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# WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

JANUARY 1954 35 CENTS



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**EVAN HUNTER**

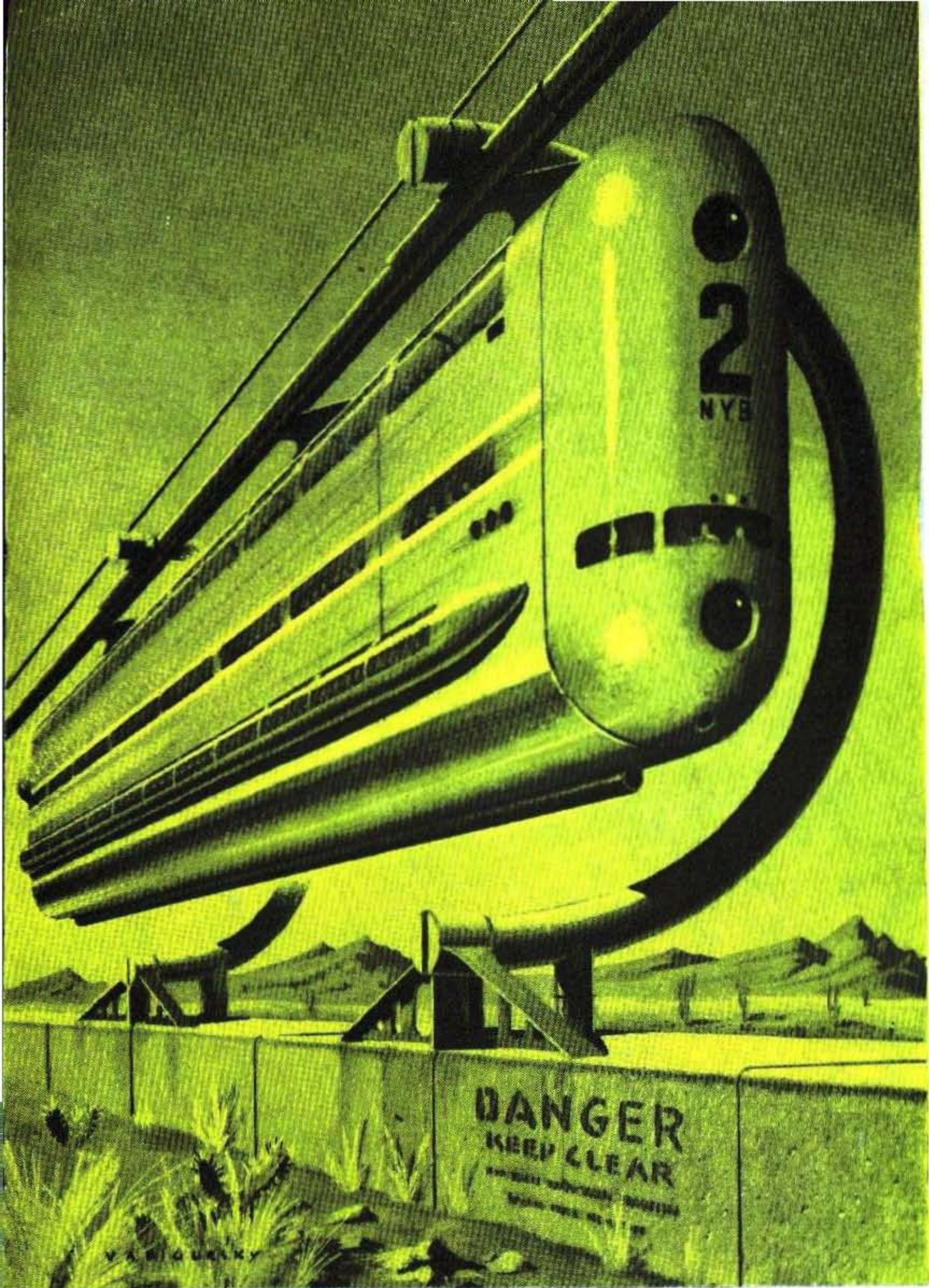
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# WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

JANUARY 1954

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: JAMES L. QUINN

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Assistant Editor: THOR L. KROGH

Cover by Ken Fagg, illustrating  
*An Undersea Civilization*

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## A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**THE ONLY** good language is a dead language.

That, of course, is a trick statement, designed to arrest attention. It does so, if successful, by a calculated use of the word "good" in strict compliance with dictionary definitions. It takes lots of words to define "good" completely, but these are prominent: sufficient for its purpose, ample, possessing desirable or attractive qualities, well-behaved, virtuous, sound and reliable, socially in good repute. (That last one is interesting—Webster rarely finds himself backed into a corner where he has to use a word to define itself.)

If your first reaction to the opening sentence was one of sharp disagreement, you were using the word "good" carelessly. All right—carelessness is one of the influences which keep any living language constantly changing. There are

others as well. With all of them in operation, no living language can be *completely* sufficient for its purpose, *entirely* ample, possessing *only* desirable or attractive qualities, *strictly* well-behaved, virtuous, sound and reliable. At least part of the time, too, it will be socially in ill repute.

Our language, because we use it, is a highly suspicious character. It is adaptable, resilient, and fast on its feet. It twists words like "good" to mean all sorts of unlikely things, it adds to "good" to construct other words, and it invents completely new words to cover parts of the territory formerly occupied by "good." So it isn't a *good* language—according to Webster.

**THE ABOVE** has been said before, and there's nothing very surprising about it. But let's carry it a step further by examining a couple of other facets of the changing process.

Members of any given profession or specialized group have a language of their own. Some of this is pure slang which is never assimilated into the common language, although some of it could be quite usefully. One of the first things an editor learns is that the part of a magazine story that is continued in the back of the book is the "jump", and thereafter he always refers to it as such. You never heard the term outside an editorial office, and it's certainly simpler than "continuation" or the painfully frequently heard, "You know—where it says 'Continued on page so-and-so. . .'"

Science and technology, naturally, are increasingly responsible for words that are new, com-

pounded, or adapted to new meanings: amplidyne and analogue, cybernetics and cyclotron, resnatron and resojet, winterize and wobble-pump. Part of the credit for "winterize" goes to advertising and public relations men, a specialized group whose members vie hungrily with each other in the creation and spread of novel and catchy words. In any case, words describing inventions and discoveries that are headlines today but will henceforth affect the average man profoundly are bound to creep into his language.

**AT THE SAME TIME**, scientists and technologists are turning their attention more directly to problems of communication and the exchange of information. Cyberneticists and others interested in this new science (yes, Information is now a science, the word having acquired a slightly new meaning of its own in the process) are intent on finding flaws and failures in effective communication, and are progressing by leaps and jet-blasts.

What we've been getting around to, and what we hope such investigators will consider, is that flawed or unsuccessful communication may sometimes be deliberate. People, in many cases, don't want others to understand them. There are specialized groups that speak their own languages to bar understanding by outsiders through sheer selfishness or outright maliciousness.

To his teacher, the third grade youngster speaks the best English she is capable of teaching him. With his own age group, as soon as he is outside the school building, he uses

only their current slang and—what is worse—the deliberately ungrammatical language required by their unwritten code. If he doesn't, he isn't one of the gang.

Teen-agers, of course, commit even worse crimes against the language, but their jargon has been discovered by magazine writers, gets into print occasionally, and some of it drifts into the main stream. This is an accident that has nothing to do with this basic argument.

Look around you! Fans of various forms of sports mumble cryptically, hypnotizing themselves into dangerous dreams of the good old days. Women when alone speak a language incomprehensible to men, and undoubtedly use it as camouflage for all sorts of evil schemes. Avid science fiction fanatics, the kind who have long since cut themselves loose from the rest of humanity, invent new ways of blowing up the universe and make it appear that they are only discussing the most recent convention. Cabots speak only to Lowells, and Lowells ain't talkin' to nobody.

It takes a strong mind to resist the pressure. Many otherwise good minds yield to it and are lost forever. It's a vicious spiral downwards, with warped speech leading to warped thinking which produces more warped speech.

Clarity and lucidity are difficult ideals to attain. The communication of ideas is not easy at best. Scientists, in their new and admirable attempts to discover why this is so, should not confine their investigations to man's sub-conscious mind. The conscious mind is in there pitching. —Its



*The Vike tide is rising—and it's doom, brothers, doom!  
Get fixed with sensational stereos, flaming senso's,  
seductive skin tints, super-sending hypos! Loin your  
girds for battle with the Ree's . . .*

# malice

*in*

# wonderland

By Evan Hunter

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

I SHOULD HAVE recognized the trouble signs when they first started. Looking back, I can see millions of them, some big, and some very small and simple. But as it was . . .

I pulled Belazi's review out of the com, read it quickly, and then sat back to enjoy a quiet chuckle. He killed me. The guy absolutely paralyzed me. I held the review out at arm's length, and I read it over again, and I nearly choked laughing. It was getting so I could pre-

dict just what he was going to say even before a paback hit the stands. I pulled my chair closer to the desk and punched Lizbeth's buzzer.

"Yes, sir?" Her voice was soft, well-modulated.

"Honey," I said, "see if you can get Clark for me, will you?"

"Yes, sir." She clicked off, and I thought of something and buzzed her again. "Sir?"

"And have Clipinc get me copies of all the papes carrying reviews of *Stolen Desire*, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

I sat back again, and shook my head in wonder at Dino Belazi and all the other Rees. They'd never learn. They'd sit in their high porcelain bathtubs until the Vike tide reached up past their nostrils and drowned them. Clark Talbot's book had been a masterpiece of Vike literature. So Belazi had dipped his duck quill deep in Ree blood and torn it to pieces with archaic language. Typical. Typical, and doomed, because the Vikes were—

The buzzer sounded and I clicked on.

"Yes?"

"I have Mr. Talbot for you, sir. On five."

"Thanks, Liz."

I swung my chair around and snapped on five, focusing the picture. Clark was still in his pajamas, and there was the flabby look of sleep on his rough-hewn features.

"Oh, good morning, Van," he said.

I showed him my teeth in a wide grin, and he winced and licked his lips with his tongue. "You see what Belazi brewed on *Stolen*?" I asked.

"No. Is it out yet?" Clark's face became interested, and the sleep began to flee from his eyes.

"Hit the stands this morning. Belazi's on the com now, if you want to pull it."

"Did you pull it?"

"Sure, got it right here."

"Let me see it," he said. Then he shook his head and put one hand over his eyes. "No, read it to me instead."

"Big night?"

"Herrocoke. You ever try it?"

"I never mix, Clark."

"I was blind, Van. It's really destruction. You should try—" He stopped short, blinked his eyes and asked, "You mean you *never* mix? *Never*?"

"My habit is short and straight, and needs no mate."

Clark shook his head. "Mister, you're just a Ree in disguise. What'd Belazi chop about?"

"The usual. Pull up a chair."

"Will I need one?"

"Hell, no. Every sad review Belazi gives is another million in the bank. You should pray he doesn't honeymoon you."

"Fat chance. The day Belazi gives one of my pabacks a favorable review, I'll eat the book—glue and all."

"Corn in the morn, Clark. You'd better just loin your girds and listen."

"They're loined. On, father."

"There's the usual feese heading it: title, scribe, pub, and price. Then: 'Clark Talbot, chief purveyor of Vicarious filth, is represented on the pocket-size stands this morning with a lewd, lascivious, obscene, and pornographic document titled . . .'"

"How was that again?"

"Lewd, lascivious, obscene, and pornographic."

"Father, that is pure feese for the falcons."

"He seems to feel the same way about your book. Shall I go on?"

"Fire at Billy Boy."

"Still quoting: 'pornographic document titled *Stolen Desire*. As with all Vicarious literature, and with the entire Vicarious Movement in general, this alleged novel seeks to arouse and to excitate. . .'"



"Excitate?"

"So the man said."

Clark shrugged. "Excitate," he said dully. "More, Van."

"to excitate the body, to stimulate the diseased mind, to fabricate an existence completely alien to that surrounding us. Realistically . . ."

"Oops, here comes the Ree pitch again."

"Realistically, it serves no purpose. It is a symposium of smut, as narcotic as the more tangible drugs the Vicarious Movement has. . ."

"Stop! Enough. I gather he didn't care much for it. Wouldn't you say so, Van?"

"Well, I think he was mildly goofed by it, yes. So what? Scroom."

Clark looked mildly serious. "I suppose so. But sometimes. . . Oh well. You going to that Deborah thing tonight?"

"Maybe. What's on?"

"Some new stuff, she said. But then, you don't mix."

"Nope, I don't mix."

"Well, she's also got a new senso. Supposed to be the cat's. Drop around. I want to talk to you about tri-dim rights to *Even Dozen*, anyway."

"Sorry, Clark. I close my office at seventeen."

"Well hell, father. . ."

"You want business, come around at about fourteen today. Otherwise, I'll see you tonight. But no business chop, chum."

"The trouble with agents. . ."

"Feese for the falcs, Clark. I'll see you later."

"Yeah," he mumbled. I snapped off and the picture faded. I

thought about Belazi's review for a few moments, and then I buzzed Lizbeth again. When she came on, I said, "Did you round up those papes, honey?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bring them in, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir."

I waited for a few seconds until the door slid open and Lizbeth stepped through. She was a small blonde, and the dailies she carried fairly hid her head. She staggered over to the desk, dropped the pile onto its polished top and then backed away.

SHE WAS WEARING one of the new see-thru skirts, but in the light she stood in it was opaque. The skirt was belted around her waist with a narrow red sash. Above the skirt, her flesh was firm and taut, her breasts high. I stared at them for a moment and asked, "That's new, isn't it?"

She looked down at her naked breasts. "Do you like it?"

"I'm not sure."

"It's a new shade. It changes with the light, too, the way the skirt does."

I walked to the window and pressed the button in the sill. The blinds slanted downward quickly, spilling sunlight into the room, bathing Lizbeth in a warm glow. It caught the skirt in its molten web, turning the material to a thin translucent stuff through which I saw the outline of her legs, the tops of her stockings taut against her thighs. Her breasts had suddenly shifted shades, their undersides shimmering in dazzling silver, their

sloping tops a pale fuchsia.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so. It's effective." I turned away and began thumbing through the dailies. As I'd suspected, the Ree columnists had all blasted hell out of Clark's book. That was good. That was fine. Still, there were a lot of them and they had a lot of sympathetic readers. But tables were made to be turned.

"Honey, I want you to have bigs made out of Belazi's com review, and a few stereos, also. We'll use the bigs in our regular ad space; and try to get us some time for the stereoshows. The sooner the better. Call Sterling Baker at Triple Press and tell him what we plan. Hint that I'd like him to split the cost. If he sounds goofed, forget it. But try to convince him, Liz. Hell, he'll be sharing in the profits."

"Yes, sir."

"You might give him a full shot of yourself when you call. Stand in the light." I looked at the skirt again. "That's a very effective gizmo."

"Thank you, sir."

"Has Bruce called in yet?"

"No, sir."

"Put him through as soon as he does, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had your morning fix?"

"No, sir."

"Neither have I. What's your pleasure?"

"Opaine."

"Another mixer." I shook my head. "You're trading your womb for a tomb, Liz."

Lizbeth shrugged, and the sudden shift of light turned her breasts

a deep blue. Effective gizmo was milding it, I thought, and made a decision. "It's no fix without the tricks, father."

"Well spoke, but a big joke. Want to join me?" I didn't wait for an answer. "Bring your kit in."

"There's someone waiting to see you, sir."

"Scroom. Bring your kit in. He can wait."

"It's a *she*, sir."

"So, scroor. *She* can wait, too."

"I'm honored, father," Liz said, smiling.

"Come on, mother. It's later than you think."

She turned and walked toward the door, and her skirt turned opaque again, hiding the long curve of her legs. The door slid open as she reached it, and I looked through to the reception room, saw a tall redhead sitting on the couch, her legs crossed. The door slid closed, hiding her from view, and I walked to the bar and took out my kit. I unsnapped the leather case, opened it, and selected one of the silver vials inside. The chron set in the case's lid told me it was nine twenty-five, and nine thirty was happy time.

I brought the vial to my desk, checked the gauge to be sure the fix was adequate, and waited for Lizbeth. The door slid open, and she came in carrying a small, red leather woman's kit.

She laid the kit on the desk, her breasts shading to a pale chartreuse as she stepped into the shadow of the drapes. She snapped open the lid, selected a silver vial, and asked, "Sure you won't try a mixed fix? Grand kicks, father."

"I'm straight," I told her.

"On what?"

"Morph."

She wrinkled her nose. "It's your snort, but why make life short?"

The hands of the chron nudged nine-thirty. "Time to kick," I said. I placed the silver vial on the desk, swabbed my arm with alcohol, and then picked up the hypo again. I traced it along the vein, waiting until the indicator told me I'd score. I glanced at Lizbeth who had lifted her skirt and was running the vial along her thigh. Most women used their legs, preferring not to mark arms which were constantly exposed.

"Well," I said, "happy."

"Here's to you."

We pressed the buttons on our vials simultancously, and I felt the sharp slender needle puncture my vein, felt the drug ooze from the vial, felt the vial draw back the drug mixed with blood, pump it into my body again, out, in, out, in.

"Destruction," I murmured, my eyes closed.

"Doom," Lizbeth answered, her eyes beginning to glaze, her mouth partly opened as the drug took hold.

I released the button, twisted the cap of the vial so that it would clean the needle, and then put it back in the kit, alongside the other empties. Lizbeth snapped shut the lid on her case.

"This is good stuff," I told her.

"Where'd you order it?"

"Swift's Drugs. We've always got it from them."

"Mm? Well, this is unusually good. You might order more at

once. We may get some of the same lot. Incidentally, is everyone in the office supplied?"

"We ordered a new shipment of benzejuana yesterday."

"Benzejuana? Who's the square?"

"One of the stock clerks. A Ree convert. He's breaking in slow."

"Mother, how slow can you get? Give him a pop of herro tomorrow. That or two weeks' notice. Groove?"

"I understand," she said. Her speech was slow, her lids half-covering her blue eyes.

"What brews this eve, Liz?"

"With me?"

"Uhm."

"Naught, father."

"Fine. I'll be by at twenty. A party."

Her eyes twinkled. "Father, I'm dead," she said gaily.

"Fine. Send the girl in, Liz. Tell her I've an appointment at. . ." I glanced at my wrist chron. ". . . nine forty-five. Tell her we'll have to make this short."

"Grooved," she said, and then she was gone.

I hitched up my breeches, looking at myself in the full-length mirror set next to the bar. The breeches were tight, and the new stuff I'd used on my chest had given me a wild crop of hair there. I nodded in satisfaction and sat down behind my desk. In a few moments, the door opened, and the girl entered.

**I** DIDN'T NEED a second look to know she was a Ree. She was wearing a skirt that reached below her knees, and the blouse she wore had long sleeves and a neckline

that hugged her throat. She wore almost no makeup. The only vivid color about her was in her hair, and that was gathered at the nape of her neck in a tight bun. She even wore flats, de-emphasizing the curve of her legs. There didn't seem to be a bra beneath her blouse or girdle under her skirt—which was something. But otherwise she was strictly Ree, and an arty type at that.

"Mr. Brant?" she asked.

"Yes?"

"My name is Lydia Silverstein."

"Have a seat, won't you, Miss Silverstein?" I thought of what my own name had been before I'd joined the Vikes. John Branoski. Van Brant was a definite improvement.

She sat in the chair I offered, crossed her legs, and demurely pulled her skirt down.

"What can I do for you, Miss Silverstein?"

"I'm a writer," she said.

"I gathered. Most people who come to literary agents are."

Her green eyes widened slightly, and her lips parted. "Yes. Yes, I suppose they are." She sucked in a deep breath and said, "I've written some stercoshows."

"Have you?" I said solicitously.

"Yes. But I've been having trouble getting them aired."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm a Ree."

I smiled and looked at the blouse. "I wouldn't have guessed."

"I suppose you're wondering why I came to you."

"Well. . ."

The buzzer sounded on my desk, and I clicked down the toggle.

"Excuse me," I said. Then: "Yes?"

"I've got Mr. Alloway on seven."

"Thanks, Liz." I turned, snapped on seven, and focused. "Hello, Bruce."

"Hello, Van. What brews?" Bruce was a handsome lad who'd recently had a nose bob. He was wearing crimson breeches, his chest curling with blond hair that was striking against the bronze of his skin. He'd had the hair on his head tinted blond, too, leaving his eyebrows their original black for a really unusual effect.

"I was wondering how you're getting along on the new senso," I said.

"All right, I suppose."

"Ails? Ills?"

"Small smells, that's all. I need a chick with a frontage. These damn senso things demand too much."

"Would you rather be back writing for the pabacks?"

"Don't make glip, father."

"I'm the original glib lip," I told him. "Since when is the scribe casting the show?"

"You ever work with Lana Davis?"

"Only to take her checks. Why?"

"She's got Ree tendencies, I swear."

I glanced quickly at Miss Silverstein, and then turned back to Bruce. "How so?" I asked.

"You know how these sensory shows work. I swear, father, the step below is a better one. I'd rather do tri-dims any day of the week."

"Less slop and more chop, Bruce. I've got someone with me."

"All right, I'll get straight to the point. I've got a busty bazoo in one

scene. Davis doesn't want falsies. She says the viewers can spot them and feel them. She wants the real thing. Is that Ree feese, or is it?"

"She's right," I said. "Hell, Bruce, she's been producing senso's for a long time now. She knows what the customers want."

"But the *real* thing? There ain't no such chick. Christ, Van, not the way I've written it."

"So change the script."

"That's the crux, Van. She likes it the way it is." He shook his head. "She's a crazy illidge, Van. I swear."

"Then do it her way. Pop over to Deborah Dean's tonight. You'll see plenty of frontage. You might be able to get something."

Bruce didn't look convinced. "Did you read the script?" he asked.

"No."

"I thought so. If you had, you'd know there is no chick with a natch frontage like that. Oh, the hell with it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, scroor. I can always get back into tri-dims—and if worse comes to worst, there's the pabacks. At least the money is steady and I don't have to take feese from a chick with an Oedip as long as my arm."

"She been psyched, or are you just guessing?"

"I'm guessing, but it's a sure thing. In the last sequence I did for her, she insisted my baddy was destroying the father image. Father image! How's that for the falcs?"

"Stick with it, Bruce. It's cool cash. So you put up with a nut, so what?"

"Yeah," Bruce said disgustedly.

"I'll see you tonight?"

"Deborah's?"

"Yeah, at about twenty or twenty-one."

"I'm with you."

"Grooved."

I CLICKED OFF and turned to Miss Silverstein, who had politely stared out the window during the conversation.

"Now then," I said, "what can I do for you?"

"Was that Bruce Alloway?" she asked.

"Himself."

"He. . . he makes a lot of money, doesn't he? Writing, I mean."

"One of our best scribes."

She nodded, thinking of the money, and not the quality of Bruce's writing. "I want to make a lot of money," she said suddenly.

"Everyone does."

"I. . . I've never tried any Vike stuff."

"What *have* you written?"

She turned her head, and a flush suffused her neck, spread over her face. "Stuff," she said. "You know."

"Stark realism? Slices of life? Turning the cruel, cold spotlight on suffering humanity? Exposing the —"

"You needn't make fun," she snapped.

"I wasn't. I used to handle that kind of stuff until I hopped aboard. If you want to make money, you'd best turn in your pen for a later model. You can sell that slice-of-life feese to some of the small Ree journals for five bucks a throw. I

won't handle it."

"Why not?"

"Because an agent's commission on a five-dollar sale is fifty cents. I run a business, not a benevolent society."

"But. . .but do you really believe in this Vike stuff you sell? I mean, do you honestly believe it's literature?"

"What's literature?" I asked. "I define it as the profession of a writer or author."

"That's a rather narrow definition."

"It's also what people read. If people no longer read *Beowulf*, it's no longer literature. Vike literature serves a need in our society. If it needs any *raison d'etre*, that's it."

"And. . .you'd recommend that I write that kind of. . .of stuff?"

"If you want to. I'm not recommending anything."

"Where do I begin?" she asked earnestly.

"First, shorten your skirt by about three feet. Throw your blouse away and show your breasts. Get some tints and real cosmetics, and find a habit. If you're bedding with anyone, kick him the hell out. Live with Vikes and eat with Vikes and learn what it's all about. As they used to say, get with it. That's the only way you can write it, and the only way you can sell it."

"I. . .I see."

"Toss over all your realistic beliefs, because they've no place in the Vike world. Then come back in a year or two and let me see what you've got."

"Such a long time? Couldn't it be done faster?"

I smiled. "I see you've read

*Fygmalion*. One of the prime examples of early Vike literature. I thought that was on the Ree spit list."

"It is."

"And you read it anyway, huh? Well, that's promising." I thought it over. "Maybe you can do it faster, who knows? What's your name?"

"Lydia Silverstein."

"Change it, and fast. Come back in a week, and I'll talk to you then."

She smiled ingratiatingly. "All right. Thanks a lot. I really—"

"No slop, mother. Come back in a week with a new name. We can use some good women scribes if you work out."

"Thank you. Thank you very—"

"So long, Miss Silverstein."

She rose abruptly, walking swiftly to the door. It slid open as she approached it and then closed gently behind her. I left my desk and glanced at my wrist chron. It was already nine forty-six, and Hayden Thorpe didn't like to be kept waiting.

I walked to the closet, took a bottle of alcojel from the shelf on the door, and rubbed it over my chest, arms, and back. It dried almost instantly, leaving a high sheen on my muscles. I looked into the mirror appreciatively, winked at myself, and then closed the closet door.

I walked back to my desk and buzzed Lizbeth.

"Sir?"

"I'm leaving, Liz. I may be back this afternoon. If not, I'll see you at twenty tonight."

"Fine, Van."

"You know where I'm going now, don't you?"

"Mr. Thorpe's?"

"Right. You can reach me there if it's urgent. Otherwise, I'm in Outer Mongolia."

"Grooved, Van."

"Keep thee close, Liz." I said. I heard her chuckle as I clicked off. I took one last look in the mirror, and then headed for the lift and the sixteenth level.

## II

THE JECTOR snapped off, leaving the room black for an instant, somehow cold and empty after what had been. I sank back in the upholstered chair, feeling completely exhausted. Music flowed from the wall speaks, and the lights came on, soft and golden.

"Well," Hayden Thorpe asked, "how'd you like it?"

"I'm dead," I said. I wasn't kidding. It had been terrific. Positively sensational.

Hayden beamed happily. "This is going to set the senso industry on its arse, Van. I'm telling you it's the greatest goddamned thing since video."

"You've sold me, Hayden," I said. "How many scribes will you need?"

"Always business," he said, chuckling. He nudged one of his assistants and asked, "What do you think of this illidge, Lawrence?"

Lawrence chuckled back, not daring to offend me by agreeing with Hayden, yet not wanting to seem disagreeable.

"What'd you think of the love scene?" he asked me.

"Destruction," I said. It had been. I'd never experienced anything like it before.

"Felt as if the chick was really in your arms, didn't it?" Hayden asked.

"In my arms? Father, I could feel her flesh and smell her perfume. Hayden, you've got something here that. . ."

"That's only half of it, Van," Hayden said proudly. "Remember, we call this Individual Sensory Productions. Just a sec." He leaned back and pressed a button on the arm of his chair. Above the music coming from the speaks, came a well-modulated feminine voice.

"Yes, sir?"

"Rhonda, would you come in a moment, please?"

"Certainly, Mr. Thorpe."

Hayden leaned forward again and said, "My secretary, Van. I think you'll be a little surprised by what she has to say."

I nodded and waited for the door to slide open. When it did, a tall brunette entered, carrying a small stenotab. Her hair was piled high on her head, accentuating her height, in the fashion most tall girls affected. She wore her breasts pitch black, matching her hair, with silver sequins scattered from the center in a haphazard smear. Her skirt was long, but slit up the center and revealing laced, translucent underwear as she walked across the room in long-legged strides. She sat in a chair next to Hayden, crossed her legs and poised her slender fingers over the keys of the stenotab, ready for dictation.

"No," Hayden said, "I just wanted you to tell Mr. Brant some-

thing."

"Yes, sir," she said. She arched her brows, batted her lashes over the auburn contact lenses she wore.

"What was it, sir?"

"You saw the indi-senso we ran yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember the love scene?"

A pulse in her throat quickened, and she lowered her eyes. "Yes, sir."

"Will you describe it to Mr. Brant?"

"Well. . .it was set on a balcony. . ."

"Yes?"

"And. . .and it was a starry night. . ."

I remembered the balcony, and I remembered the stars. I also remembered how crisp the air had smelled. The hero had taken the girl into his arms, and I had actually felt the pressure of her breasts, the silkiness of her hair. I'd smelled the musky fragrance of her perfume, tasted the faint mint flavor of her lipstick. It had been an experience, one of the best senso's I'd ever seen. But I was beginning to wonder just why the hell Thorpe was putting his secretary through an inquisition.

"The. . .the girl went into the boy's arms," Rhonda said. "And then he kissed her."

"Yes, go on."

"I. . .his face was rough, as if he had shaved but not too closely. There was the smell of aftershave on his face, I remember, and an old leather smell about him, somehow. You know what I mean. A very . . .masculine smell."

I looked at the girl in astonishment, beginning to understand just exactly what Hayden had accomplished.

"His arms were very strong," she said. "They'd been coated with alcojel, you know the odor. He'd been smoking before that, and I could. . .could taste the tobacco on his mouth. It. . .it was very nice." She paused, seeming to wander into a reverie. "Very nice."

"Thank you, Rhonda," Hayden said. "You may go now." Hayden could hardly contain himself until the door slid shut behind her. "Well, Van?" he asked, a smile mushrooming over his face.

"I don't believe it," I said. "It was a put up job."

"God's truth," Hayden said. "The gal saw the show yesterday. I haven't spoken to her since."

I digested this for about three seconds. "Father," I said, "you're a crazy, drug-loving, psyched-up illidge, but I love you! Jesus, this will set the industry. . ."

". . .on its arse. Just what I said. Individual senso's, Van. The men live a completely different experience than the women. I've brought *viewpoint* to the senso's, Van. It overwhelms me when I think of it. I'm a goddamned genius!"

"Genius! You're going to be a millionaire, you crazy stud. You're going to have more money than God!"

Hayden turned to his assistant. "Take a pow, Lawrence," he said.

"Yes, sir," Lawrence answered obediently. He walked to the door and left soundlessly. Hayden's face turned suddenly serious.



"You think I've got something, Van?"

"Got something? Hayden, this is the most terrific thing I've ever. . ."

"I need money," he said quickly.

**H**E SHOCKED ME for a moment. Hayden had been producing senso's for a long time now. If there was anyone I thought was comfortably fixed, it was him. "You're kidding," I said.

"No. No, I'm straight, Van."

"Money? You?"

"My habit is long and strong," he said. "Corradon."

"Oh." Corradon was a synthetic drug. It cost a hell of a lot, even now that narcotics were legal. A corradonict needed a pile, and he needed a pile measured in miles.

"This thing is the biggest," he said. "There's plenty in it for both of us. You back me, Van, and we're wedded."

"Five-five?" I asked.

"You know the idea itself rates a seven-three," Hayden said. "At least a six-four, anyway." He shrugged and spread his hands wide. "Without the moo, though, I've got nothing. You back me, and I'll make it an even split. Grooved?"

"How much do you need?"

"Two stones."

"What!"

"I thought I could get by on one, but it's impossible. Even cutting to the bone, it would come to at least a stone and a half."

