morbid even than Fritz Leiber's "Coming Attraction." They're polished and effective works, but the clinical interest — a species of joy — which informed all the Kuttners' earlier serious work, is here replaced by a kind of masochistic despair.

The other seven stories range from second-rate Kuttner ("By These Presents," "De Profundis") to the very best. "Camouflage" is the brilliant companion piece to C. L. Moore's "No Woman Born" — an equally fascinating, and totally different, exploration of the psychology of a human brain in a metal body. "Shock" is a prime specimen of the Kuttners' true forte, the seemingly harmless but vaguely disturbing little story which suddenly turns around and bites you. And "Pile of Trouble" is another uninhibited adventure of the astonishing Hogben family; I only regret its inclusion here because I hate to see these stories scattered; they belong in one volume.

Until its recent and lamentable change of heart, incidentally, Ballantine's art department was solving the problem of adapting Powers' wonderful jacket designs to two different formats, imaginatively and with great skill. This volume represents its first fall from grace. Readers who want the hardbound "Ahead of Time" had better buy the paperbound edition as well; Powers' gleeful fantasy, a botched and curtailed copy of which appears on the two-dollar jacket, is worth the extra 35¢.

REALLY earnest Heinlein fans will probably feel justified in spending 35¢ for "The Argosy Book of Adventure Stories," edited by Rogers Terrill (Bantam, 281 pp.). In among the Westerns, period pieces, South Seas romances and so on you'll find Heinlein's "Water Is For Washing" — science fiction, because it concerns a geologic event which hasn't happened within the memory of man . . . but close to the borderline, because the story is a convincing argument that it could happen tomorrow.

The volume also contains a post-atomic set-piece by Pat Frank, but if you're bright enough to admire Heinlein, you won't like it.



“Maturity” in Science Fiction

(continued from page 5)

turns out that one of the chief characters has had the weapon all along. He couldn't bring himself to use it, however, because the menace was really his father, son, own personal construction, or whatever. Not quite an idiot plot, you see, because hero — while perhaps not overly bright — has no reason to suspect that such is the case, nor has the reader. Thus, hero slashes or blasts his way from world to world, hewing through parsecs of living flesh or nonflesh, dragging his spacecraft behind him, as he seeks out the weapon . . .

All three can, and doubtless have been combined. There are other “immature” plot-types, too, but the main point here is that the basic plots of early science fiction tales were often so fundamentally trite, absurd, or false to human realities as to make the story unacceptable to other than the rabid enthusiast.

3. *Action as a substitute for development.* In the real world, persons are likely to find themselves up against important problems — sometimes problems involving the fate of other people they do not know — at almost any time. Ideas of all kinds are thought of constantly, and promulgated to a small or large extent. Problems and ideas often intertwine.

The fact of the problems and the existence of the ideas play their part in the general milieu; in working out a problem there is a simultaneous *development* of personalities and of ideas which bear upon the problem and the characters. Thus, at the end of an episode, those involved are not exactly the same as they were at the start; and ideas which they have expressed may have undergone changes, too.

Science fiction is perhaps more largely concerned with ideas of all kinds than any other category of fiction; in the early examples, people were pretty much the same throughout a story, and not likely to have shown any change as a result of their experiences. (Hair turned white from terror, hearts throbbing, a few assorted but expendable appendages or organs missing, stolen, lost or shattered brains do not count.) Ideas were presented flatly, mostly in the professorial manner, and that was that. There was little concern with the interaction of idea on personality and personality upon idea. In those stories which weren't brief narratives of a great discovery, ending with catastrophe, once the lecture was over our heroes usually went off to slash or blast their way (see three paragraphs above).

Sam Baracol was fond of his niece, Mara, but women had to stay in their place in this world—and their place most certainly was not in a chemical laboratory, helping a man discover the formula for an elixir of sheer delight!

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4. *Absence of adult motivation.* The mad scientists were never explained — well, hardly ever. As a rule, they just wanted to destroy the Earth, or transmute the girl into a Thing, because they were mad. On the whole, this circular hypothesis was easier to take than such explanations as were given — since only a very young and inexperienced reader could (a) find them convincing (b) believe that such a person was nonetheless capable of the tremendous discoveries the author attributed to him.

Nowadays, when a mad scientist is introduced, he isn't so labelled. You see for yourself, after awhile, that he seems to have certain eccentricities — such as insisting on bread baked to order in loaves the size of throw-rugs. But you realize that his custom of sitting on toast is perfectly

logical once he explains to you that he is a poached egg in his off-hours.

The dictators and conquerors were shadow players and they ruled faceless people. They nearly all came from the same closets and shelves in Villains and Victims, Inc., and seemed equally susceptible to the heroine's antiseptic charms, and were cursed with glass chins. Their behaviour, philosophy, etc., conformed to a child's idea of a wicked king.

The rulers and dictators figure in present-day science fiction, too. But such are cardboard caricatures of Hitler, Stalin and company only in comic strips, and magazines catering to a common audience with that for the comics. (Note: by comics, here, I mean any "comic book" which isn't intended to be funny, such as the various crime, horror, etc. comics.)

Cassius says of Caesar, "Poor man! I know he would not be a wolf, but that he sees the Romans are but sheep . . ." In present-day science fiction, we are interested in why the Romans are but sheep; why Caesar seeks the crown; and the philosophical implications of liberty and its absence under the conditions the author sets up, rather than detailed accounts of the wolf's feast.

Along with the motivation, of course, goes characterization — since you can't get convincing motives from puppets. So much has been written about characters and characterization in science fiction, as being part of the essence of its "maturity", however, that we need not go into that point here.

5. *Absence of skill in writing.* A great many of the early authors in science-fiction magazines were not writers by profession, but workers in the sciences. Technical skill in writing was often at a rather low ebb; while there was seldom any difficulty with incoherent English — in the published copy, that is — the styles affected by many of the authors were of 19th Century vintage, and hardly appropriate to the subject matter; writing matched story-construction for awkwardness.

There are few current science-fiction authors whose writing can be called incompetent, but the number of just-barely-competent runs a bit high for the "maturity" claimers' comfort. For one thing, the shoddy

English that one hears in crime and detective features on the radio and TV, and in the movies, shows up quite regularly in science fiction manuscripts. It also shows up in published science fiction, and not only in such parts of a story where it can be justified.

In addition to the flat and phony realism of the Spillane school (which might be considered as an inbred illegitimate offspring of the Hammet-Hemingway school), one gets the pseudo-simplicity of Saroyan; affectations after Bradbury and Sturgeon (and, as with most affectations, these manage to exaggerate the faults of the original without perpetrating any of their virtues); and fadographs from 6th-hand impressions of "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake". All of this may be more readable to present-day writers than Austin Hall, but that does not make bad writing good.

However, some of the early "immature" aspects of science fiction are no longer — or, at least very rarely — found, and this seems to substantiate part of the science-fictionists' claims of "maturity". But there's quite a difference between contending that science fiction is now mostly produced for a discriminating, adult audience, and the allegation that science fiction has reached the point where it can be considered favorably with literature in general.

Such differences will be something to discuss in our next issue.



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