

WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

MARCH 1952

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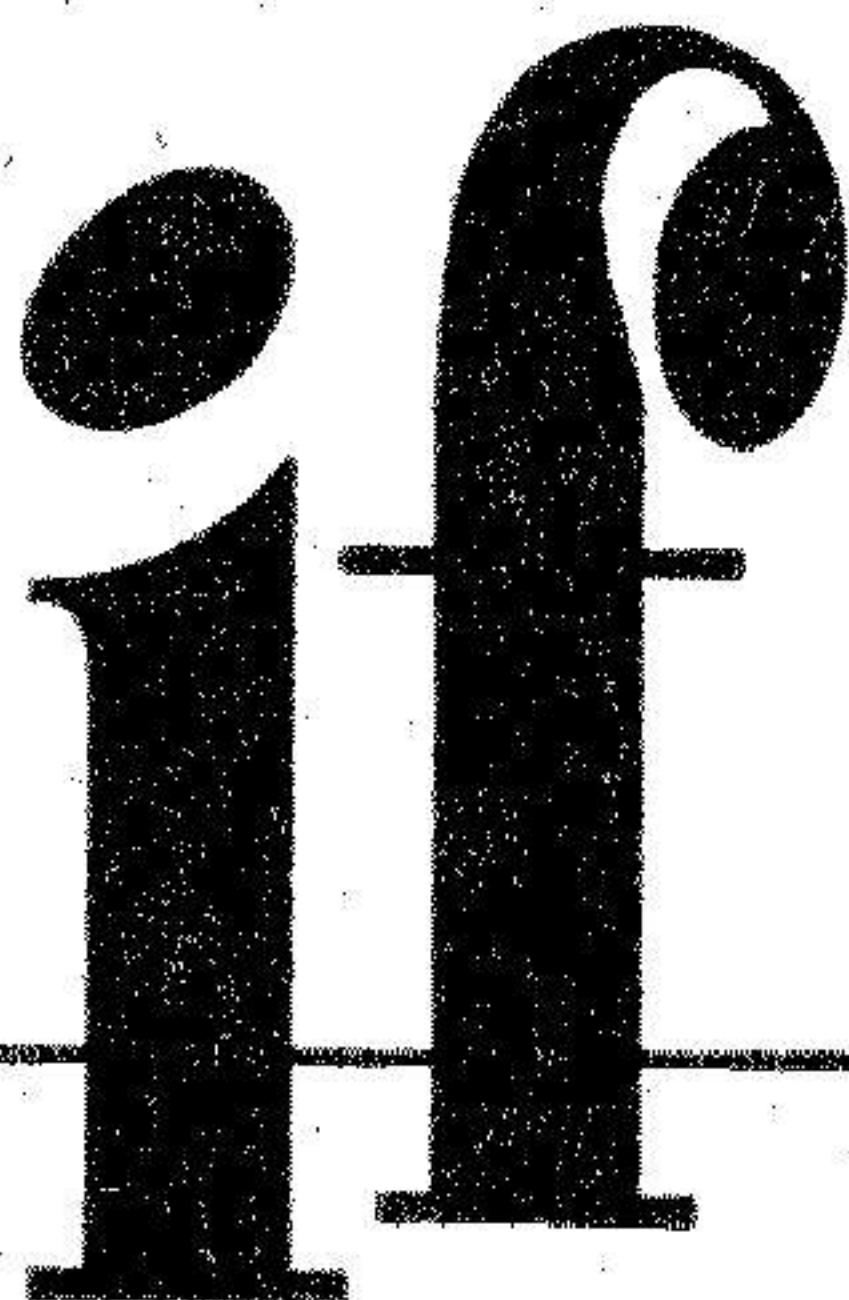
TWELVE TIMES ZERO

By Howard Browne

Also Ray Palmer • Richard Shaver • Rog Phillips • Ted Sturgeon

WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

MARCH 1952



All Stories New and Complete

Publisher

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Editor

PAUL W. FAIRMAN

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Cover by MARTIN KEY

IF is published bi-monthly by Quinn Publishing Company, Inc., Kingston, New York. Volume 1, No. 1. Copyright 1952 by Quinn Publishing Company, Inc. Application for Entry as Second Class matter at Post Office, Buffalo, New York, pending. Subscription \$3.50 for 12 issues in U.S. and Possessions; Canada \$4 for 12 issues; elsewhere \$4.50. Allow four weeks for change of address. All stories appearing in this magazine are fiction. Any similarity to actual persons is coincidental. 35c a copy. Printed in U.S.A.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 5TH AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND

A chat with the editor . . .

THIS IS the first issue of a new science fiction magazine called IF. The title was selected after much thought because of its brevity and on the theory it is indicative of the field and will be easy to remember. The tentative title that just missed was BEYOND TOMORROW, but when we woke up one morning and couldn't remember it until we'd had a cup of coffee, it was summarily discarded.

A great deal of thought and effort has gone into the formation of this magazine. We have had the aid of several very talented and generous people, for which we are most grateful. Much is due them for their warmhearted assistance. And now that the bulk of the formative work is done, we will try to maintain IF as one of the finest books on the market.

WE HAVE spent a lot of thought upon what we can do to cause a great public demand for our magazine. In short, why will you buy IF?

We cannot, in honesty, say we will publish at all times the best science fiction in the field. That would not be true. But we will have access to the best stories, and we will get our fair share of works from the best writers.

We definitely will not talk

“adult” or “juvenile” relative to our content as we feel such terms are misleading. We would rather think at all times in the terms of “story”. Some of the greatest escapist literature ever written, *Treasure Island* for instance, could be put into either category or both. And if Edgar Rice Burroughs is juvenile, then so are we, because the late master has given us some memorable thrills.

Frankly, we don't think you'll buy IF because you feel we print better yarns than any other mag. You will buy it, we hope, because you like its personality. Every magazine, we feel, does have a definite personality of its own. This personality is usually a reflection of the editors, their way of thinking, their appreciation of the market, their interpretation of what you will like best in stories and artwork.

We have tried to make IF different from any other science fiction magazine on the stands while still building it along the lines of what every science fiction mag must be. Aside from the letter columns and the editorial, which are departments of field-wide use, we have not copied any feature of any other magazine. We will not, for instance, review fanzines, because we feel that is being most ably done

by other mags. Nor will we, as a general practice, review books because that appears to us to be overdone.

IN SHORT, we're trying to build a personality of our own and hope thereby to establish an affinity with a large number of readers who will remember IF when they buy a science fiction mag as one they like and wish to continue reading.

At all times we will hew to the story-line and will exhort with our writers to do the same. As an example, when Howard Browne phoned to talk over the plot for his lead novel in this issue, he described what was without doubt a staggering premise, a really startling concept. "But," he mourned, "I suppose I'll have to bend it around to give them the good old conventional ending."

We told Howard, "Not for IF, chum. Remember the old creed we live by. A writer may cheat on his wife, but he is ever true to the story-line. He may haul his infant son around by one leg, but he carries a good story-idea like a holy relic. If there is only one logical ending for *Twelve Times Zero*, that's the ending we want."

Therefore, we do not feel the majority of readers necessarily want a happy ending regardless of all else. Not when it is incompatible with the aura of realism created by the writer.

A check-list of fiction masterpieces certainly bears this out. The furor created by a little piece called *Sorry, Wrong Number* would certainly not have been forthcoming had the bedridden lady been rescued in the last paragraph. *Romeo and Juliet* would have been nothing more than the smooth effort of the world's greatest writer if Romeo had gotten there in time. Yet, in modern fiction, he gets there in time with such amazing regularity one feels he has memorized at least a dozen time-tables. The result has been unnumbered carloads of mediocre fiction.

Also—though we don't wish to underscore the point too heavily—what could more surely have smothered the greatness of *Wuthering Heights* than a happy ending?

WE DO NOT wish to indicate that IF will be a magazine given over to tragedy. We will only insist that our writers create scenes and climaxes that fix the story rather than cater to that old "debil" formula.

And in so doing we have an entirely selfish motive. This: As the years go by, we want to look back with personal pride upon an ever-lengthening list of *great* stories.

So the book you now hold in your hands is a new one titled IF. We hope you will like it—not for just a day—not for just a month. But for years to come. PWF



*Police grilted him mercilessly, while
eyes from a hundred worlds looked on.*

TWELVE

times

ZERO

By Howard Browne

It was a love-triangle murder that made today's headlines but the answer lay hundreds of thousands of light years away!

THEY BROUGHT him into one of the basement rooms. He moved slowly and with a kind of painful dignity, as a man moves on his way to the firing squad. A rumpled shock of black hair pointed up the extreme pallor of a gaunt face, empty at the moment of all expression. Harsh light from an overhead fixture winked back from tiny beads of perspiration dotting the waxen skin of his forehead.

The three men with him watched him out of faces as expressionless as his own. They were ordinary men who wore ordinary clothing in an ordinary way, yet in the way they moved and in the way they stood you knew they were hard men who were in a hard and largely unpleasant business.

One of them motioned casually toward a straight-backed chair almost exactly in the center of the room. "Sit there, Cordell," he said.

A quiet voice, not especially deep, yet it seemed to bounce off the painted concrete walls.

Wordless, the young man obeyed. Sitting, he seemed as stiff and uncompromising as before. The man who had spoken made a vague gesture and the overhead light went out, replaced simultaneously by strong rays from a spotlight aimed full at the eyes of the seated figure. Involuntarily the young man's head turned aside to avoid the searing brilliance, but a hand came out of the wall of darkness and jerked it back again.

"Just to remind you," the quiet voice continued conversationally, "I'm Detective Lieutenant Kirk, Homicide Bureau." A pair of hands thrust a second chair toward the circle of light. Kirk swung it around and dropped onto the seat, resting his arms along the back, facing the man across a distance of hardly more than inches.

In the pitiless glare of the spotlight Cordell's cheekbones stood out sharply, and under his deepset eyes were dark smudges of exhaustion. His rigid posture, his blank expression, his silence — these

WHEN THE PLANS for IF were laid out, our first idea was to stage the scoop of the century: Get the lead novel from Howard Browne, editor of AMAZING STORIES. No greater boost could be given an infant publication than Browne's name on the cover. We asked Howard and he asked his boss, Mr. Davis, and Mr. Davis said, "Sure."

AMAZING STORIES is the oldest science-fiction publication in the world. It has the largest circulation in its field and up to January 7th (the day IF went on the stands), AMAZING was the best science fiction magazine your money could buy. It has the best writers in the field. Its departments are excellent with Rog Phillips doing the fanzine reviews and Sam Merwin reviewing the books. So if you have a spare quarter, get a copy of AMAZING. You can't go wrong.

And now, about Howard Browne. He is a huge man, made up almost entirely of vast enthusiasms. We have known Howard intimately for about six years and we continue to

regard him with awe. There is no middle ground with this man. When he likes something, it's terrific! If Howard hung a picture in his office we doubt if it would be a casual chore. The hammer he used would be a terrific hammer. The tack he drove would outshade other tacks by five country miles. And the picture? Gad, what a masterpiece!

Seriously, one has only to view Browne's enthusiasm for living to know it for what it is—a priceless gift. He has written unnumbered short stories and, under the name of John Evans, is the father of Paul Pine, hero of the HALO series, the last of which was HALO IN BRASS, and the next of which will be HALO FOR HIRE out in the near future. We have watched him write several of his stories and he hurled himself into each with a zeal and a zest that stunned us into a partial paralysis.

So we give you Howard Browne, a hard fellow to classify; an astounding mixture of Balzac, a ten-ton dynamo, and Peter Pan. But this above all—a great guy.

seemed not so much indications of defiance as they did the result of some terrible and deepseated shock.

"Let's go over it again, Cordell," Kirk said.

The young man swallowed audibly against the silence. One of his hands twitched, came up almost to his face as though to shield his eyes, then dropped limply back.

"That light—" he mumbled.

"—stays on," Kirk said briskly. "The quicker you tell us the answers, the quicker we all relax. Okay?"

Cordell shook his head numbly, not so much in negation as an effort to clear the fog from his tortured mind. "I told you," he cried hoarsely. "What more do you want? Yesterday I told you the whole thing." His voice began to border on hysteria. "What good's my trying to tell you if you won't listen? How's a guy supposed—"

"Then try telling it straight!" Kirk snapped. "You think you're fooling around with half-wits? Sure; you told us. A crazy pack of goof-ball dreams about a blonde babe clubbing two grown people to death, then disappearing in a ball of blue light! You figure on coping a plea on insanity?"

"It's the truth!" Cordell shouted. "As God hears me, it's true!" Suddenly he buried his face in his hands and long tearing sobs shook his slender frame.

ONE OF the other men reached out as though to drag the young man's face back into the

withering rays of the spotlight, but Kirk motioned him away. Without haste the Lieutenant fished a cigar from the breast pocket of his coat and began almost leisurely to strip away its cellophane wrapper. A kitchen match burst into flame under the flick of a thumb nail and a cloud of blue tobacco smoke writhed into the cone of hot light.

"Cordell," Kirk said mildly.

Slowly the young man's shoulders stopped their shaking, and after a long moment his wan, tear-stained face came back into the light. "I—I'm sorry," he mumbled.

Kirk waved away the layer of smoke hanging between them. He said wearily, "Let's try it once more. Step by step. Maybe this time . . ." He let the sentence trail off, but the inference was clear.

An expression of hopeless resignation settled over Cordell's features. "Where do you want me to start?"

"Take it from five o'clock the afternoon it happened."

The tortured man wet his lips. "Five o'clock was when my shift went off at the plant. The plant, in case you've forgotten, is the Ames Chemical Company, and I'm a foreman in the Dry Packaging department."

"Save your sarcasm," Kirk said equably.

"Yeah. I changed clothes and punched out around five-fifteen. Juanita had called me about four and said to pick her up at Professor Gilmore's laboratory."

"At what time?"

"No special time. Just when I

could get out there. We were going to have dinner and take in a movie. No particular picture; she said we'd pick one out of the paper at dinner."

"Go on."

"Well, it must've been about quarter to six when I got out to the University. I parked in front of the laboratory wing and went in at the main entrance. I walked down the corridor to the Professor's office. His typist was knocking out some letters and there were a couple of students hanging around waiting for him to show up. How about a smoke, Lieutenant?"

Kirk nodded to one of the men behind him and a package of cigarettes was extended to the man under the light. A match was proffered and the young man ignited the white tube, his hands shaking badly.

The Lieutenant crossed his legs the other way. "Let's hear the rest of it, friend."

"What for?" Bitterness tinged Cordell's voice. "You don't believe a word I'm saying."

"Up to now I do."

"Well, I said something or other to Alma—she's the Prof's secretary—and went on through the door to the hall that leads to the private lab. When I got—"

KIRK HELD up a hand. "Wait a minute. Your busting right in on the Professor like that doesn't sound right. Why not wait in the office for your wife?"

"What for?" Cordell squinted at him in surprise. "He and I get . . .

got along fine. When Juanita first went to work for him he said to drop in at the lab any time, not to wait in the outer office like a freshman or something."

"Go ahead."

"Well . . ." The young man hesitated. "We're back to the part you *don't* believe, Officer. I can't hardly believe it myself; but so help me, it's gospel. I *saw* it!"

"I'm waiting."

Cordell said doggedly: "The lab door was open a crack. I heard a woman's voice in there, and it wasn't my wife's. It was a voice like—like cracked ice. You know: cold and kind of . . . well . . . brittle and—and deadly. That's the only way I can describe it.

"Anyway, I sort of hesitated there, outside the door. I didn't want to go bulling in on something that wasn't none of my business . . . but on the other hand I figured my wife was in there, else Alma would've said so."

"You hear anything besides this collection of ice cubes?"

The young man's jaw hardened. "I'm giving it the way it happened. You want the rest, or you want to trade wise cracks?"

One of the men behind Kirk lunged forward. "Why, you cheap punk—"

Kirk stopped him with an arm. "I'll handle this, Miller." To Cordell: "I asked you a question. Answer it."

"I heard Professor Gilmore. Only a couple words, then two quick flashes of light lit up the frosted glass door panel. That's when I heard these two thumps

like when somebody falls down. I shoved open the door fast . . . and right then I saw *her!*"

Kirk nodded for no apparent reason and was careful about knocking a quarter inch of ash off his cigar. "Tell me about her."

The young man's hands were shaking again. He sucked at his cigarette and let the smoke come out with his words: "She was clear over on the other side of the lab . . . standing a good two feet off the floor in the middle of a big blue ball of some kind of—of soft fire. *Blue* fire that sort of *pulsed*—you know. Anyway, there she was: this hell of a good-looking blonde; looking right smack at me, and there was this funny kind of gun in her hand. She aimed it and I ducked just as this dim flash of light came out of it. Something hit me on the side of the head and I . . . well, I guess I blanked out."

"Then what?"

"Well, like I said yesterday, I suppose I just naturally came out of it. I'm all spread out on the floor with the damndest headache you ever saw. Over by the window is the Prof and—" he wet his lips—"and Juanita. They're dead, Lieutenant; just kind of all piled up over there . . . dead, their heads busted in and the—the—the—"

HE SAT there, his mouth working but no sound coming out, his eyes staring straight into the blazing light, the cigarette smouldering, forgotten, between the first two fingers of his left hand.

Almost gently Kirk said: "Let's

go back to where you were standing outside the door. You heard this woman talking. What did she say?"

Cordell looked sightlessly down at his hands. "Nothing that made sense. Sounded, near as I can remember, like: 'Twelve times zero'—then some words, or more numbers maybe—I'm not sure—then she said, 'Chained to a two hundred thousand years'—and the Professor said something about his colleges having no idea and he'd warn them—and the blonde said, 'Three in the past five months'—and then something about taking in washing—"

The detective named Miller gave a derisive grunt. "Of all the goddam stories! Kirk, you gonna listen to any—"

Kirk silenced him with a gesture. "Go on, Cordell."

The young man slowly lifted the cigarette to his mouth, dragged heavily on it, then let it fall to the floor. "That's all. That's when the lights started flashing in there and I tried to be a hero."

"Sure you've left nothing out?"

"You've got it all. The truth, like you wanted."

Kirk said patiently, "Give it up, Cordell. You're as sane as the next guy. Give that story to a jury and they'll figure you're trying to make saps out of them—and when a jury gets sore at a defendant, he gets the limit. And in case you didn't know: in this State, the limit for murder is the hot seat!"

The prisoner stared at him woodenly. "You know I didn't kill my wife—or Professor Gilmore. I

had no reason to—no motive. There's got to be a motive."

The police officer rubbed his chin reflectively. "Uh-hunh. Motive. How long you married, Cordell?"

"Six years."

"Children?"

"No."

"Ames Chemical pay you a good salary?"

"Enough."

"Enough for two to live on?"

"Sure."

"How long did your wife work for Professor Gilmore?"

"Four years next month."

"What was her job?"

"His assistant."

"Pretty big job for a woman, wasn't it?"

"Juanita held two degrees in nuclear physics."

"You mean this atom bomb stuff?"

"That was part of it."

"Gilmore's a big name in that field, I understand," Kirk said.

"Maybe the biggest."

"Kind of young to rate that high, wouldn't you say? He couldn't have been much past forty."

Cordell shrugged. "He was thirty-eight—and a genius. Genius has nothing to do with age, I hear."

"Not married, I understand."

"That's right." A slow frown was forming on Cordell's face.

"How old was your wife?" Kirk asked.

The frown deepened but the young man answered promptly enough. "Juanita was my age. Twenty-nine."

Martin Kirk eyed his cigar casually. "Why," he said, "did you want her to walk out on her job; to give up her career?"

Cordell stiffened. "Who says I did?" he snapped.

"Are you denying it?"

"You're damn well right I'm denying it! What is this?"

KIRK WAS slowly shaking his head almost pityingly. "On at least two occasions friends of you and your wife have heard you say you wished she'd stay home where she belonged and cut out this 'playing around with a mess of test tubes.' Those are your own words, Cordell."

"Every guy," the young man retorted, "who's got a working wife says something like that now and then. It's only natural."

Kirk's jaw hardened. "But every guy's wife doesn't get murdered."

The other looked at him unbelievably. "Good God," he burst out, "are you saying I killed Juanita because I wanted her to stop working? Of all the—"

"There's, more!" snapped the Homicide man. "When you passed Professor Gilmore's secretary in his outer office yesterday, what did you say to her?"

"Say to her?" the prisoner echoed in a dazed way. "I don't know that I . . . Some kidding remark, I guess. How do you expect me to remember a thing like that?"

"I'll tell you what you said," Kirk said coldly. "It goes like this: 'Hi, Alma. You think the Prof's through making love to my wife?'"

Cordell's head snapped back and his jaw dropped in utter amazement. "What! Of all—! You nuts? I never said anything like that in my life! Who says I said that?"

Without haste Kirk slid a hand into the inner pocket of his coat and brought out two folded sheets of paper which he opened and spread out on his knee.

"Listen to this, friend," he said softly. "My name is Miss Alma Dakin. I reside at 1142 Monroe Street, and am employed as secretary to Professor Gregory Gilmore. At approximately 5:50 on the afternoon of October 19, Paul Cordell, husband of Mrs. Juanita Cordell, laboratory assistant to Professor Gilmore, passed my desk on his way into the laboratory. I made no effort to stop him, since my employer had previously instructed me to allow Mr. Cordell to go directly to the laboratory at any time without being announced." Kirk looked up at the man in the chair opposite him. "Okay so far?"

Paul Cordell nodded numbly.

"At the time stated above," Kirk continued, reading from the paper, "Mr. Cordell stopped briefly in front of my desk. He seemed very angry about something. He said, 'Hi, Alma. You think the Prof's through making love to my wife?' Before I could say anything, he turned away and walked into the corridor leading to the laboratory. I continued my work until about five minutes later when Mr. Cordell came running back into the office and told me to call the police, that Professor Gilmore and Mrs. Cordell had been murdered.

"Since there is an automatic closer on the corridor door, I did not see Mr. Cordell enter the laboratory itself. I do know, however, that Professor Gilmore and Mrs. Cordell were alone in the laboratory less than ten minutes before Mr. Cordell arrived, as I had just left them alone there after taking some dictation from my employer. Since I went directly to my desk, and since there is no entrance to the laboratory other than through my office, I can state with certainty that Mr. Cordell was the only person to enter the laboratory between 5:00 that afternoon and 5:55 when Mr. Cordell came out of the laboratory and told me of the murders.

"I hereby depose that this is a true and honest statement, to the best of my knowledge, that it was given freely on my part, and that I have read it before affixing my signature to its pages. Signed: Alma K. Dakin."

THERE WAS an almost ominous crackle to the document as Lieutenant Kirk folded it and returned it to his pocket. Paul Cordell appeared utterly stunned by what he had heard and his once stiffly squared shoulders were slumped like those of an old man.

"I don't have to tell you," Kirk said, "that the only window in that laboratory is both permanently sealed and heavily barred. No one but you could have murdered those two people. You say you saw them killed by some kind of a gun. Yet a qualified physician states both deaths were caused by a terrific

blow from a blunt instrument. We found a lot of things around the lab you could have used to do the job—but nothing at all of anything like a projectile fired from a gun.”

The prisoner obviously wasn't listening. “B—but she—she lied!” he stammered wildly. “All I said to Alma Dakin was a couple of words—three or four at the most—about not working too hard. Why should she put me on a spot like that? I just—don't—get—it! Why should she go out of her way to make trouble . . .” Dawning suspicion replaced his bewilderment. “I get it! You cops put her up to this; that's it! You need a fall guy and I'm elec—”

“Listen to me, Cordell,” Kirk cut in impatiently. “You knew, or thought you knew, your wife was having an affair with Professor Gilmore. You tried to break it up, to get her to leave her job. She wasn't having any of that; and the more she refused, the sorer you got. Yesterday you walked in on them unannounced, found them in each other's arms, and knocked them both off in a jealous rage. When you cooled down enough to see what you'd done, you invented this wild yarn about a blonde in a ball of fire, hoping to get off on an insanity plea.”

“I want a lawyer!” Cordell shouted.

Kirk ignored the demand. “You're going back to your cell for a couple hours, buster. Think this over. When you're ready to tell it right, I want it in the form of a witnessed statement, on paper. If you do that, if you co-operate with

the authorities, you can probably get off with a fairly light sentence, maybe even an outright acquittal, on the old ‘unwritten law’ plea. I don't make any promises. Gilmore was a prominent man and a valuable one; that might influence a jury against you. But it's the only chance you've got—and I'm telling you, by God, to take it!”

Cordell was standing now, his face working. “Sure; I get it! All you're after is a confession. What do you care if it's a flock of lies? My wife wouldn't even *look* at another man, and not you or anybody else is going to make me say different. That blonde killed them, I tell you—and I'll tell a jury the same thing! They'll believe me; they're not a bunch of lousy framing cops! You'll find out who's—”

Lieutenant Martin Kirk wearily ground out his cigar against the chair rung. “All right, boys. Take him back upstairs.”

Chapter II

IT WAS a gray chill day late in November, and by 4:30 that afternoon the ceiling lights were on. Chenowich, the young plain-clothes man recently transferred to Homicide from Robbery Detail, stopped at Martin Kirk's cubby-hole and slid an evening paper across the battered brown linoleum top of the Lieutenant's desk.

“This oughta interest you,” he said, jabbing a chewed thumbnail at an item under a two-column

head half-way down the left side of page one.

CORDELL DRAWS DEATH NOD

Killer of Wife and Atom Wizard To Face Chair in January

Paul Cordell, 29, was today doomed by Criminal Court Justice Edwin P. Reed to death by electrocution the morning of January 11, for the murders of his wife, Juanita, 29, and her employer, world-famous nuclear scientist Gregory Gilmore.

A jury last week found Cordell guilty of the brutal slayings despite his testimony that it was a mysterious blonde woman, floating in a "ball of blue fire," who had blasted the victims with a "ray gun" on that October afternoon.

Ignoring the "girl from Mars" angle, alienists for the prosecution pronounced the handsome defendant sane, and his attorneys were powerless to offset the damage.

The final blow to Cordell's hopes for acquittal, however, was administered by the State's key witness, Alma Dakin, Gilmore's former secretary. For more than three hours she underwent one of the most grilling cross-examinations in local courtroom . . .

Kirk shoved the paper aside. "What could he expect when he wouldn't even listen to his own lawyers? They'll appeal—they have to—but it'll be a waste of time."

He leaned back in the creaking swivel chair and began to unwrap the cellophane from a cigar. "In a way," he said thoughtfully, "I hate to see that kid end up in the fireless cooker. In this business you get so you can recognize an act when you see one, and I'd swear Cordell wasn't lying about that blonde and her blue fire. At least he thought he wasn't."

Chenowich yawned. "I say he was nuts then and he's nuts now. What do them bug doctors know? I never seen one yet could count his own fingers."

The telephone on Martin Kirk's desk rang while he was lighting his cigar. He tossed the match on the floor to join a dozen others, and picked up the receiver. "Homicide; Lieutenant Kirk speaking."

It was the patrolman in the outer office. "Woman out here wants to see you, Lieutenant. Asked for you personally."

"What about?"

"She won't say. All I get is it's important and she talks to you or nobody."

"What's her name?"

"No, sir. Not even that. Want me to get rid of her?"

Kirk eyed the mound of paper work on his desk and sighed. "Probably a taxpayer. All right; send her back here."

A moment later the patrolman loomed up outside the cubbyhole door, the woman in tow. Lieutenant Kirk remained seated, nodded briskly toward the empty chair alongside his desk. "Please sit down, madam. You wanted to see me?"

"You are Mr. Kirk?" A warm voice, almost on the husky side.

"Lieutenant Kirk."

"Of course. I am sorry."

WHILE SHE was being graceful about getting into the chair, Kirk stared at her openly. She was worth staring at. She was tall for a woman and missed being

voluptuous by exactly the right margin. Her face was more lovely than beautiful, chiefly because of large eyes so blue they were almost purple. Her skin was flawless, her blonde hair worn in a medium bob fluffed out, and her smooth fitting tobacco brown suit must have been bought by appointment. She looked to be in her mid-twenties and was probably thirty.

Her expression was solemn and her smile fleeting, as was becoming to anyone calling on a Homicide Bureau. She placed on a corner of Kirk's desk an alligator bag that matched her shoes and tucked pale yellow gloves the color of her blouse under the bag's strap. Her slim fingers, ringless, moved competently and without haste.

"I am Naia North, Lieutenant Kirk."

"What's on your mind, Miss North?"

She regarded him gravely, seeing gray-blue eyes that never quite lost their chill, a thin nose bent slightly to the left from an encounter with a drunken longshoreman years before, the lean lines of a solid jaw, the dark hair that was beginning to thin out above the temples after thirty-five years. Even those who love him, she thought, must fear this man a little.

Martin Kirk felt his cheeks flush under the frank appraisal of those purple eyes. "You asked for me by name, Miss North. Why?"

"Aren't you the officer who arrested the young man who today was sentenced to die?"

Only years of practise at letting nothing openly surprise him kept

Kirk's jaw from dropping. "...You mean Cordell?"

"Yes."

"I'm the one. What about it? What've you got to do with Paul Cordell?"

Naia North said quietly, "A great deal, I'm afraid. You see, I'm the woman who doesn't exist; the one the newspapers call 'the girl from Mars.'"

It was what he had expected from her first question about the case. Any murder hitting the headlines brought at least one psycho out of the woodwork, driven by some deep-seated sense of guilt into making a phony confession. Those who were harmless were eased aside; the violent got detained for observation.

But Naia North showed none of the signs of the twisted mind. She was coherent, attractive and obviously there was money somewhere in her vicinity. While the last two items could have been true of a raving maniac, Kirk was human enough to be swayed by them.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you've come to the wrong man about this, Miss North." His smile was frank and winning enough to startle her. "The case is out of my hands; has been since the District Attorney's office took over. Why don't you take it up with them?"

HER SHORT laugh was openly cynical. "I tried to, the day the trial ended. I got as far as a fourth assistant, who told me the case was closed, that new and conclusive evidence would be neces-

sary to reopen it, and would I excuse him as he had a golf date. When I said I could give him new evidence, he looked at his watch and wanted me to write a letter. So I wrote one and his secretary promised to hand it to him personally. I'm still waiting for an answer."

"These things take time, Miss North. If I were you I'd—"

"I even tried to see Judge Reed. I got as far as his bailiff. If I'd state my business in writing. . . . I did; that's the last I've heard from Judge Reed *or* bailiff."

Kirk picked up his cigar from the edge of the desk and tapped the ash onto the floor. "Shall I," he said, his lips quirking, "ask you to write *me* a letter?"

Naia North failed to respond to the light touch. "I'm through filling wastebaskets," she said flatly. "Either you do something about this or the newspapers get the entire story. Not that I'll enjoy being a public spectacle, but at least they'll give me some action."

"What do you want done?"

She put both elbows on the desk top and bent toward him. He caught the faint odor of bath salts rising from under the rounded neckline of her blouse. "That man must go free, Lieutenant. He didn't kill his wife—*or* Gregory Gilmore."

"Who did?"

She looked straight into his eyes. "I did."

"Why?"

Slowly she straightened and leaned back in the chair, her gaze shifting to a point beyond his left shoulder. "Nothing you haven't heard before," she said tonelessly.

"We met several months ago and fell in love. I let him make the rules . . . and after a while he got tired of playing. I didn't—and I wanted him back. For weeks he avoided me."

"So you decided to kill him."

She seemed genuinely astonished at the remark. "Certainly not! But when I saw him take this woman—this assistant of his, or whatever she was—into his arms . . . I suppose I went a little crazy."

"Now," Kirk said, "we're getting down to cases. You know the evidence given at the trial—particularly that given by Gilmore's secretary?"

"Of course."

"Then you know this Dakin woman was in the laboratory until a few minutes before Cordell showed up. You know that nobody could have gone into that laboratory without her seeing them. You know that Alma Dakin testified that there were only two people in there: Gilmore and Juanita Cordell. So, Miss North, how did you get in there after Alma Dakin left and before Paul Cordell arrived?"

"But I didn't."

The Lieutenant's air of triumph sagged under a sudden frown. "What do you mean you didn't?"

"I didn't enter the laboratory after Greg's secretary left it. *I was there all along.*"

KIRK'S HEAD came up sharply. "You *what?*"

"I was there all the time," the girl repeated. "Since noon, to be exact. I planned it that way. I knew

everybody would be out to lunch between twelve and one, so I went to the laboratory with the intention of facing Greg there on his return. When I heard him and Mrs. Cordell coming along the corridor, I sort of lost my nerve and hid in a coat closet."

Martin Kirk had completely dropped his air of good-humored patience by this time. "You telling me you were hiding in there for almost five hours without them knowing it?"

Naia North shrugged her shoulders. "They had no reason to look in the closet. I'll admit I hadn't intended to—to spy on Greg. But I kept waiting for him to say or do something that would prove or disprove he was in love with Juanita Cordell, and not until his secretary left and he was alone with her did I discover what was between them. I must have come out of that dark hole like a tiger, Lieutenant. They jumped apart and two people never looked guiltier. He said something particularly nasty to me and I grabbed up a short length of shiny metal from the workbench and hit him across the side of the head before he knew what was happening. He fell down and the Cordell woman opened her mouth to scream and—and I hit her too."

She paused as though to permit Kirk to comment. "Go on," he said hoarsely.

"There's not much left," the girl said. "I was standing there still holding that piece of metal when the door crashed open and the dead woman's husband ran in. He

started to lunge across the room at me and I threw the thing I was holding at him. It struck him and he fell down. My only thought was to hide, for I realized I couldn't go out through the outer office, and the only window was barred. So I hid in that closet again.

"It was only a few minutes before Paul Cordell regained consciousness. He staggered out of the room and down the hall and I could hear a lot of excited talk and Greg's secretary calling the police. Then I didn't hear anything at all for a moment, so I came out of the closet and looked down the hall. The office door was closed, but it seemed so quiet in there that I tiptoed quickly to the inner door, opened it a crack and peered through. The office was deserted; evidently Cordell and Miss Dakin had gone out to direct the police when they showed up.

"When I saw there was no one in the main hall of the building itself, I simply walked out and left by another exit. No one I passed even noticed me."

FOR A LONG time after Naia North had finished speaking, Martin Kirk sat as though carved from stone, staring blindly into space. She knew he was thinking furiously, weighing the plausibility of what he had heard, trying to arrive at some method of corroborating it in a way that would stand up in a court of law.

"Miss North."

She came out of a reverie with a start, to find the Lieutenant's eyes

boring into hers. "This shiny hunk of metal you used: where is it now?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know. Probably some place in the laboratory, unless somebody took it away. I do seem to remember picking it up and tossing it back with several others like it on the bench."

"Then it's still there," he said slowly. "Judge Reed ordered the room sealed up until after the trial. And then there's the closet. . . . Were you wearing gloves that afternoon, Miss North?"

She said, "No. You're thinking of fingerprints?"

"If you're telling the truth," he said, "there's almost certain to be some of your prints on the inside of that closet door—maybe even on that length of metal, if we can find it."

She said almost carelessly: "That's all you'd need to clear Paul Cordell, isn't it?"

"It would certainly help." He swung around in the chair, scooped up the telephone and gave a series of rapid-fire orders, then dropped the instrument on its cradle and turned back to where she sat watching him curiously.

He said, "A few things I still don't get. Like this business of your standing two feet off the floor in a ball of blue light. And the flashes of light just before Cordell heard his wife and Gilmore fall to the floor. Even the snatches of conversation he caught while still in the hall. He couldn't have dreamed all that stuff up—at least not without *some* basis."

She had opened her bag and

taken out a cigarette. Kirk ignited one of his kitchen matches and she bent her head for a light. He could see the flawless curve of one cheek and the smooth cap of blonde hair, and he resisted the urge to pass a hand lightly across both. Something was stirring inside the Lieutenant—something that had long been absent. And, he reflected wryly, all because of a girl who had just finished confessing to two particularly unpleasant murders.

Naia North raised her head and their eyes met—met and held. Her lips parted slightly as she caught the unmistakable message in those gray-blue depths. . . .

The moment passed, the spell was broken and she leaned back in the chair and laughed a little shakily. "I read about those statements of his in the papers, Lieutenant. I think perhaps I can at least partially explain them. As I remember it, there were several Bunsen burners lighted on the laboratory bench near that window. They give off a blue flame, you know, and I must have been standing near them when Paul Cordell came charging in. In his confused frame of mind, he may have pictured me as being in a ball of flame."

"Sounds possible," the man admitted, frowning. "What about those flashes of light?"

"You've got me there. Unless they were reflections of sunlight through the window—from the windshield of a passing car, perhaps."

"And the things he heard you and Gilmore saying?"

She shook her head regretfully.

"There I'm simply in the dark. I don't see how he could have twisted what little we said into the utterly fantastic nonsense he claims to have heard."

KIRK RUBBED a hand slowly along the side of his neck, still frowning. "He *could* have confused that length of metal in your hand as a gun. . . . Well—" his shoulders lifted in the ghost of a shrug—"it all seems to add up. Except one thing: Cordell had been tried and convicted, leaving you in the clear. Why come down here voluntarily and stick your lovely head in a noose?"

The girl smiled faintly. "'Lovely head', Lieutenant?"

Kirk flushed to the eyebrows. "That slipped out. . . . Why the confession?"

She said soberly: "I was so sure they'd let him off. When you *know* someone's innocent you can't realize that others won't know it too, I suppose. But when I learned he'd been found guilty and actually condemned to die . . . well, I know it sounds noble and all that but I couldn't let him go to his death for something I'd done. Surely such a thing has happened before in your experience, Lieutenant."

He watched as she drew smoke from the cigarette deeply into her lungs and let it flow out in twin streamers from her nostrils. Only rich men, he thought, could afford a woman like this, and somehow it made him resentful. What right did she have to walk in here and flaunt a body like that in his face?

She went with mink stoles and cabin cruisers and cocktails at the Sherry-Netherland, and her shoe bill would exceed his yearly salary. She would be competent and more than a little cynical and not too concerned with morals or the lack of them. That kind of woman could kill—and would kill, on the spur of the moment and if the provocation was strong enough.

"Well, Lieutenant?" She said it lightly, almost with disinterest.

Then Kirk was all right again, and he was looking at a woman who had just confessed to murder.

"You heard the phone call I made a moment ago, Miss North. Two men from the Crime Lab are already on their way to the University. If they find your fingerprints inside that closet, if they can turn up *anything* to prove you've been in Gregory Gilmore's laboratory, then you and that evidence and your confession get turned over to the D. A. and Paul Cordell will be on his way to freedom."

"And if those men don't find anything?"

"Then," he told her rudely, "you're just another crackpot and I'm tossing you *and* your phony confession out of here."

THEY FOUND the fingerprints: several perfect ones on the inner door of the laboratory coat closet. But even more conclusive was their discovery of a short length of polished metal pipe among the dismantled parts of a Clayton centrifuge. At one end of the pipe were the imprints of four



She was standing a good two feet off the floor in the middle of a glowing bubble that pulsed and wavered around her.

fingertips—at the other a microscopic trace of human blood.

“We had no business missing it the first time, Lieutenant,” the Crime Laboratory technician told Kirk ruefully. “I’d a sworn we pulled that place apart last month. But this time we got the murder weapon and we got the prints—and those prints match the ones we took off that blonde. Hey, how

about that, Lieutenant? I thought this Cordell guy did that job?”

Slowly Kirk replaced the receiver and eyed Naia North across the desk from him. “Looks like you’re elected,” he said somberly. “I’m telling you straight: the D. A. isn’t going to like this at all—not even any part of it.”

Her brow wrinkled. “I’m afraid I don’t understand. Doesn’t he

want murder cases solved?"

Kirk smiled crookedly. "You're forgetting this case *was* solved—over a month ago. You any idea what it can mean to a politician to have to admit publicly that he's made a mistake? Especially a mistake that's going to get all the publicity this one's bound to? 'District attorney railroads innocent man!' 'Tragic miscarriage of justice averted only by chance!' Stuffy editorials in the opposition press about incompetence in high offices and how the voters must keep out anybody who goes around executing the innocent and helpless. Looks like Arthur Kahler Troy is going to be a mighty unpopular man around these parts—and election less than five months away!"

He glanced up at the office clock. It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening, and both of them were showing signs of wear. Kirk left his chair and went over to the water cooler, drank two cupfuls and brought one back to the girl. She thanked him with a wan smile and gulped down the contents.

He took the empty paper container and crumpled it slowly. "Might as well get hold of him," he muttered. "It's going to be mighty damned rough, sister. You sure you want to go through with it?"

She lifted an eyebrow at him. "That's a peculiar question for a homicide officer to ask, isn't it?"

"I suppose so." His eyes shifted to the phone on his desk, stayed there for a long moment. Then he shrugged hugely and picked up the receiver. . . .

IT WAS well after two in the morning before Martin Kirk reached his apartment. He showered and got into a fresh pair of pajamas and went into the small, sparsely furnished living room. He moved slowly and with no spring in his step, and the set of his features was harsh and strained in the soft light from the floor lamp.

Troy had been even more difficult than he'd feared. What had begun as plain irritability at being disturbed, had passed by successive stages to amused disbelief, open anger and finally reluctant conviction that Paul Cordell was innocent of the crimes for which he had been sentenced to die.

A male stenographer from his staff was called in and Naia North dictated a complete statement which she signed. Troy questioned her for nearly two hours, getting in every possible angle of her private life as well as minute details of her actions on the day of the murders. Kirk had not been present during that part of the night, but he figured it wouldn't be much different from what he'd heard many times before.