I shook my head. "I haven't got that kind of money, Hayden."

"How much can you raise immediately?"

"Nine hundred gee. Maybe."

Hayden nodded. "That's not bad. That's only a gee short of a stone. Can we raise the other million?"

He looked at me, saw the dubious look on my face, and said, "Did you see the stars in that chick's eyes when she described the mush to you? Did you ever see anyone look like that talking about an ordinary senso? Hell, Van, you saw the show yourself. Was it, or wasn't it?"

"It was."

"Did it fix you?"

"It fixed me. It was doom. But two stones. . ."

"You said you could raise close to one. That leaves a million to go. If you can get the nine hundred gee by the end of the week, we can start production. We'll need another half stone by the end of the month, and the remainder for the bally just before release. That won't be for another six months, at least."

"How long did it take you to make the pilot?" I asked.

"Three months."

"And you figure on a full-length feature in six months? Father, what are you mixing?"

"All right, the pilot you just saw was a fifteen minute show. But we were working out a lot of bugs, and the medium was new. There'll be no guessing on the featch, Van. We've got it down pat. When I say six months, I mean six months. Not a day over."

"What about scribes?"

"That's your end. You're a literary agent, aren't you?"

"How many will we need?"

"I used a team of six men and

## III

six women for the pilot. We need both, you know. This takes a special kind of writing. Van, you don't know the half of it."

"I know we won't get six of each for less than a stone. My scribes are high-priced, Hayden."

"Can't you—"

"I'm their agent. I work for *them*, remember?"

"Then get some low-priced scribes. Get one of each, a man and a woman. They don't have to be terrific. The medium will carry the lousiest writing, as long as it's suited to the process. Besides, it's new. There *are* no experienced scribes for this sort of thing."

"How high can we go?"

"You're not thinking of your goddamned commish, are you?"

"Hell, no! I want to know who I can get. For that, I want to know what I can pay."

"All right. We can go to twenty gee."

"Per."

"I was thinking of twenty gee for both. If we have to make it per, okay." Hayden smiled. "It's your money, Van."

"Yeah." I stood up and took his hand. "Deal?" I asked.

"Deal," he said.

"Real," I acknowledged. "I'll have the moo by the end of the week. Nine hundred gee. Another five hundred by the end of the month, and the rest in six months or so."

"Right."

"I see the light, father."

"Call me, Van," he said. "This thing is big."

"Your language is small," I said. "This thing is doom!"

I CALLED Bruce Alloway from a pay phone. When his picture and voice came on, I said, "I'm using our usual scrambler. Want to tune in?"

"Hush stuff?" he asked.

"Much hush. Mush, Bruce."

"Sure," he said.

I pressed a combination of buttons on the face of the instrument. That would scramble my voice so that only Bruce, after adjusting his own set to decode, would receive my message.

"Okay?" I asked.

"Grooved."

"Fine. You still want to take a pow on Lana Davis?"

"I'd love to. How?"

"I've got something big for you. It'll mean a cut, though."

"How much of a cut?"

"Down to twenty gee."

"That's a mean slash, father."

"I know. Do you want it?"

Bruce shook his head. "I'd sure like to get from under that chick, Van. But twenty gee. Hell, after taxes, I'll have marbles."

"This is the biggest goddamned thing you've ever fallen into," I said harshly. "I can get sixty scribes who'll do it for nothing, just for what it'll bring them later on. If you don't want it, I'll look elsewhere. So long, Bruce."

"Hey, hold on, father!"

"What is it?"

"Well chop a little more about it. Be fair, Van."

"I can't chop on the phone."

"You're scrambled, Van. Hell . . ."

"Even scrambled. Look, think it

over. I'm your agent, and I say this is hot. You can remember who pulled you out of the pabacks, or you can donut-leap."

"Van, give me a chance to—"

"I'll see you at Deborah's tonight. I'll tell you more then. But only if you're in. If you're cool, fool, this is too hot to spread around. You follow?"

"All the way. It's big, huh, Van?"

"Bigger than birth."

"But a cut in cash."

"It'll be the smartest move you ever made. Think about it."

I clicked off, smiling to myself. I stepped out of the booth, walked through the store and out onto the curb. I grabbed the first pneumo-tube that came by, punching the tabs near my seat as soon as I'd dropped in my coin. In three minutes, we'd traveled three miles, and I cursed the snail's pace until I remembered I was down on the fifth level. The signal light near my seat blared red, and I rose as the door slid open. I stepped onto the curb, looked for the numbers on the buildings, found the one I wanted, and walked inside.

My heels echoed on the marble floors as I walked down the corridor. I passed two Ree's in the hallway, complete with shirts and ties, and wearing—of all goddamned things—hats. They studied the hair on my chest with obvious distaste, wrinkled their noses, and hurried off down the hallway. I shrugged, and then walked into the reception room of Barton and Houston, my accountants.

A redheaded switchboard operator, her skin tinted an offcolor

green, sat with her hands darting out for rubbery, snakelike connections. Her shoulders were bare, as were her breasts, and she had left the skin between her collar bones and the lower side of her bosom its natural shade. The effect was a bit startling, and I glanced at it appreciatively.

She plugged one of the connections into a hole on the board.

"Barton and Houston, good afternoon."

I looked at my wrist chron. Damn if it wasn't thirteen-ten already. I whistled tunelessly while she disposed of the lights flickering on her board. When she turned to me, I said, "Jo Houston, please."

"Who's calling, sir?"

"Van Brant."

"Just a moment, sir."

I WALKED OVER to the long window looking out over the criss-crossed, seemingly haphazard ribbons that wound through the sky above and below the fifth level. Stretching from the third level up to the ninth, I saw the full-length figure of the star of one of the stereoshows playing on the seventh level. As I watched, the gigantic figure sucked in a deep breath. Her breasts moved suggestively, and her navel filled with shadow.

"Mr. Brant?"

I turned away from the window and the poster art, and walked back to the redhead, who was real.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Houston will see you now, sir." She smiled, and I smiled back and walked through the gate and into Jo's office. He was sitting be-

hind a cluttered desk, with an enormous ledger opened before him. When I came in, he rose and extended his hand.

"Van, you old illidge! How goes the body?"

"Ticking and clicking, no kicking. And you?"

"Sound and round, like money found. What brings you, Van?"

"Business."

"Oh?"

"Liquidation," I said flatly.

"Huh?"

"I need cash fast, Jo. I want you to get rid of all my holdings. I need close to a stone by Saturday."

Jo whistled softly. "In a jam?"

"No. Business."

"Sounds good."

"It is. Can you do it for me?"

He spread the fingers of one hand wide. "Sure." Then he cocked his head to one side, his deep brown eyes set into the layers of flesh on his face. "Anything that might interest me?"

"Sorry, Jo."

Jo smiled. "Okay, okay." He held up his palm like a traffic robot. "So what's new otherwise?"

"Nothing much. You?"

"A few new accounts. You know Steele and Dawes?"

"Advertising?"

"Yes. Enormous. The boys who finally broke through the prohibish lobby. We just got them."

"Oh yes, of course. The ones who started the new swing in liquor advertising."

Jo nodded. "You remember what the ads used to be like. 'For mellow flavor' or 'for a taste treat.' Anything but what they really wanted to say." He chuckled amiably. "I'll

never forget the first one, Van. The liquor was Daley's. Steele and Dawes plastered the town with tri-dim bottles. Everywhere you looked, a bottle was staring down at you. And all the copy said was: 'Daly's makes you drunker'n hell!'"

He laughed aloud, and I laughed with him, remembering what a furor that first honest whiskey ad had caused. When we'd quieted down, I said, "By Saturday then, Jo. You won't let me down?"

"Have I ever?"

"No."

"I won't start now."

"Grooved. I'll see you."

#### IV

THE PARTY was a sumptuous thing, but then all of Deborah Dean's parties were.

She'd had one complete wall of the living room knocked down for the occasion, replacing it with a clear pane of plexoid that ran the length of the room. Her apartment was swank, very, high up on the fifteenth level, looking down over the city and the river. When I came in with Lizbeth on my arm, the lights were low in the room, and the city twinkled and sparkled outside the plexoid sheet like a galaxy of blazing, multi-colored suns.

Deborah spotted us the moment we came through the door and hurried over. She was the only woman I knew who could carry off green eyes and a blue skin tint well. Her breasts were spattered with sparkling gold dust, the nipples luminous in the dim light of the room. Her skirt was long in the back, almost trailing the floor, gashing upward



in a wide V that terminated at her waist in the front.

"Van," she cried, "How good!"

I took the hand she extended, and smiled cordially. "Deborah, this is Lizbeth."

Deborah grinned, and her eyes roamed Lizbeth's body candidly. I had to admit that Liz had really outdone herself tonight. She had a thin blue, shimmering strip of plastic decorously clinging to her breasts. She had chosen a peach skin tint, and had contrasted it with a pitch-black skirt that ended on her thighs. Her lips matched the plastic strip, and she'd done her hair to go with the skirt. We'd had a fix at her place, and her eyes sparkled behind their blue contacts. Even Deborah was impressed.

She smiled again. "What's your pleasure?"

"We've been fixed," I told her. "Maybe later."

"You know where the bar is. Just help yourself. I've got a wonderful senso for later, and something new in a tri-dim. And, oh, I've got some destructive tapes, Van. The very latest sound." She closed her eyes ecstatically. "Doom, pure doom."

"I'll be listening." I paused. "I'd like to talk to you later, Deb."

"Why not now?"

"Alone," I said.

She patted my cheek, her hand cool and firm, a sensuous musky perfume rising from its palm. "As a matter of fact, I want to talk to you, too. When the senso is showing, grooved? But I hate to have you miss it. It really is good."

"I'll see it some other time."

"All right, Van. I'll look for you

later."

She waved and was gone, ready to greet another pair of guests.

"She's nice," Lizbeth said. "I like her stomach. Who does it for her?"

"I don't know. I didn't see anything unusual about it."

"Didn't you notice? It was beautiful, Van, really. I'm surprised you didn't notice."

"There's Rog Brooks," I said.

"Who?"

"Brooks. You know him. The big psych. I wonder what the hell he's doing here."

"Why not? Psychs are human."

"Are they?"

Lizbeth giggled and took my arm. "Come on," she said, "let's mingle."

**WE WALKED** across the room to where a small clique had got a song going. We listened to one chorus and joined in on the refrain:

*"Pop it, moppet,  
Stick it in your vein.  
Push it in and pull it out  
And stick it in again  
Mass it, gas it,  
Dast thou pass it?  
Never!  
Never!  
Naaaaaay, fa-ther,  
NAY!"*

We all enjoyed a good laugh, and then a tall, dark-haired boy in silver breeches began improvising a chorus:

*"There once was a Ree man  
named Dino!"*  
"Oh, yes," we chanted.  
"Who strolled on the old

*bal-colino."*

"Yes."

*"He tripped on his clothes,  
And ruptured his nose  
In a most realistic fash-ino!  
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh. . ."*

He signaled for us to all join in, and we started once more with, "*Pop it, moppet, stick it in your vein . . .*"

**WE ALL LAUGHED** at the end of the refrain, and then a girl with pink shells on her nipples took up another chorus, a bit raw this time, but still funny. We were in the middle of another refrain when I saw Bruce Alloway come into the room. I excused myself and started for the door, the sound of the singing behind me.

I grabbed Bruce by the arm before he'd had a chance to say hello and began steering him toward a dark corner.

"Hey," he complained, "what the hell's the rush?"

"You want to hear this, or don't you?"

"Sure, sure. But I want to taste some of this new stuff I hear Deborah's got. Hell, father, I haven't had a fix since noon in preparation."

"All right, go pop. But hurry back, Bruce."

"Sure," he said, looking at me curiously. "Sure."

He started toward the bar, waving his hand in greeting as he passed Rog Brooks, the psych. I followed Bruce with my eyes until he reached the bar, and then lost him in the cluster of people there. When I swung my eyes back, I

realized that Brooks was heading in my direction. I turned my head away, pretending to look through the plexoid at the city. But he'd already spotted me, so I gave it up and loined my girds.

"Hello, there, Brant," he called.

I looked up feigning surprise. "Well, hello, Brooks. Long time no. Pull up."

"Thanks." He hooked a small foam cushion with his toe, pulled it toward him, and plopped down on it. Brooks was a tall, thin man with eager eyes set in an intense face. He sported a vandyke carefully trimmed on his chin and he wore his hair in its natural shade, a deep black that hugged his scalp like a helmet. He cocked one raven brow and said, "Nice party."

"Not bad," I admitted. "I didn't know you knew Deborah."

"Oh yes," Brooks said. "Quite well." He passed a clawlike hand over his naturally hairy chest, scratched idly at one pectoral. "One of my favorite patients, in fact."

"That right?"

"Yes."

I felt somehow uneasy. I wasn't used to psychs, and I'd never held a lengthy conversation with one. Brooks seemed to be experiencing the same discomfort. We sat and stared at each other while a few long minutes dragged their feet laboriously through a field of molasses.

Finally, I said, "So how's the psych business these days?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Not too good. Not for a Vike man, anyway. The Ree boys seem to be getting all the work."

I wondered if he were kidding,

but I didn't express skepticism. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"It's a question of finding a norm," he said slowly.

"I still don't groove."

Brooks spread his palms wide. "I was taught in a Ree school, Van. Got my Bah from a Ree college, my Mud from a Ree medical school and all my specialized training at Ree clinics. The emphasis was a little different."

"How so?"

"Great god Freud. Chew a cigar? You were weaned too early. Wash your hands often? You're a mastur. Glove anesthesia? You've got a guiltplex. You know the Ree pitch."

"So?"

"So along come the Vikes. And everybody flees into a dream world. Your norm is kicked in the arse."

I didn't say anything, because I still didn't know what he was talking about.

"Look at it this way. You establish a pattern. The majority of people don't go around picking their noses on pneumotubes. All right, this is the norm. You get a guy who *does* pick his nose, he's a deleg for a booby bin. But what happens when the norm is reversed? What happens when everyone seeks the world heretofore reserved for the schizoid? Who's normal then? And how do you treat the person who isn't?"

"Are you saying that Vikes are . . . mentally unbalanced?"

Brooks smiled thinly. "I'm a Vike myself. It's been ten years since I've touched a woman or wanted to touch one. I've been a morphict for three years, a herrict for four,

and I've been on corradon for the last three, ever since it hit the market. My biggest charge is the senso's, but I'm not above reading the pabacks. A wild tape still gets a rise out of me. I know all the tricks and all the gimmicks. I've even come along with the language, which was probably the hardest part. Who am I to say Vikes are nuts?"

"What *are* you saying then?"

"I'm not saying anything. I came here tonight for the same thing you did. Something like a cat house, isn't it?"

"Listen, Brooks. . ."

"All right, you don't like what I'm saying. I don't much like it, either. I keep thinking about tomorrow, though. And the tomorrow after that. And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. What's the step beyond schizophrenia? Or mania? I'm afraid it's catatonia—and that means doom." He saw the look on my face. "I'm not using it in the Vike sense, Brant. I mean doom. Plain old doom. The end. Finis. *Pffft!*"

"You through?"

"Sure, sure, I'm through. I understand Deb has some new stuff at the bar." He stood wearily and his eyes met mine for an instant, and then fled into their own retreat. "Maybe I'll try some. So long, Brant." He turned abruptly.

*"There was a young Ree girl  
who knew it!"*

*"Oh, yes."*

*"But didn't quite know how to  
do it."*

*"Yes."*

*"She sought an advisor  
Who quickly did size her . . ."*



Amid the laughter and the bubbling sound of voices lifted in song, in the dim lights glinting on sequined and painted bosoms, among my fellows and friends, in my world, I watched Rog Brooks shoulder his way to the bar, a tall man walking with his head bent and his fists clenched. A strange man with strange ideas. But maybe, I thought, I shouldn't have been so short with him. He was different, at least. . .

I CLOSED my eyes for an instant, and the song echoed in my ears, and suddenly there was a cool hand on my bare flesh, and the aroma of Lizbeth's perfume in my nostrils.

I shrugged her hand away.

"Don't paw me," I said.

"Sorry, father. You look sad. Want to pop?"

"No."

Liz giggled. "I got a confession. I already did. The new stuff. It's doom, Dad. *Whoo!*"

"I want solo," I said. "Take a pow."

"Sure, Van. They're starting a round of Coverup, anyway, and I want to get in on it."

"Have fun," I said.

She turned and walked away from me, her hips swiveling, her high heels clicking against the marble floor. I looked across the room to the bar, saw Bruce elbow his way free, straighten his hair, and start over toward me. I stood up, walked to meet him halfway, and said, "Let's step outside, Bruce. I don't want this overheard."

"You act like a Martian spy," he said.

"How the hell would you know what a Martian spy acts like?"

"I read the sci-fix. Interesting."

"That Ree feuse?"

"Listen," he said earnestly, "it's the closest thing the Rees have to real Vike stuff. It's their one salvation."

We'd reached the balcony, and I yanked open the manual sliding door, stepping outside into the night. A mild breeze played over the balcony, and Deborah had covered the place with rose bushes that oozed their perfume onto the mild air.

"So what's the big one?" Bruce asked.

"A new senso. So big you can't imadge, Bruce. Individual sensory experiences. *Individual*, Bruce. A man sees, feels, smells one thing. A woman another. Bruce, it's gigantic. It's like nothing we've got. I'm sinking all I own into it. I need scribes."

Bruce screwed up his black brows. He was a moment before answering. "You like it?"

"Yes."

"I'm in."

"Just like that?"

"My friend, before you came on the scene I was writing for the pabacks. I made an average of fifteen gee a year, and you know how far that gets you. You came on then. Last year, I stacked close to half a stone. This year, with six months to go yet, I've made that much already. I've never made a move you didn't suggest, and you've never suggested a move that wasn't right." Bruce shrugged, a little overwhelmed by his own sincerity. "You say this is big, it's big. You

say I should get into it now, I get into it now. That's the way it is, Van. That's the kind of stupid bastard I am."

I grinned in the darkness. "That's Ree talk, Bruce."

"All right, change it to 'stupid illidge.' It's still the way I am, so let's go inside and get into the Coverup. Christ, this is a dull party."

I clapped him on the shoulder, and we started to head back for the party, and that was when I noticed how unusually quiet it was inside. Bruce must have detected the lack of sound at about the same time, because he turned to me with a puzzled expression on his face. Coverup is usually a pretty damned noisy game during the donning stage. The stripping half is so quiet you can hear a pin drop, but hardly enough time had progressed for the game to have been in that stage yet. As if by common consent, we ran for the doors and into the room.

The first person I saw was Deborah, and her face showed pale even through the blue tint. I was starting toward her when a voice shouted, "Hey, here's two more of the bastards."

I whirled rapidly, and then I understood the silence in the room.

**THEY STOOD** in the center of the room, four Ree's, smug grins on their faces. They were fully clothed, of course, wearing shirts, jackets, flapping trousers. The apparent leader of the group, the one who had spoken, looked younger than the others. His blond hair tumbled over his forehead, and

his eyes insolently roamed the room, studying the naked bosoms of the women.

I walked over to Deborah and asked, "Crashers, or did you invite them?"

"My God, Van," she said. "Please!"

"What's all the talk over there, Chesty?" the blond boy called.

I turned and looked at him, and his friends formed behind him in a tight semi-circle. "You talking to me, son?"

"Yeah, you with all the hair on your chest, and the shiny muscles. What's with you and Big Bust there?"

Deborah glanced self-consciously at her breasts, feeling the lust in the blond youth's eyes. I felt embarrassed for her, and I started across the room.

"Ho, look," the blond shouted, "a hero in the crowd."

I walked right up to him, and I heard Bruce padding across the floor behind me. The boy was as tall as I was and had well-rounded muscles beneath the rough cloth of his jacket. His eyes were slate grey, and he carried his mouth like an open switch-knife.

"Are you looking for trouble, son?" I asked.

He grinned and nudged one of his pals in the ribs. "Listen to Shiny Skin," he said. "Yeah, mister, we're looking for trouble."

"You came to the right place," I said softly. Bruce pulled up alongside me, but I didn't turn my head.

"Hey, look at the blond hair and black eyebrows," one of the Ree's said, indicating Bruce. "That takes it, boy." He began laughing, and

they all joined in. They'd obviously been drinking heavily.

"You'd better go," I said. "You'd better go damned fast."

The blond boy thought that was hilarious. "Why?" he asked. "You gonna show me a movie or something?"

"Oh," I said, "I get it."

He laughed again, sure of himself now. "Listen to the tough Vike, boys. He gets all his fights from the stereos and senso's. That's the way he enjoys his fights." He turned a sneer on me. "You're scarin' me to death, mister."

"Grooved," I said. "You figure because we get our action vicariously we don't know how to get it any other way. Is that right?"

"Yeah," he said quickly. He turned to the boys then and said, "Hey, you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna grab one of these nude babes and show her what a real . . ."

That was when my fist collided with his mouth.

I felt his lip split, and then the sharp edge of his teeth knifed into my skin. A blossom of blood sprouted on his mouth, and he brought up his hand to his lips in surprise and terror. I slammed my other fist into his open hand, and his spread fingers tore into his flesh, almost gouging out his own eye. He backed up a few paces, and I jumped after him. I heard his pals yell something and grab for me, and then Bruce stepped into the picture and started throwing his weight around a little.

I gave Blondie a pop in the eye that sent him staggering back to land right on his arse. He was

ready to stand up when I lashed out with my boot and caught him on the point of the chin. After that, he wasn't ready to do anything. I turned quickly, about to take on another one, when I saw Rog Brooks run across the room and tear one of the Ree's from Bruce's back. I threw myself headlong at the closest Ree and began throwing fists at his head. I wasn't used to this because it had been a long time since I'd had any practice, but I punched and I kicked, and I felt my blows crashing against solid flesh that began to crumble after a while. I kept hitting until my fists were covered with blood, until my breeches were torn, until the breath was raging in my lungs. And then I stopped because the flesh had already crumbled and was lying on the floor in a bloody, sodden heap. I stood back then and looked around me at Bruce and Rog.

"Let's get them out of here," I said hoarsely.

We dragged them to the front door and stuck them on the lift, setting the tabs for the first level. The lift dropped out of sight with its cargo, and we went back into the room.

Deborah rushed over to me and said, "Van, you were wonderful."

"Those rotten bastards," I said. *Illidge* simply wasn't strong enough, so I reverted to the Ree terminology. "Those filthy . . ."

"If they come back," Bruce said, "they're dead. They're dead, Van, dead." His hands were trembling as he spoke, and there was a smear of blood stretching from his temple to his jaw. A murmur of conversation sprang up around the room

now, and someone put on a tape in an effort to relieve the strained atmosphere.

"Can we wash up, Deb?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, of course. Come with me."

**WE FOLLOWED HER,** and she dropped Rog and Bruce off at the hall bathroom, and then led me to the private bathroom in her own bedroom. She sat on the bed while I washed, and talked to me through the open bathroom door. I let water into the sink and then plunged my hands into it, watching it turn muddy with blood.

"This makes me wonder," she said.

"About what?"

"About whether I'm doing the right thing or not."

"I'm lost, Deb." I splashed water onto my face, feeling it sting the cuts there.

"I want to have a baby, Van."

"What!" I jerked upright and looked at her, my face and hands dripping water onto the floor.

"Yes, I want to very much."

"Why?"

"Well. . . I'm just tired of. . . of senso's and. . . you know, all of it. I want something new."

"Who's the lucky man?" I asked sarcastically, dipping into the water again.

"Van, don't make me vomit. It won't be that way at all."

"No?"

"No." She smiled playfully. "There are only three men I'd even consider that with, anyway. Even if I were a Ree."

"Who?" I asked.

"Jamie Grew. Know him?"

"No. Who else?"

"Rog Brooks."

"Oh."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. But I'll bet he's the illidge who talked you into this."

"Well, in a way."

"Who's the third man?"

"You."

I snorted and rinsed off my face.

"Well, honey, you're barking up the wrong three."

"I'm only joking. I'll go to the clinic, of course."

"Mmm?"

"Yes. In fact, I've already informed them. I'm enrolling in the next Inseminar."

I snapped on the ultra-vi and stepped into the field, rubbing my hands as the rays dried me. "That's the next step above a Ree," I said. "Next thing you know, you'll be mating in an alley."

"Van, for God's sake! You say the goddamndest things."

"Well it's the truth." I shrugged. "Is this what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Yes. I haven't told anyone yet, not even Rog. I wanted to hear what you thought of it."

"Well, now you know."

"And I'm going to do it anyway."

"Go right ahead. Your womb, your tomb." I stepped out of the field and snapped off the ray. I looked at my torn breeches. "I don't suppose you've an extra pair in the house."

"No. Sorry."

"Didn't expect you to." I tried to pull the tear together, gave it up as a sorry job, and said, "I wanted

to talk to you, too, Deb."

"What about?"

"Money."

"What about money?"

"I need a stone. Can you lend it to me?"

"Are you in trouble?"

"No."

"Then why do you need that much moo?"

"I need it."

Deborah hesitated. "I might be able to scrape it together."

"How soon?"

"How soon do you need it?"

"Immediately."

"That gives me a lot of time," she said snidely.

"All right, six months. No later."

"That's a little better. In six months, I should be pregnant."

"Must we talk about that?"

"No, of course not. I'll have the money for you, Van. Is that better?"

I grinned. "That's much better."

Deborah rose, brushed a fleck of dirt from her breast and said, "Done. Shall we join the party?"

My grin got bigger. I was thinking of the stone she'd promised me within six months, and I was thinking of the way Hayden Thorpe and I would parlay that moo into a nice pile. Individual Sensory Productions.

And all Deborah could think about was having a baby!

## V

**A**CTUALLY, the four Ree crashers were one of the clearest omens, but you never see things in their true light until they're over and done with—and then it's too

late.

Jo Houston called me the next day, shortly after my noon fix. His face was troubled, and his eyes were weary. For a moment, I thought he'd gone without a fix, but then I noticed the empty vial on his desk.

"What is it, Jo?" I asked.

"I'm having a rugged go, Van."

"Spell it."

"Your holdings. I can't get rid of them."

I looked at his face hard to see if he was kidding. "What the hell are you talking about, Jo?"

"The stuff. No buyers."

"No buyers? Hop down, father, and jest me not! I'm in no mood for—"

"Bible stuff, Van, s'help me. I've been shagging since yesterday. The market's dim."

"Then you haven't been shagging hard enough. What the hell's the matter with you, Jo? The stuff I've got is the hottest you can get today."

"Maybe."

"Listen, stop crypticclipping. Shoot it to me straight."

"All right. You loined?"

"Shoot, goddamnit!"

Jo began ticking the points off on his fingers.

Item A: three hundred shares Sappho Stereos. Dead ducks."

"How so?"

"No buyers. Hold it, Van, don't blowtop. I tried everywhere, and I mean everywhere. I couldn't even sell them for a fifty percent loss."

"You mean you *offered* that?"

"As a last resort. Van, the market is tighter than a Ree's necktie."

"More, father."

"Item B: twenty-two shares Arbac Press. Dead ducks. I shopped all over town. No one's interested."

"That's impossible! Arbac is one of the best paback outfits in the field. You sure this isn't a gag, Jo?"

"I never kid where it concerns money," Jo said seriously.

"All right. Read it."

"Item C: fifty-seven shares Dale Cosmetics. I got rid of twenty. You know what you can do with the other thirty-seven."

"What'd you raise?"

"One."

"A thousand? For twenty shares of Dale? Holy Christ, Jo, are you losing your marbles?"

"I didn't say a thousand. I said 'one.' One hundred, Van. One clam. Count it."

"One clam! Look, Jo—"

"I'm lucky I got that. You've got no idea what it's like, Van. So help me, I don't like it."

"You don't like it? You don't like it? It's only my goddamned money you're throwing around, that's all. It's only—"

"Cool, Van."

"Cool my big keester! Listen, Jo, you're paid to handle my affairs. If I ever made a deal like that for one of my clients, I'd be hanged on Times Square the next day. What the hell do you think this is: *Parchesi*?"

"Van, I tell you—"

"You tell me horsemanure! I'm telling you, goddamnit. And you'd damn well better listen. I've got stock worth at least 700 gee. I want 900 gee, and a good man should be able to raise that. If you're not a

good man, you're not the man for me. There are approximately eight thousand accountants in this city, Jo, and—"

"Easy, Van, easy. I'm—"

"Easy, nothing. I'll give you until tomorrow. That's Wednesday. If you can't produce by then, you can close out my account and go back to filing income tax returns at fifty cents a throw!"

"That's not fair, Van—"

"It may not be fair, but it's the way it is. I want at least 500 gee by tomorrow. If you get that much, I'll give you 'till Saturday to get the rest. If you can't, goodbye, Jo; it's been, but it ain't no mo."

"Van—"

I clicked off before he could protest, and then I went over to the bar and shot up a booster. When the buzzer on my desk sounded, I nearly tore off the switch answering.

"Yes!" I shouted.

"Ouch!" Lizbeth said.

"What is it, Liz?" I answered harshly.

Her voice was surprised. "I did something, Van?"

"You did naught. You buzzing to be sociable or have you got something on your mind?"

"Van. . ."

"Come on, Liz, I haven't got all day!"

"Yes, sir." Her voice was shocked now, and a little hurt. "There's someone to see you, sir."

"I'm not in."

"She said it was important."

"I'm still not in."

"Sir, she—"

"Listen, Liz, do I have to send a diag with everything I say? I'm

not in! That goes for this chick, and the President, and even Dino Belazi. I'm out. I'm not in. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fine, fine. I'm glad I speak English."

"Yes, sir."

"Is that all?"

"Ye—"

"All right. Don't disturb me for the next hour or so."

I clicked off and began pacing the rug. How the hell was a man supposed to get anything done when he was surrounded by idiots? Imagine Jo selling twenty shares of Dale for a clam! *A clam!* And he called himself an accountant. A shoe shine boy could have got at least five, and—

The door behind me opened swiftly, and I turned with my fists clenched as it slid shut again.

"I thought I told you not to . . ."

The girl standing there was not Lizbeth.

**S**HE WAS TALL, with her red hair pulled to one side of her neck, trailing down over one naked breast. Her breasts were firm and high, concentrically ringed in various hues. Her stomach was bare and flat, etched with a deep naval. Her skirt was shorter than a good many skirts I'd seen, and she wore six inch spikes with ankle straps.

I stared at her for an instant.

"Who the hell are you?" I shouted.

"Lois Sylvan."

"Who?"

"Lois Sylvan."

"Do you know what doors are

for, Miss Sylvan? They keep people out. I told my secretary I wasn't to be disturbed. I wasn't kidding. Now if you'll swing your keester out of here, I'll be much obliged."

"I thought you'd be interested," she said archly.

I looked her over again. "Whatever you're selling, I'm not interested."

"We're even. I'm not selling."

I looked at her again. "Am I supposed to know you or something? I'm not good at guessing games."

"Lydia Silverstein," she said quickly.

"Lydia wh—" I closed my mouth and looked her over again. Yes, the red hair was certainly hers, and the long legs, and . . . but . . .

"Well. You've changed."

"My name, too. Not legally yet. I've assumed it by common law, and I've already got a shyst to bring it to court."

"Good. So?"

"I've bared my . . . I've taken off my blouse, and I've shortened my skirt. I tried morphine today. I did just what you said."

"So?"

"Well. . . I . . . I'm ready to begin."

"Begin what?"

"You said—"

"Miss Silverstein, or Sylvan, or whatever-the-hell, this is not a Ree convertorium. I run a business, and I don't have to—"

"But you said—"

"I *know* what I said. I also told you to kick out your mate. Did you do that?"

Her eyes began to cloud, and her lower lip trembled a little. "I . . .

I didn't have one."

"Fine! You had nothing to lose then, did you? The fact remains that I can't play father-confessor to every Ree who decides to chuck it all. Miss, I'm right now in the middle of something—"

She started to cry.

Just like that.

It had been such a long time since I'd seen any woman cry that I almost didn't believe it.

"Hey!" I said.

"Oh, shut up," she blubbered.

"Well, look. . ."

"Don't talk to me," she said between sobs.

"Well, don't cry," I offered lamely. "Save that for the stereosoaps. Come on, now, Miss. Miss, you shouldn't. . ."

"I did what you said," she blubbered. "I did just what you said. Now I'm here, and I feel so cheap and so. . .so. . .naked, and you don't even. . .you don't even. . ."

I walked over to her and put my arm around her shoulder. "Look, Miss, please, don't cry. There's no need for that, really. Please, now, please."

"I feel awful," she whimpered.

"There, there, I'll help you. Don't worry. I said I'll help you, and I will."

"You will?"

"Of course I will. We can use good female scribes. I said I'd help, and I've never gone back on my word. I was just feeling sort of grumpy, that's all."

"You'll really help me write?" she asked. She looked for a pocket, found none, and wiped her tears with the back of one hand.

"Yes, I will," I said. "Yes, I—"

A thought hit me. Full-blown. Right out of the air.

"Yes, by God," I said. "Yes, I will!" I thought of the twenty gee we were paying Bruce Alloway for his writing on the new show. And Hayden was looking to cut costs. I grinned amiably and asked, Miss Sylvan. . .Lois. . .how would you like to earn a cool five gee?"

Her eyes opened wide, and her lashes batted frantically for a moment. "Five. . .five. . .?"

"Five gee. Five thousand skins. All yours. All for your hot little hands. How about it?"

She gulped hard. "For writing?"

"What else?" I asked.

For a moment, I thought she would faint. Instead, she gulped again, and her eyes were incredibly green and incredibly wet behind their thick lashes. She opened her mouth to answer, but when no words came, she simply nodded her head weakly.

"Fine!" I shouted. "Terrific."

I stabbed the button on my desk and Liz came on.

"Sir?"

"Liz, honey," I said, "I want you to call Hayden Thorpe for me."

"Sir?" Her voice brightened.

"I want you to call him, sweetness, and tell him I've got the two scribes he wanted. Tell him one of them is Bruce Alloway, and reel off Bruce's credits to him. Mention the *After Dark* thing, Liz. That was really big."

She sounded quite happy now. "Yes, Van."

"And then tell him I've discovered a fabulous new female scribe. Tell him she's the greatest thing since transundies—"



"Van!"

"—the best damned scribe since Shakespeare, the best damned discovery since corradon. Tell him she's starting at once, and that I've had to go to five gee, but that she's worth every penny. Tell him I'm clearing up the other details now, and that we'll be ready to roll on Sunday."

"Yes, Van."

"And tell him, Liz; tell him her name is. . ." I snapped my fingers, and the redhead fluttered her eyelashes.

"Lydia," she said. "No, Lois. Lois Sylvan."

"Lois Sylvan, Liz."

"Lois Sylvan," Liz repeated.

"Remember that name, Liz. Remember it well. This little lady is going to have that name in lights soon. Lois Sylvan. Magnificent. Make that call now, Liz, and double it."

She clicked off, and I turned to the redhead.

"Well, Miss Sylvan," I said. "This is the beginning. You're on your way."

Miss Sylvan didn't answer. Miss Sylvan was too busy holding her breath and giving herself a great big healthy mental pinch.

## VI

**J**O CALLED ME at thirteen the next day.

"Hello, Van." He was beaming broadly, and good news was scrawled all over his face.

"What's the snap, pap?"

"I've got a buyer."

"Good. How much did you raise?"

"You sitting, Van?"

"Why?"

Jo grinned secretively. "How much did you want me to raise? For the lot, I mean."

"You know how much. Stop catenmousing."

"You wanted 900 gee, right?"

"That's right, Jo. Come on."

"I got a stone and two."

"What?"

"A stone and 200 gee, that's right. And I managed to buy back that twenty shares of Dale and throw that into the package, too. Who's the hottest accountant in town, boy?"

"A stone and two! Jo, how'd you do it?"

Jo smiled obliquely. "Trade Secrets, lad."

"Well, who's the buyer?"

"An outfit called Ball Associates."

I thought this over for a moment. "You mean Don Ball? That illidge will never make good, Jo. He hasn't got a cent to his—"

"No, not Don Ball. This is a new outfit. I checked them thoroughly, Van. They've got more moo than God."

"You sure?"

"Positive. I saw their books. They're loaded, Van."

"A corporation?"

"Yes."

"Who's behind it?"

"I couldn't find out. Listen, their money is good. What the hell are you worried about?"

"I just don't like doing business with shadows. Who do I sue if the check hops?"

"It won't hop. I'll have it certified."

"Mmmmm."

"What do you say, Van? This is damned good money. You said yourself you only expected to realize—"

"And I was shooting high," I said, "just to get you to push."

"So there. A stone and two is fabulous. Shall I close it?"

"Ball Associates, huh?"

"Ball Associates."

"Okay, Jo, close it. I want the check by seventeen tonight, and certified. I'll deposit it first thing in the morning. No delivery until I hear from the bank."

"Even with a certified check?" Jo protested.

"I'm cautious, father."

"Cautious? Father, you're paralyzed!"

"Close the deal, Jo. And good work."

"Thanks," he said drily. "You'll have the check by seventeen. One stone and two. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Real. See you, Van."

## VII

HELLO, Hayden?"

"Here."

"Scrambler twelve."

"Grooved."

I heard the scrambler clicking as Hayden set it. I punched my own tabs, waited for the picture to clear, and said, "Okay, father."

"What?"

"I'm on my way to the office. I just came from the bank."

"And?"

"Everything's fine. We've got a stone and two to play with. We can start rolling now, father!"

## VIII

NO, NO, no, no, nonononono-no!" I shouted. I threw the pencil onto the floor and walked to the bar.

"You still haven't got it! You're still turning out Ree garbage. Goddamnit, Lo, you're back in the Middle Ages! You're giving me Charles Dickens!"

"Dickens wasn't in the Middle Ages," Lois said coldly.

"All right, then you're giving me Spenser."

"He wasn't—"

"I don't give a damn! You're not giving me what I want. Is that clear?"

"I don't think you *know* what you want," Lois said. She sat in a chair with her long legs crossed, the skirt opened over her thighs. She wore no stockings, but a deep green garter set with a rhinestone circled the flesh of one leg. Her breasts were done in two golden sunbursts, and the echo of a small burst shaded her navel.

"I know what I need," I said. I opened my kit and selected a vial. "You're enough to make a man mix, I'll tell you that much."

I popped off, closed my eyes for a moment, and asked, "You had yours?"

"This morning," she said. There was anger on her face. Her brows were pulled together tightly, and she carried her lower lip in a pout.

"Have another," I said.

"No, thank you."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

I walked to the desk and slapped the back of my hand onto her

script. "You think this is good, is that it? You think this is deathless prose. You think—"

She stood up suddenly, and her breasts bobbed with her sudden fury. "Yes, if you must know. I think it's good. I think it's better than any of the crap—"

"Feese," I corrected.

"—any of the crap Bruce is turning out. In fact, I think it's too good for—"

"I guess you don't like the smell of that five gee."

"I think it's too good for. . ." She paused. She let out an exasperated breath. Then she began pacing the floor. "It is good," she said.

"It stinks," I told her.

"It's just what you and Hayden said you wanted."

"It stinks."

"It's the best I can do."

"You'll have to do better."

"I can't!" she fairly screamed.

"You can."

"I can't, can't can't. I've had enough. I can't take any more. Do it this way, do it that way. Change this, change that. How can a person write that way? How can anyone—"

"Shut up, Lois."

"—can anyone con. . .cen. . ." Her voice dropped to a whisper. She sucked in a deep breath, passed a hand over the side of her face, and asked, "All right, how do we fix it?"

"That's my girl."

"Never mind the feese. How do we fix it?"

"Listen to this: *Darling, kiss me. Take me in your arms.*"

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's not loaded. We want something like: *Darling, put your mouth on mine. Cover my lips with yours. Crush me in your arms. Press me against your body and let me—*"

"I get it," she said dully. She took another deep breath. "Have you any morph, Van?"

"I'm Mister Morph himself, honey."

Lois smiled, but her eyes were dull.

## IX

"IT DOESN'T FIT," Bruce Alloway said.

"Then we'll make it fit."

Bruce shook his head. We were alone in my office, and the city gleamed like a broad, jeweled tiara outside my window. The light over my desk cast a golden circle on the scripts scattered over the polished top.

"It's no go, Van."

"Why not?"

"Lois."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing that talent wouldn't fix."

"She's not that bad."

"Van, she's terrible. She's got Ree sentiments as long as my arm. And on top of that, she can't write."

"You weren't so damned hot when I stumbled across you, either."

"No, but I at least had the inclination. She's got nothing. Sure, she tries, but that isn't enough. We'll never mate her words and mine, Van. Never."

"You're wrong, Bruce. We damn well better mate them."

"I tell you she's no good. Zero."

"Lower your voice. She'll be here any sec."

Bruce shook his head again. "Why are you keeping her, Van? You're not going Ree, are you?"

"Friend or no friend," I told him, "I can still punch you in the mouth."

"All right, I'm sorry. Suppose tell *me* why?"

"I'm paying her five gee. You're getting twenty. Is that good enough?"

Bruce spread his hands wide. "The root of all. Sure, good enough. That means I'll have to work hard enough to earn fifty, while she ambles along earning about three clams worth. That sounds really fai—"

A tapping sounded on the outer door, and I touched the lock release on my desk. I heard the door slide open, heard the hurried click of high heels through the reception room. The door to my office slid wide then, and Lois came into the room.

She was out of breath, and she carried a thick script under her arm. "Am I late?"

"A little. Come on over."

She walked to the desk and dumped the script under the lamp. "There it is, father. My sweat and blood. Now all we have to do is match it with Bruce's."

Bruce sighed painfully. "Yes," he he said. "That's all we have to do."

## X

**H**AYDEN THORPE sat in the big chair under the ceilamp. The shooting script was open in his

lap, and his brow was furrowed in concentration. Lois, Bruce, and I sat opposite him, side by side, on the couch. The room was quiet. Outside, the traffic on the various levels raised a din that tried valiantly to penetrate his muted office.

I had never seen a corradonict smoke before. I wasn't even sure that Hayden *was* smoking. I don't think he even knew he had that cigar in his mouth. But great billows of smoke rose from his mouth, puffed out over his head, smothered him and the chair and the script. He could have acted the part of a volcano in an adventure stereo with no extra effort.

He turned a page, blew out another stream of smoke. The rustle of the paper made a loud, scratching sound in the silence of the room.

Hayden made a noise that sounded like a cross between a burp and a grunt. He turned another page.

The electric clock on the wall hummed pleasantly, throwing seconds, minutes, hours into the room. The cloud of smoke thickened, and Hayden kept turning pages, one after the other, grunting occasionally, burping frequently.

He leaned back at last, closed the script. On the couch, I felt Bruce lean forward expectantly.

"Well. . ." Hayden said. He studied the end of his cigar, then dropped it into the disposotray.

Lois gripped my hand tightly, and I glanced down at it and then over to Hayden's face.

He drew a heavy breath, and I felt Lois tense.

"It's terrific," he said mildly. "We can start shooting at once."

## XI

DINO BELAZI came to my office two days later.

At first, I couldn't believe my ears. "Who?" I asked Lizbeth.

"Dino Belazi, Van."

"The Ree? The critic? The . . . the Ree?"

"The same."

"Well. *Well*. Give me ten minutes, then show him in."

I cleared off my desk, leaving the top as glistening as a mountain lake. Then I walked around the office and straightened the zines and the pabacks. I closed the top of the bar, straightened a stereopic on the wall and tilted the blinds so that the sun backlighted me. I went to the closet, rubbed some alcojel on, combed my hair, and scrutinized myself in the door mirror. I pulled my breeches higher, saw that my boots carried a high polish, sucked in my stomach, and then walked to my desk. I tilted my head so that the sunlight hit my profile. I waited for Dino Belazi.

The door slid open, and I heard his heavy shoes on my rug. I glanced through the blinds for a few seconds, and then turned casually.

Belazi had stopped in the center of the room.

He was not at all what I had pictured. He was a small man with a carefully trimmed white beard. He wore a severely tailored black suit. His collar was tight, his tie thin. His shoes were black and highly polished. His straight nose sliced down the middle of his face like a cleaver. His lips were pursed beneath that nose, carefully con-

cealing his teeth. His eyes could tell stories, but they were short of material at the moment.

"Mr. Belazi," I said cordially. "I'm honored."

Belazi took a quick step forward, then stopped with his heels together, his homburg clenched in both hands, his cane looped over his right arm. "I shall make my visit brief and to the point, Mr. Branski," he said. His voice was deep, but his speech was clipped.

"Mr. Brant," I corrected him.

Belazi smiled mirthlessly. "If you prefer."

"I prefer."

"I have compiled a list of alleged literary agents who are today soliciting the majority of smut on the market. You, unfortunately, are one of the chief purveyors. I have been systematically eliminating these men, starting at the top and working my way to the bottom."

"Eliminating?"

"Through visits. I've come to ask something of you, Mr. Branski . . . Mr. Brant."

"And what's that?"

"May I sit down?"

"Please do."

"Thank you." Belazi moved to the chair opposite my desk. He sat down, carefully raising his trousers to protect their crease. He put his homburg on one arm of the chair, leaned forward and rested both hands on the head of his cane. "Now, then. I've come to ask that you discontinue the submission of manuscripts to: (a) the magazines, (b) the paperbacks, (c) the stereoscopic, the three dimensional, and the sensory mediums."

"You missed one," I said.



"Did I indeed?"

"Yes. We're still submitting material to the live shows."

Belazi coughed politely. "We shall eliminate the legitimate theatre from our discussion. I rather imagine you are not selling them a great deal of material."

I smiled. "In other words, you'd like me to go out of business, is that it?"

"I did not suggest that."

"But your statement was heavily loaded with that implication, I would say. Wouldn't you?"

"I would prefer not to comment on that. Do you agree to my proposal?"

"Don't be popped, father."

"Sir?"

"Your proposal is absurd. You're asking me to slit my own throat."

"Suicide is sometimes a more pleasant prospect than execution."

"Don't tickle me, Belazi. The Vikes are firmly rooted. It'll take more than a threat from you to kick us out."

"I know that. We possess the means to destroy you and your ilk, Mr. Brant. Believe me, we are fully prepared."

"How? With bad reviews? Every time you razor something, we sell a million more copies or we get a million more viewers. Grow up, father. The people are wise."

"Are they?"

"They are. They are that. Finally, after all these years, they're wise. Oh so wise, father. They know just what they want, and we're giving it to them."

"But is it what they want?"

"I've no time for philo, Bilazi. And I don't want to chop psych

with you, either. You know what they want as well as I do."

Belazi pursed his lips and said nothing. His hands were firm on the head of his cane.

I TOOK his silence for assent. "It used to be the other way around, Belazi. The little man was the slob, wallowing in filth, breeding kids he didn't want, dreaming of adventures he never had and never would have. The paperbacks took hold then, and the little man began to wake up. He recognized convention for what it really was: a petty disguise of polite society, a subterfuge designed to keep the little man's feet firmly on the ground, to keep his head from out of the clouds."

"I'm really not terribly interested in—"

"And at the same time, the body magicians were at work. *'Wear a Juno bra and you won't be flat-chested.'* *'Use Vitagro on your hair, and you'll be dazzling.'* *'Don't smell—use Sosoap.'* While the paperbacks peddled vicarious adventure, the advertising industry emphasized clothes, cosmetics, luxuries the little man could never afford, trips to Bermuda, beauty aids, dreams. And sex reared its lovely breast. The paperbacks featured busty broads on their covers in full color, a vicarious thrill for a quarter, the thin part of a dollar. Television joined the parade, for free this time, and if you couldn't see a chick's navel on Channel 30, you switched to 29. The movies clung to their stupid censorship rulings until they realized they were losing out in the big

race. They relaxed then, and the results were amazing. Three-dimensional processes took hold, giving more reality to the vicarious pleasure. And the people liked it. The people loved it. The people—”

“All of which—”

“All of which illustrates a point. Joe Sucker began to understand an important truth. It had been there all along, starting maybe with the now-defunct comic books, working its way up through pulp magazines, through the now-extinct hard cover novels, into the pabacks, into television, the movies, the stereos, the senso's. Now he knew. *The make-believe was better than the reality!* The girl's behind wiggling on the motion picture screen was a hundred times better and a thousand times more effective than his own wife's fat pratt in the shabby, dubious comfort of his own home. The colorful characters of the dream world, the people with names like Drew and Allison and Mark and Cynthia, were having a hell of a lot more fun than the little man was. In real life, the pure maiden was the acme of perfection. In the dream world, if a chick didn't hop into bed after five minutes of casual conversation she was a Mongolit. ‘Hey!’ Joe Sucker yelled, ‘where have I been all my life?’ He woke up, and the waking was a tremendously powerful thing.”

“The awakening was the doom of society.”

“No, Mr. Belazi. It put the little man right where he'd always wanted to be. He changed his name from Joe Sucker to Joel Standish. He forgot about the disappointing realities all around him and con-

centrated on the purely vicarious aspect of living. He began to enjoy himself for the first time because now his *entire* world was a make-believe one. He conveniently disposed of the reality, which no longer served any concrete purpose in his life. He was a sucker reborn, and he clasped hands with millions of other suckers, and began having a hell of a good time. Drugs, which had already taken a strong illegal foothold, became as common as cigarettes. Eventually, as you know, they became legal, which was a damned smart move. Marriage was abandoned as the shoddy thing it was, the invention of some fools who wanted to indulge but conceal what is basically a disgusting animal impulse. Archaicism was replaced by new thoughts, new language, new dreams. Society was revitalized. It still is revitalized. It still is—”

“Decadent! It is decadent!” Belazi shouted.

“Only for a Realist. For the Vike, there is pure escape. It does things better for him, with no strain and no pain. Three cheers for it, I say.”

Belazi's face seemed ready to erupt. It turned a deep red, and then modulated the chromatic scale until it reached its normal shade again. “I take it you will continue with your submissions.”

“I will.”

Belazi rose stiffly. “Thank you for the history lesson, Mr. Branoski. I appreciated it.”

He turned brusquely and started for the door, stopping halfway across the carpet. “You will remember that you were warned.”



"Sure, I'll remember."

"We will do everything in our power to crush you, Mr. Branoski. You and the others. The Vicarious Movement is finished, believe me."

I didn't answer. I simply grinned.

Belazi turned on his heel and walked out.

## XII

**I** UNDERSTAND cancer is that way.

You can have all the signs, you can see them every day, but you won't realize what they mean until someone tells you you've got six months to live.

I was up to my ears in production details. The *senso* was going to cost a lot more than we'd figured, even cutting it to the bone. Hayden insisted on complete secrecy, which meant no outdoor shooting, no borrowing of sets, no established players who would spread the word around. It meant that we had to hire a studio large enough to hold all the sets we needed for the show. We had to get additional equipment, and we had to get it the hard way, laying out cold cash for purchased items rather than renting the stuff. And we had to search for actors and actresses without advertising, without stirring up any outside interest. We had to get cameramen, musicians, audio and olfactory technicians, a guy to write the score and another to direct it. And most expensive were the men Hayden had trained in the new individual sensory techniques. It was a headache, but its possibilities looked even bigger to me

once I got wrapped up in it

And at the same time, I tried to run the agency, taking harassed calls from scribes and eds, reading tons of manuscripts, haggling over prices, marketing the material we had on hand. I hired two new eds, adding an extra strain to my budget. I began to lean on Liz more and more heavily, delegating much of the marketing to her. My mind was almost always occupied with thoughts of the show, with problems that had come up, but I kept a small corner of my thinking capacity open and reserved for the agency, and I used that when Liz gave me daily reports.

"Three scripts back from Preen Publishers," she said.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. They said they weren't right."

"That's funny. Who were the scribes?"

"Mercer, Peer, Fitch."

"They've sold to Preen."

"I know."

"Mm. What else?"

"A notice from Agon *Senso*. New ownership."

"What else?"

"Pile of stuff back from Stereo One. Not their type, they said."

"Not their type? It's the same stuff we've been sending them all along," I complained.

Liz shrugged. "You want me to remarket this stuff?"

"Yes. But first call Andrews at Stereo One. Ask him what the hell he means by *not their type*. Tell him —"

"He's not there any more, Van."

"Since when?"

"Yesterday. A new fellow's taken

over. I forget his name."

I nodded disgustedly. "That explains it. A new cd, a new batch of pet agents and scribes. Well, scroom. There are lots of other markets."

"Hundreds," Liz agreed. "What brews tonight, Van?"

"Why?"

"Got a party, thought you might like to take my arm."

"Not tonight, hon."

"Business?"

"Business," I said

Liz shrugged. "It'll probably be a dull glom anyway."

### XIII

**H**AYDEN SHOWED ME a portion of the shooting script.

*Camera 1-2*  
CLOSEUP  
BETTY FACE

*Camera 3-4*  
STERO  
BETTY BRSTS

*Camera 5-6*  
FILTER-SHOT  
CARL ARMS

*Camera 7-8*  
CU  
CARL NOSE

*Olefact*  
PERFUME 312A  
TOBACCO 42  
ROSES

*Special*  
WIND  
FAINT RAIN

BETTY: Don't! Carl, please, please. You're hurting me!

*Camera 1-2*  
CU  
CARL FINGERS

*Camera 3-4*  
GRID SHOT  
BETTY FLESH  
ARM

*Camera 5-6*  
SUPERIMP  
ROSE BUSH

*Camera 7-8*  
OVHD DOLLY  
CARL FINGERS

<i>Olefact</i>	<i>Special</i>
SAME, ADD:	TWEED
MUSK WOMAN	SCRATCH
LT PERSPIR	STICKY
CLOTH	BLOOD

CARL: I know! I want to hurt you. I want to keep hurting you until —

<i>Camera 1-2</i>	<i>Camera 3-4</i>
SNAP CU	UNDER
BETTY MOUTH	SAME

<i>Camera 5-6</i>	<i>Camera 7-8</i>
OVER	SAME AS
SAME	CAMERA 1-2

<i>Olefact</i>	<i>Special</i>
CUT ALL BUT	NONE
ROSES, ADD	
FNT TOOTH	
PST 580-5	

BETTY: No! Carl! Carl!

I looked at it and scratched my head. It had certainly changed from the simple arrangement of dialogue Bruce and Lois had written.

"Do you see now why it's going to cost us so much?" he asked.

I nodded dumbly. "I see."

### XIV

**W**E SWUNG into production, and I was pulled away from the office even more than usual. It was a tough grind for me, but Hayden stayed with us all every inch of the way. There were a million things to be done at the studio, and our limited budget meant that everyone had to pitch in.

And that meant that when I got home each night, I was ready to sleep through the next week. Instead, I got up each morning at six, rushed to the office to open the mail and sort it, and then waited for Liz to come in with a rundown of the previous activities. It was on one of these mornings, while waiting for Liz, that I happened to check the stock room. What I found surprised me.

Lizabeth pranced in at nine, her breasts sparkling with an iridescent glow. Her skirt was the most daring thing I'd ever seen in an office, consisting of a single thin strip that hung over her buttocks. Her underwear was transparent, and fully exposed.

"That's going a little far, isn't it?" I asked.

She glanced at her near-nudity, lifted her eyes. She shrugged. "Kicks, father."

"Kicks? What the hell . . ."

"Look, Van," she snapped. "Don't tell me how to dress."

"I don't give a damn what you wear on your own time. In this office, though, don't look as if you're ready to crawl into some god-damn Ree's nest."

"You're insulting!"

"And so's that skirt!"

"All right!" she shouted. "Would you like me to go home and change it?"

"No. But there are a few things I'd like to know."

"Like what?"

"Like where our supply of drugs went to? Did you forget to re-order, or has someone been using it for private parties?"

"Neither. Swift's is out."

"Out of drugs? Are you —"

"Out of drugs, yes."

"Then why didn't you get it elsewhere?"

"I tried. There seems to be a scarcity of the stuff."

"Of drugs?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, yes, of *drugs*. Don't you understand when I —"

"What the hell's wrong with you, Liz?"

"Nothing. I haven't had a fix yet, that's all."

"Well, go take one then, and we'll talk business when you've popped."

"There's none in the office. You saw that yourself."

I was beginning to get a little exasperated. "Then why didn't you pop before you left your house?"

"Because I'm all out, too, and I couldn't get any."

"I've got plenty at my place," I said. "Send one of the kids when they come in."

"Opaine?" she asked, an eager light in her eyes.

"Morph, mostly. A guest supply of a few others. Have you tried all the drug outfits?"

"Yes, all of them."

"The private sellers?"

"All of them."

"Probably a small shortage. Maybe a shipment got fouled. Anyway, I want to ask you about the marketing setup. We usually get checks from Vizco and Young & Co. on Thursdays. There were none in this morning's mail. Any idea what's wrong?"

"Yes. They've both been taken over by a new outfit."

"Oh. What's the name of the new owner?"

Lizbeth sucked in her breath.  
 "Ball Associates," she said.

## XV

**I**RAN INTO Deborah Dean that week. She was hurrying to catch a pneumotube, and she almost knocked me over.

"Hey!" I said, "what's the rush?"

She looked up at me for a moment, and then said, "Van! How good." She grasped my hand firmly, squeezed it hard. "It's awfully nice to see you. What are you doing? Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Well, I've been pretty busy," I said.

She'd changed a great deal. She wore her hair long, curling about her neck. There were no contacts on her eyes, and I noticed for the first time that their original color was a somewhat muddy brown. She'd put on weight, of course, so I assumed her trips to the Inseminary had been successful. She wore a breast sheath that fully covered her bosom, and her skirt ended just above the knees, much longer than anything I'd ever seen on her. She wore flats, but I attributed that to her condition.

"I have, too," she said. Her eyes seemed to sparkle, making me forget the drabness of their color for a moment. This hardly seemed like the same exciting, vivacious Deborah I'd known. And yet, there was something new about her that hadn't been there before, either. A glow, almost. She glanced at her wrist chron and said, "I must run, Van. Are you going uptown?"

"Yes, I am."

"Good. Come along."

We caught a dual car, sitting side by side as the buildings sped by in a blur outside. We talked of little things, neither of us mentioning the change in her.

Finally, I asked, "Have you been having trouble getting fixed, Deb?"

She smiled tolerantly. "I'm off it, Van. I'm having a baby, you know. They don't mix well."

"Oh. Yes, of course. The Inseminar was a success, then?"

She hesitated a moment before answering.

"Well . . . not exactly."

I didn't get her meaning at first. When it hit me, I stared at her in surprise. A feeling of revulsion gripped me, and I almost wanted to leap out of the car.

"I thought you knew," Deborah said softly. "Rog Brooks and I were married four months ago."

"Married!"

Deborah turned away from me and gazed steadily through the window of the car.

"A person gets tired of parties," she said after a while.

I didn't answer her.

## XVI

**T**HE REPORT came through on all coms, pri and pub. It came after a week in which drugs had dwindled down to a mere trickle. I was at home, getting ready for bed. I snapped on the com, scanning the messages as they taped out of the machine. The report said:  
 COM PRI-PUB DISPATCH  
 38C 4213 X WASHINGTON,  
 D.C. AUGUST 12, 2174 X EF-  
 FECTIVE 0001 AUGUST 15,

2174, ALL DRUGS, NARCOTICS, STIMULANTS, DEPRESSIVES ILLEGAL EXCEPT MEDICINALLY ADMINISTERED BY LICENSED PHYSICIANS X JOINT SESSION CONGRESS TODAY VOTED UNANIMOUSLY IN FAVOR BILL PROHIBITING SALE OR CONSUMPTION OF NARCOTICS TO PRIVATE CITIZENS X EXTREME SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION WAIVED DELAY IN FAVOR OF IMMEDIATE RESUMPTION OF RESTRICTIONS X THREE-DAY GRACE PERIOD GRANTED AFTER STRONG VIKE PROTESTS BUT LAW EFFECTIVE AUGUST 15 X OFFENDERS LIABLE TO ARREST AND PROSECUTION X

I tore the tape off and held it in trembling hands. This was impossible. This was utterly fantastic. I rushed over to the phone, dialed Hayden Thorpe's number, let it ring six times before I gave up. I tried Bruce next, and when I got no answer there, I called Clark Talbot in desperation.

He didn't look good. He didn't look good at all. He blinked his eyes at the screen, wet his lips with his tongue.

"That you, Van?" he asked.

"Yes, Clark. Did you see the latest on the com?"

"About the narcotics?"

"Yes."

"They've been running that every ten minutes. Where you been goofing, father?"

"Is it straight goods?"

"Sure, it must be. It's on the public communicators, too. You can't get any bum dope on those."

"Well, Jesus, what the hell are we going to do? What does it all mean? I thought we had a Vike majority in Congress."

"Majorities don't mean beans, Van. You spread a little moo around in the right places, and majorities become minorities overnight. Don't you know politics?"

"But . . . I mean . . . well, where are we going to get our stuff?"

Clark gave a short, dry laugh that sounded more like a cackle. "Jest me not, father," he said. "I've been cool for the past nine days. I couldn't raise a drop of herrocoke no matter how hard I tried. So this makes it illegal, so what? If you can't get it, what difference does it make if somebody says you're not *allowed* to get it? Father, I've been down, really."

"Nine days!" I said, incredulity in my voice.

"Cooler and cooler, and now I'm almost cold. It was rough tough stuff, Van. I thought I was done a few days ago. I was ready to make out a will."

"What about now? I mean . . ."

"Now?" Clark asked. "Now?" I looked into his eyes. They were vacuous and lonely. Something of a smile played on his lips and then died there. "No mo, Van. Gone. From my body, anyway. In my mind . . . in my mind . . ." He sighed deeply, then changed the subject abruptly. "Who's Ball Associates?"

"What?" I asked, still a little dazed.

"Ball Associates. I understand

they've cornered half the god-damn publishing field. Have you sold anything of mine lately?"

"Well, Clark, Triple Press is now owned by —"

"I know. Ball. What about it?"

"Change of policy. You know how these things work. New owner, new —"

"Yeah," Clark said drily. "Well, without a habit, all I have to worry about is food. Think you can scrape enough for that?"

I managed to laugh weakly. "Hell, Clark, stop talking like a—"

"Ree?" he asked. He began laughing then, continued laughing until I snapped off.

I walked to my home bar, checked the vials there. I still had a fair supply even though this past week had dented it badly. My hands were trembling as I pulled the lid shut. I felt like talking to someone, anyone. I thought of Hayden, realized he was out. The same applied to Bruce. I picked up the com report and looked at it again, and then I dressed slowly and left the apartment.

**A**LL TRAFFIC had been stopped on the street levels. The robot policemen had their hands full as small jet cars piled up one behind the other, their horns blaring shrilly. Everyone seemed to be in the streets. There was swearing and shouting and cursing and singing and drunken revelry. The Ree's commanded the night, and they reeled about everywhere, proclaiming their major victory to the neon skies. Every Vike I passed stared at me dejectedly, sharing

silently the blow of our defeat.