He mixed himself a drink, and was surprised to discover that his hands were shaking noticeably. Well, why not? A day like the one he'd just been through would put the shakes in Grant's Tomb. Even as he made the excuse, he knew it wasn't the real reason. There had been cases that had kept him on his feet for as much as forty-eight hours—cases where men had pointed guns at him and pulled the

triggers—and the shakes never came.

No, it was the girl. Naia North. Naia—a strange name. But no stranger than the girl herself. Now how about that? Why should he think her strange? Because she'd taken a life or two? Hell, lots of people did that and no one called them strange. Criminal or unmoral or greedy or angry, yes. But not strange. She looked like other women—only a lot better. She dressed like them, walked like them, talked like them. So why strange?

Because she *was* strange. Nothing you could put your finger on made her that way, but that's the way she was.

He threw his cigar savagely into the fireplace. He went over and made another drink and poured it down fast and another one after it, right on its heels. Then he went to bed. Tomorrow—today, rather—was a work day and work days were tough days and he needed his rest.

He didn't get much of it, though. The phone woke him a few minutes after seven o'clock. It was Arthur Kahler Troy at the other end and the D. A. was too angry to be coherent.

It seemed Naia North had disappeared from her locked cell during the night.

Chapter III

“I DON'T give a triple-distilled damn *what* you say!” Troy snarled. “Nobody's got enough

money to make that kind of pay-off. Five men, Lieutenant—five men and five locked doors stood between that girl and the street. And you sit there and try to tell me somebody bought all *five* of 'em off!”

“Then,” Kirk said heatedly, “what's *your* explanation?”

It had been going on this way for over an hour. The morning sun came in weakly at the window behind Troy's huge polished mahogany desk, picking up random reflections from the collection of expensive gadgets littering the glass top.

Troy began to wear another path in the moss-colored broadloom carpeting. He was big and broad and getting puffy around the middle, like a one-time halfback going to seed. His round, heavy-featured face was even more florid than usual, and his heavy growth of reddish-blond hair needed a comb.

Martin Kirk pushed himself deeper into the depths of a brown leather chair and watched the D. A. through brooding eyes. He wanted a cigar but it was too early in the morning for that kind of indulgence. You needed a good breakfast and a couple cups of coffee before—

“I don't explain it,” Troy said in quieter tones. He was standing by the window now, staring down into the boulevard passing that side of the Criminal Courts Building. “It's one of those things that make me think my sainted mother wasn't so wrong when she used to tell about elves and gnomes and lepre-

chauns and fairies and—”

Kirk made a sound deep in his throat. “Naia North was a hell of a long way from being a leprechaun. Somebody wanted her out of here for some reason—and they got her out. I want to know who took her out, why she was taken, and where she is now. And I’m going to find out the answers to all three if I have to turn this town on its ear.”

“Go ahead,” Troy said. “Hop right to it and I wish you luck. Only leave me and my people out of it.”

“Seems to me you’re mighty damned anxious *to* be left out.”

Arthur Kahler Troy turned on his heel and strode toward the Lieutenant until he was towering over him. “Just what,” he said between his teeth, “do you mean by *that* crack?”

“Figure it out for yourself,” Kirk snapped. “And I’m sure you can.”

Troy reared back as though the police officer had pulled a gun on him. “Why—why you— I’ll have you busted for making a dirty insinu—”

“You couldn’t bust a daisy chain at the police department,” Kirk growled. “The Commissioner hates your guts and you know that as well as I do. Now let’s cut out all this hokey-pokey and pick up a few loose ends. The first thing: what about Paul Cordell?”

All the wide-eyed fury seemed to go out of Troy’s face like water down the bathtub drain. He turned away and walked slowly back to his desk chair and sat down.

He said, “What about Cordell,” in a soft voice.

“The morning paper,” Kirk said, “reports he was taken up to Hillcrest last night. The warden out there’s probably got him in Death Row already.”

“Uh-hunh.”

“Well, let’s get him out of there. With the evidence we’ve got, plus Naia North’s sworn statement, Judge Reed will have to bring him back down here and release him—at least on bail until we can find the girl. The man’s innocent, Mr. D. A.; have you forgotten?”

“Yes.”

“‘Yes’? Yes, what?”

“I’ve forgotten he’s innocent,” Troy said quietly. “Matter of fact, he’s guilty as hell.”

THE LIEUTENANT half rose from his chair. “Now wait a minute! You heard that girl’s story and you’ve got the evidence I turned over to you right here in this office last night. What more—”

“I’ll tell you what more,” Troy snapped. “That girl was a fraud, her story was a downright lie and that evidence was faked. Let me tell you something else, Mister: within five minutes after the guard downstairs reported your girl friend missing, I had five squads of my men out running down the personal information she gave me a few hours before. And you know what they found out? *Every bit of what she told me was false!* Hear that? False! It took my men about one hour to prove as much, for the simple reason that not one lead

panned out. Not one! And you know what *I* think?"

Martin Kirk opened his mouth but nothing came out but a strangled croak.

"I think you and this dame worked out the whole thing between the two of you to save Cordell's neck. Who could do a better job of faking evidence than a crooked cop? What's more, you might have gotten away with it, too—only it suddenly dawned on the girl that she was getting in too deep."

"And so," Kirk cut in hotly, "she calmly walked through five locked sets of iron bars and went back to Mars!"

He stood up and crossed to the desk and leaned down with his palms in the center of the brown blotter. "You won't get away with it, Troy. You didn't want any part of this new development from the minute I called you on the phone last night. You knew it could show you and your whole organization up as a bunch of bunglers and incompetents. So you got rid of the girl, thinking that without her the truth of those murders would never get out to the voters.

"Well, it won't work, Fatso! The evidence I dug up is strong enough to reopen the case *without* Naia North. All I have to do is put that evidence in front of Judge Reed, and—"

Troy was smiling wolfishly. "What evidence, Lieutenant?"

Kirk stiffened. "You know damned well what evidence. It's in your files right now: Naia North's statement, the strips of paneling

from that coat closet, the murder weapon. I turned the whole works over to you."

The D. A. was shaking his head. "We don't keep worthless junk around here, my boy. The Cordell case is closed; the guilty man is awaiting execution. Sure, you run along and tell the Judge all about it. Tell the newspapers, tell Cordell's defense attorneys, tell the world for all I care. See who'll touch it without something more concrete than your highly imaginative day dreams. For all you can prove, the girl might have confessed the whole thing was a hoax and we tossed her out of here last night. . . .

"I'm a busy man, Lieutenant. Good morning—good luck—and kindly close the door on your way out."

Chapter IV

LIEUTENANT Martin Kirk shoved the pile of mimeographed pages aside. Three hours spent in going through the complete transcript of the Cordell trial and nothing to show for it but stiff muscles and an aching head.

Give it up, a small voice in the back of his mind urged. You haven't got a leg to stand on as far as getting any action out of the authorities. Troy and his gang put the fear of God in that purple-eyed dame and shipped her out of the State. You lose, brother—and so

does that poor devil up in Death's Row.

He drummed his fingers over and over on the arm of his chair and listened to the every-day sounds of a normal day at the Homicide Bureau. A new day, a new set of problems, and why knock yourself out over something that doesn't concern you? Thing to do was go down to the corner tavern and have a couple of fast ones and watch an old movie on television. Yes sir, that's exactly what he'd do!

He went back to the mimeographed pages.

For the fourth time he read through Cordell's testimony of what had happened that October afternoon. And it was there that he came across the first possible break in the stone wall.

Once more Martin Kirk went over the few lines, although by this time he could have come close to reciting them from memory. It was an excerpt from Arthur Kahler Troy's cross-examination of the defendant after Cordell's counsel, in a last desperate effort to swing the tide of a losing battle, had placed him on the stand.

Q: (by Troy): Now, Mr. Cordell, I direct your attention to the point in your testimony at which first entered Professor Gilmore's outer office. At what time was this?

A: At about 5:45 p.m.

Q: Who was in the office at that time?

A: Alma Dakin, the Professor's secretary. And a couple of students—although they were at the other end of the room and I didn't pay much attention to them.

Q: But you did pay attention, as you call it, to Miss Dakin?

A: Well, I spoke to her, if that's what you mean.

Q: That's exactly what I mean, Mr. Cordell. And what was it you said to her?

A: Something about it was too late in the day to be working so hard.

Q: That was all?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Remember, Mr. Cordell, you're under oath. Now I ask you again: Was that all you said to her at that time?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: It isn't possible you've forgotten some additional remark? Think carefully, please.

A: No, sir. That's all I said. I swear it.

Q: Very well. Now how well do you know Miss Dakin?

A: Just to speak to.

Q: Have you ever seen her outside Professor Gilmore's office?

A: No, sir.

Q: Ever ask her for a date?

A: No, sir.

Q: Did you ever have an argument with her? A discussion of any kind that may have become a bit heated?

A: No, sir.

Q: Then to your knowledge she'd have no reason to dislike you?

A: No, sir.

Q: Very good. Now, Mr. Cordell, I want to read to you an excerpt from the testimony given by Miss Dakin in this court. "Mr. Cordell was looking very angry when he came in. He came up to me and bent down over the desk and said so low I could hardly hear him: 'Hi, Alma. You think the Prof's through making love to my wife?'" I now ask you, Paul Cordell, isn't that what you said to Alma Dakin? Not that she was working too hard, or whatever it was you

claimed to have said.

A: No, sir. I didn't say anything like she said I did. I wouldn't insult my wife by saying such a thing to a third—

Q: Just answer the questions, Mr. Cordell. Then you contend that Miss Dakin deliberately lied in her testimony.

A: She was mistaken.

Q: Oh, come now! Miss Dakin is an intelligent girl; she couldn't misunderstand or twist your words to that extent. Now could she?

A: Then she lied. I never said anything like that.

Q: What reason would she have for lying, Mr. Cordell? By your own statement she hardly knew you, always greeted you pleasantly on the times you came to the office, never got into any arguments with you, and never saw you outside the office. She had worked for Professor Gilmore for five or six months, has excellent references, and is well liked by her friends. Yet you're asking us to believe that she coldly and deliberately lied to get you into trouble. Is that true?

A: All I know is she lied.

THE BREAK was there all right, Kirk thought grimly. For if Cordell was innocent, then he had told the truth during the trial. And if he had told the truth about his remark to Alma Dakin, then, automatically, Alma Dakin's testimony was untrue.

Kirk ran his fingers through his hair in a gesture of bafflement. What possible reason could Gilmore's secretary have for going out of her way to lie about Cordell's remark? Was it because she was so certain he had killed her employer that she wanted to make sure he would be punished?

Or was it because she wanted to shield the real killer? Maybe she was a friend of Naia North's and had known the blonde girl was in Gilmore's laboratory all along. She might even have deliberately steered everyone out of her office after Cordell discovered the bodies, making it possible for Naia to slip out unseen.

It was a slender lead, but the only one large enough to get even a fingernail grip on. He drew the phone over in front of him and began a series of calls designated to give him more information about Alma Dakin.

A call to the University took him through a couple of secretaries before he reached the right person. Her name was Miss Slife, personnel director of all non-teaching employees. Miss Dakin? Why, of course! A lovely girl and very dependable. She had come to the

University in search of a position only a day or two before Miss Collins, Professor Gilmore's previous secretary, had resigned. Since Miss Dakin's references showed that she had worked for a short time as secretary to Dr. Karney, one of the co-discoverers of the atom bomb (according to Miss Slife), she had been engaged to take Miss Collins' place. Professor Gilmore, poor man, had been very pleased with the change and everybody was happy: Miss Collins at inheriting a very large sum of money from a relative she'd never even heard of, Miss Dakin at being able to get such a nice position, and dear Professor Gilmore at finding such a satisfactory replacement.

When Miss Slife had run down, Kirk said, "This Dr. Karney. Why did Miss Dakin leave him?"

The woman at the other end of the wire seemed astonished by Kirk's ignorance. "Why, I assumed *everybody* knew about Dr. Karney. He died of a heart attack about eight months ago."

"What!"

"Goodness, there's no need to shout, Mr. Kirk. He was connected with Clement University, out in California, and suffered a stroke of some kind while at work."

Kirk thanked her dazedly and broke the connection. This, he told himself, is too much a coincidence to be a coincidence! Two prominent nuclear scientists dying suddenly within seven months of each other at opposite ends of the country—and both of them with the same secretary at the time of their deaths!

A sudden thought sent him leafing rapidly through the trial transcript to the place where Paul Cordell had told of the disjointed phrases he claimed to have heard before he pushed into Professor Gilmore's laboratory. The words he sought seemed to stand out in letters of fire: "... three in the past five months ..."

A GAIN HE caught up the telephone receiver, aware that his heart was pounding with excitement, and dialed a number. . . . "Bulletin? Hello; let me talk to Jerry Furness. . . . Jerry, this is Martin Kirk at Homicide. Look, do something for me. I want to find out how many top nuclear fission boys have died in the past four or five months. . . . No, no; nothing like that. Some of the boys down here were having an argument about . . . Sure; I'll hold on."

He propped the receiver between his ear and shoulder and groped for a cigar. In the office beyond the partition of his cubbyhole a woman was sobbing. Chenowich went past his open door whistling a radio commercial.

The receiver against his ear began to vibrate. "Yeah, Jerry. . . . Four of 'em, hey? Let's have their names." He picked up a pencil and took down the information. "Uh-huh! Three heart attacks and one murder. Check. . . . You mean *all* of them? Tough life, I guess. . . . Yeah, sure. Anytime. So long."

He replaced the receiver with slow care and leaned back to study the list of names. Not counting the

last name — Gilmore's — three world-renowned men in the field of nuclear physics had dropped dead from heart failure within the designated span of months.

Coincidence? Maybe. But he was in no mood for coincidences. If the deaths of these four scientists was the result of some sinister plan, who was responsible? Some foreign power, concerned about this country's growing mastery of nuclear fission? Was it his duty to notify the FBI of his findings and let them take over from here?

He shook his head. Too early for anything like that. He needed more evidence—evidence not to be explained away as coincidence.

Once more Lieutenant Martin Kirk went back to analyzing the broken phrases Cordell had picked up while eavesdropping that October afternoon. *Twelve times zero* made no sense at all . . . unless it could be the combination of a safe . . . ? Hardly possible; no combination he'd ever heard of would read that way. The next one, then: . . . *chained to two hundred thousand years* . . . Another blank; could mean anything or nothing. Next: *A: . . . sounded like the Professor said something like his colleges had no idea and he'd see they were warned right away.*

Kirk bit thoughtfully down on a corner of his lip. Gilmore didn't own any colleges and how do you go about warning one? Maybe the word was *college*, meaning the one where he had his laboratory. But actually it wasn't a college at all; it was a university. Not much dif-

ference to the man in the street, but to the Professor . . . Wait a minute! Not *colleges!* *Colleagues!* It was his colleagues Gilmore had promised to warn. And the word meant men and women in the same line of work as the Professor—nuclear physics. Things, Kirk told himself with elation, were looking up!

The business about “three in the past five months” was next, but he felt sure of what that had meant. But the last of the quotations went nowhere at all.

“Something about *taking in washing*—” Under less tragic circumstances, a nonsense line. But Cordell hadn’t actually heard the words clearly enough to quote them with authority. That could mean he had heard words that sounded *like* “taking in washing.”

Taking, baking, making, slaking, raking—the list seemed endless. “Washing” could have been the first two syllables of Washington—and Washington would be the place where the Atomic Energy Commission hung out.

Still too hazy. He leaned back and put his feet up and attacked the three mysterious words from every conceivable angle. No dice.

SIGHT OF the ambling figure of Patrolman Chenowich passing the office door caught his eye, reminding him that two heads were often better than one. “Hey, Frank.”

Chenowich came in. “Yeah, Lieutenant. Somethin’ doin’?”

“I’m trying to figure out a little

problem,” Kirk explained carelessly. “Let’s say you hear a guy talking in the next room. You can’t really make out the words he’s saying, but right in the middle of his mumbling you hear what sounds like ‘taking in washing.’ Now you know that can’t be right, so you try to think out what he actually *did* say . . .”

It was obvious Chenowich had fallen off on the first curve, so completely off that Kirk didn’t bother finishing what was much too involved to begin with. The patrolman was staring at him in monstrous perplexity.

“Jeez, Lieutenant. I don’t get it. ‘Less the guy’s goin’ to open up one of these here laundries. That way he’d be takin’ in washin’. But I don’t know what else—”

Kirk’s feet hit the floor with a solid thump and he grabbed Chenowich’s wrist with fingers that bit in like steel. “Say that again!” he shouted. “Say it just that way!”

The patrolman recoiled in alarm. “What’s got into you, Lieutenant? Say *what*?”

“Taking in washing!”

“Takin’ in washin’? What for?”

Kirk’s grin threatened to split his face. “The same words,” he said, “but you say them different. Only your way’s the right way! Thanks, pal. Now get out of here!”

Chenowich went. His mouth was still open and his expression still troubled, but he went.

The last of the killer’s cryptic remarks was now clear. For Kirk realized that “takin’” rhymed with words you’d never associate with

"taking." "Bacon", for instance—or "Dakin"! Alma Dakin, former secretary to two widely separated, and now dead, nuclear scientists. Her name had been mentioned by the slayer of Professor Gilmore only seconds before she had clubbed the savant to death.

But now that "taking" had come out "Dakin"—what did the rest of the phrase mean? *Dakin in washing* made no sense. What sounded like *washing*? Washing; washing . . . *watching*? It was close; in fact nothing he could think of came closer.

All right. *Dakin in watching*; no. *Dakin is watching*—that made sense. But Alma Dakin hadn't been watching anything at the time of the killing; she, according to Cordell, was at her desk in the outer office. That would leave *Dakin was watching* as the right combination. Watching for the right opportunity for murder!

What did it mean? Well, assuming from her past record that Alma Dakin was mixed up in the deaths of two prominent men of science, it argued that she and Naia North were accomplices in a scheme to rid America of her nuclear fission experts. The nice smooth story of killing Gilmore because of unrequited love was probably as much a lie as the personal information Naia North had given Arthur Kahler Troy.

The North girl had confessed to murdering Gilmore and Juanita Cordell. As a confessed killer she must be taken into custody and booked on suspicion of homicide. Taking her was Martin Kirk's job

—and it seemed he had a contact that would lead him to her. Namely Alma Dakin.

Lieutenant Kirk grabbed his hat and went out the door.

Chapter V

THE ADDRESS for Alma Dakin turned out to be a small three-story walk-up apartment building on a quiet residential street near the outskirts of town. At two in the afternoon hardly anyone was visible on the sidewalks and only an occasional automobile passed.

Kirk parked his car half a block further on down and got out into the chill November air. He entered the building foyer and looked at the name plates above the twin rows of buttons. The one for Alma Dakin told him the number of her apartment was 3C.

He pushed the button several times but without response. The foyer was very quiet at this time of day, and he could hear the faint rasp of her bell through the speaking tube.

Kirk was on the point of shifting his thumb to the button marked SUPERINTENDENT when a sudden thought stayed his hand. It was not the kind of thought a conscientious, rule-abiding police officer would harbor for a moment. The lieutenant, however, was fully aware he had no business working on a closed case to begin with—and when you're breaking one set of rules, you might as well break

them all.

He rang four of the other bells before the lock on the inner door began to click. Pushing it open, he waited until a female voice floated down the stairs. "Who is it?"

"Police Department, ma'am. You folks own that green Buick parked out in front?" There was no Buick, green or otherwise, along the street curbing, but Kirk figured she wouldn't know that.

"Why, no, Officer. I can't imagine—"

"Okay. Sorry we bothered you, lady." Kirk let the door swing into place hard enough to be heard upstairs. But this time he was on the right side of it.

There was a moment of silence, then he caught the sound of retreating feet and a door closed. Without waiting further, the Lieutenant mounted the stairs to the third floor, his feet soundless on the carpeted treads.

The entrance to 3C was secured by a tumbler-type lock. From an inner pocket Kirk took out a small flat leather case and a thin-edged tool from that. Working with the smooth efficiency of the expert, he loosened the door moulding near the lock and inserted the tool blade until it found the bolt. This he eased back, turned the door handle and, a moment later, was standing in a small living room tastefully furnished in modern woods.

His first action was to enter the tiny kitchen and unbolt the door leading to the rear porch. In case Alma Dakin arrived at an inopportune moment, he could be half way down the outer steps while she was

still engaged with the front door lock. Since he had pressed the moulding back into place, there would be nothing to indicate his presence.

WITHIN TEN minutes Kirk had ransacked every inch of the living room in search of something, anything, that would point to Alma Dakin as being more than a nine-to-five secretary. And while he found nothing, no one, not even the girl who lived here, could tell that an intruder had been at work.

The bedroom seemed even less promising at first. Dresser drawers gave up only the pleasantly personal articles of the average young woman. Miss Dakin, it turned out, was almost indecently fond of frothy undergarments and black transparent nightgowns—interesting but not at all important to the over-all problem.

Kirk, his search completed, sat down on the edge of the bed's footboard and totaled up what he had learned. It didn't take long, for he knew absolutely no more about Alma Dakin than he had before entering her apartment. No personal papers, no letters from a yearning boy friend in the old home town, no savings or checking-account passbook. Not even a scrawled line of birthday or Christmas greetings on the fly leaves of the apartment's seven books.

To Kirk's trained mind, the very lack of such things, the fact that Alma Dakin lived in a vacuum, was highly significant. It smacked of her having something to hide—and

his already strong suspicion of her was solidified into certainty of her guilt. But certainty was a long way from rock-ribbed evidence—and that was something he must have to proceed further.

He was ready to leave when it dawned on him that he had not yet looked under the bed. Kneeling, he pushed up the hanging edge of the green batik spread and peered into the narrow space. Nothing, not even a decent accumulation of dust. The light from the window was too faint, however, to reach a section of the floor near the footboard. Kirk climbed to his feet and attempted to shove that end to one side.

The bed failed to move. He blinked in mild surprise and tried again. It was only by exerting almost his entire strength that he was able to shift the thing at all, and then no more than a few inches.

He felt his pulse stir with the thrill of incipient discovery. Once he made sure nothing was anchoring the bed to the floor, he began to tap lightly against the wood in an effort to detect a possible false panel.

Within two minutes he located an almost microscopic crack in the headboard cleverly concealed by a decorative design running along the base. He ran his fingers lightly along the carvings until they encountered a small projection which gave slightly under pressure.

Kirk pressed down harder on the knob. A tiny *click* sounded against the silence and a section of wood some three feet square swung out. Lifting it aside, the detective found

himself staring at an instrument board of some kind with a series of buttons and dials countersunk into it. The board itself formed a part of what was obviously a machine of some sort which evidently contained its own power, for there seemed to be no lead-in cord for plugging into a wall socket.

It could, Kirk thought, be a short wave radio transmitter. If it was, it looked like none he had ever come across before. On the other hand it could be some sort of infernal machine, ready to blow half the city to bits at the turn of a dial.

EVEN AS his mind was weighing the advisability of tampering with the thing, his fingers were reaching for the various controls. Gingerly he moved one or two of the dials but nothing happened. A little more boldly now, he began to depress the buttons. As the third sank in, a low humming sound began to fill the room. Before Kirk could find a cut-off switch of some kind, the faint light of day streaming through the room's one window winked out, plunging him into a blackness so infinitely deep that it was like being buried alive.

Nothing can plunge a man into the sheerest panic like the absence of light. Even a man like Martin Kirk, who had walked almost daily with danger for the past fifteen years. And since the form panic takes varies with the individual, the Lieutenant's reaction was an utter inability to move so much as a finger.

Abruptly the low humming note

ceased entirely, replaced immediately by the sound of a human voice. "Mythox. Contact established. Proceed."

Almost as though the words had tripped a lever in his brain, Kirk's paralysis ended. Both his hands seemed to swoop of their own volition to the invisible control panel and their fingers danced across the dials and buttons.

"Mythox," said the voice again. It seemed to swell and recede, like a direct radio newscast from half around the world. "Contact estab—"

The word ended as though it had run into a wall. The humming note came back, then ceased—and without warning daylight from the window washed over the bewildered and thoroughly frightened police officer.

Not until five minutes had passed was Martin Kirk sufficiently in control of his nervous system to even attempt replacing the loose panel in the headboard. When at last he managed to do so, he returned the bed to its original position, closed and bolted the kitchen door, took one last look around to make sure nothing was out of place, then slunk out of the apartment.

By the time he was back behind the wheel of his car and had burned up half a cigar, Kirk's brain was ready to function with something like its normal ability. He sat limp as Satan's collar, trying to piece together the significance of the last half hour's events.

There was no longer any doubt that Alma Dakin was in this mess up to her bangs. Linked as she was

to the murders (and Kirk was convinced heart disease had nothing to do with it) of those scientists, he would have sworn she was a foreign agent bent on weakening America's defenses. Except for one thing. That machine. The kind of mind that could design and put together a mechanism like that was not of this planet. No longer did Paul Cordell's story of a girl who floated in a ball of blue fire sound like the ravings of a deranged brain. And the seeming miracle of Naia North's escape from a cell block now passed from fantasy to the factual.

What to do about it? Martin Kirk, at this moment undoubtedly the most bewildered man alive, put his head in his hands and tried to reach a decision. Take his story to the Police Commissioner? It would mean a padded cell—and without even bothering to see if Alma Dakin possessed a machine more complicated than an electric iron. Some government agency? By the time the red tape was unsnarled the former secretary could have reached Pakistan on foot.

Slowly from the depths of his terror of the Unknown, Martin Kirk's training in police procedure began to make itself felt. A plan started to form—hazy at first, then in a sharp and orderly pattern.

HE LEFT THE car and returned to the apartment building. A glimpse of his badge and a few incisive orders masked as requests reduced the superintendent to a state of almost obsequious co-operation.

Nor was the tenant of apartment 3D, a middle-aged spinster, any less anxious to assist the law. It seemed she had an older sister living on the other side of town who would be happy to put her up for a few days. She departed within the hour, a traveling bag in one fist.

Before that hour was gone, Chenowich, in response to a sizzling phone call, skidded a department car to a stop at the curb a block from the building. He delivered a dictograph to his superior, listened to a grim warning to keep his mouth shut about this at Headquarters, asked a couple of questions that drew no answers, and departed as swiftly as he had come.

The next step was the dangerous one. The superintendent admitted Kirk to the Dakin apartment and went down to the foyer to ring the bell in case the girl arrived at the wrong time. He soothed the Lieutenant's anxiety somewhat by explaining that she seldom returned to the place before seven o'clock, over three hours from now, but Kirk was taking no chances.

By five o'clock he had Alma Kirk's bedroom bugged and the instrument in working order and thoroughly tested. He was painstaking about removing all traces of plaster and sawdust and bits of wires before pushing the dresser back into place to cover the dictograph's receiver.

He found the superintendent stiffly on guard in the foyer and gave him his final instructions. The man listened respectfully, repeated them back to Kirk to convince him there would be no slip-up, and the

Lieutenant went back upstairs to 3D to take up his vigil.

He was in the spinster's bedroom, working out a crossword puzzle, earphones in place, when he heard the sound of the bedroom door closing in the next apartment.

The time was 7:18.

Chapter VI

IT WAS like being in her room with his eyes shut. The soft scraping of drawers opening and closing, the creak of a chair being sat in, the cushioned thump of shoes dropped to the carpeted floor, even the rustle of a nylon slip as she drew it over her head.

It seemed much too early for her to turn in for the night. Was he going to be forced to sit there and listen to twelve or fourteen hours of feminine snoring? It would be damned unlikely in view of what was a cinch to be running through her mind.

Minutes later he heard her leave the bedroom, followed at once by the muted roar of a running shower. After that had lasted a normal length of time, the sound ceased and naked feet were audible on the bedroom rug. There was more opening and closing of drawers, the whisper of clothing being donned, and an irregular clicking sound like tapping glass against glass which he finally interpreted as part of the ritual of alternately combing and brushing hair while in front of the glass-topped vanity.

If there was anything of a panicky nature in her movements it would take better ears than his to detect it. But for Alma Dakin to get away with her kind of job required the nerves of lion trainer no matter what pressures she was subjected to.

Kirk stretched his legs, dug a cigar from the breast pocket of his coat and got it burning, then went back to the crossword puzzle with half his attention, keeping alert for any significant sound from the other apartment. His years as a minion of the law had adequately conditioned him to the utter boredom that went with the ordinary stake-out.

Several times the subject left the bedroom, but he was able to pick up sounds familiar enough to trace as emanating from the living room or kitchen. But nothing she did was worthy of notice in the home-town paper or even on the margin of a police blotter.

AT 9:24 Alma Dakin again entered the bedroom. A hunch, or a sixth sense, or whatever years of experience in a single field gives a man, told Kirk that this time something would pop. He put aside the newspaper, placed a sheet of blank paper on the cover of a historical romance lifted from the spinster's nightstand, and got out a pencil.

A motor whined unexpectedly from the opposite side of the apartment wall and he could hear a heavy object roll with well-oiled smoothness a short distance across

the carpet. He decided it was the bed being moved out from the wall by mechanical means rather than muscle, and it was clear to him now how she was able to get at that hidden radio, or whatever it was.

For the second time that day Kirk heard that eerie humming—a sound, he realized, that ordinarily would have been completely inaudible beyond the girl's bedroom walls. Suddenly the hum was chopped off and a familiar voice spoke familiar words.

"Mythox. Contact established. Proceed."

"A message for Orin. Alma Dakin."

A series of almost undetectable clicking sounds; then:

"Alma?" Despite the fact that the voice was coming through an amplifier, there was no distortion. "Anything wrong?"

It was a man's voice, clear, vibrant, young, and with no trace of an alien accent. Kirk's theory of an interplanetary menace lost some of its strength.

"I—I'm not sure, Orin," the girl said hesitantly. "There was a policeman at my apartment today—the same one Naia went to: The building superintendent told me."

"That's odd. There's no way you can be tied in with her. Or is there?"

"Not that I know of, Orin. Unless they've decided to check back on me just for the sake of something to do. If that's what's happened and they've learned I was working for Dr. Karney at the time of *his* death, they may get an idea the three deaths are related. And

once a police officer gets suspicious, he can hound you unmercifully. That's what worries me, Orin. You know I'm not really an accomplished liar!"

"Shall we bring you here? At least long enough to build you a new identity?"

A pause. Then the girl's voice again: "Something else puzzles me, too. There's no mention of Naia's confession in the newspapers."

"*What?* You mean they haven't released Cordell? What will Tamu say?"

"If they have, nobody knows about it. I told you Naia should have remained in their hands until the young man was set free. You don't know my people as I do, Orin—none of you do."

"But the evidence? Nobody, not even the most stupid of Earthmen, could have ignored that evidence! Tamu won't like this."

"I can't help it, Orin. I keep telling you, Orin: you must use a new set of standards for this world. If its people thought as yours do, none of these unpleasant things would have to happen."

ANOTHER PAUSE before the man's voice came over Kirk's earphones. "We didn't dare leave Naia in their hands. That's why we brought her back here. Look at the chance we took by permitting them to hold her even briefly. If only she hadn't blundered in the first place . . ."

His voice trailed off, then came back suddenly brisk. "Well, too late for regrets. We won't risk letting

them question you. Field Seven in, say, three hours. Time enough?"

"More than enough!" Her relief was unmistakable. "It'll be wonderful visiting Mythox again, Orin. I hope Methu will allow me to stay for a long time."

"I hope so too, darling. But our work comes first; none of us dares let down for even a moment. . . . See you soon. And don't neglect to eliminate the contrabeam."

"It will be gone seconds after we break contact. Field Seven at—let's see—12:30."

"I'll be there. Farewell, Alma."

The dim humming came back again, followed briefly by no sound at all. Then there was the noise of drawers being opened and closed with a kind of brisk and cheerful haste. Alma Dakin was preparing to take it on the lam!

Martin Kirk knew he had only a limited time to plan his own course of action. One way was to walk into the adjoining apartment, place Alma Dakin under arrest and force the whole story from her. A moment's reflection, however, caused him to abandon the idea. Any such move would end his chances of getting his hands on Naia North. More than anything else he wanted her, and he closed his mind to the broader aspects of what had taken—and was still taking—place.

No, his job was to follow Alma Dakin to her rendezvous with this man Orin and in some way force the two of them into turning Naia North over to him. This time she'd stick around long enough to stand trial—even if he had to handcuff

her to the bars of her cell!

From beyond the wall he caught the sounds of suitcases being snapped shut, followed by the fading echo of footsteps. He jerked the earphones from his head and went quickly to the hall door in time to catch a glimpse of Alma Dakin on her way to the building stairs, a bulging suitcase in each hand.

Kirk raced for the kitchen of 3D, flung open the door and went down the rear steps with astonishing agility. He was opening the door of his car by the time the girl came out of the front entrance. He watched her place the bags in the trunk of a small sand-colored coupe, then slip in behind its wheel and start the motor.

The coupe passed his parked car, turned the corner and disappeared. Before it had reached the next intersection, Kirk was rolling smoothly half a block to her rear.

Two hours later both cars were moving along a winding country road miles from civilization. Kirk was driving without lights, bad enough under favorable circumstances but sheer folly considering the sky was completely overcast, so that he was denied even the faint radiance of the stars. Fortunately there was no other traffic in this desolate section at eleven o'clock at night, so that his only danger was in failing to remain on the twisting road.

FINALLY, near the crest of a particularly steep hill, two flaring red lights warned him his

quarry was applying the brakes of her car. He cut his engine long enough to hear the coupe's motor die, then he swung his wheel to the right and coasted to a halt on the soft shoulder of the road.

Under cover of bushes and trees, naked of foliage at this time of the year, Kirk worked his way silently ahead until he could make out the dim figure of the girl as she dragged the pair of bags from the boot. Without a backward glance, she turned away from the road and an instant later was lost to sight among the trees.

There was nothing of the frontiersman in Lieutenant Martin Kirk, but fortunately the same was true of Alma Dakin. Where anyone accustomed to moving across natural terrain could have lost the officer with ease, in her case he need only pause briefly from time to time and use his ears.

At last the seemingly interminable forest ended and the girl sank wearily down on an upended suitcase. Kirk, perspiring freely under the folds of his topcoat, halted in the shelter of a tree bole, and waited.

Beyond where the girl sat was a large natural clearing covered with a fringe of winter grass. The silence was close to being absolute; only the faint keening of a chill wind and the restless creak of barren branches kept it from becoming unbearable.

Gradually his eyes became more and more accustomed to the absence of light worthy of the name, and he began to identify objects as something more than formless



Into his solid world had come strange and unreasonable things.

shadows. Alma Dakin appeared to be much closer to him than he had realized. He eyed her slim back malevolently, and when she lighted a cigarette, the wind bringing the odor of tobacco to his nostrils, he could cheerfully have strangled her for adding to his torture.

Time crawled by. An hour by reckoning was ten minutes by the illuminated dial of his wristwatch. His leg muscles began to twitch under the strain of holding the same position. Twice he managed to hold at bay explosive sneezes; he worried at being able to do so again.

The last five minutes before

12:30 was like being broken on the rack. He caught himself straining his ears for the sound of a motor, of a faint humming—of anything to indicate Orin was arriving. Nothing—and at 12:30 still nothing.

Martin Kirk had had all he could take. He was through standing out on a windy hill like some goddam—

Something seemed to flicker in the night air above the clearing—and he was staring slackjawed at a circular structure the size of small house standing in the center of the clearing as though it had been there for years.

Before the Lieutenant could get his jaw off his necktie, Alma Dakin had uttered a cry of relief and was racing toward the nearest edge of the gleaming vessel. A panel in its side slid noiselessly back and the tall figure of a man was outlined in the opening.

"Alma!" he shouted and sprang to the ground to meet her.

They came together almost violently midway between the clearing's edge and the ship. She clung to him as he bent his head to meet her lips.

Kirk glanced past them at the open portal. Dim light from within cast a soft glow against the night. Nothing moved in the narrow segment of the interior visible from where he was standing.

And Kirk had a moment of what was as close to fear as he was able to know. A little time of bewilderment when his guard slipped just a trifle. What in the hell *was* all this? Into his solid world had come strange and unreasonable things. Crazy ships, and people who didn't play according to the rules he had learned over thankless drudging years as an honest cop. A few tiny beads of sweat formed on his upper lip.

Then his stubborn, inherent fatalism came to his aid. He grinned without humor. The hell with it. Whatever came up—a screwball flying saucer or a berserk psycho waving a gun. You played it the same; according to your own rules. This thing, whatever it was, bridged the gap to a killer. And when you found such a bridge, you crossed it.

MARTIN KIRK, his gun clutched tightly, moved like a casual shadow, eased his way along the hull of ship and slipped inside.

He had never seen anything like this. The lighting for one thing. It came from nowhere and somehow the stuff had a mood. It seemed alive—an intelligent force watching him, mocking him, sneering at him. And so potent was the mood of the whole setup, so sharp his need of release that he muttered, "The hell with you," and softly followed a circular corridor which curved off the hull.

They were coming toward the ship, Orin and Alma—coming while he still hunted a hole. He kept on going. If he met anybody they were going to go down. But he didn't. He found a steel stairway and a pocket at its base to hold his body. It wasn't a dark pocket. Light was everywhere. But the stairway hid him and the pair passed by and went on down the corridor.

He realized his right hand was aching and relaxed his grip on the gun butt he clutched. He straightened up and the tense little mirthless grin played on his lips.

Okay. Now where was she and how did it work? Could he find her and haul her off silly tilt-a-whirl? He thought not. Either his eyes were bad or this thing had appeared from nowhere. Something inside snapped: Quit thinking that way! Whatever it looked like—*think right*. Follow the rules. Look for the dame. His grin deepened.

Sure.

He started walking. Around the

eerie corridor in the direction opposite that taken by Orin and Alma Dakin. He walked a long time and there were no doors or anything else so the only thing to do was keep walking. He thought: When I come to that stairway I'll be back where I started but where's that? What good is a hall you keep going around and around in?

The ship lurched and threw him to the floor. It was going somewhere.

But it didn't go anywhere. Of that he was sure. Maybe he'd been fooled but it seemed the ship settled back after that single lurch and lay there like a choice segment out of someone's pet nightmare. Kirk got to his feet and rubbed the place his leg had violently met the floor.

He walked on and there was the steel stairway again and it was all very damned silly because he knew he'd circled the ship at least three times.

But lucky because the footsteps sounded again and as he dived toward the pocket, the wall of the ship opened to form a doorway. They forgot something, he thought. What kind of supermen are these? They can build a ship that has a stairway every third trip around and still they go away and forget things.

The grin was tighter than ever. Whistle in the dark, boy, but admit it—you're scared. Sure, but what's that got to do with it?

Orin and Alma left the ship. Martin Kirk pushed his head around the staircase. He crouched

for sometime, staring through the open segment of the hull at the outside world. And his poor stupid orthodox mind asked a pitifully logical question:

How could it get light, with the sun at high noon, in fifteen minutes?

After a long, motionless time, the silence became such a roaring thing in Kirk's ears he could stand it no longer. He got up and walked to the doorway.

Something had gone somewhere; either the ship or the world he'd known, because out there was a different world and he knew damn well he'd never seen it before.

Chapter VII

MARTIN KIRK stepped out into a circle of lush vegetation. And in doing so, he learned something. He learned that the human mind is a far more adaptable mechanism than most people imagine; that they can pelt you with goof balls and you get sweat on your lip and have to talk to yourself to keep from sliding off your rocker, but after a while when your mind seems halfway over the edge, it straightens up suddenly and starts going along. A defense mechanism against insanity? He didn't know.

He only knew that when the tiger roared, he whirled around with his gun leveled, saw the six-inch teeth, got wholesomely and sanely scared, and then everything

was all right. He knew he was all right when he got the right reaction from sight of the almost naked girl holding the tiger.

For a long moment it was a frozen-action tableau. The huge orange and black beast. The wide eyed young brunette nudist, and the tropical forest with the great big fat sun overhead. The girl's voice nailed it all down. "Don't be afraid. Rondo won't hurt you."

Kirk's resentment flared warmly and, had resentment been a tangible thing, he would have kissed it. "You're tootin' right he won't, sister. This isn't a toy I'm holding."

"Rondo is very gentle."

Kirk eyed the girl. "Why don't you put some clothes on?"

Her teeth were as bright and even as little white knives but her smile took the edge off them. "Only people in the city wear clothes. I wear them when I'm in the city. When I come out here I—"

"—you don't wear any clothes. Tell me—where am I?"

"Don't you know?"

"Let's not play games. If I knew I wouldn't ask you."

"Did you come on the ship?"

"You saw me get out of it didn't you? Now answer my question." And he realized how certain he was of what her answer would be.

"On Mythox."

"Well fancy that. Now tell me something else. Do you know what language you're speaking?"

"Of course. English."

"And why should you speak English on Mythox? Haven't you got a language of your own?"

"Certainly. But you're obviously

from Earth. I thought you were a Watcher. I tried English. If you hadn't responded I'd have spoken to you in the other Earth languages."

"How many do you know?"

"Eleven hundred and seventeen. With various dialects, four thousand and—"

"There aren't that many."

She looked puzzled. Then her face cleared. "Oh you mean Earth languages. I was referring to those of the Five Galaxies."

I'm not going to be surprised at anything, he told himself doggedly. Not at anything. "Do you know anyone named Naia North?"

THERE WAS a childlike seriousness in her manner. It tended to deny the maturity of her body. Or was it the other way around? Martin Kirk wasn't sure, and grimly assured himself that he didn't give a damn.

The girl said, "I don't know anyone by that name. But I could find her for you."

"How would you go about it?"

"I'd go to the city and check the video-directory, naturally."

"Naturally. And you'd put your clothes on before you went?"

"Of course I would. We go without clothing only out here in the playground."