There was the solemn air of a funeral procession mixed with the blatant enthusiasm of a wedding feast. The streets were a complexity of contrasts, but the celebrants seemed to outweigh the mourners — if by lung power alone.

I lurched along the walk, shouldering Ree's aside, biting my lip, wondering how this had happened, wondering how it had all come about. I kept walking, unseeing almost, and I found myself at my office. I took the lift up, pressed my key into the lock, and entered.

A light was burning, and I cursed Liz' inefficiency until I opened the door to my private office and found her sitting at the desk.

Her face was drawn in the light of the overhead lamp, her features haggard.

"It's all over," she said.

"Don't be silly. Just because —"

"Not only the drugs," she protested. "Everything! Look at this." She held out a white sheet of paper, and I looked at it incredulously. It told me that Ball Associates now owned a majority of the stock throughout the publishing and entertainment fields, and that editorial requirements would be changed abruptly in the near future.

I nodded my head vaguely. "We should have seen this coming, Liz. We should have —"

"We didn't," she said blankly.

"It still doesn't mean the end. We can still submit material. We can —"

"Look at the signature," she said dully. "At the bottom of the page."

I looked.

It was signed: *Dino Belazi, President.*

"No!" I shouted involuntarily. "This can't —"

I stopped myself. It *could*, and it had. I knew then what Belazi's weapon had been. Money. Money to buy out the industry, and money to pay off the lobbies. Money, the Vikes' own weapon, and in the hands of the Ree's. How many stupid Ree's had contributed to Belazi's death fund? How many grubby peasants had scraped up their last dollar for the cause of destroying the Vike Movement?

It made me a little ill. I crumpled the paper into a ball and dropped it on the floor. I wheeled then and ran from the room, leaving Liz at the desk. I ran into the streets, into the mayhem again, shoving, pushing, fighting my way uptown, fighting the blares of the horns, the sharp laughter, the voices high in song, the giggling, the roaring, the endless procession of jubilant Ree's and despondent Vikes, the clatter and the clash, the clamor and the incessant din — fighting all the way.

And then I got where I was going, and I closed the door behind me, cutting myself off from the noise outside. I took the lift up, walked briskly down the hall and pressed the buzzer.

A series of chimes rang within the apartment, and then the door panel slid open and I showed my face to the mirrored side of the seethru. The door slid back, and Lois stood there, ready for bed, her red hair fluffed behind her, her body sheathed in thin pajamas.

"Van," she said. There was something of desperation in her

voice, and something of expectancy — as if she thought I'd have the solution to the entire problem.

I went inside and walked quickly to the window, looking down at the milling crowds. She came and stood beside me, and I felt the warmth of her body, smelled the faint aroma of her perfume.

"It's bad," I said. "This new law . . . and they've got control of the field. Ball Associates — Dino Belazi. We'll never sell them another Vike script as long as —"

"And the show?" Lois cut in. "After all this work, all the money put into it? Will that . . . die, too?"

I thought of the show.

Individual Sensory Productions.

Something new, something spectacular.

Something as potent as a shot of morph. Maybe . . . maybe . . .

My mouth was grim when I answered. "No, Lois, the show won't die. We're not licked yet."

She moved closer to me, and we kept watching the frantic crowd in the street until the pale beginnings of dawn chased the revelers to their homes and their beds.

## XVII

I WENT TO SEE Dino Belazi the next day.

I didn't go there to beg or plead. I went there to tell him what I was going to do. I went there to spit in his gloating face.

He wasn't gloating, though. He was sitting seriously behind his severe desk. His hair was slightly disarrayed, and he stroked his beard with forced concentration.

"All right," I said, "you've got it all now. Right in the palm of your fat Realist fist. But we're not through, Belazi. I came to tell you that you'd better enjoy yourself while you can."

"Your attitude, Mr. Branoski —"

"Mr. *Brant*, goddamnit! And don't forget it!"

"Your attitude, Mr. Brant is not a sound one. It is, rather —"

"Just listen to this, Belazi. I've got something that's bigger than anything that's ever come along. I'm producing it myself, so I don't need any big company to bother with. In other words, I don't need Ball Associates. I'm producing myself, with my own money, and I'll distribute myself — and when this hits the market, you can take your rejuvenated Ree society and stick it right up your nose. Just remember that, Belazi. Remember it, and enjoy yourself because you've got one foot in the grave and the other on a grapeskin."

Belazi's face became a little sad. "I had hoped we could get together. I had hoped . . ." He shrugged.

"Together? Ree's and Vikes? Hah!" I looked at him contemptuously. "You mean you'd hoped my writers would turn out the Ree feese you're dying to put on the market again. Well they won't, Belazi. They won't because what I've got is going to take all the starch out of your little *coup*. You're going to be right back where you started. Only this time, we're going to be more careful. We're going to watch you this time, Belazi, and there'll be no mistakes."

"Do what you must do," he said

softly.

"I'll do it, all right. I just wanted you to know. So that you won't sit up here and gloat all day. I wanted you to worry a little, Belazi. I wanted you to know that your happiness is short-lived. I'll leave now, but you'll be hearing from me."

I turned and headed for the door.

Behind me, Belazi said, "Good luck, Branoski."

### XVIII

I COULDN'T contact Deborah. She was nowhere to be found. I got Hayden and Bruce, and together we began scouring the city, anxious to find her because the stone she'd promised us would be enough to put the show over and smash the new Ree uprising. I still had some drugs left, and so I didn't feel the new law as much as Clark apparently had. But they wouldn't last forever, and we had to work fast. We had to start a bally that would generate enough Vike interest to start a counter-movement. We had to do something to blast through the miasma of defeat that had settled over the city like a plague of locusts. We had to announce the new *senso fast*.

It took me five days to find her, and when I did, she was working hard, her hair trailing over one eye, her face sweated. She was very tired, and her pregnancy seemed to show more now than it had the last time I'd seen her. She was wearing a nurse's frock, which was in perfect keeping with her surroundings because she was in a clinic.



"Deborah," I said, "I've come for the money."

She didn't stop working. She was banking plasma row on row, turning to pick up the jars, then stacking them neatly on the shelf.

"The what, Van?"

"The money. The stone you promised me. Remember? That night at your party? When you told me —"

"Oh. Yes. Yes, I remember now."

There was an uncomfortable silence. She put another jar on the shelf and it clinked solidly against the one beneath it.

"Well? Can I have it?"

Deborah didn't answer.

"I said —"

"I heard you, Van."

"Well?"

"No."

"No? What do you mean, no? You promised me, Deb. I went ahead with plans because I was counting on that moo. Honey, if ever you wanted to help someone, this is —"

"It's not a question of *wanting* to, Van. Believe me, I do want to. I simply haven't got that much money."

"How much do you have?"

"Two thousand at the most. And . . . and we'll need that, too."

"But for Christ's sake," I said, almost wanting to weep, "what did you do with all your money? Where —"

"The clinic," she said. "It's Rog's, you know. We . . . we're going to be needed, Van."

"Deb," I said. "Deb, Deb."

"I would help you if I could, believe me. But you can't imagine

what this abrupt change is doing to people. Rog has his hands full already, and there'll be more. It's going to take work, Van, hard work. Rehabilitating the addicts, and then rehabilitating the sick minds."

"What? I'm sorry, Deb. What did you say?"

"We've got to find a meeting ground, don't you see, Van? That's the hardest job ahead, and that's where every psych is going to be valuable. A meeting ground, somewhere in the middle."

"What do you mean? Somewhere in the middle of what?"

"The middle of Vike and Ree. Neither is healthy, Van — and I think both factions realize it."

"Realize it?" I was suddenly angry. "Sure," I said, "start talking like a goddamn smug Ree tramp. Build a cozy clinic for your shackmate and then start spouting pretty phrases. Well, you don't know what the hell you're talking about. You think this Ree business is going to last? You think the people are going to turn back to all that feese? We've been Vike for more than ten years now. We'll never go back to Ree."

"You're right," Deborah said, "but only because the Ree attitude is a sick one, too. As sick as the Vike. And Ball Associates — which was the Ree's weapon — is a virtual monopoly, and any such monopoly of art and entertainment is bad, Van. Van, we've got to wed the two." Her eyes burned with a fierce intensity, and she put her hand on my arm. "*We've got to bring them together.* We've got to make a happy whole out of two diseased parts."

She paused and turned her head away. "It's going to get worse, Van. Much worse. This is only the beginning. And then someone will have to pick up the pieces. Rog is helping, and so am I. But we've all got to." She paused again. "You see, we have no choice. It's either that . . . or the end of everything we know."

Her voice had got very low. She looked up at me, and her fingers tightened on my arm. "Do you understand, Van?"

I stared at her for a few moments, and then I gently took her hand from my arm.

"Goodbye, Deborah," I said. And then I left her.

## XIX

### IT GOT WORSE.

The drug ruling was strictly enforced, and it was impossible to get as much as a stick of benzejuana anywhere. I was sick. I was sicker than I'd ever been in my life. For the next month, I stayed locked in my room, my body the only thing that concerned me. The coms reported new suicides daily, new mental crackdowns. And everywhere around me, the picture was changing. Vike entertainment was slowly and deliberately being suffocated. The Ree's were having a field day, and Dino Belazi must have been riding on a big cloud.

Lois called often. Her habit had been a short one, and an easy one to shuck. My habit had come from years of use, and it left my body reluctantly, fighting for every inch of control it lost. I'd click on whenever she called, and then lay back

while she spoke. I very rarely answered her. I just listened, nodding now and then, thinking of my own private hell and envying the easy battle she had won.

And then it was all over. I could eat in the morning without spitting it up again before noon. My appetite began to return and I started to think of other things besides the constant physical turmoil that had held me for so many weeks.

I did a lot of thinking. Some of it surprised me. But chiefly, I thought of the new senso — and of the money we needed.

I tried to sell the agency. It was all I had left, and I figured we could still save the show, still stage something big enough to knock the Ree's on their arses. But people know when you're pedding a corpse. My stable consisted of Vike scribes. There was no market for Vike stuff now. I got laughed at in a good many places, and actually tossed out of one place. In the end, I was forced to close the office and cut the scribes loose.

I moved to a cheaper apartment, and I tried to sell the furnishings. But the furnishings were of Vike design, and Vike had become synonymous with bubonic plague.

I started to look around me then. I still had some money, and it wasn't necessary for me to hunt work immediately. I took long walks, and I watched the results of the new scheme of things.

Summer was giving way to autumn, and brisk winds moved in as quickly as the Ree upsurge had. I walked the streets, and I watched the people, Ree and Vike, and I thought. There was the smell of

winter in the air. The sky had turned cast iron, and dying leaves rasped along the street levels, crushed beneath the hurrying boots of passersby. The air was crisp, with the tang of a ripe apple. It caressed the flesh with tingling fingers, left my face raw and my body invigorated. I walked and I watched and I listened. And I saw the broken pieces Deborah had mentioned, and I saw the people who were painstakingly picking up those pieces, trying to fit them together into a new pattern.

I thought often of the new senso and Ball Associates and Dino Belazi.

**I** WENT TO Lois' place after a while. I hadn't seen her or talked to her for some time now, but I wasn't surprised to see her looking the way she'd looked that first day in my office, long long ago, when her name had been Lydia Silverstein and her habits had been somewhere between Ree and Vike. It was good to see her like that. She was fully clothed, and somehow that made her more attractive.

She was happy to see me. She took me into her living room, and we sat before a blazing fire in the hearth, mocking the cold air outside the plexoid windows.

Neither of us said anything for a long while. And then, finally, with my eyes on the crackling flames and my hand clenched in front of me, I said, "It's all over, Lois. All of it."

She didn't answer.

"The Vikes are dead," I went on. "There's nothing remaining of them, Lois."

"Maybe . . . maybe it's for the best," she said. "Maybe . . . maybe this should have happened a long time ago."

I nodded abruptly. "I've . . . I've been thinking. A lot. I've been looking around me and seeing kids holding hands again and being human again. I've seen people laughing at . . . at humor that wasn't manufactured for them. I've seen tears that were personal and not generated. I . . . I think this is the first time I've really looked around me since as long as I can remember."

"Yes, Van," Lois said softly.

"I was wondering . . . if . . . if we couldn't take the senso to Belazi. Show him what we've got so far. Ask him for . . . for help in completing it." I turned my head back to the flames. It wasn't easy to say what I was saying. It wasn't easy at all. It was like cutting off the arm you've had attached to your shoulder all your life. "You see, Lois, the senso can be changed. I mean, it doesn't have to be . . . the . . . the way we have it. We could . . . get together. It's still a terrific thing, and it can be used for real entertainment. If . . . if we can find a middle ground . . . a compromise."

Lois stared at me curiously.

"I think we can," she said at last.

"Maybe," I said. "maybe".

She covered my hand with hers, and her flesh was warm and not at all repulsive. "It's not the end after all, is it, Van?"

I turned to face her, and her eyes were warm, her lips parted expectantly.

"No," I said. "It may be just the beginning."

. . . THE END



*Survival of the fittest, on the frontier planet of Altair, was a matter of who could tell the biggest whopper. Con-man Harry Zeckler considered himself a real master of the art—but he didn't know the Altairians!*

## *Letter of the* **LAW**

By Alan E. Nourse

Illustrated by Rudolph Palais

**T**HE PLACE was dark and damp, and smelled like moldy leaves. Meyerhoff followed the huge, bearlike Altairian guard down the slippery flagstones of the corridor, sniffing the dead, musty air with distaste. He drew his carefully-tailored, Terran-styled jacket closer about his shoulders, shivering as his eyes avoided the black, yawning cell-holes they were passing. His foot had slipped on the slimey flags from time to time, and finally he paused to wipe the caked mud from his trouser leg. "How much farther is it?" he shouted angrily.

The guard waved a heavy paw vaguely into the blackness ahead. Quite suddenly the corridor took a sharp bend, and the Altairian

stopped, producing a huge key ring from some obscure fold of his hairy hide. "I still don't see any reason for all the fuss," he grumbled in a wounded tone. "We've treated him like a brother—"

One of the huge steel doors clicked open. Meyerhoff peered into the blackness, catching a vaguely human outline against the back wall. "Harry?" he called sharply.

There was a startled gasp from within, and a skinny, gnarled little man suddenly appeared in the guard's light, like a grotesque, twisted ghost out of the blackness. Wide blue eyes regarded Meyerhoff from beneath uneven black eyebrows, and then the little man's face broke into a crafty grin. "Paul! So they sent you! I knew I could

count on it!" He executed a deep, awkward bow, motioning Meyerhoff into the dark cubicle. "Not much to offer you," he said slyly, "but it's the best I can do under the circumstances. . ."

Meyerhoff scowled, and turned abruptly to the guard. "We'll have some privacy now, if you please. Interplanetary ruling. And leave us the light."

The guard grumbled, and started for the door. "It's about time you showed up!" cried the little man in the cell. "Great day! Lucky they sent you, pal. Why, I've been in here for years—"

"Look, Zeckler—the name is Meyerhoff, and I'm not your pal," Meyerhoff snapped. "And you've been here for two weeks, three days, and approximately four hours. You're getting as bad as your gentle guards when it comes to bandying the truth around!" He peered through the dim light at the gaunt face of the prisoner. Zeckler's face was dark with a week's beard, and his bloodshot eyes belied the cocky grin on his lips. His clothes were smeared and sodden, streaked with great splotches of mud and moss. Meyerhoff's face softened a little. "So Harry Zeckler's in a jam again," he said. "You *look* as if they'd treated you like a brother."

The little man snorted. "These overgrown teddy-bears don't know what brotherhood means, nor humanity, either. Bread and water I've been getting, nothing more, and then only if they feel like bringing it down." He sank wearily down on the rock bench along the wall. "I thought you'd never get here! I sent an appeal to the Terran Con-

sulate the first day I was arrested. What happened? I mean, all they had to do was get a man over here, get the extradition papers signed, and provide transportation off the planet for me. Why so much time? I've been sitting here rotting—" He broke off in mid-sentence and stared at Meyerhoff. "You *brought* the papers, didn't you? I mean, we can leave now?"

Meyerhoff stared at the little man with a mixture of pity and disgust. "You are a prize fool," he said finally. "Did you know that?"

Zeckler's eyes widened. "What do you mean, fool? So I spend a couple of weeks in this pneumonia-trap! The deal was worth it! I've got three million credits sitting in the Terran Consulate on Altair IV, just waiting for me to walk in and pick it up. Three million credits—do you hear? That's enough to set me up for life!"

Meyerhoff nodded grimly. "If you live long enough to walk in and pick it up, that is."

"What do you mean, if?"

**M**EYERHOFF sank down beside the man, his voice a tense whisper in the musty cell. "I mean that right now you are practically dead. You may not know it, but you are. You walk into a newly-opened planet with your smart little bag of tricks, with a shaky passport and no permit, with no knowledge of the natives outside of two paragraphs of inaccuracies in the Explorer's Guide—and then you're not content to come in here and sell something legitimate, something the natives might conceivably

be able to use. No, nothing so simple for you. You have to pull your usual high-pressure stuff. And this time, buddy, you're paying the piper."

"You mean I'm not being extradited?"

Meyerhoff grinned unpleasantly. "I mean precisely that. You've committed a crime here—a major crime. The Altairians are sore about it. And the Terran Consulate isn't willing to sell all the trading possibilities here down the river just to get you out of a mess. You're going to stand trial—and these natives are out to get you. Personally, I think they're going to get you."

Zeckler stood up shakily. "You can't believe anything the natives say," he said uneasily. "They're pathological liars. Why, you should see what they tried to sell *me!* You've never seen such a pack of liars as these critters." He glanced up at Meyerhoff. "They'll probably drop a little fine on me and let me go."

"A little fine of one Terran neck." Meyerhoff grinned nastily. "You've committed the most heinous crime these creatures can imagine, and they're going to get you for it if it's the last thing they do. I'm afraid, my friend, that your con-man days are over."

Zeckler fished in the other man's pocket, extracted a cigarette, and lighted it with trembling fingers. "It's bad, then," he said finally.

"It's bad, all right."

Some shadow of the sly, elfin grin crept over the little con-man's face. "Well, at any rate, I'm glad they sent you over," he said weakly.

"Nothing like a good lawyer to handle a trial—"

"*Lawyer?* Not me! Oh, no—sorry, but no thanks." Meyerhoff's face beamed maliciously. "I'm your advisor, old boy. Nothing else. I'm here to keep you from botching things up still worse for the Trading Commission, that's all. I wouldn't get tangled up in a mess with these creatures for anything!" He shook his head. "You're your own lawyer, Mr. Super-Salesman. It's all your show. And you'd better get your head out of the sand, or you're going to lose a case like it's never been lost before!"

**M**EYERHOFF watched the little man's pale face, and grinned inwardly. In a way, he thought, it was a pity to see such a change in the rosy-cheeked, dapper, cocksure little man who had talked his way glibly in and out of more jams than Meyerhoff could count. Trading brought scalpers; it was almost inevitable that where rich and unexploited trading ground was uncovered, it would first fall prey to the fast-trading boys. They spread out from Terra with the first wave of exploration—the slick, fast-talking men who could work new territories unfettered by the legal restrictions that soon closed down the more established planets. The first men in were the richest out, and through some curious quirk of the Terrestrial mind, they knew they could always count on Terran protection, however crooked and underhanded their methods.

But occasionally a situation arose where the civilization and social

practices of the alien victims made it unwise to tamper. Altair I had been recognized at once by the Trading Commission as a commercial prize of tremendous value, but early reports had warned of the danger of wildcat trading on the little, musty, jungle-like planet with its shaggy, three-eyed inhabitants—warned specifically against the confidence tactics so frequently used—but there was always somebody, Meyerhoff reflected sourly, who just didn't get the word.

Zeckler puffed nervously on his cigarette, his narrow face a study in troubled concentration. "But I didn't *do* anything!" he exploded finally. "So I pulled an old con game. So what! Why should they get so excited? So I clipped a few thousand fast credits, pulled a little fast business." He shrugged eloquently, spreading his hands. "Everybody's doing it. They do it to each other without batting an eye. You should *see* these critters operate on each other. Why, my little scheme was peanuts by comparison—"

Meyerhoff pulled a pipe from his pocket, and began stuffing the bowl with infinite patience. "And precisely *what sort* of con game was it?" he asked quietly.

Zeckler shrugged again. "The simplest, tiredest, moldiest old racket that ever made a quick nickel. Remember the old Terran gag about the Brooklyn Bridge? The same thing. Only these critters didn't want bridges. They wanted land—this gooey, slimey swamp they call 'farm land'. So I gave them what they wanted. I just sold them some land."

Meyerhoff nodded fiercely. "You sure did. A hundred square kilos at a swipe. Only you sold the same hundred square kilos to a dozen different natives!" Suddenly he threw back his hands and roared. "Of all the things you *shouldn't* have done—"

"But what's a chunk of land?"

Meyerhoff shook his head hopelessly. "If you hadn't been so greedy, you'd have found out what a chunk of land was to these natives before you started peddling it. You'd have found out other things about them, too. You'd have learned that in spite of all their bumbling and fussing and squabbling they're not so dull. You'd have found out that they're marsupials, and that two out of five of them get thrown out of their mother's pouch before they're old enough to survive. You'd have realized that they have to start fighting for individual rights almost as soon as they're born. Anything goes, as long as it benefits them as individuals."

Meyerhoff grinned at the little man's horrified face. "Never heard of that, had you? And you've never heard of other things, too. You've probably never heard that there are just too many Altairians here for the food their planet can supply, and their diet is so finicky that they just can't live on anything that doesn't grow here. And consequently, land is the key factor in their economy. Not money, nothing but land.

"To get land, it's every man for himself, and the loser starves, and their entire legal and monetary system revolves on that principal. And they've built up the most confusing



and impossible system of barter and trade imaginable, aimed at individual survival, with land as the value behind the credit. That explains the lying—of course they're liars, with an economy like that. They've completely missed the concept of truth.

"Pathological? You bet they're pathological! Only a fool would tell the truth when his life depended on his being a better liar than the next guy! Lying is the time-honored tradition, with their entire legal system built around it—"

**Z**ECKLER snorted. "But how could they *possibly* have a legal system? I mean, if they don't recognize the truth when it slaps them in the face?"

Meyerhoff shrugged. "As we understand legal systems, I suppose they don't have one. They have only the haziest idea what truth represents, and they've shrugged off the idea as impossible and useless." He chuckled maliciously. "So you went out and found a chunk of ground in the uplands, and sold it to a dozen separate, self-centered, half-starved natives! Encroachment on private property is legal grounds for murder on this planet, and twelve of them descended on the same chunk of land at the same time, all armed with title-deeds—" Meyerhoff sighed. "You've got twelve mad Altairians in your hair. You've got a mad planet in your hair. And in the meantime, Terra's most valuable uranium strike in five centuries is threatening to cut off supply unless they see your blood splattered liberally all the way from

here to the equator."

Zeckler was visibly shaken. "Look," he said weakly. "So I wasn't so smart—what am I going to do? I mean, are you going to sit quietly by and let them butcher me? How could I defend myself in a legal setup like *this*?"

Meyerhoff smiled coolly. "You're going to get your sly little con-man brain to working, I think," he said softly. "By Interplanetary Rules, they have to give you a trial in Ter-ran legal form—judge, jury, court procedure, all that folderol. They think it's a big joke—after all, what could a judicial oath mean to them?—but they agreed. Only thing is, they're going to hang you, if they die trying. So you'd better get those stunted little wits of yours to clicking—and if you try to implicate *me*, even a little bit, I'll be out of there so fast you won't know what happened."

With that, Meyerhoff chuckled and strolled to the door. He jerked it inward sharply, and spilled three guards over on their faces. "Privacy," he grunted, and started back up the slippery corridor.

**I**T CERTAINLY looked like a courtroom, at any rate. In the front of the long, damp stone room was a bench, with a seat behind it, and a small straight chair to the right. To the left was a stand with twelve chairs—larger chairs, with a railing running along the front. The rest of the room was filled almost to the door with seats facing the bench. Zeckler followed the shaggy-haired guard into the room, nodding approvingly. "Not such a bad



arrangement," he said. "They must have gotten the idea fast."

Meyerhoff wiped the perspiration from his forehead and shot the little con-man a stony glance. "At least you've got a courtroom, a judge, and a jury for this mess. Beyond that—" He shrugged eloquently. "I can't make any promises."

In the back of the room a door burst open with a bang. Loud, harsh voices were heard as half a dozen huge Altairians attempted to push through the door at once. Zeckler clamped on the headset to his translator unit, and watched the hubbub in the anteroom with growing alarm. Finally the question of precedence seemed to be settled, and a group of the Altairians filed into the room in order of stature,

stalking across the room in flowing black robes, pug-nosed faces glowing in self-importance. They descended upon the jury box, grunting and scrapping with each other for the first-row seats, and the judge took his place with obvious satisfaction behind the heavy wooden bench. Finally the prosecuting attorney appeared, flanked by two clerks, who took their places beside him. The prosecutor eyed Zeckler with cold malevolence, then turned and delivered a sly wink at the judge.

In a moment the room was a hubbub as it filled with the huge, bumbling, bearlike creatures, jostling each other and fighting for seats, growling and complaining. Two small fights broke out in the rear, but were quickly subdued by

the group of gendarmes guarding the entrance. Finally the judge glared down at Zeckler with all three eyes and pounded the bench top with a wooden mallet until the roar of activity subsided. The jury-men wriggled uncomfortably in their seats, exchanging winks, and finally turned their attention to the front of the court.

"We are reading the case of the people of Altair I," the judge's voice roared out, "against one Harry Zackler—" he paused for a long, impressive moment — "Terran." The courtroom immediately burst into an angry growl, until the judge pounded the bench five or six times more. "This—creature—is hereby accused of the following crimes," the judge bellowed. "Conspiracy to overthrow the government of Altair I. Brutal murder of seventeen law-abiding citizens of the village of Karzan at the third hour before dawn in the second period after his arrival. Desecration of the Temple of our beloved Goddess Zermat, Queen of the Harvest. Conspiring with the lesser gods to cause the unprecedented drought in the Dermatti section of our fair globe. Obscene exposure of his pouch-marks in a public square. Four separate and distinct charges of jailbreak and bribery—" the judge pounded the bench for order—"Espionage with the accursed scum of Altair II in preparation for interplanetary invasion—"

The little con-man's jaw sagged lower and lower, the color draining from his face. He turned, wide-eyed, to Meyerhoff, then back to the judge.

"The chairman of the jury," said

the judge succinctly, "will read the verdict!"

The little native in the front of the jury-box popped up like a puppet on a string. "Defendant found guilty on all counts," he said.

"Defendant is guilty! The court will pronounce sentence—"

"Now wait a minute!" Zeckler was on his feet, wild-eyed. "What kind of railroad job—"

The judge blinked disappointedly at Paul Meyerhoff. "Not yet?" he asked, unhappily.

"No." Meyerhoff's hands twitched nervously. "Not yet, your honor. Later, your honor. The trial comes first."

THE JUDGE looked as if his candy had been stolen. "But you *said* I should call for the verdict—"

"Later. You have to have the trial before you can have the verdict."

The Altairian shrugged indifferently. "Now. . .later. . ." he muttered.

"Have the prosecutor call his first witness," said Meyerhoff.

Zeckler leaned over, his face ashen. "These charges," he hissed. "They're insane!"

"Of course they are," Meyerhoff hissed back.

"But what am I going to—"

"Sit tight. Let *them* set things up."

"But those *lies*. They're liars, the whole pack of them—" He broke off as the prosecutor roared a name.

The shaggy brute who took the stand was wearing a bright purple hat which sat rakishly over one ear.

He grinned the Altairian equivalent of a hungry grin at the prosecutor: Then he cleared his throat and started: "This Terran riffraff—"

"The oath," muttered the judge. "We've got to have the oath."

The prosecutor nodded, and four natives moved forward, carrying huge inscribed marble slabs to the front of the court. One by one the chunks were reverently piled in a heap at the witness's feet. The witness placed a huge, hairy paw on the cairn, and the prosecutor said, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you—" He paused to squint at the paper in his hand, and finished on a puzzled note, "—Goddess?"

The witness removed the paw from the rock pile long enough to scratch his ear. Then he replaced it, and replied, "Of course," in an injured tone.

"Then tell this court what you have seen of the activities of this abominable wretch."

The witness settled back into the chair, fixing one eye on Zeckler's face, another on the prosecutor, and closing the third as if in meditation. "I think it was on the fourth night of the seventh crossing of Altair II (may the Goddess cast a drought upon it)—or was it the seventh night of the fourth crossing?—" he grinned apologetically at the judge—"when I was making my way back through town toward my blessed land-plot, minding my own business, your honor, after weeks of bargaining for the crop I was harvesting. Then suddenly from the shadow of a building, this creature—" he waved his paw at Zeckler—

"stopped me in my tracks with a vicious cry. He had a weapon I'd never seen before, and before I could find my voice he forced me back against the wall. I could see by the cruel glint in his eyes that there was no warmth, no sympathy in his heart, that I was—"

"Objection!" Zeckler squealed plaintively, jumping to his feet. "This witness can't even remember what night he's talking about!"

The judge looked startled. Then he pawed feverishly through his bundle of notes. "Overruled," he said abruptly. "Continue, please."

The witness glowered at Zeckler. "As I was saying before this loutish interruption," he muttered, "I could see that I was face to face with the most desperate of criminal types, even for Terrans. Note the shape of his head, the flabbiness of his ears! I was petrified with fear. And then, helpless as I was, this two-legged abomination began to shower me with threats of evil to my blessed home, dark threats of poisoning my land unless I would tell him where he could find the resting place of our blessed Goddess —"

"I never saw him before in my life," Zeckler moaned to Meyerhoff. "Listen to him! Why should I care where their Goddess—"

Meyerhoff gave him a stony look. "The Goddess runs things around here. She makes it rain. If it doesn't rain, somebody's insulted her. It's very simple."

"But how can I fight testimony like that?"

"I doubt if you *can* fight it."

"But they can't prove a word of it. . . ." He looked at the jury, who

were listening enraptured to the second witness on the stand. This one was testifying regarding the butcherous slaughter of eighteen (or was it twenty-three? Oh, yes, twenty-three) women and children in the suburban village of Karzan. The pogrom, it seemed, had been accomplished by an energy weapon which ate great, gaping holes in the sides of buildings. A third witness took the stand, continuing the drone as the room grew hotter and muggier. Zeckler grew paler and paler, his eyes turning glassy as the testimony piled up. "But it's not true," he whispered to Meyerhoff.

"Of course it isn't! Can't you understand? *These people have no regard for truth.* It's stupid, to them, silly, a mark of low intelligence. The only thing in the world they have any respect for is a liar bigger and more skillful than they are—"

**Z**ECKLER jerked around abruptly as he heard his name bellowed out. "Does the defendant have anything to say before the jury delivers the verdict?"

"Do I have—" Zeckler was across the room in a flash, his pale cheeks suddenly taking on a feverish glow. He sat down gingerly on the witness chair, facing the judge, his eyes bright with fear and excitement. "Your—your honor, I—I have a statement to make which will have a most important bearing on this case. You must listen with the greatest care." He glanced quickly at Meyerhoff, and back to the judge. "Your honor," he said in a hushed voice, "you are in grav-

est of danger. All of you. Your lives—your very land is at stake."

The judge blinked, and shuffled through his notes hurriedly as a murmur arose in the court. "Our land?"

"Your lives, your land, everything you hold dear," Zeckler said quickly, licking his lips nervously. "You must try to understand me—" he glanced apprehensively over his shoulder— "now, because I may not live long enough to repeat what I am about to tell you—"

The murmur quieted down, all ears straining in their headsets to hear his words. "These charges," he continued, "all of them—they're perfectly true. At least, they *seem* to be perfectly true. But in every instance, I was working with heart and soul, risking my life, for the welfare of your beautiful planet."

There was a loud hiss from the back of the court. Zeckler frowned and rubbed his hands together. "It was my misfortune," he said, "to go to the wrong planet when I first came to Altair from my homeland on Terra. I—I landed on Altair II, a grave mistake, but as it turned out, a very fortunate error. Because in attempting to arrange trading in that frightful place, I made certain contacts." His voice trembled, and sank lower. "I learned the horrible thing which is about to happen to this planet, at the hands of those barbarians. The conspiracy is theirs, not mine. They have bribed your Goddess, flattered her and lied to her, coerced her all-powerful goodness to their own evil interests, preparing for the day when they could persuade her to cast your land into the firey furnace of a ten year

drought—”

Somebody in the middle of the court burst out laughing. One by one the natives nudged one another, and booed, and guffawed, until the rising tide of racket drowned out Zeckler's words. "The defendant is obviously lying," roared the prosecutor over the pandemonium. "Any fool knows that the Goddess can't be bribed. How could she be a Goddess if she could?"

Zeckler grew paler. "But—perhaps they were very clever—"

"And how could they flatter her, when she knows, beyond doubt, that she is the most exquisitely radiant creature in all the Universe? And *you* dare to insult her, drag her name in the dirt—"

The hisses grew louder, more beligerent. Cries of "Butcher him!" and "Scald his bowels!" rose from the courtroom. The judge banged for silence, his eyes angry.

"Unless the defendant wishes to take up more of our precious time with these ridiculous lies, the jury —"

"Wait! Your honor, I request a short recess before I present my final plea."

"Recess?"

"A few moments to collect my thoughts, to arrange my case."

The judge settled back with a disgusted snarl. "Do I have to?" he asked Meyerhoff.

Meyerhoff nodded. The judge shrugged, pointing over his shoulder at the little anteroom. "You can go in there," he said.

Somehow, Zeckler managed to stumble from the witness stand, amid riotous booes and hisses, and tottered into the anteroom.

ZECKLER puffed hungrily on a cigarette, and looked up at Meyerhoff with haunted eyes. "It—~~it~~ doesn't look so good," he muttered.

Meyerhoff's eyes were worried, too. For some reason, he felt a surge of pity and admiration for the haggard little con-man. "It's worse than I'd anticipated," he admitted glumly. "That was a good try, but you just don't know enough about them and their Goddess." He sat down wearily. "I don't see what you can do. They want your blood, and they're going to have it. They just won't believe you, no matter *how* big a lie you tell."

Zeckler sat in silence for a moment. "This lying business," he said finally. "Exactly how does it work?"

"The biggest, most convincing liar wins. It's as simple as that. It doesn't matter how outlandish a whopper you tell. Unless, of course, they've made up their minds that you just naturally aren't as big a liar as they are. And it looks like that's just what they've done. It wouldn't make any difference to them *what* you say—unless, somehow, you could *make* them believe it."

Zeckler was on his feet, his eyes suddenly bright with excitement. "Wait a minute," he said tensely. "To tell them a lie that they'd have to believe—a lie they simply couldn't *help* but believe—" He turned on Meyerhoff, his hands trembling. "Do they *think* the way we do—I mean, with logic, cause and effect, examining evidence and drawing conclusions? Given certain evidence, would they have to draw the same

conclusion that we have to draw?"

Meyerhoff blinked. "Well—yes. Oh, yes, they're perfectly logical."

Zeckler's eyes flashed, and a huge grin broke out on his sallow face. His thin body fairly shook, and he started hopping up and down on one foot, staring idiotically into space. "If I could only think. . ." he muttered. "Somebody—some-where—something I read. . ."

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"It was a Greek, I think. . ."

Meyerhoff stared at him. "Oh, come now. Have you gone off your rocker completely? You've got a problem on your hands, man—"

"No, no—I've got a problem in the bag!" Zeckler's cheeks flushed. "Let's go back in there—I think I've got an answer!"

The courtroom quieted the moment they opened the door, and the judge banged the gavel for silence. As soon as Zeckler had taken his seat on the witness stand, the judge turned to the head jurymen. "Now, then," he said with happy finality. "The jury—"

"Hold on! Just one minute more."

The judge stared down at Zeckler as if he were a bug on a rock. "Oh, yes. You had something else to say. Well, go ahead and say it."

Zeckler looked sharply around the hushed room. "You want to convict me," he said softly, "in the worst sort of way. Isn't that right?"

The judge looked uncomfortable. "If you've got something to say, go ahead and say it."

"I've got just one statement to make. Short and sweet. But you'd better listen to it, and think it out

carefully before you decide that you really want to convict me." He paused, and glanced slyly at the judge. "You don't think much of those who tell the truth, it seems. Well, put *this* statement in your record, then." His voice was loud and clear in the still room. "*All Earthmen are absolutely incapable of telling the truth.*"

Puzzled frowns appeared on the jury's faces. One or two exchanged startled glances, and the room was still as death. The judge stared at him, and then at Meyerhoff, then back. "But you. . ." he stammered. "You're. . ." he stopped in mid-sentence, his jaw sagging.

One of the jurymen let out a little squeak, and fainted dead away. It took, all in all, about ten seconds for the statement to soak in.

Then pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom.

**REALLY,"** said Harry Zeckler loftily, "it was so obvious I'm amazed that it didn't occur to me first thing." He settled himself down comfortably in the control cabin of the Interplanetary rocket and grinned at the outline of Altair IV looming larger in the view-screen.

Paul Meyerhoff stared stonily at the controls, his lips compressed angrily. "You might at least have told me what you were planning."

"And take the chance of being overheard? Don't be silly. It had to come as a bombshell. I had to establish myself as a liar, the prize liar of them all, but I had to tell the sort of lie that they simply could not cope with. Something

that would throw them into such utter confusion that they wouldn't *dare* convict me." He grinned impishly at Meyerhoff. "The paradox of Epiminedes the Cretan. It really stopped them cold. They *knew* I was an Earthman, which meant that my statement that Earthmen were liars was a lie, which meant that maybe I wasn't a liar, in which case—oh, it was tailor-made."

"It sure was." Meyerhoff's voice was a snarl.

"Well, it made me out a liar in a class they couldn't approach, didn't it?"

Meyerhoff's face was purple with anger. "Oh, indeed it did! And it put *all* Earthmen in exactly the same class, too."

"So what's honor among thieves? I got off, didn't I?"

Meyerhoff turned on him fiercely. "Oh, you got off just fine. You scared the living daylights out of them. In an eon of lying they never have run up against a short-circuit like that. You've also completely botched any hope of ever setting up a trading alliance with Altair I, and that includes uranium, too. Smart people don't gamble with loaded dice. You scared them so badly they don't want anything to do with us."

Zeckler's grin broadened, and he leaned back luxuriously. "Ah, well. After all, the Trading Alliance was *your* outlook, wasn't it? What a pity!" He clucked his tongue sadly. "Me, I've got a fortune in credits sitting back at the consulate waiting for me—enough to keep me on silk for quite a while, I might say. I think I'll just take a nice, long vacation."

Meyerhoff turned to him, and a twinkle of malignant glee appeared in his eyes. "Yes, I think you will. I'm quite sure of it, in fact. Won't cost you a cent, either."

"Eh?"

Meyerhoff grinned unpleasantly. He brushed an imaginary lint fleck from his lapel, and looked up at Zeckler slyly. "That—uh—jury trial. The Altairians weren't any too happy to oblige. They wanted to execute you outright. Thought a trial was awfully silly—until they got their money back, of course. Not too much—just three million credits. . . ."

Zeckler went white. "But that money was in banking custody!"

"Is that right? My goodness. You don't suppose they could have lost those papers, do you?" Meyerhoff grinned at the little con-man. "And incidentally, you're under arrest, you know."

A choking sound came from Zeckler's throat. "*Arrest!*"

"Oh, yes. Didn't I tell you? Conspiring to undermine the authority of the Terran Trading Commission. Serious charge, you know. Yes, I think we'll take a nice long vacation together—straight back to Terra. And there I think you'll face a jury trial."

Zeckler sputtered. "There's no evidence! You've got nothing on me! What kind of a frame are you trying to pull?"

"A *lovely* frame. Airtight. A frame from the bottom up, and you're right square in the middle. And this time—" Meyerhoff tapped a cigarette on his thumb with happy finality—"this time I *don't* think you'll get off." . . . THE END





*The Army had a new theme song: "Anything you can do, we can do better!" And they meant anything, including up-to-date hornpipes!*

## NAVY DAY

By Harry Harrison

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

**G**ENERAL WINGROVE looked at the rows of faces without seeing them. His vision went beyond the Congress of the United States, past the balmy June day to another day that was com-

ing. A day when the Army would have its destined place of authority.

He drew a deep breath and delivered what was perhaps the shortest speech ever heard in the hallowed halls of Congress:

"The General Staff of the U.S. Army requests Congress to abolish the archaic branch of the armed forces known as the U. S. Navy."

The aging Senator from Georgia checked his hearing aid to see if it was in operating order, while the press box emptied itself in one concerted rush and a clatter of running feet that died off in the direction of the telephone room. A buzz of excited comment ran through the giant chamber. One by one the heads turned to face the Naval section where rows of blue figures stirred and buzzed like smoked-out bees. The knot of men around a paunchy figure heavy with gold braid broke up and Admiral Fitzjames climbed slowly to his feet.

Lesser men have quailed before that piercing stare, but General Wingrove was never the lesser man. The admiral tossed his head with disgust, every line of his body denoting outraged dignity. He turned to his audience, a small pulse beating in his forehead.

"I cannot comprehend the general's attitude, nor can I understand why he has attacked the Navy in this unwarranted fashion. The Navy has existed and will always exist as the first barrier of American defense. I ask you, gentlemen, to ignore this request as you would ignore the statements of any person . . . er, slightly demented. I should like to offer a recommendation that the general's sanity be investigated, and an inquiry be made as to the mental health of anyone else connected with this preposterous proposal!"

The general smiled calmly. "I

understand, Admiral, and really don't blame you for being slightly annoyed. But, please let us not bring this issue of national importance down to a shallow personal level. The Army has facts to back up this request—facts that shall be demonstrated tomorrow morning."

Turning his back on the raging admiral, General Wingrove included all the assembled solons in one sweeping gesture.

"Reserve your judgment until that time, gentlemen, make no hasty judgments until you have seen the force of argument with which we back up our request. It is the end of an era. In the morning the Navy joins its fellow fossils, the dodo and the brontosaurus."

The admiral's blood pressure mounted to a new record and the gentle thud of his unconscious body striking the floor was the only sound to break the shocked silence of the giant hall.

**T**HE EARLY morning sun warmed the white marble of the Jefferson Memorial and glinted from the soldiers' helmets and the roofs of the packed cars that crowded forward in a slow-moving stream. All the gentlemen of Congress were there, the passage of their cars cleared by the screaming sirens of motorcycle policemen. Around and under the wheels of the official cars pressed a solid wave of government workers and common citizens of the capital city. The trucks of the radio and television services pressed close, microphones and cameras extended.

The stage was set for a great day.

Neat rows of olive drab vehicles curved along the water's edge. Jeeps and half-tracks shouldered close by weapons carriers and six-bys, all of them shrinking to insignificance beside the looming Patton tanks. A speakers' platform was set up in the center of the line, near the audience.

At precisely 10 a.m. General Wingrove stepped forward and scowled at the crowd until they settled into an uncomfortable silence. His speech was short and consisted of nothing more than amplifications of his opening statement that actions speak louder than words. He pointed to the first truck in line, a 2½-ton filled with an infantry squad sitting stiffly at attention.

The driver caught the signal and kicked the engine into life; with a grind of gears it moved forward toward the river's edge. There was an indrawn gasp from the crowd as the front wheels ground over the marble parapet—then the truck was plunging down towards the muddy waters of the Potomac.

The wheels touched the water and the surface seemed to sink while taking on a strange glassy character. The truck roared into high gear and rode forward on the surface of the water surrounded by a saucer-shaped depression. It parked two-hundred yards off shore and the soldiers, goaded by the sergeant's bark, leapt out and lined up with a showy *present arms*.

The general returned the salute and waved to the remaining vehicles. They moved forward in a series of maneuvers that indicated a great number of rehearsal hours on some hidden pond. The tanks

rumbled slowly over the water while the jeeps cut back and forth through their lines in intricate patterns. The trucks backed and turned like puffing ballerinas.

The audience was rooted in a hushed silence, their eyeballs bulging. They continued to watch the amazing display as General Wingrove spoke again:

"You see before you a typical example of Army ingenuity, developed in Army laboratories. These motor units are supported on the surface of the water by an intensifying of the surface tension in their immediate area. Their weight is evenly distributed over the surface, causing the shallow depressions you see around them.

"This remarkable feat has been accomplished by the use of the *Dornifier*. A remarkable invention that is named after that brilliant scientist, Colonel Robert A. Dorn, Commander of the Brooke Point Experimental Laboratory. It was there that one of the civilian employees discovered the Dorn effect—under the Colonel's constant guidance, of course.

"Utilizing this invention the Army now becomes master of the sea as well as the land. Army convoys of trucks and tanks can blanket the world. The surface of the water is our highway, our motor park, our battleground—the airfield and runway for our planes."

Mechanics were pushing a Shooting Star onto the water. They stepped clear as flame gushed from the tail pipe; with the familiar whooshing rumble it sped down the Potomac and hurled itself into the air.

"When this cheap and simple method of crossing oceans is adopted it will of course mean the end of that fantastic medieval anachronism, the Navy. No need for billion-dollar aircraft carriers, battleships, drydocks and all the other cumbersome junk that keeps those boats and things afloat. Give the taxpayer back his hard-earned dollar!"

Teeth grated in the Naval section as carriers and battleships were called "boats" and the rest of America's sea might lumped under the casual heading of "things." Lips were curled at the transparent appeal to the taxpayer's pocketbook. But with leaden hearts they knew that all this justified wrath and contempt would avail them nothing. This was Army Day with a vengeance, and the doom of the Navy seemed inescapable.

The Army had made elaborate plans for what they called "Operation Sinker." Even as the general spoke the publicity mills ground into high gear. From coast to coast the citizens absorbed the news with their morning nourishment.

". . . Agnes, you hear what the radio said! The Army's gonna give a trip around the world in a B-36 as first prize in this limerick contest. All you have to do is fill in the last line, and mail one copy to the Pentagon and the other to the Navy . . ."

The Naval mail room had standing orders to burn all the limericks when they came in, but some of the newer men seemed to think the entire thing was a big joke. Commander Bullman found one in the mess hall:

*The Army will always be there,  
On the land, on the sea, in the  
air*

*So why should the Navy*

*Take all of the gravy . . .*

to which a seagoing scribe had added:

*And not give us ensigns our  
share?*

The newspapers were filled daily with photographs of mighty B-36's landing on Lake Erie, and grinning soldiers making mock beachhead attacks on Coney Island. Each man wore a buzzing black box at his waist and walked on the bosom of the now quiet Atlantic like a biblical prophet.

Radio and television also carried the thousands of news releases that poured in an unending flow from the Pentagon Building. Cards, letters, telegrams and packages descended on Washington in an overwhelming torrent. The Navy Department was the unhappy recipient of deprecatory letters and a vast quantity of little cardboard battleships.

The people spoke and their representatives listened closely. This was an election year. There didn't seem to be much doubt as to the decision, particularly when the reduction in the budget was considered.

It took Congress only two months to make up its collective mind. The people were all pro-Army. The novelty of the idea had fired their imaginations.

They were about to take the final vote in the lower house. If the amendment passed it would go to the states for ratification, and their votes were certain to follow that of

Congress. The Navy had fought a last-ditch battle to no avail. The balloting was going to be pretty much of a sure thing—the wet water Navy would soon become ancient history.

For some reason the admirals didn't look as unhappy as they should.

**T**HE NAVAL Department had requested one last opportunity to address the Congress. Congress had patronizingly granted permission, for even the doomed man is allowed one last speech. Admiral Fitzjames, who had recovered from his choleric attack, was the appointed speaker.

“Gentlemen of the Congress of the United States. We in the Navy have a fighting tradition. We ‘damn the torpedoes’ and sail straight ahead into the enemy’s fire if that is necessary. We have been stabbed in the back—we have suffered a second Pearl Harbor sneak attack! The Army relinquished its rights to fair treatment with this attack. Therefore we are *counter-attacking!*” Worn out by his attacking and mixed metaphors, the Admiral

mopped his brow.

“Our laboratories have been working night and day on the perfection of a device we hoped we would never be forced to use. It is now in operation, having passed the final trials a few days ago.

“The significance of this device *cannot* be underestimated. We are so positive of its importance that—we are *demanding* that the *Army* be abolished!”

He waved his hand towards the window and bellowed one word.

“LOOK!”

Everyone looked. They blinked and looked again. They rubbed their eyes and kept looking.

Sailing majestically up the middle of Constitution Avenue was the battleship Missouri.

The Admiral’s voice rang through the room like a trumpet of victory.

“The Mark-1 Debinder, as you see, temporarily lessens the binding energies that hold molecules of solid matter together. Solids become liquids, and a ship equipped with this device can sail anywhere in the world—on sea *or* land. Take your vote, gentlemen; the world awaits your decision.”

... THE END

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*Space travel is possible. Even the worst cynics now admit that, but some still ask skeptically why it's needed, and what possible good it can do. Here's a new and surprising answer!*

# A WORD FOR FREEDOM

By James E. Gunn

Illustrated by Rudolph Palais

FROM THE lascivious embrace of the pneumatic chair in the anteroom, Bryson watched the secretary with the dark hair and the blue eyes being efficient over her typewriter. She was small, pretty, and trim. She wore a class-five navy-blue suit with a white, starched collar, but the figure beneath was strictly Class A.

He would have enjoyed watching her longer as a slow flush creeping up beneath her clear, creamy skin said that she was not unaware of his admiration, but the box on her desk murmured and she looked up.

"You may go in now, Mr. Bryson," she said respectfully to his gray-pinstripe, class-three business suit. "Mr. Gregg is expecting you."

His shoes clicked across the asphalt tile, and the solid door swung silently open in front of him. The room was large, he thought, pausing at the doorway—larger than the anteroom. And then he realized that it was mainly an illusion, that the room was not over twenty by twenty-five.

There were no blast-dangerous windows, of course, but the upper half of one wall was almost all mirror. That helped. But the most compelling feature of the room was the biggest example of the popular three-dimensional pictures Bryson had ever seen. It was a landscape, done with realism if not with feeling: rolling green fields, rising to low wooded hills in the background,

lighted from without in the Dutch manner.

Then the tall, thin, greying man was approaching with his hand outstretched.

"I'm Ben Gregg," he said with nervous energy. "Call me Ben. And you are John Bryson."

"That's right."

Gregg's handshake was firm and dry. He gestured Bryson to a chair and settled himself behind the broad desk, picked up the manuscript from the pile at his side, and laid it in front of him.

"Er-ah—I wanted to speak to you personally," he said uncertainly, "because I didn't think I could put what I had to say in writing. Let me say first that this is a good story—er—a very good story. It has strong believable characters, a convincing, significant plot, effective description—"

His voice trailed away.

"But?" Bryson prompted drily.

Gregg smiled and relaxed a little.

"Yes. But I can't publish it."

He tossed the manuscript across the desk.

"The language?" Bryson asked.

"The words?"

Gregg nodded.

"Exactly. I'm as willing to try something new as the next editor—maybe a little more so—but this has too much against it."

"I know," Bryson nodded. "That's why I sent the story to you. If it doesn't go over here, it hasn't a chance anywhere."

"That's very flattering," Gregg said, getting up to pace back and forth behind his desk. "But you must understand my position. We publish a middle-class magazine—

classes six to three to be exact—and in these days, when one must aim at a specific market, that means a great deal. The middle-class has always been the stoutest defender of the status quo, both in the social order and the literary field. You can't offend its ideas of propriety and expect anything but failure."

"Unfortunately that's true," Bryson agreed. "And yet that's where one must start if one is ever to do any good."

Gregg stopped for a moment and stared at him with a speculative look in his dark eyes.

"I thought that you had more than a literary objective in mind. Maybe I'm in sympathy with it. But the time has passed when you can inject all those new phrases and words. They don't sound proper; they don't seem, even to me, in good taste. You could have done it twenty years ago—in the forties or even the early fifties—but not today. Clean it up and I think I can use it."

Bryson shook his head.

"That would be removing the whole purpose of it."

Bryson paused and his eyes drifted to the picture. It might have been a window looking out onto rural New England. He looked back at Gregg.

"The language is in a strait-jacket," he continued abruptly. "The English language has hardened and calcified, ceased to grow, has become rigid and inflexible, hostile to anything new. English literature is dying because of this straitjacket—it is killing the vigor which has always been its dominant feature. Unless something is done,



the language will soon be as dead and dry as Sanskrit."

Gregg smiled.

"Let me hazard a guess. You're a teacher."

Bryson nodded.

"English. You should see the young writers I'm trying to help—beating their heads against the impenetrable wall of language, trying, as all writers must, to express the inexpressible and finding themselves tied down by dead or dying words, rendered impotent and mute. It's enough to put out the fires of mature genius, much less discourage forever struggling young talent. I tell you, Mr. Gregg—"

"Ben," Gregg smiled.

"I tell you, Ben, if something isn't done a whole literary generation will be wiped out—a catastrophe from which English literature might not recover for centuries. That wall must be leveled, Ben. That barrier of language must be broken down. The straitjacket must be unloosed, or circulation will be cut off entirely and limbs will have to be amputated, even if the patient does not die."

Gregg sighed.

"Which it looks as if it will. The cold war slowly gets hotter, like a bunch of oily rags thrown under the basement steps. Maybe you're worrying too much about a language there may be no one around to speak."

Bryson shook his head.

"That's no solution. We've got to act as if the human race were going to pull through this, or we may have nothing worthwhile left, even if we do survive."

"But what good will this one

story do?" Gregg objected.

Bryson spread his hands helplessly.

"I don't know. The hole in the dike maybe? The crack in the wall? The slit in the straitjacket? You have to start somewhere."

"But, I'm afraid, not here," Gregg said with finality. "Not because I don't believe in much of what you've been saying—I do; but because I don't think it will do any good."

Bryson's eyes drifted back to the picture, and Gregg's gaze followed. His laugh was a little embarrassed.

"Pretty poor, isn't it?" he admitted. "But it's there for psychological, not aesthetic, reasons. A touch of claustrophobia, the neurosis of our age. Being in these windowless offices for hours on end, I begin to get a little stifled. Then I look at that thing and imagine it's a window and it goes away sometimes."

**B**RYSON LOOKED at Gregg and back at the picture, back and forth as if he had suddenly discovered some strange identity between the two. Gregg followed him with a puzzled frown for a moment; then his face cleared and he began to chuckle.

"I see what you mean," he said, a little sheepishly. "Maybe you're right. Come on—the least I can do is buy you a drink."

The door swung open as he approached. Bryson followed him into the reception room.

"I'm going out for a moment, Miss Haines," Gregg informed the secretary. "If anything urgent

comes up, you can get me at Tony's."

As Bryson passed the desk, *he* bent over and breathed huskily in her ear, but loud enough for Gregg to overhear: "What do you say we go out on the town tonight, you and me?"

She jerked back, her face shocked and white, as if she had just learned that he was radioactive.

"Okay, okay," Bryson said, straightening and shrugging. "If you're busy you're busy."

When he joined Gregg in the hall, he was laughing.

"You see?" he said, after they were out of earshot.

Gregg raised a thin, dark eyebrow.

"You surely didn't expect anything else?"

"Oh, the answer was all right. Although I must admit I'd have been more pleased—in one way—with another. But the reaction was a little violent, don't you think?"

"That 'let's go out on the town tonight' was pretty vulgar," Gregg objected.

"Romance speaks all languages," Bryson said as Gregg signaled for the elevator. "No, I'm afraid the answer would have been the same no matter how I phrased it. A class-five girl doesn't go out with a class-three man and keep her reputation. You'd be surprised how many dates I've missed that way."

He sighed.

"All the lovely girls I see are in other classes. The barriers are getting high and thick. On the other hand, if you had invited her to your apartment, I bet she'd have come—reluctantly, maybe, but

she'd have come. You know—*droit de seigneur*?"

"I'm married," Gregg said stiffly.

"The principle's the same," Bryson laughed. "The attitude of the lower classes is getting positively medieval."

"You might be right," Gregg relaxed and smiled. "But I hope you don't repeat the experiment. That sort of thing might quickly demoralize my staff—besides giving me dangerous ideas."

The elevator doors swung open.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Gregg," the boy said, and with almost imperceptible shading, "Good afternoon, sir."

As they faced the closing doors, Bryson nodded significantly toward the back of the boy's head. Gregg shrugged in recognition. The elevator lunged to a cushioned stop.

"I must admit," Gregg said, when the doors had closed behind them and they were walking across the foyer, "that I'm becoming aware of a lot of things I took for granted before. And I'm not sure I like the awakening."

"Oh, we're all falling into molds. It's a highly stratified society in which everybody knows his place and nobody steps out of it. Except me."

Bryson grinned recklessly.

"I make rebellion a habit—an ineffectual one, perhaps, but soul-satisfying. Once I carried a sample of low-grade uranium ore into a security lock and shoved it under the geiger. You should have seen the commotion. Bolts clicked, bright lights came on, the scanner stamped my card and the video told me in a cold voice that my picture

and identifying characteristics were in the wanted file and that I must not move. Within a minute, an emergency car wailed up outside, the front door clicked open, I walked out with five guns covering me, and I was whisked away to headquarters. Then's when the fun really began."

"You have plenty of nerve," Gregg commented drily.

"Oh, that!" Bryson shrugged. "I was shaking before it was over. But I did manage to wangle a release before they got everything straightened out. I still have a little fun with it."

Gregg opened the door, and they stepped into the security lock. The editor slipped his card quickly into the slot and faced the screen. A cackle, and the card was back in his hand. Then Bryson inserted the corner of his card and grinned at Gregg.

"Watch what happens!" he said slyly.

He pushed the card and it disappeared into the wall. Extra bolts clicked in the doors. The lock was filled with an intense, merciless light that showed up every line, every bead of sweat on Gregg's paling face.

"What the hell, Bryson—" he began, his voice shaking.

"Listen!" Bryson chuckled.

The video sprang into life.

"Oh, my God!" said a weary, disillusioned voice. "It's you again."

"There seems to be something wrong with the machine," Bryson said apologetically.

"There's nothing wrong with the machine," the voice shouted. "It's you — you — you — troublemak-

er! There's something wrong with you!"

"Maybe it's the card," Bryson suggested meekly.

"Of course it's the card!" the voice screamed. With obvious effort, the voice regained control of itself. "See here, Bryson! I'm warning you for the last time. Come in and get a new card or I'll send a squad out to bring you in!"

**T**HE SCREEN snapped off with finality. The bolts shot back, and the outside door swung open. Gregg stepped precipitately onto the sidewalk, Bryson following more slowly. He had a little difficulty walking; he was shaking with laughter. Finally he took a handkerchief and wiped the tears from his eyes.

"That clerk!" he said. "Sometimes I think he'll crack wide open."

Bryson glanced at Gregg, and his laughter was suddenly cut off. Gregg's face was still white; he was mopping at his forehead.

"Oh, say," Bryson said, sincerely apologetic now. "I'm sorry I upset you. I had no idea—"

"It wasn't that," Gregg said, smiling feebly. "It's the being shut up—you know!"

"I should have remembered," Bryson said, waggling his head repentantly. "I'm never troubled with it, and I tend to forget. Forgive me, will you?"

Gregg waved his hand and managed a ghost of a chuckle.

"Forget it. It was rather amusing, at that."

The sidewalks were busy, but the



steady streams of pedestrians had formed an eddy around them, carefully delineated. As they walked south, the eddy followed them. Over the heads of the crowd, Bryson could see other eddies, some approaching, others traveling in the same direction as they were.

The general stream seemed to separate into layers, like unmixable liquids: along the street side the class nine and ten, laborers; next, classes seven and eight, skilled workers and technicians; toward the buildings, classes five and six, white-collar workers, class four, supervisors and students; in the middle, class threes and above. Even a casual eye could detect the subtle but definite tones, cut, and style of clothing that marked the differences.

Then another eddy met theirs and merged with it for a moment. Gregg nodded, with precise equality, at the class-two businessman in the center. Then the eddies split apart again, like a fissioning amoeba.

"Rebellion is all right as an individual protest," Gregg remarked, "but it's suicidal for anyone dependent on public approval—in a purely pragmatic dollars and cents way, at that."

"Perhaps you're underestimating the sub-current of revolt among your readers?"

Gregg scoffed.

"What sub-current? You should read the letters I get. The slightest deviation from the norm is greeted with howls of protest and demands for the heads not only of the writer

but myself. Would you like to know what would happen if I printed your story?"

Bryson nodded.

"Well," Gregg began, "first, it would stand out like a prostitute at a meeting of the Anti-Sex League. It would be inconsistent with the rest of the material in the magazine. The critical letters would descend upon us like a Second Flood, half of them threatening to cancel their subscriptions. Various organizations for the suppression of this or that would launch campaigns against us. We'd be labeled 'vulgar,' 'immoral,' 'indecent,' 'subversive,' and finally 'un-American' or 'Communistic.'"

"That's absurd. Russia is in even a tighter straitjacket than we are," Bryson objected, "if that's any consolation."

"What difference has that ever made? But I'm not finished. The critics would complete the massacre with charges of 'decadence,' 'slovenly writing,' 'corrupting the language,' 'defiling the pure springs of American speech and literature,' etc., etc., etc. At their head would be Joshua Duncan."

Gregg winced at his own suggestion.

"I've had him on my back a few times before and, I'm sorry to say, come out of it glad to cling to my job and my scalp."

Bryson made a grimace of distaste.

"Duncan! That big bag of superfluous remarks!"

"Perhaps," Gregg shrugged, "but he wields an inordinate amount of power—and a deadly typewriter. At the Chinese Torture of a Thousand

Cuts or relatively painless decapitation, he is unrivaled. And I'm not sure that some of the things he may say will not be justified."

"Such as?"

"That the neologisms and new phrases are, on the whole, obviously contrived, artificial, and unlikely."

Bryson's spirits seemed slightly dampened.

"That's right, I suppose. How can one *invent* a new, vital language? That has to grow out of the life of a people; it comes spontaneously under the influence of a strong, new impulse. And yet, what can one do when one wishes to represent such a situation?"

"Fail, Duncan will say. And that you should never have tried."

"Duncan is a fool," Bryson said gloomily. "And yet if it weren't he, it would be someone else. The age called out for a literary dictator and Duncan answered, as Samuel Johnson did in his. Outside of the fact that Johnson had some creative power and Duncan has none, there's an amazing resemblance between the two. Oh, Duncan has some merits: he can recognize what's good within certain narrow limits and encourage it. But outside of that, he's blind and vindictive. He stands for everything that's responsible for the death of our world and our language—the narrowness, the restrictions, the ossification, the insensitivity, the—"

THE STREET wailed, a mounting, soul-piercing shriek that echoed between the city cliffs and screamed terror to the winds. The streams of humanity froze, and in

the next moment distinctions of person and class were forgotten. With one mind, the crowd turned and began running, threading around or vaulting the cars and busses pulled up in the middle of the street, whose occupants had poured out to join the rest. Like sands in an hourglass, the fractions of humanity poured slowly through the constricting necks of openings into the earth.