Kirk realized he'd been holding the gun rigidly in front of him. The tiger had dropped to the ground and lay outstretched like a lazy, good-natured dog. Kirk lowered the gun, setting his eyes again on the girl. "A minute ago you said you

thought I was a Watcher. What did you mean?"

He would have framed his questions with more guile, but something told him it wasn't necessary. This child of nature was utterly without guile. She said, "An Earth Watcher. What did you think I meant?"

"I didn't know or I wouldn't have asked."

It clarified. *Dakin is watching.* Sure. What the hell else would a Watcher do but watch? But why, and for what? Kirk was mystified. But it didn't matter, he asserted inwardly, and turned his mind back to the straight line. The cop's line. "Will you put on your clothes and go into the city and locate Naia North for me?"

"If it will help you."

"It will. Where can I wait for you?"

"If you want to see Naia North why don't you come with me?"

Kirk shrugged. Why not? So long as the score was completely unknown to him, why not follow the path of least resistance? "Get your clothes on," he said.

The girl turned and started leading the tiger back toward a grove of trees. After a few steps she turned back, a look of sober thought on her face. "Are all Earthlings so assertive?" she asked. Kirk grinned. As long as it works, this one is, baby. But what if it stops working? His reply was not audible and the girl turned finally to disappear into the bushes.

Kirk then experienced a strange feeling of unreality which persisted until the girl returned.

"MY NAME is Raima," the girl said solemnly. She wore tight-fitting trousers, a loose blouse and had a silver colored air car with room in back for the tiger.

Kirk knew it was an air car when the craft lifted from the ground from no apparent means of acceleration and skimmed along just above the trees. He sat beside Raima and asked, "About that ship I came here in? How fast does it travel and how far is it from Mythox to Earth?"

"The distance is around two hundred thousand light years but the ship doesn't really travel at all."

"Maybe you could go into a little more detail," Kirk said wearily.

"It's very simple. Distance, as you Earthlings regard it, is not distance at all. Space bends to a greater or lesser degree depending upon its immediate function in whatever time-space equation you are using."

"Thank you very much," Kirk replied and silently added: Keep to the line. Hold to your own values. On Earth, wherever it is, a man is waiting to go to the chair for a murder he didn't commit. Use whatever equation you want to—that still adds up the same. These people may be a lot smarter than you are, but they can't twist that one and make you believe it comes out any different.

A strange city of graceful flying spirals was coming over the horizon. It moved closer and the air car arced in to a halt on a huge cement landing area punctuated with small circles of a different material.

Raima jumped from the cockpit

and Kirk followed to hear the soft thud of the cat's four paws landing beside him. The cat went over and sat down on one of the circles. Raima followed, stood beside the animal and called, "Don't you want to go down to street level?"

"Of course. How stupid of me not to know how."

The circle dropped silently beneath them in a bright metal tube in which a door soon appeared to let them out into a broad street filled with casually moving pedestrians. Kirk noted that none of them seemed in any hurry; that here and there was an individual dressed like himself. Watchers on furlough or vacation, he thought a trifle bitterly. This picture was far from complete but enough of it added up to furnish a name for them. Quizling was a good one. Perhaps traitor was better.

All in all, he found one satisfaction. He could travel about as he pleased.

A short walk brought them to a huge four or five story wall, the like of which Kirk had never seen. It was symmetrically covered with small, opaque, glass windows, beside each of which was a dial not unlike the ones on Earth telephones. Catwalks of some bright metal covered the wall. On these catwalks, numerous people were busy with a strange business Kirk could not follow.

"This is the video-directory," Raima said. She gave no further explanation, but while Rondo lazily rubbed noses with a bear cub sitting on its haunches waiting for its master, she spun the dial with practiced

efficiency. "Now, if Naia North is in the city and wishes to see you, her image will appear in the mirror.

As Kirk watched and the bear slapped the grinning tiger with a playful paw, the opaque glass cleared and the tall, willowy figure of Naia North appeared in miniature.

"You may speak in here," Raima said, solemnly indicating a small screened opening beside the mirror. "My! She's pretty, isn't she?"

Naia North was entirely composed. She wore a pale blue gown and from the background in the mirror, Kirk gathered that she was at home. "Aren't you surprised?" Kirk asked.

Now a slight frown creased the lovely Naia's brow. "A little perhaps. How did you get to Mythox? And why did you come?"

"A slight matter of murder. A murder you confessed to, or has it slipped your mind?"

"Aren't you being rather absurd? That's all done with."

"Not so far as Paul Cordell is concerned. He's going to the chair—only he isn't. We're going back and straighten a few things out."

Genuine surprise was reflected now. And possibly a certain contempt. "My opinion of you lessens. I hadn't rated you as a complete fool. How did you get here?"

"The same way you did I suppose. Is there more than one way?"

Naia's frown deepened. "Do you mean you were brought—?"

"Not intentionally. I stowed away on that funny round ship that doesn't go anywhere and travels far."

The beautiful brow immediately cleared. "Oh, I see," Naia observed with amusement. "And you know exactly how you'll get me back to Earth I suppose? Thousands of light years. It's a long walk."

"I'll take one thing at a time and worry about them in order of appearance. The main thing for you to remember, is this: You may be as smart as all get out but you broke an American law on American soil by your own confession and by God you're going back and answer for it!"

"Idiot! I can have you—"

KIRK'S MOOD changed to the quizzical. "It's entirely beside the point, but still I don't get you, baby. Why the switcheroo? You walked in and confessed. Then you took a powder. Now you sneer in my teeth. What do you use for a rudder, sweetheart."

"I followed orders," Naia flared with a mixture of anger and sullenness. "I am now free of the assignment."

Kirk pursed his lips thoughtfully. "You wouldn't be sort of a hatchet-woman for this high-blown outfit would you? I can think offhand of a few other names. Karney, Blatz, Kennedy. What gives with knocking off nuclear physicists, baby?"

Naia did not answer. When she started to turn away from the mirror, Kirk glanced at the silent Raima standing with her hand on the tiger's head. "Is there any way I can call on the lady in the mirror personally?"

"Not if she doesn't want to re-

ceive you," Raimu said. She was studying Kirk with wistful dark eyes.

Naia turned back quickly. "I'll be glad to receive you. It's time I taught you a lesson."

"Fine. What's your address?"

But Naia was gone. The little mirror turned opaque. Kirk shot a questioning glance at Raimu. "Does yes mean no on this cockeyed planet?"

"Her car will come." Raimu murmured. But the petite dark beauty seemed interested in other things. "You didn't tell me your name."

"Sorry. Rude of me. It's Martin Kirk. You've been pretty nice to me. I wish there was some way I could show my appreciation."

"You're going to see Naia North?"

"Yes. She's a murderess. I'm taking her back to my planet."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be possible."

"You too, honey?" Kirk reached out and flicked one of the raven curls. "If things were different you and I might be able to have fun."

"I spend a lot of time—where you found me. Maybe—"

"I doubt if I can make it. But keep your clothes on after this—as a personal favor to me."

She was the very soul of solemnity. "I don't understand you. I really don't understand you at all."

At that moment, an air car—much smaller than Raimu's, dropped gently into the street beside Kirk. "Good lord! Did this thing smell me out?"

"It came to the mirror on Naia's

private wave-length. Get in. It will take you to her."

Kirk crawled into the car. The last thing he saw before it lifted into the air, were Raimu's dazzling black eyes. The last words he heard were, "Goodbye, Martin Kirk. I will visualize you."

The car swung up above the graceful, spidery buttresses and moved across the city. Kirk filled in the time by trying to figure out what made the thing go. He hadn't gotten to first base when the car lost altitude and came to rest on a balcony hung with seeming perilousness on a sheer white wall. Kirk stepped out. A large glass panel had been pushed back and Naia stood waiting in the opening.

"Nice of you to receive me," Kirk said. "Have you got your bags packed for a trip stateside?"

"Please come this way."

Naia turned and moved through the room just off the balcony. On the far side another door gave exit. She passed through it and turned as though waiting for Kirk. He took one step, two, three, four.

Then something came from somewhere and almost tore his jaw off. He went out in an explosion of black light.

Chapter VIII

KIRK CAME TO with the feeling that his period of unconsciousness had been momentary. Naia was standing as she had stood before, just beyond the inner door-

way. The mocking smile was still on her face. "Did you trip?"

Kirk got groggily to his feet. "No, angel. That's the way I always cross a room." As he came upright his hand reached toward the bulge made by his shoulder holster. But it didn't get that far.

He had not seen from whence the first blow came but that was not true with the second. From a tiny opening in the door jamb, a pinpoint of light appeared. It hung there for a moment. Then it brightened, expanded, and shot forth as a slim beam. It contained a silvery radiance and the kick of a Missouri mule. It slammed against Kirk's jaw, but not quite so hard this time; only hard enough to send him down again amidst a cloud of shooting stars.

He shook his head and got to his hands and knees. "Wha's 'at? A trained flashlight?" He began coming up. As soon as he didn't need his right hand for rising he reached for his gun. The light beam seemed to resent this. It hit him in the solar plexus this time; a sickening blow that fed nausea down through his legs. He tightened his stomach against the agony and began getting up again.

"You see how useless it is?" Naia asked. "Beside us, you Earthlings are children. Will you stop being foolish, or must I kill you?"

Kirk squinted craftily at the pinpoint of light with one closed eye. Clever little devil. What the hell! Nude innocents. Tigers on leashes. Light beams that knocked your teeth out. Paul Cordell with a shaved spot on his head.

"You got your bag packed for a little trip, baby?"

For a brief moment, genuine fear flamed in Naia's eyes. And in Kirk's mind: Dumb babe. What's she got to be scared of? They hit you with nothing and make it stick. Kirk croaked, "Grab your bag, baby. We'll go find that flying biscuit. We got a date with Arthur Kahler Troy."

He was really cagey this time. When the light beam shot out, he hurled himself to the side. But he could have saved the effort. A beam came from the other door jamb and he stepped right into it. That one really tore his head off.

SOMEBODY was talking. It was a man and he had a deep resonant voice: a voice full of authority—and censure. "I'm surprised at you Naia. I never suspected you of having a sadistic streak."

Naia's sullen reply. "Do you think anyone can do the work I do and remain unmarked?"

"I suppose not. But as I remember it, you asked to serve."

"As a benefit to humanity."

"We won't go into it."

But Naia pressed the point. "I have always followed orders. I placed myself in possible jeopardy on Earth by clearing Paul Cordell."

"But Paul Cordell was not cleared."

"Not through any fault of mine."

"But why this? What end does torturing this poor unfortunate serve?"

Martin Kirk cautiously opened

one eye. It brought to his brain the image of a large blue globe. A man of fine and commanding appearance stood within the globe, suspended about a foot from the floor. The globe and the man gave every indication of having just come through the opaque glass wall of the room, and as Kirk watched, the man was lowered slowly to the floor and the globe became a blue mist that spiralled lazily and was gone.

Kirk opened both eyes now, stirred, and climbed dizzily to his feet. "You bump into the damndest things around here," he said. "But let's get down to the important business. My name is Martin Kirk. I'm an American police officer. One of your subjects committed a murder on American soil. I hope you aren't going to be difficult about extradition."

The other could not hide his surprise. Nor did he try to. "Amazing," he murmured. Then, "I am Tamu, the overlord of the galaxy. I wonder if Naia's cruelty hasn't affected your mind?"

"If you mean I'm nuts, I think maybe you're right. But it wasn't little Playful here who did it. I've gone through a lot and I don't speak with any sense of bragging. I've seen more funny things happen than any one man should see in so short a time. So maybe I am off my rocker. So I'd like your permission to take my prisoner back to Earth so I can give all my time to regaining my sanity."

Tamu regarded Kirk with thoughtful eyes. "I think we should have a talk."

"I would like a talk. I would like nothing better than to chew the fat with you for hours on end if my jaw didn't hurt so damned much. So I'll just take my prisoner and go. Do I have to sign a paper or something?"

The overlord's surprise was fast becoming a kind of fascinated awe. "Kirk, you said?" He pointed to the door leading to the inner room. "Please go in, sir. There's no use of our standing out here while we discuss your problem."

The Lieutenant eyed the door frame warily. "I tried getting through there before but the light got in my eyes!"

"You can trust me."

The police officer stepped cautiously through the opening and on into a luxuriously furnished room. Tamu, dressed much the same as one of Earth's better bankers, followed him in and suggested he sit down.

"Why?" Kirk demanded bluntly. "Let's stop kitten-and-micing around, Mr. Tamu. I'm not comfortable here and I want to leave. With her." He tilted his head toward the watching, sullen-faced Naia North. "And now."

Tamu said, "Believe me, it will be as easy for you to return to Earth an hour from now. You seem weary to the point of exhaustion. I ask you again: sit down and get back some of your strength. Naia will find you something to eat."

Kirk's stubborn determination to force an immediate showdown wavered. It had been born largely of fear to begin with, and the thought of relief for his burning

throat was impossible to resist.

"I could use a drink," he admitted.

TAMU GESTURED and Naia North turned to leave the room. But Kirk leaped forward to block her off. "Nothing doing! I don't take my eyes off you, baby. I'll just pass up that drink."

The girl glanced at the overlord and shrugged helplessly. Tamu said, "Have a girl bring in something. While we're waiting I suggest all three of us get comfortable."

While Naia was speaking into a tiny screen set into one of the silk-covered walls, Tamu and the man from Earth sat down across from each other on a pair of fragile-legged chairs. The overlord leaned back and sighed. "You've asked my leave to return to Earth and to take Naia back with you to stand trial for murder. Have you considered that I may refuse that permission?"

"I don't think I have to consider it," Kirk said promptly.

"You don't?" Tamu was mystified again. "Why not?"

"You tell me you're the overlord. I take that to mean you're in charge. That means you have laws to govern your people and *that* means you believe in laws. One of your subjects has broken the law of my country. You can't refuse to let her take the consequences any more than if the situation was reversed."

Tamu was shaking his head and smiling slightly. "I'm afraid you're not taking into consideration one fact, Mr. Kirk. Naia North broke your law, as you call it, on express

and definite instructions from me."

Martin Kirk made a show of astonishment. "Let me get this straight. You *ordered* Professor Gilmore and Juanita Cordell murdered? Is that what you're telling me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Exactly the reason I suggested we have a talk. To make you see why they—and others in the same classification—could not be allowed to live."

"Men like Karney? Kennedy? Blatz?"

Tamu blinked. "My respect for you increases, Martin Kirk."

"Don't let it throw you. I'm a police officer, and police officers are trained to do the job right."

The overlord crossed his legs and settled deeper into the chair. "Mythox needs men like you, Martin Kirk. That is why I'm going to give you a chance for life. For this you must understand: if I wanted it, you would be dead within seconds."

A chill slid along the stubborn back of the Lieutenant but nothing showed in his impassive expression and he did not speak.

"But because we do need you, I am going to tell you things no Earthman knows. I believe that once you understand why Mythox has undertaken to meddle in the affairs of another world—and I tell you frankly that our doing so is as abhorrent to us as anything you can imagine—once you understand our reasons, you will cheerfully, even eagerly, join us."

"And if I don't?"

"You know the answer to that, I'm sure."

A SLIM FAIR-HAIRED girl in a pale green toga-like dress entered the room carrying a tray holding tall glasses of some sparkling blue beverage. She offered it first to Kirk, then the others. The Lieutenant removed one of the glasses, waited until Tamu and Naia had done the same, but not until they had drunk some of the liquid did he tilt his own glass. The cold tangy liquid hit him like a bombshell—a bombshell on the pleasant side. He could almost literally feel his strength flow back, his senses sharpen and the poisons of fatigue and mental strain disappear.

"I'm listening," he said.

Tamu set his glass on the edge of a nearby table and bent forward, his manner earnest. "It won't take long, Martin Kirk. Hear me. We of Mythox are far in advance of the peoples of Earth—both spiritually and scientifically. Life on our planet materialized in much the same manner as on your own world, but countless ages before. Almost the same process of evolution took place; but somewhere along the line humanity on Mythox managed to reach full development without the flaws of character found among so many of Earth's inhabitants. When I tell you that we find it almost impossible to voice an untruth, that taking a human life willfully for any reason is equally difficult, that crime of any nature is almost unknown here—then you will see the difference between the two planets.

"For ages our scientists have observed the events taking place on Earth. By perfecting a method for changing matter from terrene to contraterrene, we have managed to bridge the million light years of space separating our worlds as we saw fit. Thousands of years ago we could have gained control of your ball of clay and turned mankind into any pattern we might choose.

"That is not our way, Martin Kirk. Free will is our heritage too—and we respect it in ourselves, and for that reason must respect it in others. So long as Earth's peoples confined their more destructive tendencies to themselves we kept our hands off—even while we failed to understand such senseless conduct.

"And then one day we witnessed an explosion on Earth's surface—an explosion different from any of the countless ones before it. That explosion was the first man-made release of atomic energy—a process we had known how to bring about for ages, but one we would never use. For we have learned the secret of limitless power without the transformation of mass into energy. Your way is the way of destruction, Martin Kirk; ours is exactly the opposite.

"For the first time, the leaders of Mythox knew the meaning of fear—fear that, once Earth's scientists had found the secret of nuclear fission, they would go on to the one extreme forbidden throughout the Universe itself.

"And so we acted. Not in the way your people would have acted were the situation reversed. For we

were still determined that there would be no intervention on our part in Earth's affairs—and that is still our way, just as it must always be. But there must be one exception to this rule: no one on Earth must be allowed to blunder into the extreme I mentioned a moment ago."

TAMU, overlord of Mythox, paused to drink from his glass and to cast a speculative glance at the stolid face of Martin Kirk. He might as well have studied the contours of a brick wall.

"The road to that blunder had been opened the day your learned men first split the atom. If they persisted down that path, it was bound to follow that they would attempt the thing we feared: the splitting of hydrogen atoms—the hydrogen bomb, as you call it.

"We know what that would mean: a chain reaction that would wipe out an entire galaxy in one blinding flash. *Our galaxy*, Martin Kirk—yours and mine! Do you have any thought at all on what that means?"

The question was rhetorical; even before Kirk could shake his head, the overlord pressed on.

"Mythox and Earth are two grains of dust on opposite sides of a galaxy—a spiral formation of stars and planets 200,000 light years wide and 20,000 thick. Between us lie countless other worlds, a vast number of them supporting life—not always, or even often, life as we know it, but life nonetheless.

"There is not one of those worlds, Martin Kirk, we do not know as

thoroughly as we do our own. Fortunately for our purpose only a relative few have progressed along a line which can lead to danger for the rest. Yours is one of those which has—and that is why we of Mythox have taken a well-masked place in your affairs *so far as they relate to nuclear physics*.

“Every scientist of your world, male or female, is constantly under the eye of a Watcher. These Watchers are members of your own races—people we have enlisted in the fight to save not just their world or mine—but millions of worlds.

“When a Watcher learns a physicist is close to the one key to success in his effort to make a hydrogen bomb—an equation that begins: ‘Twelve times zero point seven nine’—we are notified and a killer from our own people is sent to execute that scientist. Yes, Martin Kirk, we have those among us—a very few—who are capable of killing on orders and for cause. Naia, here, is one of them. She was sent to take the lives of Gregory Gilmore and Juanita Cordell; but she bungled and instead of their deaths resembling heart failure, they were obviously murdered.

“Alma Dakin tried to cover up the truth by making it appear both scientists had died at the hands of a jealous husband. She succeeded, both because of her perjured testimony and the fact that Paul Cordell insisted on telling the truth. But when we of Mythox learned what had happened, Naia was sent back to confess the crime. She entered the laboratory only a few hours before she came to your

office; while she was in the laboratory the second time, the clues you found were put there.

“Our mistake was in thinking that, once proof was offered clearing Cordell, the innocent man would be freed. For once more we credited Earthlings with the same code of ethics we of Mythox adhere to.

“You succeeded in following Naia here. Only a man composed of equal parts of Earth bulldog and genius could have done so. Martin Kirk, I offer you a place among us and a lifetime devoted to making sure the galaxy of which we both are a part does not perish. What say you?”

Several minutes dragged by. The eyes of both Tamu and Naia North were glued to the grim visage of Homicide Lieutenant Kirk. It was impossible for either of them to know what thoughts were churning behind that stone face.

Abruptly he stood up. “I’m a cop. I leave your kind of problem to the people who are good at it. My people, Tamu. You see, I belong to my world, not to yours.

“But you’ve got a solid argument—one I’d be a fool not to consider. Let me sleep on it. Tomorrow morning we’ll talk about it some more; then I’ll give you my answer. Right now I’m too worn out to think in a straight line.”

“Of course.” The overlord rose to his feet. “Find Martin Kirk comfortable quarters, Naia, and leave orders he is not to be disturbed until he is ready to join us.”

On his way down a corridor behind the same slip of a girl who had

brought him his drink, Martin Kirk was thinking: They didn't even frisk me for a gun!

Martin Kirk went into his apartment and lay for a while looking at the ceiling. After a time, he got up and went out again.

Chapter IX

THE SOFT silvery radiance which this planet seemed to feature, bathed the metal hallway as Kirk marched stolidly toward the slim arcing stairway that led toward Naia's floor. This was certainly a strange building, he thought. The architects of Mythox knew how to use curves. They utilized them for utility and beauty to a point where a straight line was something to be surprised at. Pretty smart people, the Mythoxians—in more ways than one.

And Kirk, for no apparent reason, thought of a phrase common among children during his own childhood. "Who died and left you boss?"

He counted the markings over one door. He had seen those markings before. Naia North lived here.

And Naia North was in. Kirk walked softly across the large foyer room and quietly pushed open a door to the left. Naia, clad as always, in beauty, lay sleeping on a bed that stood out from the wall on two narrow rods of metal and needed no other support.

As Kirk opened his mouth, Naia awakened, so she was looking calm-

ly at him as he spoke. "Up, baby. You've got a date with a hot electrode a lot of light years from here. It's a hike, so rise and shine."

Naia sat up very slowly, very gracefully. She was what men dream of finding in bed beside them. What they marry to keep in bed beside them.

"You must be mad."

"As a hatter, baby. Into your duds." He saw her glance at the door jamb of the bedroom entrance, saw the shadow of disappointment in her lovely eyes. "You didn't put those Joe Louis light rays in your bedroom, did you?"

Naia set her feet on the floor and drew herself to her full height. She wore light blue, a gown that hung as had that of Guinevere, as that of the Maid of Shalot.

But Naia was contempt. She was contempt clothed in cold blue, then contempt naked as she allowed the gown to fall to the floor. A few minutes later, she was contempt clothed for the street in tight britches and a loose blouse.

"You go first," Kirk said. "And do as you're told. You may be a Mythoxian, but this .45 doesn't know that. It puts big holes in anybody."

As Naia walked serenely toward the hall door, there was only a touch of sullenness at the corners of her mouth. She turned her head to speak over her shoulder. "Hiding behind a woman, brave Earthman?"

"Yes and no. I'm hiding behind a woman from those damn straight-left rays, and I'm not a brave Earthman. I spend most of my time

scared to death. That's why all of us are getting back to Earth quick, so I can draw an easy breath."

"All of us?"

"Oh yes. Didn't I tell you? You're taking me to the places I can find Alma Dakin and Orin. We're going to have witnesses and testimony. And the party who gets burned isn't going to be Paul Cordell."

"I won't—"

"Hold it, honey."

Kirk had picked up two items upon leaving Naia's apartment. A pair of filmy silk stockings and a white scarf. He jerked Naia's hands behind her back in somewhat of a surprise move. Before she recovered, her wrists were tightly bound. She gasped, "You—madman," just before he deftly pulled the scarf across her mouth and twisted it into an effective gag. He stepped back to admire his handywork.

"Now we're all ready. Orin and Alma."

Naia shook her head in a slow negative. Kirk pushed her gently into the hall and rounded to face her. "Yes, baby," he said. "You ought to know now I won't be stopped. I need Orin to fly that space buggy. If I don't get him we can't go. Then there'd be nothing left for me to do but even the score for Paul Cordell. He'll have to go but you'll keep him company."

Naia stood like a statue, apparently considering. Then she moved slowly down the corridor in the opposite direction from which Kirk had come. Down three curving flights and stopping finally in front of a door identical to her own.

Kirk stepped forward and leaned firmly on the knob. The door opened. He knew where the bedroom was in these apartments now. He pushed Naia ahead of him, into the bedroom and saw Alma lying with her eyes closed.

Kirk whirled, just in time to level his gun and bring Orin to a dead stop. "Over by the bed, high-born." As Orin complied, Kirk leered at Naia. "That was clever, but I had it doped. I spotted them for husband and wife or the Mythox equivalent quite some time back. A good chance shot to hell."

"What do you want here?" Orin demanded.

"A chauffeur. We're heading Earthward on the first ship. That's the one out in the jungle."

"But you talked to Tamu. I thought—"

"I'd been suckered? No no my friend! On the force they called me the boy with the one-track mind."

"I can see what they meant," Orin sighed.

"I thought you would. Tell your wife to get dressed. We're getting an air-sled."

"You might have the decency to—"

"I won't turn my back. You can stand between us. That's the best I can do."

ALMA DRESSED swiftly in a costume similar to Naia's. When they were ready to leave, Kirk said, "Now let's get it straight once and for all. I'll stand for no fast moves. It's Earth or some quick slugs. Do you follow me?"

They did not speak but they evi-

dently believed Kirk because, fifteen minutes later, the party of four stood beside the ugly ship while thick trees and grasses whispered around them.

"Inside."

In the corridor, Orin stopped and turned as though having thought of a convincing argument he was bent upon trying. Kirk poked him sharply in the ribs with the barrel of the .45 and he moved on after the women toward the ladder and thence to the motor room.

Once inside, Orin turned and spoke sharply. "Won't you reconsider?"

"Push the levers, Jack. The right ones."

"Tamu is a reasonable man. We could talk to him again. He would make even a more generous offer."

"I'm waiting."

"Certainly you did not refute the logic of his argument? We are in the right. Our case is just. The galaxies must be protected from—"

"The right levers, Jack."

"—from those who through ignorance, stupidity, or ferocity would destroy it."

"One more minute of this and there'll be dead people aboard this ship."

"You're helpless, really. You can't fly this ship without me. Therefore my life is safe. I merely

refuse to launch it."

"Would you like a dead wife?"

Orin whitened perceptibly.

"She may be a wife to you, but to me she's just a doll who helped lie a man into the chair."

"You wouldn't do it! You haven't got the nerve to shoot down a man or a woman in cold blood."

Kirk looked steadily into Orin's eyes. "You don't believe that do you, bud?"

Orin held the gaze for a long time. Then he dropped his eyes. "No. I don't believe it."

"Then get to work."

"One last offer. Won't you reconsider. Join us?"

"No!"

"Very well."

And Orin, a fixed, taut look on his face, reached forth his hand and touched a button on the panel board. It was a very special button.

A button for use only when all hope was gone.

The exploding space-time ship lighted the countryside to blinding brilliance.

* * *

A.P. Jan 21st—Shortly after midnight today, Paul Cordell, convicted killer in the famous "woman from Mars" case, was put to death in the electric chair at the state penitentiary.

The Stowaway

By Alvin Heiner

He stole a ride to the Moon in search of glory, but found a far different destiny.

HIS EYES were a little feverish—as they had been of late—and his voice held a continuous intensity—as though he were imparting a secret. I've got to get on that ship! I've got to, I tell you! And I'm going to make it!"

Different members of the group regarded him variously, some with amusement, some with contempt, others with frank curiosity.

"You're plain nuts, Joe. What do you want to go to the moon for?"

"Sure, why you wanna go? What they got on the moon we aint got right here?"

There was general laughter from the dozen or so who sat eating their lunch in the shade of Building B. They all thought that was a pretty good one. Good enough to repeat. "Sure, what they got on the moon we ain't got here?"

But Joe Spain wasn't in the mood for jokes. He burned with even greater conviction and stood

up as though to harangue the workers. "You wanta know why I got to go to the moon? Why I've got to get on that ship? Then I'll tell you. It's 'cause I'm a little guy—that's why! Joe Spain—working stiff—one of the great inarticulate masses."

More laughter. "Where'd you get those big words, Joey? Out of a book? Come on—talk English!"

Joe Spain pointed to the huge, tubelike Building A, off across the desert; the building you had to have two different passes and a written permit to enter. The mystery building where even newspaper reporters were barred. "It's only the big shots they let in there ain't it? Only them that's got a drag or went to college or something. Us little guys they tell go to blow—ain't that right?"

"Who the hell cares? Maybe it's a damn good place to stay away from. Maybe it'll explode or some-

thing. Who wants to die and collect his insurance?"

"I got to get on that ship when it blasts off because they can't push the masses around! We got a right to be represented even if we got to sneak in!"

"Me—I'll stay on the ground."

"And besides there's the glory! You guys are too stupid to see that but it's there. The glory of being on the first rocket ship to the Moon. The name of Joe Spain written down in the history books and said over by people and school kids for thousands of years! Immortality! That's the word!"

"Well, just forget about it, Joe, 'cause you ain't going."

Joe Spain's eyes burned brighter. "Joe Spain, coming down the ramp with the big shots when it's all over. News cameras snapping! People asking for interviews!"

"But you ain't going 'cause—"

Joe shouted the man down. "And another thing. Us little people are entitled to a representative aboard that ship. We got a right to know what's going on. How come there's nothing about it in the papers? Only the big shots knowing about it and whispering among themselves? It's because they're trying to snag it all and freeze us out!"

"You're crazy. It's for security reasons. It's all hush-hush so it won't leak out like the atom bomb did. The big boys are being smart this time."

"And you ain't getting on," the interrupted man repeated doggedly, "because there ain't a way in God's world to *get* on. With triple security all around the building

just tell me a way to get in. Just tell me one."

"I'm going to get on that ship," Joe Spain said. Then he clammed up suddenly. Joe Spain wasn't stupid. He was a talker but he knew when to stop sounding off.

The men went back to work shifting the big aluminum barrels from trucks into Building B. Carrying the wooden crates and the paper wrapped parcels up the ramps and to the side of the building facing big secret structure labeled A. They worked until five o'clock. Then they filed out and got into the waiting trucks and were hauled back to town; the boom town that had mushroomed up in the desert overnight and would die with the same swiftness when the project was completed.

JOE WENT straight to his rooming house, washed up, put on his good clothes, and found a stool in a nearby restaurant. He ate a leisurely supper, glancing now and again at the clock. When the clock read eight, he went out into the neon-stained darkness and walked three blocks to the Black Cat, one of the three night clubs the desert town boasted. He went to the bar and ordered a drink. He downed it slowly, carefully, after the manner of a man who wanted to stay sober.

A half-hour passed before a thin, nervous individual elbowed to the bar and stood beside him. Joe said, "Hello, Nick. You been thinking it over?"

"I need a drink."

"Sure, Nick. Then we'll go some

place and talk." But Nick got rid of five drinks while Joe protected his own glass from the barkeep. After a while, Joe said, "I'm willing to up the price, Nick. "Two thousand—cash. All I got."

"Le's get out o' here," Nick mumbled.

They walked out of the town and into the desert, Nick stumbling now and again, to be supported by the tense, sober Joe. "Two thousand, Nick. You need the dough."

"Sure. Need the dough. But it wouldn't work. Couldn't get you into one o' them barrels."

"You wouldn't have to. All I ask is that you come along in the morning and seal me up in one. All you'll have to do is lock on the lid."

"How you know the barrels are going on the ship?"

"Never mind about that. I just know. I paid to find out."

"Okay—suppose you do get on the ship in a barrel. Maybe it'll be stored in a hold somewhere. Maybe they wouldn't open it very soon. You'd die."

"I got a way to get out. One of them special forches. The little ones. Aluminum isn't very strong. I can cut it like butter."

"It'd be hot. You'd burn yourself."

"Let me worry about that," Joe said fiercely. "You want the two grand or not?"

Nick wanted the two thousand and he was against the wall for excuses. Then he had a happy thought. "Barrels is air-tight. You'd smother. Thing's im—impracac'l. We'll forget it."

"I won't smother. I'm taking my

own oxygen. Enough to last me clear to the Moon if it has to. Come on. Break down!"

"Okay. For two grand. Got to have the dough now though."

His heart singing, Joe Spain counted out two thousand in cash. When he'd finished he had exactly nine dollars left. He was a pauper. But the happiest pauper who ever bought with his whole fortune, the thing he craved most.

"You won't doublecross me now, will you? If you've got any ideas like that—"

"I'll do like we said. Nick Sparks never went back on his word—never. But how you going to stay hid when it's time to leave work?"

"Leave that to me. It'll be easy. They don't check Building B too close. No double check 'cause it's over a mile from Building A—outside the safety perimeter. I'll stay in tomorrow night and I'll put a little chalkmark on the barrel I'm in—right near the top rim. First thing you do when you come to work the next morning is seal it and line it up with the filled ones."

"Okay, but I gotta go home now. I got a head. I gotta get some sleep."

"WHAT'S in the duffel bag?"

"Clean overalls—towel." Joe pulled the zipper down halfway. The guard fingered the blue denim but didn't dig deeper to find the towel. He checked Joe's badge number, made a note on his pad, and motioned to the next worker. Joe let tight breath slowly out of his lungs as he walked toward

Building B. Getting past the guard was a load off his mind. He'd expected to get by, but it was one of the calculated risks that could have stopped him cold.

Once inside the building, he put the bag into his locker and went to work. He labored briskly and carried more than his share of the load. But now again he stopped to look over at the outline of Building A, limned hard against hot blazing sky. And each time it was with a sense of heady exhilaration that he thought of his destiny—his hard earned, dearly bought destiny. To be among that select group who would first set foot upon the surface of the Moon!

He had no worries about not being allowed to do so. Once he showed himself—with the ship far out in space—they'd have to accept him. Not graciously of course, but they'd have to admire his courage and tenacity. They could not in all humanity, deny him a share of the victory.

The day wore on and as quitting time approached, he became more tense—more alert. Five minutes before the whistle, he faded back into the building and hurried to the lavatory. He went into the booth furthest from the entrance and locked the door. Now there was nothing to do but wait. Another of the calculated risks.

The whistle blew. Almost immediately, the sound of footsteps broke the silence and the lavatory was filled with hurrying men. Their stay in the room was short, however, as Joe had known it would be. Men leaving for home do not daw-

dle on the premises.

The lavatory was empty again. A period of silence while Joe raised his feet from the floor and braced them on the toilet seat. The entrance door opened. A guard making the departure checkup.

Joe held his breath. If the guard came down the line and tried the door, he was finished. But Joe had banked upon human nature. The guard stopped. For a long moment there was no sound and Joe knew the man was bending over to run his eyes down the line of toilets close to the floor. In this manner he could see the floor of every booth. The guard straightened, turned, walked out. The door closed. Silence. Joe's heart swelled with gratitude. He grinned, looking forward with joy to the long night ahead.

He found a spot over behind the barrels where the night watchman would have to climb over a lot of equipment in order to find him. He made himself comfortable, practically certain the guard would not do this. He stretched out on the hard floor and recorded the passing of the hours by the number of times the watchman went through.

And he was surprised at how fast the time passed. Finally, checking his count carefully, he left his hiding place and tiptoed to the line of lockers. He took the oxygen equipment from the duffel bag after which he hid the bag and the clothing therein behind a wall flange in a far corner. Then he climbed into the barrel at the front end of the packing line. He checked the barrel with a small X and

jockeyed the lid into place.

TIME PASSED. Nothing happened. He wondered if he'd missed on the time element. The men should certainly have come to work now. More than once he was tempted to push the barrel lid aside and check the situation. When footsteps sounded, close by, and the lid snapped firmly into place, he was glad he hadn't done so. Good old Nick! When he got back from the Moon, he'd see to it that Nick got credit for his courageous act.

Soon the barrel began to move. Joe felt it rise into the air and settle with a thump. Then the motor of a truck roared and Joe knew where he was going. Straight toward Building A and the Moon rocket. There was more movement until finally the barrel was set down for what appeared to be the last time. Joe put the nose-piece of the oxygen tube into place and visualized himself safe and snug in a storage room of the rocket.

He closed his eyes and went peacefully to sleep.

He slept a long time, to be awakened by a crushing—a wrenching—that all but drove his head down into his spine. The pain brought him sharply alert. He knew instantly what had happened.

Blast-off.

He braced himself against the sides of the barrel and gritted his teeth.

Soon it was better. Then no pres-

sure at all. Only the fierce happiness on his heart. He'd set a course and won through! He was on the way to the Moon!

Joe let plenty of time elapse. He knew it was well over an hour later when he unlimbered the torch to cut an escape-hole in the barrel. This, he knew, would be tricky. He could easily burn himself. The heat would be intense.

But it wasn't too bad. The aluminum cut quickly and in a matter of minutes, he was standing beside his barrel. As he'd suspected, it was a storage hold. The pitch darkness did not bother him. He'd come prepared with a small pencil flash that threw an adequate beam.

He found the door, opened it and went out into a long passageway . . .

NOW HE'D covered the length and breadth of the ship. He'd found a lot of rooms—all in pitch-darkness. No observation ports.

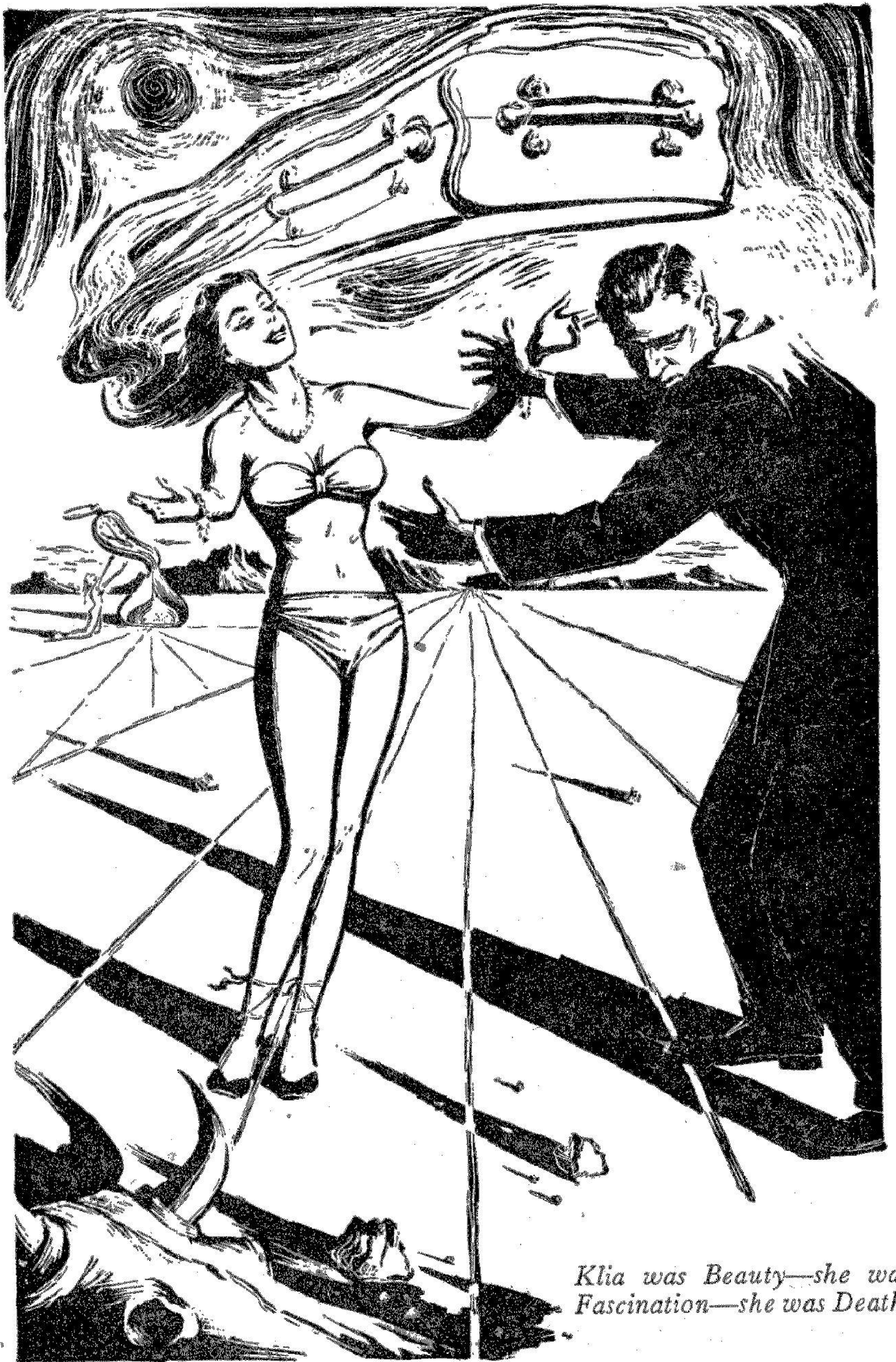
And no living thing.

He stood frozen in one of the rooms while the beam of his flash picked out a code stenciled on a steel plate over some piece of machinery. X59-306MY—Experimental—Explosion Rocket—Moon.

The flash dropped from Joe Spain's fingers. He stood in the pitch darkness while the jets vibrated through the rocket.

But there was no fear in him. Only the great pain of futility. Only his tears, and his whispered words:

"They'll never know. Nobody won't ever know!"



*Klia was Beauty—she was
Fascination—she was Death.*

Bitter Victory

By WALTER MILLER, Jr.

Klia had a beautiful body. And why not? She made it herself.

HE PROWLED the city's streets by night, watching the crowds with eyes of gray steel, waiting for Klia's probing thoughts to touch some unwary Terran. Sooner or later she would have to betray herself to him if she meant to pursue her goal. And then he would kill her and go. This was his task, set for him by the director of the Phoenician Quarantine Commission.