"This way," Gregg shouted. "The nearest subway is just down the block."

They ran, battling against the pushers and shovers on either side. Squeezed in finally, they were unable to help their own progress any more but permitted themselves to be carried along, concentrating only on keeping their feet—a difficult process when the grains began to flow down the steps. Down—down—down—past the subway levels and down again. At last they were released in a huge concrete room, broken by large pillars and scattered benches.

Gregg and Bryson pulled at their disarranged suits, whose untorn condition was a proof of the quality of class two and three tailoring. Some of the others who now began to fill the room were not so fortunate; here a sleeve was missing; there a man was naked to the waist, his shirt hanging in shreds.

Slowly the trickle into the room diminished and stopped; armed guards appeared at the doors. The mob began to mill around, gathering into groups here and there until Gregg and Bryson were isolated.

"We seem to be alone," Bryson said drily.

It was true. They were the only class twos and threes in the room. Everywhere else knots of men and women talked and gestured in comradery, even venturing an occasional short, barking laugh; but the space around them was as clearly defined as it had been on the street.

Bryson glanced around the crowded room.

"A symbol of the age," he said. "We're in what Matthew Arnold called an epoch of concentration, like England in the 1790's, produced by what he called the hostile, forcible pressure of foreign ideas. We call it a cold war."

"Cold!" exclaimed Gregg, looking around the bomb shelter.

"Every epoch of concentration, Arnold said, is followed by an epoch of expansion. But I wonder how long an epoch of concentration can last without inflicting permanent damage. Ours has lasted twenty years. A little longer and we may not be able to recover."

"We're no nearer a solution than we were twenty years ago," Gregg said moodily.

"I know. There seems to be no hope of a diplomatic settlement of the cold war, or of Russia's being weakened by internal dissension. But if a new frontier opened. . . Look at England's Elizabethan Age if you want to see what an epoch of expansion looks like."

"What do you mean?"

"The defeat of the Spanish Armada and the great explorations and discoveries opened up vast new territories. As a consequence, the Elizabethan was the lustiest, most fully alive age of English literature. It was full of the joy of living; new

words were being absorbed into the language by the thousands; the period was receptive to all sorts of influences. And then, as England began to age and harden, America became the center of vigor. A frontier, that seemed as if it would last forever, eternally renewed the language and kept it alive. But the frontiers are gone, and we are both dying and the language with us, and there is nowhere else to look."

There was silence between them for a moment. Gregg began to fidget and pull at his collar.

"It's stifling in here," he complained.

The large screen at the end of the room came alive, and the air of tension that had begun to grow throughout the crowd subsided. The screen imaged the blue sky puffed with clouds. There were white trails in the blue, circling and climbing.

"Interceptors," Gregg muttered. "For what?"

In the depths of the blue there was a glint that sparkled and was gone. And the glint came again and was steady.

"God!" breathed Gregg. "The interceptors are invisible. That must be big!"

The glint came nearer and was a silver dot that poured forth a long, white tail. And the screen went blank.

"This telecast," the voice from the speaker said, "is interrupted for security reasons. There is no cause for alarm at this time, but the all-clear will be withheld until the military authorities have had time to make a final check."

The screen came back on with

a light, airy movie—a pastoral interlude with songs and dances and gay chatter. The worries were minute, the problems simple, the atmosphere joyous. It was the latest rage. It was, however, not completely successful. The tension began to grow again, until it became almost tangible. Conversations ceased or became monosyllabic. Laughter was cut off short.

The crowd swayed a little toward the entrance.

"Remain where you are," a speaker warned, "until the sounding of the all-clear."

The crowd swayed back, hesitated for a moment, and surged again toward the door. A guard turned and pressed a button near the entrance. A steel door slid across the opening. The guards unbuttoned their holster flaps.

A SIGH went up from the crowd, and it sagged to its former position. A slow, uneasy murmur began to grow. A class-nine laborer tore at the collar of his gray working-clothes and ripped it open, breathing harshly.

"Don't you think the air's getting bad in here?" Gregg asked, his face getting white. He pulled down his tie and unloosed his collar.

"Surely not," Bryson said cheerfully. "The place is well ventilated."

Minutes passed. The free space around them began to grow smaller and less sharply defined. Somewhere a woman fainted and a child began to wail. The sanitary facilities were kept busy; lines formed at the drinking fountains.

Gregg's face began to twist as his breath came quickly.

"God," he muttered. "Oh, God!"

Finally the speaker cleared its throat.

"The Airport Authority has just announced that the object which caused the initial alarm has landed at an undisclosed airport near the city. The object was a manned rocket constructed by the Department of Defense. It has just returned from the moon. The all-clear will be sounded immediately; you may all return to your normal activities."

The last few words were lost in the cheers and swelling conversational hubbub that greeted the announcement. Gregg and Bryson looked at each other with lifted eyebrows. Bryson nodded, and they made their way toward the now-open door, the all-clear wailing behind them.

They emerged, blinking, into the sunlight.

"There's your new frontier," Gregg said.

"Maybe," Bryson said noncommittally. "Or maybe it's the last stitch in the straitjacket. Depending on how it's used."

"You mean if it's exploited solely for military purposes?"

Bryson nodded.

"And presented to the public as military in nature. Does the moon-gate open out to freedom or in to hell? It all depends."

Gregg came to a halt in front of a door-lock.

"Here we are."

Bryson looked up and saw the word "Tony's" printed across the blackened windows in what must be

luminescent paint. Gregg fidgeted beside him.

"Go ahead," Bryson motioned with a smile. "I won't put you through that twice."

With a muttered thanks, Gregg disappeared through the door. After a moment, Bryson followed him. When he came out inside, he was chuckling.

"That clerk—" he began.

"Look!" interrupted Gregg, motioning. "The great man himself."

At a rear booth of the dimly lit, sedately luxurious bar, Bryson saw a large, ugly, fat man surrounded by a group of eagerly listening admirers. The man's booming voice carried easily to where they stood.

"As a writer, Saunderson is a stink in the nostrils of the American public; as a philosopher, he is an abomination in the eyes of God."

Bryson screwed up his face and glanced at Gregg.

"So that is Duncan!"

"In his full glory."

"Ah there, Gregg," the voice rolled out. "Still publishing those sections of tripe you call short stories."

Gregg winced.

"Come back," Duncan bellowed.

"I have someone here I want you to meet. You may bring your half-witted friend with you."

Bryson flushed, but Gregg shrugged his shoulders and strolled to the rear.

"Here," said Duncan when they arrived, indicating a dark, nondescript young man, "is a dull-witted fellow who writes the sort of swill you prefer. He'd like to show you a story."

Gregg lifted a thin, dark eye-



brow at the unsmiling young man.

"Tomorrow morning—at ten?"

The young man nodded.

"And now," said Duncan, turning away from them, "begone! I am already beginning to feel tainted. And take your half-witted friend with you. He has been made happy enough for one day."

Bryson leaned forward across the table.

"You, sir, are as insulting as you are ugly and as stupidly narrow as you are fat. You are a stink in the nostrils of the American public and an abomination in the eyes of God."

Duncan turned back.

"Ah, a lad with spirit," he said coolly. "I like a lad with spirit." And then his voice grew icy. "But puerile, juvenile, and unoriginal. Take him away, Gregg, until he ripens."

Gregg tugged at his coat-tails, and Bryson permitted himself to be led from the table.

"Why do you stand for that?" he demanded, fuming, when they had found a booth and pressed quickly for a drink.

"Because I can't help myself."

"You surely aren't going to see that sullen fellow he urged on you."

"Oh, yes," Gregg shrugged. "And I'll buy his story, I imagine. Duncan's pretty shrewd. It probably is the sort of swill I prefer."

"If I were in your shoes, I'd do something about it," Bryson said bitterly.

Gregg smiled humorlessly.

"Let me tell you about someone who did. He was an editor—told Duncan off, too—in public and in print. So every chance Joshua got, he slipped in a sly remark about the

editor until you had only to mention his name in almost any gathering to get a laugh and have someone repeat Duncan's latest witticism. He was laughed out of town. He's now hacking out fiction, and the only way he can sell it is under a pseudonym."

"What this country needs," Bryson muttered, "is another Mencken who could stand up to him and trade blow for blow for freedom. Someone who could beat him at his own game."

THEY SAT huddled over their drinks for several minutes, thinking their thoughts in silence, until an uproar at the door-lock brought them out of their reveries. One of the bartenders was engaged in a violent argument with a small, sunburned man in an uncertain assortment of garments which were incapable of classification. Behind him, a medley of men of all classes, from four down to ten, were emerging from the lock.

"I'm very sorry," said the bartender, sounding not the least sorry as he barred the way, his arms folded across his chest. "This bar is reserved for class-three patrons and above."

"Out of my way, Earthbound," the bantam said imperiously in a surprising baritone voice, and then he burst out with irrepressible exuberance. "I've reached E.V., and I'm almost spacebound. Today's my day, and I'm blowing all my jets. Don't try to tie me down; I'm space dust. I'm free as a comet's tail and twice as hard to take hold of. Make way, Obsolete, or I'll tie

a rocket to your tail and ride you bareback to Venus."

By sheer volume and vigor and by the weight of numbers behind him, the cocky little fellow pushed his way past the stunned bartender, who stood staring after him with his mouth hanging half-way open. The intruder, who could not have stood over five feet three or four, pounded vigorously on the bar with his clenched fist.

"A bulb and a straw," he shouted. "Straight bourbon."

There was a chorus of seconds from his worshipping followers, some of whom seemed just a little uneasy in the surroundings. Not so the bantam.

"Whoo-ee!" he yelled, after downing his drink. "Throw me a line—I'm floating."

Gregg and Bryson exchanged glances.

"There's your new language," Gregg grimaced.

"Vulgar!" Bryson exclaimed with admiration. "Vulgar as hell!"

The crowd around the bantam increased. Gregg watched in amazement as even class twos and threes began to join the group in friendly non-distinction.

"Maybe this is it," Bryson said. "Maybe the pressure from within has burst through the walls. The influences of concentration will try to push it back into the mold, but if the force is strong enough, maybe it will completely shatter the walls and scatter the pieces from here to the moon. It's a beginning, anyway. Maybe even the cold war won't be able to stand up to it when the word gets out that the United States has broken the chains of

Earth, has opened the way to the stars."

He pulled out a pen and a piece of paper and began to scribble madly.

A familiar voice bellowed from a back booth.

"The atmosphere in here has become fouled with the stench of the masses. Sweep the garbage out!"

No one moved. The bartenders stared toward Duncan helplessly.

"Oh-oh!" muttered Bryson. "The restraining influence begins. Can the new force withstand it?"

"Either the rabble goes," Duncan rumbled, as if there were no doubt of the final choice, "or I go."

One of the bartenders, glancing cautiously toward the group at the bar, lifted a phone, dialed and spoke briefly into the receiver.

"Float a bulb to the overstuffed groundhog in the back booth," said the bantam cheerfully. "He can't help it if he's planet-bound."

Duncan got up ponderously and stalked, glowering toward the bar. He pushed his way through the throng until he stood towering above the little intruder.

"Mite on the back of culture!" he thundered. "Flea in the fur of the world-bitch! You and your trained chimpanzees are unwelcome here. We want none of your tricks and even less of your vulgar, meaningless monkey chatter. Go and annoy someone else, vacuum brain!"

The bantam pressed himself forward against Duncan's overhanging belly and stared defiantly up at the jowled, furious face.

"Dampen them, Overload. If you were my cargo, you'd be jettisoned before anything else. You

haven't got the jayvee to lift that overage hull off the ground. Your jets are eaten out; one more blast and you'll blow off your stern. You think you're in a tight orbit because you're eating your own exhaust, but you were born six feet under and never dug yourself out."

Step by step, Duncan backed toward the front as the bantam followed, keeping him off balance with his light word-jabs. Finally Duncan stood bewildered, against the door-lock.

"Bah!" he muttered. "I won't trade insults with a vulgar barbarian."

He turned and fled through the door. The room exploded with laughter.

"Whoo-ee!" shouted the victorious bantam. "I'm a cosmic ray. You can't keep me out and you can't keep me in. All you know is that I've passed when you count the atoms I've split."

When Gregg ceased shaking, he wiped his eyes.

"Oh, Duncan will never live this down. Beaten by a flyweight who wouldn't know a verbal from a vocative."

The place suddenly grew quiet as two officers of the security patrol stood in the door. The bartender hurried to them and pointed toward the little intruder and his friends, but the officers shook their heads

and continued to search the room. Then one stopped and nodded toward the side of the room where Bryson and Gregg were sitting. They strode determinably forward, skirting the tables.

"All right, Bryson," one of them said. "Come with us."

"Me?" Bryson said.

"You've got a little business to settle with the security office."

Bryson got up slowly.

"Just a millisecond," said the bantam, bursting between them. "Let's not break up the party, Groundcrew."

Bryson patted the little fellow on the shoulder.

"That's all right, hero. You've done enough for one day."

"Come on, Bryson," said one of the officers, wearily. "Let's get that card fixed up. One of the clerks had hysterics, right in the middle of the main control room, just because of you."

Bryson laughed and started across the floor with them.

"I'll send Miss Haines down to vouch for you," Gregg called after him. "And Bryson," he shouted with sudden decision, "fix up the neologisms and put Duncan in it, and I'll buy that story."

Bryson chortled, leaped in the air, and flapped his arms.

"Whoo-ee!" he shouted. "I'm floating."

... THE END

The Big News:

**if**

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Yes, beginning with the March issue, you'll be able to buy your favorite science fiction magazine each and every month! And you won't want to miss an issue—they'll all be tops!



*The barn turned out to be a spaceship in disguise, and that was only the beginning. Before his strange adventure ended, young Paul Asher found himself going around in circles—very peculiar circles indeed!*

## DOUBLE TAKE

By Richard Wilson

Illustrated by Paul Orban

**P**AUL ASHER, 27, men's furnishings buyer, leaned back and let the cloth band be fastened across his chest, just under his armpits. He adjusted his heavy spectacles, closed his eyes for a moment, breathed deeply, and was off.

The semi-darkness was dispelled as he shot out of a tunnel into dazzling sunlight. The high-powered vehicle he was driving purred smoothly as it took the long, rising curve. The road climbed steadily toward the mountaintop city ahead. He looked around to satisfy himself that he was alone in the car.

He wasn't.

The girl was a pretty one. He'd seen her somewhere before, he thought. She was looking insolently at him, her wide red mouth in a half smile. Her dark hair stirred in the breeze coming through the window, next to her, which was open just a slit.

She said: "Just keep going, Sweetheart, as fast as you can." And she patted the oversized pocketbook that lay in her lap.

He pressed down on the accelerator and the car responded with a flow of power. The countryside fell away from the road on either side. Far below he could see a river, winding broadly to the far-off sea. The summer day sent its heat-shimmers across the miniature landscape.

The road curved again. There was the only car he had seen since he'd come out of the tunnel. But now, far ahead, he saw another. It was standing at the side of the road, next to a gate that came down in the manner of one at a railroad crossing. But he knew by its black and white diagonals and by the little sentry hut half hidden behind the other car that it marked the frontier. A man with a rifle on his

shoulder stood there. They drew up to it fast, but his foot automatically eased up on the floorboard pedal until the girl spoke sharply.

"Right through it, Sweetheart."

In the rearview mirror he saw her leaning forward, her face tense.

In a moment it would be time to stop, if he were going to.

*Paul Asher hesitated a moment. Then he too leaned forward, the band pressing into his chest. He was breathing heavily. There was an almost inaudible click.*

He trod on the accelerator. He had a glimpse of the guard unslinging his rifle from his shoulder and of another man running toward the parked car as his vehicle smashed into the flimsy gate and sent it, cracked and splintered, to the side of the road. He fought the slight wrench of the wheel and sped on. He thought he heard a shot.

"Nice work," the girl said. She seemed to be appraising him as she looked at him. "My name, incidentally, is Naomi."

"Hello," he heard himself saying as he whipped the car around a curve that hid the frontier behind a hill. "You seem to know who I am."

"That I do," she said.

"Then why don't you call me by my name, instead of 'Sweetheart'?"

"That's because I like you, Sweetheart." She was looking out the rear window. "Now just step on the gas, because we've got company."

The car that had been parked near the sentry hut was whipping into view around the curve. It was lighter than his, but it was fast, too. He stepped on it.

**N**OW THE ROAD had become narrow and twisting. The grade was steep but the surface was good. Abruptly, it entered a forest.

The girl said: "Two more curves. Then you'll see a field and a barn. Off the road and into the barn, fast."

He took the curves with rubber screaming and almost without braking sent the car bumping across the field and into the barn. It was bigger than it had seemed from the outside. As he brought the car to a lurching halt the barn door closed.

Where he had expected to see stalls and milking machines and hay he saw an expanse of metal floor and monstrous machinery. The barn door which had been a rickety wooden slab from the outside was a gleaming sheet of metal from the inside. It glided silently shut and left no joint or seam to show where there had been an opening.

"Out," said Naomi.

As they left the car, a flexible metal arm snaked from one of the smooth walls, attached itself to the front bumper of the vehicle, and whisked it into a cubicle which opened to receive it and closed behind it.

A power-driven wheelchair sped up to them. Sitting in it was a fat man of middle age, with pendulous jowls and a totally bald head. His expression was a sardonic scowl.

"You have the plans?" he asked the girl.

"Sweetheart here has them."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the young man said.

"He knows, all right," the girl said. "He pretends to be innocent, but that is merely his training. He

has them under a sticking plaster on the small of his back."

"Remove your coat and shirt," commanded the man in the wheelchair.

At that moment the floor shuddered under their feet, a gong began to clang insistently, and the giant machinery, which had been silent, throbbed into life.

The man in the wheelchair whirled and was off, shouting commands to men who materialized high on the walls in cylindrical turrets which the visitor could only think of as battle stations.

"What is this place?" he asked.

He got no answer. Instead the girl grabbed his arm and pulled him off to the edge of the gigantic metal room. An opening appeared in the wall and she pushed him through it into a room beyond. The entranceway snapped shut behind them and when he looked he could see no door. The room also was windowless.

Naomi went to a metal table and as she looked down into its surface it became a screen. Mirrored in it was the mountainous countryside they had driven through to get to the barn—or what had seemed to be a barn from the outside. He looked over her shoulder.

They saw as from a height. There was the light car that had chased them from the frontier. Standing near it was a man in an officer's uniform and another in civilian clothes. They were talking and gesturing. Beside the car was a tank. As they watched, its gun fired and the structure they were in shuddered, but they heard no sound.

Lumbering up the mountain road were more tanks and a self-propelled gun. One of the tanks became enveloped in smoke and flames as they watched. After a moment the smoke cleared. The tank was gone; where it had been there was a deep crater.

Gradually, the figures in the drama below grew smaller. At the same time the vista widened, so that they saw more and more countryside. It twisted beneath them and the horizon came giddily into view. A few moments later the curvature of the earth could be plainly seen.

Everything fitted together at once. Some of the things, anyway.

"We're in a ship," he said. "Some kind of rocket-ship."

"It's a planet plane," the girl said. "We're safe now."

"Safe from what?" he asked. "What's this all about?"

She smiled enigmatically. "Hafitz could tell you, if he chose. He's the boss."

"The man in the wheelchair?"

She nodded and took out a compact. As she added lipstick to her mouth, she looked him over, between glances in her mirror.

"You don't look like the spy type. If there is a type."

"I'm not a spy. I don't know what you're talking about."

"The innocent! Go on, take off your coat and shirt. We'll save Hafitz some time."

"I'll be glad to, just to prove this is all ridiculous. A case of mistaken identity. You've made a mistake, that's what you've done."

He stood there, hesitating.

The girl gave a burst of laughter.

Then she said: "All right, Sweetheart. I'll turn my back."

She did, and he pulled his shirt out of his trousers. Then he froze. Taped to the skin of his back was a flat package.

*Paul Asher made the decision. He bent forward, feeling perspiration in the palms of his hands. There was a faint click.*

**Q**UICKLY he ripped the adhesive from his back. There was an instant of pain as the plaster came free. He wadded up the sticky package, dropped it to the floor and kicked it under the desk.

Then he took off his coat, tie and shirt.

"You can turn around now," he said.

"A more modest spy I've never seen. Okay," she said, "now you turn around."

"As you see," he said, "there are no plans—no papers."

"No—not now. But there is a red mark on your back. What is it?"

"Oh," he said. "Oh—that's a birthmark."

She spun him around to face her. Her face was harsh. She slapped his cheek. "Where is the sticking plaster? Don't trifle with me."

Her eyes bored into his. He returned the gaze, then shrugged.

"Under the desk," he said. "I tore it off and kicked it under the desk."

"You are sensible to confess," she said.

She bent down, unwisely.

*Paul Asher felt the familiar tightening in his chest as he leaned*

*forward. The click was barely heard.*

He raised his hand and brought the edge of it down hard on the back of her neck.

She crumpled and fell to the metal floor. He noticed that a smear of her freshly-applied lipstick came off on it.

He pushed the unconscious body aside and fished the packet out from under the desk. He searched the room for another hiding place.

But it was too late. A section of wall opened and Hafitz, the fat man in the wheelchair, sped in.

He wheeled past the young man, looked briefly at the unconscious girl, then whisked himself around.

"You will pay for this, my friend," he said. "But first we will have the plans for the way-station. Where are they?"

"I don't know anything about any plans and I don't know anything about a way-station. I tried to tell the girl: it's all a crazy mistake."

"We will see," said Hafitz. He pressed a button on the arm of his wheelchair and two bruisers appeared through the walls, in the abrupt way people had of materializing here. Bruisers was the only way they could be described. They were human brutes, all muscle and malevolence.

"Take them," said Hafitz, indicating the unconscious girl and the young man. "Take them and search them for a small packet. If you do not find it, search this room. If you do not find it still, hurt the male animal. They persuade well with pain here, I understand. But do not kill him. I will be in the com-



munications room.”

He sped off, through a wall opening.

One of the bruisers picked up the girl, roughly, and disappeared with her. The other grabbed the young man and hauled him off in a third direction. The young man hastily snatched up his coat, shirt and tie en route.

They ended up in a cell of a room, about seven feet in all directions, in which the bruiser stripped him, methodically went through each piece of clothing, and then satisfied himself that he didn't have the packet anywhere on his body.

The muscle-man then raised a fist.

“Wait,” his prospective victim said. He thought back quickly. “Hafitz didn't say you could bat me around till you searched the room, too.”

The other spoke for the first time. “You say the truth.” He put his arm down.

The young man watched intently as the bruiser went through the wall of the cell-like room.

He dressed fast. By placing his fingers in exactly the same position as the other had done, was able to make the wall open for him.

The silver-metal corridor had two directions. He went to the right. After many turnings, at each of which he reconnoitered carefully, he came to a passageway that was damp. Why it was damp he couldn't tell, but there in the wetness were tracks which could have been made by a wheelchair.

He followed them, feeling the throb of giant engines underfoot.

**T**HE WHEELCHAIR tracks abruptly made a ninety-degree turn and ended at a blank wall. Somewhere beyond it must be the communications room.

He retreated and waited.

In time the wall snapped open and Hafitz sped out. The young man retreated into the maze of corridors and hoped chance would be on his side. It was. Hafitz went another way.

The young man ran back to the wall and used his fingers on it in the combination he had learned. It opened for him.

He closed it behind him and blinked at the huge instrument panel which filled almost the entire room.

One of the instruments was a color vision screen, tuned in to a room in which there was a mahogany desk, at which was seated a man in uniform. Behind him was a map of the United States.

The man in uniform was a major general in the Air Force. An aide, a lieutenant colonel, was leaning over the desk. He had a sheaf of papers in his hand. The men's conversation was audible.

“Messages have been coming in from all over Europe,” the colonel was saying. “Here's the way it reconstructs:

“Our agent was en route to the rendezvous when he was intercepted by Naomi. That's the only name we have for her. She's a spy. She's worked for half a dozen countries and her present employer could be any one of them. They were spotted as they crossed the frontier between Italy and France. Their car went into a barn and we thought

we had them. But the barn turned out to be a spaceship in disguise. It took off."

*So I'm their agent, Paul Asher thought. So that's what it's all about. I'm a secret agent for the United States, but they didn't tell me anything about it. This is real George, this is . . . He expected to hear a faint click and leaned forward experimentally, but nothing happened. He leaned backward. Still nothing.*

The colonel was answering a question from the general. "We don't know who they are, Sir. They're not from Earth, obviously. And the best scientific minds go still further—they're not even from our solar system. Whoever they are, it's clear that they don't want us to build a way-station in space."

"Those spaceships started buzzing around right after our first Moon trip," the general said. "This is the first time they've become really troublesome—now that we've got the Moon under control and are ready to build the way-station so we can get to Mars."

"That's right, Sir," said the colonel.

"Progress is a wonderful thing," said the general. "Things certainly have changed since those early days of strategic atomic bombing and guided missile experiments."

"Yes, Sir," said the colonel.

The young man in the communications room of the spaceship let his attention wander away from the scene back on Earth and experimented with some of the switches and controls. Trial and error led him to one which lit up a signal on the desk of the general.

The general flicked it on.

"Yes?" he said. He looked puzzled when he got no picture, just a voice saying, "Hello, hello."

"Yes?" he said. "Hello. Speak up, man."

"This is your agent aboard the enemy spaceship," said the young man. "Do you read me?"

"Yes," said the general. "We read you. Go ahead."

"I may not have much time. Get a fix on me if you can. And send help."

"What's your position?" the general was reacting well. He was alert and all business.

"I don't know. I've been taken prisoner, but I'm temporarily free. There isn't much time. Hafitz is bound to be back soon. He seems to be the brains of this outfit—this part of the outfit, anyway. Naomi is here, too, but I don't know whether she's with them or against them."

"Where are the plans, son?" asked the general.

"They're safe, for the moment. I can't guarantee for how long."

"I'm getting the fix," the colonel said. He was beyond the range of the young man's vision screen. "I've got him. He's still within range, but accelerating fast. We can intercept if we get up a rocket soon enough."

"Get it up," ordered the general. "Get up a squadron. Scramble the Moon patrol and send out reserves from Earth at once."

"Right!" said the colonel.

The young man was so engrossed in the makings of his rescue party that he didn't see the wall open up behind him.

There was a squeak of rubber tires and he whirled to see Hafitz, in his wheelchair, slamming toward him. The fat man's hand held a weird-looking gun.

The young man recoiled. His back pushed against a row of control buttons.

*Then everything went white.*

**P**AUL ASHER blinked his eyes, like a man awakening from a vivid dream.

The house lights went on and the manager of the theater came on the stage. He stood in front of the blank master screen with its checkerboard pattern of smaller screens, on which the several lines of action had taken place simultaneously. Paul took off his selectorscope spectacles with the earphone attachments.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the manager said. "I regret very much having to announce that this vicarion of the production *Spies from Space, was defective*. The multifilm has broken and, because of the complexity of the vokie process, it will be impossible to splice it without returning it to the laboratory.

"Ushers are at the exits with passes good for any future performance. Those of you who prefer can exchange them at the box office for a full refund of your admission price."

Paul Asher unstrapped the wired canvas band from across his chest. He put the selectorscope spectacles into the pouch on the arm of the seat and walked out of the R.K.O. Vicarion into High Street and around the corner to

where his car was parked.

His roommate at the communapt, MacCloy, was still up when he got there, going over some projectos. Mac snapped off the screen and quickly swept the slides together and into a case.

"You're back early," MacCloy said.

"The multifilm broke," Paul told him.

"Oh." Mac seemed abstracted, as he often did, and again Paul wondered about this man he knew so casually and who had never confided in him about anything—especially about his government job.

"So I missed the ending," Paul said. "I guess it was near the end, anyhow. The space patrol was on the way, but the villain, that Hafitz, was just about to blast me with his gun and I don't know how I would have got out of that."

"I remember that," Mac said. He laughed. "You must have been Positive all the way through. Like I was when I saw it. If you'd had any negative reactions—if you'd leaned back against the strap instead of forward—you'd have been at some other point in the multiplot and I wouldn't have recognized that part. Want me to tell you how it ends?"

"Go ahead. Then if I do see it again I'll change the ending somewhere along the line with a lean-back."

"Okay. There really wasn't much more. It takes so much film to provide all the plot choices that they can't make them very long.

"Well, Hafitz blasts me and misses," Mac went on, "—or blasts you and misses, to keep it in your

viewpoint. When you jump back, you set off a bunch of controls. That was the control room, too, not just the communications room. Well, those controls you lean back against take the ship out of automatic pilot and send it into some wild acrobatics and that's why Hafitz misses. Also it knocks him out of the wheelchair so he's helpless and you get his gun. Also you see that the plans are still there—right where you put them, stuck to the bottom of his wheelchair.”

“So that was it.” said Paul.

“Yes,” said Mac. “And then you cover Hafitz while he straightens out the ship and you rendezvous with the space control and they take you all into custody. You get a citation from the government. That's about it. Corny, huh?”

“But what about the girl?” Paul asked. “Is she really a spy?”

“Girl? What girl?”

“Naomi, her name was,” Paul said. “You couldn't miss her. She was in the vikiie right at the beginning—that brunette in the fast car.”

“But there wasn't any girl, Paul,” Mac insisted. “Not when I saw it.”

“Of course there was. There had to be—the vikiies all start out the same way, no matter who sees them.”

“It beats me, pal. I know I didn't see her. Maybe you dreamed up the dame.”

“I don't think so,” Paul said. “But of course it's possible.” He yawned. “I wouldn't mind dreaming of her tonight, at that. Think I'll turn in now, Mac. I've got that long trip tomorrow, you know. Up to Canada to look over a new line

of Marswool sport jackets at the All-Planets Showroom.”

“Driving or flying?”

“The weather prognosis is zero-zero. I'll drive.”

“Good,” said Mac.

**P**AUL ASHER woke up late. He had a confused recollection of a dream. Something about a beautiful brunette giving him a backrub.

A look at the chrono sent the dream out of his head and he hurried through shaving and dressing.

His car was waiting for him, engine idling, at the curb. He got in, tossing his briefcase and topcoat ahead of him to the far side of the front seat. His back began to itch, insistently, and he rubbed it against the leather upholstery.

Paul adjusted the safety belt around him, and fastened it. Might as well do it now, instead of having to fool around with it later. Damn that itch, anyway! It was as if something were stuck to his skin—like a sticking plaster. . .

The high-powered vehicle purred smoothly as it took a long, rising curve. The road climbed steadily toward the mountaintop city ahead.

The scene was familiar.

The itching of his back spread and became a prickly feeling in the small hairs at the nape of his neck.

He knew now that he was not alone in the car. He looked in the rear-view mirror.

Naomi.

She was looking at him insolently, her wide red mouth in a half smile.

She said: “Just keep going, Sweetheart, as fast as you can.”

. . . THE END

# Personalities in Science

*Fresh Fields of Science  
Are His Home Ground*

**CYBERNETICS** is a word that has been accepted and placed in everyday use with amazing rapidity. It is also a concept of tremendous usefulness and awe-inspiring possibilities. The man who coined the word and gave the world the concept is Professor Norbert Wiener of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

Considered one of the top six mathematicians in the United States, this one-time child prodigy published his study of control and communication in the animal and the machine under the title, *Cybernetics*, in the early part of 1949. Within six weeks after the first American printing (it was published first in France), three more printings were necessary because of the unprecedented demand for it from readers of all types. The book is beautifully written, lucid, direct and, despite its complexity, readable by the layman as well as the scientist; it has been said that anyone seriously interested in our civilization would find it impossible to ignore.

It is not easy to ignore Wiener himself, either. Norbert Wiener is



*Norbert Wiener*

short, heavy, brown-eyed, greying, and bearded; he is also a bundle of nervous energy. Although best known as a mathematician, he is also a physicist, an engineer, and an expert in almost all the physical sciences. Just to top it off, he has a doctor's degree in philosophy. But he scoffs disdainfully at anyone who calls him a genius, and proves his point by bidding wildly at bridge and playing only mediocre chess.

Born in Columbus, Missouri, in 1894, Wiener was constantly being written up in newspapers because of his precocity. The family's move halfway across the continent to Massachusetts when he was in his early childhood did little to hamper young Norbert's education. He

managed to graduate from the local high school at the age of 12, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Tufts College when he was 15. By this time he had had four years of Greek, seven years of Latin, four of German, one of French and a smattering of both Spanish and Chinese in addition to his scientific education.

After getting his Master's at Harvard, he took extension courses at Cambridge and Heidelberg. For a while he proceeded to use this magnificent education to earn his living as a high-class hack writer for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He spent a year as a reporter for the *Boston Herald*, and between 1917 and 1918 worked at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, first as a civilian computer and later as a private in the Army.

During World War II Weiner worked for the United States Government on the construction of automatically aimed guns, and did research in the guided missile field. When questioned about the latter work he told reporters, "The interchange of ideas which is one of the great traditions of science must receive limitations when the scientist becomes the arbiter of life and death. I realize that I am acting as a censor of my own ideas and may sound arbitrary. If I do not desire to participate in the bombing of defenseless people—and I do not—I must take a serious responsibility as to those to whom I disclose my ideas."

During his war work Weiner studied the handling of information in highly involved machines such as automatic computers, radar devices, servo mechanisms and others. From

the operation of the feedback principle (which is nicely exemplified by the thermostat) in these devices, and the necessary preoccupation with accuracy rather than efficiency found in their design, it was made evident to Weiner and his fellow workers in the field—physicists, psychologists, electronics engineers, and researchers from almost every other division of science—that a similarity existed between such mechanisms and the human brain and nervous system. Cybernetics, which Weiner considered an invasion of the no-man's land between established fields, was the natural result.

**T**HE PROPER names of Weiner's two most important discoveries are less familiar; they are Generalized Harmonic Analysis and the Universal Tauberian Theorem. Incredibly involved and difficult to understand, these are the results of his constant probing into the unknown territories of mathematics. The results of his discoveries are in the newspapers every day, and include not only the electronic brain and automatically tracking guns but also "automatic factories" now being put into use by the chemical industry.

As a typical example of control and communication in the machine, Professor Weiner cites the governor of a steam engine, which senses mechanically when the engine is going too fast and reduces the steam supply accordingly. A machine, when instructed to carry out a certain task, will do so—barring mechanical failure. A man may carry out the task or he may refuse to do

so—for some sound reason, for pure cussedness, or out of sheer laziness. The difference, according to Weiner, “proves the immense superiority of man over the machine.”

The Professor believes that the great new computers are harbingers of a whole new science of communication and control. So far, they have no senses or effectors such as arms and legs, but why shouldn't they have in the future? There are all sorts of artificial eyes, ears and fingertips (thermometers, strain gauges, pressure indicators, photoelectric tubes) that may be hooked up to them. The machines already can and do work typewriters to set down answers to the questions fed into them; Weiner insists that they can be built to work valves, switches and other control devices.

Such a development, says Weiner, will usher in “the second industrial revolution”—there will be wholly automatic factories with artificial brains keeping track of every process. They will order raw materials, inspect them, store them, route them through the plant.

Some of the Professor's colleagues call this pure sensationalism. Others acclaim it. In point of fact, the telephone company has already installed computer-type machines that watch the operations of a dial exchange and total up the subscribers' bills. It's reasonable to expect many more of Weiner's ideas to be put into use in the near future. He is not only amazingly good at discovering and developing them, but he is also much better at pointing out the practical possibilities than the average theoretical scientist.

His work with machines alone

should not be overemphasized, however. He has ideas for improving the iron lung, for instance, by allowing the paralyzed person to control the artificial breathing apparatus with his own nerve impulses. He believes that someday amputees will be provided with artificial arms and legs with which they can actually feel. He also wants to use electronic brains to gain new and deeper insights into human thinking and various mental and nervous disorders.

A list of Norbert Weiner's contributions to mathematics, scientific and philosophical journals totals more than one hundred and reveals better than anything else how widespread his interests are. In these articles he has discussed such varied—and difficult—subjects as the postulate theory, the foundation of mathematics, the assemblages and functions of a real variable, probability theory, analysis, Tauberian theorems, mathematical logic, trigonometric expansion, potential theory analysis, relativity, epistemology and electrical networks.

This definitely human thinking machine lives in an unpretentious house in Belmont, Massachusetts, claiming he has no time for any of the usual pleasures and privileges associated with wealth and prestige. The time and energy he pours into his work, on the other hand, is enormous. He's often tired and preoccupied, and has a few of the typical eccentricities of the famous absent-minded professor. But the truth is exactly the opposite; he is very much present in his mind, and through his searchings there he is learning more and more about your mind and mine!





*Harold discovered the time-sphere by a lucky accident. His brother Peter decided to use it selfishly, and laid his plans with extreme care. Then there was another accident . . .*

# ANACHRON

By Damon Knight

Illustrated by Philip B. Parsons

**T**HE BODY was never found. And for that reason alone, there was no body to find.

It sounds like inverted logic—which, in a sense, it is—but there's no paradox involved. It was a perfectly orderly and explicable event, even though it could only have happened to a Castellare.

Odd fish, the Castellare brothers. Sons of a Scots-Englishwoman and an expatriate Italian, born in England, educated on the Continent, they were at ease anywhere in the world and at home nowhere.

Nevertheless, in their middle years, they had become settled men. Expatriates like their father, they lived on the island of Ischia, off the Neapolitan coast, in a palace—quattrocento, very fine, with peeling cupids on the walls, a multitude of rats, no central heating, and no neighbors.

They went nowhere; no one except their agents and their lawyers came to them. Neither had ever married. Each, at about the age of thirty, had given up the world of people for an inner world of more precise and more enduring pleasures. Each was an amateur—a fanatical, compulsive amateur.

They had been born out of their time.

Peter's passion was virtu. He collected relentlessly, it would not be too much to say savagely; he collected as some men hunt big game. His taste was catholic, and his acquisitions filled the huge rooms of the palace and half the vaults under them—paintings, statuary, enamel, porcelain, glass, crystal, metalwork. At fifty, he was a round little man with small, sardonic eyes and a careless patch of pinkish goatee.

Harold Castellare, Peter's talented

brother, was a scientist. An amateur scientist. He belonged in the 19th century, as Peter was a throwback to a still earlier epoch. Modern science is largely a matter of teamwork and drudgery, both impossible concepts to a Castellare. But Harold's intelligence was in its own way as penetrating and original as a Newton's or a Franklin's. He had done respectable work in physics and electronics, and had even, at his lawyer's instance, taken out a few patents. The income from these, when his own purchases of instruments and equipment did not consume it, he gave to his brother, who accepted it without gratitude or rancor.

Harold, at fifty-three, was spare and shrunken, sallow and spotted, with a bloodless, melancholy countenance on whose upper lip grew a neat hedge of pink-and-salt mustache, the companion piece and antithesis of his brother's goatee.

On a certain May morning, Harold had an accident.

Goodyear dropped rubber on a hot stove; Archimedes took a bath; Curie left a piece of uranium ore in a drawer with a photographic plate. Harold Castellare, working patiently with an apparatus which had so far consumed a great deal of current without producing anything more spectacular than some rather unusual corona effects, sneezed convulsively and dropped an ordinary bar magnet across two charged terminals.

Harold, getting up from his instinctive crouch, blinked at it in profound astonishment. As he watched, the cloudiness abruptly disappeared and he was looking

*through* the bubble at a section of tessellated flooring that seemed to be about three feet above the real floor. He could also see the corner of a carved wooden bench, and on the bench a small, oddly-shaped stringed instrument.

Harold swore fervently to himself, made agitated notes, and then began to experiment. He tested the sphere cautiously with an electroscope, with a magnet, with a Geiger counter. Negative. He tore a tiny bit of paper from his notepad and dropped it toward the sphere. The paper disappeared; he couldn't see where it went.

Speechless, Harold picked up a meter stick and thrust it delicately forward. There was no feeling of contact; the rule went into and through the bubble as if the latter did not exist. Then it touched the stringed instrument, with a solid click. Harold pushed. The instrument slid over the edge of the bench and struck the floor with a hollow thump and jangle.

Staring at it, Harold suddenly recognized its tantalizingly familiar shape.

Recklessly he let go the meter stick, reached in and picked the fragile thing out of the bubble. It was solid and cool in his fingers. The varnish was clear, the color of the wood glowing through it. It looked as if it might have been made yesterday.

Peter owned one almost exactly like it, except for preservation—a viola d'amore of the 17th century.

Harold stooped to look through the bubble horizontally. Gold and rust tapestries hid the wall, fifty feet away, except for an ornate door in

the center. The door began to open; Harold saw a flicker of amber.

Then the sphere went cloudy again. His hands were empty: the viola d'amore was gone. And the meter stick, which he had dropped inside the sphere, lay on the floor at his feet.

**LOOK AT THAT,**" said Harold simply.

Peter's eyebrows went up slightly. "What is it, a new kind of television?"

"No, no. Look here." The viola d'amore lay on the bench, precisely where it had been before. Harold reached into the sphere and drew it out.

Peter started. "Give me that . . ." He took it in his hands, rubbed the smoothly finished wood. He stared at his brother. "By God and all the saints," he said. "Time travel."

Harold snorted impatiently. "My dear Peter, 'time' is a meaningless word taken by itself, just as 'space' is."

"But, barring that, time travel."

"If you like, yes."

"You'll be quite famous."

"I expect so."

Peter looked down at the instrument in his hands. "I'd like to keep this, if I may."

"I'd be very happy to let you, but you can't."

As he spoke, the bubble went cloudy; the viola d'amore was gone like smoke.

"There, you see?"

"What sort of devil's trick is that?"

"It goes back . . . Later you'll see. I had that thing out once be-

fore, and this happened. When the sphere became transparent again, the viol was where I had found it."

"And your explanation for this?"

Harold hesitated. "None. Until I can work out the appropriate mathematics."

"Which may take you some time. Meanwhile, in layman's language . . ."

Harold's face creased with the effort and interest of translation. "Very roughly, then—I should say it means that events are conserved. Two or three centuries ago—"

"Three. Notice the sound-holes."

"Three centuries ago, then, at this particular time of day, someone was in that room. If the viol were gone, he or she would have noticed the fact. That would constitute an alteration of events already fixed; therefore it doesn't happen. For the same reason, I conjecture, we can't see into the sphere, or—" He probed at it with a fountain pen. "—I thought not—or reach into it to touch anything; that would also constitute an alteration. And anything we put into the sphere while it is transparent comes out again when it becomes opaque. To put it very crudely, we cannot alter the past."

"But it seems to me that we did alter it. Just now, when you took the viol out, even if no one of that time saw it happen."

"This," said Harold, "is the difficulty of using language as a means of exact communication. If you had not forgotten all your calculus—However. It may be postulated (remembering that everything I say is a lie, because I say it in English) that an event which doesn't influ-

ence other events is not an event. In other words—”

“That, since no one saw you take it, it doesn’t matter whether you took it or not. A rather dangerous precept, Harold; you would have been burned at the stake for that at one time.”

“Very likely. But it can be stated in another way, or indeed, in an infinity of ways which only seem to be different. If someone, let us say God, were to remove the moon as I am talking to you, using zero duration, and substitute an exact replica made of concrete and plaster of paris, with the same mass, albedo, and so on as the genuine moon, it would make no measurable difference in the universe as we perceive it—and therefore we cannot certainly say that it hasn’t happened. Nor, I may add, does it make any difference whether it has or not.”

“—‘when there’s no one about on the quad,’” said Peter.

“Yes. A basic, and, as a natural consequence, a meaningless problem of philosophy. Except,” he added, “in this one particular manifestation.”

He stared at the cloudy sphere. “You’ll excuse me, won’t you, Peter? I’ve got to work on this.”

“When will you publish, do you suppose?”

“Immediately. That’s to say, in a week or two.”

“Don’t do it till you’ve talked it over with me, will you? I have a notion about it.”

Harold looked at him sharply. “Commercial?”

“In a way.”

“No,” said Harold. “This is not the sort of thing one patents, or

keeps secret, Peter.”

“Of course. I’ll see you at dinner, I hope?”

“I think so. If I forget, knock on the door, will you?”

“Yes. Until then.”

“Until then.”

**A**T DINNER, Peter asked only two questions.

“Have you found any possibility of changing the time your thing reaches—from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth, for example, or from Monday to Tuesday?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact. Amazing. It’s lucky that I had a rheostat already in the circuit; I wouldn’t dare turn the current off. Varying the amperage varies the time-set. I’ve had it up to what I think was Wednesday of last week, at any rate my smock was lying over the workbench where I left it, I remember, Wednesday afternoon. I pulled it out. A curious sensation, Peter—I was wearing the same smock at the time. And then the sphere went opaque and of course the smock vanished. That must have been myself, coming into the room . . .”

“And the future?”

“Yes. Another funny thing, I’ve had it forward to various times in the near future, and the machine itself is still there, but nothing’s been done to it . . . none of the things I’m thinking I might do. That might be because of the conservation of events, again, but I rather think not. Still farther forward there are cloudy areas, blanks; I can’t see anything that isn’t in existence now, apparently . . . but here, in the next few days, there’s

nothing of that.

"It's as if I were going away. Where do you suppose I'm going?"

**H**AROLD'S ABRUPT departure took place between midnight and morning. He packed his own grip, it would seem, left unattended, and was seen no more. It was extraordinary, of course, that he should have left at all, but the details were in no way odd. Harold had always detested what he called "the tyranny of the valet." He was, as everyone knew, a most independent man.

On the following day Peter made some trifling experiments with the time-sphere. From the 16th century he picked up a scent-bottle of Venetian glass; from the 18th, a crucifix of carved rosewood; from the 19th, when the palace had been the residence of an Austrian count and his Italian mistress, a hand-illuminated copy of de Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine*, very curiously bound in human skin.

They all vanished, naturally, within minutes or hours—all but the scent-bottle. This gave Peter matter for reflection. There had been half a dozen flickers of cloudiness in the sphere just futureward of the bottle; it ought to have vanished, but it hadn't. But then, he had found it on the floor near a wall with quite a large rat-hole in it.

When objects disappeared unaccountably, he asked himself, was it because they had rolled into rat-holes—or because some time fisher had picked them up when they were in a position to do so?

He did not make any attempt to explore the future. That afternoon he telephoned his lawyers in Naples and gave them instructions for a new will. His estate, including his half of the jointly-owned Ischia property, was to go to the Italian Government on two conditions: (1) that Harold Castellare would make a similar bequest of the remaining half of the property, and (2) that the Italian Government would turn the palace into a national museum to house Peter's collection, using the income from his estate for its administration and for further acquisitions. His surviving relatives, two cousins in Scotland, he cut off with a shilling each.

He did nothing more until after the document had been brought out to him, signed, and witnessed. Only then did he venture to look into his own future.

Events were conserved, Harold had said—meaning, Peter very well understood, events of the present and future as well as of the past. But was there only one pattern in which the future could be fixed? Could a result exist before its cause had occurred?

The Castellare motto was *Audentes fortuna juvat*—into which Peter, at the age of fourteen, had interpolated the word "*prudentesque*": "Fortune favors the bold—and the prudent."

Tomorrow: no change; the room he was looking at was so exactly like this one that the time-sphere seemed to vanish. The next day: a cloudy blur. And the next, and the next . . .

Opacity, straight through to what Peter judged, by the distance he

had moved the rheostat handle, to be ten years ahead. Then, suddenly, the room was a long marble hall filled with display cases.

Peter smiled wryly. If you were Harold, obviously you could not look ahead and see Peter working in your laboratory. And if you were Peter, equally obviously, you could not look ahead and know whether the room you saw were an improvement you yourself were going to make, or part of a museum established after your death, eight or nine years from now, or—

No. Eight years was little enough, but he could not even be sure of that. It would, after all, be seven years before Harold could be declared legally dead . . .

Peter turned the vernier knob slowly forward. A flicker, another, a long series. Forward faster. Now the flickering melted into a grayness; objects winked out of existence and were replaced by others in the showcases; the marble darkened and lightened again, darkened and lightened, darkened and remained dark. He was, Peter judged, looking at the hall as it would be some five hundred years in the future. There was a thick film of dust on every exposed surface; rubbish and the carcass of some small animal had been swept carelessly into a corner.

The sphere clouded.

When it cleared, there was an intricate trail of footprints in the dust, and two of the showcases were empty.

The footprints were splayed, trifurcate, and thirty inches long.

After a moment's deliberation Peter walked around the workbench

and leaned down to look through the sphere from the opposite direction. Framed in the nearest of the four tall windows was a scene of picture-postcard banality: the sun-silvered Bay and the foreshortened arc of the city, with Vesuvio faintly fuming in the background. But there was something wrong about the colors, even grayed as they were by distance.

Peter went and got his binoculars.

The trouble was, of course, that Naples was green. Where the city ought to have been a rankness had sprouted. Between the clumps of foliage he could catch occasional glimpses of gray-white that might equally well have been boulders or the wreckage of buildings. There was no movement. There was no shipping in the harbor.

But something rather odd was crawling up the side of the volcano. A rust-orange pipe, it appeared to be, supported on hairline struts like the legs of a centipede, and ending without rhyme or reason just short of the top.

While Peter watched, it turned slowly blue.

**O**NE DAY farther forward: now all the display cases had been looted; the museum, it would seem, was empty.

Given, that in five centuries the world, or at any rate the department of Campania, has been overrun by a race of Somethings, the human population being killed or driven out in the process; and that the conquerors take an interest in the museum's contents, which they have accordingly removed.

Removed where, and why?

This question, Peter conceded, might have a thousand answers, nine hundred and ninety-nine of which would mean that he had lost his gamble. The remaining answer was: to the vaults, for safety.

With his own hands Peter built a hood to cover the apparatus on the workbench and the sphere above it. It was unaccustomed labor; it took him the better part of two days. Then he called in workmen to break a hole in the stone flooring next to the interior wall, rig a hoist, and cut the power cable that supplied the time-sphere loose from its supports all the way back to the fuse-box, leaving him a single flexible length of cable more than a hundred feet long. They unbolted the workbench from the floor, attached casters to its legs, lowered it into the empty vault below, and went away.

Peter unfastened and removed the hood. He looked into the sphere.

Treasure.

Crates, large and small, racked in rows into dimness.

With pudgy fingers that did not tremble, he advanced the rheostat. A cloudy flicker, another, a leaping blur of them as he moved the vernier faster—and then no more, to the limit of the time-sphere's range.

Two hundred years, Peter guessed—A. D. 2700 to 2900 or thereabout—in which no one would enter the vault. Two hundred years of "unliquidated time."

He put the rheostat back to the beginning of that uninterrupted period. He drew out a small crate and prized it open.

Chessmen, ivory with gold inlay, Florentine, 14th century. Superb.

Another, from the opposite rack.

T'ang figurines, horses and men, ten to fourteen inches high. Priceless.

**T**HE CRATES would not burn, Tomaso told him. He went down to the kitchen to see, and it was true. The pieces lay in the roaring stove untouched. He fished one out with a poker; even the feathery splinters of the unplanned wood had not ignited.

It made a certain extraordinary kind of sense. When the moment came for the crates to go back, any physical scrambling that had occurred in the meantime would have no effect; they would simply put themselves together as they had been before, like Thor's goats. But burning was another matter; burning would have released energy which could not be replaced.

That settled one paradox, at any rate. There was another that nagged at Peter's orderly mind. If the things he took out of that vault, seven hundred-odd years in the future, were to become part of the collection bequeathed by him to the museum, preserved by it, and eventually stored in the vault for him to find—then precisely where had they come from in the first place?

It worried him. Peter had learned in life, as his brother in physics, that one never gets anything for nothing.

Moreover this riddle was only one of his perplexities, and that not among the greatest. For another example, there was the obstinate opacity of the time-sphere when-





ever he attempted to examine the immediate future. However often he tried it the result was always the same: a cloudy blank, all the way forward to the sudden unveiling of the marble gallery.

It was reasonable to expect the sphere to show nothing at times when he himself was going to be in the vault, but this accounted for only five or six hours out of every twenty-four. Again, presumably, it would show him no changes to be made by himself, since foreknowledge would make it possible for him to alter his actions. But he laboriously cleared one end of the vault, put up a screen to hide the rest with the vow—which he kept—not to alter the clear space or move the screen for a week—and tried again with the same result.

The only remaining explanation was that sometime during the next ten years, something was going to happen which he would prevent if he could; and the clue to it was there, buried in that frustrating unbroken blankness.

As a corollary, it was going to be something which he *could* prevent if only he knew what it was . . . or even when it was supposed to happen.

The event in question, in all probability, was his own death. Peter therefore hired nine men to guard him, three to a shift—because one man alone could not be trusted, two might conspire against him, whereas three, with the very minimum of effort, could be kept in a state of mutual suspicion. He also underwent a thorough medical examination, had new locks installed on every door and window,

and took every other precaution ingenuity could suggest. When he had done all these things, the next ten years were as blank as before.

Peter had more than half expected it. He checked through his list of safeguards once more, found it good, and thereafter let the matter rest. He had done all he could; either he would survive the crisis or he would not. In either case, events were conserved; the time-sphere could give him no forewarning.

Another man might have found his pleasure blunted by guilt and fear; Peter's was whetted to a keener edge. If he had been a recluse before, now he was an eremite; he grudged every hour that was not given to his work. Mornings he spent in the vault, unpacking his acquisitions; afternoons and evenings, sorting, cataloguing, examining, and—the word is not too strong—gloating. When three weeks had passed in this way, the shelves were bare as far as the power cable would allow him to reach in every direction, except for crates whose contents were undoubtedly too large to pass through the sphere. These, with heroic self-control, Peter had left untouched.

And still he had looted only a hundredth part of that incredible treasure-house. With grappling hooks he could have extended his reach by perhaps three or four yards, but at the risk of damaging his prizes; and in any case this would have been no solution but only a postponement of the problem. There was nothing for it but to go through the sphere himself, and unpack the crates while on the other "side" of it.

**P**ETER THOUGHT about it in a fury of concentration for the rest of the day. So far as he was concerned there was no question that the gain would be worth any calculated risk; the problem was how to measure the risk and if possible reduce it.

Item: he felt a definite uneasiness at the thought of venturing through that insubstantial bubble. Intuition was supported, if not by logic, at least by a sense of the dramatically appropriate. Now, if ever, would be the time for his crisis.

Item: common sense did not concur. The uneasiness had two symbols. One was the white face of his brother Harold just before the water closed over it; the other was a phantasm born of those gigantic, splayed footprints in the dust of the gallery. In spite of himself, Peter had often found himself trying to imagine what the creatures that made them must look like, until his visualization was so clear that he could almost swear he had seen them.

Towering monsters they were, with crested ophidian heads and great unwinking eyes; and they moved in a strutting glide, nodding their heads, like fantastic barnyard fowl . . .

But, taking these premonitory images in turn; first, it was impossible that he should ever be seriously inconvenienced by Harold's death. There were no witnesses; he was sure; he had struck the blow with a stone; stones also were the weights that had dragged the body down, and the rope was an odd length Peter had picked up on the

shore. Second, the three-toed Somethings might be as fearful as all the world's bogies put together; it made no difference, he could never meet them.

Nevertheless, the uneasiness persisted; Peter was not satisfied; he wanted a lifeline. When he found it, he wondered that he had not thought of it before.

He would set the time-sphere for a period just before one of the intervals of blankness. That would take care of accidents, sudden illnesses, and other unforeseeable contingencies. It would also insure him against one very real and not at all irrational dread: the fear that the mechanism which generated the time-sphere might fail while he was on the other side. For the conservation of events was not a condition created by the sphere but one which limited its operation. No matter what happened, it was impossible for him to occupy the same place-time as any future or past observer; therefore, when the monster entered that vault, Peter would not be there any more.

There was, of course, the scent-bottle to remember. Every rule has its exception; but in this case, Peter thought, the example did not apply. A scent-bottle could roll into a rat-hole; a man could not.

He turned the rheostat carefully back to the last flicker of grayness; past that to the next, still more carefully. The interval between the two, he judged, was something under an hour: excellent.

His pulse seemed a trifle rapid, but his brain was clear and cool. He thrust his head into the sphere and sniffed cautiously. The air was

stale and had a faint, unpleasant odor, but it was breathable.

Using a crate as a stepping-stool, he climbed to the top of the workbench. He arranged another close to the sphere to make a platform level with its equator. And seven and a half centuries in the future, a third crate stood on the floor directly under the sphere.

Peter stepped into the sphere, dropped, and landed easily, legs bending to take the shock. When he straightened, he was standing in what to all appearances was a large circular hole in the workbench; his chin was just above the top of the sphere.

He lowered himself, half-squatting, until he had drawn his head through and stepped down from the crate.

He was in the future vault. The sphere was a brightly luminous thing that hung unsupported in the air behind him, its midpoint just higher than his head. The shadows it cast spread black and wedge-shaped in every direction, melting into obscurity.

Peter's heart was pounding miserably. He had an illusory stifling sensation, coupled with the idiotic notion that he ought to be wearing a diver's helmet. The silence was like the pause before a shout.

But down the aisles marched the crated treasures in their hundreds.

Peter set to work. It was difficult, exacting labor, opening the crates where they lay, removing the contents and nailing the crates up again, all without disturbing the positions of the crates themselves, but it was the price he had to pay for his lifeline. Each crate was in

a sense a microcosm, like the vault itself—a capsule of unliquidated time. But the vault's term would end some fifty minutes from now, when crested heads nodded down these aisles; those of the crates' interiors, for all that Peter knew to the contrary, went on forever.

The first crate contained lace-work porcelain; the second, shakudô sword-hilts; the third, an exquisite 4th-century Greek ornament in repoussé bronze, the equal in every way of the Siris bronzes.

Peter found it almost physically difficult to set the thing down, but he did so; standing on his platform-crate in the future with his head projecting above the sphere in the present—like (again the absurd thought!) a diver rising from the ocean—he laid it carefully beside the others on the workbench.

Then down again, into the fragile silence and the gloom. The next crates were too large, and those just beyond were doubtful. Peter followed his shadow down the aisle. He had almost thirty minutes left: enough for one more crate, chosen with care, and an ample margin.

Glancing to his right at the end of the row, he saw a door.

It was a heavy door, rivet-studded, with a single iron step below it. There had been no door there in Peter's time; the whole plan of the building must have been altered. *Of course!*, he realized suddenly. If it had not, if so much as a single tile or lintel had remained of the palace as he knew it, then the sphere could never have let him see or enter this particular here-and-now, this—what would Harold have called it—this nexus

in space-time.

For if you saw any now-existing thing as it was going to appear in the future, you could alter it in the present—carve your initials in it, break it apart, chop it down—which was manifestly impossible, and therefore . . .

And therefore the first ten years were necessarily blank when he looked into the sphere, not because anything unpleasant was going to happen to him, but because in that time the last traces of the old palace had not yet been eradicated.

There was no crisis.

Wait a moment, though! Harold had been able to look into the near future . . . But—of course—Harold had been about to die.

In the dimness between Peter and the door he saw a rack of crates that looked promising. The way was uneven; one of the untidy accumulations of refuse that seemed to be characteristic of the Somethings lay in windrows across the floor. Peter stepped forward carefully—but not carefully enough.

**H**AROLD CASTELLARE had had another accident—and again, if you choose to look at it in that way, a lucky one. The blow stunned him; the old rope slipped from the stones; flaccid, he floated where a struggling man might have drowned. A fishing boat nearly ran him down and picked him up instead, suffering from a concussion, shock, exposure, and asphyxiation and more than three-quarters dead . . . But he was still alive when he was delivered, an hour later, to a hospital in Naples.

There were of course no identifying papers, labels or monograms in his clothing—Peter had seen to that—and for the first week after his rescue Harold was quite genuinely unable to give any account of himself. During the second week he was mending but uncommunicative, and at the end of the third, finding that there was some difficulty about gaining his release in spite of his physical recovery, he affected to recover his memory, gave a circumstantial but entirely fictitious identification and was discharged.

To understand this as well as all his subsequent actions, it is only necessary to remember that Harold was a Castellare. In Naples, not wishing to give Peter any unnecessary anxiety, he did not approach his bank for funds but cashed a check with an incurious acquaintance, and predated it by four weeks. With part of the money so acquired he paid his hospital bill and rewarded his rescuers. Another part went for new clothing and for four days' residence in an inconspicuous hotel, while he grew used to walking and dressing himself again. The rest, on his last day, he spent in the purchase of a discreetly small revolver and a box of cartridges.

He took the last boat to Ischia, and arrived at his own front door a few minutes before eleven. It was a cool evening, and a most cheerful fire was burning in the central hall.

"Signor Peter is well, I suppose," said Harold, removing his coat.

"Yes, Signor Harold. He is very well, very busy with his collection."

"Where is he? I should like to

“speak to him.”

“He is in the vaults, Signor Harold. But—”

“Yes?”

“Signor Peter sees no one when he is in the vaults. He has given strict orders that no one is to bother him, Signor Harold, when he is in the vaults.”

“Oh, well,” said Harold. “I dare say he’ll see me.”

**I**T WAS A THING something like a bear trap, apparently, except that instead of two semi-circular jaws it had four segments that snapped together in the middle, each with a shallow, sharp tooth. The pain was quite unendurable.

Each segment moved at the end of a thin arm, cunningly hinged so that the ghastly thing would close over whichever of the four triggers you stepped on. Each arm had a spring too powerful for Peter’s muscles. The whole affair was connected by a chain to a staple solidly embedded in the concrete floor; it left Peter free to move in any direction a matter of some ten inches. Short of gnawing off his own leg, he thought sickly, there was very little he could do about it.

The riddle was, what could the thing possibly be doing here? There were rats in the vaults, no doubt, now as in his own time, but surely nothing larger. Was it conceivable that even the three-toed Somethings would set an engine like this to catch a rat?

Lost inventions, Peter thought irrelevantly, had a way of being rediscovered. Even if he suppressed

the time-sphere during his lifetime and it did not happen to survive him, still there might be other time-fishers in the remote future—not here, perhaps, but in other treasure-houses of the world. And that might account for the existence of this metal-jawed horror. Indeed, it might account for the vault itself—a better man-trap—except that it was all nonsense, the trap could only be full until the trapper came to look at it. Events, and the lives of prudent time-travelers, were conserved.

And he had been in the vault for almost forty minutes. Twenty minutes to go, twenty-five, thirty at the most, then the Somethings would enter and their entrance would free him. He had his lifeline; the knowledge was the only thing that made it possible to live with the pain that was the center of his universe just now. It was like going to the dentist, in the bad old days before procaine; it was very bad, sometimes, but you knew that it would end.