He had been here six months, and thus far the only evidence of her presence was a series of articles in a technical journal, written by a certain Willa E. Foggerty, M.S. The author had access to information possessed by no Terran scientist. The information was presented tidbit-style, almost humorously, and as pure speculation rather than as fact, but it was obviously calculated to steer the minds of readers toward certain doors that Klia wanted opened.

Klia's mental formative-patterns

were those of the paranoid, but having matured in a society where such patterns were the norm, she was neither insane nor neurotic. Her mind was keen, and her goals were those of the predator. San Rorrck had to find and kill her quickly.

He watched the streets by night because her race and his were both non-sleepers. They were capable of resting a part of the brain at a time, having two cortical areas for each bodily function. He knew she would become bored by night-time inactivity; sooner or later she would come wandering, while most of the city slept. In what guise would he find her? Her normal racial appearance did not conform to Terran standards. She was tall, willowy, nearly albino, with pink-gray eyes, slightly slanted, and with rich red hair that swept upward in a natural tufted appearance. But hair and skin could be dyed. And over a period of several weeks she could

control her circulatory and glandular systems in such a way that fatty deposits would appear where she desired them and disappear in other places so that she could change her features and her form at will, as he himself had done.

Of one thing he was certain: Her paranoid pride would not permit her to assume a guise regarded as ugly by this world. Most certainly she would make herself strikingly beautiful.

San Rorrek however had reduced his body-weight, padded his cheekbones to give himself a gaunt appearance, dyed his hair black and his skin a sallow shade. An irritant, rubbed into pinpricks on his face, resulted in mild acne that made him something less than handsome. He smeared his teeth with brown stain, wore shabby second-hand clothing, and a pair of plain-rimmed glasses. He was not here to attract attention; he was here to kill. He looked like a peddler or a laborer out of a job.

He was walking down a side-street at midnight when he caught the first faint aura of her presence. She was somewhere within a few blocks, and she was planting a suggestion in the mind of the Terran who would not recognize the source of the thoughts as stemming from outside his own consciousness.

Sweee-whew! That dame on the corner! Did she look at me? Think I'll walk that way.

This was it! San had not reached out to touch the Terran's mind, for in doing so he would broadcast his own thought-aura and reveal his presence to Klia. He had merely

listened to Klia's planting of the thought in the Terran's mind, and he caught the general direction from whence it came. He began walking rapidly up the street, then cut through the blackness of an alley.

Was she playing games, or had she chosen a Terran to be of some service to her? Perhaps she was bored, and only wanted a brief love-affair.

AT THE END of the alley, he paused to peer toward both intersections. There were a few people on the sidewalk, but no woman tall enough to be Klia. He jaywalked and darted down the next alleyway. If the Terran had responded immediately to her suggestion, they would perhaps be gone before he could reach them.

But then he caught another brief flash of thought—not words, but an image. She was helping the Terran imagine what she might look like without clothing. San chuckled as he trotted ahead. Unknowingly, she had given him a clue as to her appearance. Through glandular control, she had apparently padded herself to a remarkable condition of mammalian grandiloquence. The effect was almost surrealistic; the way a male might design a female if he had any choice in the matter.

"You liked that, eh?" snarled a quiet voice from the darkness of a doorway.

He stopped abruptly in mid-alley, caught in a puddle of moonlight. She had tricked him. There

had been no Terran. The phoney suggestion had been a trap. He glanced quickly around.

"Don't move," she snapped. "I've got a native gun on you—a projectile weapon, in case you aren't familiar with their artifacts."

He stood in stony silence, staring at the doorway until he made out her faint shadow. There was a tiny venom-gun strapped to his wrist, but its action would not be immediate, and if he used it, she would have ample time to kill him before she died. If it came to that he would use it, but now he hesitated, trying to piece together her immediate intentions.

He shrugged and grinned. "Okay. So I lost. Shoot and get it over with."

"Not here. They'd run an autopsy on you, pastoral. They'd figure you weren't quite Terran."

"I'm no pastoral. I'm an inventive."

"It's all the same to me, Rorrek. You're a lousy Thirder. Now move! Stay in the moonlight and walk slow. Stop when you come to the street. I'll be right behind you."

"Where are we going?"

"Shut up! And don't start making suggestions at a policeman, or I'll kill you."

Rorrek started walking. He felt her thoughts scanning lightly through various regions of consciousness-patterns until she found a taxi-driver. *Then: I gotta hunch there's a customer on the next street. Think I'll turn right.*

The taxi was approaching the alley entrance as they emerged. "Flag it," she ordered. Rorrek

obeyed grim-lipped.

"You get in first, darling," she said in a pleasant tone. "I like to sit on the right."

"That's just because I'm right handed, dear," he purred acidly.

"Where to, sir?"

Out of the city, the girl ordered Rorrek wordlessly. Tell him.

"Ask her. She's boss."

The gun jabbed him ruthlessly in the ribs. The driver grinned.

"Where to, lady?"

She hesitated. "A long trip?"

"How long?"

"Oh, thirty, forty miles. North."

"It'll cost you."

"That's all right. Will twenty dollars do it?"

"Maybe. Watch the meter and double it. You'll have to pay both ways."

"Let's go."

Rorrek glanced at her sourly as they moved through the traffic. She had been exaggerating only slightly with the mental image used to trap him. The platinum blonde hair, the gray eyes, the aristocratic features, the full, slightly cynical mouth—she conformed perfectly to the beauty standards of this world. The black dress revealed things that would have won her first place in any of the inane native female contests.

"You've done well by yourself, I see," he said, eyeing the expensive clothing and jewelry.

What telepath couldn't? And stop talking aloud.

He watched her for a moment. The gun was in her handbag. So was her hand. And she was keeping a sharp eye on him. Rorrek

frowned. No opening yet.

Where are we going?

Someplace where you can dig a hole without being seen.

Rorrek stared ahead at the traffic for a moment. He didn't need to ask her what the hole was for.

THE DRIVER was approaching an intersection and the light was just changing from green to red. Having heard the girl summon the taxi, Rorrek knew the man's consciousness pattern. He adjusted to it quickly and planted a rapid suggestion: *Damn the light! I can make it!*

The girl cursed and lifted the handbag. The light was already red. A car shot out from the other street. The brakes screamed. A police-whistle shrilled angrily.

"Shoot," Rorrek dared, smirking at Klia.

The handbag hesitated. "Make a wrong move and I'll have to."

The driver was too busy with his own troubles to hear them. The cop came stalking across the pavement. "You like to live dangerously, huh?" he said in a bored voice.

The cabby began a plaintive explanation.

"Come on, dear," said Klia. "We'll catch another cab."

"I like this one."

Get out, or I'll kill you and the cop too. Pay the driver.

Rorrek handed the driver a dollar. They crossed to the sidewalk and the girl looked shaken. This was a busier street and there were more pedestrians. He grinned at her again.

"May I buy you a drink before you finish me off?"

Surprisingly, she replied, "I'll let you live that long, pastoral. It's interesting to watch you try to wiggle out of it."

He knew she meant it. She could have hypnotized the cop and the driver, shot him in the cab, and strolled calmly away as one of a dozen multiple mental images. She could still do it, but evidently the idea of making him dig his own grave appealed to her icy sense of humor.

They entered a small bar and she directed him toward a secluded booth. "I'm surprised you haven't used your wrist weapon yet," she said as they sipped a martini. "Apparently you pastorals have no capability for self-sacrifice."

His face showed no surprise, but he rested his arm across the table. He smirked. "I was waiting for a better opportunity, but since you put it that way let's get it over with." His other hand darted toward the lethal wrist.

"One moment," she said.

He paused.

"Do you have an extra projectile?"

He frowned, then nodded.

She smiled again, and laid a braceleted white arm across the table. "I'll save you the trouble of firing. Prick me with it."

His throat started with surprise. "You're not immune," he hissed.

"To Ayoyo venom? Try me."

Rorrek gained new admiration for her. The process of immunization was an excruciatingly painful treatment covering three years and

usually it shortened the lifespan considerably. This could mean but one thing.

"You've been plotting this for a long time then?"

Her eyes narrowed and she leaned forward. "Correct, pastoral. Ever since you excluded us from your society and sent us to an ironless planet."

"I'm *not* a pastoral," he protested. "I'm an inventive."

"An artificial category. An inventive is a maladjusted pastoral who wishes he were a Klidd."

Her use of the ancient feudal name for her race startled him. His people had almost forgotten it. Once on Nu Phoenicis IV there had been the Klidds, or barons, the Algon, or serfs, and the Taknon, or artisans. The feudal system had lasted more than five thousand years, and because of natural selection operating within the occupational groups, the three classes had become genetically distinct. After the rise of a technology, the Klidds were overthrown and exiled to the ironless fourth planet where they formed their own ruthless social order under a strict space quarantine, enforced by the Taknon spaceforce which Rorrek served.

"I'll stop arguing heredity with you, Klia," he said. "Finish your drink and let's go."

"I'll call the signals."

"I love your Terran idiom," he grunted, "and your company is charming. But get your business over with."

"You're anxious to die?"

He shrugged indifferently. "Someone else will come and kill

you, if I don't do the job. They know you're here now."

A smile. "You underestimate these people, Rorrek." She waved a casual hand toward the rest of the room. "Before another yokel like you can find me, I'll have these primitives building a five-space drive and proving that Nu Phoenicis has habitable planets. Then let's see you stop us."

He nodded thoughtfully. "So that's the picture. You get Terra to send ships to your world, expecting no human life there. The ships come back to Terra full of your people, ready to take over. Then you get your hands on Terran iron and steel to use in attacking my people."

"In general, yes." Her gray eyes were icy calm, and she hated him with a fierceness that he could feel—hated him as a symbol of the race who had exiled her people.

"You're pathetic," he said quietly.

She flushed, then her face went hard. He bored in.

"I have always felt intensely sorry for your asinine emotion patterns."

No Klidd could endure that. She turned white and hissed a curse in her native tongue. He locked a probe in her consciousness, and when she squeezed the trigger of her gun, he was on his feet heaving the table into her lap. It crashed down as the gun exploded. The bullet tore his calf. He lashed out with a heavy fist, hard to her temple, and hoping it was brutal enough to kill her. She sagged and toppled to the floor.

THE LOUNGE was in an uproar, the people cringing toward the walls. A police-whistle made an ear-shocking screech as the traffic cop from the corner came lumbering in to investigate.

"Don't anyone move!" he bellowed, and charged across the room toward Rorrek, who was about to kick Klia's temple to insure her death. His foot froze and settled to the floor.

"Call an ambulance," the cop bawled at the manager. "Everybody stay back!"

Rorrek began, "It was purely an—"

"Don't say anything. Just stand there and keep your hands in sight."

Rorrek kept his hands in sight. He stared at the cop, suggesting nausea, suggesting a fluttering of the heart, suggesting asphyxiation. The cop began to gasp and reel. Rorrek increased the mental dosage. The cop choked and fainted.

As Rorrek walked calmly out into the night, he heard voices behind him telling that the girl was dead. He felt sick himself now. There was something compelling about Klia, something that attracted. He felt a little like a child, drawn toward a cruel mother—or a husband, lured to a wantonly selfish and unfaithful mistress. He knew she had to be killed, yet now that it was done, he felt rotten inside.

At last he found a doctor and had his flesh-wound dressed. He stared at the doctor peculiarly and the medic seemed to forget it had been a bullet wound. Rorrek went

home to his apartment, packed his belongings and called a cab.

An hour later he was aboard a flight for San Francisco. There was no returning to his home planet for he had ditched the ship at sea lest it be found by Terrans. Such were the quarantine regulations. He felt certain that Klia had done the same with her stolen Hydrian ship for another reason: Lest it be found by a commission agent such as himself. Also, her plan for leading Terrans spaceward, luring them to Phoenicis IV, and taking their ships, required that they continue in their naive belief that Terra possessed the only human life in the galaxy.

So he was stuck here for life unless a Taknon ship came to pick him up, and there had been no guarantee of that from the Commission. Secret landings on non-spacegoing planets were forbidden except in several specifically defined emergencies. Rescuing a second-class agent was not one of them.

He was faced with a life of ease but of loneliness. A telepath would have no difficulty acquiring tremendous wealth here, but a telepath would have no company—unless he could find a few natives whose neural associative circuits were so ordered as to make telepathy latently possible. Occasionally he had encountered a Terran whose thought-aura was vaguely perceptible. Perhaps, through long and patient hypnotic conditioning, their latent abilities could be brought forth. If the genetic hodge-podge could be straightened out,

Terran had high possibilities. Their basic genetic emotion-patterns were not as sharply divided into groups as those of Nu Phoenicis, but the patterns were present, and the conflict among them was present. Rather than calling them Pastorals, Inventives, and Imperials, as in the Phoenician case, he decided perhaps that the basic Terran-patterns could best be described by the goals they were inclined to favor. The "Security-Seekers", the "Knowledge-Seekers", and the "Glory-Seekers" perhaps.

Phoenician code forbade any tampering with non-threat cultural forms, but who was there to enforce it? And in a sense, this was his planet now. Marooned here, he could participate in a subtle way, and help a few local inventives find new directions. Maybe he owed them that much for killing Klia, who would certainly have steered them spaceward, although the end result would have been disastrous for them, had her plan worked.

THE FIRST WEEK in San Francisco he spent replenishing his funds through poker games, wrestling matches, and various forms of betting in which thought-projective powers were a distinct advantage. Then he rented a house in the suburbs, ordered half a ton of various electronic parts, and began building several computer units while he concentrated on revising his physical appearance to a more pleasing form.

As the weeks passed, he put on weight, removed the fatty tissue

from his cheekbones, thickened his cheeks enough to remove the gauntness, and restored his complexion to a healthier hue. When he was finished, he had the appearance of a gregarious young businessman, cleanly attractive but not offensively handsome.

He finished the computer shortly after he finished himself. It was not a large unit as computers went. It was built into a chassis the size of an eight-foot refrigerator. A Terran might say it was constructed to handle problems in that rarefied strata of mathematics known as the Von Neumann theory of games. But the twenty-four instruments on its face were calibrated in "points per share".

Rorrek spent a month in libraries, photographing stock-market reports covering a thirty-year period. These he laboriously studied, plotting the rise and fall of each stock on graphs, writing empirical equations to describe each graph, and feeding the equations to the computer's memory tanks. Fed also into the tanks, were thirty-year record-equations describing tax-rates, population growth, national income, government expenditures, world armaments, exports, imports, and average individual incomes. The computer, required to assume that all the variables were dependent upon one another, evolved an implicit function in some thirty-seven variable quantities.

He then fed it the "present conditions" and required it to extrapolate the values forward over a period of two months. Eleven stocks appeared due for sharp rises

within the period. San Rorrek invested ten thousand dollars. At the end of two months, the stocks had risen fifteen thousand. He corrected the small errors in the computer's estimates by supplying new data, then extrapolated again, selling and reinvesting in accordance with the new predictions. There was danger, of course, that a completely unpredictable series of events might occur to cause unfavorable market fluctuations. Therefore he very carefully watched world conditions, political developments, and technical advancements.

Klia's articles were still appearing in magazines and technical journals, but that was not surprising, considering the usual lag between the acceptance of an essay and its publication. And the pieces were having subtle repercussions in the news, attracting no attention in themselves, but spurring certain scientists to think along new lines. Klia had suggested a method for testing basic mental formative patterns in infancy; and now a western university's psychology department was setting up a research lab "for studying the basic affective reaction patterns of infants at birth".

Klia, under another pen-name, had suggested an extension of relativistic mechanics to cover hypothetical N-dimensional universes. The newspapers announced now that the famous mathematician, Larwich, was beginning work on the creation of a mathematical physics with no basic assumptions other than those of elementary arithmetic. "Man's only insight into

reality," said Larwich, "derives from his ability to count on his fingers. All else is purely experiential approximation."

Rorrek grinned. Klia had been trying to steer Terran inventors straight toward a five-space interstellar drive, while the government was still spending billions on rocket research in the hope of reaching the moon. She was trying to get the mathematicians to see the velocity of light as a constant *only* at one specific universe-level of five-space, and as a different constant at other levels. And she had managed to steer Larwich in the right direction.

Only one thing was lacking: an experiential tie between observable reality and the theory Larwich would certainly develop. Without it, the theory would remain merely abstruse mathematical speculation of an invariantive nature. Rorrek's fingers itched at the typewriter, longing to supply the missing suggestion. A guilt-reaction, he told himself, probably associated with Klia's death.

Nevertheless he wrote an essay entitled "Origin of Interstellar Hydrogen", and sent it to a university press periodical. The article suggested that the spontaneous appearance of matter in the four-space cosmos could be explained in terms of a five-space continuum with a circulation of matter along the fifth component.

The essay was rejected with a brief note from the editor: "Sorry, but we just last week purchased an essay dealing with the mechanics of this 'continuous creation' notion. Your style is good. Try us again,

soon, Editor."

Rorrek snorted and chucked the essay in the wastebasket. Some local yokel had probably beat him to the draw with some weirdly empirical notion that left out the tie with five-space.

The rejection irritated him. He decided to give it up for a while, and concentrate on making himself a millionaire. Then he learned that Dr. Larwich was in San Francisco for the summer. After some debate about the desirability of direct intervention, he found the professor's address—a modest cottage overlooking the bay with a short stretch of narrow beach before it.

RORREK RENTED a cottage half a mile away. Three days later he wandered^o past the professor's cottage, having spied three brown bodies sunbathing on the beach before it. As he drew nearer, he studied them curiously. An elderly couple and a girl in her late twenties, possibly Larwich's daughter. She was watching him casually—a large, dark girl with hazel eyes and firm breasts.

Rorrek approached the group. "Am I still on a public beach?" he asked, "Or am I a trespasser?"

The elderly couple glanced up questioningly. The girl smiled. "Trespassers are welcome. Help yourself." She had a nice musical voice.

"I've got the next cottage down the line," he said. "But I scarcely realized I had neighbors."

"It is lonely out here. Won't you sit with us awhile? You look tired."

Rorrek grinned and patted a slight bulge in his mid-section. "Trying to work off my bay window." He strolled toward them, scraping his feet in the sand.

The old man looked down at his own sagging belly, then glowered at the stranger. "Young man, you have just committed a grievous *faux pas*," he grunted.

"I'm Edith Larwich," said the girl. "This is my father, Frank Larwich . . . and my mother, Louise."

He nodded and sat down. "I'm Sam Rory." He hesitated, looking at the professor and gathering a frown. "Larwich—Frank Larwich—I've heard of you, I think. Is it Doctor Larwich—of the new-look in invariance viewpoints?"

The old man looked surprised. He lifted his eyebrows first at his wife, then his daughter. He extended his hand to Rorrek and looked a beam of amusement down his slender nose. "Young man, you have just absolved yourself of that *faux pas*. What school are you with?"

"No school."

"What research lab, then?"

"No lab, I'm a gambler."

"Bah! Stop joking. Laymen don't talk about invariance, or remember the names of old codgers like me."

He shrugged. "I apologize for being a layman, sir, but I like mathematics. I've read a few of your pieces in the digest."

Larwich glanced at his wife and daughter again. They were looking curiously at Rorrek.

"My fame comes as a distinct shock to me," the old man said

with a slight smile.

"Have a cup of iced tea," said Edith, pouring from a thermos.

He thanked her and managed to pull his eyes away from her body. Terran standards of beauty were beginning to appeal to him.

"When do you expect to publish your new theory, Doctor?" he asked casually.

"Make it 'Frank'," grunted the oldster. "And I expect to publish it within a few months. It's coming along much faster than I thought. In fact, it scares me sometimes."

Rorrek fell briefly thoughtful. Any man would could work that theory out in a few months was certainly the mental equal of the best minds of his own race. It startled him. Here seemed proof enough that Terran-humanity was going places, given a little intelligent bio-social reform.

"That's remarkable," he murmured. "I thought it would be at least two years."

"So did I. But Edith here helped me tremendously with certain down-to-earth suggestions. It may seem unbelievable to you, but I think this thing is going to have some practical applications, and apply to certain observable phenomena."

Rorrek looked sharply at the girl. She was smiling at him faintly with the cool green eyes. The old man laughed.

"Edith forgot to mention—it's Edith Larwich, Ph.D. in physics. She instantly spotted some possible correlations between my theory and some of the modern cosmologies."

Rorrek was still staring at her.

"Such as the mechanics of spontaneous creation of matter?" he asked quietly.

The girl nodded, and smiled amusement at her father who appeared taken aback. "If Sam Rory is really a gambler, let's not invite him to any poker games." She grinned at the visitor again. "This is remarkable. We'll have to get better acquainted."

He murmured pleasantly, but felt a vague uneasiness. He had come to plant a hint of the correlation in the mathematician's mind, but now there was no need to do so. When Larwich was through, physicists could build an experimental five-space generator on the basis of his theory. When the physicists were through making data-tables, engineers would be able to construct a working model interstellar drive, provided someone would make the investment. Rorrek, busy making a fortune in the stock-market, musingly saw himself as angel for the first ship.

Edith stood up, tugging at her suit to cover a streak of white hip. She smiled down at him. "Think I'll swim. Care to join me?"

"Leave him here for a while, will you?" grunted Larwich.

Rorrek nodded at the girl. "I'll meet you in the water."

She trotted toward the surf, lithe, brown, and lovely in the sun.

"Your daughter is very beautiful, sir," Rorrek murmured.

"Eh? Oh, thank you. I find myself marvelling about her change so much that I scarcely notice her prettiness."

"Change?"

"In personality. You see, she was nearly blind until a few months ago. Cataracts. And she was always so retiring, quiet and introspective. It's remarkable what the removal of a physical defect can do for a girl's personality. You wouldn't call her shy and retiring now, would you?"

"Not at all. Quite friendly, I'd say."

Rorrek watched her plunging gracefully in the surf, and he wondered at his vague uneasiness.

"What do you really do, Sam?" Larwich asked.

"Investor. I hit it lucky on the market. Gambler—same thing."

Larwich chuckled. "You evidently read technical publications as a hobby, then. Or are you working on a mathematical way to beat the stock market?"

Rorrek smiled enigmatically, and got to his feet. "You might try the Von Neumann theory of games," he offered, then smiled sheepishly. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll join your daughter for a swim."

SHE WAS far out beyond the feeble breakers when he trotted through the shallow water, but she rolled on her back to wave and watch him. A very beautiful, intelligent girl, he thought calculatingly. If he were to remain marooned on Terra, it would be interesting to see if normal procreation could result from marriage with a native. He felt an urge to touch the girl's mind, then decided against it for the present. Some Terrans seemed sensitively recep-

tive, and they became startled by undue power.

She lay treading water until he swam up beside her, then she smiled but her eyes were thoughtful.

"Water's nice!" he grunted.

"Is it?"

He frowned. "Why the challenging tone?"

"Who are you, anyway?"

"Just who I said I was. Sam Rory, gambler, investor."

She said nothing more about it, but her eyes were suspicious. They swam in silence for a time, then she called, "How's the beach down at your place?"

He hesitated. Was she angling?

"Just fine," he said. "Why don't you come down?"

She lifted her wet head from the tide and nodded soberly. "I will. Very soon."

Again he felt the vague uneasiness.

Rorrek spent the afternoon on his porch, watching the bay. Tomorrow he meant to go back to the suburbs, return to the task of making himself the wealthiest man in the country as quickly as possible, then start endowing universities with research grants like a fat old capitalist with a guilty conscience.

Twilight came, and he felt the loneliness of an alien longing for home. He visualized the warm, rolling hills of Phoenicis III, dotted with pastoral Algon villages, and the great walled city-states of the Taknon, covering hundreds of square miles and set in the midst of the Algon landscape. They

worked in harmony, the two races—each maintaining its own government, each keeping itself socially and biologically separated, yet each realizing that one could not exist and prosper without the other. It was a class society that worked, worked because the classes were divided according to the goals they sought, not according to any artificial framework. Of course, Man's goals were chosen in the light of his emotions and aptitudes, and at least among the Phoenicians, emotion and aptitude patterns were founded on genetic bed-rock. It was only rarely that Taknon aptitudes were born in an Algun village, and equally rare when a pastorally inclined child appeared in the Taknon cities.

Loneliness weighed heavily on him. With some misgivings he closed his eyes, and searched through the transor regions for the Larwich girl's pattern of consciousness. When he passed through it, he started up with a low gasp—and lost the pattern. There had been a knife-edge sharpness about it—a clarity of focus that suggested resonant neural circuits as in the trained telepath. He groped for it again.

But when he found it, the sharpness was gone—if it had really been there. The transor was strong but blurred, unreadable. He decided his first impression had been illusion.

I wonder what that young man is doing? he suggested. *He did invite me to his beach. Maybe if I walked down that way.*

He paused a moment, trying to

catch the blurred images that swam in leisure through her consciousness. But they were too muddled. He withdrew from her and waited. Half-a-mile might be too far for the untrained mind to catch the faint suggestion, and even though she would mistake the thoughts for her own, she might offer herself some counter-excuse for not coming.

HE WATCHED the cottage in the failing gray of twilight. After a few minutes, the screen door opened, and someone stood on the porch. Then she trotted down the steps to the beach and came walking his way, but looking toward the sea. As she drew nearer, he saw that she was wearing white shorts and a pale blue blouse with the tail knotted about her waist. The wind whipped the blouse against her breasts and ruffled her short dark hair like a nest of feathers. He watched her come toward him with narrow speculative eyes, and he wondered again: Was a procreative union possible here?

She looked toward him and waved, breaking his reverie, then on apparently sudden impulse turned and plodded through the sand toward his porch.

"Am I trespassing? Or did you invite me to your beach?"

"Come on up," he called. "I was just wishing you'd drop by."

She hooked her foot on the step and cocked her head at him. "Why?"

It startled him. "The answer to that," he chuckled, "might be

found in textbooks of psychology and biology, particularly the latter. Come up and sit down."

"Not if you're going to be biological."

"Only introspectively so. I have insufficient data on the subject to feel safe in rash experiments."

She laughed and came up to take a chair, propping her long, trim legs on the rail. "The subject is a carnivore who might chew off an ear."

"Mmmp! How about a nice thick steak with onions and french fries and a gallon of beer?"

"The bloated subject would fall asleep in her cage."

"Exactly."

She watched him with cool amusement in the dusk. "I think we find each other attractive."

"I'm glad it's mutual. I have plans for you."

She dropped her legs, rested her elbows on her knees, and swung half around to grin peculiarly, head cocked up at him. "Okay, Sam. Finish the funny story."

He leaned toward her and tried to steal as softly as possible into her consciousness pattern, but he kept his voice light and casual.

"The plan is simple biology, but it involves many unknowns as yet. For instance—"

He pulled her face toward him slowly, and moulded her mouth with his. Quietly they slipped to their feet, locked tightly together, laughing quietly with soft fire where their faces touched. He brought his mind slowly into full resonance with her pattern, demanding her to respond.

The response was white flame, but not of the body. His mind reeled for an instant before he understood. *Full focus! Too bright!* And something hard against his ribs.

You should have been born a Klidd!

He backed away, staring at her, and the glint of metal in her hand.

I wasn't certain, she went on until you threw that full resonance at me.

"Klia!"

"Yes." She found a cigaret with her left hand and lit it while she held the gun on him with her right. He could see her face in the match-flare, and it appeared tight and drawn.

"Your lipstick is smeared," he offered.

"Thanks. It was a pleasure. I'm really sorry I have to kill you."

"Like you killed Larwich's blind daughter and took her place?"

Klia snorted. "She's not dead. She's still blind, and she's an amnesiac in a Pennsylvania psychopathic ward."

"Hypnotically induced amnesia, undoubtedly."

"Right. I had to get her personality patterns, and leave her a blank."

"I thought I left you dead on the floor."

She sighed impatiently. "Would a Terran know when a Phoenician was dead?"

Rorrek saw his blunder and gritted his teeth. He'd been a fool to believe. Naturally, every time someone touched her wrist to test her pulse, she had simply stopped

her heartbeat until the fellow let go, or perhaps shut off the circulation in the arm.

"Well, you've got Larwich well on the road to the theory of a space drive, I see."

She nodded, started to reply, paused, then: "You didn't suspect me because you thought I was dead. Then why did you come prowling around Larwich?"

"To do what you've already done."

"You're lying."

"See for yourself." He began sliding into resonance with her, but she backed away warily and blocked him out.

"You can break it whenever you want to," he said.

She risked it, and their transors found sharp focus again. He reeled off the contents of his associative circuits relating to Larwich and his theory, reeled them off too rapidly for them to be inventions of the moment. Then he switched to memories concerning his thoughts of her.

"Why did you do that?" she muttered when he was through. Her voice was shaky, and the gun seemed to be sagging in her hand.

He shrugged. "We're a long way from Nu Phoenicis. I expect to be here for good."

"You will be," she said ominously, straightening. "Start marching down to the water."

"Why?"

"The tide's going out. You'll go with it."

"Suppose I suggest we work together."

She laughed scornfully. "Move,

quickly, Taknon!"

He walked slowly down the steps and into the faint moonlight. He moved ahead with a calm leisurely tread. Behind him the girl laughed.

"You're part Klidd, Rorrek. A hybrid—or a throwback."

He failed to ask her why.

"I could feel affection for a Taknon, but I couldn't love one. I've watched you. You're part Klidd. I can feel it."

He wondered why his throat constricted. He said nothing.

"I love you, Rorrek. Damn your hide."

But she loved her planet more.

"What are you going to do about Larwich now?" he asked coldly. "Are you going to switch to someone else, or are you going to keep on brazening it out?"

"Switch. I'm through with him. He's on the right course."

Rorrek started wading into shallow water.

"Go on out past the breakers," she called. "I don't want you to wash back in."

"Glad to oblige," he grunted, but he paused to look back. She had kicked off her sandals and was wading after him.

She stopped, gun glinting in the moonlight. "Well?"

"One thing."

He scanned for her mind, but she blocked, refusing him resonance. He bludgeoned through until he made a strong but fuzzy contact. He held the contact, but turned away and began wading through the gentle rush of breakers while he wandered through his associative circuits concerning her.

Stop it, Rorrek!

Then the resonance was complete, and he chuckled, because she was going to feel it when she shot him. Beyond the breakers, he turned again to face her. She was reeling dizzily, holding the gun at arm's length, with her left hand pressed tight to her face.

HE WAS unprepared for the shots when they came. Two went wide, but the third seared his chest, and he went down, fighting for air, hearing a choking scream from Klia. He gasped once and went under, swimming weakly for deeper water. Another bullet streaked phosphorescence through the blackness about him. He drove still deeper, clinging precariously to consciousness. Another slug streaked under him and he veered upward. Seven cartridges in the gun, five gone. If he could only live a little longer.

Then he had to rise for air. He spun around and came up slowly, facing shore. She was walking dejectedly back across the beach toward his cottage. He waited for her to look back. He dog-paddled with the waves, but the tide seemed to be sweeping him out.

"*PraTalv' Bladen, Klia!*" he choked in their native tongue. "For the love of Man!"

She heard him. She turned slowly, watched him coldly for a moment, pistol lifted high.

"*PraTalv' Kliddn, Taknon!*" came her icy paraphrase.

The gun barked, and barked again. Seven! But this time it was

his abdomen, and he heard himself screaming as he fought toward shore. He could only partially control the flow of blood to the wounds. When tissue cried for blood, the unconscious reflex let it go. It was like holding one's breath, and occasionally he had to bleed.

She was standing there watching him, white in the moonlight, locked in a kind of trance.

Go, he thought at her savagely. When I get there, I'll kill you—for those last two shots.

She looked at the gun in her hand. She let it drop, stared down at it, wiped the hand distastefully on her shorts. She backed away a step, stumbled in the sand, and sat down, rolling her head on her knees. He groped for her mind, and she erected no block. She hoped he would die before he got to shore, but she wasn't going to move.

Fate, about to be satisfied—it gave him angry strength. A breaker washed over him from behind, and he rode with it briefly. When it passed him by and dropped him, he stood chest-deep, wading shoreward. He peered at her dazedly, hands clenching and unclenching in anticipation. He let her feel the strength of his hate, but her thoughts were wandering—her home, her people. But she saw them differently somehow, as if she were no longer capable of being guided by their values. Her affective framework had collapsed. She sat in a bewildered daze.

He staggered from the water and fell to his knees on the sand. He crawled toward her with savage deliberation in the moonlight.

Run, Klia—I'm going to kill you!

She looked up slowly, watched him crawling toward her. Then she pulled herself up and went to meet him. Snarling, he lurched for her.

"Let me get you to a doctor," she said.

He laughed, groped for her. She slipped her shoulders under his arm to support him. His fist cracked savagely. Something brittle shattered. She screamed and pawed at her face. He hit her again and again, rolling across the sand, battering her face until his fists were driving into wet pulp.

"My eyes! My eyes!"

Weakly he crouched over her, staring. She had been wearing contact lenses. The green irises had been stained on the glass to cover her gray ones. Now jagged slivers of glass protruded from under her eyelids. She rolled her head and moaned, trying to escape him.

Flashlights were coming down the beach, and Doc Larwich was shouting frantically. Rorrek backed away from the girl. She came to her feet and began running blindly, staggering toward a sand embankment.

"Rorrek!" The cry was plaintive.

He moved drunkenly after her, groping for resonance, steering her toward the pathway around the cottage. His car loomed on the driveway. He guided her into it, followed her.

The girl drove, watching the road through his eyes.

You're finished, Klia!

There was only wildness and fright in her racing mind. *My eyes,*

my eyes, my eyes . . .

He let her alone, clinging precariously to consciousness and fighting internal hemorrhage. The glaring lights on the road dazed him, and the car weaved crazily as she used his dimming vision to guide her.

He knew he had won. He had stopped her, for as in every paranoiac culture, loss of function or deformity was cause for shame and ridicule among the Klidd. A blinded Klidd, like a Kwakiutl tribesman or Zulu warrior, was disgraced and ashamed. The only recourse was death.

Why didn't she accept it then? He was waiting for her to ram the car into a truck or bridge, but she drove as straight as his failing sight would allow.

A SIGN on the road said, "Robert Honkler, Physician and Surgeon." He stared at the white house, and the girl pulled to the curb.

"Get out!" she ordered, but left the engine running and stayed behind the wheel.

So that was it. She brought him here, and now, blinded, she was going to plunge on.

"Why?" he gasped. "Why—help—me—?"

"*PraTalv' Bladen, Rorrek!*" she snapped with a sarcastic viciousness that masked her heart. "—for love of Man!"

He jerked the key from the ignition and fell across her to hold her in the car. His elbow pressed against the horn and held it down.

"Let me go!"

We'll work together, Klia. We'll get these people into space, and somehow we'll help your people.

She laughed bitterly. *Help them? You never gave them a chance! When the feudal order collapsed, the Taknon and the Algun adapted themselves to technology. But you banished the Klidd without letting them find a place in the new society. You hated them too much as your former tyrants.*

"A place? What place could a Klidd—"

Administrators, coordinators, organizers. But you exiled us to a world without iron, condemned us to an eternal stone age. There is but one fundamental right of Man, Taknon! The right to try. You denied it to us.

Footsteps were coming down the walk, and gentle hands were dragging them out of the car. Came blackness.

When he awoke, he expected to see iron bars, or the walls of a hospital room. Instead, he was in his own home in the suburbs. He tried to move, and groaned. Something rustled in the room.

"Lie still," she said.

He rolled his head weakly to look at her. She sat stiffly in a straight-

backed chair by the window, morning sunlight playing in her hair. There was a bandage across her eyes. He groped for her mind, and found the answer. She had helped the doctor forget that he had ever seen three bullet-wounds and a pair of ruined eyes.

"As soon as you're able to get up, I'll go," she said coldly.

"No. You'll stay. We'll build ships. We'll get your people to a ferrous planet somehow—an uninhabited one. If they can build a civilization from scratch, they deserve it."

She stood up and faced the window for a time, soaking in the warm sunlight, and he allowed her the privacy of her thoughts.

The right to try—even for a race of power-grabbers.

PraTalv' Bladen. For the love of Man.

"My eyes," she said dully. "He said there's not much chance."

"There is a chance?"

She shrugged.

"We still have *one* pair." And he showed her herself through them; showed her herself with ever-increasing daring until she blushed crimson.

But her hands reached out to him.



When Black Eyes needed a nap—everybody slept!

BLACK EYES *and the* DAILY GRIND

By MILTON LESSER

The little house pet from Venus didn't like New York, so New York had to change.

HE LIKED the flat cracking sound of the gun. He liked the way it slapped back against his shoulder when he fired. Somehow it did not seem a part of the dank, steaming Venusian jungle. Probably, he realized with a smile, it was the only old-fashioned recoil rifle on the entire planet. As if anyone else would want to use one of those old bone-cracking relics today! But they all failed to realize it made sport much more interesting.

"I haven't seen anything for a while," his wife said. She had a young, pretty face and a strong young body. If you have money these days, you could really keep a thirty-five year old woman looking trim.

Not on Venus, of course. Venus was an outpost, a frontier, a hot, wet, evil-smelling place that beckoned only the big-game hunter. He

said, "That's true. Yesterday we could bag them one after the other, as fast as I could fire this contraption. Today, if there's anything bigger than a mouse, it's hiding in a hole somewhere. You know what I think, Lindy?"

"What?"

"I think there's a reason for it. A lot of the early Venusian hunters said there were days like this. An area filled with big lizards and cats and everything else the day before suddenly seems to clear out, for no reason. It doesn't make sense."

"Why not? Why couldn't they all just decide to make tracks for someplace else on the same day?"

He slapped at an insect that was buzzing around his right ear, then mopped his sweating brow with a handkerchief. His name was Judd Whitney, and people said he had a lot of money. Now he laughed, pat-

ting his wife's trim shoulder under the white tunic. "No, Lindy. It just doesn't work that way. Not on Earth and not on Venus, either. You think there's a pied-piper or something which calls all the animals away?"

"Maybe. I don't know much about those things."

"No. I don't think they went anywhere. They're just quiet. They didn't come out of their holes or hovels or down from the trees. But why?"

"Well, let's forget it. Let's go back to camp. We can try again tomorrow—look! Look, there's something!"

Judd followed her pointing finger with his eyes. Half-hidden by the creepers and vines clinging to an old tree-stump, something was watching them. It wasn't very big and it seemed in no hurry to get away.

"What is it?" Lindy wanted to know.

"Don't know. Never saw anything like it before. Venus is still an unknown frontier; the books only name a couple dozen of the biggest animals. But hell, Lindy, that's not *game*. I don't think it weighs five pounds."

"It's cute, and it has a lovely skin."

Judd couldn't argue with that. Squatting on its haunches, the creature was about twenty inches tall. It had a pointed snout and two thin, long ears. Its eyes were very big and very round and quite black. They looked something like the eyes of an Earthian tarsier, but the tarsier were bloody little beasts. The

skin was short and stiff and was a kind of silvery white. Under the sheen, however, it seemed to glow. A diamond is colorless, Judd thought, but when you see it under light a whole rainbow of colors sparkle deep within it. This creature's skin was like that, Judd decided.

"If we could get enough of them," Lindy was saying, "I'd have the most unusual coat! Do you think we could find enough, Judd?"

"I doubt it. Never saw anything like it before, never heard of anything like it. You'd need fifty of 'em, anyway. Let's forget about it—too small to shoot, anyway."

"No, Judd. I want it."

"Well, I'm not going to stalk a five-pound—hey, wait a minute! I taught you how to use this rifle, so why don't you bag it?"

Lindy grinned. "That's a fine idea. I was a little scared of some of those big lizards and cats and everything, but now I'm going to take you up on it. Here, give me your gun."

Judd removed the leather thong from his shoulder and handed the weapon to her. She looked at it a little uncertainly, then took the clip of shells which Judd offered and slammed it into the chamber. The little creature sat unmoving.

"Isn't it peculiar that it doesn't run away, Judd?"

"Sure is. Nothing formidable about that animal, so unless it has a hidden poison somewhere, just about anything in this swamp could do it in. To survive it would have to be fast as hell and it would have to keep running all the time. Beats

me, Lindy."

"Well, I'm going to get myself one pelt toward that coat, anyway. Watch, Judd: is this the way?" She lifted the rifle to her shoulder and squinted down the sights toward the shining creature.

"Yeah, that's the way. Only relax. Relax. Shoulder's so tense you're liable to dislocate it with the kick. There—that's better."

Now Lindy's finger was wrapped around the trigger and she remembered Judd had told her to squeeze it, not to pull it. If you pulled the trigger you jerked the rifle and spoiled your aim. You had to squeeze it slowly . . .

The animal seemed politely interested.

Suddenly, a delicious languor stole over Lindy. It possessed her all at once and she had no idea where it came from. Her legs had been stiff and tired from the all-morning trek through the swamp, but now they felt fine. Her whole body was suffused in a warm, satisfied glow of well-being. And laziness. It was an utterly new sensation and she could even feel it tingling even at the roots of her hair. She sighed and lowered the rifle.

"I don't want to shoot it," she said.

"You just told me you did."

"I know, but I changed my mind. What's the matter, can't I change my mind?"

"Of course you can change your mind. But I thought you wanted a coat of those things."

"Yes, I suppose I do. But I don't want to shoot it, that's all."

Judd snorted. "I think you have a streak of softness someplace in that pretty head of yours!"

"Maybe. I don't know. But I'd still like the pelt. Funny, isn't it?"

"Okay, okay! But don't ask to use the gun again." Judd snatched it from her hands. "If you don't want to shoot it, then I will. Maybe we can make you a pair of gloves or something from the pelt."

And Judd pointed his ancient rifle at the little animal preparing to snap off a quick shot. It would be a cinch at this distance. Even Lindy wouldn't have missed, if she hadn't changed her mind.