He cocked his head toward the door, holding his breath. A distant thud, another, then a curiously unpleasant squeaking, then silence.

But he had heard them. He knew they were there. It couldn’t be much longer now.

**T**HREE MEN, two stocky, one lean, were playing cards in the passageway in front of the closed door that led to the vault staircase. They got up slowly.

“Who is he?” demanded the shortest one.

Tomaso clattered at him in fur-

ious Sicilian; the man's face darkened, but he looked at Harold with respect.

"I am now," stated Harold, "going down to see my brother."

"No, signor," said the shortest one positively.

"You are impertinent," Harold told him.

"Yes, signor."

Harold frowned. "You will not let me pass?"

"No, signor."

"Then go and tell my brother I am here."

The shortest one said apologetically but firmly that there were strict orders against this also; it would have astonished Harold very much if he had said anything else.

"Well, at least I suppose you can tell me how long it will be before he comes out?"

"Not long, signor. One hour, no more."

"Oh, very well, then," said Harold pettishly, turning half away. He paused. "One thing more," he said, taking the gun out of his pocket as he turned, "put your hands up and stand against the wall there, will you?"

The first two complied slowly. The third, the lean one, fired through his coat pocket, just like the gangsters in the American movies.

It was not a sharp sensation at all, Harold was surprised to find; it was more as if someone had hit him in the side with a cricket bat. The racket seemed to bounce interminably from the walls. He felt the gun jolt in his hand as he fired back, but couldn't tell if he had hit anybody. Everything seemed to be

happening very slowly, and yet it was astonishingly hard to keep his balance. As he swung around he saw the two stocky ones with their hands half inside their jackets, and the lean one with his mouth open, and Tomaso with bulging eyes. Then the wall came at him and he began to swim along it, paying particular attention to the problem of not dropping one's gun.

As he weathered the first turn in the passageway the roar broke out afresh. A fountain of plaster stung his eyes; then he was running clumsily, and there was a bedlam of shouting behind him.

Without thinking about it he seemed to have selected the laboratory as his destination, it was an instinctive choice, without much to recommend it logically, and in any case, he realized halfway across the central hall, he was not going to get there.

He turned and squinted at the passageway entrance; saw a blur move and fired at it. It disappeared. He turned again awkwardly and had taken two steps nearer an armchair which offered the nearest shelter when something clubbed him between the shoulder-blades. One step more, knees buckling, and the wall struck him a second, softer blow. He toppled, clutching at the tapestry that hung near the fireplace.

**W**HEN THE three guards, whose names were Enrico, Alberto and Luca, emerged cautiously from the passage and approached Harold's body it was already flaming like a viking's in its

impromptu shroud; the dim horses and men and falcons of the tapestry were writhing and crisping into brilliance. A moment later an uncertain ring of fire wavered toward them across the carpet.

Although the servants came with fire extinguishers and with buckets of water from the kitchen, and although the fire department was called, it was all quite useless. In five minutes the whole room was ablaze, in ten, as windows burst and walls buckled, the fire engulfed the second story. In twenty a mass of flaming timbers dropped into the vault through the hole Peter had made in the floor of the laboratory,

utterly destroying the time-sphere apparatus and reaching shortly thereafter, as the authorities concerned were later to agree, an intensity of heat entirely sufficient to consume a human body without leaving any identifiable trace. For that reason alone, there was no trace of Peter's body to be found.

**T**HE SOUNDS had just begun again when Peter saw the light from the time-sphere turn ruddy and then wink out like a snuffed candle.

In the darkness, he heard the door open. . . . **THE END**

## IF you know . . .

LISTED BELOW, in jumbled fashion, are the names of 10 scientific instruments, with a brief description of each. Can you match up at least six of them correctly for a passing score? Seven to nine is good; 10 excellent. The answers are on page 113.

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. ONDOMETER       | (a) any instrument for measuring the intensity of light.  |
| 2. OLFACTOMETER    | (b) one for measuring a lower temperature than the ordinary mercury-thermometer will indicate.  |
| 3. PERIMETER       | (c) it measures strength of X-rays.   |
| 4. PYROMETER       | (d) an instrument for registering the form of electric waves.                                   |
| 5. PHOTOHELIOGRAPH | (e) for measuring solar radiation.  |
| 6. CRYOMETER       | (f) one for testing the scope of the field of vision.   |
| 7. CYCLOMETER      | (g) is used to measure the keenness of the sense of smell.                                      |
| 8. PHOTOMETER      | (h) a telescopic photographic instrument for taking pictures of the sun (as during an eclipse). |
| 9. PYRHELIOMETER   | (i) an instrument for recording the rotations of a wheel.                                       |
| 10. PENETROMETER   | (j) measures high degrees of heat.  |



### The Road to Space

**S**PACE TRAVEL is just around the corner; there are many problems to be solved yet, but clues to their solutions are becoming abundant. When manned rockets burst out of Earth's atmosphere, and when they land on the moon and the planets, they will probably carry special equipment the design of which has been influenced by the conquerors of Mount Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa tribesman guide, Tenzing Bhutia.

Special oxygen equipment will be a must, for instance, and the Everest expedition carried the lightest and most efficient breathing apparatus ever designed. Even so, Col. Sir John Hunt, the expedition's leader, said it had to be even better for future trips, and improvements are undoubtedly on the way.

Vacuum packs compressed the expedition's food rations into solid wedges, which reverted to their normal form (including cereals, cheese, tea, coffee, lemonade, sugar sweets and pemmican) when seals on the packs were broken. Thus, for the first time, a properly balanced diet was carried to really high altitudes.

Tents were of a new material, a

specially woven light-weight mixture of cotton and nylon. Boots for the final assault had to be very light and easy to put on in the rarefied atmosphere, but also very warm and strong. Those used had a glacé kid outer surface, an inner insulation of fiber surrounded by a lining of waterproof fabric, inner soles of leather with lightweight rubberized fabric backing, an inner sock of plastic fiber, and an outer sole of rubber reinforced with synthetic resin aerated for lightness. Walkie talkie sets weighing only five pounds were carried.

The equipment used by space travelers may bear no exact resemblance to that described here, but the techniques that will be used in making that equipment are being discovered and used right now!

### The Weatherman Says

**A** NEW PLUG for the space platform idea has come from Dr. Harry Wexler, chief of the Scientific Services Division of the United States Weather Bureau.

Dr. Wexler points out that the sun is of course responsible for our weather, but that "there are many things in our atmosphere that interfere with solar radiation." He listed particularly dust and the amount of carbon dioxide, but excluded atom bombs, which "dissipate too quickly."

What we need, Dr. Wexler continues, is "instruments close enough to the sun to measure the variations of solar radiation." Comparing these with ground measurements, we could learn the precise effect of the atmospheric resistance—after



which we could proceed to change the composition of the atmosphere in order to change the weather, if we wished.

And the obvious conclusion, the way to get the necessary instruments above the atmosphere, is to get that much-discussed space platform into operation! Dr. Wexler is convinced that we'll do so one of these days.

Dr. Wexler also points out that the Earth has become hotter. This is supported by the work of physicist Gilbert N. Plass of The Johns Hopkins University, who has recalculated the opacity of carbon dioxide to long-wave heat radiation and found it to be much greater than formerly believed. With so much industrial activity adding carbon dioxide to the air, the result is a greenhouse effect in which short-wave heat arrives from the sun but longer heat waves are prevented from escaping the Earth.

Plass figures that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will be doubled by the year 2080, and that this will raise the Earth's temperature by about four per cent. This will also lessen the temperature differential between the tops and bottoms of clouds, weakening the convection currents responsible for rainfall. If this happens, the weather will definitely be clearer and drier.

### Tragedy Unearthed

**I**T'S A PARADOX that the terrible tragedy of the sudden burial of the Roman city of Pompeii in 79 A.D. should become an advantage to modern archaeologists—but

it has. The very nature of the catastrophe has made it invaluable in the accumulation of historical relics from this spot. When the unfortunate city with its 25,000 citizens was abruptly engulfed under volcanic ash, resulting from the tremendous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, important works of art and science, as well as articles of everyday life, were preserved for future historians.

These did not suffer the inroads of slow destruction by the elements, as normally occurs. The volcanic ash mixed with the rain as it fell and hardened to form perfect casts, preserving victims' features immediately after death. Even minute facial features of the Pompeians were kept intact. By pouring plaster into the cavity formed in the volcanic ash where a victim was buried, a lifelike duplication of the person's appearance nearly 2,000 years ago is possible.

Excavations were first started on this spot in 1748, and digging has been continued off and on with many interruptions. Since that time, over 60 per cent of the overlay of ash from the volcano's eruption has been removed.

### Watch the Fishie!

**T**HE FIRST equipment ever designed especially for photographing underwater life at night has been put into operation off the Florida Keys by the National Geographic Society. Called the aquascope, this new diving chamber consists of a flat tank seven feet long by five feet wide and 17½ inches high. There is room inside for two

men with color cameras, high voltage power equipment and bright lights.

Constructed of armorplate steel, the aquascope looks like something out of science fiction. It narrows at one end like a lobster's tail, and there are two side windows that extend outwards like metallic claws containing floodlights. A long stainless steel "feeler" extending above the photographed area carries a third set of lights.

The device is designed to photograph underwater night life at depths of 50 to 100 feet. Using it, the photographers lie prone on air mattresses in perfect comfort. Bright but brief flashes of light apparently do not disturb the fish, and no tell-tale air bubbles emerge from the aquascope since outgoing air is returned to the surface by hose. Even a fish has no privacy these days!

### Triple Threat Genes

**A** NEW THEORY about genes that may help explain the cause of several diseases, including cancer, has been advanced by Dr. David M. Bonner, research associate in microbiology at Yale University. The main difference from former ideas on the subject is that Dr. Bonner believe genes—the tiny particles in the body that govern individual characteristics — may have three functional parts instead of only one.

The single-function hypothesis held that the gene controlled a specific type of reaction within the cell. Now Dr. Bonner has demonstrated that each gene also controls the time and rate of speed of such re-

actions. If any one of these three functions is upset, a serious change results in the body's biochemical reactions.

It's interesting to note that it was Dr. Bonner himself, in company with other scientists, who established the earlier theory eight years ago. Science keeps advancing largely because scientists are willing and able to re-examine their own ideas!

### Measuring by Sound

**I**N THE PAST, mechanical devices for measuring the flow of fluids often altered that flow by their own presence. This disadvantage has been overcome in a new instrument developed by the National Bureau of Standards. It does the job by sound waves. A transmitter sends an impulse to a receiver a short distance along the line of flow, and the speed of the current is found by its effect on the speed of the sound. Thus the rate of flow of liquids in tubes, speeds of boats in the water, and even minute air currents can be measured easily and accurately.

### 3-D For Good Eyesight?

**P**RODUCERS of three-dimensional movies haven't gotten around to ballyhooing this in their advertising, but some experts claim that the widespread appearance of such films may raise the level of eyesight of the entire world.

According to the calculations of R. A. Sherman, a Bausch & Lomb Optical Co. visual specialist, between 12 and 15 per cent of the public now have eye problems of

which they are unaware—and about which they'll learn for the first time by viewing 3-D movies. The eyes of such movie-goers can then be trained to lessen or eliminate these difficulties.

"The beneficial impact on vision of properly produced, projected and viewed stereo motion pictures will be profound," Sherman has stated. "Directly and indirectly, viewing of true three-dimensional pictures will improve visual performance and thereby improve the general well-being of hundreds of thousands of individuals with good eyesight. Furthermore, additional

thousands with insufficient visual skills will be stimulated to get professional eye care, which, in turn, will result in more efficient and satisfactory vision for them."

So even if you don't enjoy the movies ordinarily, you owe it to yourself to see some 3-D pictures. Your eyes may be the winner!

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*Answers to*

IF YOU KNOW . . .

1—d; 2—g; 3—f; 4—j; 5—h;  
6—b; 7—i; 8—a; 9—e; 10—c.

### WORTH CITING:

**CHILDHOOD'S END**, by Arthur C. Clarke. Ballantine Books, New York, 1953. (35c and \$2.00.)

Arthur C. Clarke is best known to the public at large as an expert on rocketry and spaceflight, but science fiction readers know him equally well as a fiction writer with a distinctively quiet and effective style. His scientific background, of course, helps make his stories outstanding, but his ability to make his characters come alive and his willingness to sacrifice all the usual blood-and-thunder tricks to achieve credibility have also contributed to his popularity.

In *Childhood's End* he has taken another step forward. While it contains enough new ideas and new slants on old ideas to satisfy the most thoroughly spacewarped fan, it can also be recommended to new readers, since it starts in a recognizable near-future and gradually, convincingly shows the changes in humanity and civilization that occur under 200 years of domination by the alien "Overlords." The plot is one that can't and shouldn't be summed up in a review.

Naturally, such a theme has limitations; no one human character can be "hero" or even become vitally important to the reader. This makes for remoteness, but still the book is an admirable accomplishment and a thrill to read.



*Shure and begorra, it was a great day for the Earth! The first envoy from another world was about to speak—that is, if he could forget that horse for a minute . . .*

## off course

By Mack Reynolds

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

**F**IRST ON the scene were Larry Dermott and Tim Casey of the State Highway Patrol. They assumed they were witnessing the crash of a new type of Air Force

plane and slipped and skidded desperately across the field to within thirty feet of the strange craft, only to discover that the landing had been made without accident.

Patrolman Dermott shook his head. "They're gettin' queerer looking every year. Get a load of it—no wheels, no propeller, no cockpit."

They left the car and made their way toward the strange egg-shaped vessel.

Tim Casey loosened his .38 in its holster and said, "Sure and I'm beginning to wonder if it's one of ours. No insignia and—"

A circular door slid open at that point and Dameri Tass stepped out, yawning. He spotted them, smiled and said, "Glork."

They gaped at him.

"Glork is right," Dermott swallowed.

Tim Casey closed his mouth with an effort. "Do you mind the color of his face?" he blurted.

"How could I help it?"

Dameri Tass rubbed a blue-nailed pink hand down his purplish countenance and yawned again. "Gorra manigan horp soratium," he said.

Patrolman Dermott and Patrolman Casey shot stares at each other. "'Tis double talk he's after givin' us," Casey said.

Dameri Tass frowned. "Harama?" he asked.

Larry Dermott pushed his cap to the back of his head. "That doesn't sound like any language I've even *heard* about."

Dameri Tass grimaced, turned and reentered his spacecraft to emerge in half a minute with his hands full of contraption. He held a box-like arrangement under his left arm; in his right hand were two metal caps connected to the box by wires.

While the patrolmen watched him, he set the box on the ground,

twirled two dials and put one of the caps on his head. He offered the other to Larry Dermot; his desire was obvious.

Trained to grasp a situation and immediately respond in manner best suited to protect the welfare of the people of New York State, Dermott cleared his throat and said, "Tim, take over while I report."

"Hey!" Casey protested, but his fellow minion had left.

"Mandaia," Dameri Tass told Casey, holding out the metal cap.

"Faith, an' do I look balmy?" Casey told him. "I wouldn't be puttin' that dingus on my head for all the colleens in Ireland."

"Mandaia," the stranger said impatiently.

"Bejassus," Casey snorted, "ye can't—"

Dermott called from the car, "Tim, the captain says to humor this guy. We're to keep him here until the officials arrive."

Tim Casey closed his eyes and groaned. "Humor him, he's after sayin'. Orders it is." He shouted back, "Sure an' did ye tell 'em he's in technicolor? Begorra, he looks like a man from Mars."

"That's what they think," Larry yelled, "and the governor is on his way. We're to do everything possible short of violence to keep this character here. Humor him, Tim!"

"Mandaia," Dameri Tass snapped, pushing the cap into Casey's reluctant hands.

Muttering his protests, Casey lifted it gingerly and placed it on his head. Not feeling any immediate effect, he said, "There, 'tis satisfied ye are now, I'm supposin'."

The alien stooped down and

flicked a switch on the little box. It hummed gently. Tim Casey suddenly shrieked and sat down on the stubble and grass of the field. "Begorra," he yelled, "I've been murdered!" He tore the cap from his head.

His companion came running, "What's the matter, Tim?" he shouted.

Dameri Tass removed the metal cap from his own head. "Sure, an' nothin' is after bein' the matter with him," he said. "Evidently the bhoy has niver been a-wearin' of a kerit helmet afore. 'Twill hurt him not at all."

**Y**OU CAN talk!" Dermott blurted, skidding to a stop.

Dameri Tass shrugged. "Faith an' why not? As I was after sayin', I shared the kerit helmet with Tim Casey."

Patrolman Dermott glared at him unbelievably. "You learned the language just by sticking that Rube Goldberg deal on Tim's head?"

"Sure, an' why not?"

Dermott muttered, "And with it he has to pick up the corniest brogue west of Dublin."

Tim Casey got to his feet indignantly. "I'm after resentin' that, Larry Dermott. Sure, an' the way we talk in Ireland is—"

Dameri Tass interrupted, pointing to a bedraggled horse that had made its way to within fifty feet of the vessel. "Now what could that be after bein'?"

The patrolmen followed his stare. "It's a horse. What else?"

"A horse?"

Larry Dermott looked again, just

to make sure. "Yeah—not much of a horse, but a horse."

Dameri Tass sighed ecstatically. "And jist what is a horse, if I may be so bold as to be askin'?"

"It's an animal you ride on."

The alien tore his gaze from the animal to look his disbelief at the other. "Are you after meanin' that you climb upon the crature's back and ride him? Faith now, quit your blarney."

He looked at the horse again, then down at his equipment. "Begorra," he muttered, "I'll share the kerit helmet with the crature."

"Hey, hold it," Dermot said anxiously. He was beginning to feel like a character in a shaggy dog story.

Interest in the horse was ended with the sudden arrival of a helicopter. It swooped down on the field and settled within twenty feet of the alien craft. Almost before it had touched, the door was flung open and the flying windmill disgorged two bestarred and efficient-looking Army officers.

Casey and Dermott snapped them a salute.

The senior general didn't take his eyes from the alien and the spacecraft as he spoke, and they bugged quite as effectively as had those of the patrolmen when they'd first arrived on the scene.

"I'm Major General Browning," he rapped. "I want a police cordon thrown up around this, er, vessel. No newsmen, no sightseers, nobody without my permission. As soon as Army personnel arrives, we'll take over completely."

"Yes, sir," Larry Dermott said. "I just got a report on the radio that

the governor is on his way, sir. How about him?"

The general muttered something under his breath. Then, "When the governor arrives, let me know; otherwise, nobody gets through!"

Dameri Tass said, "Faith, and what goes on?"

The general's eyes bugged still further. "*He talks!*" he accused.

"Yes, sir," Dermott said. "He had some kind of a machine. He put it over Tim's head and seconds later he could talk."

"Nonsense!" the general snapped.

Further discussion was interrupted by the screaming arrival of several motorcycle patrolmen followed by three heavily laden patrol cars. Overhead, pursuit planes zoomed in and began darting about nervously above the field.

"Sure, and it's quite a reception I'm after gettin'," Dameri Tass said. He yawned. "But what I'm wantin' is a chance to get some sleep. Faith, an' I've been awake for almost a *decal*."

**D**AMERI TASS was hurried, via helicopter, to Washington. There he disappeared for several days, being held incommunicado while White House, Pentagon, State Department and Congress tried to figure out just what to do with him.

Never in the history of the planet had such a furor arisen. Thus far, no newspapermen had been allowed within speaking distance. Administration higher-ups were being subjected to a volcano of editorial heat but the longer the space alien was discussed the more they viewed with alarm the situation his arrival had

precipitated. There were angles that hadn't at first been evident.

Obviously he was from some civilization far beyond that of Earth'. That was the rub. No matter what he said, it would shake governments, possibly overthrow social systems, perhaps even destroy established religious concepts.

But they couldn't keep him under wraps indefinitely.

It was the United Nations that cracked the iron curtain. Their demands that the alien be heard before their body were too strong and had too much public opinion behind them to be ignored. The White House yielded and the date was set for the visitor to speak before the Assembly.

Excitement, anticipation, blanketed the world. Shepherds in Sinkiang, multi-millionaires in Switzerland, fakirs in Pakistan, gauchos in the Argentine were raised to a zenith of expectation. Panhandlers debated the message to come with pedestrians; jinrikisha men argued it with their passengers; miners discussed it deep beneath the surface; pilots argued with their co-pilots thousands of feet above.

It was the most universally awaited event of the ages.

By the time the delegates from every nation, tribe, religion, class, color, and race had gathered in New York to receive the message from the stars, the majority of Earth had decided that Dameri Tass was the plenipotentiary of a super-civilization which had been viewing developments on this planet with misgivings. It was thought this other civilization had advanced greatly beyond Earth's and that the

problems besetting us—social, economic, scientific—had been solved by the super-civilization. Obviously, then, Dameri Tass had come, an advisor from a benevolent and friendly people, to guide the world aright.

And nine-tenths of the population of Earth stood ready and willing to be guided. The other tenth liked things as they were and were quite convinced that the space envoy would upset their applecarts.

**VILJALMAR** Andersen, Secretary-General of the U.N., was to introduce the space emissary. "Can you give me an idea at all of what he is like?" he asked nervously.

President McCord was as upset as the Dane. He shrugged in agitation. "I know almost as little as you do."

Sir Alfred Oxford protested, "But my dear chap, you've had him for almost two weeks. Certainly in that time—"

The President snapped back, "You probably won't believe this, but he's been asleep until yesterday. When he first arrived he told us he hadn't slept for a *decal*, whatever that is; so we held off our discussion with him until morning. Well—he didn't awaken in the morning, nor the next. Six days later, fearing something was wrong we woke him."

"What happened?" Sir Alfred asked.

The President showed embarrassment. "He used some rather ripe Irish profanity on us, rolled over, and went back to sleep."

Viljalmar Andersen asked, "Well,

what happened yesterday?"

"We actually haven't had time to question him. Among other things, there's been some controversy about whose jurisdiction he comes under. The State Department claims the Army shouldn't—"

The Secretary General sighed deeply. "Just what *did* he do?"

"The Secret Service reports he spent the day whistling Mother Machree and playing with his dog, cat and mouse."

"Dog, cat and mouse? I say!" blurted Sir Alfred.

The President was defensive. "He had to have some occupation, and he seems to be particularly interested in our animal life. He wanted a horse but compromised for the others. I understand he insists all three of them come with him wherever he goes."

"I wish we knew what he was going to say," Andersen worried.

"Here he comes," said Sir Alfred.

Surrounded by F.B.I. men, Dameri Tass was ushered to the speaker's stand. He had a kitten in his arms; a Scotty followed him.

The alien frowned worriedly. "Sure," he said, "and what kin all this be? Is it some ordinance I've been after breakin'?"

McCord, Sir Alfred and Andersen hastened to reassure him and made him comfortable in a chair.

Viljalmar Andersen faced the thousands in the audience and held up his hands, but it was ten minutes before he was able to quiet the cheering, stamping delegates from all Earth.

Finally: "Fellow Terrans, I shall not take your time for a lengthy introduction of the envoy from the



stars. I will only say that, without doubt, this is the most important moment in the history of the human race. We will now hear from the first being to come to Earth from another world."

He turned and gestured to Dameri Tass who hadn't been paying over much attention to the chairman in view of some dog and cat hostilities that had been developing about his feet.

But now the alien's purplish face faded to a light blue. He stood and said hoarsely. "Faith, an' what was that last you said?"

Viljalmar Andersen repeated, "We will now hear from the first being ever to come to Earth from another world."

The face of the alien went a lighter blue. "Sure, and' ye wouldn't jist be frightenin' a body, would ye? You don't mean to tell me this planet isn't after bein' a member of the Galactic League?"

Andersen's face was blank. "Galactic League?"

"Cushlamachree," Dameri Tass moaned. "I've gone and put me foot in it again. I'll be after getting *kert* for this."

Sir Alfred was on his feet. "I don't understand! Do you mean you aren't an envoy from another planet?"

Dameri Tass held his head in his hands and groaned. "An envoy, he's sayin', and meself only a second rate collector of specimens for the Carthis zoo."

He straightened and started off the speaker's stand. "Sure, an' I must blast off immediately."

Things were moving fast for President McCord but already an

edge of relief was manifesting itself. Taking the initiative, he said, "Of course, of course, if that is your desire." He signaled to the bodyguard who had accompanied the alien to the assemblage.

A dull roar was beginning to emanate from the thousands gathered in the tremendous hall, murmuring, questioning, disbelieving.

VILJALMAR Andersen felt that he must say something. He extended a detaining hand. "Now you are here," he said urgently, "even though by mistake, before you go can't you give us some brief word? Our world is in chaos. Many of us have lost faith. Perhaps . . ."

Dameri Tass shook off the restraining hand. "Do I look daft? Begorry, I should have been a-knowin' something was queer. All your weapons and your strange ideas. Faith, I wouldn't be surprised if ye hadn't yet established a planet-wide government. Sure, an' I'll go still further. Ye probably still have wars on this benighted world. No wonder it is ye haven't been invited to join the Galactic League an' take your place among the civilized planets."

He hustled from the rostrum and made his way, still surrounded by guards, to the door by which he had entered. The dog and the cat trotted after, undismayed by the furor about them.

They arrived about four hours later at the field on which he'd landed, and the alien from space hurried toward his craft, still muttering. He'd been accompanied by a general and by the President, but

all the way he had refrained from speaking.

He scurried from the car and toward the spacecraft.

President McCord said, "You've forgotten your pets. We would be glad if you would accept them as—"

The alien's face faded a light blue again. "Faith, an' I'd almost forgotten," he said. "If I'd taken a crature from this quarantined planet, my name'd be *nork*. Keep your dog and your kitty." He shook his head sadly and extracted a mouse from a pocket. "An' this amazin' little crature as well."

They followed him to the spacecraft. Just before entering, he spotted the bedraggled horse that had been present on his landing.

A longing expression came over his highly colored face. "Jist one thing," he said. "Faith now, were they pullin' my leg when they said you were after ridin' on the back of those things?"

The President looked at the woe-begone nag. "It's a horse," he said, surprised. "Man has been riding them for centuries."

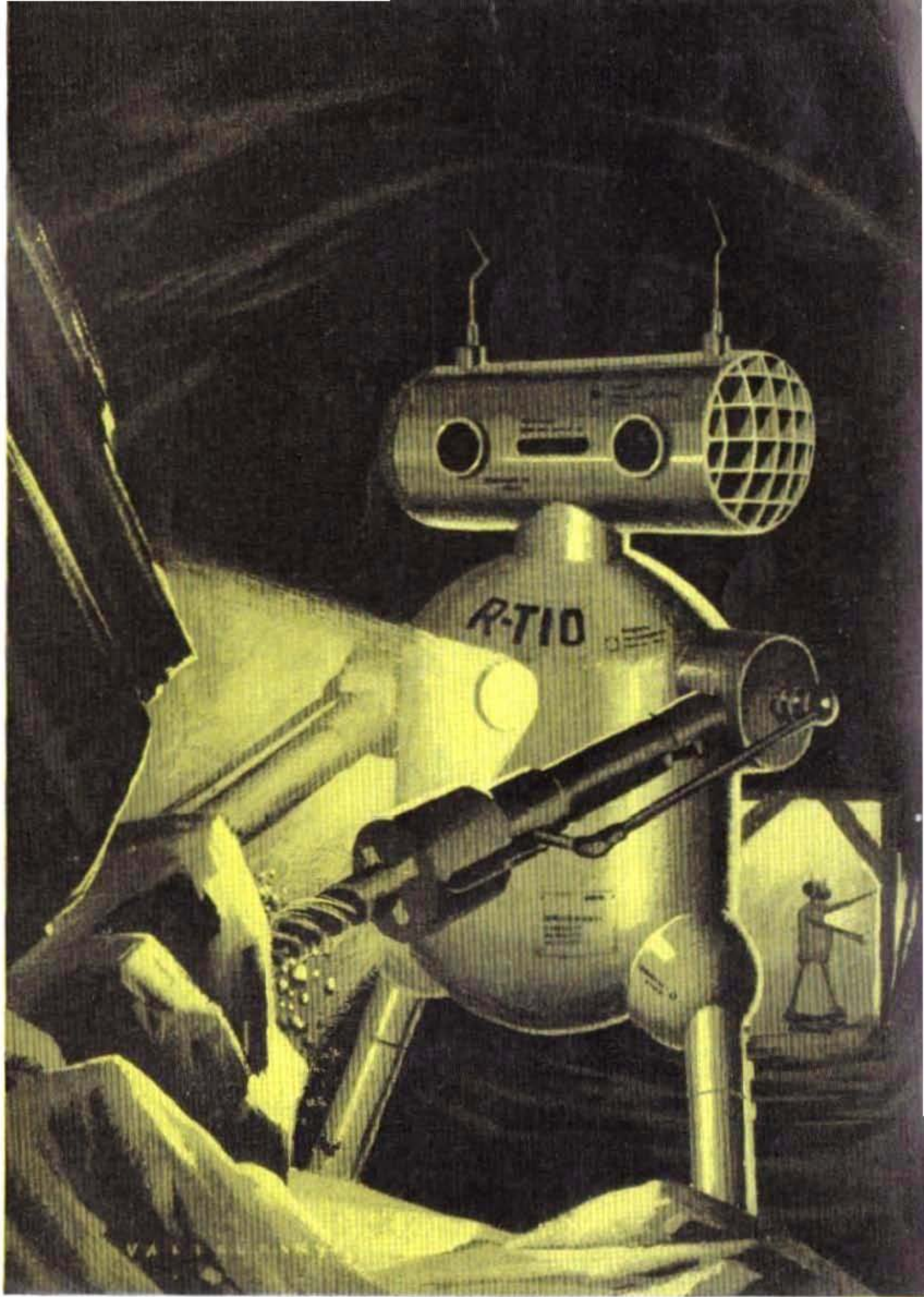
Dameri Tass shook his head. "Sure an' 'twould've been my makin' if I could've taken one back to Carthis." He entered his vessel.

The others drew back, out of range of the expected blast, and watched, each with his own thoughts, as the first visitor from space hurriedly left Earth.

... THE END

## ONE SANE MAN — IN A NEUROTIC WORLD!

LEADING OFF the first monthly issue of IF will be a stunning short novel by one of the most popular and talented writers in the field, Sam Merwin Jr., entitled *The Ambassador*. Here you'll find an intriguing situation, replete with action, romance and humor—and a grim problem you'll twist your wits trying to solve. The scene is a future in which Earth is ruled by computing machines and entangled in eccentric notions—just for instance, it's the height of politeness to make yourself as ugly as possible! There's a cast of unique people, including a multitude of spies and plotters, two mysterious and beautiful women, and Ambassador Zalen Lindsay, the strikingly human Man-from-Mars who must straighten out the tottering mess or see two worlds perish. This stellar performance will be backed up by the best work of such top-notch writers as Robert Abernathy, James McKimmey Jr., Frank M. Robinson and many others. There will also be the first of a series of articles designed to acquaint you entertainingly with the scientific facts of today and possibilities of tomorrow. January 8th is the date the March issue goes on sale—don't miss it!



ROBOT MINING can eliminate all the dangers and hardships now undergone by human miners, and extend the possible depth of shafts to five or even ten miles below the surface. The robot shown here is drilling holes for the demolition squad. It is radio-controlled, and a television camera in its head keeps its operators on the surface fully informed of its progress.

*(Drawings by Ed Valigursky)*