Judd yawned. He'd failed to realize he was so tired. Not an aching kind of tiredness, but the kind that makes you feel good all over. He yawned again and lowered the rifle. "Changed my mind," he said. "I don't want to shoot it, either. What say we head back for camp?"

Lindy gripped his hand impulsively. "All right, Judd—but I had a brainstorm! I want it for a pet!"

"A pet?"

"Yes. I think it would be the cutest thing. Everyone would look and wonder and I'll adore it!"

"We don't know anything about it. Maybe Earth would be too cold, or too dry, or maybe we don't have anything it can eat. There are liable to be a hundred different strains of bacteria that can kill it."

"I said I want it for a pet. See? Look at it! We can call it Black Eyes."

"Black Eyes—" Judd groaned.

"Yes, Black Eyes. If you don't do this one thing for me, Judd—"

"Okay—okay. But I'm not going

to do anything. You want it, you take it."

Lindy frowned, looked at him crossly, then sloshed across the swamp toward Black Eyes. The creature waited on its stump until she came quite close, and then, with a playful little bound, it hopped onto her shoulder, still squatting on its haunches. Lindy squealed excitedly and began to stroke its silvery fur.

A MONTH LATER, they returned to Earth. Judd and Lindy and Black Eyes. The hunting trip had been a success—Judd's trophies were on their way home on a slow freighter, and he'd have some fine heads and skins for his study-room. Even Black Eyes had been no trouble at all. It ate scraps from their table, forever sitting on its haunches and staring at them with its big black eyes. Judd thought it would make one helluva lousy pet, but he didn't tell Lindy. Trouble was, it never did anything. It merely sat still, or occasionally it would bounce down to the floor and mince along on its hind-legs for a scrap of food. It never uttered a sound. It did not frolic and it did not gambol. Most of the time it could have been carved from stone. But Lindy was happy and Judd said nothing.

They had a little trouble with the customs officials. This because nothing unknown could be brought to Earth without a thorough examination.

At the customs office, a bespectacled official stared at Black Eyes, scratching his head. "Never

seen one like that before."

"Neither have I," Judd admitted.

"Well, I'll look in the book." The man did, but there are no thorough tomes on Venusian fauna. "Not here."

"I could have told you."

"Well, we'll have to quarantine it and study it. That means you and your wife go into quarantine, too. It could have something that's catching."

"Absurd!" Lindy cried.

"Sorry, lady. I only work here."

"You and your bright ideas," Judd told his wife acidly. "We may be quarantined a month until they satisfy themselves about Black Eyes."

The customs official shrugged his bony shoulders, and Judd removed a twenty credit note from his pocket and handed it to the man. "Will this change your mind?"

"I should say not! You can't bribe me, Mr. Whitney! You can't—" The man yawned, stretched languidly, smiled. "No sir, you can keep your money, Mr. Whitney. Guess we don't have to examine your pet after all. Mighty cute little feller. Well, have fun with it. Come on, move along now." And, as they were departing with Black Eyes, still not believing their ears: "Darn this weather! Makes a man so lazy. . . ."

It was after the affair at the customs office, that Black Eyes uttered its first sound. City life hasn't changed much in the last fifty years. Jet-cars still streak around the circumferential highways, their whistles blaring. Factories still belch smoke and steam, although the new

atomic power plants have lessened that to a certain extent. Crowds still throng the streets, noisy, hurrying, ill-mannered. It's one of those things that can't be helped. A city has to live, and it has to make noise.

But it seemed to frighten Lindy's new pet. It stared through the jet-car window on the way from the spaceport to the Whitney's suburban home, its black eyes welling with tears.

"Look!" Judd exclaimed. "Black Eyes can cry!"

"A crying pet, Judd. I knew there would be something unusual about Black Eyes, I just knew it!"

The tears in the big black eyes overflowed and tumbled out, rolling down Black Eyes' silvery cheeks. And then Black Eyes whimpered. It was only a brief whimper, but both Judd and Lindy heard it, and even the driver turned around for a moment and stared at the animal.

The driver stopped the jet. He yawned and rested his head comfortably on the cushioned seat. He went quietly to sleep.

A MAN NAMED Merrywinkle owned the Merrywinkle Shipping Service. That, in itself, was not unusual. But at precisely the moment that Black Eyes unleashed its mild whimper, Mr. Merrywinkle—up-town and five miles away—called an emergency conference of the board of directors and declared:

"Gentlemen, we have all been working too hard, and I, for one, am going to take a vacation. I don't know when I'll be back, but it won't be before six months."

"But C.M.," someone protested. "There's the Parker deal and the Gillette contract and a dozen other things. You're needed!"

Mr. Merrywinkle shook his bald head. "What's more, you're all taking vacations, with pay. Six months, each of you. We're closing down Merrywinkle Shipping for half a year. Give the competition a break, eh?"

"But C.M.! We're about ready to squeeze out Chambers Parcel Co.! They'll get back on their feet in six months."

"Never mind. Notify all departments of the shut-down, effective immediately. Vacations for all."

WHO SHUT off the assembly belt?" the foreman asked mildly. He was not a mild man and he usually stormed and ranted at the slightest provocation. This was at Clewson Jetcraft, and you couldn't produce a single jet-plane without the assembly belt, naturally.

A plump little man said, "I did."

"But why?" the foreman asked him, smiling blandly.

"I don't know. I just did."

The foreman was still smiling. "I don't blame you."

Two days later, Clewson Jetcraft had to lay off all its help. They put ads in all the papers seeking new personnel but no one showed up. Clewson was forced to shut down.

THE CRACK Boston to New York pneumo-tube commuter's special pulled to a bone-jarring

stop immediately outside the New York station. Some angry commuters pried open the conductor's cab, and found the man snoozing quite contentedly. They awakened him, but he refused to drive the train any further. All the commuters had to leave the pneumo-train and edge their way along three miles of catwalk to the station. No one was very happy about it, but the feeling of well-being which came over them all nipped any possible protest in the bud.

BLACK EYES whimpered again when Judd and Lindy reached home but after that it was quiet. It just sat on its haunches near the window and stared out at the city.

The quiet city.

Nothing moved in the streets. Nothing stirred. People remained at home watching local video or the new space-video from Mars. At first it was a good joke, and the newspapers could have had a field day with it, had the newspapers remained in circulation. After four days, however, they suspended publication. On the fifth day, there was a shortage of food in the city, great stores of it spoiling in the warehouses. Heat and light failed after a week, and the fire department ignored all alarms a day later.

But everything did not stop. School teachers still taught their classes; clerks still sold whatever goods were left on local shelves. Librarians were still at their desks.

Conservatives said it was a liberal plot to undermine capital and demand higher wages; liberals

said big business could afford the temporary layoff and wanted to squeeze out the small businessman and labor unions.

Scientists pondered and city officials made speeches over video.

"Something," one of them observed, "has hit our city. Work that requires anything above a modicum of sound has become impossible; in regards to such work people have become lazy. No one can offer any valid suggestions concerning the malady. It merely exists. However, if a stop is not put to it—and soon—our fair city will disintegrate. Something is making us lazy, and that laziness can spell doom, being a compulsive lack of desire to create any noise or disturbance. If anyone believes he has the solution, he should contact the Department of Science at once. If you can't use the video-phone, come in person. But come! Every hour which passes adds to the city's woes."

Nothing but scatter-brained ideas for a week, none of them worth consideration. Then the bespectacled custom's official who had bypassed quarantine for Black Eyes, got in touch with the authorities. He had always been a conscientious man—except for that one lapse. Maybe the queer little beast had nothing to do with this crisis. But then again, the custom's official had never before—or since—had that strange feeling of lassitude. Could there be some connection?

A staff of experts on extra-terrestrial fauna was dispatched to the Whitney residence, although, indeed, the chairman of the Department of Science secretly considered

the whole idea ridiculous.

The staff of experts introduced themselves. Then, ignoring the protests of Lindy, went to work on Black Eyes. At first Judd thought the animal would object, but apparently it did not. While conditions all about them in the city worsened, the experts spent three days studying Black Eyes.

They found nothing out of the ordinary.

Black Eyes merely stared back at them, and but for an accident, they would have departed without a lead. On the third day, a huge mongrel dog which belonged to the Whitney's next-door neighbors somehow slipped its leash. It was a fierce and ugly animal, and it was known to attack anything smaller than itself. It jumped the fence and landed in Judd Whitney's yard. A few loping bounds took it through an open window, ground level. Inside, it spied Black Eyes and made for the creature at once, howling furiously.

Black Eyes didn't budge.

And the mongrel changed its mind! The slavering tongue withdrew inside the chops, the howling stopped. The mongrel lay down on the floor and whined. Presently it lost all interest, got to its feet, and left as it had come.

Other animals were brought to the Whitney home. Cats. Dogs. A lion from the city zoo, starved for two days and brought in a special mobile cage by its keeper. Black Eyes was thrust into the cage and the lion gave forth with a hideous yowling. Soon it stopped, rolled over, and slept.

THE SCIENTISTS correlated their reports, returned with them to the Whitney house. The leader, whose name was Jamison, said: "As closely as we can tell, Black Eyes is the culprit."

"What?" Lindy demanded.

"Yes, Mrs. Whitney. Your pet, Black Eyes."

"Oh, I don't believe it!"

But Judd said, "Go ahead, Dr. Jamison. I'm listening."

"Well, how does an animal—any animal—protect itself?"

"Why, in any number of ways. If it has claws or a strong jaw and long teeth, it can fight. If it is fleet of foot, it can run. If it is big and has a tough hide, most other animals can't hurt it anyway. Ummm, doesn't that about cover it?"

"You left out protective coloration, defensive odors, and things like that. Actually, those are most important from our point of view, for Black Eyes' ability is a further ramification of that sort of thing. Your pet is not fast. It isn't strong. It can't change color and it has no offensive odor to chase off predatory enemies. It has no armor. In short, can you think of a more helpless creature to put down in those Venusian swamps?"

After Judd had shaken his head, Dr. Jamison continued: "Very well, Black Eyes should not be able to survive on Venus—and yet, obviously the creature did. We can assume there are more of the breed, too. Anyway, Black Eyes survives. And I'll tell you why.

"Black Eyes has a very uncommon ability to sense danger when it approaches. And sensing danger,

Black Eyes can thwart it. Your creature sends out certain emanations—I won't pretend to know what they are—which stamp aggression out of any predatory creatures. Neither of you could fire upon it—right?"

"Umm-mm, that's true," Judd said.

Lindy nodded.

"Well, that's one half of it. There's so much about life we don't understand. Black Eyes uses energy of an unknown intensity, and the result maintains Black Eyes' life. Now, although that is the case, your animal did not live a comfortable life in the Venusian swamp. Because no animal would attack it, it could not be harmed. Still, from what you tell me about that swamp. . . .

"Anyhow, Black Eyes was glad to come away with you, and everything went well until you landed in New York. The noises, the clattering, the continual bustle of a great city—all this frightened the creature. It was being attacked—or, at least that's what it must have figured. Result: it struck back the only way it knew how. Have you ever heard about sub-sonic sound-waves, Mr. Whitney, waves of sound so low that our ears cannot pick them up—waves of sound which can nevertheless stir our emotions? Such things exist, and, as a working hypothesis, I would say Black Eyes' strange powers rest along those lines. The whole city is idle because Black Eyes is afraid!"

In his exploration of Mars, of Venus, of the Jovian Moons—Judd

Whitney had seen enough of extra-terrestrial life to know that virtually anything was possible, and Black Eyes would be no exception to that rule.

"What do you propose to do?" Judd demanded.

"Do? Why, we'll have to kill your creature, naturally. You can set a value on it and we will meet it, but Black Eyes must die."

"No!" Lindy cried. "You can't be sure, you're only guessing, and it isn't fair!"

"My dear woman, don't you realize this is a serious situation? The city's people will starve in time, No one can even bring food in because the trucks make too much noise! As an alternative, we could evacuate, but is your pet more valuable than the life of a great city?"

"N-no. . . ."

"Then, please! Listen to reason!"

"Kill it," Judd said. "Go ahead."

Dr. Jamison withdrew from his pocket a small blasting pistol used by the Department of Domestic Animals for elimination of injured creatures. He advanced on Black Eyes, who sat on its haunches in the center of the room, surveying the scientist.

Dr. Jamison put his blaster away. "I can't," he said. "I don't want to."

Judd smiled. "I know it. No one—no *thing*—can kill Black Eyes. You said so yourself. It was a waste of time to try it. In that case—"

"In that case," Dr. Jamison finished for him, "we're helpless. There isn't a man—or an animal—on Earth that will destroy this

thing. Wait a minute—does it sleep, Mr. Whitney?”

“I don’t think so. At least, I never saw it sleep. And your team of scientists, did they report anything?”

“No. As far as they could see, the creature never slept. We can’t catch it unawares.”

“Could you anesthetize it?”

“How? It can sense danger, and long before you could do that, it would stop you. It’s only made one mistake, Mr. Whitney: it believes the noises of the city represent a danger. And that’s only a negative mistake. Noise won’t hurt Black Eyes, of course. It simply makes the animal unnecessarily cautious. But we cannot anesthetize it any more than we can kill it.”

“I could take it back to Venus.”

“Could you? Could you? I hadn’t thought of that.”

Judd shook his head. “I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t?”

“It won’t let me. Somehow it can sense our thoughts when we think something it doesn’t want. I can’t take it to Venus! No man could, because it doesn’t want to go.”

“My dear Mr. Whitney—do you mean to say you believe it can *think*?”

“Uh-uh. Didn’t say that. It can sense our thoughts, and that’s something else again.”

Dr. Jamison threw his hands up over his head in a dramatic gesture. “It’s hopeless,” he said.

THINGS GREW worse. New York crawled along to a standstill. People began to move from

the city. In trickles, at first, but the trickles became torrents, as New York’s ten million people began to depart for saner places. It might take months—it might even take years, but the exodus had begun. Nothing could stop it. Because of a harmless little beast with the eyes of a tarsier, the life of a great city was coming to an end.

Word spread. Scientists all over the world studied reports on Black Eyes. No one had any ideas. Everyone was stumped. Black Eyes had no particular desire to go outside. Black Eyes merely remained in the Whitney house, contemplating nothing in particular, and stopping everything.

Dr. Jamison, however, was a persistent man. Judd got a letter from him one day, and the following afternoon he kept his appointment with the scientist.

“It’s good to get out,” Judd said, after a three hour walk to the Department of Science Building. “I can go crazy just staring at that thing.”

“I have it, Whitney.”

“You have what? Not the way to destroy Black Eyes? I don’t believe it!”

“It’s true. Consider. Everyone in the world does not yet know of your pet, correct?”

“I suppose there are a few people who don’t—”

“There are many. Among them, are the crew of a jet-bomber which has been on maneuvers in Egypt. We have arranged everything.”

“Yes? How?”

“At noon tomorrow, the bomber will appear over your home with

one of the ancient, high-explosive missiles. Your neighbors will be removed from the vicinity, and, precisely at twelve-o-three in the afternoon, the bomb will be dropped. Your home will be destroyed. Black Eyes will be destroyed with it."

Judd looked uncomfortable. "I dunno," he said. "Sounds too easy."

"Too easy? I doubt if the animal will ever sense what is going on—not when the crew of the bomber doesn't know, either. They'll consider it a mighty peculiar order, to destroy one harmless, rather large and rather elaborate suburban home. But they'll do it. See you tomorrow, Whitney, after this mess is behind us."

"Yeah," Judd said. "Yeah." But somehow, the scientist had failed to instill any of his confidence in Judd.

WITH LINDY, he left home at eleven the following morning, after making a thorough list of all their properties which the City had promised to duplicate. Judd did not look at Black Eyes as he left, and the animal remained where it was, seated on its haunches under the dining room table, nibbling crumbs. Judd could almost feel the big round eyes boring a pair of twin holes in his back, and he dared not turn around to face them. . . .

They were a mile away at eleven forty-five, making their way through the nearly deserted streets. Judd stopped walking. He looked at Lindy. Lindy looked at him.

"They're going to destroy it," he said.

"I know."

"Do you want them to?"

"I—I—"

Judd knew that something had to be done with Black Eyes. He didn't like the little beast, and, anyway, that had nothing to do with it. Black Eyes was a menace. And yet, something whispered in Judd's ear, *Don't let them, don't let them. . . .* It wasn't Judd and it wasn't Judd's subconscious. It was Black Eyes, and he knew it. But he couldn't do a thing about it—

"I'm going to stay right here and let them bomb the place," he said aloud. But as he spoke, he was running back the way he had come.

Fifteen minutes.

He sprinted part of the time, then rested, then sprinted again. He was somewhat on the beefy side and he could not run fast, but he made it. Just.

He heard the jet streaking through the sky overhead, looked up once and saw it circling. Two blocks from his house he was met by a policeman. The entire area had been roped off, and the officer shook his head when Judd tried to get through.

"But I live there!"

"Can't help it, Mister. Orders is orders."

Judd hit him. Judd didn't want to, but nevertheless, he grunted with satisfaction when he felt the blow to be a good one, catching the stocky officer on the point of his chin and tumbling him over backwards. Then Judd was ducking under the rope and running.

He reached his house, plummeted in through the front door.

He found Black Eyes under the kitchen table, squatting on its haunches. He scooped the animal up, ran outside. Then he was running again, and before he reached the barrier, something rocked him. A loud series of explosions ripped through his brain, and instinctively—Black Eyes' instincts, not his—he folded his arms over the animal, protecting it. Something shuddered and began to fall behind him, and debris scattered in all directions. Something struck Judd's head and he felt the ground slapping up crazily at his face—

He was as good as new a few days later.

And so was Black Eyes.

"I have it," Judd said to his nurse.

"You have what, sir?"

"It's so simple, so ridiculously simple, maybe that's why no one ever thought of it. Get me Dr. Jamison!"

Jamison came a few moments later, breathless. "Well?"

"I have the solution."

"You . . . do?" Not much hope in the answer. Dr. Jamison was a tired, defeated man.

"Sure. Black Eyes doesn't like the city. Fine. Take him out. I can't take him to Venus. He doesn't like Venus and he won't go. No one can take him anyplace he doesn't want to go, just as no one can hurt him in any way. But he doesn't like the city. It's too noisy. All right: have someone take him far from

the city, far far away—where there's no noise at all. Someplace out in the sticks where it won't matter much if Black Eyes puts a stop to any disturbing noises."

"Who will take him? You, Mr. Whitney?"

Judd shook his head. "That's your job, not mine. I've given you the answer. Now use it."

Lindy had arrived, and Lindy said: "Judd, you're right. That is the answer. And you're wonderful—"

No one volunteered to spend his life in exile with Black Eyes, but then Dr. Jamison pointed out that while no one knew the creature's life-span, it certainly couldn't be expected to match man's. Just a few years and the beast would die, and . . . Dr. Jamison's arguments were so logical that he convinced himself. He took Black Eyes with him into the Canadian Northwoods, and there they live.

JUDD was right—almost.

This was the obvious answer which escaped everyone.

But scientists continued their examinations of Black Eyes, and they discovered something. Black Eyes fears had not been for herself alone. She is going to have babies. The estimate is for thirty-five little tarsier-eyed creatures. No doctor in the world will be able to do anything but deliver the litter.



Of Stegner's Folly

*When a twenty-foot goddess
walked out of the jungle,
they knew Stegner wasn't
kidding.*

By Richard S. Shaver

OLD PROF STEGNER never foresaw the complications his selective anti-gravitational field would cause. Knowing the grand old man as I did, I can say that he never intended his "blessing" should become the curse to mankind that it did. And the catastrophe it brought about was certainly beyond range of all prophecy.

Of course, anyone who lived in 1972 and tried to get inside Stegner's weird life-circle must agree that you can get too much of a good thing. Even a pumpkin can get too big—and that's what happened when the Prof turned on his field—things got big; and too darned healthy!

I was there the day Stegner announced the results of ten year's

*Only the fire-power of cannon
could stop the monster.*

research on his selector. Nearly everyone present had read the sensational articles concerning his work in the feature sections of the big town newspapers. Like the rest, I had a vague idea of what it was about. It seemed the Prof had developed a device that repelled various particles of matter without effecting others. In short, if he turned on his gadget, gravity reversed itself for certain elements, and they went away in a hurry. Like this: he could take oxide of iron, turn on his selective repeller, and the rust rather magically turned to pure iron without the oxygen. Or, he could take a pile of mixed chemicals, turn his control knobs to the elements known to be present in the mixture, and presto! Only certain ones, of his choosing remained. The atoms of the other elements conveniently left the vicinity.

All of which was interesting and

extremely useful. The Prof promptly got rich selling patent rights to the device, tuned to certain frequencies which refined heretofore unrefinable ores. His device made an improvement over most known methods of refining, costing far less in operation than the standard and often complicated methods previously in use.

Money gave the old man his opportunity. He fitted out a big research lab in California, not too far from civilization, but secluded enough for secrecy. Then he set about to try his selective repeller on living tissues. His suspicion, that wonderful things could be discovered if he tuned his anti-gravitational field to the undesirable elements in the body, was confirmed. Like lead poisoning—something no doctor can cure if it is severe. He found that he could cure a case of lead poisoning merely by making the lead go away from there via the field. More wonderful things began to come out of the Stegner laboratory, and he made a lot more money.

Which was all very well indeed, only the Prof couldn't leave well enough alone—he had to delve and pry. He had his own theories about disease and its cause, old age, and so on—all nuttier than a fruit cake. He was something of a crank on various health foods and diets that left out foods raised with chemical fertilizers. He had an organic garden, a garden where no chemical fertilizer or poison spray was ever used. And after all, who knew better than the Prof—who could isolate them in a trice—how many

poisons could be found accumulating in the average human body, consumed along with perfectly harmless foods during a lifetime?

Anyway, when the Prof called in the press, myself among them, he was really excited. "Gentlemen," he said, "I have solved the greatest medical puzzle of all time. Before me, no medical man knew the cause of old age. I have proved what the deterioration factor is, and I have provided a remedy—a sure and immediate remedy! The golden age of mankind is here! Our life span can be greatly extended!"

I looked at Jake Heinz, my cameraman. Jake winked at me, but I didn't respond. I liked the Prof. Such a fine old gentleman, to go whacky from so much success . . .

Jake took a few shots of the Prof's rabbits and guinea pigs, of the Prof himself, and of the apparatus he had constructed which he claimed drove out the causative poison of age; a poison he called a radioactive isotope of Potassium. The other reporters, not having the soft hearts Jake and I toted around, wrote him up as a joke; said right out they thought the old boy was blowing his top. Immortality! Hah! They presented the whole thing as a farce.

No reporters were ever more wrong than those smart buckos.

SOME MONTHS after the Prof's little news conference was over and forgotten, an item of vast importance turned up. It seemed that around Stegner's secluded retreat there was a line where things

started. What kind of things? Well, up to that line, things were normal; but beyond it, grass got enormous, the ground was higher and softer. Trees forgot to shed their leaves. Animals flocked there to eat the lush grass, so the Prof erected a ten-foot electrified fence around his land to keep out the hordes of rabbits, deer, mice and what have you that came to feast off the new supply of better forage.

That was only the beginning. Some months later there came items about houseflies the size of walnuts hatching out around the Prof's retreat. Now a swarm of houseflies the size of walnuts is news, and Jake and I got up there on the jump.

It was terrific! The flies were there all right, but so were a good many other oversized creatures. Roosting in the trees were robins, bluebirds, and doves as large as turkeys. King-sized ducks waddled about importantly, displaying pouter-pigeon crops from overeating. It was as if some god had drawn a line and said: "This is the new Eden, where all living things will prosper terrifically."

You never saw a sight like it! Or did you? Were you one of the horde who started camping around the Prof's magic circle trying to get permission to enter?

It was then we got proof that it pays to be kind. Of all the news-grabbers who surrounded the Prof's big wire gate, Jake and I were the only ones who got in. The old man had not forgotten who had taken him seriously and who had made fun of him.

Jake snapped a series of startling pics of the oversized animals and birds. I interviewed the Prof again, even got his maid, Tilda's opinions, and wrote it up as unsensationally as possible, playing down the tremendous potential for trouble, playing up the really effective method the old scientist had discovered for "eliminating the deterioration factor" in life. I could see where the world was in for some changes, and the going was going to be rough enough for the old man without making it worse. But my efforts came to naught when the pics Jake had taken reached the editor's desk. He hit the ceiling, called me on the carpet, wanted to know where my news sense had gotten lost. Then he sent out three other smart boys to do a *good* job on it.

The paper got out a special edition—and the troubles I had foreseen began. First, the government stepped in, trying to hush-hush the whole thing; but too late. The rush had started. For miles around the poor Prof's fenced-in hideaway, cars and trailers parked in a mad senseless jumble. People crowded against the fences and the electricity had to be shut off. Some smart aleck produced wire cutters and made an opening. The invasion of the new Eden had begun.

Stegner took flight, taking his secret apparatus and files with him. He declined police escort, and vanished from his mad Eden. Where he went was impossible to learn, but I supposed the government knew.

The area he had revitalized with

his selective field was a nine days wonder, and after just about that long it was a tramped over, paper strewn, garbage littered wreck. The oversized animals and birds drifted away, the huge houseflies perished or were eaten by the birds. Apparently that was the end of the thing. Humanity had triumphed over its savior with its usual stupid interference.

A few of us remembered, could not put out of our minds the significance of what the old man had done. He had pointed the way to a lush immortality, and he had been shoved aside and pawed over and written about like some freak. If he had been a notorious criminal, he would have gotten far better journalistic treatment.

But the years went by—four, five of them. And nothing more was heard of Stegner and his work. Until, one day coming home from a night shift on the paper, I found a letter in my box. It was a rather plain looking envelope, but much larger than the ordinary. The handwritten address was quite legible, but very big, as if a giant hand had cramped itself to produce ordinary script:

Dear old friend:

You may have forgotten me, but I do not forget you. If you would like to join me for a time, insert a notice to Harry F in the personal column to that effect. I am trusting you to keep my secret.

Stegner

Needless to say, I inserted the notice.

A LIMOUSINE, driven by a noncommittal chauffeur, picked me up off a street corner, whisked me to the airfield. I boarded a plane piloted by a man I used to know as a fading stunt pilot—Harry Fredericks. The plane lifted and took a southerly course which presently changed to an easterly bearing. I looked below and saw we were over water.

We came down somewhere in South America and I got out of the plane as mystified as I'd entered it. Secrecy? Fredericks wouldn't even discuss the weather!

I had expected another Eden, hidden away from the world. But the land of brobdignags I found staggered me. Grasses, trying to be trees, and trees . . .

There were no words for the bigness, the health and vitality of Stegner and the government bigwigs, who had welcomed him here in South America. But Stegner hustled me aside before I had time to do more than goggle at the mammoth layout of this new Eden under government supervision. He took me to his house, a huge thing built with huge hands, big enough to accommodate a man ten feet tall! Yes, Stegner was a giant! *Everybody* in that fantastic hide-away was a giant.

The second floor of the house overlooked a great, wide valley. Stegner pointed one great finger to the horizon and I looked. There was an endless fence out there. The same as in California, only more so. The natives of the valley, the Indios, the rancheros, the more intelligent animals, were trying to get

in to the wonders they saw beyond that fence. And some of them were dying against the killing electric charges in its wires. Through a pair of glasses the Prof handed me, I saw that some of the dead were human.

"That's murder!" I gasped.

Stegner's voice held the sadness of a great and sorrowful god. "I am in a trap, my friend. I have pretended to acquiesce, but my cohorts are not fully deluded as to my loyalty to the thing they plan. These government men had gone mad with power. And the problem that now faces me seems insurmountable. The peoples of this world are too small, morally, for so big a life. I fear chaos. I thought that perhaps you, with your native shrewdness, might help me unlock this prison I am in, reconcile this Eden and its growth to the world that it must eventually overrun. It *will* overrun the planet, but I would prefer it not to be by violence as these mad men plan it. They have selfishly taken my gift to mankind to themselves, for their own aggrandizement."

I gulped. He thought I had the savvy to answer that one! "Hell, Prof. I thought you saw that from the first. I've often wondered when the blow-off would come. I'm a newspaperman; I know what goes on in the world. It isn't ready for such a life as you can give it—too much selfishness. This thing has so many angles, so many ways it can give private groups power."

"Then what can I do?"

"As long as this is going to be a fight, let's make it an even one, so

that the chips aren't all on one side of the table. Then maybe there'll be a balance of power, a stalemate—such as existed between Russia and the U. S. A. for so long."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean let me get the hell out of here in a hurry, with the details of your processes, and let me spread them all over the world. Publicity can lick this thing. Your mistake was in building fences. Put up a fence, and somebody'll bust it."

"You are a wise man, my friend," he said.

"Then I'm making a run for it right now. They won't expect me to be dashing off before I've even taken off my hat. Give me your formulae, and show me the back door."

"You can only leave by plane . . ."

"Okay. I can fly one. I had my own crate for several years until the finance company took it away from me. The airfield's right next to the house . . ."

He gave me the papers.

"What's in 'em?" I asked.

"The formulae for the creation of the repellent anti-gravitational field which eliminates the age-factor element. I have been working on a growth inhibitor, but in secret. So I have had little time to develop it. Briefly, it is a method of making the field even more selective, leaving in the body those elements which have caused life to stop growing at adulthood, although it is not natural to stop growing. I am sure that any good scientist can finish my work. With this development, man can have his cake and eat it too. He won't grow to giant-

ism as we are doing, yet his life and health will be prolonged."

"Why not just explain it to these men?"

He laughed bitterly. "They wish to use their gigantic size to conquer the world. They can do it, too. Their minds have increased in power. Growth is that way. But moral values are something different—they are acquired by experience. Find some moral men who might use this information to circumvent what is about to happen."

I took the papers and shook his gigantic hand. I left via the back door, and sneaked through a clump of giant ferns to the edge of the airfield. A little prowling revealed a parked plane, long unused because those who had flown it here had grown too big to use it. I waited, hidden in the lush greenery until the setting sun would hide my movements. It would only be a few minutes now. . .

The hangar in which the plane was parked contained several gasoline drums, the kind with pumps on them that worked with a crank. I got into the hangar, finally, and before it got too dark to see, checked the plane's gas gauge. It was about a quarter full. I connected the gas hose and started pumping. In twenty minutes I had her full, then I climbed into the plane. . .

When the motor caught, after I was sure it never would, the thunder of the prop brought giants running toward me from the far end of the field, their twenty-foot strides eating up the distance. But I taxied straight toward them, giving the plane's motors all they

would take. The plane roared down the field, and they fell flat as the prop came at them. The plane lifted, spun over them, was off. Now slugs from oversize rifles came buzzing about me, crashing through the fuselage. But it was dark and I was away. No serious damage had been done.

In Texas it took me four hours to get the brass to listen to me. Finally they did. They didn't ask me to keep my mouth shut. They just turned me loose. I went to my editor and told him the truth. He didn't believe me. When he checked with the army, they said I was obviously trying to perpetrate a hoax. I nearly got fired.

MONTHS went by, and I waited. I knew I'd have to wait until my chance came. There'd have to be hellfire before anybody'd believe my story. Then the storm broke, in sensational headlines. "Gigantic beasts wipe out town in South America."

My editor sent for me. He showed me the headline. "Maybe I made a mistake not believing your story about Stegner," he said. "I make a lot of mistakes."

"You want me to cover this?" I said.

"That's it. And if you can come up with proof of what you told me when you got back from that crazy trip, I'll print every damned word."

WHEN I GOT on the scene, I knew they were at last taking it seriously. The locals had

called out the army to fight the strange monsters that were coming out of the jungle. They were such things as army ants six feet long; anteaters looking like ambling locomotives with hairy hides and noses; lumbering sloths vast as a houses on legs, sleepy and comic as ever, but terrifyingly destructive; jaguars like trucks and trailers; centipedes with stingers over their backs that would reach a man in a third-story window; wasps and bees like buzzards. The army was lashing at these things with machine guns, flame throwers, tanks and rockets. Jeeps careened across the landscape with loads of ammo. It was a madhouse on a vast scale, and being fought to the death. They waited for the beasts to come out of the jungle, then they jumped them—or were jumped. Nobody was allowed to fly into the hinterland to see where they were coming from. And when I tried to get officials to consider it, they absolutely refused. Up there, it was hinted, were secret government projects—besides they were too far away—and radio said there was no sign of anything unusual there. It was worth even a general's job to poke his nose in near those projects. And how could I tell these people traitorous men of their own government were the culprits? It just wasn't possible—and because I had to stay on the scene, I never even hinted it. I merely waited my chance to produce proof. I knew I'd get it, sooner or later. Something would come out of that jungle I'd be able to use to convey the real menace to the knowledge of

a puzzled world.

I wrote carefully, reporting the weird war with the animal world—and I kept inserting paragraphs hinting about Stegner and his growth field, adding "rumors" that maybe his work had been taken over by a power-mad clique and it was they who were loosing this horror.

My boss liked the stuff I was putting in, because it sold papers, and I was careful to keep my facts separate, and label my theories. Nobody—at least so it seemed—believed the theories, but they made good reading. I got a raise in salary.

Other reporters were knocking out stories as good as mine, but without the insight into the facts that I had. So their stories went too far afield. Mine became popular, and were in demand as reprints all over the world. But officially, nobody paid any attention to me, so the important papers nestled in the bottom of my trunk. I didn't want them confiscated until the time came when I could publish them with proof. My boss would back me up when that proof came. I was sure of that.

I got my chance the day the giantess came crashing out of the smoke and dust of the circle of horror across which the beasts were constantly lunging. She was near naked, and half mad with pain from the giant insects plaguing her. No one fired on her as she stood with uplifted arms, waiting for the soldiers to kill her as she expected. Beautiful as a goddess out of an ancient myth she came forward to-

ward the soldiers, her face lighting with hope, her hair streaming golden in the sun. She spoke to us then, and the silence that came over the field of carnage was complete.

"Look at me! Look at me and believe! There are others like me, back in the jungle; mad giants who plan to conquer your world. They are ready to do it. I have escaped to warn you. They are mad, these giants my master has created. They are monsters. . ."

I recognized her now. My senses leaped and my blood pounded in my veins. Here was my opportunity to convince the world. This was Tilda, Stegner's maid! I snapped several pictures of her as she went on talking.

"These men, who were once your own leaders are plotting to destroy you and take the world for themselves. You do not know what they are preparing for you, but I come to tell you. Make ready, for they are on their way to destroy you. They bring huge guns, monster tanks that they have built, machines never before seen on earth."

What more she might have told we were never to know, for she fell then, at the end of her strength. Whatever she had dared, whatever she had gone through to break out of that monstrous circle and come to us, had been too much even for her giant's strength. She fell, like a tower crashing down, and lay there, a great lax pile of pink and red flesh, torn by thorns, the claws of animals, the stingers of terrible giant insects.

Then the monsters came again, and we could not go to her. She lay there as darkness came, and in the morning only her skeleton remained, stripped of flesh in the night by the myriad devouring giant ants and beetles.

MY STORY went in, with photos of Tilda. My editor printed the whole story, printed my formulae, printed every word of the history of Stegner and his creations, and the secret menace he had unwittingly loosed on the world from his second hidden Eden in the jungle. I was called home.

They came to me then, those moral ones Stegner had said existed. Men high in government and army circles who had the peace and welfare of the world at heart. Selfless ones whose records were above reproach. And they proved to be high in the powers of the world, able to command.

I WENT back to South America, to my reporting. I wanted to be on hand when the attack of which Tilda had warned became reality.

I was some twelve miles from the deadly circle when the giant tanks appeared. They were larger than any moving thing ever seen on Earth before. Tracklayers, caterpillars—and swinging above them slender towers which bore ominous gleaming nozzles. On they came.

Then they struck at us. From the nozzles a cold brilliance leaped out, unnameable, that swept forward

like a slow lightning, a kind of crackling sheet of cold fire that spread from tower to tower, in an arc that began to bend toward our lines.

The fire came in mile-wide swaths. There was no outcry, no terror—just the sweating lines of men in foxholes, the crews about the guns, heaving ammo into their maws; the rumbling trucks and the careening jeeps. The fire swept over all like liquid radiance, like a pouring out of moonlight, soft but brilliant, mild yet deadly. Then it was gone. And when it had gone, nothing but silence remained. Dead men stretched out where they had lain waiting, fallen where they labored; jeeps careened on to crash into stumps or bigger trucks—and stop forever. Only silence and death and nothingness was left.

When the silence swept across the whole front I dropped my glasses and lit out for my own car, and headed for the coast. I wanted to file this story in person, and I knew, too, that army would not be there in the morning. I meant to stay alive. I knew that the hope for mankind lay in what honest men were doing with Stegner's formulae. I had to know. So I fled.

Next day they were dropping atom bombs on every moving thing in Stegner's ghastly Eden. High flying bombers flew in swarms—and many of them were being shot down by the weird fire. I saw those atom bombs falling, on television, and the white radiance reaching up toward them. I saw it catch them in its embrace, saw them explode harmlessly in the air, midway in

in their plunge. Whatever the fire was, it was a defense against the atom bomb, for it exploded them before they could reach their targets.

It didn't catch them all, and it didn't intercept all the high-flying bombers loosing their guided rocket missiles. It got enough though, to show us we were on the losing end. What we needed was a miracle. And the miracle did occur. . .

At first, even with my fingers on every tag end of information that came out of the terrible area, it was an unnoticeable change. Then I got it. The men doing our fighting changed in caliber and ability. I never learned, due to the official habit of hushing everything up, just whose technology accomplished the miracle, but it must have been started from the first, with those army officers who had listened to me with such lack of interest when I spoke before their inquisition at the Texas army air field.

All I learned was that there was a new kind of man busy at the front, a man of keener intellect, swifter of action, infinitely more able than the former ordinary soldier.

It was Jake who first confirmed my suspicions. He brought in photographs of men lifting trucks out of mudholes, men tearing steel cables apart with their bare hands, men jumping over twenty-foot barriers with full pack. "Whatta I do with that kind of pic? The people are so fed up with the impossible news they are getting that they don't believe anything any more!

But you and I know a news camera doesn't lie . . . it doesn't have time!"

They had put the Prof's formulae to work against the giants. This time it was the right formulae. They had growth without increase in size, a growth of ability, of strength, of mentality, without any increase in ponderous structure. These new soldiers were the policemen of the United Nations made into supermen!

I began to believe in the human race again. "Great!" I said. "This is what I've been waiting for!"

Jake tossed me his pictures and went away. I turned to the typewriter and began batting out my story: "Mankind solves the problem of giantism! The new weapon against the giants is—the new man!"

Those little giants waded into that circle through all the deadly fire and the giant scorpions and vast beasts like Jack-the-Giant-Killer's multitudinous sons—and it

wasn't a month later that I typed the last story of my life and gave up reporting for good. It was the tale of the death of the last giant—and Jake's picture of him, armed in the end with only his fists, huge as a tree, mad with hunger and thirst and terrible fear of the little men who were just as mighty, a lot quicker, and every bit as smart as any giant. They routed him out with tear gas and shot him down with plain old GI rifle fire.

Yes, I gave up newspaper work. Why? They offered me a job making a movie out of the "War of the Giants". The job gave me quick money, which is what I needed. The wife and I are starting a new colony on Malino Island. It's in the Carolinas. We're going to try this growth-without-size business out properly.

Yes, that's my son. Eight months. He doesn't ordinarily go around dragging a piano—it just got in his way.

NEVER

underestimate...

Lefferts' madness could drive all women back into slavery—it could even cost Lucinda a mink coat!

By Theodore Sturgeon

SHE WAS BRAZEN, of course," said Lucinda, passing the marmalade, "but the brass was beautifully polished. The whole thing made me quite angry, though at the same time I was delighted."

Meticulously Dr. Lefferts closed the newly-arrived *Journal of the Micro-biological Institute*, placed it on the copy of *Strength of Materials in Various Radioisotopic Alloys* which lay beside his plate, and carefully removed his pince-nez. "You begin in mid-sequence," he said, picking up a butter-knife. "Your thought is a predicate without a stated subject. Finally, your description of your reactions contains parts which appear mutually exclusive." He attacked the mar-

malade. "Will you elucidate?"

Lucinda laughed good-humoredly. "Of course, darling. Where would you like me to begin?"

"Oh . . ." Dr. Lefferts made a vague gesture. "Practically anywhere. Anywhere at all. Simply supply more relative data in order that I may extrapolate the entire episode and thereby dispose of it. Otherwise I shall certainly keep returning to it all day long. Lucinda, why do you continually do this to me?"

"Do what, dear?"

"Present me with colorful trivialities in just such amounts as will make me demand to hear you out. I have a trained mind, Lucinda; a fine-honed, logical mind. It must think things through. You know



The coat was worth a lot of money—and worth a battle!

that. Why do you continually *do* this to me?"

"Because," said Lucinda placidly, "if I started at the beginning and went right through to the end, you wouldn't listen."

"I most certainly . . . eh. Perhaps you're right." He laid marmalade on to an English muffin in three parallel bands, and began smoothing them together at right angles to their original lay. "You are right, my dear. That must be rather difficult for you from time to time . . . yes?"

"No indeed," said Lucinda, and smiled. "Not as long as I can get your full attention when I want it. And I can."

Dr. Lefferts chewed her statement with his muffin. At last he said, "I admit that in your inimitable—uh—I think one calls it *female* way, you can. At least in regard to small issues. Now do me the kindness to explain to me what stimuli could cause you to—" His voice supplied the punctuation—"feel 'quite angry' and 'delighted' simultaneously."

Lucinda leaned forward to pour fresh coffee into his cooling cup. She was an ample woman, with an almost tailored combination of sveltness and relaxation. Her voice was like sofa-pillows and her eyes like blued steel. "It was on the Boulevard," she said. "I was waiting to cross when this girl drove through a red light right under the nose of a policeman. It was like watching a magazine illustration come to life—the bright-yellow convertible and the blazing blonde in the bright-yellow dress . . . dar-

ling, I do think you should call in this year's bra manufacturers for consultation in your Anti-Gravity Research Division. They achieve the most baffling effects . . . anyway, there she was and there by the car was the traffic-cop, as red-faced and Hibernian a piece of type-casting as you could wish. He came blustering over to her demanding to know begorry—I think he actually did say begorry—was she color-blind, now, or did she perhaps not give a care this marnin'?"

"In albinos," said Dr. Lefferts, "color perception is—"

LUCINDA raised her smooth voice just sufficiently to override him without a break in continuity. "Now, here was an arrant violation of the law, flagrantly committed under the eyes of an enforcement officer. I don't have to tell you what should have happened. What *did* happen was that the girl kept her head turned away from him until his hands were on the car door. In the sun that hair of hers was positively dazzling. When he was close enough—within range, that is—she tossed her hair back and was face to face with him. You could see that great lump of bog-peat turn to putty. And she said to him (and if I'd had a musical notebook with me I could have jotted down her voice in sharps and flats)—she said, 'Why, officer, I did it on purpose just so I could see you up close.'"

Dr. Lefferts made a slight, disgusted sound. "He arrested her."

"He did not," said Lucinda. "He shook a big thick forefinger at her as if she were a naughty but beloved child, and the push-button blarney that oozed out of him was as easy to see as the wink he gave her. That's what made me mad."

"And well it should." He folded his napkin. "Violations of the law should be immediately pun—"

"The law had little to do with it," Lucinda said warmly. "I was angry because I know what would have happened to you or to me in that same situation. We're just not equipped."

"I begin to see." He put his pince-nez back on and peered at her. "And what was it that delighted you?"

She stretched easily and half-closed her eyes. "The—what you have called the *femaleness* of it. It's good to be a woman, darling, and to watch another woman be female skillfully."

"I quarrel with your use of the term 'skillfully,'" he said, folding his napkin. "Her 'skill' is analogous to an odor of musk or other such exudation in the lower animals."

"It is *not*," she said flatly. "With the lower animals, bait of that kind means one thing and one thing only, complete and final. With a woman, it means nothing of the kind. Never mind what it *might* mean; consider what it *does* mean. Do you think for a moment that the blonde in the convertible was making herself available to the policeman?"

"She was hypothesizing a situation in which—"

"She was hypothesizing nothing

of the kind. She was blatantly and brazenly getting out of paying a traffic fine, and that was absolutely all. And you can carry it one step further; do you think that for one split second the policeman actually believed that she was inviting him? Of course he didn't! And yet that situation is one that has obtained through the ages. Women have always been able to get what they wanted from men by pretending to promise a thing which they know men want but will not or cannot take. Mind you, I'm not talking about situations where this yielding is the main issue. I'm talking about the infinitely greater number of occasions where yielding has nothing to do with it. Like weaseling out of traffic tickets."

"Or skillfully gaining your husband's reluctant attention over the breakfast table."

Her sudden laughter was like a shower of sparks. "You'd better get down to the Institute," she said. "You'll be late."

He arose, picked up his book and pamphlet, and walked slowly to the door. Lucinda came with him, hooking her arm through his. Suddenly he stopped, and without looking at her, asked quietly, "That policeman was a manipulated, undignified fool, wasn't he?"

"Of course he was, darling, and it made a man of him."

He nodded as if accepting a statistic, and, kissing her, walked out of the house.

Darling, she thought, dear sweet chrome-plated, fine-drawn, high-polished blue-print . . . I think I've found where you keep your vanity.

She watched him walk with his even, efficient, unhurried stride to the gate. There he paused and looked back.

"This has been going on too long," he called. "I shall alter it."

Lucinda stopped smiling.

MAY I come in?"

"Jenny, of course," Lucinda went to the kitchen door and unhooked it. "Come in, come in. My, you're prettier than ever this morning."

"I brought you violets," said Jenny breathlessly. "Just scads of 'em in the woods behind my place. You took your red curtains down. Is that a new apron? My! you had Canadian bacon for breakfast."

She darted in past Lucinda, a small, wiry, vibrant girl with sunlit hair and moonlit eyes. "Can I help with the dishes?"

"Thank you, you doll." Lucinda took down a shallow glass bowl for the violets.

Jenny busily ran hot water into the sink. "I couldn't help seeing," she said. "Your big picture window . . . Lucinda, you *never* leave the breakfast dishes. I keep telling Bob, some day I'll have the routines you have, everything always so neat, never running out of anything, never in a hurry, never surprised . . . anyway, all the way over I could see you just sitting by the table there, and the dishes not done and all . . . is everything all right? I mean, don't tell me if I shouldn't ask, but I couldn't help . . ." Her voice trailed off into an ardent and respectful mumble.

"You're such a sweetheart," Lucinda said mistily. She came over to the sink carrying clean dish-towels and stood holding them, staring out past Jenny's head to the level lawns of the village. "Actually, I did have something on my mind . . . something . . ."

She related the whole conversation over breakfast that morning, from her abrupt and partial mentioning of the anecdote about the blonde and the policeman, to her husband's extraordinary and unequivocal statement about women's power over men: *This has been going on too long. I shall alter it.*

"Is that all?" Jenny asked when she had finished.

"Mm. It's all that was said."

"Oh, I don't think you should worry about that." She crinkled up her eyes, and Lucinda understood that she was putting herself and her young husband in the place of Lucinda and Dr. Lefferts, and trying to empathize a solution. "I think you might have hurt his feelings a little, maybe," Jenny said at length. "I mean, you admitted that you handled him in much the same way as that blonde handled the policeman, and then you said the policeman was a fool."

Lucinda smiled. "Very shrewd. And what's your guess about that parting shot?"

Jenny turned to face her. "You're not teasing me, asking my opinion, Lucinda? I never thought I'd see the day! Not you—you're so wise!"

Lucinda patted her shoulder. "The older I get, the more I feel that among women there is a low-

est common denominator of wisdom, and that the chief difference between them is a random scattering of blind spots. No, honey, I'm not teasing you. You may be able to see just where I can't. Now tell me: what do you think he meant by that?"

"*'I shall alter it'*, Jenny quoted thoughtfully. "Oh, I don't think he meant anything much. You showed him how you could make him do things, and he didn't like it. He's decided not to let you do it any more, but—but . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, it's like with Bob. When he gets masterful and lays down the law I just agree with him. He forgets about it soon enough. If you agree with men all the time they can't get stubborn about anything."

Lucinda laughed aloud. "There's the wisdom!" she cried. Sobering, she shook her head. "You don't know the doctor the way I do. He's a great man—a truly great one, with a great mind. It's great in a way no other mind has ever been. He's—different. Jenny, I know how people talk, and what a lot of them say. People wonder why I married him, why I've stayed with him all these years. They say he's stuffy and didactic and that he has no sense of humor. Well, to them he may be; but to me he is a continual challenge. The rules-of-thumb that keep most men in line don't apply to him.

"And if he says he can do something, he can. If he says he will do something, he will."

Jenny dried her hands and sat down slowly. "He meant," she said

positively, "that he would alter your ability to make him do things. Because the only other thing he could have meant was that he was going to alter the thing that makes it possible for any woman to handle any man. And that just couldn't be. How could he change human nature?"

"How? How? He's the scientist. I'm not. I simply eliminate that 'how' from my thinking. The worrisome thing about it is that he doesn't think in small ways about small issues. I'm afraid that's just what he meant—that he was going to change some factor in humanity that is responsible for this power we have over men."

"Oh . . . really," said Jenny. She looked up at Lucinda, moved her hands uneasily. "Lucinda, I know how great the doctor is, and how much you think of him, but—but no one man could do such a thing! Not outside of his own home." She grinned fleetingly. "Probably not inside of it, for very long . . . I never understood just what sort of a scientist he is. Can you tell me, I mean, aside from any secret projects he might be on? Like Bob, now; Bob's a high-temperature metallurgist. What is the doctor, exactly?"

"That's the right question to ask," Lucinda said, and her voice was shadowed. "Dr. Lefferts is a—well, the closest you could get to it would be to call him a specializing non-specialist. You see, science has reached the point where each branch of it continually branches into specialties, and each specialty has its own crop of experts. Most

experts live in the confines of their own work. The doctor was saying just the other day that he'd discovered a fluorine-boron step-reaction in mineralogy that had been known for so long that the mineralogists had forgotten about it—yet it was unknown to metallurgy. Just as I said a moment ago, his mind is great, and—different. His job is to draw together the chemists and the biologists, the pure mathematicians and the practical physicists, the clinical psychologists and the engineers and all the other -ists and -ologies. His specialty is scientific thought as applied to all the sciences. He has no assignments except to survey all the fields and transfer needed information from one to the other. There has never been such a position in the Institute before, nor a man to fill it. And there is no other institute like this one on earth.

"He has entree into every shop and lab and library in this Institute. He can do anything or get anything done in any of them.

"And when he said 'I shall alter that' he meant what he said!"

"I never knew that's what he did," breathed Jenny. "I never knew that's what . . . *who* he is."

"That's who he is."

"But what can he change?" Jenny burst out. "What can he change in us, in all men, in all women? What is the power he's talking about, and where does it come from, and what would . . . will . . . happen if it's changed?"

"I don't know," Lucinda said thoughtfully, "I—do—not—know. The blonde in the convertible . . .

that sort of thing is just one of the things a woman naturally does, because she is a woman, without thinking of it."

Unexpectedly, Jenny giggled. "You don't plan those things. You just do them. It's nice when it works. A better roast from the butcher. A reminder from one of the men at the bank that a check's overdrawn, in time to cover it."

"I know," smiled Lucinda, "I know. It's easy and inaccurate to say that all those men are on the prowl—or all those women either. A few are, but most are not. The willingness of men to do things for women has survived even equal opportunity and equal pay for women. The ability of women to get what they want from men lies completely in their knowledge of that willingness. So the thing my husband wants to alter—*will* alter—lies in that department."

"Lucinda, why don't you just ask him?"

"I shall. But I don't know if I'll get an answer. If he regards it as a security matter, nothing will get it out of him."

"You'll tell me, won't you?"

"Jenny, my sweet, if he tells me nothing, I can't tell you. If he tells me and asks me to keep his confidence, I won't tell you. If he tells me and puts no restrictions on it, I'll tell you everything."

"But—"

"I know, dear. You're thinking that it's a bigger thing than just what it might mean to the two of us. Well, you're right. But down deep I'm confident. I'd pit few women against most men and ex-

pect them to win out. But anytime all womankind is against all mankind, the men don't stand a chance. Think hard about it, anyway. At least we should be able to figure out where the attack is coming from."

"At least you admit it's an attack."

"You bet your sweet life it's an attack. There's been a woman behind most thrones all through history. The few times that hasn't been true, it's taken a woman to clean up the mess afterward. We won't give up easily, darling!"

THE NORTH wind doth blow, and we shall have snow', and so on," said Lucinda as she lit the fire. "I'm going to need a new coat."

"Very well," said Dr. Lefferts.

"A fur coat this time."

"Fur coats," pronounced the doctor, "are impractical. Get one with the fur inside. You'll keep warmer with less to carry."

"I want a fur coat with the fur outside, where it shows."

"I understand and at times admire the decorative compulsions," said the doctor, rising from the adjusted cube he used for an easy chair, "but not when they are unhealthy, uneconomical, and inefficient. My dear, vanity does not become you."

"A thing that has always fascinated me," said Lucinda in a dangerously quiet voice, "in rabbits, weasels, skunks, pumas, pandas, and mink, and all other known mammals and marsupials, is their

huge vanity. They *all* wear their fur outside."

He put on his pince-nez to stare at her. "Your logic limits its factors. I find such sequences remarkable because of the end results one may obtain. However, I shall not follow this one."

"If you're so preoccupied with efficiency and function," she snapped, "why do you insist on wearing those pince-nez instead of getting corneal lenses?"

"Functional living is a pattern which includes all predictable phenomena," he said reasonably. "One of these is habit. I recognize that I shall continue to like pince-nez as much as I shall continue to dislike rice pudding. My functionalism therefore includes these glasses and excludes that particular comestible. If you had the fur-coat habit, the possibility of a fur coat would be calculable. Since you have never had such a coat, we can consider the matter disposed of."

"I think some factors were selected for that sequence," said Lucinda between her teeth, "but I can't seem to put my finger on the missing ones."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said," appended Lucinda distinctly, "that speaking of factors, I wonder how you're coming with your adjustment of human nature to eliminate the deadliness of the female."

"Oh, that. I expect results momentarily."

"Why bother?" she said bitterly. "My powers don't seem to be good enough for a fur coat as it is."

"Oh," he said mildly, "were you

using them?"

Because she was Lucinda, she laughed. "No, darling, I wasn't." She went to him and pressed him back into the big cubical chair and sat on the arm. "I was demanding, cynical, and unpleasant. These things in a woman represent the scorched earth retreat rather than the looting advance."

"An excellent analogy," he said. "Excellent. It has been a long and bitter war, hasn't it? And now it's coming to an end. It is an extraordinary thing that in our difficult progress toward the elimination of wars, we have until now ignored the greatest and most pernicious conflict of all—the one between the sexes."

"Why so pernicious?" she chuckled. "There are times when it's rather fun."

He said solemnly, "There are moments of exhilaration, even of glory, in every great conflict. But such conflicts tear down so much more than they build."

"What's been so damaging about the war between the sexes?"

"Though it has been the women who made men, it has been largely men who have made the world as we know it. However, they have had to do so against a truly terrible obstacle: the emotional climate created by women. Only by becoming an ascetic can a man avoid the oscillations between intoxication and distrust instilled into him by women. And ascetics usually are already insane or rapidly become so."

"I think you're overstating a natural state of affairs."

"I am overstating," he admitted,

"for clarity's sake, and off the record. However, this great war is by no means natural. On the contrary, it is a most unnatural state of affairs. You see, *homo sapiens* is, in one small but important respect, an atypical mammal."

"Do tell."

He raised his eyebrows, but continued. "In virtually all species but ours, the female has a rigidly fixed cycle of conjugal acceptability."

"But the human female has a—"

"I am not referring to that lunar cycle, unmentionable everywhere except in blatant magazine advertisements," he said shortly, "but to a cycle of desire. Of rut."

"A pretty word." Her eyes began to glitter.

"Mahomet taught that it occurred every eight days, Zoroaster nine days, Socrates and Solon agreed on ten. Everyone else, as far as I can discover, seems to disagree with these pundits, or to ignore the matter. Actually there are such cycles, but they are subtle at best, and differ in the individual from time to time, with age, physical experience, geography, and even emotional state. These cycles are vestigial; the original, *natural* cycle disappeared early in the history of the species, and has been trembling on the verge ever since. It will be a simple matter to bring it back."

"May I ask how?"

"You may not. It is a security matter."

"May I then ask what effect you expect this development to have?"

"Obvious, isn't it? The source of woman's persistent and effective control over man, the thing that

makes him subject to all her intolerances, whims, and bewildering coyness, is the simple fact of her perennial availability. She has no regular and predictable cycle of desire. The lower animals have. During the brief time that a female mouse, a marten, or a mare is approachable, every male of her species in the vicinity will know of it and seek her out; will, in effect, drop everything to answer a basic call. But unless and until that call occurs, the male is free to think of other things. With the human female, on the other hand, the call is mildly present at all times, and the male is *never* completely free to think of other things. It is natural for this drive to be strong. It is unnatural indeed for it to be constant. In this respect Freud was quite correct; nearly every neurosis has a sexual basis. We are a race of neurotics, and the great wonder is that we have retained any of the elements of sanity at all. I shall liberate humanity from this curse. I shall restore the natural alternations of drive and rest. I shall free men to think and women to take their rightful places as thinking individuals beside them, rather than be the forced-draft furnaces of sexual heat they have become."

"Are you telling me," said Lucinda in a small, shocked voice, "that you have found a way to—to neuterize women except for a few hours a month?"

"I am and I have," said Dr. Leferts. "And incidentally, I must say I am grateful to you for having turned me to this problem." He looked up sharply. "Where are you

going, my dear?"

"I've got to th-think," said Lucinda, and ran from the room. If she had stayed there for another fifteen seconds, she knew she would have crushed his skull in with the poker.

WHO—Oh, Lucinda! How nice. Come in . . . why, what's the matter?"

"Jenny, I've got to talk to you. Is Bob home?"

"No. He's got night duty at the high temperature lab this week. Whatever is wrong?"

"It's the end of the world," said Lucinda in real anguish. She sank down on the sofa and looked up at the younger woman. "My husband is putting a—a chastity belt on every woman on earth."

"A *what*?"

"A chastity belt." She began to laugh hysterically. "With a time-lock on it."

Jenny sat beside her. "Don't," she said. "Don't laugh like that. You're frightening me."

Lucinda lay back, gasping. "You should be frightened . . . Listen to me, Jenny. Listen carefully, because this is the biggest thing that has happened since the deluge." She began to talk.

Five minutes later Jenny asked dazedly, "You mean—if this crazy thing happens Bob won't . . . won't *want* me most of the time?"

"It's you who won't do any wanting. And when you don't, he won't want either. . . . It isn't that that bothers me so much, Jenny, now that I've had a chance to think

about it. I'm worried about the revolution."

"What revolution?"

"Why, this is going to cause the greatest social upheaval of all time! Once these cycles become recognized for what they are, there will be fireworks. Look at the way we dress, the way we use cosmetics. Why do we do it? Basically, to appear to be available to men. Practically all perfumes have a musk or musk-like base for that very reason. But how long do you think women will keep up the hypocrisy of lipstick and plunging necklines when men *know* better—*know* that they couldn't possibly be approachable all the time? How many men will let their women appear in public looking as if they were?"

"They'll tie us up in the house the way I do Mitzi-poodle," said Jenny in an awed tone.

"They'll leave us smugly alone with easy minds for three weeks out of four," said Lucinda, "and stand guard over us like bull elks the rest of the time, to keep other men away."

"Lucinda!" Jenny squeaked and covered her face in horror. "What about other women? How can we compete with another woman when she's—she's—and we're not?"

"Especially when men are conditioned the way they are. Women will want to stick to one man, more likely than not. But men—men, building up pressures for weeks on end . . ."

"There'll be harems again," said Jenny.

"This is the absolute, final, bitter end of any power we ever had over

the beasts, Jenny—do you see that? All the old tricks—the arch half-promise, the come-on, the manipulations of jealousy—they'll be utterly meaningless! The whole arsenal of womankind is based on her ability to yield or not to yield. And my husband is going to take the choice away from us. He's going to make it absolutely certain that at one time we can't yield, and at another we must!"

"And they'll never have to be nice to us at either time," added Jenny miserably.

"Women," said Lucinda bitterly, "are going to have to work for a living."

"But we do!"

"Oh, you know what I mean, Jenny! The lit-tul wife in the lit-tul home . . . that whole concept is based on women's perpetual availability. We're not going to be able to be home-makers, in that sense, at monthly intervals."

Jenny jumped up. Her face was chalky. "He hasn't stopped any war," she ground out. Lucinda had never seen her like this. "He's started one, and it's a beaut. Lucinda, he's got to be stopped, even if you—we have to . . ."

"Come on."

They started for Dr. Lefferts' house, striding along like a couple of avenging angels.

AH," SAID DR. LEFFERTS, rising politely. "You brought Jenny. Good evening, Jenny."

Lucinda planted herself in front of him and put her hands on her hips. "You listen to me," she

growled. "You've got to stop that nonsense about changing women."

"It is not nonsense and I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Dr. Lefferts," said Jenny in a quaking voice, "can you really do this—this awful thing?"

"Of course," said the doctor. "It was quite simple, once the principles were worked out."

"It *was* quite simple? You mean you've already—"

Dr. Lefferts looked at his watch. "At two o'clock this afternoon. Seven hours ago."

"I think," said Lucinda quietly, "that you had better tell us just exactly what you did, and what we can expect."

"I told you it is a security matter."

"What has my libido to do with national defense?"

"That," said the doctor, in a tone which referred to *that* as the merest trifle, "is a side issue. I coincided it with a much more serious project."

"What could be more serious than . . ."

"There's only one thing *that* serious, from a security standpoint," said Lucinda. She turned to the doctor. "I know better than to ask you any direct questions. But if I assume that this horrible thing was done in conjunction with a super-bomb test—just a guess, you understand—is there any way for an H-blast to bring about a change in women such as you describe?"

He clasped both hands around one knee and looked up at her in genuine admiration. "Brilliant," he said. "And most skilfully phrased.

Speaking hypothetically—hypothetically, you understand," he interjected, waving a warning finger, "a hydrogen bomb has an immense power of diffusion. A jet of energy of that size, at that temperature, for even three or four microseconds, is capable of penetrating the upper reaches of the stratosphere. But the effect does not end there. The upward displacement causes great volumes of air to rush in toward the rising column from all sides. This in turn is carried upward and replaced, a process which continues for a considerable time. One of the results must be the imbalance of any distinct high or low pressure areas within several thousand miles, and for a day or two freak weather developments can be observed. In other words, these primary and secondary effects are capable of diffusing a—ah—substance placed in the bomb throughout the upper atmosphere, where, in a matter of days, it will be diffused throughout the entire envelope."

Lucinda clasped her hands in a slow, controlled way, as if one of them planned to immobilize the other and thereby keep both occupied.

"And is there any substance . . . I'm still asking hypothetical questions, you understand—is there anything which could be added to the hydrogen fusion reaction which might bring about these—these new cycles in women?"

"They are not new cycles," said the doctor flatly. "They are as old as the development of warm-blooded animals. The lack of them is, in biological terms, a very recent

development in an atypical mammal; so recent and so small that it is subject to adjustment. As to your hypothetical question—" he smiled —"I should judge that such an effect is perfectly possible. Within the extremes of temperature, pressure, and radiation which take place in a fusion reaction, many things are possible. A minute quantity of certain alloys, for example, introduced into the shell of the bomb itself, or perhaps in the structure of a supporting tower or even a nearby temporary shed, might key a number of phenomenal reaction chains. Such a chain might go through several phases and result in certain subtle isotopic alterations in one of the atmosphere's otherwise inert gases, say xenon. And this isotope, acting upon the adrenal cortex and the parathyroid, which are instrumental in controlling certain cycles in the human body, might very readily bring about the effect we are discussing in an atypical species."

Lucinda threw up her hands and turned to Jenny. "Then that's it," she said wearily.

"What's 'it'? What? I don't understand," whimpered Jenny. "What's he done, Lucinda?"

"In his nasty, cold-blooded hypothetical way," said Lucinda, "he has put something in or near an H-bomb which was tested today, which is going to have some effect on the air we breathe, which is going to do what we were discussing at your house."

"Dr. Lefferts," said Jenny piteously. She went to him, stood looking down at him as he sat primly in

his big easy chair. "Why—*why*? Just to annoy us? Just to keep us from having a little, petty influence over you?"

"By no means," said the doctor. "I will admit that I might have turned my attention to the matter for such reasons. But some concentrated thought brought up a number of extra-polations which are by no means petty."

HE ROSE and stood by the mantel, pince-nez in hand, the perfect picture of the Pedant At Home. "Consider," he said. "*Homo sapiens*, in terms of comparative anatomy, should mature physically at 35 and emotionally between 30 and 40. He should have a life expectancy of between 150 and 200 years. And he unquestionably should be able to live a life uncluttered by such insistent trifles as clothing conventions, unfunctional chivalries, psychic turmoils and dangerous mental and physical escapes into what the psychologists call romances. Women should phase their sexual cycles with those of the seasons, gestate their young longer, and eliminate the unpredictable nature of their psychosexual appetites—the very basis of all their insecurity and therefore that of most men. Women will not be chained to these cycles, Jenny, and become breeding machines, if that's what you fear. You will begin to live in and with these cycles as you live with a well-made and serviced automatic machine. You will be liberated from the constant control and direction of your so-

matic existence as you have been liberated from shifting gears in your car."

"But . . . we're not conditioned for such a change!" blazed Lucinda. "And what of the fashion industry . . . cosmetics . . . the entertainment world . . . what's going to become of these and the millions of people employed by them, and the people dependent on all those people, if you do a thing like this?"

"The thing is done. As for these people . . ." He paused. "Yes, there will be some disturbance. A considerable one. But in overall historical terms, it will be slight and it will be brief. I like to think that the television service man is one who was liberated by the cotton gin and the power loom."

"It's . . . hard to think in historical terms just now," said Lucinda. "Jenny, come on."

"Where are you going?"

She faced him, her blued-steel eyes blazing. "Away from you. And I—I think I have a warning to give to the women."

"I wouldn't do that," he said dryly. "They'll find out in time. All you'll succeed in doing is to alert many women to the fact that they will be unattractive to their husbands at times when other women may seem more desirable. Women will not unite with one another, my dear, even to unite against men."

There was a tense pause. Then Jenny quavered, "How long did you say this—this thing will take?"

"I did not say. I would judge between thirty-six and forty-eight hours."

"I've got to get home."

"May I come with you?" asked Lucinda.

Jenny looked at her, her full face, her ample, controlled body. A surprising series of emotions chased themselves across her young face. She said, "I don't think . . . I mean . . . no, not tonight; I have to—to—goodnight, Lucinda."

When she had gone, the doctor uttered one of his rare chuckles. "She has absorbed perhaps a tenth of this whole concept," he said, "but until she's surer of herself she's not going to let you or any woman near her husband."

"You . . . you complacent pig!" said Lucinda whitely. She stormed upstairs.

HELLO . . . hello—Jenny?"
"Lucinda! I'm — glad you called."

Something cold and tense deep inside Lucinda relaxed. She sat down slowly on the couch, leaned back comfortably with the telephone cradled between her cheek and her wide soft shoulder. "I'm glad you're glad, Jenny darling. It's been six weeks . . . how are you?"

"I'm . . . all right now. It was pretty awful, for a while, not knowing how it would be, waiting for it to happen. And when it did happen, it was hard to get used to. But it hasn't changed things *too* much. How about you?"

"Oh, I'm fine," said Lucinda. She smiled slowly, touched her tongue to her full lower lip. "Jenny, have you told anyone?"

"Not a soul. Not even Bob. I

think he's a little bewildered. He thinks I'm being very . . . understanding. Lucinda, is it wrong for me to let him think that?"

"It's never wrong for a woman to keep her knowledge to herself if it makes her more attractive," said Lucinda, and smiled again.

"How's Dr. Lefferts?"

"He's bewildered too. I suppose I've been a little . . . understanding too." She chuckled.

Over the phone she heard Jenny's answering laughter. "The poor things," she said. "The poor, poor things. Lucinda—"

"Yes, honey."

"I know how to handle this, now. But I don't really understand it. Do you?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"How can it be, then? How can this change in us affect men that way? I thought *we* would be the ones who would be turned off and on like a neon sign."

"What? Now wait a minute, Jenny! You mean you don't realize what's happened?"

"That's what I just said. How could such a change in women do such a thing to the men?"

"Jenny, I think you're wonderful, wonderful, wonderful," breathed Lucinda. "As a matter of fact, I think women are wonderful. I suddenly realized that you haven't the foggiest notion of what's happened, yet you've taken it in stride and used it *exactly* right!"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Jenny, do you feel any differ-

ence in yourself?"

"Why, no. All the difference is in Bob. That's what I—"

"Honey, there *isn't* any difference in you, nor in me, nor in any other woman. For the very first time in his scientific life, the great man made an error in his calculations."

There was silence for a time, and then the telephone uttered a soft, delighted, long-drawn-out "Oh-h-h-h-h . . ."

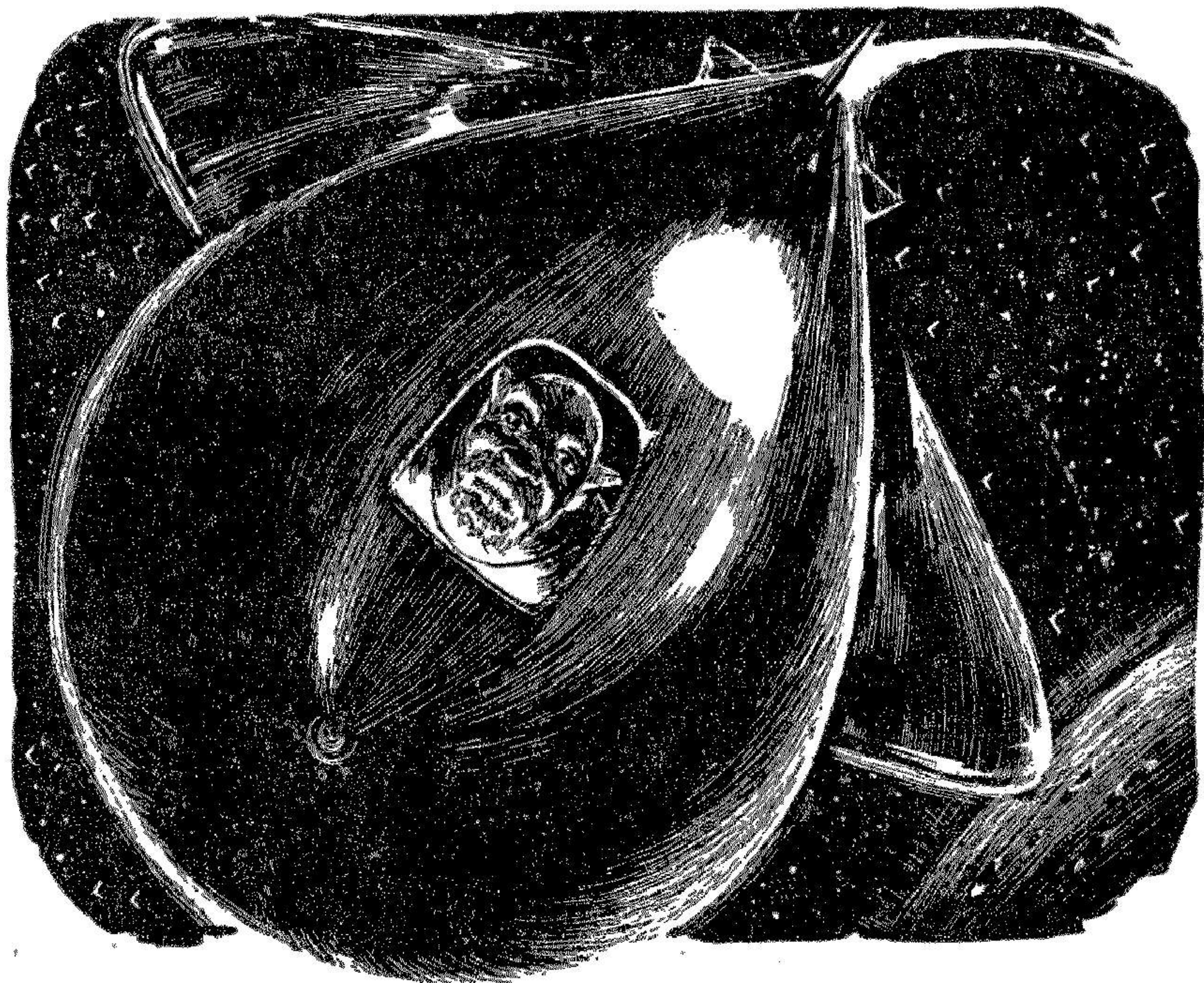
Lucinda said, "He's sure that in the long run it will have all the benefits he described—the longer life expectancy, the subduing of insecurities, the streamlining of our manners and customs."

"You mean that all men from now on will . . ."

"I mean that for about twelve days in every two weeks, men can't do anything with us, which is restful. And for forty-eight hours they can't do anything without us, which is—" She laughed. "—useful. It would seem that *homo sapiens* is still an atypical mammal."

Jenny's voice was awed. "And I thought we were going to lose the battle of the sexes. Bob brings me little presents every single day, Lucinda!"

"He'd better. Jenny, put down that phone and come over here. I want to hug you. And—" She glanced over at the hall closet, where hung the symbol of her triumph—"I want to show you my new fur coat."



The HELL SHIP

By Ray Palmer

THE GIANT space liner swung down in a long arc, hung for an instant on columns of flame, then settled slowly into the blast-pit. But no hatch opened; no air lock swung out; no person left

the ship. It lay there, its voyage over, waiting.

The thing at the controls had great corded man-like arms. Its skin was black with stiff fur. It had fingers ending in heavy talons and

The passengers rocketed through space in luxury. But they never went below decks because rumor had it that Satan himself manned the controls of The Hell Ship.

eyes bulging from the base of a massive skull. Its body was ponderous, heavy, inhuman.

After twenty minutes, a single air lock swung clear and a dozen armed men in Company uniforms went aboard. Still later, a truck lumbered up, the cargo hatch creaked aside, and a crane reached its long neck in for the cargo.

Still no creature from the ship was seen to emerge. The truck driver, idly smoking near the hull, knew this was the *Prescott*, in from the Jupiter run—that this was the White Sands Space Port. But he didn't know what was inside the *Prescott* and he'd been told it wasn't healthy to ask.

Gene O'Neil stood outside the electrified wire that surrounded the White Sands port and thought of many things. He thought of the eternal secrecy surrounding space travel; of the reinforced hush-hush enshrouding Company ships. No one ever visited the engine rooms. No one in all the nation had ever talked with a spaceman. Gene thought of the glimpse he'd gotten of the thing in the pilot's window. Then his thoughts drifted back to the newsrooms of Galactic Press Service; to Carter in his plush office.

"Want to be a hero, son?"

"Who, me? Not today. Maybe

tomorrow. Maybe the next day."

"Don't be cute. It's an assignment. Get into White Sands."

"Who tried last?"

"Jim Whiting."

"Where is Whiting now?"

"Frankly we don't know. But—"

"And the four guys who tried before Whiting?"

"We don't know. But we'd like to find out."



"Try real hard. Maybe you will."

"Cut it out. You're a newspaperman aren't you?"

"God help me, yes. But there's no way."

"There's a way. There's always a way. Like Whiting and the others. Your pals."

Back at the port looking through the hot wire. *Sure there was a way. Ask questions out loud. Then sit back and let them throw a noose around you. And there was a place where you could do the sitting in complete comfort. Where Whiting had done it—but only to vanish off the face of the earth. Damn Carter to all hell!*

Gene turned and walked up the sandy road toward the place where the gaudy neons of the Blue Moon told hard working men where they could spend their money. The Blue Moon. It was quite a place.

Outside, beneath the big crescent sign, Gene stopped to watch the crowds eddying in and out. Then he went in, to watch them cluster around the slot machines and bend in eager rows over the view slots of the peep shows.

He moved into the bar, dropped on one of the low stools. He ordered a beer and let his eyes drift around.

A man sat down beside him. He was husky, tough looking. "Ain't you the guy who's been asking questions about the crews down at the Port?"

Gene felt it coming. He looked the man over. His heavy face was flushed with good living, eyes peculiarly direct of stare as if he was trying to keep them from roving suspiciously by force of will. He was

well dressed, and his heavy hands twinkled with several rather large diamonds. The man went on: "I can give you the information you want—for a price, of course." He nodded toward an exit. "Too public in here, though."

Gene grinned without mirth as he thought, *move over Whiting—here I come*, and followed the man toward the door.

Outside the man waited, and Gene moved up close.

"You see, it's this way . . ."

Something exploded against Gene's skull. Even as fiery darkness closed down he knew he'd found *the way*. But only a stupid newspaperman would take it. Damn Carter!

Gene went out.

He seemed to be dreaming. Over him bent a repulsive, man-like face. But the man had fingernails growing on his chin where his whiskers should have been. And his eyes were funny—walled, as though he bordered on idiocy. In the dream, Gene felt himself strapped into a hammock. Then something pulled at him and made a terrible racket for a long time. Then it got very quiet except for a throbbing in his head. He went back to sleep.

SHE HAD on a starched white outfit, but it wasn't a nurse's uniform. There wasn't much skirt, and what there was of it was only the back part. The neckline plunged to the waist and stopped there. It was a peculiar outfit for a nurse to be wearing. But it looked familiar.

Her soft hands fixed something over his eyes, something cold and wet. He felt grateful, but kept on trying to remember. Ah, he had it; the girls wore that kind of outfit in the Blue Moon in one of the skits they did, burlesquing a hospital. He took off the wet cloth and looked again.

She was a dream. Even with her lips rouge-scarlet, her cheeks pink with makeup, her eyes heavy with artifice.

"What gives, beautiful?" He was surprised at the weakness of his voice.

Her voice was hard, but nice, and it was bitter, as though she wanted hard people to know she knew the score, could be just a little harder. "You're a spaceman now! Didn't you know?"

Gene grinned weakly. "I don't know a star from a street light. Nobody gets on the space crews these days—it's a closed union."

Her laugh was full of a knowledge denied him. "That's what I used to think!"

She began to unstrap him from the hammock. Then she pushed back his hair, prodded at the purple knob on his head with careful fingertips.

"How come you're on this ship?" asked Gene, wincing but letting her fingers explore.

"Shanghaied, same as you. I'm from the Blue Moon. I stepped out between acts for a breath of fresh air, and wham, a sack over the head and here I am. They thought you might have a cracked skull. One of the monsters told me to check you. No doctor on the ship."

Gene groaned. "Then I didn't dream it—there is a guy on this ship with fingernails instead of a beard on his chin!"

She nodded. "You haven't seen anything yet!"

"Why are we here?"

"You've been shanghaied to work the ship. I'm here for a different purpose—these men can't get off the ship and they've got to be kept them contented. We've got ourselves pleasant jobs, with monsters for playmates, and we can't get fired. It'll be the rottenest time of our lives, and the *rest* of our lives, as far as I can see."

Gene sank down, put the compress back on his bump. "I don't get it."

"You will. I'm not absolutely sure I'm right, but I know a little more about it than you."

"What's your name?"

"They call me Queenie Brant. A name that fits this business. My real name is Ann O'Donnell."

"Queenie's a horse's name—I'll call you Ann. Me, I'm Gene O'Neil."

"That makes us both Irish," she said. He lifted the compress and saw the first really natural smile on her face. It was a sweet smile, introspective, dewy, young.

"You were only a dancer." He said it flatly.

For a long instant she looked at him. "Thanks. You got inside the gate on that one."

"It's in your eyes. I'm glad to know you, Ann. And I'd like to know you better."

"You will. There'll be plenty of time; we're bound for Io."

"Where's Io?"

"One of Jupiter's moons, you Irish ignoramus. It has quite a colony around the mines. Also it has a strange race of people. But Ann O'Donnell is going to live there if she can get off this ship. I don't want fingernails growing on *my* chin."

O'Neil sat up. "I get it now! It's something about the atomic drive that changes the crew!"

"What else?"

Gene looked at Ann, let his eyes rove over her figure.

"Take a good look," she said bitterly. "Maybe it won't stay like this very long!"

"We've got to get off this ship!" said Gene hoarsely.

THE DOOR of the stateroom opened. A sharp-nosed face peered in, followed by a misshapen body of a man in a dirty blue uniform. Hair grew thick all around his neck and clear up to his ears. It also covered the skin from chin to shirt opening. The hair bristled, coarse as an animal's. His voice was thick, his words hissing as though his tongue was too heavy to move properly.

"Captain wants you, O'Neil."

Gene got up, took a step. He went clear across the room, banged against the wall. The little man laughed.

"We're in space," Ann said. "We have a simulated gravity about a quarter normal. Here, let me put on your metal-soled slippers. They're magnetized to hold you to the floor." She bent and slipped

the things on his feet, while Gene held his throbbing head.

The little man opened the door and went out. Gene followed, his feet slipping along awkwardly. After a minute his nausea lessened. At the end of the long steel corridor the little man knocked, then opened the door to a low rumble of command. He didn't enter, just stood aside for Gene. Gene walked in, stood staring.

The eyes in the face he saw were black pools of nothingness, without emotion, yet behind them an active mind was apparent. Gene realized this hairy thing was the Captain—even though he didn't even wear a shirt!

"You've shanghaied me," said Gene. "I don't like it."

The voice was huge and cold, like wind from an ice field. "None of us like it, chum. But the ships have got to sail. You're one of us now, because we're on our way and by the time you get there, there'll be no place left for you to work, unless it's in a circus as a freak."

"I didn't ask for it," said Gene.

"You did. You wanted to know too much about the crew—and if you found out, you'd spread it. You see, the drives are not what they were cooked up to be—the atomics leak, and it wasn't found out until too late. After they learned, they hid the truth, because the cargo we bring is worth millions. All the shielding they've used so far only seems to make it worse. But that won't stop the ships—they'll get crews the way they got you, and nosey people will find out more than they bargain for."

"I won't take it sitting down!" said Gene angrily.

The Captain ignored him. "Start saying sir. It's etiquette aboard ship to say sir to the Captain.

"I'll never say sir to anyone who got me into this . . ."

The Captain knocked him down.

Gene had plenty of time to block the blow. He had put up his arms, but the big fist went right through and crashed against his chin. Gene sat down hard, staring up at the hairy thing that had once been a man. He suddenly realized the Captain was standing there waiting for an excuse to kill him.

Through split and bleeding lips, while his stomach turned over and his head seemed on the point of bursting. Gene said: "Yes, sir!"

The Captain turned his back, sat down again. He shoved aside a mass of worn charts, battered instruments, cigar butts, ashtrays with statuettes of naked girls in a half-dozen startling poses, comic books, illustrated magazines with sexy pictures, and made a space on the top. He thrust forward a sheet of paper. He picked up a fountain pen, flirted it so that ink splattered the tangle of junk on his desk, then handed it to Gene. "Sign on the dotted line."

Gene picked up the document. It was an ordinary kind of form, an application for employment as a spacehand, third class. The ship was not named, but merely called a cargo boat. This was the paper the Company needed to keep the investigators satisfied that no one was forced to work on the ships against their will. Anger blinded

him. He didn't take the pen. He just stood looking at the Captain and wondering how to keep himself from being beaten to death.

After a long moment of silence the Captain laid the pen down, grinned horribly. He gave a snort. "It's just a formality. I'm supposed to turn these things over to the authorities, but they never bother us anymore. Sign it later, after you've learned. You'll be glad to sign, then."

"What's my job, Captain?"

"Captain Jorgens, and don't forget the sir!"

"Captain Jorgens, sir."

"I'll put you with the Chief Engineer. He'll find work for you down in the pile room."

The Captain laughed a nasty laugh, repeating the last phrase with relish. "The pile room! There's a place for you, Mr. O'Neil. When you decide to sign your papers, we'll get you a job in some other part of this can!"

Gene found his way back to the cabin he had just left. The little guy with the hairy neck was there, lacerating at the girl.

"Put you in the pile gang didn't he?"

Gene nodded, sat down wearily. "I want to sleep," he said.

"Nuts," said the little man. "I'm here to take you to the Chief Engineer. You go on duty in half an hour. Come on!"

Gene got up. He was too sick to argue. Ann looked at him sympathetically, noting his split lips. He managed a grin at her, "If I never see you again, Ann, it's been nice knowing you, very nice."

"I'll see you, Gene. They'll find us tougher than they bargained for."

THE ENGINE room looked like some of the atomic power stations he'd seen. Only smaller. There was no heavy concrete shielding, no lead walls. There was shielding around the central pile, and Gene knew that inside it was the hell of atomic chain reaction under the control of the big levers that moved the cadmium bars. There was a steam turbine at one end, and a huge boiler at the other. Gene didn't even try to guess how the pile activated the jets that drove the space ship. Somehow it "burned" the water.

This pile had been illegal from the first. Obviously some official had been bribed to permit the first use of it on a spaceship. Certainly no one who knew anything about the subject would have allowed human beings to work around a thing like this.

Gene's skin crawled and prickled with the energies that saturated the room. Little sparks leaped here and there, off his finger-tips, off his nose.

The Chief Engineer was on a metal platform above the machinery level. The face had hair all over it, even on the eyelids. The eyes, popping weirdly, were double. They looked as if second eyes had started growing inside the original ones. They weren't reasonable; they weren't even sane. The look of them made Gene sick.

The Engineer shook his head

back and forth to focus the awful, mutilated eyes. His voice was infinitely weary, strangely muffled. "Another sacrifice to Moloch, an's the pity! So they put you down here, as if there was anything to be done? Well, it'll be nice to work with someone who still has his buttons—as long as they last. Sit down."

Gene sat down and the metal chair gave him a shock that made him jump. "I don't know anything about this kind of work."

The man shrugged, "Who does? The pile runs itself. Ain't enough of it moves to need much greasing. You ought to be able to find the grease cups—they're painted red. Fill them, wipe off the dust, and wait. Then do it over again."

"What's the score on this bucket?"

"We're all signed on with a billy to the knob. And *kept* aboard by a guard system that's pretty near perfect. After awhile the emanations get to our brains and we don't care anymore. Then we're trusted employees. Only reason I don't blow her loose, it wouldn't do any good."

He got up, a fragile old body clad in dirty overalls. He beckoned Gene to follow him. He led the way to a periscope arrangement over the shielded pile. Gene peered in. It was like a look into boiling Hell. As Gene stared, the old man talked in his ear.

"Supposed to be perfectly shielded, and maybe they are. But *something* gets out. I think it happens in the jet assembly. A tiny trickle of high pressure steam crosses the atomic beam just above

a pinhole that leads into the jet tube. It's exploded by the beam, exploded into God knows what, and the result is your jet. It's a wonderful drive, with plenty of power for the purpose. But I think it forms a strong field of static over the whole shell of the ship, a kind of sphere of reflection that throws the emanations back into the ship from every point. Just my theory, but it explains why you get these physical changes, because that process of reflection gives a different ray than was observed in the ordinary shielded jet."

Gene nodded, asked: "Can I look at the jet assembly?"

"Ain't no way to look at it! It's sealed up to hold in the expanding gases from that exploded steam. Looking in this periscope is what changed my eyes. Only other place the unshielded emanations could escape is from the jet chamber. Only way they can get back into the ship is by reflection from some ionized layer around the ship. If I could talk to some of those big-brained birds that developed this drive, I'd sure have things to say."

Gene was convinced the old man knew what he was talking about. "Why don't you try to put your information where it'll do some good? How about the Captain?"

"He's cocoo." The old man slapped the cover back on the periscope, tottered back to his perch on the platform. "He sure has changed the last two years. Won't listen to reason."

Gene squatted on the steps, just beneath the old engineer's chair. The old man seemed glad to have

someone to talk to.

"It's got us trapped. And it's so well covered up from the people. Old spacers are changed physically, changed mentally. They know they can't go back to normal life, because it's gone too far. They'd be freaks. No woman would want a monstrosity around. Besides, it don't stop, even after you leave the ships. God knows what we'll look like in the end."

Gene shivered. "But you're all grown men! A fight with no chance of winning is better than this! Why do you take it?"

"Because the mind changes along with the body. It goes dead in some ways, gets more active in others. The personality shifts inside, until you're not sure of yourself, and can't make decisions any more. That's why nobody does anything. Something about those rays destroys the will. Nobody leaves the ships."

"I will!" Gene said confidently. "When the time comes, I'll go. All Hell can't stop me."

The old man yawned. "Hope you do, son. Hope you do. I'm going to take me a nap." He propped his feet up on the platform rail and in seconds was snoring.

Gene clenched his fists, growing despair in his thoughts.

"Tain't no worse than dying in a war," muttered the old man in his sleep.

THE DAYS went by and Gene learned. He understood why these men didn't actively resent the deal they were getting. No wonder

the secrecy was so effective! The radiations deadened the mind, gave one the feeling of numbness, so that nothing mattered but the next meal, the next movie in the recreation lounge, the next drink of water. Values changed and shifted, and none of them seemed important.

The chains that began to bind him were far stronger than steel. The chains were mental deterioration, degeneration, mutation within the very cells of the mind. He knew that now he must tend this monster forever, grease and wipe the ugly metal of it, and sit and talk idly to MacNamara, its keeper. He realized it, and didn't know how to care!

The anger and hate came later. The real, abiding anger, and the living hate. At first the numbness, the sudden incomprehensible enormity of what had happened to him, then the anger. Hate churned and ground away inside him, getting stronger by the hour. It all revolved around the Captain who tramped eternally around the corridors bellying orders, punching with his huge fists. He knew there was more to it; the lying owners of the Company, the bribe-taking officials, the health officers who failed to examine the ships and the men and the ships' papers. But somehow it all boiled down to the Captain.

Sometimes he was sure he must be crazy already. Sometimes he would wake up screaming from a nightmare only to find reality more horrible.

Then he would go to Ann.

Ann was not the only woman

aboard ship. There were three others, and to the crew of twenty imprisoned, enslaved men they represented all beauty, all womanhood. They lived with the men—as the men—and nobody cared. Here, so close to the raging elementals of the pile, life itself was elemental.

As one of them expressed it to Gene: "Why worry? We're all sterile from the radioactivity anyway. Or didn't you know?" She had been on the ship for years, and was covered with a fine fur, like a cat's. Her eyes were wide, placid, empty; an animal's unthinking eyes. Gene prayed Ann would never turn monster before his eyes; hoped desperately they could get away in time.

"We've got to fight, Ann," he said to her one day. "We must find a way to get off at the end of the trip, or it will be too late for us to live normal lives. It's then or never. Besides that, we've got to warn people of what's going on. They think space travel is safe. In time this could effect the whole race. The world must be told, so something can be done."

Ann's young face showed signs of the strain. The fear of turning into some hideous thing was preying on her mind. She spoke rapidly, her voice breaking a little. "I've been talking to several of the crew, the old-timers, trying to get an understanding of why nothing is done. It's this way: when the ships land, guards come aboard. They're posted at the cargo locks and the passenger entrances. The only door aboard the ship that leads to the

passenger compartment is in the Captain's cabin, and it's locked from both sides. Even our Captain never meets the passengers. There's only one chance, a mutiny. Then we could open the door, show the passengers."

"It wouldn't do any good. When we landed, they'd find a way to shut us all up before we got to anybody. They've had a lot of practice keeping this quiet. They know the answers."

She stamped a foot angrily. "It was you who said we had to fight! Now you say it's hopeless!"

Gene leaned against the wall and passed a hand across his eyes. He looked at Ann's flushed beauty and managed a grin. "Guess I'm getting as bad as the rest of them, baby. We'll fight. Sure we'll fight."

IT STARTED with Schwenky. Schwenky was a gigantic Swede. He was the boss freight handler. It was his job to sort the cargo for the next port of call. He would get it into the cargo lock, then seal the doors so nobody would try to smuggle themselves out with the freight. Schwenky was intensely loyal and stupid enough not to understand the real reason behind their imprisonment—which was why he held his job. No one got by Schwenky.

But this time, in Marsport, something was missing. They'd driven the trucks up to the cargo port, unloaded everything, and then compared invoices with the material. They swore some claimed machinery parts were due them.

Schwenky swore he'd placed them in the cargo lock, and that the truckers were trying to hold up the Company.

The Captain allowed the truckers' claim and after the ship had blasted off into space, called Schwenky in to bawl him out. They must have gotten really steamed up, because Gene and Frank Maher heard the racket clear down on the next deck where they were cleaning freight out of a sealed compartment for the next stop.

Gene and Frank raced up the ladders to the top deck, and Gene found the break he had prayed for. Schwenky holding the Captain against the wall; beating the monstrosity that had once been a man with terrible fists. Gene felt a sudden thrill. In a situation like this you used any weapon you could find. Schwenky was a deadly weapon.

Gene laid a hand on Schwenky's massive shoulder. "Hold it man! You'll kill him!"

Schwenky turned a face, red and popeyed, to Gene. "The Captain make a mistake. He try to knock Schwenky down. No man do that to Schwenky."

"When he comes to, he'll lock you in the brig, put you on bread and water. . ."

Suddenly Schwenky realized the enormity of his offense. It was obvious from his face that he considered himself already dead. "Nah, my friend Gene! Now they kill Schwenky. Bad! But what I do?"

Gene eyed him carefully. "Put the Captain in the brig, of course. What else? Then he *can't* kill you."

"Lock him up, eh? Good idea! Then we think, you and I, what we do next. Maybe something come to us, eh?"

Gene bent over the Captain's body, found the pistol in his hip pocket, put it in his own. He took the ring of keys from the belt.

"Bring him along, Schwenky. If we meet anyone, I'll use this." Gene patted the gun. "I won't let them hurt my friend, Schwenky."

"Damn! let them come! I fix them! Don't have to shoot them. I got fists!"

"I'd rather be shot, myself," said Gene, watching the ease with which the giant freight handler lifted the huge body of the Captain, tossing it over his shoulder like a sack of straw.

"I'll go ahead," said Frank Maher. "If I run into Perkins, the First, I'll whistle once. If I run into Symonds, the Second, I'll whistle twice. I don't think there's another soul aboard we need worry about. All we got to do is slap the Cap in the brig, round up Perkins and Symonds, and the ship is ours. What worries me, Gene, then what do we do?"

"It's Schwenky's mutiny," grinned Gene. "Ask him."

"Nah!" said Schwenky hastily. "I don't know. Maybe we just sail on till we find good place, leave ship, go look for job."

Maher said, "Me with my lumpy face? And the Chief with hair on his cheekbones and double eyeballs? And Heinie with fingernails growing where his collar button should be? I wonder what we *can* do, if we get free?"

THEY GOT DOWN the first stairwell, but passing along the rather lengthy companionway to the next stairhead, they heard Maher whistle twice. Schwenky put the Captain down, conked him with one massive fist to make sure he stayed out, then stood there, waiting. The Second came up out of the stairwell, turned and started toward them. Gene put his hand on the gun butt, waiting until he had to pull it. Schwenky said: "Come here, Mr. Perkins, sir. Look see what has happened!"

The Englishman peered at the shapeless, hairy mass of the unconscious Captain. His face went white. Gene knew he was wondering if he could keep the crew from mutiny without the Captain present to cow them. Perkins straightened, his face a pallid mask in the dimness. "What happened, Schwenky?"

"This, Mr. Perkins, sir—" said Schwenky. He slapped an open palm against the side of Perkins' head. Perkins sprawled full length on the steel deck, but he wasn't out, which surprised Gene. He lay there, staring up at the gigantic Swede, his face half red from the terrible blow, the other half white with the fear in him. His hand was tugging at his side and Gene realized he was after his gun. Gene pulled out his own weapon even as he leaped upon the slim body of the man on the floor. His feet missed the moving arm, the hand came out with a snub-nosed automatic in it. Gene grabbed it, bore down. But the gun went off, the bullet ricocheting off the wall-plates with a scream. Gene

slugged the man across the head with the barrel of the Captain's gun. Perkins went limp. Maher came up now and grabbed Perkins' gun.

"Lead on," said Gene. He picked Perkins up and put him over his shoulder. Schwenky retrieved the slumbering Captain and they proceeded on their way to the cell on the bottom deck.

But the shot had been heard, and from above came the sound of running feet. Gene began to trot, almost fell down the last flight of stairs, went along the companionway at a run. At the cell door he dropped Perkins, tried four or five keys frantically. One fit. He pulled open the door and Schwenky drove in, kicking the body of Perkins over the sill. The Captain dropped heavily to the deck and Schwenky was out again. Gene was locking the door when he heard the shout from Symonds, running toward them.

"What's going on there, men?"

Schwenky started to amble toward the dark, wiry Second, his big face smiling like that of a simpleton. "We haf little trouble, Mr. Symonds, sir. Maybe we should call you, but we did not haf time. Everything is all right now. You come see, we explain everything . . ."

He made a grab for the little Second Mate's neck with one big paw. But the Second was wary, ducked quickly, was off. Gene and Maher sprang after him. Gene shouted: "Stop or I'll fire, Symonds! You're all alone now!"

Gene let one shot angle off the

wall, close beside the fleeing form, but the man didn't stop. Instead he headed for the bridge. Gene realized he could lock himself in, keep them from the ship controls. He could hold out there the rest of the voyage.

"We've got to stop him!"

Maher close behind, they ran up the stairs on the Second's heels. Up the companionway they pounded, the Second increasing his lead. A door opened ahead of him and Ann O'Donnell appeared.

Symonds cursed and tried to pass her. Ann deftly slid out one pretty leg and the officer turned a somersault, and brought up against the wall at the foot of the stairs to the upper deck and the bridge.

But the Second was too frightened to let a little thing like a fall stop him. He went scrambling up the stairs on all fours. Gene was still too far away, and Ann moved like a streak of light. She sailed through the air in a long dancer's leap and with two bounds was up the stair, ahead of the scrambling, fear-stricken officer.

"Out of my way, bitch," and Symonds hurled himself toward Ann.

Gene leaped forward, but he needn't have bothered. Ann lifted one of her educated feet, caught the Second under the chin and he came down the stair like a sack of meal. Gene caught his full weight.

The two men fell in a scramble of flailing arms and legs, knocking the props out from under Maher, who had started out after them. Just how the mixup might have turned out they were not to know,

for just then the vast weight of Schwenky descended upon the three and Maher let out a scream of anguish. But Gene and Symonds were on the bottom, too crushed by this tactic to make a sound.

IT WAS minutes later when Gene came back to consciousness, finding his head resting in Ann O'Donnell's lap while her swift hands prodded him here and there, looking for broken bones.

"I'm dead for sure," groaned Gene.

"You've just had the wind knocked out of you. You'll be all right," and Ann let his head fall from her grasp with a thump. She stood up, a little abashed at the going over she'd been giving him.

"Where're my mutineers?" Gene asked.

"Went to lock Symonds with the others. What is going to happen now? I'm not sure I like this development, now it's happened."

"You should have thought of that before you tripped Symonds," said Gene. "But I'll admit there are problems. For instance, with all the officers in the brig, how can we be sure we can keep this atomic junk heap headed in the right direction?"

"What is the correct direction?" asked Ann, squatting down beside him.

"I don't know. We'll have to figure it out, then see if we can point her that way."

"Let's get up to the bridge," she said.

Schwenky and Maher found

them brooding over the series of levers and buttons which comprised the control board. Schwenky noted their baffled frowns. His big face took on a worried look. "You fix!" he said. "You good fellow, Gene. We run ship, let officers go to hell. Yah!"

Maher scratched one patch of greying hair over his left eye. The rest of his skull was covered with brown bumps like fungus growths. "It's just possible we'll wreck the ship, let the air out of her or something, if we experiment," he warned.

"Go get MacNamara," said Gene. "He's been on the ship longer than any of us. Maybe he'll know."

He didn't. "All I know is grease cups," he reminded Gene.

Hours later eighteen men and four women gathered together in the recreation room to discuss a plan of action. Everyone had his or her ideas, but after an hour of wrangling, they got nowhere. Finally Gene held up a hand and shouted for silence.

"Let's decide who's boss, then follow orders," he said. "If I may be so bold, how about me?"

"Yah!" said Schwenky. "I do what you say. I like you!"

Old MacNamara grumbled to himself. "Do nothing, I say. We ought to stick to our duty, and save the lives of those who would have to take our places . . ." The unguarded pile had given MacNamara a martyr complex.

Maher looked over at him. "Your idea of sacrifice is all very fine, MacNamara. But we're not all anxious to die. You know what

would happen now if we gave up!"

Gene spoke up again. "Let me summarize the position we're in—maybe then we can make a better decision."

"Go ahead," said Ann. The others nodded and fell silent, waiting.

Gene cleared his throat. "The way it looks to me, we've had a lucky accident in getting control of the ship. So far, we've not contacted the passengers. They know nothing of the change that's taken place. As it is, I see no point in contacting them. It might force us to face another mutiny, that of the passengers, who would regard us as what we are, mutineers, and when they found we weren't going to our destination, they'd certainly not all take it lying down. Point number one, then, is to ignore the passengers, keep the knowledge of a mutiny from them.

"Now, our real purpose in this mutiny is to expose this whole vicious secret slavery, tell Earth of the danger of the unshielded piles in space ships, destroy the Company's monopoly, and bring about new research which I'm sure would eventually overcome the difficulty. Just how are we going to do that? The answer is simple—we must get back to Earth, and we must get back in a way the Company will not be able to intercept us. As I understand it, this won't be easy. The Company is in complete control of space travel, and they have the ships to knock us out of space before we can get near Earth. Somehow we've got to win through. Can we do it by a direct return to Earth? I doubt it. How-

ever, say we do it. Then where do we go? The government might look upon us as mutineers and thus give the Company a chance to quash the whole affair.

"So we've got to go directly to the people, who, once they *see* us, and realize what space travel with these piles means, will demand an explanation with such public feeling even the government can't avoid a showdown. It's the secrecy we must break. Thus, we must land on Earth with the biggest possible splurge of publicity. We've got to do it so no Company ship can prevent it.

"Then there's this to consider. Most of you would find it a difficult thing to take up a life on Earth. I know that many of you want to take off for some remote world, and try to live out your lives by yourselves. I say that would be a cowardly thing to do. So, before we decide anything else, I say let's decide here and now that the *only* thing we will do is go back to Earth."

One of the most grotesquely deformed of the crew spoke up. "No woman would ever look at me," he said defiantly. "Children would stare at me and scream in terror. I've suffered enough. Why should I suffer more?"

The woman in the fine fur got to her feet and walked over to him. She sat down beside him and took his hand in hers. "I will look at you," she said. "When we get back to Earth, I will marry you and live with you—if you are brave enough to take me there."

For an instant the crewman

stared at her out of his horribly bulging popeyes, then he swallowed hard and clutched her hand fiercely.

"The Devil himself will not keep me from it!" he said hoarsely.

Gene, staring at the man, felt a warm hand slip into his, and he turned to find Ann.

"I think that answers for all of us," she said.

The room rang with the shouts of approval.

Once more Gene began talking. "All right, then, I've a plan. First, we'll try to find out how to maneuver this craft. I believe we can persuade one of the Mates to show us the controls without much trouble."

"Yah!" interrupted Schwenky. "They show!"

"We'll set a course for Earth by the sun. We'll come in with the sun at our back, which means we'll have to make a wide circle off the traveled spacelanes, through unknown space, and come in from the direction of the inner planets, which are uninhabited and unvisited. Also, with the sun behind us, we won't be observed from Earth. Then, with all our speed, we'll come in, land at high noon in Chicago, right in front of the offices of the *Sentinel*, the newspaper for which I work."

There was a chorus of exclamations. Ann looked at him in amazement. "You, a newspaperman!" she gasped.

"Yes. I was sent out by my boss to find out what was behind the secrecy of the space ships. I got shanghaied as a crew member. Now, with your help, maybe I can

complete my assignment. Once we get to my boss, the show will be over. He'll blast the story wide open."

"Wonderful!" shouted Maher. "Come, Schwenky! We will get Perkins and make him show us how to run the ship!"

Schwenky chortled in glee. "Yah! We get. By golly, I know that Gene O'Neill is good man! Maybe I get my picture in newspaper?"

Maher stared at him. "God forbid!" he said. "Unless it's in the comic section!"

"Yah!" agreed Schwenky. "In comic section!"

TWO WEEKS later, as the ship crossed Earth's orbit and headed in behind the planet in the plane of the sun, the meteorite hit. It tore a great hole in the passenger side of the ship, and knocked out the port jets.

The ship veered crazily under the influence of its lopsided blast, and the crew was hurled against the wall and pinned there as the continuing involuntary maneuver built up acceleration.

Gene, who had been in his bunk, was pressed against the wall by a giant hand. Savagely he fought to adjust himself into a more bearable position, then tried to figure out what had happened. Obviously the ship was veering about, out of control.

"Meteorite!" he gasped. "We've been hit."

He pulled himself from the bunk, slid along the wall to the door. It

was all he could do to open it, but once in the companionway outside, he found that he could crawl along one wall, off the floor, in an inching progress. He made it finally to the control room, and forced his body around the door jamb and inside. Against the far wall Maher was plastered, dazed, but conscious. At his feet lay Heinie, his head crushed, obviously dead.

"Cut off the rest of the jets!" gasped Maher. "I can't make it!"

Gene crawled slowly around the room, following the wall, until he could reach the controls, then he pulled the lever that controlled the jet blast. The ship's unnatural veering stopped instantly and both Maher and Gene dropped heavily to the floor.

Gene was up first and helped Maher to his feet. Together they turned to the indicators.

"Passenger deck's out!" said Maher. "Except for a few compartments. The automatic seals have operated. But there must be somebody left alive in them."

"We've got to get them," said Gene. "But first, we've got to check up on what damage has been done here, and how many casualties we have."

"Heinie's dead," said Maher. "He hit the wall with his head."

Gene shuddered, and deep in his stomach nausea churned. He thought of Ann and his blood froze in his veins. "You take below decks, I'll go up," he said. Ann's cabin was on the deck above.

Maher nodded and staggered away. Gene scrambled up the stairwell as fast as he could, and ran

down the corridor. At Ann's door he stopped, turned the knob. The door opened. The room was empty.

Suddenly he heard running footsteps, and Ann threw herself into his arms, sobbing.

"Where were you?" he asked, almost savagely.

"I went to your cabin, to see if you were hurt. What happened to the ship?"

"Meteorite hit us. Knocked out the passenger deck. Most of the passengers will be dead, but we've got to go in and rescue the survivors."

Doors were opening here and there and the crew members able to make it were congregating around them. They went to the recreation room. There Gene counted noses. Five crewmen were missing. Of those present, six men were injured, and one woman exhibited a black eye, accentuating her other abnormalities. The three prisoners were reported unharmed.

"What about the missing men?" Gene asked.

"Three dead," Maher replied, "two badly hurt. We'll need somebody to look after them."

"I'll go," volunteered Ann. The woman in fur stepped forward also, and they left the room behind Maher and Schwenky.

Gene faced the rest. "We've got a real problem now. With a reduced crew, we'll have to finish a trip that would have been tough with an uninjured ship. But first, we've got to search the passenger deck and remove the survivors. All of you who are able, put on pressure suits and come with me."

He led the way to the locker containing the pressure suits. Seven men, those who were not too deformed to don the suits, made up the party. Gene led the way to the Captain's stateroom, ordered the door sealed behind them, then opened the only door to the damaged deck. The air rushed out as the door swung open, and suddenly complete silence descended upon them. There would be no more communication between them except for signs.

In an hour they had determined the truth. All passengers but one, a woman, had been killed instantly. The woman was unconscious, but suffering only from bruises. It had been necessary, after discovering her unpierced cabin, to return to the deck above and cut through with a torch.

When she regained consciousness and saw her rescuers, she screamed.

"That'll give us some idea of how the people back on Earth will receive us," said Gene. "If we get there, that is."

Later, in the control room, Maher and MacNamara gave their report.

"We can make it," said MacNamara, "but we'll come in limping like a wounded moose. If any of the Company ships sight us, we'll be a sitting duck. But maybe it will be better that way. This is like war, and some of us must die . . ." His voice trailed off in a mumble.

"Some of us *are* dying," said Maher. "But he's right, Gene; we can make it, with luck. We'll not be able to come in fast, nor land in

the city, but we'll make it to Earth."

"That's enough," decided Gene. "If we can land near Chicago, I think I can manage the rest."

They turned to the controls, and MacNamara went back to his pile room. Once more the ship limped on, this time directly toward the ball of Earth, looming a scant twenty million miles away.

IT TOOK eight days to come within a million miles of their goal. Then tragedy struck again. The cabin on the passenger deck from which they had removed the sole survivor blew its door, and the air on the deck above rushed out through the hole they had burned into the cabin. It had been forgotten, and it meant the lives of three more crew members.

Then, as they prepared to bring the ship into the atmosphere, Maher, peering through the telescope, let out a shout. "Company ship, coming up fast! They're after us!"

Gene leaped to the telescope and peered through. Far to the left, a glowing silver streak in the sky, was the familiar shape of a space ship, growing larger by the minute. Studying it, Gene saw that it was an armed cruiser.

"They've got wise," said Maher. "I thought they would, when we didn't check in at Io. Probably radioed back to be on the lookout for us."

"Call MacNamara," said Gene. "We've got to see if he can set us down faster. Maybe there's some way to step up that pile."

Maher rushed off, and Ann came in. "What's up?" she asked.

"Cruiser after us," said Gene, his face grim. "Looks like we won't get to Chicago unless MacNamara has something up that old sleeve of his."

Ann went white, and together they waited for the old Engineer.

When he came in, Gene gestured to the telescope. "Take a look."

MacNamara squinted through the eyepiece with his double pop-eyes. "Don't see a thing," he grumbled.

"Well, it's a Company Cruiser, gunned to the limit. She's going to be near enough to shoot us down in about three hours."

"Three hours, you say?" MacNamara scratched his head. "How near we to Earth?"

"Half a million miles."

"You could make it in the lifeboat."

Gene snorted. "That Cruiser'd shoot down the lifeboat as easy as it will the ship—a lot easier."

"If they can catch you," said MacNamara. "Some of us must die, that the rest may live."

"Don't start that again, Mac," said Maher impatiently. "What we want to know is whether you can soup up that pile so we can beat that Cruiser down to Earth?"

"Not a thing I can do," said the Chief Engineer. "We've only one set of tubes. Full power would shoot us all over the sky. But I can do something as good."

"What?"

The old Engineer considered them through his double eyes. "The rest of you'll take the lifeboat

and make for Earth. I'll remain here on the ship and shield your flight. I'm sure I can hide the little boat for awhile, and then, even with one jet, I think I can delay the cruiser until you get away. Someone's got to make a sacrifice. I'm old, and I didn't want any of this to begin with.

Maher gasped. "Mac, you old fool. D'ya mind if I apologize for what I just said? But you're right, that's a possible answer. Only I'll be the one to stay."

"Do you know how to adjust the pile and the jets to make a weapon out of them?" asked MacNamara.

"No . . ." began Maher.

MacNamara grinned. "Nor am I going to tell you! So, you see, you can't be the one to stay."

Maher gripped the old man's hand and pumped it. "You win," he said. "You old . . . crackpot!" There was real affection in his voice.

"Then be off with you," said the Chief Engineer. "You've not a minute to lose. Every man jack of you into the boat, including the Captain and the Mates. I'll not have *my* ship cluttered up with extra hands that might cramp my style. . . ." And turning, the old man made his way back to the pile room, mumbling to himself.

Eyes wet, Gene gave the orders to abandon ship, and within thirty minutes every living soul was aboard the lifeboat.

MacNamara had finished his work with the pile and was back in the control room, waiting for the lifeboat to cast off. As it did so, he waved, then turned to the controls.

As the lifeboat darted away on its chemical jet engines, they could see the old man maneuvering the big ship so as to keep it ever between them and the Cruiser. An hour later when they were within a hundred thousand miles of Earth, MacNamara sent up a flare denoting surrender.

Tensely they watched the distant speck of light that was the ship with MacNamara on it. Then, around its side came the Company Cruiser, steering in toward it to make the capture. It was scarcely a thousand miles from the disabled ship. Gradually it drew closer, then edged in. Now it was only a few miles away, and at this distance, both specks seemed to merge.

"They got him!" Maher said.

"Yah!" Schwenky boomed, disappointment in his voice. "Me, I should have been the one to stay. I would slap them."

Suddenly, out in space, a bright flower grew. A flower of incandescent light that blossomed with terrifying rapidity, until it seemed to engulf all space in the area of the two ships. The familiar sphere of brilliance that marked an exploding atom bomb hung there in the heavens an instant, then it was gone. In its place was only a vast cloud of smoke, the dust and scattered atoms that were all that remained of two gigantic space ships.

"He detonated the pile!" said Gene. "He turned himself into an atom bomb!"

"Yah!" said Schwenky, his voice strangely muted. "Yah!" Awkwardly he turned and patted Ann's head as she began to sob.

"IS IT NOT handsome?" asked Schwenky proudly, holding the front page of the newspaper up for all to see. "I have my picture in the paper! Is it not nice?"

Laughing, Ann kissed the big Swede right on the lips, and hugged him, paper and all. "It's beautiful, you big lug!" she said. "The handsomest picture I've ever seen in any paper."

"Nah!" denied Schwenky. "It is not the handsomest. All of us have our pictures in the paper. We are all very good looking! Not only Schwenky. Is it not so, Gene, my friend?"

Gene grinned at him, and at the others. Maher pounded him on the back, and over the uproar came the voice of the editor of the *Sentinel*. "Telephone for Mr. Schwenky!"

Schwenky looked dazed, cocked his big ears at the editor. "For Schwenky?" he asked stupidly. "Telephone? Who would call Schwenky on the telephone?"

"How do I know?" said the editor. "It's some lady . . ." He thrust the phone into the big Swede's hand.

"Lady?" said Schwenky wonderingly. "Hello . . . lady . . ." he spoke into the receiver, his booming voice making it rattle.

"The other . . ." began Gene, then desisted. "Never mind, she'll hear you . . ."

"What? You want to marry me? Lady . . ." Schwenky's eyes bulged even more, and he roared into the transmitter. "Lady! You wait! I come!" He thrust the phone into the editor's hands and made for

the door like a lumbering bull.

"Where you going?" yelled Gene.

Schwenky halted, turned with a big grin. "I go to marry lady. She asked me to become my wife!"

"Where is she?" asked Gene. "Where are you going to meet her?"

Schwenky looked stupidly at the now silent phone. "By golly! I forget to ask her!" There was tragedy in his voice. "Now I never find her!"

The editor laughed. "Never mind—you'll get a hundred more proposals before the day's over. You can take your pick!"

Schwenky's eyes opened wide. Then he grinned again. "Yah!" he roared. "I take my pick! She will be so beautiful! Yah!"

The chatter of the teletype interrupted him, and the editor turned to watch the tape as it came from the machine. Then he began to read:

"Washington. April 23. President Walworth has grounded all space-ships and ordered all those enroute to proceed to the nearest port. A Congressional committee has been picked, including top members of the cabinet, to investigate the ships,

the atomic drives, and the system of secret slavery among crews. In a statement to the Press, President Walworth said that space travel will not be resumed until proper shields are developed. But he added that he had been informed by leading physicists that the problem can be solved within a year if sufficient funds were available. Said the President: 'I will see that the funds are made available!'"

The editor dropped the tape and turned to Gene. "I have one more bit of information, this one direct from the President by phone. He has asked me to inform you that he has appointed you new head of FAST."

"FAST?" asked Gene. "What's that?"

"Federal Agency for Space Travel," grinned the editor. "And congratulations. I hate to lose a good reporter, but maybe you'll be back after you finish in Washington—at a substantial increase in salary."

Gene grinned back. "Maybe I will," he said. "And I'll need the money." He put an arm around Ann and drew her to him. "Two can't live as cheap as one, you know."

Personalities

IN SCIENCE FICTION

**BOB TUCKER . . . His
News Letter Covers
the Field**

WILSON (BOB) TUCKER is a very personable young man who lives in P.O. Box 702, Bloomington, Illinois. Since 1934, he has labored mightily and thanklessly to evolve and create the "Science Fiction News Letter." This, according to Bob's letterhead is "the leading newspaper of the science fiction world."

The first item in the oldest issue of this newsletter we have at hand (Feb. 1946) reads:

FLASH! (pro-stuff:) New semi-slick fantasy and scific magazine to appear soon. Details scarce and confidential. Mag will follow general format of Time. Title not yet chosen.

And an item from the last issue on our desk:

A group of fen in . . . the Carolinas have organized a . . . fan club called The Little Monsters of America and published the first issue of their bulletin. For those un-

organized monsters eager to join, address The Little Monsters: Lynn Hickman, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, N. C.

The two items quoted are not necessarily representative of the broader content of Bob Tucker's newsletter. But Bob Tucker is certainly representative of that broad and interesting brotherhood—the science-fiction fan clubs. Even the moreso because his newsletter represents no single club, but caters to the many hundreds of them all over the world.

An examination of the letter shows it to be neatly almost professionally done. But more than this, it shows the heart and soul, the work and sweat that goes into it. Bob's circulation has risen from a handful of giveaways in 1934 to a paid circulation in 1951 of 450 copies. This rise is probably indicative of two factors: The increased public interest in science-fiction, and Tucker's amazing grit, courage, or maybe plain bullheadedness.

Bob Tucker is not a monopolist by any means. He has competition which has no doubt put a few gray hairs in his 37-year-old head. There is James Taurasi, in New York who

appears to specialize in flash information from the professional science-fiction editors and who will pen the guest editorial in the next issue of IF. There is also Captain Ken Slater of England, whose very able newsletter circulates about 250 copies throughout the world. And there are no doubt others.

WE BELIEVE, at this point, two questions arise in the mind of the casual non-letter-writing reader of science-fiction, who makes up, of course, the vast bulk of the field's paid circulation.

First, why do these amateur newsmen do it? Why does Bob Tucker beat out his brains year after year in this strange manner? Profit? We are sure this is not the case. Tucker's letter is issued bi-monthly and sells for 15c a copy. He could make more money re-decorating old bird houses. Vanity? Certainly not in the case of Wilson Tucker, who has written six novels—five of which are oddly enough, detective yarns and only one a science-fiction story—since 1945 and must be far more widely known for his fiction than his stf news reporting. Personal satisfaction?

That, in our opinion, is it. And it also answers for us, the second question of the casual reader: Why science-fiction fan clubs? They have been described learnedly by objective writers in various terms, the loftiest of which may well be "The phenomenon of science-fiction." Frankly, we see no phenomenon whatever in the move-

ment unless the term is also applied to movie star fan clubs, sports fans, stamp collectors, and any other segment of hobbyists.

In short, science-fiction appears to be a hobby with a large following of sane, healthy-minded enthusiasts who band together through the natural manner to discuss their mutual interests. In fact the principle error here is in using the term "science-fiction" to define their particular field. While one of the major cohesive forces relative to this hobby is the professional science-fiction magazine, many of the fan are thoroughly at home with the dry-as-dust higher mathematics, abstract equations, and technical data which have no place in magazines dedicated to pure entertainment and seldom appear there. An item noted in Tucker's newsletter informed us that a stf fan wrote to a fairly well-known scientist named Einstein, received a reply, and that the fan's local club spent entire session digesting that reply.

A GREAT DEAL has also been said about the "lunatic fringe" of stf fandom. Beyond all doubt, such a fringe exists, even to a point that the Post Office authorities last year banned a fanzine from the mails. However, this segment exists in almost every field of mass enthusiasm. And we feel the stf fanatic is far less spectacular than, say the baseball extrovert. We have yet to hear of an stf fan sitting all night on the sidewalk wrapped in a blanket waiting for a club meet-

ing to start. Yet this "phenomenon" can be observed unfailingly every year in front of a world series stadium.

In case the reader may interpret the foregoing as IF's invitation to the fan clubs into a mutual admiration society, it's not true, and we ask Bob Tucker and his clansmen to read further. As an individual, we admire them very much, but as editor of IF, a magazine dedicated to entertainment and thence to a publisher's profit, we can only quote the able Sam Merwin who bowed out of THRILLING WONDER STORIES' editorial chair with the following comment in the October '51 issue of that magazine:

"... fans as such make up a very small percentage of our net paid circulation. The magazine is actually supported by a much less actively zealous and vociferous readership. Thus we have given the fans space in the deliberate hope and intention of making their antics entertaining to at least a fair proportion of the larger, less-fannish readership."

We did not see the foregoing reported in Tucker's newsletter. An oversight no doubt. But Bob certainly knows that Sam Merwin is a man who—by his own admission—considered "the trading of reasonably ingenious insults a delightful pastime". Therefore we think we could, with Sam's consent, substitute "their affairs interesting" for "their antics entertaining" in the above quotation. And with the substitution we've probably quoted from Sam, the policy of ninety-nine percent of the professional sf mag editors, although few of them have exhibited either Sam's courage or his desire to give up editing.

Frankly, we don't think the fans need the pro mags as much as they appear to. We feel that if all paper supplies were suddenly needed to make blotters for the Pentagon and the pro mags thus ceased to be, Bob Tucker and his science-fiction fans would go merrily on their way, getting together to discuss atom bombs, guided projectiles, space platforms and other things far beyond the layman's ken.

Next Month's Personality:

RAYMOND A. PALMER

A PERTINENT and searching article on the man who has been called "The High-Priest of Science-Fiction." He rocketed Shaver to fame—gave the world the bitterly controversial Shaver Mystery. But how many people really *know* Palmer? Get the facts in the May issue of IF.

They opened the ruins to tourists at a dollar a head but they reckoned without . . .

The OLD MARTIANS

By Rog Phillips

THE MAN with the pith helmet had his back toward me. Hunched forward, he was screaming at the girl in the lens of his camera. "Don't just stand there, Dotty! Move! Do something! Back up toward that column with inscriptions on it . . ."

The girl was tall and longlegged with ideal body proportions, her features and skin coloring a perfect norm-blend with no throwback elements. Right now she seemed confused and half-frightened as she tried to comply with the directions of the man with the movie camera. She smiled artificially, turned her head to look at the fragment of a wall behind her, reached out with a finger and started tracing the lines of an almost obliterated inscription in its stone surface.

The camera stopped whirring. Its owner straightened and grumbled, "That's all."

Now the girl was allowed to go back to her worrying. Swiftly she surveyed the crowd, but didn't find the person she was looking for. She started moving toward one of the arches that led deeper into the ruins.

I followed her slowly.

She passed through the arch, stopped, and turned her head toward the right, her eyes on something out of sight. She'd found him, but she saw me at the same time and her worry deepened.

When she moved back into the crowd, I strolled casually through the archway.

There was a vaguely defined passageway, the roof over it gone for half a million years, of course. And twenty feet away, oblivious of his surroundings except for what was directly in front of him, was my man.

His height and build were some-

what less than the norm. But it was his profile that drew my attention. A remarkable throwback; a throwback of a distinct type.

In fact, he might well have served as the model in the types textbooks labeled British. The resemblance was subtle. Only one trained to differentiate would ever have noticed it.

I let my attention take in his whole figure. His elbows had a habit of making fluttery movements when his exploring hands paused so that a strange birdlike impression was given. Also an air of ungainliness in the lines of the lean body, rather than the feline smoothness and grace of the normblend. It was so in keeping with his features that it served to strengthen the psycho diagnosis.

A throwback to an era ten thousand years in the past, and therefore, as the textbooks say, prone to mental instability. It was no wonder that the girl called Dotty had had the air of being perpetually worried!

She appeared now, from the far side of the ruin and approached the man.

He sensed rather than saw her and straightened up, every line of him etched with excitement.

"Dotty!" he said. "I've found it. I've found the proof. I've been here before, thousands of years ago when this wasn't a ruins. I remember."

The girl's manner reflected weariness. "Please, Herb. You've got to forget all about it. You'll talk too much!"

His shoulders stiffened. "Don't

worry. I won't talk until I have proof to convince even them. Somewhere around here something lies buried. Something I will be able to remember. They will dig where the rocks haven't been touched for five thousand centuries and find what I say is there."

Dotty was shaking her head. "No, Herb. If it were on Earth I might half believe you. But not here on Mars. These—these people weren't even humanoid!"

"Neither was I," Herb whispered hoarsely.

I sighed regretfully. I'd seen too many cases like this one. I'd grown to dread them. But it was a job and a man had to eat.

THE GUIDE began herding the tourists back to the bus. I mingled with the crowd, and when Dotty and Herb climbed aboard I managed to stick close to them.

"Where'd you two go to?" the man in the pith helmet called from where he was sitting. "Stick close to me. I put a new role in the camera. At the next place I want to get some shots of both of you together."

"All right, George," Dotty said obediently.

She and Herb were forced to find separate seats. They would do no talking, so I faced around and studied the three alternately. The man in the pith helmet, George, was a normal blend; totally unconcerned about his reactions on others so long as he could pursue his hobby.

The bus detoured a roped-off

If this was a cemetery, the old Martians should have been here. But there were no voices—no bones.



area in the center of the ancient city, the part considered too dangerous because of cave-in possibilities, and made its way out to the northern edge of ruins to the part that resembled the ancient cemeteries on Earth. The only major difference was that there were no remains under the evenly spaced stones. There was some doubt that it had been a cemetery. But the guide announced it as one. And that announcement as the bus came to a stop had a pronounced effect on Herb. He began his fluttery elbow movements again and looked around at Dotty with a triumphant smile. I moved up quickly to keep him in earshot.

He protested when George insisted on taking camera shots, then gave in and cooperated in order to get it over with.

Finally George snapped his camera shut. Herb mumbled something to Dotty that I didn't catch, and started down one of the lanes between rows of stones as though headed for a definite goal.

I couldn't very well follow after they left the main group. It would have been obvious. Instead, I veered off to one side, gambling that when they reached their destination I would be able to read their lips.

I got well away from stragglers and took out my microscope, pointing it off in the distance and swinging the objective lens around until it centered on them. I was lucky. They were facing in my direction.

"It isn't a cemetery," Herb was saying with emphatic motions of his hands. "It was a parking area, and

this stone was where I parked my airsled. I can remember it as though it were yesterday."

I had to admire the man's subconscious. It was a remarkably shrewd guess. The experts wouldn't play along with it, but they would probably never be able to prove him wrong on that count. But Dotty was arguing with him. "How can you prove it was a parking area?" Her eyes roamed over the large field with its regularly spaced stones. "It certainly looks impractical for a parking lot."

"Just the same, that's what it was. I wish I had a shovel here. I seem to remember burying something near my stone. If I could find that it would prove I really remember."

"Why don't you forget it?" Dotty pleaded. "After all, even if it were true, what does it matter *now*?"

"It matters to me. Ever since we arrived here I've seen familiar things. Too familiar to be coincidence. I never felt this way before. I always considered reincarnation as ancient superstitious belief, just like everyone else. But not any more. I *know*. I lived here when all this was new."

"But can't you just be satisfied to feel that you did and let it go at that?" Dotty asked. "I'm afraid of what they would do to you if they found out what you're thinking."

"Hah!" Herb snorted. "I have a feeling that before we leave Mars I'll be able to prove it to them. Somewhere in this city is something that only I know exists. It's hidden under stones that haven't been disturbed since man first set foot on

the planet. It isn't entirely clear yet, but it will come—it will come. Then I'll make them listen. They'll dig, and they'll find what I say is there. You wait and see."

"They'll lock you up, darling," Dotty said. "They won't believe you."

The guide was calling everyone back to the bus. I watched Herb scowl fiercely at the stone marker that he believed to have been his, open his mouth to say something, then turn away so that his lips were out of sight. Regretfully I put the microscope away and went back to the bus.

I KNEW WHERE we were going next, and I was uneasy about it. Herb and Dotty managed to sit together and I got a place right behind them where I could eavesdrop. But they sat in silence.

The bus had left the ancient city behind, to head out over the desert toward one of the few structures on Mars which had withstood the ravages of time without crumbling. An immense dome of solid concrete reinforced with pure copper rods harder than steel. The Martians had know what Earth civilization didn't learn until around the year three thousand: that copper can't be tempered, but pure copper becomes tempered of itself in a thousand years.

That immense dome was a honeycomb of passageways and rooms, some of which were not open to tourists. It would be a natural for Herb.

The bus stopped. The people

were piling out and staring curiously at the smooth surface of the dome. Especially at places where the reinforcement rods were protruding and glittering like tarnished gold.

Two of the permanent guards had come out to take charge of the tour. I caught the eye of one of them and nodded toward Herb. The guard caught my meaning, edged over to his partner, and soon both men were warned that Herb was to be closely watched.

I felt better, knowing that a couple of others knew about him. Maybe it would have been smarter to have taken him in custody right then. But it would have meant a scene.

The procedure of the tour was for the guide to do all the talking, leading the procession through the roped off parts of the dome, while the two guards followed along behind to make sure no stragglers got left.

I let three or four people move in front of me so Herb wouldn't get suspicious. Dotty was sticking close to him, plainly worried. And he was more excited than he had been at any of the other spots. He fairly quivered, his eyes caressing the walls with a fevered look.

Dotty didn't miss his increase agitation. Especially after he whispered in her ear a couple of times.

The guide took the usual path. Straight into the dome, pausing at half a dozen small rooms with carved walls, to arrive at a bank of elevators installed in the exact center; then straight up to the roof and the observation platform from

which miles and miles of desert and ruins could be seen. Then back down to the second level, a zig-zag course through other rooms, and finally down a flight of steps to where the tour started.

I kept my eyes on the back of Herb's head. You can tell a lot by doing that. At first his head turned this way and that, indicating he was full of curiosity. I was waiting for that telltale sudden tensing, with the head directed at some spot, that would tell of a sudden "memory" stirring in the man's mind.

I almost missed it when it came, because it was between two passages—a blank wall. The briefest pause, then Herb was going on again as though nothing had happened.

But now his head had stopped its curiosity-motivated pivotings. It was the head of a man who was no longer curious—who has made up his mind about something. I didn't like it.

And when the group emerged into open air once more without Herb having tried anything I knew as certainly as I had ever known anything that he intended coming back here, and soon.

In the comfort station before boarding the bus I scrawled a hasty note to the guards to investigate the spot halfway between passageways 14 and 15 on the first level, and slipped it to one of them as I passed him to get on the bus.

We visited four other spots on the tour. When Herb showed no real interest in them it only clinched what I was already sure of, that he planned on returning.

AT THE Ancient City Hotel
 A once again, I gave the high sign, and shortly Herb and Dotty were being watched by capable men, leaving me free to go to my room.

Once there, I called the dome. They were just getting the X-ray setup in place to explore that wall and promised to call me as soon as they were finished. Next I called C.I. and made my report. I was still making it when the operator broke in.

"Steve Merrit wants to talk to you," she said crisply.

"Make the circuit three way," I said.

Steve's voice came in. "I had to get to you, Joe. This guy Herb and his wife just left the hotel."

"C.I.'s listening too," I said. "Did they say anything that would point to where they're going?"

"To the cemetery first. He swiped a couple of knives and forks when they finished eating their dinner. Maybe for weapons."

"I doubt that," I said. "But I think it's time to pick him up. He's got to be committed."

"Wait a minute," C.I. said. "Joe, you catch up with them. Join them and play along. Tell this guy Herb you overheard him and guessed what was going on. Gain his confidence if you can."

"That's pretty dangerous!" I replied. "That guy's—"

"It's orders," C.I. said. "Steve, you lay the net so that whatever happens we can contain it."

That was that. Orders. But I still didn't like it.

I went to the desk and took out my compact paralysis tube. Then,

reluctantly, I put it back. I would have to play the part. The paralysis tube would give me away as an agent. It would have to be up to Steve and the others to contain the threat.

Down in the lobby I saw Steve waiting impatiently. He was uneasy, too. "What's come over C.I.?" They're toying with dynamite on this."

"I think I know what they want, they want to let him go far enough so we can see more of the nature of the danger. And I hope nobody gets killed. They should have spotted this Herb guy and not let him come here at all. I suspect they did spot him, and let him come to conduct another of their damned experiments. They don't want to leave well enough alone."

We were outside now. No one was around. The sun was just beginning to set, and the instant it disappeared the night would be pitch-black. Even if one of the moons was out.

"We'll be watching on the standard C.I. band," Steve assured me. "They're at the temple right now, waiting for it to get dark." He grinned. "Good luck." There was a mixture of genuineness, half mockery, and worry in his voice.

At the temple ruins I found them easily enough and took the simplest course. I walked right up to them.

"Hello," I said. "I thought I'd find you here. I want to go along with you. I'm interested."

"What do you mean?" Herb was hostile and suspicious.

"You remember me. I was on the tour this afternoon. I accidentally

overheard you. It would be something if reincarnation could be proven."

"Do you believe in reincarnation?"

I frowned as though being cautious. "I don't know." Then I put a disarming grin on my lips. "Since believing in it is legally classified as insanity, for the records, no." It was a nice statement. It could imply that I did, and Herb took that implication. He accepted me. Dotty was different.

"How do you know he isn't an agent?" she asked Herb uneasily.

"If I am, the fat's in the fire," I told her. "But wouldn't I be locking him up?" This quieted, but didn't satisfy her. "Anyway," I said, "if you can dig up something that you remember burying, an extra witness won't do any harm. That's what you're after, isn't it? Proof that will end the last bit of doubt?"

"That's right," Herb said. "And you can help me dig."

"Okay then," I said. And it was settled. We introduced ourselves, then lapsed into silence while we waited for the sun to set. It wasn't long.

THE PLACE looked more like a cemetery than ever in the eerie glow of black light pencils as we made our way along a row of stone markers. Herb strode purposefully. Dotty stuck close to him, still a little suspicious of me. I trailed half a step behind.

Finally Herb stopped beside one of the markers. "This is it," he said softly. I blinked at the marker, then

at Herb. It wasn't the one he had singled out in the afternoon. Was he mixed up?

If he was he was a good actor. He took out one of the dinner knives and squatted down and started to probe the soil, loosening it so that it could be scraped out by hand.

I watched him dig. Part of the time I helped him. We found nothing. After a reasonable amount of this Herb stood up with a resigned sigh. "Guess I was wrong," he said.

"Poor Herby," Dotty said.

"Yeah, poor Herby," Herb said with every appearance of tiredness and defeat. "But—that's that. Sorry to have gotten you all excited about nothing, Joe. Guess it was too much to expect anything." He turned to Dotty. "As long as we're out here, let's take a walk by ourselves. Huh?"

That was as obvious a cue as I had ever been handed. Neat. I was confronted with the alternatives of scrambling or calling him a liar.

"Guess I might as well go back to the hotel," I said cheerfully. "See you in the morning."

I headed back the way we had come until I was sure they couldn't hear me or see me with their black light pencils. Then, ducking down next to a marker I waited. After a couple of minutes I heard cautious footsteps.

"It's me, Joe—Steve."

"Good," I grunted. "What are they doing now? They gave me the brush-off."

"I got the play," Steve said. "Slick. Should we close in now, or wait?"

"I think I'll play my part a little further. Don't want C.I. to think we're timid."

"Okay," Steve said. "The next funeral we attend may be our own."

"Yeah," I said. "It might."

I moved into the darkness, not using my black light pencil, but keeping my sensitized glasses on so I could see Herb's if I got close enough.

I reached the spot where we had done the digging. I hesitated, then kept on, toward the spot where Herb and Dotty had been so engrossed that afternoon. In my mind's eye I knew exactly where it was.

My hands explored ahead of me, searching out each stone marker along my path, clinging to it as I passed it, and slipping off as I went on to the next. They were my only contact with reality in this total blackness.

I was thinking, too. I was thinking of what Herb had said about this being a parking area for air-sleds back before the earliest known records of man on Earth when this city was alive. He was probably right about it at that. Analysis had shown the presence of copper and aluminum in the top surface of some of the markers that could only be accounted for by some metallic object setting atop each one long ago, and remaining so that molecular and atomic creep could set in, carrying such atoms deep into the surface crystals of the stone.

And I was wondering what it was he hoped to dig up. If it were

some sort of weapon it probably wouldn't work after all this time. It couldn't! Or could it? A few things had been pieced together about the ancient Martian civilization. Not much, but enough to be sure that they knew a few things we had never discovered. They had been masters at creating machines with no moving parts. The electronic devices we had found had proven they knew far more about V.H.F. than we did.

I could see what C.I. was aiming at now. We might not even recognize what Herb was searching for. It would be better to let him find it, and get it from him before he could use it. If it was a weapon.

And it probably was a weapon. I was pretty sure his main objective was hidden in the wall in the dome, and that this thing in the cemetery was something that would help him get to that objective.

My thoughts came back to my surroundings. I was less than a dozen feet from where Herb and Dotty should be. I stopped. There was no trace of black light. I held my breath and listened. And I heard the faint scraping of the knife against stone.

I WISHED fervently that I had a standard C.I. infrascoppe so that I could see. Steve probably knew more of what was going on than I did. I had counted on watching Herb by his own black light pencil, and he was working in darkness.

Carefully I stole forward, inch by slow inch, my ears tuned for the

faintest significant sound such as a grunt of satisfaction that would tell of finding what he was digging for.

And a million thoughts taunted me, thoughts about the latest discoveries in disintegration frequencies, thoughts about how little we knew of that ancient Martian civilization.

But also I was figuring what Herb would do. He would find the object he was digging for. Unwittingly he would grunt his triumph. Dotty might forget his strict warnings to be quiet, and say something. Regardless of that, he would stand up slowly, fondling what he had found, remembering what it was and how it worked. There would be a few seconds before it would become a weapon in his hands, seconds that I had to make the most use of, and be ready for.

"Uh!" It was the triumphant grunt I had known would come.

Sudden panic made me cast aside whatever vague plan of action I had had.

I turned on my pencil, bathing the two in its black light. At the same time I said, "I *thought* it was a scheme to get rid of me."

It was the element of surprise that saved me. A still picture of the scene the black light disclosed etched itself into my mind. There was an object in Herb's hand. A strange, meaningless object, dirty, yet with definite form. It was cradled in his hand like a weapon. It was pointed almost at me.

I dropped my pencil and went in low, diving for his legs. I felt the air crackle where I had just stood. As my arms encircled his legs I

heard thunder exploding nearby.

Training has its advantages. The moment I felt contact with Herb that training took over. I jerked and rolled in a movement calculated to throw him to the ground face down, the motion ending in a backbreaker hold.

But only a part of my mind was concerned with that. The other part was frozen with horror. Approximately a half acre of the cemetery was glowing. I saw Steve in the center of it with Herb's weapon pointing his way. The very inertia of matter held Steve together for that brief instant, then he was falling apart, melting and evaporating at the same time, just like the stone markers and the ground around him.

I had the thing away from him suddenly, and I wondered what to do next. Running footsteps gave me the answer. It was other C.I. agents closing in.

Seconds later they had Herb under control. Dotty was wringing her hands and crying.

Me, I was holding the thing, afraid to let go of it and afraid to keep on holding it. But as the seconds passed without it exploding into destructive action again I began to let myself think I might live a while longer.

The area of destruction was molten now. Its heat was like that of an open blast furnace.

We skirted it and headed toward the road, lights in the distance telling us that cars were on the way to get us.

I saw Dotty stumble. I took her arm. She looked up at me, recog-

nized me in the light from the glowing pool of bubbling lava, and tried to pull away.

"Take it easy," I said gruffly. "I'm your friend. Maybe the only friend you've got here."

Her look told me she didn't believe me, but she didn't pull away any more.

We walked along, and after a moment she seemed to struggle up out of her mental paralysis.

"Herb was right!" she said in a low, wondering tone. "He really did remember."

"It was plain coincidence," I said sharply, "and don't ever let yourself think differently. He's insane. It's a recognized form of insanity. He'll be sent to a good mental hospital, and in a year or two he'll come out good as new."

"Coincidence?" she echoed. Then she laughed. It was mirth that drifted quickly into hysterical hopelessness. I dug my fingers into her flesh until the pain brought her to her senses.

"Coincidence," I said. "Nothing more. I've seen seventeen cases just like his. How else did I spot him? I recognized the type. None of the others found what they rationalized themselves into thinking they remembered from the time they were Martians. Eventually one of them would stumble onto something. That's coincidence. Not incarnated memory."

She turned her head and blinked at me. I nodded grimly. "I'm an agent," I said. "I go out on the tours for one purpose only—to spot psychos and make sure they don't get out of control. You'd be sur-

prised how many there are. Some of them, like your husband, probably show no sign of instability until they get here. They look around at the evidence of a civilization that existed before *homo sapiens* had evolved on the Earth, and it throws them. If you want to understand more about it read the medical books. They get irrational pre-memories. They look at something and the idea of familiarity associates with the new impression. They look around a corner and see something, and build up the conviction that they had consciously known what was there before they looked around the corner."

I felt that I was making headway with her. I wanted to. I had to.

"You—you say there were others, and they didn't find anything?" she said. She was groping for something logical to grasp. I had to give her that something.

"That's right," I said. "And the law of averages said that someday someone would uncover something that's been missed."

She was nodding slowly now, accepting what I was saying. It was authoritative. She would find confirmation in authoritative books. If she wanted to pursue the subject she would find plenty of evidence, real evidence, to support it. It is a common form of insanity. It was important that she believe that.

We reached the road. C.I. had been prepared. There was a car to take her back to the hotel, a stationwagon for Herb who was now very submissive and somewhat dazed, and a third car for me and my precious cargo.

TEN MINUTES later I was in the Science Building basement, laying the thing on a wooden table, very gently. It seemed solid, each integral part of its form being of a different metal.

None of the men watching me lay it down discounted the danger it contained. They knew too much about how shape and dimension can affect the electronic properties of metal. They knew the thing probably didn't contain an erg of power of its own, but probably triggered and directed the release of cosmic energies as yet unknown to them.

They stared at it. One of them reached out to touch it, then slowly drew his finger back.

I could see the decision crystallizing in their minds behind their serious eyes. This thing would go with the other strange and incomprehensible machines locked in vaults in a concrete building far out on the Martian desert away from the tourist trails of this dead planet. It would remain there until the day when human science advanced far enough to understand it.

"What about the wall in the dome?" I asked.

"They roped it off. They're afraid of it."

"Did you convince his wife he's insane?" one of the science staff asked.

I nodded. "I used the same old line. Told her there were dozens like him, and the law of averages made it certain at least one of them would find something."

He nodded, grinned without humor. "How we love to lie."

I turned away. There was a bitter taste in my mouth from all the lies I'd told—all the bilge.

But I knew the truth, too. I was as sure of that as I was of anything. It wasn't insanity, of course. And it wasn't reincarnation. It seemed to be, because the mind has a habit of *possessing* for its very own anything that enters it.

The truth of the matter was that somehow, in some incomprehensible way, the Martians were still with us. They hated us and they knew how to use our weak ones.

The old Martians—and their science.

I took a last look at the weapon lying on the table, then left the room and climbed the stairs to the

first floor. I walked down the silent, empty hall to the exit and out into the night.

I let my eyes roam the blackness of the lifeless Martian desert. With an effort I pulled them away and fixed them on the warmth, the human warmth, beckoning from the hotel.

I started walking toward that bit of comfort, and as I walked the eternal question that haunted all of us in C.I. hovered in the background of my thoughts.

Would we be able to *contain* the Martians until we understood the terrible machines they had left as a deadly heritage?

Tonight we almost hadn't. . . .

I thought of Steve.

GUEST EDITORIAL

By Capt. K. F. Slater

Editor, Operation Phantast, York, England

ATOM BOMBS and planet smashers! Just what the latter are, the reader must imagine for himself, authors rarely describe them, but only disclose their effects. These weapons form a goodly part of the space-war-science-fiction. That the former exists, and that the latter is a very strong probability, are things which cannot be denied. But just whether they would be used, or how much use they would be, are very doubtful factors.

To permit their use, one must first of all admit the fact of idealistic and annihilating war. Personally, I find it hard to apply the term idealistic to any war that has occurred in the murky past of mankind. The latter adjective is an equally doubtful one.

Wars have certainly been fought on a variety of pretexts, some of them vaguely idealistic, but in every case where it is possible to trace the causes, they are found to be economic. Empires that have been founded in the past do not truly derive from a lust for conquest, or any desire to enlighten the heathen, but can usually be

traced to simple economic factors. The Spanish empire of South America, was based on nothing more than a lust for gold. In those same Elizabethan days the English seaman was second to none—but although often describe as Empire making, those seamen instead of attempting to wrest from Spanish rule the Empire of South America went merrily ahead with the much more profitable, although equally deplorable, African slave trade! And that even after they had defeated the Spanish Armada which had been sent against England, not from any real desire to conquer the country, but simply to spike the guns of the merchant-adventurer whose main source of merchandise was frequently gold pirated from Spanish galleons.

A GAIN, the British Empire in India derives, not from any desire to conquer India, but purely because with the break-up of the Mogul Empire, resulting in anarchy and Civil war, the commercial company then exploiting India had to have peace in order

to prosper. Peace could only be obtained the price of conquest.

Should your enemy be infringing on your trade, you do not destroy him utterly. You just try to break him down to your size, or a little below. You therefore not only make his markets open to you, but you make him one of your markets. Should he have an eye on a bit of territory that will give him an advantage over you, then you try to annex it first. You don't wash it right off the map, for if it will give him an advantage, it will give you one also—no matter how many excuses of liberation are made. That liberation yarn was one of Hitler's most-played records, and Joe is running him pretty close! In fairness, it must be admitted that we have our own version of the same story.

It follows that internal use of the atom-bomb, except for race suicide, is not likely—when everyone can use it. And it is probable that most of the leading figures in today's scene could put on a very nice display of atomic fireworks. Each race, creed, or nation, does not desire to utterly destroy their enemies. They just desire an advantage—economic—over the rest. No advantage can be had when the others cease to exist. Although it may be nice politics to demand the use of the atom-bomb when you are not in favour of the present government, or administration is not likely that such demands are made seriously—except in the public eye. If it were not that the public thought the use of the atom-bomb would be a decisive factor, the

opposition would equally likely be expressing a strong desire that the government should refrain from its use.

THE SAME reasoning—which is doubtless considered fallacious by many of my readers—tends to me to prove the use of the atom-bomb and the planet-smasher improbable in space-war. (As an aside, I consider space-war, as normally visualised, highly unlikely anyway. Anyone who has had much to do with the supply lines for a military campaign will realise what I mean).

Frankly, you may consider this editorial to be an iniquitous vilification of mankind. It is not meant to be. It is intended to show that man, in the main, does things because he hopes to get something out of it. You get very little out of total devastation, if you are anywhere near the norm. The atom-bomb, fission-type, has been used twice, and although its destructive powers did not quite match up to the science-fiction fan's expectations, it was enough of a holocaust to shock most humans. The fusion-type we expect to be far worse. I do not expect them to be used to any great extent in the future—and I base my hope and expectation on man's very obvious cupidity! If that doesn't save us, nothing will!

And, naturally, if it saves us long enough to permit us to get out into space, it will probably save all those planets that our authors of today so happily blast from their orbits into flaming death. —kfs

ANTHONY

TALES OF TOMORROW

9:30 P.M., EST Each Friday

ABC-TV

LET'S SAY IT and get it over with—TALES OF TOMORROW is the best science-fiction fare on TV today. We suspected this when we saw them do Ted Sturgeon's "The Sky Was Full of Ships." Then we watched Tenn's "Errand Boy", and the classic, "Knock", by Frederick Brown and we said to ourselves, "Honey chile, this aint no coincidence, so let's prowl around and find out why."

Ted Sturgeon seemed the logical lad to quiz because we'd just sent him a fat check for his "Never Underestimate. . ." the very slick contribution to IF which you've no doubt already read.

We went to 9 Rockefeller Plaza, buttonholed Ted and asked how come? A rather shy chap, Ted, who isn't given to hitting the high notes on his own clarinet, but here's what we got:

There is a tight little group of stf masters who have banded together under the title of Science

Fiction League of America. The names Ted tossed off with pensive casualness were, Boucher, Asimov, Brown, Simak, Gold, Pratt, De-Camp, Tenn.

"As good as any names you can find in the field," said Sturgeon master of understatement.

The rest could be termed history, so let's term it history and get on. It seems this hard core of pure stf talent saw which way the wind was blowing, got together, and tossed their collective stf classics into a big hat. Then, as would naturally follow, the TV brass started showing up, looking for material for the co-axial cable. All paths seemed to lead straight to The Science Fiction League's big hat and soon TV's most obtuse producers came to realize what rare treasures it contained.

But the boys, (bless their canny little hearts) didn't want to sell piece meal. Possibly they could have gotten more money that way

but the fabulous dozen had sworn to stick together.

The result of their tenacity is **TALES OF TOMORROW**, a TV show produced by Mort Abrahams and sponsored by a gent named Jacques Kreisler who sells watch bands and also knows good entertainment when he sees it.

We think the moral here is "Never accept substitutes." Far too many TV producers took one quick look at science-fiction and said, "Huh! Hopalong Cassidy with a ray gun. Sam Spade in a diver's helmet."

The tried and true science-fiction fans could have told them how wrong they were at the very beginning; that stf isn't something any writer can bat out while waiting for the girl friend to straighten the seams in her stockings; that authors like Sturgeon, Tenn, and DeCamp didn't get up there by accident but by hard work and a sincere devotion to the highly specialized type of literature which is just now taking its rightful place in the great society of letters.

OF COURSE, anyone familiar with the fundamentals of dramatic presentation must concede that few fiction pieces, even in the category termed great, will show up to advantage in the medium of visual presentation, be it stage or television. Thus many classics must of necessity remain forever on the printed page.

But it is strange also that whenever a good story, stf or otherwise,

is of a type to fit visual presentation, it almost invariably becomes good stage or television; not fair or passable, but *good*. So if you draw your material from men who know their field—in this case, men who know how to write the best science-fiction—it is not necessary to twist the plot around in an attempt to secure drama and suspense. Those ingredients are there already, waiting to be used. It is hard to conceive even a mediocre adapter or director making a botch of Nelson Bond's *Trial Flight*, as an example.

And happily, the TV program, **TALES OF TOMORROW**, is not plagued with fuzzy minded technicians. The adaptations are skillfully done, the direction is smooth and obviously emanates from a practiced hand. The answer is quality right down the line—a perfectly logical result.

There is also another point of importance here to the true science-fiction fan. Ours is a relatively new field of literature in that it is on trial before millions of people who never before heard of it. Quite naturally, we want science-fiction to become a liked and wanted form of entertainment. Beyond doubt, **TALES OF TOMORROW** is making new friends for our infant medium every time it hits the video screens. Let's hope that more radio and TV people, when seeking science-fiction for visual and audio outlet, make it a point to go out and get the best.

Here's luck to **TALES OF TOMORROW**. Don't miss it.

SCIENCE BRIEFS

By Charles Recour

Phosphorescent Muscles

IT IS strange to consider the way in which altogether diverse scientific discoveries often dovetail. The old saying should be, "Science makes strange bedfellows! Biologists have for a long time been interested in the phenomenon of natural phosphorescence as exhibited by fireflies, deep-sea creatures and small animalcules found in fresh water. The mechanism all three types of life employ to change chemical energy into visible light is marvellously efficient. Practically no energy is lost in heat—merely a fraction of one percent—the rest appearing as useful light.

One of the major objectives of the study of phosphorescence in fireflies was the acquisition of knowledge of the mechanism in order to improve upon the efficiency of fluorescent lamps and glow tubes. This study is still going on.

But what is unique is that the scientists concerned are beginning to suspect that there is a link between the way phosphorescence occurs in living things and the way human muscles are triggered into action! Imagine the strange connection between these two (putatively) unrelated phenomena! It often happens that a discovery

made in one branch of science will apply to another, entirely dissimilar, field.

The study of the way the muscles act is of fundamental importance to anyone desiring any understanding of the life processes at all. Scientists have so far begun to get the glimmer of an idea as to how nerve actions are basically electrical, but the step from nerve impulse to muscle reaction has been a stumbling block for a long time. Now it appears that the study of fireflies is likely to suggest a lead to the right path.

Insect World Can't Win

THAT GRIMLY poetic person who had "the insect crawling out of the eye-socket of the skull of the last man on Earth" will have to change his tune soon. In the never-ending war between men and insects, it appears at last as though man is to get the upper hand. The insect world has countless numbers of soldiers, but the human world has brains.

There is a famous laboratory in California devoted to one subject—insects! It is small and understaffed, but it is efficient, and from

it have come a number of discoveries that will eventually influence all of our lives. Few people realize the destructiveness of insect pests. Hundreds of millions of dollars' damage are done each year by insects to crops, textiles, even metals. And until the Berkeley Laboratory started a truly scientific campaign, all the chemical agents in the world were able to do no more than check their ravages.

The Berkeley Laboratory is dedicated to the study of insect *diseases*. Insects, even as you and I, have a ferocious enemy in fungi and bacterial destroyers. Farmers, agronomists and scientists from all over the world have sent dead insects to Berkeley to determine what killed them. Frequently the lab is able to pinpoint the killer and very often it turns out to be a bacterium of some type or another. Fortunately the bacterial diseases that seem to destroy insects are not harmful to humans or animals—and vice versa.

This naturally led the lab men to consider wiping out insect pests with BW—bacterial warfare. They first fought the alfalfa caterpillar with a filterable virus suspended in water and sprayed from an airplane. The results were perfect and the caterpillars were wiped out in one fell swoop.

Subsequent work has shown that viruses of various types are even more effective than bactericidal compounds and, as a consequence, the electron microscope, the only medium through which viruses can be seen, is in constant use. Large varieties of viral substances have been discovered which are able to

deplete the insect world, and right now a planned program is in progress, designed to practically label some virus as a destroyer for some insect type, definitely and specifically.

The success of this program will be a great boon to farmers, beekeepers, plant and animal breeders, and even to householders. While in reality the threat of insect domination has always been very slight, the actual damage done by the creatures has been formidable. Chemicals have limited application and the best bet would seem to be to fight living fire with living fire—use harmless viruses to combat fearful insects.

Science is gradually turning from the manipulation of the physical environment, the inorganic, to the organic. In the biological world rather than the physical are the greatest chances for new and extreme advances. And BW against insects is one of the outstanding new victories!

Gassy Old Universe

WHEN YOU think of "deep space", of the regions between the remotest stars and galaxies, you think of frightening emptiness, of sheer nothingness, awesome in its lack of matter. This is not exactly the case. So-called "empty space" is actually filled almost uniformly with vast amounts of plain old hydrogen gas. Near stars this gas is ionized, electrically charged, and can be detected by ordinary telescopic and spectroscopic observation. But neutral, un-

charged hydrogen cannot be detected this way.

It took the new science of "radio astronomy" to show up the startling amounts of hydrogen present everywhere. First, neutral hydrogen makes its presence known by the unusual fact that every once in a while the electron spin of a single atom of hydrogen will be completely reversed, and thus it will send out a feeble pulse of radiation—not visible light, but the subtler radiation of familiar radio waves. Because this pulse is exceedingly weak, and because it occurs with such rarity in the life of a single hydrogen atom, there would be no hope at all of ever detecting it if it were not for the astounding fact that hydrogen is abundant beyond all expectation.

In a universe measured in hundreds of millions of light years in diameter, it is known that there is approximately one atom of hydrogen for every cubic centimeter of space! This fantastic density explains why radio astronomy in this region works. Rarely does a single hydrogen atom pulse out a blast of radiation, but when countless numbers of atoms are involved, they all add up to an appreciable amount of radiation.

Huge receptive directional antennas poke their grotesque shapes into the sky and, with highly sensitive fingers, pick up the twenty-one-centimeter radiation that touches their sensitivity. Radio astronomy is now able to make charts and graphs of the radiation distribution. What it means is another matter. What part it plays in the structure of the universe is not

fully known but, as has been mentioned before, it is very likely that these enormous numbers of hydrogen atoms provide the fuel for warming the stars, and serve as a vast "coalpile" for the stellar furnaces. It is this discovery which leads scientists to think that the universe is not dying, but rather is in a continual state of creative flux, renewing itself and regenerating itself without end.

Of course much more will be learned of these things as soon as Man can get out of the hampering blanket of air that interferes with such research and analysis. A Lunar observatory would be the thing that the average radio astronomer would sell his soul for, without a three-hundred-mile blanket of air to soak off the radio waves before they touch his antennas, he'd be able to tell a great deal more about what is happening a few hundred million light years away!

Architecture—2000

ARCHITECTURALLY speaking, people are just emerging from the Dark Ages! That statement is a little strong and exaggerated, but it must be remembered that, a mere twenty years ago, the height of architectural style was the imitation of Gothic horrors, or the duplication of the "California-Spanish" bungalow!

Fortunately there has been a widespread increase in good taste stimulated by the superb designs of modern architects who are creating

beauty and utility without being imitative.

The use of materials such as glass and new synthetic media along with stainless metals and the combining of such structures into a natural relationship with their surroundings lead us to suspect that here is a glowing future in store for architecture. We can't extrapolate architectural designs to the year 2000 but we can certainly visualize the trend they are taking and from that deduce that certain principles will be applied by future architects. The spreading-out of communities is a certainty. People will want then, as now, to take advantage of space and mobility. The skyscraper (which is now slowly dying as an architectural style) may have a new lease on life through the development of the helicopter and the wider use of flying and moving in three dimensions

which will be a surety of the time.

As far as materials go, we can only suggest that 2000 will have many as yet undreamed of by us. For example, it is almost a certainty that glass piping will be as common then as are iron and copper now. Many automatic machines just suggested now will be in use in both country life and city life.

We may get some minor glimpse of what the future will be like by examining certain fine specimens of contemporary Californian architecture in which full use is made of the idea of relating outdoors to indoors in one complete "living-unit". People living in places like these are in harmony with their environment. Nature and Man have combined forces. The year 2000 will see plenty of that, for by then Nature will have been completely tamed and function and aesthetics will be one.

—Charles Recour

The Amazing True Story of the Artist Who Bilked World Art Authorities

The ARTFUL FORGER

HERE IS the almost incredible story of Han van Meegeren, a master artist who, by artful forgery, made a multi-million dollar fortune while completely fooling some of the world's great art experts! . . . It's only one of many unusual stories in the March issue of STRANGE, the fascinating new magazine of true mystery. Ask your news-dealer!

THE *Postman* COMETH . . .

THE QUESTION an author hears again and again is "Where do you get your plots?" Most authors, in self-defense, have a stock answer they can toss off subconsciously, but we've yet to hear one of these answers which is the least bit enlightening.

Thinking in this vein, it occurred to us that a writer's correspondence concerning a current brain-child might throw at least a dim light on the subject. So here's a peek at some author-letters the postman brought us:

Take the note we received from Ted Sturgeon who wrote "Never Underestimate." A story, incidentally, which has already been snapped up for a coming anthology. Ted writes:

"The basic idea for this story was an extension of known ideas—extrapolation—the choice of a solidly based scientific or social phenomena and a series of human narratives about their development. The electric motor evolves into the cyclotron which, logically, should produce an electron accelerator which operates in a straight line instead of a circle. Which is, of course, a drive for a space ship.

Analytical chemistry has succeeded in synthesizing proteins, which logically leads to the creation of life in the laboratory and the evolution of man-made species suited to settle the outer planets."



WELL, LET'S see what Ray (*The Hell Ship*) Palmer has to say about it:

"Here it is. I think you will like it. . .

"Keep every story tense with action and human interest and good characters the reader can believe in and you will keep him on the edge of his chair and safely in your hands as a customer. He wants thrills and excitement. Strange things. Other worlds."

Thus writes one of the acknowledged masters in the field. And so well put that we are allowing Ray's plug for his own mag, **OTHER WORLDS**, to stand.

Howard Browne, whose *Twelve Times Zero* left us a trifle breathless, wrote:

"I've always wanted to put a modern cop into a situation whereby he is forced to cope with pure science-fiction with only his wits and native shrewdness to fall back on. I'll start the story immediately and I'll be just as interested as anyone else in finding out what happens to him."

Incidentally, the conversation from which we quoted in our editorial came at a later date after Howard's plot was pretty well formed.



AND NOW a word from the fabulous Rog Phillips, author of *The Old Martians*. Rog wrote:

"I hope you'll like this one, Paul. It's somewhat of an experiment. I tried to do a problem-story with three possible solutions, any one of which the reader may take as his own. I hope I succeeded. If you don't feel that I did, please, by all means, shoot the yarn back."

We should be so foolish!

So there you have it. The inside dope right from the authors themselves.



BY THE WAY—*The Postman Cometh* is our letter department and we want some letters. We want to hear from you regardless of what

you have to say, for *your* words serve as a sort of barometer on whether or not we're putting out a magazine you really like. For the best three letters received up through January 20th, we're going to give three *original* manuscripts from the first issue of IF—real collector's items.

So send us your letters right away. Each one will receive careful consideration and if yours is one of the three best ones published you'll receive post haste your original manuscript. And, along with the three prize winners, we're going to publish as many letters as we have space to accommodate. Don't forget: if you want your letter considered for a prize it must be post-marked not later than January 20th. (*Remember: no matter what you say, we promise not to sue you!*)

"Completely Fascinating"

THAT'S WHAT readers are saying about STRANGE, the new magazine of true mystery. Here is one of the most unusual publications on the stands today—a magazine devoted to the strange and mysterious, the bizarre and the baffling, stories you wouldn't believe in fiction but which actually happened in real life! Read! *Prophet Without Honor, Mystery of the Bell Witch, The Man Who Swindled Himself* and others in the March issue of—

STRANGE

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68. **KILLERS PLAY ROUGH** by Adam Ring. When Jim Pierce found the real story behind the simple little gold necklace, it was little wonder that so many people gambled their lives for it! *Hard-boiled action!* Mystery.

81. **EMPTY SADDLES** by Al Cody. Somewhere in the bloody strife of cattle war and range greed lay the secret of Burr Patton's other self, and he had to face strange people and hostile guns in order to discover it. Western.

82. **WITCH'S MOON** by Giles Jackson. At a lonely country hotel a very cunning and ruthless murderer was weaving his web, and it was Boyd's fate to drive his girl and himself right into its quivering, terror-ridden heart. . . *Creepy.* Mystery.

83. **THE FARO KID** by Leslie Ernenwein. Grim, hard-bitten, Lawman Steve Rennevant meant to capture the Faro Kid dead or alive. But after hundreds of miles in the saddle, he found that fate had dealt him a strange hand. Western.

85. **THE GREAT I AM** by Lewis Graham. A lusty, exciting novel of Garr Fallson, scoundrel and confidence man, and his tempestuous love affair with the beautiful and notorious brothel queen, Carrie Watson. Love and Adventure.

86. **DIG ANOTHER GRAVE** by Don Cameron. Martin King, of the *Morning Record*, was assigned to blast Socialite Richard Searle into a felon's cell, but his scandal packed exposé was leading King himself to the electric chair. Mystery.

91. **LULIE** by Joan Sherman. Love and beauty in a cottage were all that Lulie Warren wanted. But this gorgeous child of the tenements was damned by a fatal allure which brought her heartbreak in penthouse luxury. Romance.

92. **THE GIRL WITH THE FRIGHTENED EYES** by Lawrence Lorior. Paula Smith was talented, redheaded, beautiful, and a fine artist—but her strange disappearance was shrouded by a maze of deception, fraud and murder! Mystery.

93. **REBEL YELL** by Leslie Ernenwein. Lon Considine sided with the railroad, and found that he was fighting the girl he had fallen in love with who, by blood, was the railroad's most bitter enemy. Western.

128. **PURSUIT** by Lawrence G. Blochman. Because they were smuggling a precocious little millionairess from San Francisco to New York, Ed Mitchell and Sylvia Furness faced three thousand miles of danger with a price on their heads. Mystery.

129. **THE HEIRESS OF COPPER BUTTE** by Paul W. Fairman. Drake Hughes said he'd make Kit Douglas' copper mine pay. And he did—in a way that bent her to his will, broke the backs of men, and shattered the very earth beneath them. Love and Adventure.

130. **THE DOVE** by Robert O. Saber. Beautiful, young, provocative, she was a graduate of one of Chicago's nefarious schools for "call girls" but too wise for her trade. Mystery.

131. **THE LADY WAS A TRAMP** by Harry Whittington. Gladys Price had been a siren who knew many men—most of them were pretty shady, none of them would talk, and one of them had hated her enough to murder her. Mystery.

132. **THE TRAIL RIDER** by Lynn Westland. Red Hamilton had been an honest lawman too long to change. So he drew his gun, on the side of strangers, against an old friend in a bitter fight to the death. Western.

133. **BOOT HILL** by Weston Clay. With a price on his head and a gun in his hand, young Red Paine was forced to take the same road his father had traveled—a one-way road to an unmarked grave in Boot Hill! Western.

134. **MURDER IS DANGEROUS** by Saul Levinson. Harry Witstow was sounding for oil, and in refusing to heed grim notes of warning that he move on, he was also sounding his own death knell. Mystery.

135. **TYPED FOR A CORPSE** by Alan Pruitt. Don Carson, ace newshound of the *Chicago Globe*, gave his city editor a fit and himself a poor life insurance risk when he turned a suicide into double murder. Mystery.

136. **DARK CANYON** by Tex Holt. Two thousand miles of danger faced this wagon train headed by a dude looking tenderfoot with a fast gun and a quick eye for a woman. Western.

137. **YUCCA CITY OUTLAW** by William Hopson. One day Clay Burch was an ordinary cowpoke in love with a girl, the next day he was a vengeance seeking outlaw striking like lightning at bank after bank. Western.

138. **THE BRASS MONKEY** by Harry Whittington. Grinning, glittering, mysterious symbol of evil. An exciting new story of sex, dope, blackmail and murder in the lush Hawaiian Islands by a hard-hitting author. Mystery.

139. **THE LADY KILLERS** by William T. Brannon. Thrilling, sensational case histories of women murdered in moments of passion by various means and for different reasons. By a famous police reporter. True mystery.

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